

## Peace Literacy Curriculum: Laying the Foundations

### The Garden of Strong Community An Allegory for Kindergarten-age Children



The Garden of Strong Community, as interpreted by Carol Guagenti, 2018

This unit is built around an allegory “The Garden of Strong Community,” and is designed to accompany the essay *A New Peace Paradigm: Our Human Needs and the Tangles of Trauma* by Paul K. Chappell, available at [peaceliteracy.org](http://peaceliteracy.org).

# Peace Literacy Curriculum: Laying the Foundations

## The Garden of Strong Community

### An Allegory for Kindergarten-Age Children

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#### Foreword

This unit uses an allegory that helps students **understand our basic human needs**. Meeting these needs in healthy ways empowers us to **build strong communities**. This allegory can be introduced in kindergarten and expanded upon as students advance from first through fourth grade. This unit can also increase understanding in many areas such as science, history, reading and writing, and social and emotional learning while focusing on the learning outcomes listed below. By introducing and reinforcing these learning outcomes throughout the unit, teachers can improve quality of life for their students and also themselves.

This unit is a supplement to the essay *A New Peace Paradigm: Our Human Needs and the Tangles of Trauma*, which is available for free at [peaceliteracy.org](http://peaceliteracy.org). We recommend that you read that essay before working through this unit with your students.

#### Enduring Understandings for Kindergarten-level

- All living things have basic needs for health and growth.
- When we understand the basic needs of living things, we can help them to grow and thrive.
- Humans have basic physical needs, but also basic psychological needs (this lesson focuses on five of these needs: Belonging, Nurturing, Expression, Challenge, Explanations.)
- Understanding our non-physical needs gives us the confidence and competence to help ourselves and each other to grow and thrive.

*Our five basic psychological needs are comparable metaphorically to the needs of a plant and lend themselves to an allegory of a healthy plant. This allegory will continue to develop itself in the succeeding lessons.*

#### Concepts

- Belonging (Soil)
- Nurturing (Water)
- Expression (Air)
- Challenge/Space (Growth/Space to Grow)
- Explanation (Light)

## Skills

Active Listening, Expression, Participation

## Materials

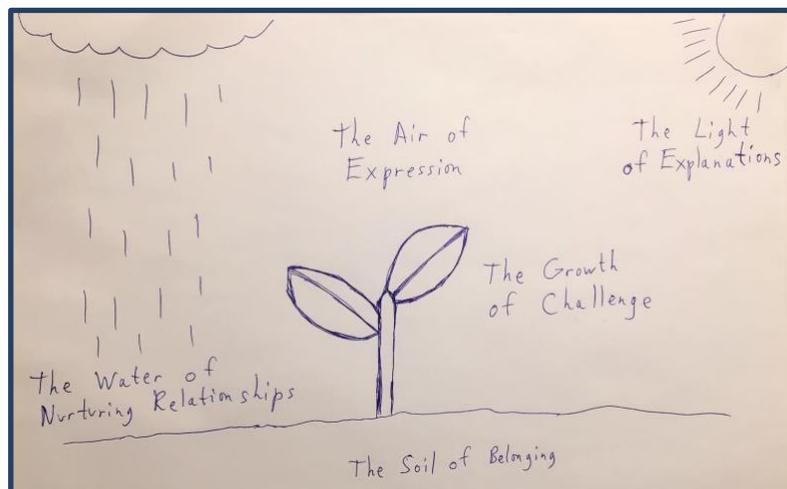
White Board, Pot, Plant, Potting Soil, Cup of Water, Chart of the Basic Needs of the Plant (for reference), Sight Word Cards printed with the Words: Soil, Water, Air, Growth/Space to Grow, Light

***This lesson may be presented in parts depending on time constraints and the attention span of the students.***

## Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

1. List the five basic needs of a plant
2. Compare those needs to the basic needs of an individual
3. Practice active listening



## Part 1: Soil – Belonging

1. Prepare students to listen to a short story by asking them what it means to be a good/active listener. Suitable responses: Pay attention, no talking while someone else is speaking, wait your turn in order to respond, think about what is being said, etc.
2. Ask students why it is important to listen carefully. Suitable responses: to understand what is being said, to learn, to be respectful, to make others feel respected. Tell students that this practice is called active listening, and that they are going to have a chance to practice this not only during this lesson, but all year long.

