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## "Growing Home" Lesson Plan Guide

*by Beth Ferry*

### Unit Overview

**Duration:** 1 week

**Grade Level:** 3–5

**Subject Integration:** ELA, Science, Social-Emotional Learning

**Essential Question:** How do we find belonging and build community, and where is the magic hiding in ordinary things?

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### Learning Objectives — Students will be able to:

- Analyze how Toasty's goldfish narrator creates humor and fresh perspective
  - Explore themes of friendship, community, belonging, and family legacy
  - Identify symbolism in plants and objects within the story
  - Express understanding through creative and community-connected projects
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### ONE-WEEK LESSON PLAN

#### Day 1: Toasty's World and the Power of Perspective

**Objective:** Introduce the goldfish narrator and build curiosity about the story's magical premise

**Materials:** Book, discussion prompts about neighborhood and community

#### Opening (10 min):

- Quick-write: "Describe your neighborhood. What do you love about it? What do you wish were different?"
- Partner share

#### Main Activity (35 min):

- Introduce Toasty the goldfish: a narrator who finds humans completely baffling
- Read opening pages together—enjoy Toasty's confusion about Jillian's ivy obsession
- Discuss: What can an outsider notice that an insider might miss? What does Toasty see clearly?
- Preview the magical octagonal tank: "What do you think the secret is?"

#### Closing (5 min):

- Exit ticket: "What question do you most want answered about the tank's secret?"

**Assessment:** Narrator perspective, humor appreciation, curiosity about the premise

#### Day 2: The Ivy, the Tank, and Symbols in Stories

**Objective:** Introduce symbolism using the ivy plant and the family fish tank as central examples

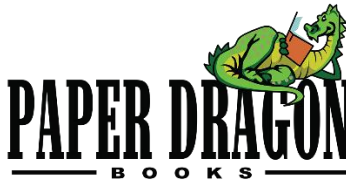
**Materials:** Plant symbolism reference, symbol analysis worksheet

#### Opening (10 min):

- Discussion: "Why do you think Jillian cares so much about an ivy plant? What might it mean to her?"

#### Main Activity (35 min):

- Introduce symbolism: objects in stories often represent bigger ideas



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- Explore ivy as a symbol: persistence, connection, growing toward light—how does this fit Jillian?
- Explore the tank: it has been in the family for generations—what does that kind of inheritance mean beyond just a fish tank?
- Students choose one object from their home and write what it might symbolize about their family

**Closing (5 min):**

- Share: "An object in my home that tells a story about my family is \_\_\_\_."

**Assessment:** Symbolism identification, text evidence, personal connection

**Day 3: The Magic That Brings People Together**

**Objective:** Analyze how magical realism serves the story's themes of community and friendship

**Materials:** Magical realism discussion notes, cause-and-effect chart

**Opening (10 min):**

- Quick-write: "If your home had a magical secret, what would you want it to be?"

**Main Activity (35 min):**

- Introduce magical realism: magic that lives inside everyday settings and serves emotional purposes
- Trace how the tank brings the story's characters together—make a simple cause-and-effect chart
- Ask: Why does the author use magic to build community rather than to create adventure?
- Compare: How does magic in this book feel different from magic in other books students have read?

**Closing (5 min):**

- Exit ticket: "What does the tank's magic really represent in this story?"

**Assessment:** Magical realism genre, cause-and-effect analysis, thematic purpose of magic

**Day 4: Community, Friendship, and the True Meaning of Home**

**Objective:** Synthesize the story's themes of belonging, friendship, and community

**Materials:** Character relationship map, friendship definition prompts

**Opening (10 min):**

- Think-pair-share: "What does 'true friendship' mean to you? What does it look like?"

**Main Activity (35 min):**

- Map all the characters and their connections—who meets whom, and how?
- Discuss: How is community built in this story? What small actions create connection?
- Big question: "What does 'home' really mean? Is it just an address?"
- Students write a theme statement: "Growing Home is really a story about \_\_\_\_."

**Closing (5 min):**

- Share theme statements—look for patterns and celebrate the range of ideas

**Assessment:** Theme synthesis, community concept, personal meaning-making

**Day 5: Creative Project and Community Celebration**

**Objective:** Express understanding through creative work and celebrate the classroom community

**Materials:** Art and writing supplies, presentation space

**Opening (10 min):**

- Preview project options and select

**Main Activity (35 min):**

- Option A: Write a week of Toasty's journal entries, observing the human events around him
- Option B: Draw an illustrated neighborhood map featuring the characters and their connections



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- Option C: Write about a real object from your home or family that holds a story—what does it mean and why?
- Share projects—frame the share as a community gathering, not just presentations

**Closing (5 min):**

- Class closing: "One thing I'm going to notice differently in my neighborhood because of this book is..."

**Assessment:** Creative expression, personal connection, community spirit

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**Differentiation**

- **Advanced learners:** Research magical realism as a literary tradition and find another example to share
  - **Students needing support:** Graphic organizers for character mapping; sentence starters for all writing tasks
  - **English Language Learners:** Discuss how community and family legacy look in different cultures; bilingual support for key vocabulary
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**Materials List**

- Class set of "Growing Home"
- Plant symbolism reference card (ivy, common garden plants)
- Character relationship map graphic organizer
- Cause-and-effect chart template
- Art and writing supplies for Day 5 project
- Chart paper and markers