

## Teacher's Notes – *The Glasshouse* by Paul Collins and Jo Thompson

### Introduction

*The Glasshouse* is a lavishly illustrated and compelling story. The story of a little girl whose excessive pride in her pumpkins isolates her will resonate with children of all ages. Younger readers will be able to understand and identify with the young girl. Learning to share and to participate with others is an important component of the lower primary experience. Older readers will be able to see the implications of the girl's behaviour on more complex levels. They will also be able to work with the idea of a glasshouse and the idea of a parable.

Teachers will be able to find a variety of uses for *The Glasshouse* in the classroom. Primary schools that employ the PYP will be able to incorporate it into any number of thematic units related to identity and community. Many schools use actual gardens to encourage students to consider how food is produced. This book would be relevant to many discussions arising from this type of enquiry. The wonderful illustrations will inspire children to draw and consider the way that colour can be used to suggest mood and tone.

But this is also simply a book to enjoy. Its bittersweet tone will resonate with students when it is read aloud in class or handed to a particular student during quiet reading. *The Glasshouse* is a special book that will become a favourite with many children.

### Before Reading:

#### 1. The Title

*The Glasshouse* is an evocative title that suggests a range of possibilities:

- What is a glasshouse?
- How do glasshouses and greenhouses work?
- What does the maxim 'people in glass houses shouldn't throw stones' mean?
- What does the word glass suggest to the reader? What ideas do we associate with glass?
- What kind of person would live in a glasshouse? Why?

#### 2. The Cover

What does the cover suggest about the story? What questions does it raise?

#### 3. Read the story

### Comprehension Questions

1. Why is Clara's glasshouse the perfect place to grow pumpkins?
2. Describe Clara's pumpkins
3. What do other people say about them?
4. What do they say about Clara?
5. How does she sell her pumpkins?
6. Why doesn't she leave her glasshouse?
7. Why does Clara look outside?

8. Why is Clara surprised by the other glasshouses?
9. Describe the other glasshouses.
10. What can't Clara understand?
11. Why was she now afraid?
12. What does she do before going to bed? Why?
13. How does her glimpse of the other glasshouses affect her life?
14. Why does she follow the visitors around?
15. Why does she spend less time tending her pumpkins?
16. Why doesn't she mind less buyers coming for her pumpkins?
17. How does Clara treat the boy?
18. How are the boy's pumpkins different from Clara's?
19. Why does the boy like the market?
20. Why is Clara not interested in going to the market?
21. What does Clara say about glasshouses? Why?
22. What does Clara think about after the boy leaves?
23. What happens to Clara after the boy leaves?
24. What happens to her pumpkins? Why?
25. What does Clara do before leaving her glasshouse?
26. What happens to Clara at the market?

#### Inference Questions:

1. What kind of a person is Clara at the beginning of the story?
2. Why doesn't she leave her glasshouse?
3. How does she change? Why?
4. What does the boy know about pumpkins that Clara doesn't?
5. Why can't she stop thinking about the boy?
6. Will Clara be happier at the market? Why?

#### Activity:

Look carefully at the following sections of the story and answer the questions

1. Clara sees the Boy looking through her doorway:

Did anything happen to change the glasshouse? Yes/No

Did anything happen to change the environment around the glasshouse? Yes/No

Did anything happen to change the pumpkins? Yes/No

Did anything happen to change Clara? Yes/No

Has anything ever happened to you that changed the way you felt about something?

2. Clara thinks that the boy has broken the other glasshouse windows

Did she have any evidence before she confronted the boy?

Did you think the boy broke the glasshouse windows?

Do you still think he broke the glasshouse windows?

Make suggestions to explain what might have happened to break the glasshouse windows?

3. At the end, Clara picks up the stone

Do you think she broke the glasshouse windows?

If yes, why did she break the windows? What was she thinking about?

If no, why didn't she break the windows? What was she thinking about?

