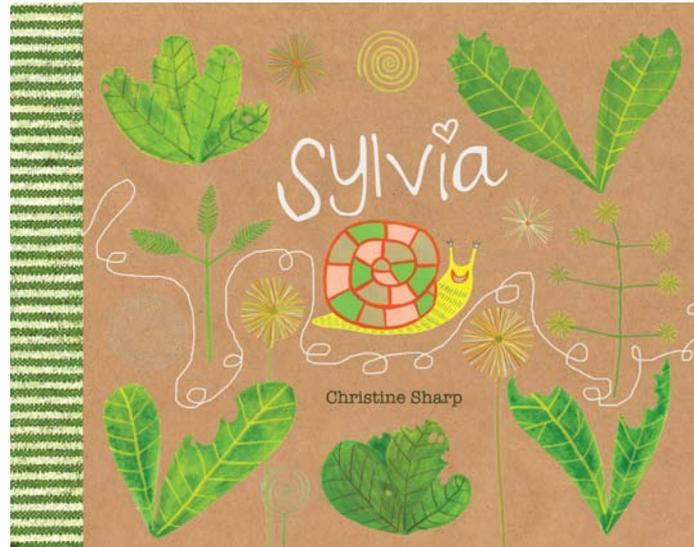


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SYLVIA

Christine Sharp



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian
in context with the Australian curriculum
(English)

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SYNOPSIS

Sylvia Snail is in love with Simon Green and his luscious lettuce, choice cucumbers and buttery beans. But Sylvia is just a small snail in a gigantic garden, so how can she get him to notice her?

In a delightfully poetic story that explores the true nature of love, Simon comes to see that there is much more to Sylvia than first meets the eye.

THEMES

Love:

- Love can be found in the most unexpected of places.

Organic and Sustainable Gardening:

- Even though snails and insects may eat vegetable gardens, it is still possible to grow organic produce.
- Organic and sustainable gardening is highlighted in the story.

Community:

- Sylvia helps the community come together when she advertises Simon's wonderful fruit and vegetables.

Snails:

- Snails feature in the text.

Poetry

- Poetic devices such as alliteration and onomatopoeia are used in the narrative.

WRITING STYLE

Sylvia is written in third person, present tense and is appropriate for younger readers. It successfully combines poetic language with a simple narrative that explores the themes of relationships, community and mutual affection.

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STUDY NOTES

- Before reading *Sylvia*, look carefully at the front and back covers. What predictions can you make about the story? Discuss the use of colour, patterns and body language.
- The written text begins, 'GET OUT!' In small groups, brainstorm who this character is and why he is shouting at Sylvia in that way.
- The first glimpse we get of Sylvia is of her sliding and shrinking away with tears in her eyes. Discuss the way in which the text and illustration combine on this page to create a sense of Sylvia's despair.
- This same page uses shape poetry as well as other poetic devices such as alliteration and onomatopoeia to depict Sylvia's character. Using this as a stimulus, choose other garden creatures on which to create your own shape poetry. View YouTube clips to observe how these creatures move. Use alliteration and onomatopoeia to fully capture these creatures.
- As you read the text, take note of the words that are written in a larger font. Why are these particular words larger? Discuss.
- Discuss the importance of 'reading pictures' as well as the written text to fully understand the narrative. In small groups, analyse the role of illustrations in conveying meaning. Share your ideas with the class.
- The author has used poetic devices such as alliteration and onomatopoeia to help tell Sylvia's story. Discuss these devices and the author's choice to include them in the text. Some examples include:
 - Sylvia snail slides away and shrinks into her shell
 - Munches on mushrooms
 - I love your luscious lettuce
 - I desire your dandelion
 - I pine for your parsley leaves
 - In the dazzling dawn light, Simon Green digs in his garden
- Both Sylvia and Simon write letters. Explore the generic features of letters and write letters to your friends or family. Consider setting up a pen-friend system with another class, perhaps at another school.
- Explore the language features of Sylvia's letter to Simon. Use copies of this page to highlight parts of speech such as verbs, adjectives and nouns.

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- Research the role that insects and grubs play in our ecosystem. Why are they a necessary part of the animal kingdom?
- Select your favourite spread from *Sylvia* on which to base your own drawing of a garden scene. Display this artwork in the classroom. Consider using brown paper and coloured chalk to recreate these illustrations.
- Create an infographic that shows the life cycle of a snail. Consider breeding some snails in an aquarium and keeping an annotated photo journal of this process.
- Use the topic of snails to teach basic research and note-taking skills. Create an information report on snails, focussing on their diet, appearance and behaviour.
- Use *Sylvia* to revise letters and sounds, phonemes and graphemes. Also examine the language features of the sentences.
- Start a class vegetable garden, taking photos of the garden as it grows. Use an app such as *Explain Everything* to document what is happening during the season.
- Plan a menu using the vegetables grown in Simon's garden. Create a recipe to include on this menu.
- Create a poster to advertise 'Simon Green's Organic Fruit & Veg'.
- Write your own poetry based on the story of *Sylvia*.
- In small groups, create a dramatised version of *Sylvia*.
- Would Simon use pesticides in an organic garden? Discuss the attributes of organic and sustainable gardening.
- Consider applying for a Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden grant.
www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au/

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AUTHOR MOTIVATION

I remembered my childhood fascination with the daily happenings and changes in the garden; how I'd eagerly greet the morning and venture outside to see dew cobwebs in the grass, gleaming chrysalises hanging from leaves and twigs, and subtle silver trails left by snails on the path. Children, I thought, notice the little things. To the young, creatures like snails, with their soft, slimy bodies and spiral shells, are a cause for fascination and not simply garden pests.

Where then, I thought, would a land snail like to live? In an organic garden, of course, full of ripe, plump and juicy fruit, and green, leafy vegetables grown without pesticides, herbicides, fungicides and toxins. Somewhere a snail could happily feast upon the delicacies of the garden. But, therein lay the dilemma: to gardeners, particularly of the adult variety, snails are a nuisance: they eat the produce and leave bite holes as evidence.

Our snail, by now called 'Sylvia' in my mind's eye, would need to convince her host, already named 'Simon Green', to allow her to stay in his garden. As well as being a love story and a tale about grit and determination, *Sylvia* is, I hope, a gentle nudge towards gardening, particularly organic gardening, and buying local fare. I hope *Sylvia* encourages the young (and the not-so-young) to get out from behind the computer or the hand-held device and get their hands in the earth.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christine Sharp is an illustrator, writer, designer, artist and occasional performer who has worked in the creative industries for over 20 years. She runs her own freelance business in areas such as book design, graphic design, editing, illustration, writing and photography. In 2010 Christine completed a Master of Arts (Research) in Writing for Youth and Children at QUT. Christine is passionate about creating beautiful, inspirational and joyful books for children and adults. She works from her home on Tamborine Mountain, surrounded by birds and in the company of her dog, Billie Bear.

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