

Growing Up Green

A Reading A-Z Level U Leveled Book

Word Count: 2,348

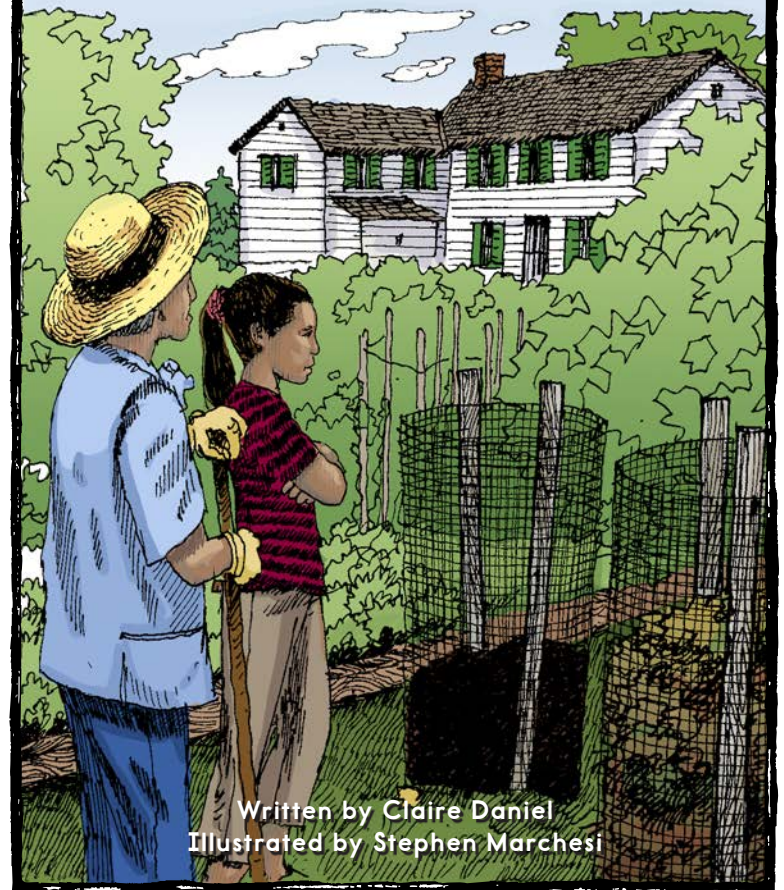


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Illustrated by Stephen Marchesi

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Correlation

LEVEL U

Fountas & Pinnell	Q
Reading Recovery	40
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Table of Contents

Off to Siberia	4
Nannie's House	9
Living Green	13
The Seed of an Idea	15
The Vegetable Thief	17
End of Summer	20
Glossary	24



Off to Siberia

Samantha pitched her pajamas into her suitcase and slammed it shut as if it contained a three-headed monster. It was crammed full of the shorts, sweatshirts, jeans, socks, and sneakers that she would need for the next eight weeks.

She glanced outside her window into the backyard next door. Mrs. Gonzalez was planting flowers, and Mr. Gonzalez was raking leaves. Mrs. Gonzalez opened a bag of store-bought **compost** and spread it on top of the soil around the pink blossoms.

Samantha heard her brother, Hal, calling her from downstairs. "Sam, your laundry is done!"

Samantha ran to the laundry room to find her favorite pink T-shirt. In her haste to grab it out of the dryer, she knocked over two boxes piled high with empty soda bottles.

"Sometimes I just hate recycling!" she yelled.

"At least you get a vacation from it," her older brother muttered.

"I might as well be going to Siberia!" groaned Samantha.



"Maine isn't so bad," Hal said, sticking his head in the laundry room. He was leaving for college in the fall, so he was working at an office to make money over the summer.

"I'll be slaving away at my summer job while you're relaxing at Nannie's." He jumped as if he were making a jump shot on a basketball court and tossed an empty water bottle into the trash.

"If Mom finds this empty bottle in the trash instead of the recycling bin, you'll be in Siberia yourself," Samantha warned.

