

Unit 4 Texts

Unit 4 *Planting a Community*

PAGE	<i>Seedfolks</i>
2	Text for Kim
5	Text for Ana
8	Text for Wendell
11	Text for Gonzalo
14	Text for Leona
18	Vocabulary Snapshot for Kim
22	Vocabulary Snapshot for Ana
25	Vocabulary Snapshot for Wendell
27	Vocabulary Snapshot for Gonzalo
30	Vocabulary Snapshot for Leona



Seedfolks

by Paul Fleischman

KIM

Use the space below
to write “I wonder”
questions and notes

Excerpt 1

I stood before our family altar. It was dawn. No one else in the apartment was awake. I stared at my father’s photograph—his thin face stern, lips latched tight, his eyes peering permanently to the right. I was nine years old and still hoping that perhaps his eyes might move. Might notice me.

The candles and the incense sticks, lit the day before to mark his death anniversary, had burned out. The rice and meat offered him were gone. After the evening feast, past midnight, I’d been wakened by my mother’s crying. My oldest sister had joined in. My own tears had then come as well, but for a different reason.

I turned from the altar, tiptoed to the kitchen, and quietly drew a spoon from a drawer. I filled my lunch thermos with water and reached into our jar of dried lima beans. Then I walked outside to the street.

Excerpt 2

The sidewalk was completely empty. It was Sunday, early in April. An icy wind teetered trash cans and turned my cheeks to marble. In Vietnam we had no weather like that. Here in Cleveland people call it spring. I walked half a block, then crossed the street and reached the vacant lot.

I stood tall and scouted. No one was sleeping on the old couch in the middle. I'd never entered the lot before, or wanted to. I did so now, picking my way between tires and trash bags. I nearly stepped on two rats gnawing and froze. Then I told myself that I must show my bravery. I continued farther and chose a spot far from the sidewalk and hidden from view by a rusty refrigerator. I had to keep my project safe.

Excerpt 3

I took out my spoon and began to dig. The snow had melted, but the ground was hard. After much work, I finished one hole, then a second, then a third. I thought about how my mother and sisters remembered my father, how they knew his face from every angle and held in their fingers the feel of his hands. I had no such memories to cry over. I'd been born eight months after he'd died. Worse, he had no memories of me. When his spirit hovered over our altar, did it even know who I was?

I dug six holes. All his life in Vietnam my father had been a farmer. Here our apartment house had no yard. But in that vacant lot he would see me. He would watch my beans break ground and spread, and would notice with pleasure their pods growing plump. He would see my patience and my hard work. I would show him that I could raise plants, as he had. I would show him that I was his daughter.

My class had sprouted lima beans in paper cups the year before. I now placed a bean in each of the holes. I covered them up, pressing the soil down firmly with my fingertips. I opened my thermos and watered them all. And I vowed to myself that those beans would thrive.



ANA

Excerpt 1

I do love to sit and look out the window. Why do I need TV when I have forty-eight apartment windows to watch across the vacant lot, and a sliver of Lake Erie?

I've seen history out this window. So much. I was four when we moved here in 1919. The fruit-sellers' carts and coal wagons were pulled down the street by horses back then.

I used to stand just here and watch the coal brought up by the handsome lad from Groza, the village my parents were born in. Gibb Street was mainly Rumanians back then. It was "*Adio*"—"Good-bye"—in all the shops when you left. Then the Rumanians started leaving. They weren't the first, or the last. This has always been a working-class neighborhood. It's like a cheap hotel—you stay until you've got enough money to leave. A lot of Slovaks and Italians moved in next. Then Negro families in the Depression. Gibb Street became the line between the blacks and the whites, like a border between countries. I watched it happen, through this very window.

I lived over in Cleveland Heights for eighteen years, then I moved back in to take care of my parents. That border moved too. Most all the whites left. Then the steel mills and factories closed and *everybody* left, like rats. Buildings abandoned. Men with no work drinking from nine to five instead, down there in the lot.

