
The Story Garden

Classroom Guide

Every family grows a garden of stories — and yours needs planting too

CASEL Competency: Social Awareness

Grade Level: Pre-K–3

Duration: 40–50 minutes

Category: Stories Together

Learning Objectives

- Understand that family stories are living things that need tending and sharing
- Learn that listening deeply is how stories grow richer
- Discover that every child has their OWN story-seed to plant
- Practice deep listening and storytelling skills

Overview & Preparation

Key Vocabulary

Story • Garden • Listen • Plant • Bloom • Tend • Family • Memory • Seed • Heritage

Materials Needed

- The personalized story
- Paper "flower" templates
- Crayons and markers
- Popsicle sticks for "story stems"
- Optional: real flower pot with soil

Before Reading

Connection Question

What is the best story someone in your family has ever told you? What made it special?

Background Building

In this story, a grandparent's garden is magical: each plant is a STORY from the family's past. Watering them with careful listening makes them bloom with more detail, more color, more life. And the grandparent shows the child: YOU have a story-seed too. Your life, your memories, your experiences — those are seeds that will grow into stories for the next generation.

During Reading — Pause Points

- **When the child discovers each plant is a family story** — A whole garden of stories! Your family has a garden too — even if nobody's planted it yet. What stories might be in YOUR family garden?
- **When listening carefully makes a story-plant bloom bigger** — The story GREW because someone listened! Why does careful listening make stories richer?
- **When the child plants their own story-seed** — The child is starting their OWN story! Your life is already a story being written. What's in your story-seed?

Discussion Questions

1. The grandparent's garden has a plant for every family story. If YOUR family had a story garden, which stories would be growing there?

↳ Who would you ask to tell you more about those stories?

2. Listening carefully made the stories bloom. What happens to stories nobody listens to?

↳ How is listening different from just hearing?

3. The child planted their OWN story-seed. What experience from YOUR life deserves to be a story?

↳ Who would you want to tell your story to someday?

4. Why is it important to keep family stories alive? What happens when they're forgotten?

↳ How can you help preserve your family's stories?

Facilitation Tips

Some children may not have access to family stories. Broaden the concept: "Your story garden can include stories from friends, neighbors, books, or experiences. Everyone has stories worth planting."

Emotional Payoff

Stories aren't just things that happened — they're living things that grow when tended and wither when neglected. The child discovers they are not just a listener but a STORY GROWER, adding their own experiences to the family garden that will bloom for generations.

After Reading Activities

Story Flower Craft

Duration: 15 min | Materials: Flower templates, popsicle sticks, markers

Each child creates a "story flower" — the center is a family story or personal memory. Each petal is a detail: who, what, where, when, and how it felt. Plant the flower (on a stick) in a class "Story Garden" display.

Deep Listening Pairs

Duration: 10 min | Materials: Timer

Pairs: one child tells a short story (30 seconds). The listener then retells it, adding: "And what I noticed was ____." The original teller says what the listener caught that they forgot. Practice: listening makes stories GROW.

Plant a Story Seed

Duration: 10 min | Materials: Small paper squares, pencils, jar or pot

Each child writes a "story seed" — one sentence about something that happened to them. Fold and place in a class Story Jar. Throughout the year, pull seeds and grow them into full stories together.

Writing Prompts

- Draw your family's story garden. Which stories are the tallest flowers? Which are just seeds?
- Write a story seed: one sentence about something that happened to you that deserves to grow.
- Who is the best storyteller in your family? What makes their stories special?

Home Connection

Family Letter

Dear Families,

Today we read "The Story Garden," about discovering that family stories are living things that need tending and sharing. Your child planted a "story flower" and learned that listening carefully makes stories bloom. Please share a family story with your child this week — the more you tell them, the richer the garden grows.

Here is how you can continue this learning at home:

- Tell your child one family story at bedtime this week — even a small one
- Ask your child to retell the story back to you and see what details they add
- Start a family "Story Jar" where everyone drops in a one-sentence memory

With warmth,

Your Child's Teacher

Related Books

- Tell Me a Story, Mama by Angela Johnson
- Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge by Mem Fox
- The Keeping Quilt by Patricia Polacco
- Grandfather's Journey by Allen Say