

Peace Literacy Curriculum: Laying the Foundations

The Garden of Strong Community An Allegory and Pictorial



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 www.peaceliteracy.org.

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The Garden of Strong Community

An Allegory and Pictorial

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Foreword

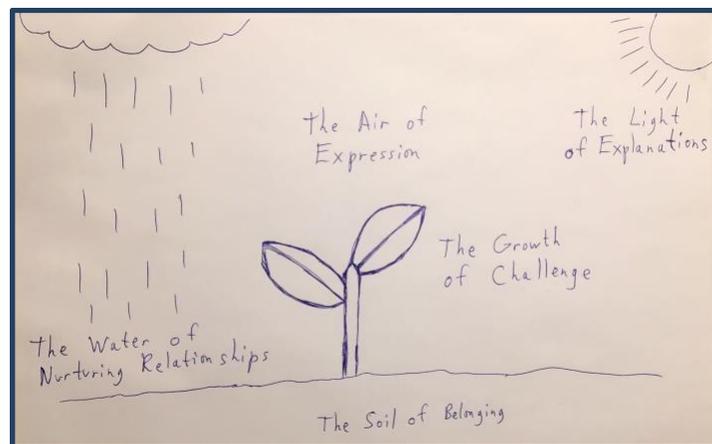
This unit uses an allegory that helps students **understand our basic human needs**. Meeting these needs in healthy ways empowers us to **build strong communities**. This allegory can be introduced in kindergarten and expanded upon as students advance from first through fourth grade. This unit can also 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. We recommend that you read that essay before working through this unit with your students.

Learning Outcomes

- List five things that plants need to survive.
- List five of our shared human needs.
- Explain how to meet those needs in healthy ways.
- Identify features of our communities that help meet those needs in healthy ways.
- Identify our responsibilities as community members and be empowered to uphold those responsibilities.

Here is an image of the completed garden pictorial. You do not have to be an artist!



As mentioned above, this unit uses an allegory as its foundation. Because allegories are extended metaphors, they make complex ideas less abstract and more engaging and accessible to students. Allegories also increase depth of understanding and allow us to implement the following kinds of learning:

- Visual Learning – This can tie into art projects
- Interactive Learning – This can tie into group work and hands-on activities
- Experiential Learning – This can tie into work that connects with and builds life experience

The Basic Psychological Needs of Students in K-4

In our multi-part unit, **Peace Literacy: Laying the Foundations**, the first part, “The Landscape of Our Human Needs” allegory, discusses nine non-physical needs shared by all humans and how to meet those needs in healthy ways. It is designed for grades 5/6 and up. “The Garden of Strong Community” allegory is designed to help younger (K-4) students understand five of those non-physical human needs that align with their own psychological development and readiness to begin learning about community life:

- 1. Belonging**
- 2. Nurturing**
- 3. Expression**
- 4. Challenge**
- 5. Explanations**

The Basic Needs of Plants

Before introducing the allegory and our non-physical needs, start with a discussion of what plants need to survive and thrive.

Essential Question

- What do plants need to survive and thrive?

The basic needs of plants must be discussed thoroughly. For an allegory to work with young children, they must have sufficient background understanding. Teachers should focus on five basic needs that must be met for plants to survive and thrive:

- 1. Soil**
- 2. Water**
- 3. Air**
- 4. Growth**
- 5. Light**

This discussion can be expanded in first grade and higher grade levels by exploring *what kind* of soil, water, air, growth, and light plants need to survive and thrive.

The Importance of Accurate Understanding

Discuss the importance of having an *accurate understanding*. What happens if we have an *inaccurate understanding* of the basic needs of plants? For example, what if we believe that putting a seed in a dark box with no soil, light, or water will cause a plant to emerge from the seed and grow. What will happen?

Student Exercise

As an experiment, have students put one seed in a dark box with no soil or water, and another seed in soil with sufficient water and light. After two weeks have them record any differences between the seeds.

Emphasize that the importance of accurate understanding can be applied to other areas of life. Simple examples can be offered in kindergarten, and more complex examples can be offered in higher grade levels. For older students, what if we have an inaccurate understanding of events that happened in history? Do we need to listen to different points of view in order to gain a *more* accurate understanding? What if we have an inaccurate understanding of how electricity works? What if we have the inaccurate understanding that metal (rather than rubber) is a good insulator that can protect us from electricity? In **Peace Literacy Curriculum: An Introduction**, Part 3 “The Anatomy of Metis” we discuss the importance of accurate understanding in much greater detail (see <http://peaceliteracy.org/curriculum>).

Levels Within the Allegory

This Allegory has two levels. For the first level, emphasize that just as it is important to have an accurate understanding of what plants need to survive and thrive, it is also important to have an accurate understanding of what human beings need to survive and thrive. We discussed five of the basic needs of plants, and now we are going to discuss five of the basic needs of human beings that are not physical needs.