Use the space below
to write "I wonder"
questions and notes

Always the sirens, people killing each other. Now I see families from Mexico and Cambodia and countries I don't know, twelve people sometimes in one apartment. These new people leave when they can, like the others. I'm the only one staying. It's so. Staying and staring out this same window.

Excerpt 2

This spring I looked out and I saw something strange. Down in the lot, a little black-haired girl, hiding behind that refrigerator. She was working at the dirt and looking around suspiciously all the time. Then I realized. She was burying something. I never had children of my own, but I've seen enough in that lot to know she was mixed up in something she shouldn't be. And after twenty years typing for the Parole department, I just about knew what she'd buried. Drugs most likely, or money, or a gun. The next moment, she disappeared like a rabbit.

I thought of calling the police. Then I saw her there the next morning, and I decided I'd solve this case myself. We had a long spell of rain then. I didn't set eyes on her once. Then the weather turned warm and I saw her twice more, always in the morning, on her way to school. She was crouched down with her back to me so I couldn't see just what she was doing. My curiosity was like a fever inside me. Then one morning she was there, glancing about, and she looked straight up at this window. I pulled my head back behind the curtain. I wasn't sure if she'd seen me. If she had, she wouldn't leave her treasure buried long. Then I'd have to dig it up before she did.

Excerpt 3

I waited an hour after she left. Then I took an old butter knife and my cane and hobbled down all three flights of stairs. I worked my way through that awful jungle of junk and finally came to her spot. I stooped down. It was wet there and easy digging. I hacked and dug, but didn't find anything, except for a large white bean. I tried a new spot and found another, then a third. Then the truth of it slapped me full in the face. I said to myself, "What have you *done*?" Two beans had roots. I knew I'd done them harm. I felt like I'd read through her secret diary and had ripped out a page without meaning to. I laid those beans right back in the ground, as gently as sleeping babies. Then I patted the soil as smooth as could be.

The next morning she was back. I peeked around the curtain. She didn't look up here or give any sign that she noticed something wrong. I could see her clearly this time. She reached a hand into her schoolbag. Then she pulled out a jar, unscrewed the lid, and poured out water onto the ground.

That afternoon I bought some binoculars.

WENDELL



Use the space below
to write "I wonder"
questions and notes

Excerpt 1

My phone doesn't ring much, which suits me fine. That's how I got the news about our boy, shot dead like a dog in the street. And the word, last year, about my wife's car wreck. I can't hear a phone and not jerk inside. When Ana called I was still asleep. Phone calls that wake me up are the worst.

"Get up here quick!" she says. I live on the ground floor and watch out for her a little. We're the only white people left in the building. I ran up the stairs. I could tell it was serious. I prayed I wouldn't find her dead. When I got there, she looked perfectly fine. She dragged me over to the window. "Look down there!" she says. "They're dying!"

"What?" I yelled back.

"The plants!" she says.

I was mad. She gave me some binoculars and told me all about the Chinese girl. I found the plants and got them in focus. There were four of them in a row, still little. They were wilted. Leaves flopped flat on the ground.

"What are they?" she asked.

"Some kind of beans." I grew up on a little farm in Kentucky. "But she planted them way too early. She's lucky those seeds ever came up."

"But they did," said Ana. "And it's up to us to save them."

Excerpt 2

It was a weekend in May and hot. You'd have thought that those beans were hers. They needed water, especially in that heat. She said the girl hadn't come in four days—sick, probably, or gone out of town. Ana had twisted her ankle and couldn't manage the stairs. She pointed to a pitcher. "Fill that up and soak them good. Quick now."

School janitors take too much bossing all week to listen to an extra helping on weekends. I stared at her one long moment, then took my time about filling the pitcher.

I walked down the stairs and into the lot and found the girl's plants. You don't plant beans till the weather's hot. Then I saw what had kept her seeds from freezing. The refrigerator in front of them had bounced the sunlight back on the soil, heating it up like an oven. I bent down and gave the dirt a feel. It was hard packed and light colored. I studied the plants. Leaves shaped like spades in a deck of cards. Definitely beans. I scraped up a ring of dirt around the first plant, to hold the water and any rain that fell. I picked up the pitcher and poured the water slowly. Then I heard something move and spun around. The girl was there, stone-still, ten feet away, holding her own water jar.

