



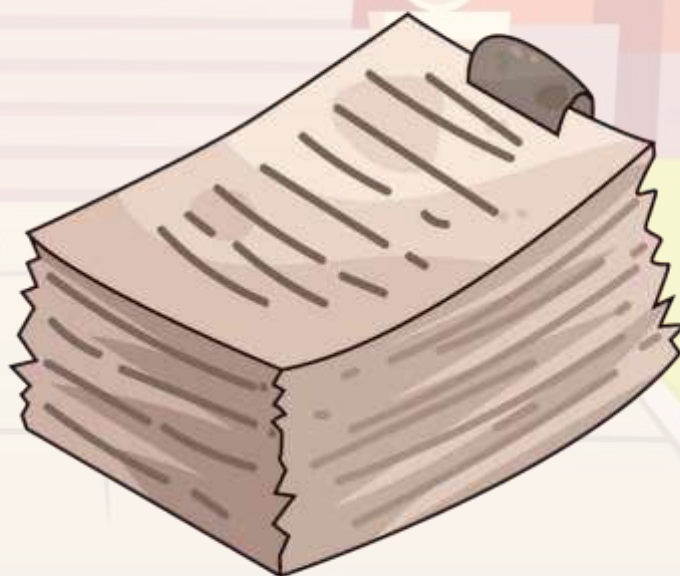
Stories of Kindness and Courage

Inspired by the Teachings
of Pope Francis

The Garden of Belonging



Maple Grove Primary had a big empty corner near the playground where weeds grew tall and the soil was dry. Most kids didn't go there, except to chase runaway balls or lost paper planes.



One Monday morning, Ms Santos made an announcement.

“This year,” she said, “our class will plant a garden in that corner. Not just any garden - a Garden of Belonging. Each of you will plant something. Together, we’ll care for it.”

The room buzzed. Mateo asked, “Do we all have to plant the same thing?”



Ms. Santos shook her head. “No. Each plant will be different, like each of you. But all together, they’ll make something beautiful.”

Tessa raised her hand. “Can I plant sunflowers? They’re tall and bright.”

“Of course,” said Ms Santos.



Aisha whispered, "I'll bring mint. My grandmother makes tea with it."

Karim leaned over to Lila. "I want chili peppers. Spicy!"

Lila giggled. "I'll plant daisies. Simple, like sunshine."

Dylan shrugged. "Guess I'll plant a tree. Something that lasts."

The list grew, one name after another. Flowers, herbs, vegetables, even vines. The children felt excited - except one.



A Quiet Worry

At the edge of the group, Priya chewed her pencil. She didn't know what to plant. Her family had just moved from another city, and she didn't feel like she belonged yet. What if her plant didn't fit in either?



That night, she asked her grandmother. “What if my plant looks strange next to everyone else’s?”

Her grandmother stroked her hair. “Strange? My dear, different doesn’t mean wrong. Our world needs many colours, many shapes. Just like in music, harmony comes from many notes, not one.”



She handed Priya a packet of seeds. “These are marigolds. In our culture, we use them in celebrations and prayers. Plant them. They will carry our story into the garden.”

Priya held the packet close. “Okay,” she whispered.



Planting Day

Saturday arrived bright and breezy. Families gathered at the school with spades, watering cans, and seed packets. Ms Santos drew a rough map: rows of soil, a small circle in the centre and paths winding through.



One by one, the children planted. Mia carefully tucked sunflower seeds into the soil. Karim pressed chili seedlings into place. Lila planted a ring of daisies. Dylan dug a hole for a young maple tree, its roots wrapped in burlap.



When it was Priya's turn, her hands shook. She knelt down and scattered her marigold seeds, covering them with earth. She glanced at the others, half-expecting someone to laugh. But Tessa leaned over. "They're such a pretty orange. They'll glow."



Karim nodded. “Spicy flowers for my spicy peppers.”

Priya smiled for the first time that day.

By the end, the empty corner no longer looked forgotten. The soil held promises—tiny seeds and seedlings ready to rise.

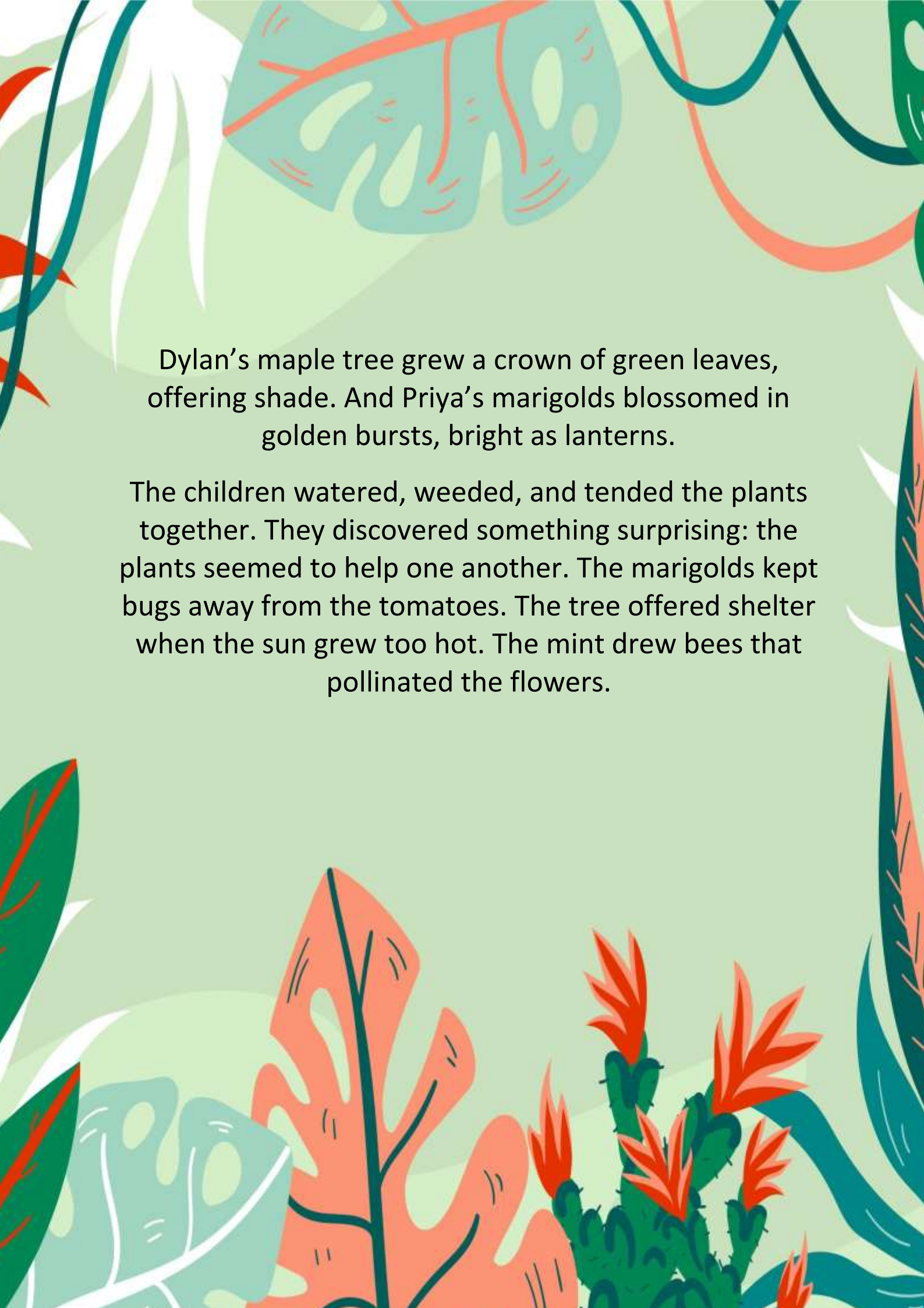


The Growing Season

Spring turned to summer and the garden came alive.

The sunflowers stretched toward the sky, taller than the children themselves. The mint spread quickly, filling the air with a fresh, sharp smell. The chili peppers blazed red, daring anyone to taste them. The daisies bloomed like little suns.





Dylan's maple tree grew a crown of green leaves,
offering shade. And Priya's marigolds blossomed in
golden bursts, bright as lanterns.

The children watered, weeded, and tended the plants
together. They discovered something surprising: the
plants seemed to help one another. The marigolds kept
bugs away from the tomatoes. The tree offered shelter
when the sun grew too hot. The mint drew bees that
pollinated the flowers.

One day, Karim pointed out, “If we only planted one kind of thing, it wouldn’t work this well. It’s better because we’re all different.”

