

SAXBY • MASCIULLO

THE FLOWER GARDEN

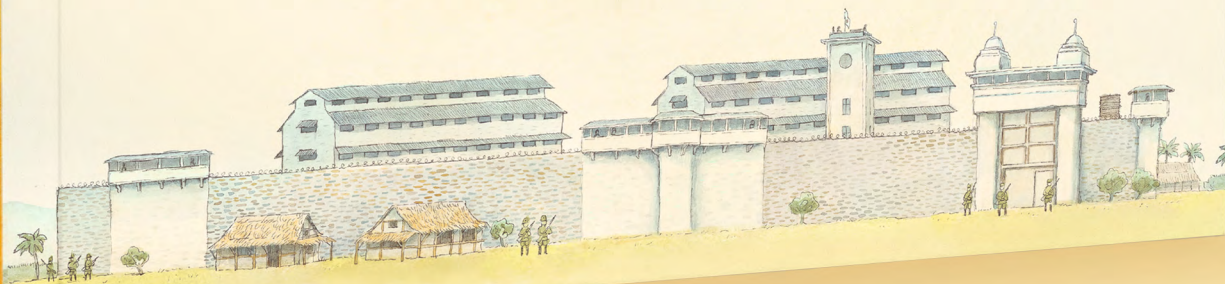
WALKER BOOKS

🧵 CLAIRE SAXBY 🧵 🧶 LUCIA MASCIULLO 🧵



# The Flower Garden

A CHANGI SECRET



## TEACHER NOTES

Teacher Notes by Belinda Bolliger, Additional Activities by Claire Saxby

WALKER BOOKS

# ABOUT THE BOOK



THE FLOWER GARDEN: A CHANGI SECRET  
CREATORS: CLAIRE SAXBY & LUCIA MASCIULLO  
ISBN 9781760657352 HARDBACK  
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**A gorgeously illustrated historical picture book about the women and children of the Changi POW camp.**

*I have a secret – we have a secret –  
in this place where secrets are not allowed.*

The children in the Changi camp are working on a surprise for Mrs Ennis' birthday. They scavenge for scraps of fabric in every colour and hide in cornered shadows to stitch flowers. But they must keep their surprise a secret, not just from Mrs Ennis, but from their black-booted captors ...

**For ages: 7+ years**

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Claire Saxby writes award-winning fiction, non-fiction and poetry for young people. She writes about history, about nature and more. Her books include Nature Storybooks (*Big Red Kangaroo, Emu, Koala, Dingo, Kookaburra, Great White Shark, Tasmanian Devil and Wedge-tailed Eagle*), which celebrate Australian wildlife and the places they live. Her historical novel, *The Wearing of the Green*, explores early colonial Melbourne. Claire lives by the sea and believes our world is a place of many wonders.

# ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Lucia Masciullo is an award-winning illustrator who loves to create whimsical characters and colouring with traditional techniques, mixing watercolour, pencil and collage. Born and bred in Livorno, Italy, she moved to Australia in 2007 and since then she has illustrated thirty books, including *Come Down, Cat!* by Sonya Hartnett, which was a CBCA Honour Book and shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Award. Lucia currently lives on the Gold Coast and when not at work, she likes running, watching anime and eating homemade pizza.

## THEMES

Friendship • kindness • resilience • hope • courage • empathy  
• belonging • community • identity • history • human rights.

## CURRICULUM AREAS

**English:** Explore how stories represent people, places and events; respond to texts through discussion, drawing and writing; create short written, oral and multimodal texts; explore historical fiction and real-world inspired narratives.

**HASS (History):** Explore personal, family and community histories; investigate how the past is remembered and recorded; explore the impact of significant historical events on people's lives; examine how objects, images and stories help us understand history.

**HASS (Civics and Citizenship):** Explore concepts of fairness, freedom and rights; discuss the experiences of children in different times and places; develop an understanding of empathy, responsibility and respect.

**Visual Arts:** Explore ideas, experiences and stories through making art; use visual symbols, colour and pattern to communicate meaning; create artworks inspired by historical and cultural traditions.

