

HARLEM GROWN

How One Big Idea Transformed
a Neighborhood

By **TONY HILLERY**

Illustrated by **JESSIE HARTLAND**

HC: 9781534402317

EB: 9781534402324

Ages: 4-8

Background/Summary

Tony Hillery had a big idea. He wanted to change the neighborhood around PS 175 in Harlem; with the help of the school's students, the initiative succeeded. Together, they cleared out an empty lot across from the school—a lot known as “the haunted garden” because of the trash and clutter inside it. Then they put down fresh, clean soil and planted seedlings. They watered, fertilized, and weeded these plants. They also learned from their mistakes, eventually creating raised beds for plants and planting seeds that would grow well in their surroundings. Soon other people from the neighborhood joined Tony and the kids as they successfully raised fruits and vegetables to bring to their families.

As this inspiring story shows, great things can happen when neighbors work together to make changes in their community. Tony Hillery's dream came true when his community created a neighborhood farm in Harlem. The illustrations by Jessie Hartland add vivid detail and additional information to the narrative. Together, words and illustrations make this moving story come alive.

Discussion Questions/Activities

Key Ideas and Details

The discussion questions and activities below draw on Common Core State Standards for reading informational text (RI) that ask children to ask and answer questions about key details in a text (RI.K–3.1), identify the main topic and key details that support it (RI.K–3.2), and describe the relationship between a series of events, ideas, or steps in a process (RI.K–3.3).

1. This book begins by explaining where the story takes place:

“Once
in a big city
called New York,
in a bustling neighborhood...”

Look at the illustrations on the first two pages of the book. Why is the neighborhood described as “bustling,” or full of activity? What activities do you see? Does this scene look similar to or different from your neighborhood or community?



2. Look at the pictures of the empty lot on pages 1–5. Do you think Nevaeh’s name for the lot, “the haunted garden,” is a good one? Explain your answer. What other names might you give to the lot before its transformation?”



3. What things did Mr. Tony, the kids at PS 175, and others from the neighborhood do to change the empty lot? How did they work together?
4. Imagine you could interview the following people: Mr. Tony, Nevaeh, a neighborhood kid who worked in the garden, and a family member who ate some of the food from the garden for dinner. Write down questions you could ask. With a partner, take turns as the interviewer asking the questions or as the person being interviewed. Here are some things you could ask about:
- The Harlem neighborhood
 - The empty lot
 - How the empty lot was changed
 - Growing seedlings
 - Eating food from the garden
 - The power of a good idea
5. The subtitle of the book is *How One Big Idea Transformed a Neighborhood*. Explain how Mr. Tony’s idea transformed, or largely changed, the neighborhood.
6. Is there a place like the empty lot near your school? If so, how could it be changed? Share your ideas for transforming your community.

Craft and Structure

To learn about craft and structure, the Common Core State Standards asks us to help students learn and understand vocabulary words and phrases (RI.K–3.4), think about the features of nonfiction text (RI.K–3.5), and assess the author’s point of view (RI.K–3.6). The questions and activities below emphasize these understandings.

1. **Character Mapping.** Create a large portrait of Mr. Tony. Surround your portrait with words and phrases describing him, and illustrate items that are important to him. Use your portrait to discuss Mr. Tony’s big idea to transform a neighborhood.
2. **Semantic Gradient.** To *transform* something means to change it and make it better. To *preserve* something means to keep it the way it is. These words are opposites. Put the words below in order. Which word is most like *transform*? Put it in the space below it. Which word is next? Keep sorting your words until you get to the word that is most like *preserve*.

Word List:

redo, leave alone, remain the same, alter, modify, keep as is, protect

transform,

preserve

To find out more about this strategy and to see a teacher using this idea, go to the Reading Rockets website at ReadingRockets.org/Strategies/Semantic_Gradients.

3. **Looking at Words and Illustrations.** Look at pages fifteen and sixteen, beginning with “How to Start a Seedling.” In this two-page spread, the words and illustrations explain how to grow seedlings and plant them in the ground. Look carefully at the words and illustrations. Then discuss these questions:

- What do the words tell you about seedlings?
- What do the illustrations show you about seedlings?
- How do the words and illustrations work together to help you learn about seedlings?



4. **Looking at Words, Illustrations, and a Sidebar.** Look at pages seventeen and eighteen, ending with the sidebar showing different kinds of seedlings. In this two-page spread, you see words, illustrations, and a sidebar. A sidebar is a column on the side of a page that gives more detailed information. Look carefully before discussing these questions:

- What do the words tell you about planting the seedlings?
- What do the illustrations show you about planting the seedlings?
- What does the sidebar tell you and show you about the seedlings?
- How do the words, illustrations, and sidebar work together?
- What other questions do you have about seedlings or planting?