3. Introduce the narrative/allegory of the plant:

***Once there was a man who decided to buy a plant for his home, but he didn't have any idea how to take care of it. He was so excited that he didn't think things out. He ran to the store and bought a plant and a pot. When he got home, he put the plant in the pot and admired it. But something didn't seem right. The plant was leaning over.***

4. Introduce the plant and a pot, and ask the students, "Do you think that this plant will grow if there is nothing else in the pot? Why or why not? Is there something that needs to hold the plant in place? What do you think that is?" Suitable responses: soil, dirt. *Note: This is an opportunity to model and support active listening.*

5. Ask students, "Why is soil a good place to put this plant?" Suitable responses: Holds the plant firmly in the ground, protects the roots, provides a good foundation, allows for the plant to get the necessary food/nutrients.

6. Continue the narrative: **When the man looked at the plant, he realized that he needed to get some soil. So he ran back to the store, bought some potting soil, and hurried back home. When he returned, he put his plant in the soil.** Place soil in the pot and put the plant in. Display on the white board the sight word card that says **Soil**. Ask students to repeat the word after you. *Refer to chart and show students where the soil is located.* Explain that soil gives the plant a home, allowing it to feel rooted and grounded.

7. Ask students to think about themselves. Tell them that they are like plants in many ways. If soil is good for a plant because it keeps it grounded and supported, what kind of soil do they need to make them feel supported and nurtured? Suitable responses: Family, friends, pets, teachers, neighbors, etc. Explain that our friends and family help us to feel like we belong, like we have a home.

8. Explain to them that our kind of soil - if it's healthy - helps us to feel part of something bigger. That we feel like we belong. Our kind of soil is called **belonging**. Ask students, "What does it mean 'to belong'?" What kinds of things do we belong to? How does it feel to belong? How can we make others feel like they belong?" Explain to them that inclusion and participation are essential nutrients for good soil and for feeling like we belong. \*At this point you may want to remind students to practice active listening skills.

### **Probing Questions:**

In order to emphasize that belonging is more about people rather than a physical home, ask the following questions:

- Why do you need a friend?
- How can a good friend help you find joy?
- How can not having a friend cause someone to feel sad?
- How can we be a good friend to others?

## Part 2: Water – Nurturing Relationships

9. Direct students' attention back to the narrative: ***When the man finished putting the plant in the soil, he stood back to admire his new friend. He noticed that the plant was wilting. He couldn't understand why it was drooping; he had put it in good fresh soil. The man sat and thought for a while. All that thinking made him thirsty! He went and got himself a drink of water and sat down again. He took a sip and looked at the plant. He took another sip. As he sipped, he wondered how to help his plant...***

10. Ask the students why they think the plant was wilting. Suitable responses: it was thirsty, it needs water. Ask the students what water does for a plant. How does it help a plant? Suitable responses: it provides nourishment, it helps feed the plant.

11. Go back to the narrative: ***Then he had an idea! Maybe the plant was wilting because it was thirsty too. He poured the rest of his glass of water into the pot. In a little while, the plant started to stand up straight and tall. It loved being nurtured. And the man felt better too because he was taking good care of it.***

Water the plant. Display on the white board the sight word card **Water**. Ask the students to repeat the word. *Refer to chart and show students the cloud and water.*

Explain that by watering our plant, we just nourished it. Just as plants need to be nourished with water, we need to be nourished with nurturing relationships, which include empathy, kindness, trust, and being respected.

### Probing Questions:

- How does it make you feel when you are nurtured?
- What happens when someone doesn't feel nurtured?
- What kinds of things can you do to make others feel nurtured?

## Part 3: Air – Expression

12: Direct the students' attention back to the narrative: ***The man was so proud of himself for taking care of the plant. He wanted to make sure that it was protected, so he put it on a very high shelf in a room that was stuffy and had no air because he didn't want it to catch a cold. In a few days, he went to check on the plant. He took it down off the shelf and noticed that its leaves were turning yellow and it was looking limp. Now what? The man couldn't understand what the problem was. He had given it good soil. He had given it plenty of water. So, what could be the problem now? As he sat in the warm, stuffy room, he found it very hard to breathe. There were no windows, so there was no fresh air coming in.***

Ask students what they think the problem could be. Besides soil and water, what else does a plant need?