He picked up the bottle, threw it up in the air, and snatched it in front of Samantha's face. "I know, Einstein. Cool your jets."

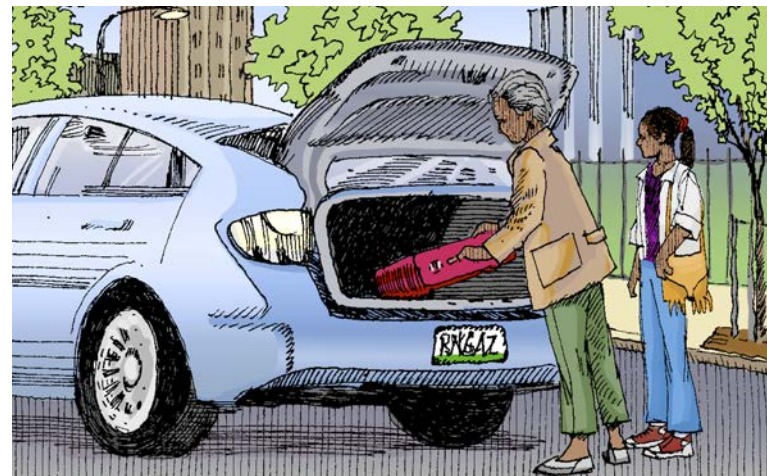




At breakfast, Samantha ate chunks of mango with delight. Her mother knew she loved mangoes, so Samantha suspected that the treat was her way of saying she was sorry.

All winter, the family had talked about Samantha going to summer camp. Her summer was going to be jam-packed with horseback riding, swimming, and mountain biking. But then the economy crashed, and her parents didn't have the money to send her to camp. Instead, Samantha was being sent to her grandmother's house in Maine for the summer.

After breakfast, Samantha grabbed the empty milk carton and threw it in the recycling bin. At least her trip to Maine would finally give her a break from her mom's tough "green rules" about recycling and saving energy.



When Samantha arrived in Maine, her grandmother picked her up at the airport. Samantha laughed when she saw that her grandmother drove a **hybrid car**, just like her parents. After hugging her grandmother, Samantha said, "Are you a 'green nut' like my mom?"

Nannie shrugged, "Not exactly."

"Great," Samantha said, "because I am sick and tired of all the rules in my house! 'Turn out that light,' 'Turn down the air conditioning,' and 'Walk so we don't have to take the car!' My mom is driving us all crazy!"

Nannie didn't comment, but she smiled slightly. Soon it was dark, and the motion of the car gently put Samantha into a deep sleep.

Nannie's House

Samantha's bedroom was on the top floor of Nannie's house, and the morning sunshine pried open her eyes. She heard digging outside and saw Nannie in the garden.

Samantha was amazed at all the flowers she saw outside her window. There were clumps of pink, blue, and yellow everywhere. Behind a fence, vegetables filled rows of raised garden beds. Nannie walked back toward the house, and Samantha quickly dressed and ran downstairs.

Her grandmother rinsed strawberries and put them in a bowl next to the milk and cereal.

"Do you have mangoes instead?" Samantha asked.

"Mangoes in Maine?" Nannie frowned. "Can you imagine how much energy it takes to ship a mango from Peru to here?"

Samantha was speechless. Nannie continued, "I buy my food locally. I bought these strawberries for you at the farmer's market yesterday. They're sweeter and fresher than fruits from faraway places."

Samantha tasted the berries, and her grandmother was right—they tasted terrific.

After breakfast, Samantha followed her grandmother into the garden and was amazed at the asparagus, spinach, lettuce, and broccoli plants. Nannie obviously had a green thumb!

Samantha watched her grandmother dump vegetable and fruit scraps into a wire bin. "What's that?" Samantha asked.

"It's my new compost bin."



Nannie rolled the wheelbarrow to a different bin filled with something that looked like rich, dark soil, "This is **mature** compost."

