



The Last Garden



by Rachel Ip, illustrated by Anneli Bray

Classroom notes prepared by Clare Hardy and Rachel Ip

Introduction

The Last Garden is a picture book which has many rich themes to explore in the classroom with a wide age range of children, from Key stage 1 to Key Stage 3. Alongside the [guided reading notes](#), some of these ideas can be adapted to suit different age groups.

Themes: hope; resilience; gardens; conflict and migration; gardens made in wartime.

About *The Last Garden*

The Last Garden follows the story of a little girl who tends *The Last Garden* in a war-torn city. As the city breaks, everyone is forced to leave and soon the girl must leave her beautiful garden behind. Whilst the garden is left alone, its seeds scatter throughout the city and roots begin to take hold.

Slowly, as people return, the city begins to bloom again, and the girl comes home to her garden.

The Last Garden was inspired by real gardens made in wartime.

About the author – Rachel Ip

Rachel is a picture book author from the UK who has lived in Hong Kong for the last 13 years. She loves the way picture books can delight and surprise you, make you laugh, and make you wonder.

She has always loved languages and linguistics and her stories are often inspired by real-world events or experiences.

About the illustrator – Anneli Bray

Anneli is an illustrator, artist and maker from the North West of England. Growing up near the Lake District, adventure was never too far away and she was heavily influenced by Beatrix Potter, Enid Blyton, Tove Jansson and the wonder of nature.

The classroom resources cover four main topics:

- Visual literacy
- Gardens and growing
- Poetry and creative writing
- Migration

Additional resources

- [Guided reading notes](#)



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Visual literacy (KS1 and KS2)

OBJECTIVES:

- To explore how illustration adds layers of meaning to the story

OUTCOMES:

- A discussion about how meaning is conveyed through illustration
- A discussion about gardens in wartime, throughout history

TASK 1 - Reading the pictures

Looking at the illustrations, discuss how the illustrator uses colour to convey a change of mood or tone in the story.

In the opening scenes, how does the colour of the garden contrast with the rest of the city?

Zara is often pictured with a soft toy, which is not mentioned in the story. Encourage students to think about why the toy is important to Zara.

Why has the illustrator included the bird and the cat? How do they add to the story? (Zara is never alone, she always has either her friends, animals or toy with her.)

Compare and contrast the opening city scene and the final city scene. How has the illustrator shown the city coming back to life?



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Gardens and Growing (adaptable for all ages)

OBJECTIVES:

- To research and explore gardens locally and through history
- To understand the importance of gardens in wartime and conflict

OUTCOMES:

- Map, plan or designs for an individual or school garden
- Report or presentation about local gardens
- Set of instructions for growing a bean seed
- A school gardening initiative

Often when there is war, there are gardens. Throughout history and across the world, there are many examples of gardens made in wartime - gardens of all shapes and sizes, on football pitches and rooftops, in school grounds and on windowsills. Some created by individuals, some bringing whole communities together.

In her research for the book, Rachel found many examples of these gardens, which can be shared in the classroom for wider discussion.

<https://www.rachelip.com/post/gardens-in-wartime>

These historical and contemporary photos could be used as a prompt for creative writing, or further research into war gardens.

TASK 1 – Research local history and gardens

- Discuss why gardens are important in times of conflict. Encourage students to think about access to food and food security.
 - Ask students to design their own garden, what would they plant? Encourage them to plant a mixture of vegetables as well as flowers.
- Research gardens in your local area. Are there any community garden projects, gardens where people from the community with special needs work, memorial gardens? Go and visit one of these if possible.
 - Ask students to write a presentation or report about local gardens or allotments.



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TASK 2 – Writing: a set of gardening instructions

Ask the children to write a set of instructions for how to grow a bean.

TASK 3 – Grow your own seed or garden

There are many ways to grow seeds or plants in school. You could:

- Design and plant your own class, year group or school garden, using containers outside the classroom, small raised beds or an area of the school playing fields if you have them.
- Give everyone a bean seed to grow. There are many sets of instructions on the web, for example:
 - <https://www.science-sparks.com/bean-in-a-jar/>
 - <https://theimaginationtree.com/growing-beans-on-cotton-balls/>
- Create your own 'garden in a jar' or 'terrarium'. Fill the bottom of a jar with a layer of coloured gravel, then approximately 4cm of soil. Plant small seedlings such as spider plants, ferns and mosses. Cover the soil in fish gravel for a lovely effect. These last a very long time if watered carefully by flicking water from your hand so they do not get waterlogged. Watch your small garden thrive!



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Poetry and Creative Writing (Upper KS2/KS3)

OBJECTIVES:

- To create poetry, inspired by the opening page of *The Last Garden*
- To explore and write poetry on the theme of migration

OUTCOMES:

- Individual or group poems

TASK 1 – Poetry

(Upper KS2)

The opening page of the book reads like a poem. With the class, explore the idea of using their own ideas to fill in the gaps differently. Ask them to think about something from their own experience or from the news to make the poem personal. This activity can be done individually or in pairs or small groups.

Explore how the poem is introducing the idea of something having gone wrong. Brainstorm situations where there has been dramatic or significant change, such as war, climate change, or deforestation.

