

DISCUSSION GUIDE



In *The Summer My Father Was Ten*, a young boy tries to make amends to his neighbor, after he and his friends thoughtlessly destroy the old man's garden. "Growing a garden is fact and metaphor in this profoundly moving cross-generational story with a neighborhood drama that children will relate to and exquisite watercolors that celebrate renewal and connection."

—Booklist, starred review

- In the book, the main story about the father as a young boy is framed at the beginning and end by the daughter's narration. Do your students think the frame adds to or takes away from the story?
- Setting is often an important element of a story. Judging from the illustrations, where do your students think the story is set? The author imagined the story taking place in an urban setting such as Brooklyn. The illustrator chose to set it in Portland, Maine, where she had often visited her grandmother when she was a child. Does setting make a difference in a story?
- Names of characters can also be important in a story. "Bellavista" is made up of two words: Bella is Italian for beautiful and vista means view. Is this a good name for this character? Why or why not?
- Find the statue in the illustrations of the garden. Can your students identify who this is? Why do your students think Mr. Bellavista would have the statue in his garden?
- When the boy meets Mr. Bellavista on the stairs and offers to help him with a garden, Mr. Bellavista studies him silently for a few minutes before answering. What do your students suppose Mr. Bellavista was thinking?
- Writers often use phrases with three things in them because it gives a sense of completeness. "...we water, mulch and tend it all through the summer", "...he trudged with rake, garden fork and trowel...", "...weeding, watering and watching over his plants" are some examples from this story. Can your students find any others? Can they think of phrases or stories with threes in them?
- Discuss with your students: Which is more important, to say you're sorry or to prove that you're sorry by your actions? Or do you need to do both? How would the story have been different if, after the boy apologized to Mr. Bellavista, he had not been allowed to help make a new garden? How important is it to be forgiven, and how do you know when you have been forgiven?