

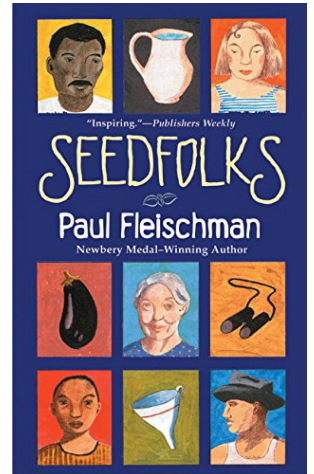
April 2021 Chapter Book of the Month

Seedfolks

Written by: Paul Fleischman

***Note: This book is appropriate for ages 10 and up, and may not be suitable for young readers.**

A Vietnamese girl plants six lima beans in a Cleveland vacant lot. Looking down on the immigrant-filled neighborhood, a Romanian woman watches suspiciously. A school janitor gets involved, then a Guatemalan family. Then muscle-bound Curtis, trying to win back Lateesha. 16-year-old Maricela. Amir from India. A sense of community sprouts and spreads.¹ Each chapter of *Seedfolks* is named for a different character and told from his or her point of view. As their garden plots grow, their hearts grow bigger, and their worldview expands. There are still hard times in this rough little neighborhood, but each eggplant and tomato is a little victory worthy of a shared celebration.²



Fun Facts

- Community gardens not only provide fresh fruits and vegetables, but also can be a tool for promoting physical and emotional health, connecting with nature, teaching life skills, and promoting financial security.³
- Community gardens are as varied as the neighborhoods in which they thrive. Types of community gardens include: plot gardens, cooperative gardens, youth gardens, entrepreneurial market gardens, and therapeutic gardens.³
- North Carolina has a long history of community gardens dating back to 1753 and the earliest-documented community garden in the Moravian town of Bethabara, near Winston-Salem.⁴
- Vegetable growing is popular in community gardens because vegetables require some space, but not necessarily acres. A vegetable garden can be in the ground or in a planting bed, but it does not have to be. Many vegetables can be grown in containers.⁵
- North Carolina ranks in the top 10 highest producing states in the country for the following vegetables: cabbage, squash, watermelon, cantaloupe, tomatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins, and sweetpotatoes.⁶

Before Reading⁷

Although the characters in *Seedfolks* live in the same neighborhood, most of them never bothered to introduce themselves until they started seeing one another at the

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garden. Have students think about their own neighborhoods. What does it mean to be neighbors? What are their relationships with their neighbors? What are some things that could potentially turn a neighborhood into a community? Do they think that their neighbors would welcome an opportunity to get to know one another better?

After Reading Discussion Questions for Groups⁷

1. How does the garden itself become a metaphor for what happens among its members?
2. Kim starts the garden without even realizing it. How does she do this? What are her reasons for planting lima bean seeds?
3. What does Ana assume about Kim when she sees her burying her seeds? How does she feel when she realizes her error?
4. On page 13, Gonzalo says, “The older you are, the younger you get when you move to the United States.” What does he mean by this?
5. How does Leona affect the course of the narrative? How does she use garbage from the lot to her advantage?
6. List some of the problems that the gardeners encounter. How do they help one another deal with these obstacles?
7. Describe Sae Young’s traumatic experiences in America. How does the garden help her overcome them?
8. Curtis tries to change his ways as he woos Lateesha with the tomatoes. What is he trying to show Lateesha about his values and principles?
9. In the course of the novel, a homeless young man named Royce comes to live in the garden. Describe how the gardeners’ attitudes towards Royce change. How do they help Royce, and how does he help them in return?
10. Why does Penny think working in the garden will be good for Maricela? How does it get Maricela to think differently?
11. What does Sam observe about how the garden is set up? How does he feel about this?
12. Sam likes to spend his time “sewing up the rips in the neighborhood.” What are some of the ways he does this in the garden? What are some of the things he does that many other people never bothered doing? Why do you think this approach helps him get through to people?
13. On page 59, Amir says, “the garden’s greatest benefit, I feel, was not relief to the eyes, but to make the eyes see our neighbors.” What does he mean? Give some examples.
14. What does Florence mean by the word “seedfolks?” Why do you think the author chose this as the title for the book?

15. What are some of the stereotypes Amir has about Polish people, and how does his attitude change when he meets one? What does this demonstrate about passing judgment?
16. What are some of the ways in which the characters work around language barriers to communicate?