**Personal and Social Capability:** understanding emotions; developing empathy and compassion; building positive relationships; recognising acts of kindness and courage.

**Ethical Understanding (for older students):** Explore fairness and injustice; reflect on moral choices in difficult situations; consider how people support each other during times of hardship.

## BEFORE READING

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT: CHANGI PRISON CAMP

At the conclusion of the book, the author has written a note about the history behind the story of *The Flower Garden*.

Before reading, it may be helpful for students to have an understanding of the historical context of the story.

Explain that *The Flower Garden: A Changi Secret* is inspired by real events during World War II.

Changi Prison Camp was a large prison camp in Singapore where thousands of Allied civilians and soldiers – including Australians – were held by the Japanese army from 1942 to 1945. Many of the prisoners were women and children who had been living in Singapore before the war.

Life in the camp was extremely difficult. There was very little food, medicine or freedom. However, people found ways to support each other and maintain hope – including creating gardens, schools, concerts and secret celebrations.

### UNDERSTANDING HISTORY

#### Discuss

- Why do you think civilians – including women and children – were imprisoned during the war?
- How might life in a prison camp be different from life at home? What does being far from home feel like?
- Why do you think the guards wanted to control where people went and what they did?
- What rights do children have today that children in Changi did not have?
- Why do you think people tried to help each other?
- What do you think makes people feel brave when things are hard?

#### Explain the concept of prison camps

- A prison is a place where people are not free to leave.
- In the story, the women and children had not chosen to be in the prison camp. They had to follow rules and they were watched all the time.
- How would it feel not to be allowed to go home?
- What would you miss most?
- What would help you feel better?

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## DISCUSSION TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

### BEFORE READING

#### Discuss

- What is a secret? Have you ever kept a special secret for someone?
- What do you think a 'flower garden' might be?
- What do you notice about the cover? What clues does it give you about the story?

#### Quilts

Quilts are like a blanket but made from many small pieces of fabric stitched together. They keep us warm, but each piece in the quilt can also tell a story about family, history and culture.

Stories can be told through patterns, colours, symbols and images, as well as through the way the pieces are arranged.

In *The Flower Garden*, the author provides a link (see Author's Note at the end of the book) so that you can see the actual quilt on which *The Flower Garden* is based.

Explore some other quilts to discover the stories they tell. Some examples are:

- The Rajah Quilt: Made in 1841 by women travelling to Australia by ship.
- Harriet Powers' quilts: created by an African-American woman in the 1800s that tell Bible stories and historical events.
- My Australia quilt by Helen Goddens (<https://helengodden.com/gallery-2/my-australia-the-huge-quilt/>)
- Gee's Bend quilts: created by generations of African-American women in an isolated community called Gee's Bend, Alabama, USA.

## Discuss

- How does a quilt show many stories in one?
- How can pictures tell stories without words?
- Why might making a quilt be comforting? Talk about how art can help people when they feel sad or afraid.
- How do colours change the mood or feeling of a quilt?
- What might different patterns represent?
- What would you put in your own story square?
- Look at the final spread that shows the children holding out the flowers. Why is it important that their names are on the flowers?
- How does this turn the quilt into a memory?
- Why do museums keep special objects like quilts?
- Look at photographs of the real quilt at the link provided by the author. What details can you see? What do you think each square might represent?
- How are quilts similar to history books?
- What can quilts tell us that photographs or books can't?
- Why do you think women often used quilts to tell their stories?
- Why might sewing have been one of the few ways some people could express themselves?
- How can fabric, colour and pattern show where someone comes from?
- How might a quilt show what is important to a family or community?
- How can everyday objects become powerful symbols? Can you think of any examples?
- Do you have an object that holds a special meaning for you? You might like to share it with the class and explain its importance to you and/or your family.
- How do objects help keep memories alive?
- Why is it powerful that the quilt in the story is made secretly?
- Why is it important that the quilt still exists today?
- How does knowing the story behind the quilt change the way you see the book?

