

Reading Group Guide

Growing Home

By Beth Ferry

Illustrated by the Fan Brothers

About the Book

Growing Home is a whimsical and heartfelt story about four unlikely housemates—a clever spider, a lovable houseplant, a dramatic fish, and a cheerful new friend—who must overcome their differences to protect their human family from a mysterious and greedy man. With themes of friendship, empathy, courage, and teamwork, the story balances humor with adventure, all brought to life through rich vocabulary and beautiful illustrations by the Fan Brothers.

Prereading Activities

Preview the Book Cover and Illustrations

1. Have students examine the cover art and any inside illustrations. Ask them to predict what the story might be about based on the images and title.

Make Predictions

2. Share a summary or blurb of the story (such as the one describing Ivy the houseplant, Toasty the goldfish, and their magical adventures). Ask students to predict:

- Who might be the main characters?

- What problems might they face?

- What magical events could happen?

3. Let students discuss and share their predictions in small groups or as a class.

K-W-L Chart

4. Create a K-W-L chart with three columns: What We Know, What We Want to Know, and (after reading) What We Learned.

Before reading, fill out the first two columns together. For example:

K: What do we know about houseplants, goldfish, or magic?

W: What do we want to learn about the characters or the story's setting?

After reading the story, have students fill in the Learned column, reflecting on what they have learned and answering their previous questions.

Activate Vocabulary

5. Introduce some key vocabulary words from the story (e.g., *invisible*, *outlandish*, *defend*, *recuperate*, *tromped*, etc.). Ask students to guess the meanings or use them in their own sentences before encountering them in the

text.

Discussion Questions

1. Who are the main characters in the story, and how are they different from one another?
2. Who is telling the story? How would it be different if Toasty or Ivy were the narrator?
3. Where does most of the story take place? What is the significance of the fish tank? Why is it so important to the plot?
4. Describe the relationship between Ivy and Toasty at the beginning of the story. How does it compare to their relationship at the end?
5. How does Toasty feel about not being the favorite? What clues from the text help you understand his feelings?
6. Compare and contrast Ivy's and Ollie's personalities. How are they similar and different as plants and as characters?
7. What magical powers do the characters discover, and how do they use them?
8. How do the illustrations help tell parts of the story that aren't in the text?
9. What problems do the characters face, and how do they solve them?
10. How does each character's personality help or hurt the team's efforts? Could they have succeeded without one of them?
11. How does Jillian treat the plants, animals, and other living things in her home? What does this tell you about her personality? Would you want Jillian as a friend? Why or why not?
12. Which character do you think grew or changed the most? Use examples from the text.
13. How do the characters show empathy or learn to understand one another better?
14. Why do you think the author chose to have the spider explore a typewriter? What might this symbolize about Arthur?
15. Why do you think the man with the purple shoes wants the fish tank so badly? What clues does the author give us about his character?
16. How do Jillian's parents react to the magical or strange things happening in their home? What does this tell you about their relationship with Jillian?
17. Why do you think the author, Beth Ferry, interrupts the story to talk directly to you, the reader? How does this make you feel about the story or help you understand it better?
18. What is the message or lesson of the story? How do the characters learn this lesson?
19. What does the story teach us about friendship and teamwork?
20. Do you think the magical powers were a gift or a problem? Support your answer with evidence.
21. How would the story change if the magical powers did not exist? Could the characters still save the Tupper

family?

22. How does Jillian's relationship with her parents change from the beginning of the novel to the end? What causes this change? Have you ever had to prove something to an adult when they didn't believe you right away?

23. Imagine you could give one new magical power to one of the characters. What would it be, and how would it affect the story?

24. If you had to choose one character to join you on an adventure, who would you pick, and why? Justify your choice using traits and actions from the story.

Extension Activities

Creative Writing Exercises

Author's Chair: Write Your Own Aside

After reading a chapter where the narrator interrupts the story, have students write their own short “aside” as if they are the author. They should pick a moment in the story and write a message directly to the reader—this could be to explain a tricky word, give a hint about what might happen next, or share a funny thought. Students can share their asides with the class, discussing how these interruptions might help readers understand the story or feel more connected to the characters.

Author's Craft: Write the next chapter!

Have students write or outline the next chapter of the book, using the below as prompts.

What new challenge might the team face next?

What happens if a new character is introduced—perhaps a talking lamp, a musical rug, or a tired butterfly? How would the team react?

Prompt: Arthur's Typewriter Tales

Imagine that Arthur the spider was using the typewriter to create letters for a secret pen pal in the attic. To whom is he writing, and what does he have to say about the events in the house and his new friends? Have students write three to four “typed” letters from Arthur to a secret pen pal of their choosing.

Magical Mishaps: “What if” Writing Lab

Encourage students to write, plot, or draw a script or scene in which the magic fish tank water splashes onto something else in the house. They should set the scene as if the object gained magical powers and joined the team. Once they've finished the scene, ask students to create a “magical rules” section explaining how the power works, its limits, and what happens if it's misused.

Logistics & Literacy Activities

All in with Alliteration

Alliteration occurs when a series of words begin with the same consonant or vowel sound (e.g., “Antiquarians acquire ancient objects to sell in their antiques store”). Arthur is a big fan of alliteration. Find other examples of alliteration throughout the novel, then have students write a sentence describing each character (Ivy, Toasty, Arthur, and Ollie) using alliteration.

Magic Powers Science Experiment

Discuss the magical abilities in the story (lifting objects, invisibility). Challenge pairs or groups of students to design a simple science experiment or invention inspired by these powers (such as using magnets to “lift” objects or using camouflage techniques). Have students present their ideas to the rest of the class, explaining how their invention works, connecting fiction to real-world science concepts.

The Great Debate: Who’s the Real Hero?

Host a class debate or write a persuasive essay: Who is the most important member of the team: Toasty, Ivy, Arthur, or Ollie? Use examples from the book to support your case. Encourage students to create campaign posters or superhero trading cards to help sway their audience.

Metaphor Match-Up and Mood

As a class, identify a metaphor used in the story (e.g., “she gobbled that compliment right up and wanted more”). (Chapter eleven) What does it *literally* mean? Discuss in groups why you believe the author chose that comparison? What mood or image does it create within the story?

- Create a Metaphor Map
- Write out the metaphor from the story
- Interpret its literal meaning
- Describe the mood or image it creates
- Explain what it reveals about the character

Challenge: Try rewriting a key sentence *without* the metaphor, then compare versions and discuss which one is more powerful and why.

Homophone Humor Comic

The author uses homophones, or words that sound the same but mean different things, to add humor and cleverness throughout the book. Find a passage where a homophone is used and discuss what makes it funny or confusing.

To further expand on this, ask students to create a three-panel comic using a pair of homophones (e.g., “toad” vs. “towed”) in a misunderstanding between characters from *Growing Home*. Write the dialogue, illustrate it, and explain the wordplay in an accompanying paragraph.

Silent Storytelling—Show, Don’t Tell

Choose an illustration from the book that includes rich detail or emotion. Write a short scene or paragraph describing what’s happening *based only on the picture*, using sensory details, internal thoughts, and dialogue, without summarizing or writing the text. Don’t say how the character feels directly (e.g., “Toasty was angry”)—show it through their actions or words. Turn it into a “before and after” writing task: What happened right before or after this scene, based on visual context clues?

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