Note how the pairs of adjectives 'grey and sad' and 'bright and beautiful' are in opposition to each other. The noun that is 'in the middle' is something that gives hope and joy, within the wider context of something that is sad. Allow for creative licence with the layout of the poem – see line 6 of the example.



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Model your own idea on the board. For example:

In the middle of our **planet** there was an **ocean**.
In the middle of the **ocean** there was an **island**.
The **ocean** was **stormy** and **wild**,
but the **island** was **tropical** and **lush**.
Once, before the **temperatures rose**,
there were **many islands in the ocean**.
Now, this was the last **island** left.

Or

In the middle of our **forest** there was a **tree**.
In the middle of the **tree** there was a **nest**.
The **tree** was **tall** and **strong**,
but the **nest** was **small** and **fragile**.
Once, before the **trees were cut down**,
there were **many birds in the forest**.
Now, this was the last **nest** left.

In the middle of our country there was a city.
In the middle of the city there was a garden.
The city was grey and sad,
but the garden was bright and beautiful.
Once, before the war came,
there were trees on every corner.
Now, this was The Last Garden left.

In the middle of our there was a
In the middle of the there was a
The city was and
but the was and
Once, before the
there were *on every corner*.
Now, this was the last left.



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TASK 2 – Poetry

(Upper KS2/KS3)

Brian Bilston – Refugee

This poem can be read start to finish, and then in reverse, with opposite meanings. Share Brian Bilston’s Refugee poem¹ (start to finish) with the class, discuss the apparent negativity towards refugees. How does it make the students feel?

After a period of discussion, invite students to read the poem in reverse. Now how do they feel?

See if students can write a four or five line poem which can be read both ways.

REFUGEES

BY BRIAN BILSTON

They have no need of our help
So do not tell me
These haggard faces could belong to you or me
Should life have dealt a different hand
We need to see them for who they really are
Chancers and scroungers
Layabouts and loungers
With bombs up their sleeves
Cut-throats and thieves
They are not
Welcome here
We should make them
Go back to where they came from
They cannot
Share our food
Share our homes
Share our countries
Instead let us
Build a wall to keep them out
It is not okay to say
These are people just like us
A place should only belong to those who are born there
Do not be so stupid to think that
The world can be looked at another way

(now read from bottom to top)

¹ <https://poetrylessons.wordpress.com/2018/09/01/refugees-by-brian-bilston/>

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Migration – (adaptable for all ages)

OBJECTIVES:

- To understand the meaning of migration and its impact on people around the world
- To understand and explore the differences between migrants and refugees

OUTCOMES:

- Definitions of migration, migrant and refugee
- Word art using words from migration
- Classroom display based on words from migration

TASK 1: Researching and creating definitions of words related to migration

(KS1 and 2)

Discuss the meaning of the word migration. Ask the children to write their own definitions. Share the definitions and agree a class definition.

- **Migration** – the act of moving from one place to another, often in large numbers. Migration can be within countries or between countries. People have migrated extensively throughout history.

Discuss the difference between a **migrant** and a **refugee**. Ask the children to write their own definitions. Share the definitions and agree a class definition.

These two words are sometimes used interchangeably in the media, but this is confusing, as there is an important legal² difference between the two.

- **Migrant** - A person who moves from one place to another, especially in order to find work or better living conditions. Migrants can return home safely and will continue to receive the protection of their government.
- **Refugee** - A refugee is someone who has had to leave their country because it is not safe for them to live there. Refugees are specifically defined and protected in international law. It is too dangerous for them to return home, and they need to seek safety and sanctuary elsewhere.

² <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/3/56e95c676/refugees-migrants-frequently-asked-questions-faqs.html>

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TASK 2 – Examining words from migration

(KS1/KS2)

Migration is ingrained in history, culture and language. Many English words come from contact with other languages and have been absorbed into English over time. This is true of every language. This would not happen without migration.

- Share the 'Words from Migration' below. In partners, ask the children to identify where each of the words come from, giving reasons for their answers.
- Take a word each and illustrate it for a classroom display of Words from Migration with the word and country of origin labelled.
- Look on a globe/map to identify where these countries are in the world and compare to the children's country of origin.
- Ask different pupils to create a piece of word art, using words from a specific country for a display. Older children could try fitting them together like a crossword answer.
- Can the children think of other words that may come from migration?

typhoon metropolis café guitar opera
ketchup lemon coffee sauna
safari kiosk atlas tofu
tart avatar yoga kung-fu ninja ski karate
impala guru moped caravan
chocolate entrepreneur giraffe tornado
pizza zebra bungalow
sapphire loot moccasin
cartoon tsunami



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Additional resources:

UNICEF resources (Upper KS2/KS3)

- Work through the 'Forced to Flee, Children on the Move' UNICEF teaching resource.
 - https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2018/09/20180926_Forced-to-flee_final3-1.pdf
- In this moving UNICEF video (Upper KS2/KS3), Harry and Ahmed tell their stories of being child refugees. Though generations separate them, there are many parallels between their stories as child refugees. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTk7a1s8vR8> **Please watch this video before sharing with students.**

UNHCR resources (adaptable for all ages)

UNHCR has a range of teaching resources across all age-groups:

<https://www.unhcr.org/teaching-about-refugees.html#words>



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