

Growing an Artist: The Story of a Landscaper and His Son
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Ages 4–8 • Paula Wiseman Books

A TEACHING GUIDE TO GROWING AN ARTIST

THE STORY OF A LANDSCAPER AND HIS SON

BY JOHN PARRA



BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

From award-winning artist John Parra comes a touching picture book based on his childhood experience about the bond between a father and son, hard work, and the links between nature, art, and creativity.

On that big day—the first time Juanito gets to help his papi on the job as a landscape contractor, he sketches anything that catches his eye: a nest full of baby birds, a nursery with row upon row of plants and flowers, and more. He and his father travel from house to house, pruning, weeding, mowing, and turning overgrown and chaotic yards into beautiful spaces. Even though there are people who don't appreciate Papi's hard work, Papi always feels pride in owning his own business and in a job well done. At the end of the day, Juanito gets a chance to help his dad using his artistic eye!

PRE-READING SUGGESTIONS

Before reading, it would be helpful to support students in exploring some ideas in order to ensure comprehension. This allows them to capture the content and engage with the ideas and discussions more productively.

Landscaping—It will be important for readers to understand what landscaping is. Discuss how people might not value it as an important job in our society. The narrative counters that idea and offers students an empathic lens for why shunning these workers is not good.

Bilingualism—In the book, an older character invites the main character to practice his Spanish. Invite students to celebrate bilingualism through the moments it happens in the story, and welcome them to share what they think of bilingualism, speaking two languages or more, and how that might impact a person's identity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What career does the main character's father have? What does he do when he goes to different homes and places?
2. Papi takes Juanito to work with him in *Growing an Artist*, and he learns all about his father's work and the different plants and people he manages. Ask the class if they know what their parents or guardians do for work, and if they have ever been to work with them. If they have, ask them to talk about what they learned about that parent's job.
3. How does the main character feel about his father and his work?
4. When Alex ignores Juanito, what impact does it have on him? Why do you think he felt that way? Have you ever been ignored by a friend? How did that make you feel?
5. What is Juanito's skill in the story? What is he doing while his father is working?
6. Toward the end of the story, Juanito plays an important role in helping his father with his work. What does he do? How does Juanito's work have a positive impact?
7. What do you think this story is about? What moment(s) in the text support your theory?

8. Juanito was able to turn his hobby and passion into something that helped with his father’s work. Discuss with the class how some of their favorite things to do and practice could be helpful to a parent, teacher, or community.

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

By understanding craft and structure, readers can identify elements of the text that help them with basic analysis. The discussion topics and corresponding activities below will help.

Discussion and Activity: Using Art to Tell Stories

For this discussion, teachers can ask students to turn to the last page of the book and consider what Juanito declares about how he will use art. He says:

“I will use my art to tell the stories of hardworking, passionate people who make the world more beautiful. I will tell their stories. I will tell my story.”

Then you can ask:

- What do you think it means to tell stories through art?
- Who does Juanito (and by default, the author) want to focus his stories on?
- What feelings come to mind when you read the book and consider this beautiful story of a hardworking and passionate person?

Materials needed: Large paper, pencils, colored pencils, crayons, markers, paint (or whatever artistic tools you have access to)

Task: Ask students to use art to tell a story with the “Using Art to Tell Stories” reproducible at the end of this guide to help them develop ideas.

Discussion and Activity: Relationships Matter

The author, John Parra, features many relationships and dynamics. Most of them are positive. Use the “Relationships Matter” reproducible at the end of this guide to analyze the various relationships featured and which ones are positive versus negative and determine why.

Materials needed: writing utensil.

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

Science

Invite students into a local gardening and/or landscaping study. As a class, do some research on popular flowers and plants in your region. Go out as a group and take notes on what flowers and plants you notice. You can use a chart to count the plants and flowers you see and then mathematically evaluate which are more popular.

Consider taking pictures of plants and flowers the class does not recognize with a camera, tablet, or smartphone, and researching what it is as homework or later in class.

Arts

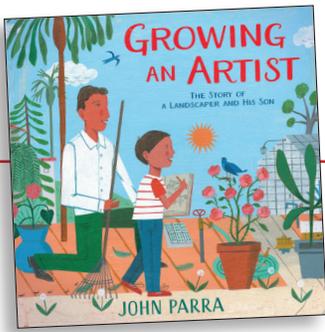
Invite students to design a landscaping plan for the school or the student’s own home. Show them designs online so they have some samples, and then create time for them to imagine and use their creativity designing something beautiful for the school community.

Field Trip

In the book, Juanito and his father visit a nursery. If possible, take students to visit a local nursery. Have them explore and see all the different plants and flowers that are local to your region. Call ahead of time and see if it’s possible to have a guide walk you through the nursery and explain the layout and their stock, and maybe even engage in an activity of some sort.

Lorena Germán is a Dominican American educator who works with middle and high school students, as well as supporting teachers and schools to ensure best practices in terms of inclusivity and antibias, antiracist approaches. She’s been published by NCTE, ASCD, EdWeek, and featured in *The New York Times*. She’s a two-time nationally awarded teacher and is cofounder of #DisruptTexts, Multicultural Classroom, and currently chairs the National Council of Teachers of English’s Committee Against Racism & Bias in the Teaching of English.

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GROWING AN ARTIST

Using Art to Tell Stories



In *Growing an Artist*, Juanito declares “I will use my art to tell the stories of hardworking, passionate people who make the world more beautiful. I will tell their stories. I will tell my story.”

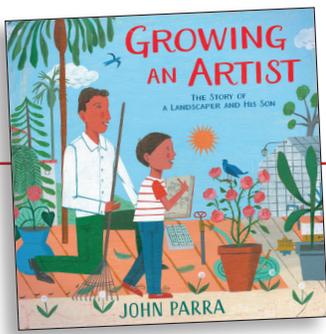
Use art to tell a story. To begin, you can organize and develop your ideas using the worksheet below. Write your idea on the left and sketch the idea in the adjoining box.

WHO DO YOU WANT TO TELL A STORY ABOUT?

WHAT IS THE MESSAGE OF YOUR STORY?

WHAT IMAGES CAN YOU USE TO TELL THAT STORY?

WHAT COLORS SHOULD YOU USE FOR THIS STORY?



GROWING AN ARTIST

Relationships Matter



The author, John Parra, features many relationships and dynamics in *Growing an Artist*. Most of them are positive. Analyze the various relationships featured in the book and which ones are positive versus negative and determine why.

Name: _____

RELATIONSHIP	POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE?	EXPLAIN YOUR ANALYSIS
<p>Example: <i>Juanito and his Father</i></p>	<p>Positive</p>	<p><i>They work together, they support each other, and they have a good day spending time together.</i></p>