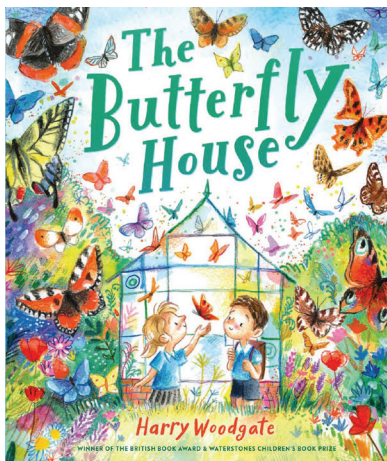




Teacher Notes

The Butterfly House

by Harry Woodgate

Teacher notes prepared by Bec Kavanagh

Publication Details

Publisher: Affirm Press
ISBN: 9781923135635
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Reader ages: 4-8 years

Themes

- Sadness
- Fear
- Growth
- Community
- Gardening
- Dreams

About the Book

When Holly goes to see what's in the overgrown garden at the end of her street, she's not expecting to find a person still living there. She writes a letter to Miss Brown to apologise for snooping in her garden. In her reply, Miss Brown reveals that her overgrown garden is a sign of her deep sadness. For years, out of sadness and fear, she has kept herself inside and alone, the beauty of her garden nothing but a daydream. But with Holly's help, Miss Brown discovers the care of her community, and slowly her garden starts to come back to life.

The Butterfly House explores complex themes of mental illness and community care through gentle illustrations and a hopeful, simple metaphor.

About the Author/Illustrator

Harry Woodgate (pronouns: they/them) is an award-winning author and illustrator. Their books include *Grandad's Camper*, *Grandad's Pride*, *Timid*, *Little Glow*, *Shine Like The Stars*, *My First Baking Book* and *The Very Merry Murder Club*. *Grandad's Camper*, their debut author-illustrator title, won the Waterstones Children's Book Prize Best Illustrated Book in 2022 as well as a Stonewall Book Award Honor from the American Library Association, then went on to win Children's Illustrated Book of the Year at the British Book Awards in 2023. It was also shortlisted for the inaugural Polari Children's & YA Prize and was nominated for the CILIP Yoto Kate Greenaway Award. Harry is passionate about writing and illustrating diverse, inclusive stories that inspire children to be inquisitive, creative, kind and proud of what makes them unique.

Before Reading

- Read the title of the book aloud. What do you picture when you hear 'the butterfly house'? What do you think the story might be about?
- Compare your responses to the blurb – does this help you to narrow things down?
- What else catches your eye from the cover? What would make you choose this book?

Comprehension questions

- What is it about the first sentence of the book that makes you curious about the house at the end of the road?
- What are some of the ways this house isn't like other houses? Do you think it's a good or a bad thing that it's different?
- What does the house remind Holly of? Why does she want to explore?
- What is Holly's first impression of Miss Brown? What does her mum say about her?
- What makes Holly decide to write Miss Brown a letter? How do you think Miss Brown feels when she receives it?
- What are some of the things that Holly dreams of? What do you daydream of while you're at school?
- What does Miss Brown tell Holly about her brain? How does her garden reflect this?
- What is Holly's idea to deal with the amount of work Miss Brown's garden needs?
- What are some of the treasures that the community finds in the garden as they clean it up?
- Why do you think Miss Brown decides to open up her garden? What does she want to help others with?

Literacy

Letter writing

Miss Brown tells Holly that for years she was scared that if she tried to reach out for help she would be hurt. Writing letters allows Miss Brown and Holly to connect with each other and also helps Holly to reach out to her local community to ask for their help.

- Why is letter writing such a useful form of communication?
- How does it differ from other forms of communication (i.e. verbal)?
- Can you think of a situation where writing a letter might help you to overcome a communication barrier?

Figurative language

Figurative language uses non-literal words and phrases to capture complex ideas or meaning. Examples of figurative language include similes, metaphors, personification and idioms. In the book, Harry Woodgate uses metaphor and similes to explore themes of sadness and isolation in a way that younger readers can connect with.

Look up the definition of a simile. Consider the following similes in the book:

- like a fairytale
- like a slumbering giant

Look closely at the pages these similes appear on. What do you notice in the illustrations?

A metaphor is also a type of figurative language – in this case, the garden is used as a metaphor for Miss Brown's sadness. If the overgrown, thorny garden is a metaphor for Miss Brown's sadness, what do you think the final images in the book are meant to represent?

Final reflections

- Would you describe the ending of this story as hopeful? Why/why not?
- What do you think will become of Holly and Miss Brown?

Creative activities

- Come up with a simile of your own. Draw a picture that hides a literal illustration of your simile somewhere in it. What other metaphors could someone use to describe sadness or loneliness?
- Design a butterfly garden for your home or school. Make a list of the flowers you would plant to attract the butterflies. What else could you do to ensure that your garden is a welcome place for them? What kinds of butterflies are local to your area?

Creative activities cont.

- Holly helps to make Miss Brown feel less alone by writing her letters and by helping with her garden. Make a list of ways that we can help to support people in our community who might be struggling on their own. Share your ideas with your class and choose one idea that you could work on to bring your community together.
- Miss Brown opens her garden up at the end of the book. Imagine that you are its next visitor. Write a letter to Holly or Miss Brown describing the afternoon you spend in the garden.