

The Village School Children's Book of the Month
The Curious Garden by Peter Brown
reviewed by Shannon Johnson 3rd & 4th grade teacher

Curiosity can lead to many things and it is curiosity and a love of the outdoors that leads Liam to discover a passion for gardening. *The Curious Garden* by Peter Brown, begins with dreary images of a city bustling with factories, but with no signs of plants or people, aside from the main character Liam, who loves to be outdoors, even in the rain.

On one such day, his curiosity leads him to the top of abandoned train tracks where he discovers a few struggling plants and weeds trying to grow in the cracks of the tracks. This sparks an idea and a passion and the next day, he sets himself to take care of the plants. Through trial and error, he learns how to be a gardener and tend to the plants.

Over the course of the spring, summer and fall, he nurtures the plants and they soon (as plants will), begin to spread and take over more of the tracks. Soon plants are popping up in the most unlikely places, many with the aid of Liam's hand. But the garden begins to take on a life of its own and is depicted as its own character—"With miles of open railway ahead of it, the garden was growing restless. It wanted to explore." Like Liam, it has a curiosity of its own.

As the garden spreads and grows, the pictures in the book grow brighter and lush. Brown interlaces pages dotted with text and then some without and one can begin to imagine where the garden might grow next. Even the weeds are part of the garden and help to create green spaces within the city.

Liam busily prepares during a winter and the next spring, with many helpers who discover the joy in helping to take care of the gardens. By the end of the story, the city is transformed, as are the people. No longer do they stay indoors, cooped up, but rather get out and enjoy the fruits of their labor.

In the author's note, Brown says that an old, elevated highline on the west side of Manhattan inspired the story. Long forgotten, the railway was soon taken over by nature. This led to him wondering what would happen to a city if people "truly cooperate with nature." This is a fun read, that inspires one to dream of what can be possible with just a little bit of effort. Liam's curiosity and newfound love lead to gardens in all sorts of new places. Where's an unlikely place a garden could grow near you?

The Curious Garden is a lovely read-aloud for ages 3-7. Ages 7 and above can enjoy reading it themselves.