She hadn't seen me behind the refrigerator. She looked afraid for her life. Maybe she thought I'd jump up and grab her. I gave her a smile and showed her that I was just giving her plants some water. This made her eyes go even bigger. I stood up slowly and backed away. I smiled again. She watched me leave. We never spoke one word.

Excerpt 3

I walked back there that evening and checked on the beans. They'd picked themselves up and were looking fine. I saw that she'd made a circle of dirt around the other three plants. Out of nowhere the words from the Bible came into my head: "And a little child shall lead them." I didn't know why at first. Then I did. There's plenty about my life I can't change. Can't bring the dead back to life on this earth. Can't make the world loving and kind. Can't change myself into a millionaire. But a patch of ground in this trashy lot—I *can* change that. Can change it big. Better to put my time into that than moaning about the other all day. That little grammar-school girl showed me that.

The lot had buildings on three sides. I walked around and picked myself out a spot that wouldn't be shaded too much. I dragged the garbage off to the side and tossed out the biggest pieces of broken glass. I looked over my plot, squatted down, and fingered the soil awhile.

That Monday I brought a shovel home from work.



GONZALO

Excerpt 1

Use the space below
to write “I wonder”
questions and notes

The older you are, the younger you get when you move to the United States.

They don’t teach you that equation in school. Big Brain, Mr. Smoltz, my eighth-grade math teacher, hasn’t even heard of it. It’s not in *Gateway to Algebra*. It’s Garcia’s Equation. I’m the Garcia.

Two years after my father and I moved here from Guatemala I could speak English. I learned it on the playground and watching lots of TV. Don’t believe what people say—cartoons make you *smart*. But my father, he worked all day in a kitchen with Mexicans and Salvadorans. His English was worse than a kindergartner’s. He would only buy food at the *bodega* down the block. Outside of there he lowered his eyes and tried to get on by mumbles and smiles. He didn’t want strangers to hear his mistakes. So he used me to make phone calls and talk to the landlady and to buy things in stores where you had to use English. He got younger. I got older.

Then my younger brothers and mother and Tío Juan, her uncle, came north and joined us. Tío Juan was the oldest man in his pueblo. But here he became a little baby. He’d been a farmer, but here he couldn’t work. He couldn’t sit out in the plaza and talk—there *aren’t*

any plazas here, and if you sit out in public some gang driving by might use you for target practice. He couldn't understand TV. So he wandered around the apartment all day, in and out of rooms, talking to himself, just like a kid in diapers.

Excerpt 2

One morning he wandered outside and down the street. My mother practically fainted. He doesn't speak Spanish, just an Indian language. I finally found him standing in front of the beauty parlor, staring through the glass at a woman with a drier over her head. He must have wondered what weird planet he'd moved to. I led him home, holding his hand, the way you would with a three-year-old. Since then I'm supposed to baby-sit him after school.

One afternoon I was watching TV, getting smart on *The Brady Bunch*. Suddenly I looked up. He was gone. I checked the halls on all five floors of the apartment house. I ran to the street. He wasn't in the *bodega* or the pawnshop. I called his name, imagining my mother's face when she found out he'd fallen through a manhole or been run over. I turned the corner, looking for the white straw hat he always wore. Two blocks down I spotted it. I flew down the sidewalk and found him standing in front of a vacant lot, making gestures to a man with a shovel.

I took his hand, but he pulled me through the trash and into the lot. I recognized the man with the shovel—he was the janitor at my old school. He had a little garden planted. Different shades of green

leaves were coming up in rows. Tío Juan was smiling and trying to tell him something. The man couldn't understand him and finally went back to digging. I turned Tío Juan around and led him home.

Excerpt 3

That night he told my mother all about it. She was the only one who could understand him. When she got home from work the next day she asked me to take him back there. I did. He studied the sun. Then the soil. He felt it, then smelled it, then actually tasted it. He chose a spot not too far from the sidewalk. Where my mother changed busses she'd gone into a store and bought him a trowel and four packets of seeds. I cleared the trash, he turned the soil. I wished we were farther from the street and I was praying that none of my friends or girlfriends or enemies saw me. Tío Juan didn't even notice people—he was totally wrapped up in the work.