Return to narrative: **He had an idea! Maybe the plant needed to breathe too! He moved the plant to a room that had plenty of fresh air. The plant began to perk up right away.**

**13.** Explain that just like plants need fresh air to breathe. Plants take in (inhale) carbon dioxide and give out (exhale) oxygen, which helps the air that we breathe. Just as plants need to inhale and exhale air, we need to **inhale through listening** and **exhale through expression** to survive and thrive as individuals and as a community. When we listen very carefully, we are taking in information so that we can understand what the person is trying to tell us. It is like we are breathing in and thinking about what the person is saying. Then, when we speak, it is like we are exhaling and letting our response out.

**14.** Display on the white board the sight word card **Air**. Ask the students to repeat the word. *Refer to chart and show students where the air of expression is.*

#### **Student Breathing Exercise:**

Direct students to breathe slowly in through their noses and out through their mouths. Tell them that inhaling is like listening and exhaling is like speaking. Just as we inhale in order to inhale, we should listen in order to speak. And just as inhaling and exhaling are a cycle, listening and speaking are a cycle. Explain that listening and speaking are a kind of inhaling and exhaling that are not limited by the capacity of our lungs.

#### **Probing Questions:**

- How can we show that we are listening carefully?
- How is careful listening a responsibility that we have to our community?
- How can we express ourselves in healthy ways?
- What are some unhealthy forms of expression?

### **Part 4: Growth/Space to Grow**

**15.** Direct the students' attention back to the narrative: **The man took very good care of his friend the plant. He made sure that it got plenty of water and fresh air, and the plant began to grow and spread. The problem was that when he moved the plant from the stuffy room, he had put the plant in a bookcase in the corner that was cramped and crowded, and filled with other things that limited the space where the plant lived. After a few months, the man noticed that the plant had no room to grow tall. It simply couldn't grow up because it was trapped on a shelf, so the plant began to hunch over and grow crooked. It wasn't doing well at all. The man was worried that his plant couldn't thrive.**

**16.** Ask the students what they think the problem was.

Suitable answers: The plant didn't have enough space, plants need room to grow, etc.

Display on the white board the sight word card **Growth**. Ask the students to repeat the word. *Refer to chart and show students where the challenge of growth is.*

Explain that just as plants need growth (which includes room to grow), we need challenge. Challenge allows us to grow in our human capacities, to become stronger, and to strive toward our full potential. We cannot become stronger physically, emotionally, or psychologically unless we are challenged.

**Probing Questions:**

- In what ways do we need space to grow? Can you give some examples?
- What kinds of challenges do we face that help us to grow physically?
- What kinds of challenges do we face that help us grow emotionally?
- What are some of the ways that these challenges help us to become stronger?

### Part 5: Light – Explanations

**17.** Return to narrative: **The man realized that the plant couldn't grow properly if he left it on the cramped shelf, so he moved it into a room that had plenty of space but had no windows. So now the plant had a pot with very good soil, it had water, it had air, and it had space, but it still wasn't growing very well. The leaves had turned a pale green. They were not the healthy, bright green that they used to be. The man was very upset because he thought that he had done everything that he could to help his plant, but there was still a problem. He wanted to look closer at the leaves to inspect them. He noticed that the room was room was too dark to see very well.**

**18.** Ask students what they think the problem could be. Explain that plants need light in order to grow and that the man didn't put his plant in a room where it could get light. Ask the students where we can find a suitable source of light (from the sun).

Display on the white board the sight word card **Light**. Ask the students to repeat the word. *Refer to chart and show students where the source of light is.*

**19.** Explain that just as plants need light, we need explanations. We seek explanations by asking questions. Just as light illuminates the world around us, explanations metaphorically illuminate the world around us, allowing us to perceive aspects of reality that were previously hidden from our view.

**Probing Questions:**

- Where are some good places to get explanations to our questions?
- Where are some places that are not so safe to get explanations to our questions?
- Why are these places not so safe?

