

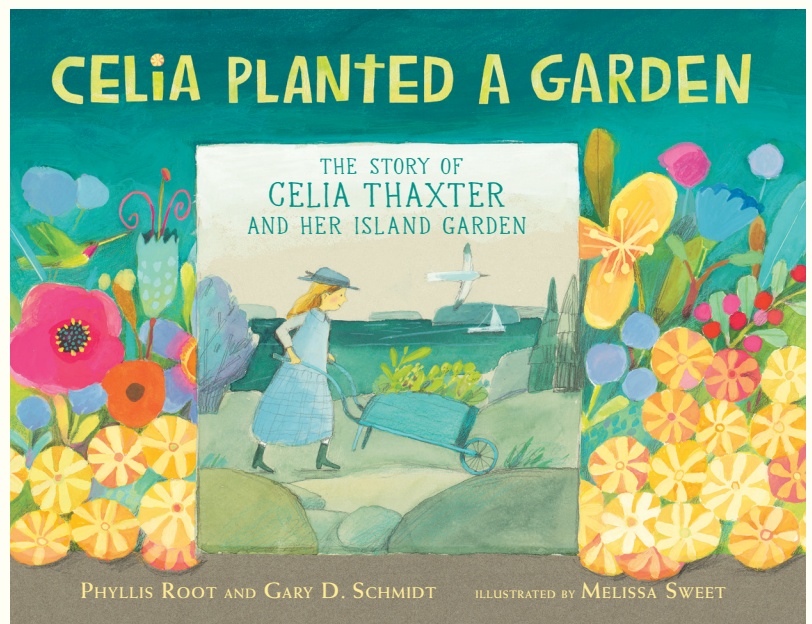
CELIA PLANTED A GARDEN

THE STORY OF CELIA THAXTER AND HER ISLAND GARDEN

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illustrated by Melissa Sweet

Poet, painter, and gardener Celia Thaxter grew up on the Isles of Shoals, islands off the coast of New England. Where others saw a barren landscape, Celia saw a future garden. As a child, she began planting colorful flowers among the rocks. As an adult, she created a large, gorgeous garden that drew many admirers. She became well known for her poetry about the flowers, birds, ocean, and weather of the islands. In this vibrant picture-book biography, quotes from her poems combine with the story of her life and pictures of her beloved flowers to introduce a remarkable gardener who made her world more beautiful. This guide provides discussion questions and activities related to her life, to the book and its format, and to biography as a genre.



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COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

This guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading informational text standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Review the book's jacket, opening endpapers, and title page. How do they welcome readers into the book? What do they suggest to potential readers about the book's content? How do you think they reflect Celia's life?
2. What information do you get in the first two paragraphs? What do they tell you about Celia? What do they foreshadow about the rest of the book? Discuss the use of repetition here and elsewhere in the narrative.
3. The first quote from Celia reads, "Ever since I could remember anything, flowers have been like dear friends to me." She also says that the flower called the scarlet pimpernel "was like a human thing." Name some aspects of friendship. How could flowers be like friends to her? How could a flower seem human? Learn more about the scarlet pimpernel. Why did its petals close when "a storm was on its way," and how might that seem human?
4. Birds are also important to Celia. When do birds appear in the narrative, poems, and pictures? What does she love about them? Describe the scene with the hummingbird that Celia finds after a storm and what it tells you about Celia.
5. Who are the members of Celia's family when she is young and when she is older? What do the pictures tell you about them? How are they important to her? What do you think it would be like to live somewhere with no one other than your family?
6. Discuss the locations in the narrative. Where is Celia happiest, and why? How does being on an island affect her life? How does she feel about living on the mainland?
7. Find places in the narrative and poems that refer to weather and the ocean. How does the weather affect her life at different times? What are her feelings about the ocean?
8. What do you learn about the hotel that her father built? What kind of work did Celia do there? How did meeting hotel guests help Celia get her poems published?
9. Look at the map of the Isles of Shoals in the book and then locate the islands on a map of the United States. Talk about the names of the islands. Why do you think Celia's father changed the name of Hog Island to Appledore Island? Why didn't Celia's husband want to live on an island?
10. Choose a double-page spread in the book and study it closely. How do the words and pictures relate to one another? How do the pictures add information and emotion beyond what the narrative gives? What emotions do the colors convey? How do the two pages in the double-page spread relate to each other?