He showed me exactly how far apart the rows should be and how deep. He couldn't read the words on the seed packets, but he knew from the pictures what seeds were inside. He poured them into his hand and smiled. He seemed to recognize them, like old friends. Watching him carefully sprinkling them into the troughs he'd made, I realized that I didn't know anything about growing food and he knew everything. I stared at his busy fingers, then his eyes. They were focused, not far away or confused. He'd changed from a baby back into a man.

LEONA



Use the space below
to write "I wonder"
questions and notes

Excerpt 1

Mama believed in doctors, but not Granny. Not even if they were black. *No*, ma'am. I grew up in her house, back in Atlanta. She drank down a big cup of goldenrod tea every morning, with a nutmeg floating in it, and declared she didn't need no other medicine. Dr. Bates tried to sell her his iron pills and told her straight out that that tea of hers would raise her blood pressure and burst her heart. He passed away that very same summer. Next doctor said it would give her brain fever. He died on his fiftieth birthday, I believe, right during the party. Had him a real nice funeral, later. Granny lived to ninety-nine, by her count. She kept a scrapbook with the obituaries of all the doctors she outlived and could recite the list of names by heart, like a chapter out of Genesis. We took to going to their funerals right regular over the years. She always laid some goldenrod on their graves.

I was thinking about her one day, walking home from the grocery store on Gibb Street. Then I came to the vacant lot and saw three people in different parts of it. I thought maybe they were looking for money. Turned out they had shovels, not metal detectors. When I saw they had little gardens going, I said to myself, "I believe I'll plant me a patch of golden rod right here."

Excerpt 2

There was a man standing and watching from the sidewalk and a girl looking down out a window. There were probably lots of folks who'd want to grow something, just like me. Then I studied all the trash on the ground. Don't know why anyone called that lot "vacant." The garbage was piled high as your waist, some of it from the neighborhood and some dropped off by outside people. The ones who don't want to pay at the dump, or got dangerous chemicals, or think we're such slobs down here we won't mind another load of junk. We can't get City Hall to *pick up* our trash, but we got it *delivered* just fine. The smell's enough to curl up a crocodile's nose, especially in the summer. The gardeners had made some trails through it. But I knew precious few would join 'em until that mess was hauled away. Looking at it, I knew this wasn't a job for no wheelbarrow. This was a job for the telephone.

I marched on home. I've got two kids in a high school that has more guns than books, so I know all about complaining to officials and such about things that need changing. Next morning was Monday. At nine o'clock I drank me a tall glass of water. I knew I'd be having to say the same thing to fifteen or twenty government folks. I put Miles on the CD player and stretched out on the bed. Might as well be comfortable when you're on hold. Then I opened the phonebook and started in dialing.

You ever watch a sax player close? They push down a key and way at the other end of the instrument something moves. That's what I was looking for—the key that would make that trash disappear. I tried the City of Cleveland, then Cuyahoga County, then the State of Ohio, and finally the U.S. government. Six and a half hours later I found out the lot was owned by the city. But the people running Cleveland don't usually come down here, unless they take a wrong turn on the freeway. You can't measure the distance between my block and City Hall in miles.

Excerpt 3

Just the same, I kept working on it the next day. That Citizens' Information Center told me to call the Public Health Department. They sent me to someone else. They're all trained to be as slippery as snakes. And to be out to lunch, to not return messages, and to keep folks on hold till they get gray and die. I had the feeling I was getting farther from the key I needed instead of closer. Then on the third day, I thought on it. When people talk to you on the phone, you're nothing but a voice. And when you're on hold you're not even that. I had to make myself real to 'em.

That morning I took a bus downtown and walked into the Public Health Department. Told about the trash all over again to this dolled-up receptionist. Let her see me up close and personal and hear me loud and clear. She just told me to sit down with the others waiting. I did. Then I opened the garbage bag I'd picked up in the lot on my way.