Nannie filled the wheelbarrow with the dark-brown substance. Then she rolled it over to an empty raised bed intended for green-bean plants.

"Make yourself useful," her grandmother said. She handed Samantha a shovel. As her grandmother emptied the wheelbarrow, Samantha mixed the compost into the dirt.

Samantha remembered Mrs. Gonzalez and how she used compost around her flowers at home. "I thought compost kept weeds out. Why are we mixing it in the dirt?"

"It makes the soil rich. Compost sticks to the soil particles and helps them hold onto the **nutrients** that make plants grow."

After mixing the compost into the soil, Nannie showed Samantha how to plant green beans. Then they watered the garden before gathering spinach and lettuce for a salad.

After lunch, Nannie suggested that they go for a hike. Samantha opened the door to the pantry and asked, "Where's the water?" Nannie pointed to the spigot.

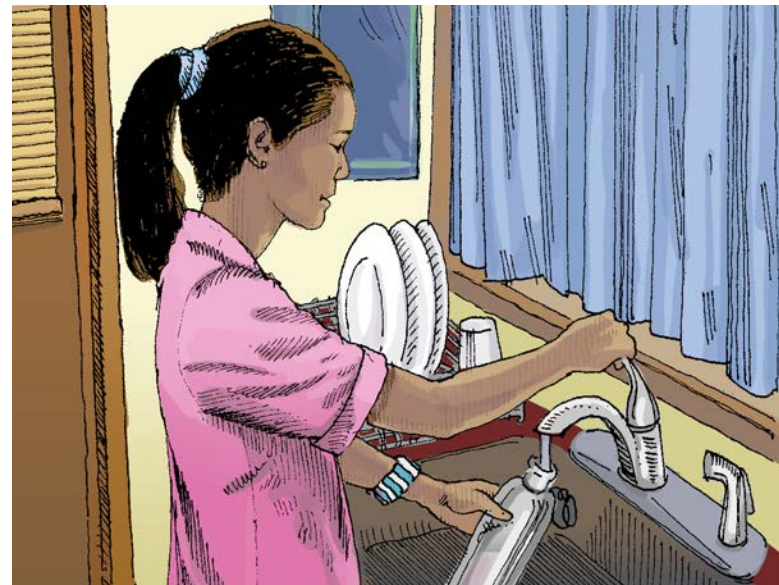
"No, I mean the bottled water for the hike."

Nannie tossed her a metal bottle. "Fill that. My water comes from a spring. Besides, if you use that, there'll be one less plastic bottle to recycle."

Samantha groaned. She had come from a **fanatical** recycling family to a situation so green that even recycling was frowned upon!

Samantha teased, "You're even greener than my mom, aren't you?"

"You could say that," Nannie said with a grin. "I'm waiting for my hair to turn green any day. Yours might, too, with a little luck."



Living Green

That first day was like many more that followed. In the mornings, they worked in the garden. In the afternoons, they went hiking or biking. It wasn't summer camp, but it wasn't torture, either.

Samantha also learned just how green her grandmother was, but her greenness, if you could call it that, was just the way she lived. Nannie pinned her clothes on a clothesline to dry. She plugged her television and lamps into power strips and shut them off at night. She mowed her lawn with a hand mower instead of a gas-powered one. Instead of using harsh chemicals to clean her house, she used baking soda and vinegar.

One day, Samantha's grandmother set up a farm stand at the end of her driveway and sold some of the vegetables from the garden. At night, she collected the money that people left in the cash box.

"It pays for the garden supplies," her grandmother said.

Samantha noticed that her forehead was creased. "What's wrong, Nannie?" she asked.



Her grandmother smiled and relaxed her muscles. "Nothing—I was just thinking." But she didn't sound very convincing.

Samantha wondered what was wrong. Was she doing something wrong, or was something else worrying her grandmother? Something was definitely not right.

The Seed of an Idea

One afternoon, after a trip to the beach, Samantha's grandmother stopped by the hardware store. She purchased yards of hardware cloth, which is a wire mesh used for fencing.