- **The first level of the Allegory** creates a parallel between plants having five basic needs and human beings having five basic needs (human beings have additional basic needs that are introduced in “The Landscape of Our Human Needs” allegory suitable for grades 5+). Explain to students that this first level of the Garden Allegory is an analogy between plants and humans. Just as plants have basic needs, humans also have basic needs. Another example of an analogy is that just as ants need to be raised in an ant colony to survive, children need to be raised in a human community to survive.
- **The second level of the Allegory** creates parallels between specific needs of plants and specific needs of human beings, where we think of belonging as metaphorical soil, nurturing as metaphorical water, etc.

Note: Children can understand elements of metaphorical thinking as early as age four, and their ability to understand metaphors increases as they grow older (see for example, Wiśniewska-Kin, Monica. 2017. “Children’s Metaphor Comprehension and Production.” *The New Educational Review*, 48: 87-97.)

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The Garden of Strong Community

An Allegory and Pictorial

Set up

Hang on the wall a large piece of white craft paper that is about four feet tall and about five feet long. After you draw each part of the allegory on the craft paper (or have students draw their own examples), tape up the accompanying text box (all of the text boxes for this pictorial can be downloaded in an easy-to-print format from peaceliteracy.org/curriculum). After going through the discussion for that part of the allegory, draw the next part. The following provides a brief overview of the allegory and a couple of exercises. More exercises will be available at peaceliteracy.org.

1. Belonging – Soil

Draw a line representing the ground.

Read the following text box to students out loud and then tape up a printed version onto the craft paper:

Just as soil gives plants a home, belonging gives us a home, allowing us to feel rooted and grounded. Our friends and family help us feel like we belong, like we have a home, allowing us to feel rooted and grounded.

Probing Questions:

To emphasize that belonging is more about people and experiences than merely a location, ask students:

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

Note: It is important to help students understand that “home” is not merely a physical structure, but also consists of a sense of belonging. Well-known sayings such as “Home is where the heart is” and “Mi casa es su casa (My house is your house)” refer to a sense of belonging. Defining “home” merely as a physical structure is a common misconception in our society that is reflected in the widespread use of the word “homeless.” For many people who lack housing, it is more accurate to use the term “unhoused” rather than “homeless,” since they often have some form of community and a sense of belonging to their city. Refugees who are forced to leave their community and are seen as strangers in a foreign land have lost both “house” and “home.”

Student Exercise: Have each student draw a plant in soil. The plant symbolizes the student. In the soil have them draw pictures or add photos of what gives them a sense of belonging. The pictures or photos can consist of **people** (this can include pets) and **experiences**. If the student draws a picture of a place or object, have the student share an experience that is connected to that place or object. For example, if a student draws a picture of a tree or personal item, ask the student why that tree or personal item is meaningful to them. What experience makes it meaningful? As a writing exercise, students can describe why each image that they have included in the soil of belonging is meaningful to them.

2. Nurturing Relationships – Water

Draw rain falling from a cloud.

Read the following text box to students out loud and then tape up a printed version onto the craft paper:

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.

Note: In higher grade levels, students might wonder if too much kindness can hurt human beings, just as too much water can hurt a cactus. This can introduce a discussion on different kinds of plants, since many plants live on water or underwater. What kind of plant do human beings more closely resemble, a cactus that doesn't need much water (with water symbolizing empathy, kindness, trust, and respect) or a plant that grows in ponds such as the lotus flower and water lily?

As our other Peace Literacy curricula illustrate, human beings thrive in environments filled with empathy, kindness, trust, and respect. In Part 3 of the Metis unit we note that when people say too much empathy and kindness are harmful, this often results from an inaccurate understanding of the nature of empathy and kindness. For example, empathy and kindness *do not mean* that we spoil people by indulging their every whim, because empathy and kindness are concerned with people's overall and long-term well-being. Spoiling children by indulging their every whim, such as buying them a toy every time they ask for one, is harmful to their overall and long-term well-being.

The essay *A New Peace Paradigm: Our Human Needs and the Tangles of Trauma* discusses the critical importance of trust for human beings, and *The Art of Waging Peace* (Chappell, 2013) discusses the critical importance of respect. When using water as a metaphor for empathy, kindness, trust, and respect, we are far more like an aquatic plant that thrives on or in water, rather than a cactus that doesn't need as much water.

3. Expression – Air

Label the “air” above the plant.

Read the following text box to students out loud and then tape up a printed version onto the craft paper:

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.