**20.** Return to narrative: **The man finally realized that he needed to put the plant in a room where there was a good light source. He went from room to room and finally found the perfect place in his bedroom next to his window that had plenty of space, air, and wonderful light. The plant was very happy there and grew and grew and grew. The two lived happily ever after.**

**21.** Tell students that they must look around their classroom to find a suitable space for their plant. Review the five needs of the plant and ask for suggestions as to the best place to put the plant.

### **Conceptual Progression of the Allegory from Kindergarten Onwards**

**Kindergarten** – To transform words such as “peace” and “well-being” from clichés into a practical path, we must establish a Vocabulary of Our Humanity that deepens our understanding of what it means to be human. For kindergarteners, you can introduce this Vocabulary of Our Humanity by exploring five of our basic needs: belonging, nurturing relationships, expression, growth, and explanations.



**First Grade** – You can expand this Vocabulary of Our Humanity by introducing the nine muscles of our humanity: hope, empathy, appreciation, conscience, reason, discipline, curiosity, language, and imagination. Just as our physical muscles allow us to tend a garden of plants, the muscles of our humanity allow us to tend the garden of people that form a strong human community. You can take the discussion from the individual level (plant) to the community level (garden) by discussing how the classroom is a community, similar to a garden.

**Pictured, left, Ari, age 6, with her plant at the end of the lesson, June 2020.**

**Second Grade** – You can spend more time discussing how human beings are different from plants. This involves discussing not only how the needs of plants are analogous to our own needs, but also how they are *dis-analogous*. For example, plants don’t have to do conscious work to generate soil, water, air, growth, and light. However, human beings must generate belonging (soil), nurturing relationships (water), air (expression), challenge

(growth), and light (explanations) through *conscious effort*. The muscles of our humanity give us the means to consciously generate healthy forms of belonging, nurturing relationships, expression, challenge, and explanations. Students can contemplate and discuss how they can use the muscles of our humanity to help themselves and others meet their non-physical needs in healthy ways. Having strong muscles of our humanity and meeting our non-physical human needs in healthy ways allow us to strengthen communities.

**Third Grade** – You can discuss that just as water is comprised of two elements (hydrogen and oxygen), the water of nurturing relationships is comprised of seven elements that we can learn to increase. These seven elements, which are essential for strong communities and can be found on the “Strengthen Communities” vocabulary sheet at [peaceliteracy.org](http://peaceliteracy.org), are:

1. Shared Trust
2. Shared Empathy
3. Shared Participation (Teamwork)
4. Shared Purpose, Ideals, or Vision
5. Shared Experiences
6. Shared History
7. Shared Struggle (Strengthening each other during struggle)

**Peace Literacy Lesson Plan 1**, which is available for free at [peaceliteracy.org/curriculum](http://peaceliteracy.org/curriculum) discusses the Three Elements of Universal Respect (Listening with Empathy, Leading by Example, and Speaking to People’s Potential), which are skills that help us increase shared trust and shared empathy, and in turn can strengthen all of the other elements.

**Fourth Grade** – Students can discuss the importance of our non-physical human needs and the muscles of our humanity in *communities beyond the classroom*, such as the entire school, their city, their country, and the world.

## Epilogue And Next Steps

During an era when humanity has the technological capacity to destroy itself, Peace Literacy is survival literacy. During an era of growing turbulence, confusion, and uncertainty, Peace Literacy is also life literacy. Peace Literacy is about how we live together, how we live within ourselves, and how we make a world in which each and every person is equipped with the skills needed to thrive and create more peaceful and just societies. This is the foundation of peace that is realistic, resilient, and sustainable.

We are here to support your teaching of Peace Literacy in a number of ways. You can contact our Peace Literacy Coordinator Jo Ann Deck ([joannpdeck@gmail.com](mailto:joannpdeck@gmail.com)).

May you be safe; may you be healthy; may you have courage; may you work for peace.

Respectfully,

Peace Literacy Team

### Please Share Your Experience!

If you used this lesson in your class, **please send a quick email** to our curriculum coordinator, [Sharyn.clough@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Sharyn.clough@oregonstate.edu), and let us know:

- \* the name of your school or school district
- \* how many students were in your class
- \* what parts worked best
- \* any suggestions you have for improvement

**Thank you!** 😊