5. Tony Hillery includes a note at the end of the book called “Dear Reader.” He tells readers more about beginning this project. After reading this note, discuss the information he reveals:

- His experience gardening before he worked with the kids at PS 175
- Why he wanted to grow food
- How his work has expanded beyond the original garden

DEAR READER,

First things first. There’s something I want you all to know. I am no garden expert. I’ll even let you in on a secret: I have killed more plants than I have been able to grow! I knew nothing about what it takes to grow a single plant, let alone start an entire farm, but I saw a problem that I wanted to fix.

In 2010, I closed my company when the economy took a turn. I began to volunteer at PS 175 in Harlem. Like many in Harlem, the underfunded school had no art or gym classes. At lunchtime the students had so much pent-up energy that they would often find themselves in trouble. The blocks around PS 175 are host to fifty-five fast food restaurants and twenty-nine pharmacies, but not a single store from which to purchase healthy food. When I noticed the vacant lot across from the school, I had the idea to begin Harlem Grown.

Now, the kids and their parents, with the support of the Harlem Grown staff, grow thousands of pounds of fruits and vegetables a year, which they give to their neighbors and community—free of charge. After school and on weekends, local kids flock to the garden to tend their vegetables and fruits. Incidents in the cafeteria decreased dramatically because the farm encourages collaboration and patience. I realized that many of these students growing up in the concrete jungle didn’t know where a tomato came from until they were introduced to Harlem Grown’s farms. Now, they happily eat fresh vegetables because they’re proud to have grown them themselves.

Originally one garden plot on 134th Street, our urban farm has expanded to twelve sites across Harlem.

It employs twenty-two full-time staff members, who provide administrative support, additional crop maintenance, and go into schools to teach nutrition and sustainability, and most importantly, mentor children daily. At Harlem Grown, the mentors are all young men and women from the community, and they work hard to teach and inspire the kids about healthy eating while also studying hard to complete their education.

The little patch where it all began still exists, and every summer the sweetest strawberries in all of New York City grow and are eaten by the children who tend to their urban farm.

**SINCERELY,
TONY HILLERY**
Founder and Director
of Harlem Grown



PHOTO PROVIDED BY HARLEM GROWN



Writing

The Common Core State Standards emphasize writing informative and explanatory text in the early grades. The writing activities below provide experience writing to give an opinion (W.K-3.1), to inform (W.K-3.2), and to explain a sequence of events (W.K-3.3).

1. **Giving Directions.** Just like the author and illustrator give directions for planting seedlings, you can write and illustrate directions for how to do or make something. Here are some suggestions for directions to write or illustrate:

- How to make a delicious sandwich
- How to draw a (you choose)
- How to make a new friend
- How to play (you choose)
- How to take care of a pet
- How to tell a joke

Using the chart below, write and illustrate your directions. To check how well your directions work, exchange directions with a partner. If your partner has questions, make changes to your directions as needed.