"That will be \$21.36," the clerk said.

Nannie pulled a twenty-dollar bill from her wallet and began digging in her purse for the rest of the money. Quickly, Samantha pulled out two dollars from her jeans pocket.

"Need this?" she asked.

"Thank you," her grandmother said. "I'll pay you back."

Samantha noticed that the wrinkles were back on Nannie's forehead. Then it occurred to Samantha that perhaps her grandmother was short of money. That would explain the wrinkles!



The next day, Samantha and Nannie loaded up the car with the hardware cloth, a bucket full of kitchen scraps, a bag of grass clippings, and a bale of straw. They drove to an outdoor flower garden, where ten members of a gardening club were waiting for them.

Nannie spoke to the group of men and women. "I'm so happy that you've asked us to teach you how to compost." She looked at her granddaughter. "This is my assistant, Samantha. She can tell you how compost helps your garden."

Samantha was shocked when everyone turned to listen to her, but she remembered what her grandmother had taught her. She spoke up loud and clear. "Compost adds richness to your soil. Gardeners call it 'black gold' because it is so precious. You can spend five dollars a bag for it, but we can teach you how to make it for free."

For the next hour, Samantha and Nannie showed the group how to compost. At the end of the demonstration, one woman gave Nannie a check. Samantha remembered Mrs. Gonzalez tending her flowers back home, and an idea formed in her mind. If it worked, she might go to camp next year!

The Vegetable Thief

During July, more and more vegetables came up in the garden. Samantha and her grandmother were busy tending the garden, and two days a week they gave composting demonstrations to homeowners and gardening groups.

The garden was thriving. The beans grew long, and the raspberries turned deep red. The yellow squash popped up overnight, and the cucumbers seemed to grow an inch longer each day. Every morning, Samantha harvested vegetables and fruits, taking what they didn't need to the farm stand.



One day, Nannie asked Samantha to collect the money at the stand. Samantha opened the cash box, and there was only twenty-five cents inside. She searched the stand in case some money had fallen under the table, but there wasn't any.

Someone was stealing their **produce**! Samantha grabbed the cash box and ran back into the house. When she told Nannie, her grandmother just said, "Hmm." Samantha was confused. If Nannie needed money, why was she so unconcerned?

"Nannie! Someone is stealing from you!"

"Maybe," she said. "Maybe not."

"There's no maybe! We sold a whole table full of squash, raspberries, and lettuce today. And there's only a quarter in there."

"Maybe someone needs the food," Nannie said.

"But it's stealing!"

"They probably can't afford to buy fresh vegetables."

Samantha said, "But it isn't right. Whoever took the food knew they were stealing. They must feel guilty. Hungry or not, people shouldn't steal."

Nannie smiled, "Then let's not let them. I have an idea."

They worked together to make a new sign for the farm stand. This time, the sign asked for voluntary **contributions** only. People could pay whatever they wanted for the fruits and vegetables they bought.

Samantha said, "But Nannie, don't you need the money that the farm stand makes?"

Nannie's brow wrinkled up again. "Money's not everything." Then she laughed, "Call it part of being green, which you so lovingly tell me I am!"

"How is giving food away being green?"



"Think of it this way. The earth provides us with fruits and vegetables. We have too many, so we give some to people who need them. If they can pay, they pay. If they can't, they can't. Times are hard now, and if I can share my garden with someone who doesn't have one, then I'm happy."

Samantha studied her grandmother's face. It was still lined with worry. Was she really serious that she didn't need the money?

End of Summer

In early August, Samantha went to check the cash box. Instead of a quarter or a dollar, there was a fifty-dollar bill inside! Samantha gave the money to her grandmother, who didn't seem surprised. She just said, "Hmm" and smiled. Neither of them knew who had put the money in the box, and Samantha realized that it didn't matter. With the money they had collected, the garden supplies had been paid for, and there was a little extra left over.

