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Family Reading Guide for "Growing Home"

Conversation starters for parents and children

Getting Started

What This Book Is About

"Growing Home" follows Jillian and her family at Number 3 Ramshorn Drive, where they live with their only pet—Toasty the goldfish, who finds the whole situation baffling. Toasty lives in a magnificent octagonal tank that has been in the family for generations and holds a magical secret. The tank acts as a catalyst, bringing together the neighborhood's cast of characters and helping everyone discover what friendship truly means. Warm, whimsical, and full of quiet wonder, this is a story about roots, connection, and the magic hiding in ordinary things.

Key Themes Your Child Will Encounter:

- **Friendship and belonging:** The story explores how genuine friendship forms between unlikely people—and creatures—and what it truly means to belong somewhere
- **Magic in the ordinary:** Beth Ferry finds wonder in everyday objects—a fish tank, an ivy plant, an old house—inviting readers to look for enchantment in their own lives
- **Family and legacy:** The tank's multi-generational history raises questions about what we inherit from those who came before us
- **Community connection:** The story celebrates neighborhoods and the unexpected ways our lives become intertwined with those around us
- **Animal perspectives:** Toasty's goldfish narration offers a playful, outside view of human concerns, adding both humor and fresh perspective
- **Care and attention:** Tending to things—plants, fish, neighbors—is shown as a meaningful and connecting act

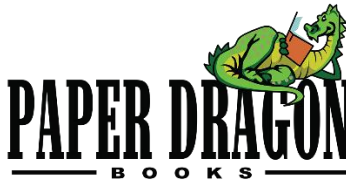
Tip for Parents: Beth Ferry's whimsical style and Toasty's puzzled perspective make this book perfect for shared reading. Stop and enjoy the humor together! The story offers rich opportunities to explore what makes a neighborhood feel like home and what it means to truly notice the people around us.

Discussion Questions

About Jillian and Her World

- Why do you think Jillian is so drawn to the ivy plant?
- What does it mean that the fish tank has been in the family for generations?
- How does Toasty's perspective help us see Jillian's world in a new way?
- What secret does the tank hold, and how does it change things?

About Friendship and Community



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- How does the magical tank help bring people together?
- What does "the true meaning of friendship" mean to you?
- Have you ever made a friend in a surprising or unexpected way?
- What makes a neighborhood feel like a community?

Fun Conversation Starters

- If you were Toasty, what would confuse you most about human behavior?
 - What object in your home do you think has the most interesting history?
 - If your house had a magical secret, what would you want it to be?
 - What plant or creature would you most want as a neighbor?
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Discussion Activities

Exploring Your Neighborhood

- Take a neighborhood walk and look for things you've never noticed before
- Learn the names of three neighbors you don't yet know
- Research the history of your street or neighborhood
- Try to spot ivy or other climbing plants and look up what they symbolize

Honoring Family Objects

- Ask family members about objects that have been passed down through generations
 - Photograph something in your home that has a story attached to it
 - Create a family "artifact" display with objects that hold memories
 - Write a short story about an object from your family's history
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Conversation Tips for Parents

Cultivating Wonder

- Point out magical or unusual things in ordinary settings—a spider's web, light through a window, an unexpected plant growing through concrete
- Encourage your child to look at familiar things from an unfamiliar angle—what might Toasty think of it?
- Ask: "What's the most surprising or magical thing you've noticed this week?"
- Model curiosity: "I wonder what story that old house has to tell."

Building Community Connections

- Discuss what makes your neighborhood feel welcoming—or what might make it feel more so
- Talk about neighbors who have surprised you with their kindness or interest
- Explore how small acts of attention—saying hello, noticing what someone loves—can create connection
- Share a story about an unlikely friendship from your own life



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Making It Personal

- Ask: "What object in our home do you think has the best story?"
 - Discuss: "What would you want a new friend to know about our neighborhood?"
 - Share what "home" means to your family beyond just the address
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Questions by Age Group

For Younger Readers (Ages 6-8)

- Where does Jillian live, and who lives with her?
- What is Toasty's tank like, and why is it special?
- What is Jillian's favorite plant, and why is Toasty confused by it?
- Name one friend or neighbor who becomes important in the story.

For Older Readers (Ages 9-12)

- How does Beth Ferry use magical realism to explore real themes of friendship and belonging?
 - What does Toasty's perspective add to the story that a human narrator couldn't?
 - What does the octagonal tank represent beyond just being a fish tank?
 - How does the story suggest that community is built through attention and care?
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Activity Ideas

Creative and Artistic Projects

- Design and illustrate your ideal aquarium or garden
- Write a journal entry from Toasty's perspective about a confusing human activity
- Draw a "neighborhood map" featuring all the characters in the story
- Create an illustrated family tree of your most treasured object, tracing where it's been

Hands-On Projects

- Plant an ivy cutting or another easy-to-grow plant and care for it together
 - Set up a simple fish tank or terrarium and observe it together over time
 - Bake something to bring to a neighbor as a small gesture of community
 - Start a neighborhood kindness project—notes in mailboxes, chalk art on sidewalks
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"Growing Home" is a reminder that magic doesn't always arrive in dramatic fashion—sometimes it lives in a fish tank that has been in the family for generations, in a plant climbing steadily toward light, in the neighbor whose story we haven't heard yet. Beth Ferry invites us to slow down, look carefully, and discover the extraordinary hiding inside the ordinary. Let this book open a conversation about what home really means to your family—not just the address, but the people, creatures, and objects that make it feel like yours.