To Consider:

1. What is the key mistake in Clara's thinking?
2. Why should Clara join the people at the market?
3. What does the story tell us about appearances?
4. What does the story tell us about pride?

Ideas in the Story

Beauty

1. What is beauty?
2. What do you think makes someone beautiful?
3. Write down something that you think is beautiful.
4. Is beauty only skin deep?

Activity

In pairs, write down what you think is the best thing about yourself.  
Now write down what you think is the best thing about your friend.  
Is your idea of your best quality the same as what your friend wrote down? Compare.

Perfection

1. How do you define 'perfection'?
2. How do you know when something is perfect?
3. Can something be perfect if it has flaws?
4. Research the term Wabi-Sabi.

Activity

Write down something that you think is perfect.  
What makes it perfect?  
Is it really perfect?  
Is your idea of perfect the same as your classmates? Compare.

### KLA based Activities

**English**

1. Write a review of the book. Be sure to include the following:
  - Information about the writer and illustrator
  - A brief outline of the story
  - A description of the illustrations

- The target readership
- Your opinion, supported with evidence

## 2. Creative response

Choose one of the following:

- A letter from Clara to the boy while she is still in the glasshouse that explains her reasons for staying.
- A letter from the boy to Clara outlining the reasons that she should come to the market
- Clara's diary after she has joined the boy at the market.
- A story about the boy before he meets Clara
- A similar story about a person who collects something

## 3. The film of the book

In small groups, put together a proposal for a film version of *The Glasshouse*. Include the following:

- A brief outline of the story – you may want to provide more background on Clara through flashbacks and finish with more information about what happens to her after she leaves.
- A storyboard to show how you will film the story
- Suggestions for casting. Who will play the various parts?
- Suggestions for a soundtrack. What songs could be featured?
- A poster advertising the film

Propose the film to your classmates in a presentation.

4. Listen to 'I am a Rock' by Simon and Garfunkel. Compare the idea of the song to *The Glasshouse*
5. Paul Collins

Who is Paul Collins? Has he written any other books? (Hint: many!). Use the Internet to find out more about this writer. Check your school library. Are any of his books on the shelves?

6. What is a 'fable'? Find a definition and some other examples. Can *The Glasshouse* be considered a fable? Why?
7. Pumpkins: Why are pumpkins associated with Halloween?
8. Opinion Piece:

One way of reading the story is to see Clara as an overprotective parent who indulges her pumpkins and refuses to allow them out into wider world.

Many people believe that today's parents are far too overprotective. Write a short essay either agreeing or disagreeing with the statement.

## Science

### Activities

Research pumpkins and their flowers

1. What kind of food is a pumpkin?
2. What are the different types of pumpkins? Describe their differences.
3. What kinds are available in Australia?
4. Are pumpkins easy to grow?
5. Where are pumpkins grown in Australia? Why?
6. What are pumpkins used for? Name three well-known dishes using pumpkins.
7. Have you ever tasted pumpkin? What did it taste like?
8. Does the appearance of pumpkins make any difference?
9. Can you name the parts of a flower?
10. Do all pumpkin flowers have the parts you named?
11. Why do the pumpkin flowers look different in the book?
12. Does the male flower have a stigma?
13. Does the female flower have a stamen or anther?
14. What is the bump under some of the flower buds?
15. Why does Clara have a paintbrush? Is she painting the flowers?
16. What is the yellow powder on the paintbrush called?

Did you know?

Pumpkins are monoecious, which means they produce both male and female flowers on the same plant.

### Hydroponics

Clara's pumpkins are grown through hydroponics, rather than in a traditional garden. Research hydroponics and answer the following:

1. Compare the difference between traditional gardening techniques and soil-less gardening with hydroponics.
2. Why is Clara afraid of bad soil? What is bad soil?
3. How do hydroponic systems work?
4. Why are Clara's pumpkin vines growing up like trees?