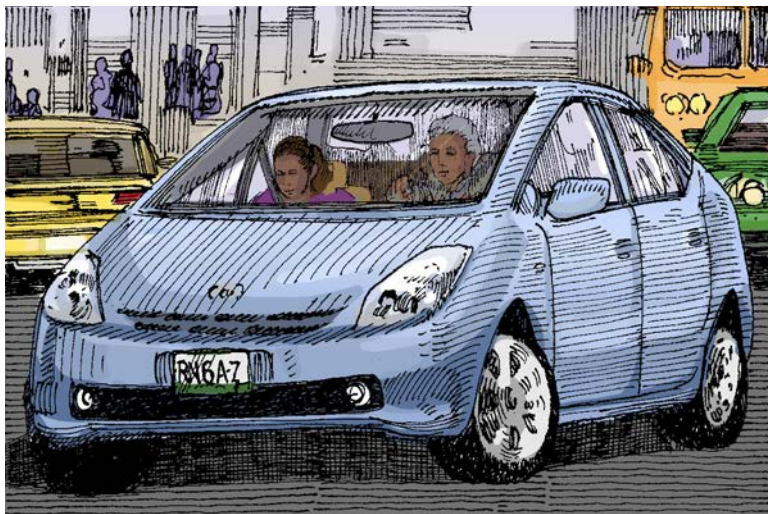
Soon it was time for Samantha to return home and get ready for school. She packed her bags and realized for the first time that she hadn't felt homesick or bored all summer. She had been too busy!

On the way to the airport, Samantha decided to tell her grandmother about her money-making idea. She said, "You know I wanted to go to camp this summer."

The wrinkles returned to Nannie's forehead. Samantha quickly added, "I had a great time, and I have a new idea. When I get back home, I'm going to teach the people there how to compost. I can save people money and help protect the **environment**."

Nannie laughed. "That's a wonderful idea! Green really does run in our family."

A few minutes before Samantha boarded the airplane, her grandmother handed her an envelope.



"What's that?" Samantha asked.

"Look inside," Nannie said.

Samantha opened the white envelope and saw a stack of ten- and twenty-dollar bills. She stammered, "I can't—"

"Yes, you can," her grandmother said. "You helped me all summer with the garden and the composting workshops. Now you can go to camp next summer."

"But you need this money!" Samantha blurted.

Her grandmother laughed. "No, I don't! I have all the money I need."

"But—but—you always looked so worried this summer."

"I was worried," Nannie said. "I was worried about you. I was worried that you were miserable staying with me instead of doing exciting things at camp."

Samantha dropped her bags and hugged her grandmother.

"I had an amazing summer! I wouldn't trade this summer for all the camps in the world!"



Nannie said, "Honey, that is the loveliest thing anyone has ever told me."

Samantha said, "You taught me a lot. You taught me that being green isn't just about recycling and turning off lights. It's about working with the earth and helping other people."

Samantha grabbed her bags and walked toward the gate. "You'll come visit us in the city, right?"

"Yes!" Nannie said, blowing her a kiss.

Samantha said, "Just do me one favor. Next year, plant some mango trees. If anyone can get them to grow in Maine, you can."

Nannie laughed and waved good-bye.

Glossary

compost (<i>n.</i>)	a mixture of decaying organic material, such as vegetables, plant clippings, or newspapers (p. 4)
contributions (<i>n.</i>)	payments made to support a cause (p. 19)
environment (<i>n.</i>)	all the conditions affecting an organism in a specific area, including plants, animals, water, soil, weather, landforms, and air (p. 21)
fanatical (<i>adj.</i>)	obsessive (p. 12)
hybrid car (<i>n.</i>)	a fuel-efficient car that uses an electric motor recharged by a conventional engine powered by fossil fuel (p. 8)
mature (<i>adj.</i>)	fully developed (p. 11)
nutrients (<i>n.</i>)	substances in food or soil that living things need to stay healthy and grow (p. 11)
produce (<i>n.</i>)	fresh fruits and vegetables (p. 18)