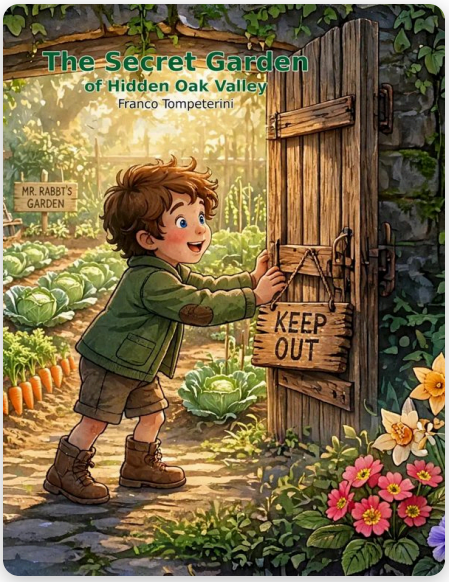



HIDDEN OAK VALLEY · BOOK 3 · SPRING

# The Secret Garden of Hidden Oak Valley

Teacher & Homeschool Guide

On a warm spring morning, Hickory welcomes Mrs. Robin back from her migration to Florida and learns how she builds her nest. With help from Mrs. Mouse, he plans and plants a porch butterfly garden, learns a safer way than pesticides when whiteflies attack Mr. Rabbit's carrots, discovers how leaves make food through photosynthesis, and builds a ladybug terrarium. When the first stem pushes through the soil, a monarch visits — and Hickory writes new questions for summer.

**Best for:** ages 9–12 (younger children can follow along as a read-aloud).
**Plan:** one week, about 30–45 minutes a day.
**Free to print and copy** for your classroom, library, or homeschool.

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## Who's who in the valley

- **Hickory**: the curious boy who lives in a treehouse in the Great Oak and plants his first butterfly garden on the porch.
- **Mrs. Robin**: returns from Florida, explains how she builds her nest, and asks Hickory to leave soft fluff on the porch rail.
- **Mrs. Mouse**: lives in the base of the same oak. She collects seeds, teaches Hickory to make a flower-gram, and explains helpful insects and photosynthesis.
- **Mr. Acorn**: brings blue yarn for the nest, labels the milkweed pot, and helps with the ladybug "parade."
- **Mr. Rabbit**: finds whiteflies on his carrot tops, first uses a store-bought pesticide, then washes it off and tries ladybugs instead.

## Discussion questions, chapter by chapter

### Chapter 1: A Spring Morning in Hidden Oak Valley

1. What steps does Mrs. Robin take to build her nest, from finding a V-shaped spot to lining it with soft material?
2. Mrs. Robin says nest-building is instinct. What does that mean?
3. Why does Hickory set up a "nest-building supply station," and what does Mr. Acorn bring?

### Chapter 2: Planting with Mrs. Mouse

1. Why does Mrs. Mouse want Hickory to draw a flower-gram before he plants a single seed?
2. Why is milkweed the most important plant in a monarch butterfly garden?
3. Name Mrs. Mouse's four planning steps. Why must the garden get at least six hours of sunlight?
4. What is germination? Why does every pot need a hole in the bottom?

### Chapter 3: Hickory's Bedroom

1. Hickory keeps labeled pebbles; Mrs. Mouse keeps labeled seed jars. How are they alike as collectors?
2. Why does Hickory decide to turn the empty aquarium into a ladybug house?
3. What question is buzzing in his mind as he falls asleep?

### Chapter 4: The Whitefly Problem

1. Why was the white powder on Mr. Rabbit's carrots a problem?
2. What is a whitefly, and how does it hurt a plant?
3. What is biological control? How will the ladybugs help Mr. Rabbit?
4. How can you invite ladybugs to a garden? What are "aphid lions," and why are they helpful?

### Chapter 5: How Plants Make Their Own Food

1. Photosynthesis literally means "making things with light." What three ingredients does a plant mix together?
2. What are chloroplasts and chlorophyll? What job do they do?
3. What "gift" do plants send out through their stomata?
4. Mrs. Mouse says a leaf's veins are like a road map. What do those veins carry?

### Chapter 6: Hickory Finds His Ladybugs

1. How does Hickory set up the terrarium before he goes looking? (Hint: gravel, sugar water, and a wet cotton ball.)
2. Where does he finally find the ladybugs, and which clue from Mrs. Mouse led him there?
3. How many ladybugs does he bring home? What does he notice in the pots about a week later?

## Chapter 7: The First Bloom

1. When Hickory sees the first stem, he realizes that "great things take time, patience, and a little help from good friends." Where did you see that in the story?
2. A monarch lands even though the garden is not blooming yet. Why is that visit important to Hickory and Mr. Acorn?
3. What four things does Hickory write down that he learned that week?
4. What new questions does he circle for later?

## Big-picture questions

1. Hickory learns that great things take time, patience, and a little help from friends. Where do you see that in your own life?
2. Why is using helpful insects safer than spraying pesticides?
3. Hickory ends the book with new questions. What question would you circle three times?