Deeper Discussion Questions⁷

1. **Identify Problems and Solutions:** In *Seedfolks*, the gardeners encounter the problem of getting water to their plants. How does the group work together to solve this problem? What other problems come up throughout the book, and how are they dealt with? What problems do you think the garden might face in the future?
2. **Identify Steps in a Process:** In the course of the book, the small garden turns isolated neighbors into a community. As students read, have them identify the steps that lead to this unexpected outcome. Make a poster-sized diagram of this process, and update it as you read.
3. **Recognize Point of View:** Ask students to think about how the author gave each of his characters a distinct voice. Describe some of the ways Fleischman distinguishes the characters by how they tell their stories. How does the way in which the characters present their stories help convey their personalities to the reader? Recall an example of when the same event is described by two different characters. How do their depictions differ? What factors may have contributed to the characters' different perspectives?

Activity 1: Compare and Contrast⁷

Each character in the book has a distinct background and reasons for coming to the garden. Select five characters from the book. For each character, consider the following:

- What is the character's ethnicity?
- What plant does the character choose to grow, and why?
- What brings this character to the garden?
- What does the character gain from participating in the planting of the garden?

Address these questions in the form of a chart, with the character's names down the side and the questions across the top. Fill the chart with the class as you read.

Activity 2: *Seedfolks* Vignettes⁷

Have students take the role of a "seedfolk" and write their own vignette to add to this collection. Just as Fleischman gives each of his characters a distinct background, voice,

and set of problems, have students develop such factors in their own stories. Students should include information about what they would plant in the garden, and potential problems associated with growing their plants/vegetables/fruits.

Activity 3: Seedfolks Mapping⁷

The characters in *Seedfolks* come from a variety of different countries. Have students locate these places on the map. Have small groups of students choose a character and research the history and economy of that character's country of origin. Why did certain characters choose the plants they did for the garden, and does it have a connection with their geographical history? Have each group prepare a report on that country, focusing on the factors that may have led people to emigrate to the United States. Students can present their reports to the class.

Activity 4: Seedfolks Monologues⁷

Students will choose a *Seedfolks* character and a passage from their character's chapter. They will memorize the passage they choose and perform it as a monologue to the class. Students should focus on the emotions of their character in the specific passage they select. Students in the class should listen to the monologues and try to figure out the character without the presenter announcing it.

If you have more students in your class than characters, consider some of the characters who do not narrate, such as Lateesha, Royce, or Virgil's father. Ask students to write a monologue for the character.

Activity 5: Propagating like Kim⁸

Materials:

- Jewelry bags, one per student
- Cotton balls, one per student
- String
- Hole punch
- Seeds (can use a variety of seeds for this activity)

*This activity is available as a kit with all materials included on the National Ag in the Classroom eStore: <https://agclassroomstore.com/living-necklace-corn-seeds/>

Procedure:

1. In *Seedfolks*, Kim starts the garden by planting lima beans. Inform students that seeds are the offspring of plants. Just like a human baby, a seed contains genetic information from a male parent and a female parent.

2. Have students read *Seed to Seed, 101* (see **Links** section). Inform students to think about the steps in the process of seed formation as they read. After students are finishing reading have them record in a notebook or journal, how a plant produces a seed. Ask, “Why is the lima bean Kim planted a seed?”
3. Have students (working in teams or alone) select a seed and research (using the internet or print resources) the flower structure of a lima bean. Instruct students to diagram how the specific plant produces a seed.
4. Next, have students select a different seed to research. Ask them to compare and contrast the information with the information they found about lima beans. Have students share and compare their results.
5. Tell students that they will be planting seeds and observing how the embryo inside the seed develops into a plant that contains the genes from its parents.
6. Model the steps below:
 - a. Punch a hole in the top of a small jewelry sized plastic bag.
 - b. Dip a cotton ball in water. Give the cotton ball three “flat” squeezes to remove excess water.
 - c. Place the cotton ball inside the plastic bag.
 - d. Place two seeds in the plastic bag, one on each side of the dampened cotton ball.
 - e. Tie a string or piece of yarn through the hold punched in the top of the plastic bag. The string can be worn like a necklace.
 - f. Do not close or seal the plastic bag! The seed needs air to sprout!
 - g. The seeds should soon swell up from the moisture and germination should take place in about three days.
7. Each day, have students record in their journals the changes they observe in their seeds. Review the reproduction process and have students use their knowledge of genetics to hypothesize how closely the new developing plants would resemble their parents.
8. Once one of the seeds has germinated, remove the other seed. There is only enough room and moisture to support the growth of one seed.
9. The seed can be transplanted into soil by cutting off the bottom of the bag, pulling out the germinated seed (cotton ball and all), and transplanting to a container with soil.

