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Activity Guide

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The Gardener

ABOUT THE STORY

The year is 1935. Lydia Grace's father has lost his job, and she must move from her country home to the city to live with her uncle Jim. Uncle Jim runs a bakery, and though he is very nice, he never smiles. Lydia Grace decides to use her love of gardening to create a secret place that will bring a smile even to Uncle Jim's face.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah Stewart has written two other picture books: *The Money Tree* and *The Library*. Both were illustrated by her husband, David Small. Ms. Stewart and Mr. Small live in Mendon, Michigan.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

David Small has written and illustrated several books, including *Imogene's Antlers*, a Reading Rainbow selection, and *Paper John*. He has also illustrated well-known books by Eve Merriam, Norman Juster, and Burr Tillstrom.

INTRODUCING THE STORY

Ask children what they know about the Great Depression in the United States. Explain that in the late 1920s and 1930s, the whole country had money problems. Many people lost their jobs, and sometimes families had to split up to survive, just as Lydia Grace's did.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

- "What years do Lydia Grace's Letter cover?"
- "Why does Lydia Grace go to live with Uncle Jim?"
- "What kind of work does Uncle Jim do?"
- "Where is Lydia Grace's special place?"
- "What is Lydia Grace's surprise for Uncle Jim?"
- "How do you think Uncle Jim feels about Lydia Grace's surprise?"
(Draw conclusions)
- "How do you think Uncle Jim will feel after Lydia Grace leaves?"
(Predict)

Vocabulary

Have children create a mini-dictionary with definitions of these words from the story. Encourage them to put the words in alphabetical order, write definitions, and, if they wish, illustrate their entries.

anxious
recognizing

mustache
knead

catalogues
vacant

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Science: How Does Your Garden Grow?

Have children work in groups to plant seeds, as Lydia Grace did. Provide them with flower or vegetable seeds and containers, and encourage them to water the seeds regularly. Children can use a notebook or journal to keep track of their plants' growth.

Language Arts: Dear Lydia Grace

Have the children imagine how Uncle Jim felt after Lydia Grace returned home. Ask them to pretend they are Uncle Jim, and have them write a letter from Jim to Lydia Grace telling how they feel.

Social Studies: The Great Depression

Provide children with information about the Great Depression. Encourage them to find out about an aspect of the Depression, such as the stock market crash, the lives of hoboes, or the Dust Bowl. Children can report on their findings to the rest of the class.

Science: Field Guide to Flowers

Have children choose one kind of flower to research, and provide them with material about their choices. Children can create a page for their flower with an illustration and information such as where and when it grows, what care it needs, and what colors its blooms are. Collect the groups' pages into a field guide to flowers.