The smell that came out of it made you think of hog pens and maggots and kitchen scraps from back when Nixon was president. It was amazing how quick people noticed it, including that receptionist. And even more amazing how quick I was called in to have a meeting with someone. I was *definitely* real to them now. I brought that bag along with me into the meeting, to keep it that way.



Vocabulary Snapshots - Kim

Seedfolks by Paul Fleischman

This is a **family altar**.



Describe **family altar**:

This is the **dawn**.



Describe **dawn**:

This is a **death anniversary**.



Describe **death anniversary**:

“Kim” Vocabulary Snapshots

This is a **lunch thermos**.



Describe **lunch thermos**:

These are **lima beans**.



Describe **lima beans**:

This is **Vietnam**.



Describe **Vietnam**:

“Kim” Vocabulary Snapshots

This is **vacant lot.** →



Describe **vacant lot:**

This is a **rat gnawing.** →



Describe **rat gnawing:**

This is a **rusty refrigerator.** →



Describe **rusty refrigerator:**

“Kim” Vocabulary Snapshots - *continued*

This is snow melting.



Describe **snow melting**:

These are (pea) pods.



Describe **pods**:

This is sprouted.



Describe **sprouted**:



Vocabulary Snapshots - Ana

Seedfolks by Paul Fleischman

This is **Lake Erie.** →

Describe **Lake Erie** :



This is a **fruit-seller's cart.** →

Describe **fruit-seller's cart**:



This is a **coal wagon.** →

Describe **coal wagon**:



“Ana” Vocabulary Snapshots - *continued*

This is a butter knife. →



Describe butter knife:

This is a cane. →



Describe cane:

This is hobble down...stairs. →



Describe hobble down...stairs:

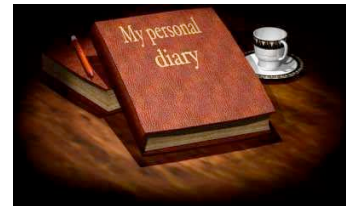
“Ana” Vocabulary Snapshots - *continued*

This is a **jungle of junk.** →



Describe **jungle of junk**:

This is a **secret diary.** →



Describe **secret diary**:

These are **binoculars.** →



Describe **binoculars**:



Vocabulary Snapshots - Wendell

Seedfolks by Paul Fleischman

This is a **car wreck**.



Describe **car wreck**:

These are **wilted leaves**.



Describe **wilted leaves**:

“Wendell” Vocabulary Snapshots - *continued*

These are leaves...like spades. →



Describe leaves...like spades:

This is a deck of cards. →



Describe deck of cards:



Vocabulary Snapshots - Gonzalo

Seedfolks by Paul Fleischman

This is **Guatemala**.



Describe Guatemala:



This is a **bodega**.



?

Describe **bodega**:



This is a **pueblo**.



Describe **pueblo**:



“Gonzalo” Vocabulary Snapshots - *continued*

This is a plaza. →



Describe plaza:

This is a manhole. →



Describe manhole:

This is a white straw hat. →



Describe white straw hat:

“Gonzalo” Vocabulary Snapshots - *continued*

This is a trowel.



Describe trowel:

This is sprinkling.



Describe sprinkling:



Vocabulary Snapshots - Leona

Seedfolks by Paul Fleischman

This is **goldenrod tea**.



Describe **goldenrod tea**:

This is **nutmeg**.



Describe **nutmeg**:

This is a **scrapbook**.



Describe **scrapbook**:

“Leona” Vocabulary Snapshots - *continued*

These are shovels. →

Describe shovels:



This is a metal detector. →

Describe metal detector:



This is piled high. →

Describe piled high:



“Leona” Vocabulary Snapshots - continued

This is a wheelbarrow. →



Describe wheelbarrow:

This is a phonebook. →



Describe phonebook:

These are hog pens. →



Describe hog pens:

“Leona” Vocabulary Snapshots - *continued*

These are maggots.



Describe maggots:

These are kitchen scraps.



Describe kitchen scraps: