

TEXT	'THE SELFISH GIANT' (1888)
AUTHOR	Oscar Wilde
THEMES	Houses and homes (unit 4)
VOCABULARY	Weather, gardens
WRITING	Students write signs.
SPEAKING	'Conscience alley' drama activity

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) was an Irish poet, novelist and playwright (see portrait on the Worksheet). As part of the 1890s' *aestheticism* movement, Wilde was involved in redefining the notion of art as a didactic or moral activity, taking Romanticism's elevation of the artist to an extreme. Wilde's creativity and skills, combined with a larger-than-life personality and a tragic personal history, have made him one of the most famous figures in English literature. He became one of London's most popular playwrights in his time and is best remembered for his epigrams and plays and his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. 'The Selfish Giant' appeared in *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, first published in May 1888.

WARMER

Ask students to think of (or search online) examples of stories featuring giants. Some suggestions are *David and Goliath*, *The BFG* by Roald Dahl, *The Iron Giant* by Ted Hughes and *Odd and the Frost Giants* by Neil Gaiman. Ask them to talk about what kind of characters giants have – are they kind, scary, sad, lonely, funny, etc? What kind of giant do they think makes for a good story?

ABOUT YOU

Students work through the questions and talk about their ideas. Monitor their conversations and share comments and suggestions with the whole class.

Read the introduction. If the topic of why someone might not want to share their garden wasn't discussed with the whole class in the previous activity, ask for suggestions as to why the giant might be selfish. Teach/elicite the meaning of *selfish* or refer students to the glossary.

1 Students read the text and answer the question.

Possible answers

spring does not arrive in the garden; the birds don't sing; the winter stays in the garden; it's very cold; flowers don't grow

2

Possible answers

- 1 This builds on the question in the previous activity – the world outside the garden has normal seasons, but the garden is in a kind of constant winter.
- 2 Perhaps they want to be near the garden because it is so special.
- 3 Because it saw the noticeboard telling the children not to play in the garden
- 4 Ask for suggestions and compare ideas.

VOCABULARY

3

Answers

- 1 cloak 2 blossoms 3 noticeboard 4 hail 5 dusty
6 delightful

4

Answers

- 1 delightful 2 dusty 3 noticeboard 4 selfish

WRITING

5 Use the question to elicit ideas from the class. Possible answers might include *Don't play in the garden*, *Children cannot play in this garden*, *Go away!*, etc. Introduce/clarify the term *sign* and give some more examples if necessary – *Please use the other door*, *No smoking*, *Quiet please*. The language of signs is actually quite complex as, although the grammar is mostly imperatives, there are aspects of register to consider as well. This makes the writing task a very interesting opportunity to look at these things. In the first sentence, for example, you probably want to apologise, but in the third, you are warning the reader. Students may well struggle to find the correct language – or simply try and translate directly from what they know of L1 signs. This makes the sharing/feedback part so important – and interesting – both in terms of the structures used and the vocabulary. You could write students' suggestions on the board and ask the whole class to choose the one they think is the best.

SPEAKING

6 This is a 'Conscience alley' drama activity. Make two groups – one has to think of reasons why the giant should let the children play in the garden and the other why he shouldn't. The groups then form two lines – making an 'alley' – and someone takes the part of the giant and walks down the alley. This could be a stronger student, or you. As the giant walks, students express their ideas. At the end, the giant chooses which advice he or she will follow/which ideas he or she liked best. If you are in a large class, there might be too many students for everyone to say something, in which case the groups should select the students to form the alley. The ones who aren't chosen can be prompters (the students in the alley should memorise their lines, not read them from a piece of paper).

MIXED ABILITY

Thinking of reasons why the giant should let the children play in the garden is much easier than giving reasons why he shouldn't. Put the stronger students in the latter group as they will have to use more challenging language.