Links

- How to Organize a Community Garden (from NC Extension)
<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/how-to-organize-a-community-garden>
- *Seed to Seed, 101* (used in **Activity 5: Propagating like Kim**)
https://cdn.agclassroom.org/media/uploads/2016/01/20/Seed_to_Seed.pdf
- Living Necklace Activity Kit

<https://agclassroomstore.com/living-necklace-corn-seeds/>

Sources

1. <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/272752.Seedfolks>
2. <https://www.npr.org/2012/04/24/151207366/both-community-and-garden-grow-in-seedfolks>
3. <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/how-to-organize-a-community-garden>
4. <https://www.ourstate.com/community-gardens/>
5. <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/home-vegetable-gardening-a-quick-reference-guide>
6. <https://news.ncsu.edu/2018/09/top-vegetables-in-nc/>
7. <http://files.harpercollins.com/PDF/TeachingGuides/0064472078.pdf>
8. <https://www.agclassroom.org/matrix/lesson/80/>
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4th-8th Grade Subject Areas

Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Science, and Social Studies

NC Standard Course of Study

Reading

- **RL.4.1** Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
- **RL.4.2** Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.
- **RL.4.3** Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text.
- **RL.4.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including words that affect meaning and tone.
- **RL.4.7** Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.
- **RL.4.9** Compare and contrast the use of similar themes and topics and patterns of events in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures.
- **RL.5.1** Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
- **RL.5.2** Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.
- **RL.5.3** Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text.
- **RL.5.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, recognizing specific word choices that contribute to meaning and tone.
- **RL.6.1** Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **RL.6.2** Determine a theme of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.
- **RL.6.3** Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.
- **RL.6.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.
- **RL.6.5** Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.
- **RL.6.6** Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.
- **RL.7.1** Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **RL.7.2** Determine a theme of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
- **RL.7.3** Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact.

- **RL.7.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text; analyze the impact of rhymes and repetitions of sounds on meaning and tone in a specific line or section of a literary work.
- **RL.7.6** Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the perspectives of different characters in a text.
- **RL.8.1** Cite textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **RL.8.2** Determine a theme of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.
- **RL.8.3** Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.
- **RL.8.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.
- **RL.8.6** Analyze how differences in the perspectives of the characters and the audience or reader create such effects as suspense or humor
- **RI.4.1** Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
- **RI.4.2** Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.
- **RI.4.3** Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.
- **RI.4.4** Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a grade 4 topic or subject area.
- **RI.4.5** Describe the overall structure of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.
- **RI.4.6** Compare and contrast a firsthand and secondhand account of the same event or topic; describe the differences in focus and the information provided.
- **RI.4.8** Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text
- **RI.5.1** Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
- **RI.5.2** Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.
- **RI.5.3** Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.
- **RI.5.4** Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 5 topic or subject area.
- **RI.5.6** Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.
- **RI.5.8** Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).
- **RI.5.9** Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.
- **RI.6.1** Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **RI.6.2** Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.
- **RI.6.3** Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text.
- **RI.6.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning.
- **RI.6.5** Analyze how a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas.
- **RI.6.6** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.
- **RI.7.1** Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **RI.7.2** Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
- **RI.7.3** Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text.
- **RI.7.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

- **RI.7.5** Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.
- **RI.7.6** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.
- **RI.8.1** Cite textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **RI.8.2** Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.
- **RI.8.3** Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events.
- **RI.8.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.
- **RI.8.5** Analyze in detail the structure of a specific paragraph in a text, including the role of particular sentences in developing and refining a key concept.
- **RI.8.6** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

Writing

- **W.4.1** Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
- **W.4.2** Write informative /explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly
- **W.4.5** Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.
- **W.5.1** Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
- **W.5.2** Write informative /explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
- **W.5.5** Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.
- **W.6.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
- **SL.6.4** Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks.
- **W.7.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
- **W.8.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content

Speaking and Listening

- **SL.4.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly
- **SL.4.4** Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; adjust speech as appropriate to formal and informal discourse.
- **SL.5.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- **SL.5.4** Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks.
- **SL.6.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one on one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- **SL.6.4** Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks.
- **SL.7.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one on one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- **SL.7.4** Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks.