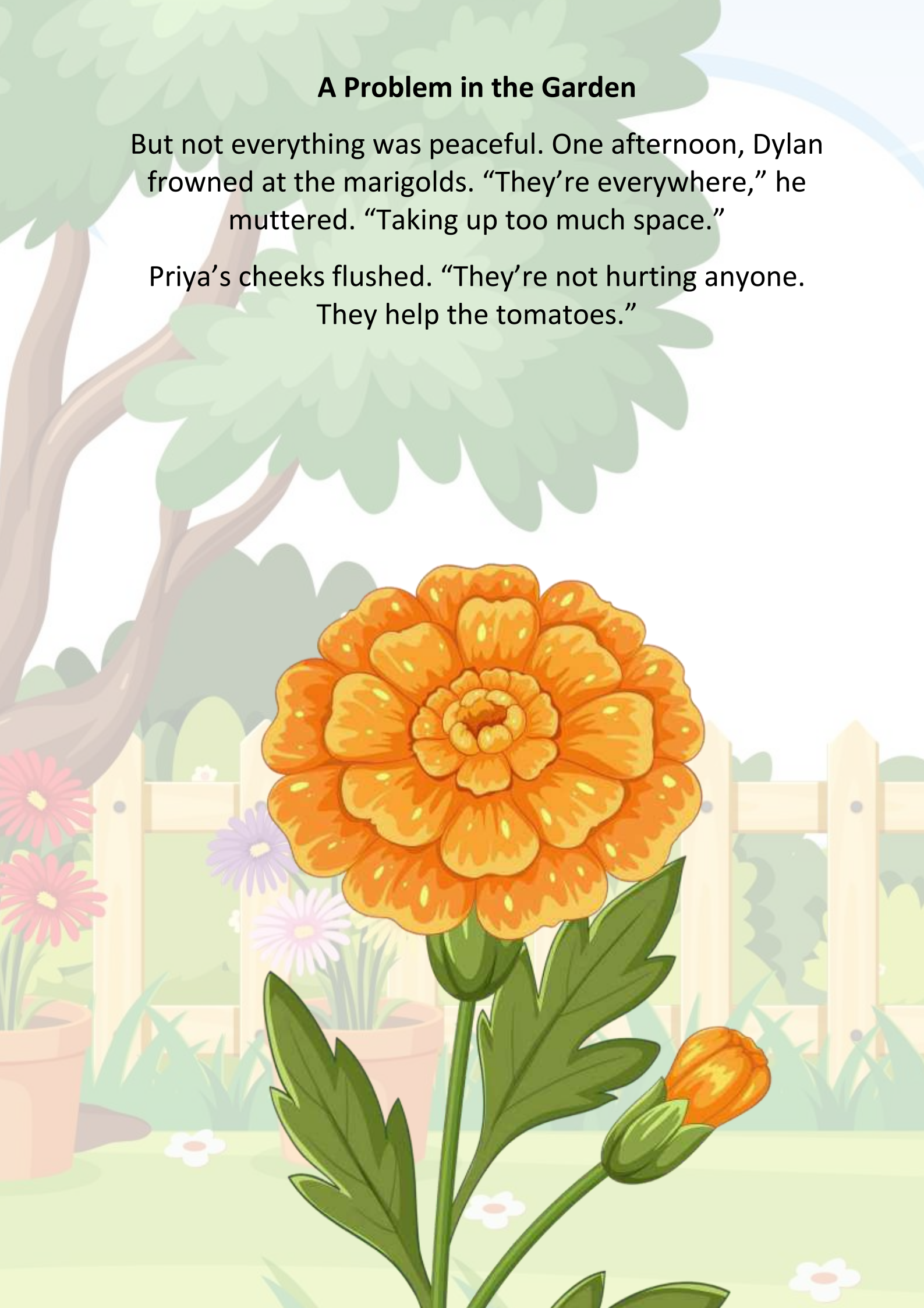
Ms Santos nodded. “Just like our class. Diversity makes us strong.”



A Problem in the Garden

But not everything was peaceful. One afternoon, Dylan frowned at the marigolds. “They’re everywhere,” he muttered. “Taking up too much space.”

Priya’s cheeks flushed. “They’re not hurting anyone. They help the tomatoes.”



“Still,” Dylan said, “they’re messy. Not neat like the rows of daisies or the straight chili plants.”

Lila overheard. “Dylan, the garden isn’t supposed to be neat. It’s supposed to belong to everyone.”

Dylan crossed his arms. “Maybe. But what if one plant doesn’t belong?”



Priya stared at the soil. Her grandmother's words came back: Many notes make harmony. But what if Dylan was right? Maybe her marigolds didn't fit.

That evening, she almost decided not to come back to water them.



The Lesson of the Garden

The next day, something strange happened. Overnight, beetles had chewed holes in the sunflower leaves. The class groaned.

Then Ms Santos bent down. “Wait. Look here. The beetles avoided the marigolds. They don’t like the smell. The marigolds protected the sunflowers.”

The children gasped.



“They saved them,” Priya whispered.

Dylan looked sheepish. “I guess... I was wrong.” He turned to Priya. “Your marigolds belong here more than anything.”

Priya’s smile spread like sunshine.



From then on, Dylan watered the marigolds whenever Priya was busy. And every time he saw their golden glow, he remembered: what seemed messy was actually protection, strength, and beauty.