## Vocabulary

| Word | What it means in the story |
|---|---|
| **Instinct** | Something an animal knows how to do without being taught, like Mrs. Robin building her nest. |
| **Flower-gram** | A garden plan drawn on paper before any seeds are planted, so every plant gets the sun and space it needs. |
| **Milkweed** | The only plant monarch caterpillars can eat, and the most important plant in Hickory's butterfly garden. |
| **Germination** | The first stage of a seed's life, when it soaks up moisture, its shell bursts, roots grow down, and a stem pushes up toward the light. Mrs. Mouse says this takes about five to seven days. |
| **Photosynthesis** | "Making things with light": the way a plant uses sunlight, water, and carbon dioxide to make food in its leaves. |
| **Chloroplasts** | Tiny green "solar panels" inside a leaf that catch sunlight. |
| **Chlorophyll** | The green pigment in a leaf. Its job is to soak up sunshine. |
| **Carbon dioxide** | An invisible gas in the air that plants take in through their leaves. |
| **Stomata** | Tiny mouth-like pores in a leaf. Plants take in carbon dioxide and release oxygen through them. |
| **Glucose** | The sweet sugar a plant makes for energy, like a "power smoothie" that helps it grow. |
| **Oxygen** | The "gift" plants send into the air — the fresh air people and animals need to breathe. |
| **Pesticides** | Man-made chemicals made to kill bugs. They can also harm people, pets, soil, and water if we are not careful. |
| **Whitefly** | A tiny sap-sucking bug with powdery white wings that gathers under leaves and can make them yellow and wither. |
| **Biological control** | The natural way to manage pests: inviting helpful insects to eat the harmful ones, without poison. |
| **Aphid lions** | The nickname for baby green lacewings (larvae). They have a huge appetite for the same bugs that hurt a garden. |
| **Pollination** | When insects carry pollen from flower to flower as they feed. Hickory remembers this from an earlier adventure. |

Tip: have students keep a word list in a notebook, just like Hickory keeps his.

## A simple one-week plan

| Day | Read | Do |
|---|---|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Day 1** | Chapters 1–2 | Talk through Mrs. Robin's nest steps (V-shaped branch, mud, twigs, soft lining). Start a flower-gram (Activity 2): mark a sunny spot, choose a spring, summer, and fall bloomer, and put tall plants at the back. Optional: leave dandelion down, cottonwood fluff, or a scrap of yarn on a porch rail for nesting birds. |
| **Day 2** | Chapters 3–4 | Make a two-column chart: harmful insects vs. helpful ones (ladybugs, green lacewings). Discuss why Mr. Rabbit's pesticide was a problem and what biological control means. If the season allows, start Hickory's Ladybug Terrarium (Activity 1), and plan to release the ladybugs after about a week. |
| **Day 3** | Chapter 5 | Do Leaf Bubbles (Activity 4) and watch for oxygen bubbles. Draw a leaf and label veins, chlorophyll, stomata, glucose, and oxygen. Try the grown-up tip: one leaf in sun and one in shade. Which makes more bubbles? |
| **Day 4** | Chapter 6 | Plant a Seed Cup (Activity 3): drainage holes, two seeds, a labeled popsicle stick, and a sunny windowsill. Check it each morning for 5–7 days, like Hickory. Talk about where he found the ladybugs (under bark on a fallen log). |
| **Day 5** | Chapter 7 | Write your own "Things I learned this week" list, as Hickory does (nest building, garden planning, germination, beneficial insects, photosynthesis). Share flower-grams. Write one new question and circle it three times. |

## Nature-learning tie-ins

- **Nest watch:** look for forked branches and old nests (do not touch an active nest). Leave soft, dry fluff on a rail for birds, the way Hickory and Mr. Acorn do.
- **Plan a butterfly garden:** include milkweed for caterpillars and nectar flowers that bloom in different seasons (the book names purple coneflower for summer and blazing star or goldenrod for fall). Place the garden where it gets at least six hours of sun, with tall plants at the back.
- **Use the book's garden plan:** the 5' × 8' layout in the back lists swamp milkweed and Joe-Pye weed in the back row, purple coneflower and black-eyed Susan in the middle, and lantana and sweet alyssum in front.
- **Invite helpers:** a shallow dish with a wet cotton ball and a little sugar water; pollen-rich flowers such as yarrow, sweet alyssum, and marigolds; and cozy spots like hollow bamboo, pinecones, and old logs.
- **Skip the spray:** if a pesticide has already been used, Mrs. Mouse's first step is to wash it off. Then use biological control instead.
- **Thank a tree:** after the photosynthesis chapter, take a deep breath outdoors and name the three ingredients a leaf uses — and the oxygen it gives back.

## Activities in the back of the book

- Activity 1: Hickory's Ladybug Terrarium (from Chapter 6). After about a week, release the ladybugs near flowers. Wash hands after handling insects, and ask a grown-up to help with catching.
- Activity 2: Draw Your Flower-Gram (from Chapter 2). Take the finished plan to the garden store when you are ready to buy seeds or plants.
- Activity 3: Plant a Seed Cup (from Chapter 2). A grown-up should poke the drainage holes. Beans or sunflowers sprout fastest.
- Activity 4: Leaf Bubbles — Catch Photosynthesis in Action (from Chapter 5). Tiny bubbles on the leaf are oxygen, the "gift" the leaf releases while it makes food.

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