In places where there is little available space, vertical gardening has become popular. Research vertical gardens and answer the following questions. You may want to look at, or read about 'The Land' at the Epcot Centre at Disneyland and the 'Eden' project in England:

1. What are vertical gardens?
2. Find a place where vertical gardens have become popular.
3. Why do the pumpkins have nets around them?
4. Why is Clara afraid of bugs getting into her glasshouse?

### The Market

Visit a local market:

1. Make a list of the fruits and vegetables that you find. Ask if you are not sure.
2. Choose one item and ask a seller whether or not it is in season. How does this affect the price?
3. Note the differences in price on some of the produce. Is appearance a factor?
4. What is the difference between a market and a supermarket? Why do some people prefer markets? Which do you prefer?

## Art

Questions

1. How do you think the illustrations for the book were created?
2. Look at the pictures without reading the text. Is the story that they tell the same? What is emphasised in the pictures? How does Jo Thompson build the characters and the ideas of the story in the illustrations?
3. What colours does the illustrator use? What is the effect of those colours?

Activities

1. Jo Thompson has created very distinctive characters in Clara and the Boy. Try to create two characters with pencils or paint. Think about how you will emphasise certain characteristics of their personalities through your drawings.

2. Pumpkins come in all different shapes, sizes and colours. Some are round with smooth, orange skin like Clara's pumpkins. Others are creamy white with pale orange freckles, like the Boy's pumpkin. The Boy grows many different varieties of pumpkin and sells them at the market. Do you recognise any of the pumpkins? Perhaps you've seen some of these varieties at the supermarket, grocery store or market.

Some you might know are:

- Butternut (long, pear shaped pumpkin with pale orange, smooth skin),
- Jap, Japanese or Kent (green pumpkin with pale yellow flecks)
- Jarrahdale (grey-green, smooth skinned, lightly ribbed pumpkin)
- Queensland Blue (large, blue-grey, smooth skinned pumpkin with deep grooves).

Did you know?

- There are pumpkins called Turks Turbans that look like a pumpkin with a turban on top!
- There's a variety called Bat Wing that are orange on the top half and dark green/black on the bottom half!
- Some white pumpkins have names like Little Boo, Baby Boo, Caspar and Snowball.
- Ghost Rider, Jack-O-Lantern, Spooktacular, Atlantic Giant and Cinderella are all names of orange pumpkins.
- Li'l Pumpkemon is a small white pumpkin with orange stripes.
- Some pumpkins have wrinkly skin and some have lumpy skin. There is even a pumpkin called 'Red Warty Thing'!

Consider this:

What kind of pumpkin would you grow? Miniature, small, medium, large or enormous? What shape would it be: round, oval, square, flattened or stretched? Or maybe your pumpkin would be shaped like a lantern, teardrop, flower, drum, bowling pin, spinning top or sea anemone? Would it have deep grooves, ribs or wrinkles? Would it have warty skin or smooth skin? What colour would it be, orange, yellow, red, green with orange splotches, orange with green stripes, slate grey or blue, white all over or white with orange stripes and green spots? Would your pumpkin have spots, stripes or both, splotches or something else? What would you call it?