- **SL.8.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one on one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- **SL.8.4** Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks.

Science

- **5.L.2** Understand the interdependence of plants and animals with their ecosystem.
- **5.L.3** Understand why organisms differ from or are similar to their parents based on the characteristics of the organism.
- **6.L.1** Understand the structures, processes and behaviors of plants that enable them to survive and reproduce.
- **8.L.5** Understand the composition of various substances as it relates to their ability to serve as a source of energy and building materials for growth and repair of organisms.

Social Studies

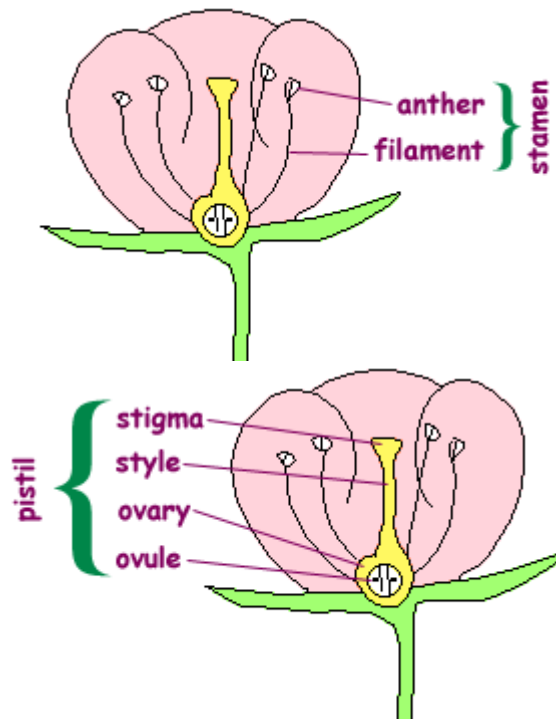
- **4.E.2** Understand the economic factors when making personal choices.
- **5.G.1** Understand how human activity has and continues to shape the United States.
- **5.E.2** Understand that personal choices result in benefits or consequences.
- **5.C&G.2** Analyze life in a democratic republic through the rights and responsibilities of citizens.
- **5.C.1** Understand how increased diversity resulted from migration, settlement patterns and economic development in the United States.
- **6.H.2** Understand the political, economic and/or social significance of historical events, issues, individuals and cultural groups.
- **6.E.1** Understand how the physical environment and human interaction affected the economic activities of various civilizations, societies and regions.
- **6.C.1** Explain how the behaviors and practices of individuals and groups influenced societies, civilizations and regions.
- **7.C.1** Understand how cultural values influence relationships between individuals, groups and political entities in modern societies and regions.
- **8.C&G.2** Understand the role that citizen participation plays in societal change.
- **8.C.1** Understand how different cultures influenced North Carolina and the United States.

Seed to Seed, 101

Where do seeds come from? Flowers are the key. Although we humans enjoy their beauty, fragrance and, in some cases, nutrition, flowers are not here to please us! Their sole function is to produce seeds. The color, size, shape, smell, and other characteristics of flowers are vital to this effort. Flower structure can vary greatly, but there are a number of basic parts. The female organ, the **pistil**, is generally in the center of the flower. Its sticky **stigma**, which traps pollen, is held up by the tube-like **style**. This leads down to the **ovary**, inside of which are **ovules**, which contain female egg cells. The male parts, the **stamens**, typically surround the **pistil**. The **anther** on top of the stamen produces pollen, which contains male sperm cells. During pollination, pollen is moved from male to female flower parts by wind, bees, birds, bats, and a host of other animals. Flowers entice pollinators — using bright colors, designs, special shapes, and aromas — to the promise of sweet, nutritious nectar inside. When a pollen grain lands on the stigma, a tiny tube grows from it down to the ovary. Sperm cells then travel through this tube to an ovule, and there joins with an egg cell in a process called **fertilization**. The fertilized ovule will become a seed, and the ovary, a fruit. Without this process, the cycle of life would cease!

From Seeds! The Promise of Life

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Images from: <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/gpe/case4/c4facts1a.html>