

# Object-Based Storytelling in the Garden

**Overview:** Objects evoke memories, emotions, and ideas and can be used as inspiration to express our thoughts and feelings. In this lesson, young gardeners use objects they find in the garden or in a natural space to help them create a story that shares a lived experience.

**Grade Level/Range:** adaptable to K – 12<sup>th</sup> Grade

## Objective:

Students will:

- Explore the garden or a greenspace to find an object that has special meaning to them.
- Use the object as a focus to remember a personal experience from their lives.
- Create a written story to share with others based on appropriate developmental levels.

**Time:** 1+ hours

## Materials:

- Access to garden, park, or other natural space
- Paper and pencils
- Notebook or paper and clipboard
- Colored pencils, crayons, or markers (optional)

## Background Information

In life, we are constantly surrounded by both natural and man-made “stuff.” Think back to early childhood and you realize that many of our first lessons for kids are filled with learning about the objects that surround them, giving them names and discovering what they do. As we navigate the world, some of these objects will take on special meaning and evoke different emotions related to our experiences. This is why objects can be great tools for inspiring kids to tell a story.

The objects can be directly responsible for the story. Here is an example of a short story where the object is part of the memory:

### Our Garden Ferns

Every summer we would go to visit my grandmother in North Carolina. Sitting on her front porch enjoying the shade and breeze from the swing is one of the things I remember most. I can remember shelling beans in a big metal bowl and also playing a game of slug bug with my sister as we watched cars drive by on the road out front. She always had these huge hanging baskets of ferns on the front porch dangling from the ceiling like spiders. My dad divided and potted up some of the ferns so that we could take some back to our own house at the end of the summer too. Every time I look at or water my ferns, I think of summer days on my grandmother’s front porch.



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Alternatively, the objects can serve as a symbol to spark our memory about an experience or thought. For example:

### The Watering Can

The watering can in our garden reminds me of climate change. In science class, we learned about climate change and how it is leading to increasing problems caused by the seemingly opposite forces of drought and flooding. The normal cycles of weather are being altered and in addition to storms and wildfires causing immediate danger conditions, farmers are having trouble getting enough water for their crops and cities are struggling to have enough safe drinking water for their residents. When I look at the watering can in our garden, I am reminded of the important role water plays in our world and that it is a precious commodity. It reminds me to be careful with how I use water and only use what I need.

Edible plants can also spark a distinct memory, and can offer an easy connection for kids at an earlier developmental stage:

### Dinner from the Garden

Green pea pods with green peas in them climb up the trellis in our garden. It reminds me of my mother and cooking dinner together at home. Arroz con pollo looks so colorful with yellow rice, red peppers, and round green peas. It's my favorite dinner!

## **Laying the Groundwork**

Introduce students to the idea of object-based storytelling and share some examples (possible examples in Background Information above). Travel out to your garden or to nearby greenspace and ask students to find an object that inspires a thought or feeling that they could use to tell a story. Ask them to bring a pencil along with a notebook or paper on a clipboard to take notes.

## **Exploration**

1. Encourage students to explore their objects. You can ask the following questions:
  - What is your object?
  - Use your senses to explore the object. What does it look like? Smell like? Feel like? Does it activate a sense? Is it safe to taste?
  - How does this object make you feel?
  - Does this object have a specific meaning to you or do you have a memory of an experience that features this object?
  - Does this object remind you of something that happened to you or that you learned about even though the object was not part of the experience?
2. Ask them to begin by jotting down some thoughts based on their exploration and add ideas about the object that they would like to share, beginning the brainstorming process for their story. Have them focus on the memories or feelings that the object inspires.

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3. If time and weather permit, you can have them find a good spot in the garden or greenspace to write their story. If you need to return to the classroom, have them draw the object or take a picture of the object to serve as a prompt as they write their story.
4. Next, have them write their story. This can be adapted based on their development level. Younger students can use pictures and simple words to tell their story (see worksheet). Encourage older students to use age-appropriate descriptions to make the story come alive for others.
5. As an optional last step, ask them to create an illustration to go with their story using pencils, crayons, or markers.

### **Making Connections**

If students feel comfortable, have them share their stories with each other. Ask students:

- Did anyone use the same object for the stories? Were any of the stories the same?
- Why do you think objects evoke memories and feelings?
- Do objects need to be expensive in order to have value to us?

### **Branching Out**

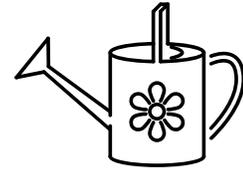
Students can continue their garden-based writing explorations by creating poetry. Check out the lesson [Growing Poems](#) for ideas.

### **Related articles**

- Garden-Inspired Writing - <https://kidsgardening.org/resources/digging-deeper-garden-inspired-writing/>
- Growing Poems - <https://kidsgardening.org/resources/lesson-plans-growing-poems/>
- Make a Field Journal: <https://kidsgardening.org/resources/garden-activities-make-a-field-journal/>

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# My Garden Story



Draw a picture of your object, or scene from your garden story in the box below:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thick black border, intended for a child to draw a picture related to their garden story.

Write your garden story here:

A series of ten horizontal black lines, evenly spaced, providing a guide for writing the garden story.