Listening and Expression Levels 1 and 2:

Emphasize that just as plants survive and thrive from “inhaling” carbon dioxide and “exhaling” oxygen (through “respiring”), we survive and thrive as individuals *and as a community* when we listen (inhale) and speak (exhale). Just as we inhale in order to exhale, we should listen in order to speak. Emphasize that listening and speaking are a kind of inhaling and exhaling that are not limited by the capacity of our lungs.

To help students better understand listening and speaking (which is one among many forms of expression), we can represent both listening and speaking as occupying two levels. Level 1 relates to the “outer world” (the physical reality that surrounds us), while Level 2 relates to the “inner world” (emotions and other aspects of the psyche).

- **Listening Level 1:** If an adult gives children guidance on what can keep them safe (such as telling them to not touch a stove because it is so hot that it will burn their skin) and they don’t listen, they can get hurt. Listening Level 1 involves listening to what someone is saying about the outer world (e.g., warnings about the dangers of stoves).
- **Listening Level 2:** When an adult tells a child that a stove can get so hot that touching it will cause a painful burn, Listening Level 2 involves the child being able to hear the compassion and/or fear that is beneath the adult’s words. Listening Level 2 involves being able to hear that the adult cares. Of course, it is easier for children to hear compassion and care when adults are skilled at speaking with compassion and care. Listening Level 2 involves being able to *listen empathetically* to others, being able to hear the compassion, fear, or anxiety that are part of someone’s inner world.
- **Expression Level 1:** This involves expressing something about our outer world, such as saying, “The movie starts at 5 p.m.”
- **Expression Level 2:** This involves expressing something about our inner world, such as saying, “I’m worried that we are going to be late to the movie.”

We need both levels of Listening and Expression. Both are important! However, the number associated with each level is meant to convey that Level 2 is more difficult than Level 1. Expression Level 2 requires self-knowledge (the ability to introspect and be self-

aware) and integrity (which includes being honest with ourselves about how we feel). For the vast majority of people, it is easier to talk about the weather (a part of our outer world) than to speak with self-knowledge and integrity about how we feel (a part of our inner world). If a child is annoyed because an adult is telling them to wear a helmet when riding a bike because it is important to protect their head from a possible fall (Listening Level 1), it takes more skill for the child to be able to hear the compassion and/or fear beneath the adult's words (Listening Level 2), which can increase the child's appreciation for the adult. You can tell students that many forms of listening and expression combine Levels 1 and 2, and that when we have conflicts with people, Level 2 Listening or Expression are needed to resolve those conflicts in healthy ways.

As mentioned earlier, Listening Level 2, which we can also call *deep listening*, requires empathy. Because empathy is its own kind of listening, when we use empathy to recognize someone's inherent dignity, we are listening in a deep way, even if they aren't saying something. When we speak first in a conversation, we can begin by using empathy to recognize the inherent dignity of those we are speaking to. When we use empathy to hear the inherent dignity of others before we speak, it is like taking a deep breath before we speak.

Examples of Level 1 and 2 for kindergarten-aged students

- Expression Level 1 (Communicating information that pertains to our outer world)
"We are having pasta for lunch."
- Expression Level 2 (Communicating information that pertains to our inner world)
"I really like pasta!"
- Listening Level 1 (Listening to information that pertains to our outer world)
Students hearing the teacher say, "Wash your hands before you eat. This will help keep you healthy."
- Listening Level 2 (Listening to information that pertains to people's inner world)
Students listening with empathy when someone says, "I am really hungry."

Student Breathing Exercise:

Have students 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 exhale, we should listen in order to speak. And just as inhaling and exhaling are a cycle, listening and speaking are a cycle. Remind students 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 express ourselves in healthy ways?
- What are unhealthy forms of expression?
- How is listening a responsibility we have to our community?

4. Challenge – Growth

Write “The Growth of Challenge” above the plant.

Read the following text box to students out loud and then tape up a printed version onto the craft paper:

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 or psychologically unless we are challenged.

Note: For first through fourth graders, nine areas of growth that require challenge can be introduced. We refer to these nine areas of growth as the *muscles of our humanity* or the *muscles of metis*. In our **Peace Literacy Curriculum: An Introduction Part 2 “The Muscles of Metis,”** we discuss these nine muscles in greater depth. These metaphorical muscles symbolize important human capacities and emphasize a growth mindset. The Muscles of Metis are:

1. Hope
2. Empathy
3. Appreciation
4. Conscience
5. Reason
6. Discipline
7. Curiosity
8. Language
9. Imagination

5. Light - Explanations

Draw the sun.

Read the following text box to students out loud and then tape up a printed version onto the craft paper:

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.

Explanations help form our worldview. Children naturally start forming their worldview at a very early age when they seek explanations by asking countless questions. Four-year-old children can ask questions such as, “Where do babies come from? Why does it rain?” Adults can become annoyed because young children ask so many questions. For older students you can discuss how explanations can give us energy to take action, similar to plants using light to create chemical energy during photosynthesis.