The Harvest Festival

By autumn, the garden overflowed. Families gathered for a Harvest Festival. They sipped mint tea, ate chili stew, and decorated tables with daisies and marigolds. The maple tree's leaves turned fiery red, and Mia handed out sunflower seeds for next year.

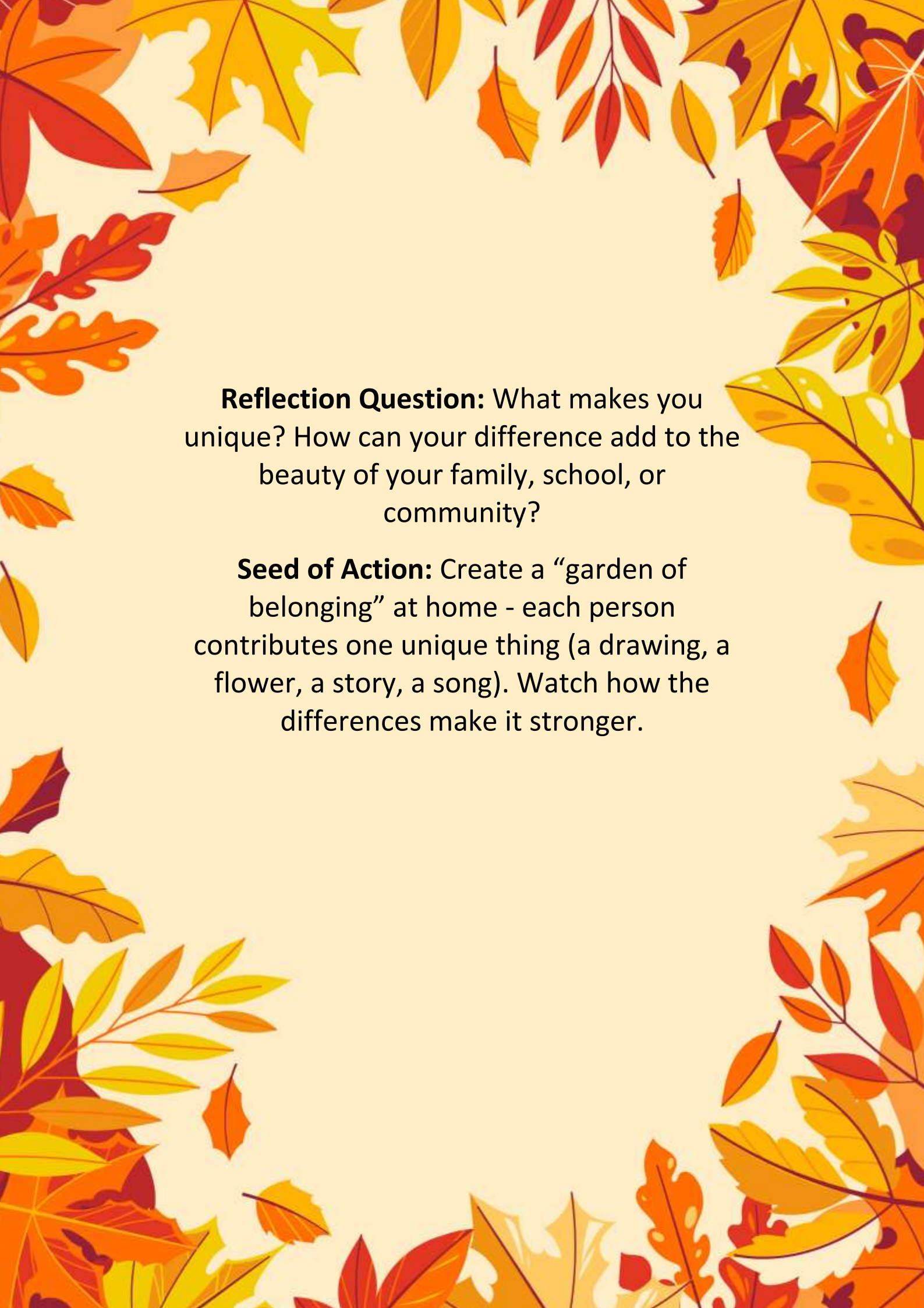
Ms Santos raised her voice over the laughter. “This Garden of Belonging shows us something important: every child, like every plant, is unique and unrepeatable. But together, you make something the world needs.”



The children stood in a circle, holding hands. They looked at the garden: tall, small, spicy, sweet, bright, simple, strong. Each different, each beautiful, each essential.

Priya squeezed Dylan's hand gently. He squeezed back.





Reflection Question: What makes you unique? How can your difference add to the beauty of your family, school, or community?

Seed of Action: Create a “garden of belonging” at home - each person contributes one unique thing (a drawing, a flower, a story, a song). Watch how the differences make it stronger.



THINK

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