### **Further Activities**

1. Design a new variety of pumpkin: Draw it and give it a creative name.
2. Make your new pumpkin out of papier-mâché and paint it to match your drawing. (See instructions below.)
3. Younger children can decorate an orange paper plate to look like their pumpkin.
4. Older children could make an origami pumpkin from coloured paper. Use the instructions to make an origami water bomb for the pumpkin shape, and decorate with curling ribbon curls. Check out: <http://comeandpeek.blogspot.com/2008/10/origami-pumpkin-friends.html> for instructions on how to make an origami water bomb.
5. You can make designer pumpkins from double-sided, patterned, scrap booking/craft paper. (See instructions below.)
6. You could make a wreath for your door. Cut out green, pumpkin leaf shapes and yellow, pumpkin flower shapes from coloured cardstock. Make pumpkin curls by tightly wrapping, thin strips of coloured paper, around a pencil. Draw around the outside of a dinner plate to make a circle on a piece of cardboard. Cut out the circle and attach the leaves, flowers and curls around the outside edge. Use cotton, string or green wool to attach your pumpkins, so they hang down. In the middle you could write something, perhaps 'welcome' or a Halloween message or drawing. You could even use it as a photo frame or table decoration to celebrate fall, autumn, or Halloween.
7. It's easy to make pumpkin flowers, using coffee filters, muffin cases or paper patty pans and drinking straws. Flatten the patty pan, pinch the centre and twist tightly so that it forms a point in the middle. Push the point into the straw and tape in place. Lightly dip the 'flower' into watered down yellow paint, then set aside to dry.
8. To make five-pointed origami star flowers, follow the easy tutorial found at <http://zencrafting.blogspot.com/2008/12/origami-star-tutorial.html>. Use yellow paper to make your pumpkin flowers.
9. Hang the papier-mâché pumpkins, curls, cut out leaves and yellow pumpkin flowers from green wool or string, to make your own pumpkin vines to decorate the classroom.

### Papier-mâché Pumpkins:

- For a small pumpkin – scrunch up a plastic shopping bag until it is a firm, round ball. Put the ball inside another plastic bag, so that you have a smooth outer surface. Cut off any excess and use a piece of sticky tape to close the top edge.
- For a larger pumpkin – blow up and tie off a balloon to the size you want your pumpkin to be.
  - a) Tear narrow strips of orange or yellow tissue paper. Break the strips into smaller pieces. The rough edges of the smaller pieces will make a smoother pumpkin.
  - b) Add a little water to white pva glue in a clean margarine or ice-cream container. Try not to make the glue too runny, or the pumpkins will take longer to dry.
  - c) Dip the tissue paper in the glue and paste onto the plastic bag ball. Continue until it is completely covered with at least 5 layers of tissue paper.
  - d) Paint glue over the top layer, making sure all the paper is covered. When the top layer is dry to the touch, wrap green or red thread around the pumpkin, pulling it tightly to form the bulges and grooves around the sides. If glue oozes out, let it dry a little more before wrapping with cotton.
  - e) Wrap the cotton around the last bit twice and pull tightly to shape the pumpkin. Leave to dry through all the layers.
  - f) With the cotton still in place, lightly rub orange or red crayon over the surface of the pumpkin. Alternatively, you could paint your pumpkin to match the one you designed earlier.
  - g) When it is dry, remove the cotton. Tightly roll up a strip of torn brown paper. Cut small slits into the bottom of the brown paper roll and flare out slightly to make it easier to glue. Coat the brown paper roll with pva and glue onto the top of the pumpkin to make the stalk. Leave to dry.
  - h) Decorate the top with paper curls.

Note: If you want to make a Halloween pumpkin, carefully cut a lid from the top of the pumpkin. Gently pull the plastic bag from inside the pumpkin. If the papier-mâché is too thin, add extra layers, inside the pumpkin so it keeps its shape. Leave to dry before cutting out scary, jack-o-lantern features.

### Designer pumpkins using coloured craft paper

- a) Using pumpkin-coloured craft paper, cut 13 strips, 13cm x 2cm. Stack the strips of paper on top of each other.



- b) In both ends of each strip, punch a hole, using a hole punch, approx 5mm in from the end. Line up the edges and holes.
- c) Push a green pipe cleaner down through one set of holes in the strip stack. Make a loop at the end of the pipe cleaner, bending it so the loop doesn't pull through the hole.
- d) Flex the strip stack into a U shape. Push the pipecleaner up through the holes at the other end of the stack.
- e) Make a loop in the pipe cleaner so that the paper keeps its U shape.
- f) Cut out a leaf shape from green card, punch a hole and feed it onto the pipe cleaner.
- g) Wrap the pipe cleaner around a pencil to make a pumpkin curl.
- h) To finish, fan out the strips, leaving them slightly overlapped to create your pumpkin shape.
- i) Set up a market stall to display your pumpkins in the classroom.