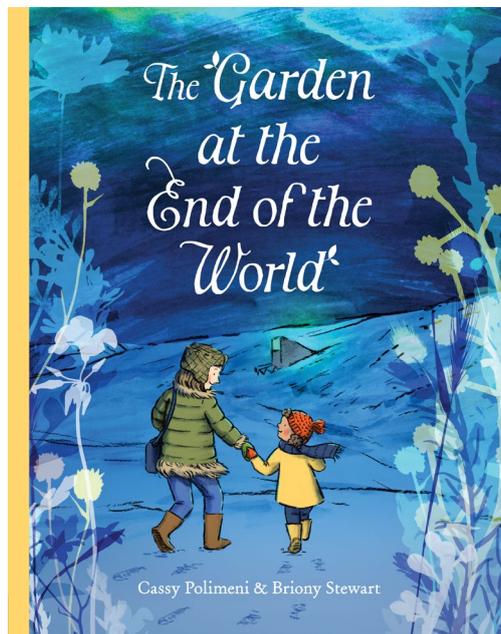


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THE GARDEN AT THE END OF THE WORLD

Cassy Polimeni & Briony Stewart



Teachers' Notes

Prepared by Christina Wheeler, who is a practising teacher librarian with a background in the Australian curriculum (English)

ISBN: 978 0 7022 6569 3/ AUS \$24.99

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SYNOPSIS

When Isla and her mother discover a plant in the forest near their home, they embark on a journey to a very special vault that protects seeds for future generations. At the end of the world, between Norway and the North Pole, this enchanting refuge offers hope and food security for ‘children who haven’t even been born yet’.

Told with beautiful, lyrical words and evocative illustrations, *The Garden at the End of the World* by Cassy Polimeni and Briony Stewart is a vital story of action, vision, and sustainability. Based on The Global Seed Vault and the work of the international non-profit organisation Crop Trust, this story is as important as it is tender and hope filled.

THEMES

- Hope
- Action
- The Crop Trust; The Global Seed Vault
- Sustainable Development Goals
- Food security
- Stewardship

WRITING STYLE

The Garden at the End of the World is written in third person, present tense. Through its gentle yet purposeful storyline, something very powerful is occurring - the enduring legacy of simple actions undertaken by everyday people. Told with the inclusion of figurative language and beautifully rich illustrations, this is a text that offers more each time it is read: a timeline of change, a solution for the future, innovation, action, and hope. When used with older readers, conceptual links to the United Nations’ Global Developmental Goals along with the aims of the Crop Trust can be made, while younger readers will connect with a parent and child who wish to tread lightly and act well their part.

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STUDY NOTES

- Before reading *The Garden at the End of the World*, carefully examine the cover, endpapers and title page. Make predictions about the story. After reading, return to these. How do the drawings, colours and shapes frame the story?
- Discuss the illustrations on the first two-page openings in which Isla and her mother go exploring. How are colour and light used to convey hope and new life? Why is it important to 'read pictures' in conjunction with the written text?
- *The Garden at the End of the World* includes beautiful figurative language. Discuss the following examples and how they contribute to the text:
 - They hunt for herbs, forage for fungi
 - Sunlight drips from the trees like honey
 - She...imagines frosty wonderlands and enchanted forests
 - The view from the plane reminds Isla of watching Grandma make meringue. A bowl of whipped eggs with frothy white peaks
 - The sky is dark except for a sprinkle of stars
 - The vault twinkles in the distance
 - Waves of emerald light fill the sky
 - Something half-buried in the snow winks at her
- When Isla and her mother 'listen to the trees', what do you think they hear?
- In what ways are the seeds in the vault 'magical'?
- Read more about the Arctic Circle's 'long polar night'. How long does this last? What happens in summer?
- Why, when the northern lights sweep across the sky, are there no words on the page? What words would you write if you decided to include written text here?
- Why, when Isla takes the last steps up the mountain, does she feel like it is easy, 'almost as if she is floating'?
- What do you think the inside of the vault is like? When Isla goes inside, do you think that it meets her expectations? Discuss with a friend. Find out more about the Global Seed Vault by visiting <https://www.croptrust.org/work/svalbard-global-seed-vault/>.
- In the role of Isla, write a series of journal entries about your experiences in *The Garden at the End of the World*.
- Which is your favourite page opening of *The Garden at the End of the World*? Why is this your favourite? Share with a friend.
- Use a Y Chart to brainstorm what Isla would have seen, heard, and felt on her visit to Norway. In the role of Isla, use this to write a letter home about your trip.