Afterword

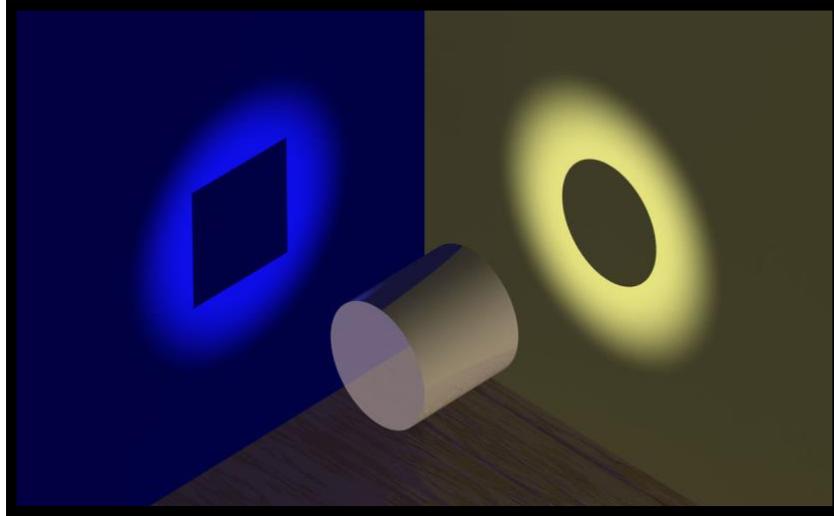
Shared Humanity

All of the needs discussed in this allegory emphasize our **shared humanity**. Understanding our shared humanity includes understanding that all people have the same basic needs, including the five non-physical needs discussed in this unit, which we can feed in a wide variety of ways. How can people feed their non-physical needs such as belonging, nurturing relationships, expression, challenge, and explanations in healthy ways? What are unhealthy ways that people can try to feed these non-physical needs? These questions are explored further in *The Landscape of Our Human Needs* allegory and the essay *A New Peace Paradigm: Our Human Needs and the Tangles of Trauma*, which provide background information on all nine of our non-physical human needs.

The essay *A New Peace Paradigm: Our Human Needs and the Tangles of Trauma* overturns Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and shows that our non-physical human needs help us meet our physical needs. *The Garden of Strong Community* allegory also shows how our non-physical human needs such as belonging, nurturing relationships, expression, challenge, and explanations create a foundation for meeting physical needs such as food and safety. If sprouting seeds don't have soil, water, air, growth and light, they will die. In a similar way, a child will die if placed in the wilderness alone and not given belonging and nurturing relationships in the form of a community. If children don't listen to warnings about what can harm them, are unable to express themselves when they are in pain or peril, and have inaccurate explanations that endanger them, they can also die. If children lack the kinds of challenges that empower them to survive and thrive as an adult, they can die prematurely during adulthood.

Multiple Metaphors

After *The Garden of Strong Community* allegory is explored in kindergarten through fourth grade, *The Landscape of Our Human Needs* allegory can be introduced in fifth grade or higher. These two allegories use the teaching technique of *multiple metaphors*, which is a Peace Literacy teaching technique that allows us to see a complex idea from multiple angles. Each metaphor gives us a new way of looking at the idea, like looking at an object from a new angle. Just as viewing the cylinder in the image below from multiple angles provides greater insight into the nature of the object being viewed, viewing our non-physical human needs through multiple metaphors (angles) provides greater insight into the nature of our non-physical human needs. *The Landscape of Our*



Human Needs allegory deepens and expands the ideas introduced in *The Garden of Strong Community* allegory in ways that address urgent issues in the lives of older students and adults.

In addition to connecting belonging, nurturing relationships, expression, challenge, and explanations to **metaphors** and **images**, we can also connect these complex ideas to an aspect of **sensory experience**. **When the soil of belonging is concerned**, we can have students focus on how soft soil feels and connect this soft feeling to belonging. **When the water of nurturing relationships is concerned**, we can have students focus on how good it feels to drink water when we are thirsty, how nourishing and refreshing this can feel, and connect this good feeling to the nourishment of empathy, kindness, trust, and respect. **When the air of expression is concerned**, we can have students focus on how good it feels to inhale and exhale nourishing air, and connect this good feeling to listening with empathy and then speaking. **When the growth of challenge is concerned**, we can connect the good feeling of learning new things and getting better at something to challenge (this can involve learning new things in hands-on exercises). **When the light of explanations is concerned**, we can have students see how when a light turns on in a room, we can see what we couldn't see before, and connect this to explanations.

Conceptual Progression When Starting This Allegory in Kindergarten

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.

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, 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 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.