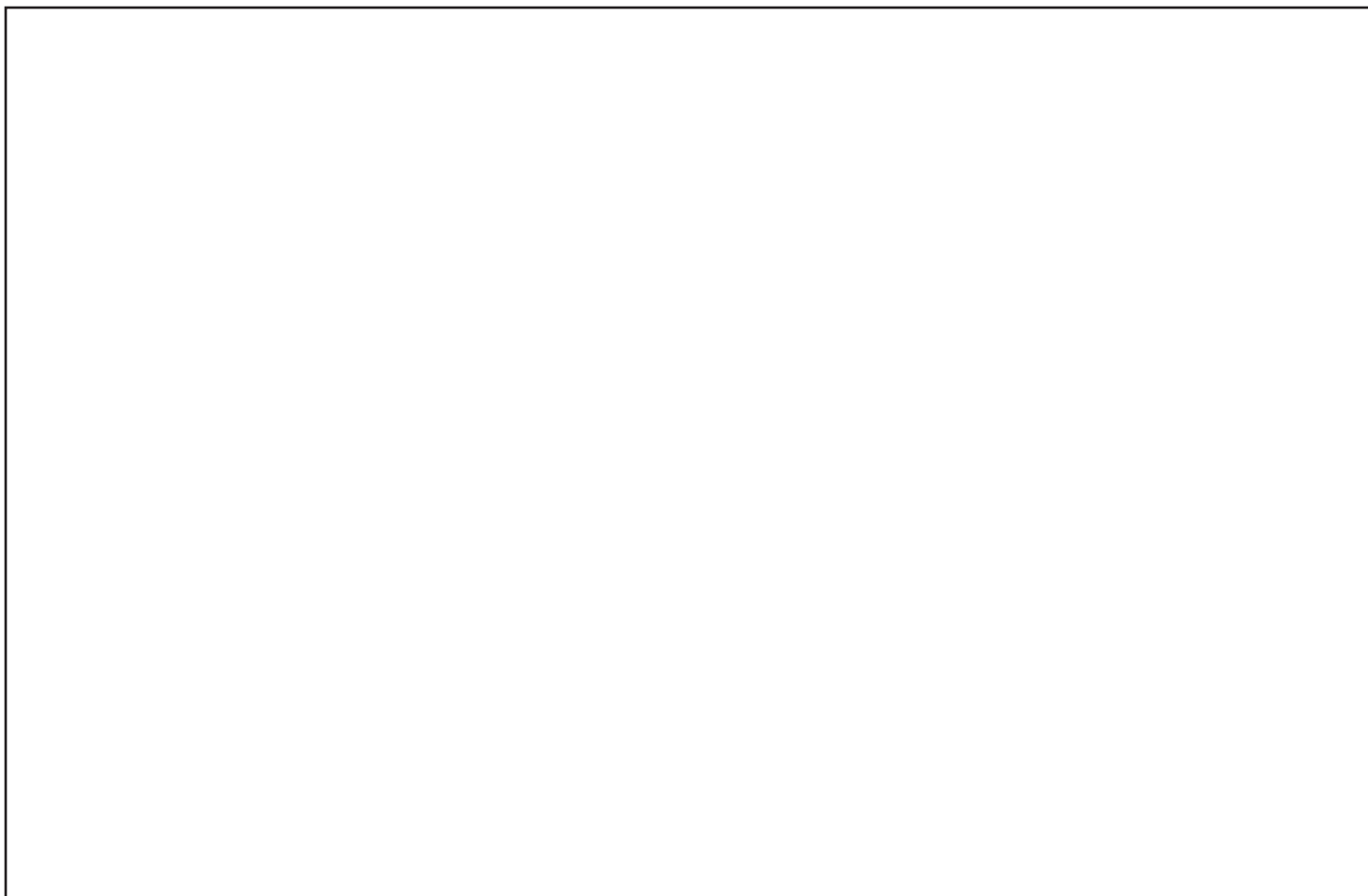
How to _____

Materials Needed: _____

In the boxes below, draw, and write about the steps to follow.

Draw	Write
	First, _____ _____ _____ _____
	Second, _____ _____ _____ _____
	Third, _____ _____ _____ _____
	Finally, _____ _____ _____ _____

2. Mr. Tony and the kids from PS 175 clean up the empty lot across from the school and make it into a garden. Imagine that you had a clean slate or a blank canvas next to your school that you could transform into something wonderful. Draw a picture of your idea, and write about why you think it is a good idea.



3. **Writing with Words in Color.** In the book, the words in red text are words of possibility, potential transformation, or big change. Write your own story using some words in color. Which colors would you use? Why would you choose these? Are the colors you used bright like red or yellow? Are they darker like black or grey? Are they colors that you see during a certain season? Here are some suggestions of stories to write about:

- My happiest day
- A day when things went wrong
- In winter
- In summer
- My big idea
- A walk in my neighborhood

4. **My Day with Mr. Tony and Nevaeh.** Imagine you could spend a day with Mr. Tony and Nevaeh. What would you see? What would you be doing? What would you be thinking and feeling? Write and illustrate the story of your imaginary day.

5. About the beginning of his journey, Mr. Tony wrote, “I knew nothing about what it takes to grow a single plant....” Do you think it was a good idea for Mr. Tony to follow his dream of creating a farm to grow healthy food even though he was “no garden expert” when he began? Follow these directions to share your opinion.

1. First, write all the reasons that you can think of for answering yes.

2. Second, write all the reasons that you can think of for answering no.

3. Third, look over all your reasons, and choose the strongest one.

4. Finally, write an answer to the question. Explain your strongest reason for thinking this way.

Extending the Experience of Reading the Book

1. Watch videos of Tony Hillery and Harlem Grown at
[YouTube.com/watch?v=ptVZ5jc6N7g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptVZ5jc6N7g) and
[YouTube.com/watch?v=fuQVpg4ZrtE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuQVpg4ZrtE)
Discuss the new things you learn about the project.

2. Read other books about growing food:

- *Green Green: A Community Gardening Story* by Marie Lamba and Baldev Lamba
- *The Farm That Feeds Us* by Nancy Castaldo
- *Potatoes on Rooftops: Farming in the City* by Hadley Dyer
- *Farmer Will Allen and the Growing Table* by Jacqueline Briggs Martin
- *Old Manhattan Has Some Farms* by Susan Lendroth
- *First Garden: The White House Garden and How It Grew* by Robbin Gourley
- *Diana's White House Garden* by Elisa Carbone

3. The back matter in the book includes directions to “Start a Garden Anywhere.” Follow these directions to plan your own garden. How will having your own garden impact your life and those around you?



Guide written by Myra Zarnowski, a professor in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education at Queens College, CUNY.

This guide has been provided by Simon & Schuster for classroom, library, and reading group use. It may be reproduced in its entirety or excerpted for these purposes. For more Simon & Schuster guides and classroom materials, please visit SimonandSchuster.net or SimonandSchuster.net/TheBookPantry.