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- How would you describe the relationship between Isla and her mother? How do the illustrations help show this?
- Discuss how throughout the text, Isla's wonderings are reflected in the illustrations. Use one of the page openings to support your ideas.
- On a map, locate the island of Svalbard. Use Google Earth to take a closer look at the site of the Global Seed Vault. Compare these images with the illustrations in the book.
- What are Isla's character strengths? Use evidence from the text to support your thinking.
- What parts of this journey are difficult for Isla? What point is the author making about the challenges and rewards that come from projects such as the Global Seed Vault?
- After reading *The Garden at the End of the World*, return to the page opening on which Isla and her mother use shadow puppets on the wall. Why is Isla holding a small green object in her hands? What else do you notice in her room that reflects the themes of the text?
- How is light used to symbolise hope in *The Garden at the End of the World*?
- Discuss the title of the book. How is the 'garden' juxtaposed with the 'end of the world'? What comment is the author making about the importance of global citizenship?
- As a class, grow your own garden from seeds. Keep a diary to track this project.
- Discuss the concept of food security. How does *The Garden at the End of the World* inform younger audiences about such concepts?
- In groups of 2-3, select a page opening to analyse, sharing how the illustrations add meaning to the story.
- Which of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals are addressed through the work of the Crop Trust? Conduct an inquiry into the work of these organisations.
 - <https://www.croptrust.org/>
 - <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- Rewrite *The Garden at the End of the World* as a poem, information report or newspaper article.
- Write or voice-record a reflection that shares your thoughts and questions after reading *The Garden at the End of the World*.

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AUTHOR MOTIVATION

This story was born during Melbourne's 2020 lockdowns, after I watched a cooking show on SBS. Adam Liaw and crew visited Svalbard and when they got to the Global Seed Vault my mind exploded. I've always been drawn to everyday/real life magic – things that feel made up, but aren't – and everything about Svalbard and the seed vault felt magical to me: the Arctic landscape and animals, the northern lights and midnight sun, the fact that there was this Aladdin's cave of treasures hidden in a frozen mountain for the good of humanity.

While there is an urgency to act on climate change, it must be overwhelming for kids to be bombarded with the message that the burden of saving the world rests with them. I hope kids reading this book feel reassured in some small way that there are 'helpers' out there who are working to protect our future – it's not all up to them to solve everything. For others, maybe it will spark an interest in global citizenship and the way we can work together. Mostly, I hope both kids and grown-ups feel the same sense of wonder that I did just knowing a place like this exists.

ILLUSTRATOR MOTIVATION

The Global Seed Vault on Svalbard is a fascinating place and such a symbol of how important plants are to the most basic functions of humanity. Because of this, I tried to use plants in different ways as key materials in the illustrations of the book. I did this firstly by using charcoal (burnt wood) for all the linework of the illustrations. I also made cyanotype prints (sunprints) of plants, which I used for the endpapers but also throughout the book along with silhouette photographs of plants. I liked the idea of incorporating cyanotypes, as it was an early form of photography, and many biological specimens of plants in modern science were first collected and documented in this way (see the work of Anna Atkins). These early prints are still used as a reference today as we trace and compare the effects of human impact on the natural environment.

My father was a university histologist and my husband is a plant biologist with a doctorate in mycorrhizal fungi. Because of this, biological specimen collection and scientific investigation have always been a big part of my life. Growing up in the corridors of a university zoology department, I always admired the work and

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projects that passionate scientists do to understand, protect, preserve and advocate for nature even when nobody is asking them to do it. I see these unsung heroes as the hope we have in the face of ecological crisis, working beyond politics to help us and our planet survive. The Global Seed Vault is such a wonderful example of this kind of hope, goodwill and science.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cassy Polimeni is a freelance editor and children's/YA author who has always loved words and faraway places. Her past jobs include travel writer, magazine editor, TV book reviewer and airport chauffeur. *The Garden at the End of the World* is her first picture book. In 2022 she was awarded an Australian Society of Authors/Copyright Australia Mentorship to develop a middle grade novel, also set in Norway.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Briony Stewart is the author and illustrator of several award-winning books for children, including the Kumiko and the Dragon series and *We Love You Magoo*, which was a CBCA Early Childhood Honour Book for 2020. She was also the illustrator of *Mina and the Whole Wide World*, which won the 2022 Prime Minister's Literary Award for Children's Fiction. Briony lectures on children's literature at university and conducts talks and workshops with children across Australia.