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

MY GARDEN PLAN

As a class or in small groups, design a flower garden and create a labeled, colored illustration of the layout and plants. Ask students to bring in ideas of flowers they've grown or seen locally. In planning they should consider the flowers' color and size and when they bloom. Introduce the concept of plant hardiness zones (<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/>), which older students should take into account in their plans. Students could also learn about what insects, birds, or other animals might come to particular flowers. Have small groups share and explain their choices. Then plant some seeds (it does not have to be the full garden). Use eggshells or pots on a windowsill inside or plant directly outside if it is warm enough and you have the space.

A DECK OF FLOWERS

Create a deck of playing cards featuring flowers with your class. Make a set of identically shaped cards out of cardstock and give each student two. Have each child choose a different flower from the book and draw a colored picture of it on each card. To play a game like Go Fish or Concentration, label the cards on the same side as the flower. For flash cards, put the name on the back. This can also be done with local flowers or Celia's favorite birds.

POEMS BRIMMING WITH COLOR

Celia Planted a Garden brims with color and poetry. Lead an activity in which students, individually or as a class, write short poems about one or more colors. Before writing, collectively make a list of color names and have students express their associations with the colors, including objects, emotions, and senses such as smell. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) offers templates for color poems: www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/color-poems-using-five.

AS THE SEASONS CHANGE

As a class or individually, have students divide a piece of paper into four equal parts and label each part with the name of a season. Ask them to write notes about how each season is portrayed in the book in terms of weather and scenery, Celia's activities and moods, colors, and so on. The student or group can then add their own experiences with each season where they live.

HER ISLAND GARDEN

Together watch the trailer for the documentary *Celia Thaxter's Island Garden* (<https://celiathaxtergarden.com/celia-thaxters-island-garden-trailer/>), which includes photographs and paintings of Thaxter, her garden, and a revival of her garden. Also share her 1894 book, *An Island Garden*, which includes her garden plan and list of flowers and paintings by Childe Hassam (the book is in the public domain, and a digital edition is available: <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/thaxter/garden/garden.html>). Then hold a discussion on what these two resources offer and how they relate to *Celia Planted a Garden*.

REMARKABLE LIVES

Picture-book biographies with their combination of narrative and illustrations provide excellent introductions to people whose lives made a difference. Gather a group of biographies to read to your students or have them read independently. Then have students compare and contrast the biographies, using questions like these: What did the person do? How much of the person's life do the books cover? What kind of illustrations are used? What information is included at the back?



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

PHYLLIS ROOT is the award-winning author of more than fifty children's books, including the *Boston Globe–Horn Book Award* winner *Big Momma Makes the World*, illustrated by Helen Oxenbury, and *One Duck Stuck*, illustrated by Jane Chapman. Phyllis Root lives in Minnesota.

GARY D. SCHMIDT is a two-time Newbery Honoree (for *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*, which also earned a Michael L. Printz Honor, and *The Wednesday Wars*) as well as a National Book Award Finalist for *Okay for Now*. He lives in Michigan.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

MELISSA SWEET is a *New York Times* best-selling author and illustrator. She has received numerous awards, including two Caldecott Honors, two Robert F. Sibert Medals, an Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children, and a *Boston Globe–Horn Book Honor* for *Some Writer! The Story of E. B. White*. She lives in Maine.

These questions were prepared by Kathleen Odean, a school librarian for more than fifteen years who now gives professional development workshops about new books for children and teens. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Caldecott and Newbery Award Committees.