## THEMES

### Hope

- What does hope mean?
- What makes you feel hopeful?
- Who helps you when you feel sad or worried?
- In the story, the flower garden becomes a secret place of hope. Why is hope important during difficult times?
- Why do you think the prisoners tried to create beauty in such a harsh place?
- Create a class chart called 'Things that give us hope' (someone who helps you; something that makes you feel safe; something that makes you feel happy).

## Kindness

- What does kindness look like?
- How can we be kind when someone is sad?
- How can small acts of kindness become powerful in unfair situations?
- Complete this sentence: I show kindness by \_\_\_\_\_.

## Courage

- What makes you feel brave?
- What helps you when things feel hard?
- Who helps you feel safe?
- What does courage look like when you don't have power or freedom?
- Create a class chart: 'Things that help us be brave'.

## Empathy

- How do you think the children in Changi felt seeing armed guards every day?
- What might it feel like to grow up without enough food or medicine?
- How would it feel to be separated from family members?
- Why is it important that we remember stories like this today?

## WRITING STYLE

- When the story is read aloud, does it sound like prose, or does it sound like a song or a poem? Why?
- Why do you think the author uses short lines?
- Which words are soft and quiet (eg 'softly, softly now')? Which words are loud (eg 'black-boot clatter')?
- Which words help you imagine what the prison camp looks like?
- Which words help you imagine the flowers?
- Which parts of the story/which words feel calm?
- Which parts of the story/which words feel frightening?
- Which parts of the story/which words feel joyful?
- 'Flowers grow from our fingers.' Can flowers really grow from fingers? What do you think the author really means? Why do authors sometimes write this way?

## VOCABULARY

Discuss the meanings of the following words and find examples in the story that show these words in action:

- Empathy
- Resilience
- Cooperation
- Gratitude

## Sewing vocabulary

- In *The Flower Garden*, sewing terms are used to help describe feelings and ideas. For example:  
*'She said cut the day in pieces,  
trim long hours with your threads.'*  
*'Flowers grow from our fingers  
And we write our names in twisted thread.'*
- What does it mean to 'cut the day in pieces'?
- Can you really trim hours like fabric? What do you think the author is saying?

- Create a 'sewing word bank' from the book:
  - stitch
  - thread
  - trim
  - snip
  - scraps
  - patch
  - quilt

Use some or all of these words to write a short poem about making something special.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why do the children want to make a surprise for Mrs Ennis?
- How do the children feel when they are making the flowers?
- Why do they have to keep their garden a secret?
- What colours and fabrics do they collect? Why are these important?
- How do the children show kindness in the story?
- How do you think Mrs Ennis felt when she saw the flowers?
- Why do you think the flower garden was so special?
- What helped the children stay hopeful?
- Why is peace important?
- How can we help protect children in war zones today?

## The power of storytelling

- Why do you think authors write stories about real historical events?
- Why is it important that we remember difficult parts of history?
- How can stories help us understand people from the past?
- How can books teach us empathy and understanding?

## VISUAL STORYTELLING

Visual storytelling is when pictures are used to tell a story. The pictures and the words work together to create meaning.

Lucia Masciullo's watercolour and ink illustrations use colour, light, body language and setting to show both the hardship of life in the prison camp and the hope and joy the children create together.

- Discuss how the soft colours, gentle face and glowing fabrics contrast with the barbed wire, guards and locked gates.
- Look at the cover of the book. Notice how it shows two very different scenes at the same time.
- How do these two parts of the picture make you feel?
- Which part feels happy? Which part feels scary or ominous?
- Why do you think both scenes are shown on the cover?
- How is the quilt used on the cover? Discuss how it seems to billow or grow out of the prison. It's like a garden in the sky. What clues does this give you about the story?
- Look at the opening spread (pp 3-4) showing the bars and the washing and the little girl whispering.
- How does this illustration show the setting of the story?
- What else does it show? Discuss the woman in the foreground with the baby, the child on the right-hand side sitting on the mat, the items on the washing line.
- If you heard the text alone: 'I have a secret – we have a secret –' would you think the story was about war and a prison camp?
- How does this illustration make you feel? Why?

- The illustrator uses light and shadow to show mood. For example, in the sewing scenes, the light is warm and golden. In the prison yard and guard scenes, the colours are cooler and darker.
    - How does the light make you feel?
    - Why do you think the illustrator used darker colours for the guards?
    - Why are the flowers so bright?
  - Look at the body language of the children in the story.
    - How can you tell they are keeping a secret?
    - How do their faces change when they are sewing?
    - How do they look when the guards walk past?
  - Flowers appear many times in the illustrations: as fabric scraps, as stitched shapes, as the final quilt.
    - What do flowers usually mean or symbolise?
    - Why might the children choose flowers?
    - How do the flowers change the prison space?
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## ACTIVITIES

### Colour and mood painting

- • Paint two pictures: one using dark, dull colours and one using bright, joyful colours.
- • Label your pictures with a sentence. For example:  
*'This picture shows how it feels when ...'* *'This picture shows hope because ...'* etc.

### Our Story quilt: Class art project

- Create a class story quilt inspired by the quilt in *The Flower Garden*. (This activity can be done using paper, card, fabric scraps or collage materials instead of sewing.)
- Each student designs a story square that represents one of the following:
  - Your family or family of choice
  - A favourite memory
  - A place you love
  - Something that makes you happy
- You can use pencils, paint, collage and/or words on your square.
- When all the squares are complete, join them together to create a class quilt display.
- Give your quilt a name, such as 'Our Story Quilt', 'Our Friendship Quilt', 'Our Kindness Quilt', and so on.
- After the quilt is complete, discuss:
  - How is your class quilt similar to the quilt in *The Flower Garden*?
  - How does each square tell a different story?
  - Why is it special to see everyone's stories together?
  - How does art help us remember important people and places?

### Extension

- You might like to create other themed quilts throughout the year, such as:
  - Class Friendship Quilt
  - Be Kind Quilt
  - Book Week Quilt
  - History Quilt

## **Create a classroom flower garden**

Create your own fabric or paper flowers using:

- Coloured paper
- Fabric scraps
- Buttons, thread, wool
- Recycled materials
- Write a kindness message to attach to your flower.
- Create a classroom display and give it a name such as 'Our Flower Garden of Kindness'.

## **Drama and role play**

In small groups, students act out:

- Collecting fabric scraps
- Stitching the flowers
- Giving the surprise to Mrs Ennis
- Focus on expressing emotions through body language and facial expression.

## **History Detectives: Research**

Investigate the real history behind the story.

- Where is Changi Prison?
- Who was held there?
- What were conditions like?
- How did people survive?
- What creative or hopeful activities did prisoners organise?

Present your findings as:

- A fact poster
- A digital slideshow
- A mini documentary script
- A timeline of events.

## **A Secret Garden project**

As a class, design your own symbolic 'hope garden'.

- Draw or design a garden that represents:
  - Hope
  - Freedom
  - Kindness
  - Courage.

Each plant, flower or tree represents a value (for example, a sunflower for hope, a strong tree for courage).

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## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Write a short explanation about your garden's meaning.

### Diary/journal writing

- Write a diary entry from the perspective of a child living in Changi Prison Camp. Describe:
  - A typical day
  - How you feel
  - What you miss
  - What gives you hope.

### Writing

If you were going away for a while (like the children in the book), what would you pack?

P.S, You have to carry it!

Perhaps use this category list:

- Something to wear
- Something to share
- Something to use
- Something to amuse (e.g. games, skip rope)

Note: this activity could also be used to pack a totally fantastical suitcase.

### Art

In the centre of a set of hexagon flowers, include your name and one of the following:

- A favourite boredom buster
- Something great about you
- Your favourite word

Assemble a hexagon flower (perhaps use coloured paper). Put your name in the centre hexagon, draw your favourite people/things in the surrounding hexagons.