The SELFISH GIANT

BY

OSCAR WILDE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

JEANNE BOWMAN

Teacher’s Guide
“A beloved tale that has lasted for generations, The Selfish Giant by Oscar Wilde, one of the world’s greatest writers, tells the tale of a very selfish giant, his wonderful garden, the curious and playful village children, and, of course, the little child who changes the giant’s heart. A beloved classic in English literature, The Selfish Giant may be Oscar Wilde’s greatest story of redemption and forgiveness.”

**Summary:** After the giant returns from a seven year trip to visit his friend the Cornish ogre, he finds children playing in his garden. He chases them away and builds a wall to keep them out. Winter arrives and it stretches on and on with the help of Snow, Frost, Hail and the North Wind. The giant is unable to enjoy his garden. Only when the children sneak back into the garden does winter vanish. When the giant looks out the window, he sees the children at play, all except for one child in the corner of the garden. This child is tormented by the winter cold brought on by The North Wind. The sight of the child’s suffering melts his heart and he allows all children into his garden. But then this special child vanishes. For a long time the giant does not see his friend until after he has grown old. Finally it is revealed that this special child has come to take him home to Heaven.

**Author and Illustrator**

Oscar Wilde was born in 1854 in Dublin, Ireland. He is best known for his poetry, plays, including The Importance of Being Earnest, and the novel The Picture of Dorian Gray. Wilde also wrote a popular collection of stories for children called The Happy Prince and Other Tales. In the years since their publication, the stories in that collection—including The Selfish Giant—have been dramatized through radio, film, and dance worldwide.

Jeanne Bowman was born in 1988, a full 100 years after The Selfish Giant. She studied art at Rocky Mountain College in Billings, Montana. She painted this book with watercolor and gouache and added photographic elements digitally. You can see more of her work at jeannebowmanillustrates.com or email her at jeanneillustrates@gmail.com to ask any questions about the illustrations in this book.

**Discussion**

**Preparing To Read**

Before reading, prime students some of the following questions and activities.

- Looking only at the cover, what do you think the story might be about?
- What does the word “selfish” mean?
- Do you have an example of a time you or someone you know might have been selfish?
- How did that make you feel?
- What are other words for selfish?
- Looking closely at the cover and the first set of endpapers, ask students where they think this story takes place. Is it in the country? The city? Is it in America? Or another country? How can they tell?
- What season is it in the story, based only on the endpapers?

**Activities**

The endpapers are filled with clues to many of Oscar Wilde’s other plays and stories. Using the following list, have students identify which posters allude to these other works of fiction. (Hint: they are not exact titles) The Remarkable Rocket, The Picture of Dorian Gray, The Happy Prince and Other Tales, The Canterville Ghost, The Importance of Being Earnest.
After Reading
Discussion/Writing Questions

Theme: Empathy, Sharing and Friendship
• How do you feel after reading this book? Can you name your emotions?
• Why do you think the giant did not want to share his garden in the beginning of the story? What could he have been feeling?
• Do you know what the word “empathy” means?
• How did the giant show empathy in the story?
• Think about a time that you had to share something you really cared about with someone else. How did you feel? What happened?
• Think about a time you wanted someone to share something with you and they wouldn’t do it. How did that make you feel? What happened? If they did share, what happened then?
• What might have happened if the giant had chosen to keep the garden for himself throughout the whole story?
• Does not sharing something always make a person selfish? Is there a time when it is OK not to share? Do you have an example?
• Why is it considered good to share? How does sharing help others?
• What makes a person a friend?
• How do you show your friend that you care about them?

Theme: Nature, Life Cycles and Seasons
• What is the regular order of the seasons?
• How were the seasons in this story different than our regular seasons?
• What are the features of each season? (Certain plants and insects appear at certain times, leaves change, etc.) Compare and contrast.
• What is the purpose of each season?
• What causes the seasons to change?
• How are the seasons different in certain areas of the world? Ex: Winter in the northern hemisphere versus the southern hemisphere? Australia vs. North America, etc.
• Why are the seasons represented as living creatures in the story?
• What do the animals in the story have in common? (Arctic Foxes, Snowy Owl, Japanese Macaque or Snow Monkey)
• How are people like the seasons? (Life cycles)

Questions for Bible School Study
• Who was the child that the giant loved?
• When the child said to the giant, “Today, you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise,” what was he talking about?
• Why did the child appear to the giant in the garden?
• Would the giant still have the same change of heart if it were a different child that was suffering?
Activities

Draw A Giant

This can be collaborative or an independent assignment.

Materials:

• Large piece of paper from roll or individual pieces taped together. Should be at least as tall as an adult.
• Crayons, markers, or other drawing utensils.
• Optional: Can focus the assignment with a prompt box using prompts of your choice such as emotions (something that scares you, something that makes you smile, etc.), seasonal attire (winter hat, summer shoes, etc.), or animal attributes (fur, teeth, wings, horns, etc.)

Preparation:
The Instructor may draw or trace the outline of a tall humanoid on the piece of paper (keep the lines light so students are encouraged to think outside the box). Students sit in lines on either side of the paper. The Instructor will set a timer for 5 minutes (or however much time is available in the session). When the timer goes off, students will move one place to the right around the piece of paper.

Ready, Set, Go!

Have each student draw on the paper before them, adding something to the giant. Keep swapping until all students have returned to their original places.

Variations

• Each student draws their own giant so that there is a room of giants at the end of the session. No timer.
• Each student draws a part of the giant separately on their own pieces of paper (hand, eye, nose, etc) and then these are taped to the outlined giant for funny effect.
• They can be timed to draw each body part as fast as possible. Then the most interesting/ funniest ones are chosen to display on the wall, tacked up “tail on the donkey” style.

(If teaching remotely, photos of the finished art can be taken and collaged together in an art program and then sent to the students)

Design Your Dream Garden

Materials:

• 2 pieces of paper (regular to large sized) per 2 students (1 paper each for each student)
• Drawing, painting and collaging materials.

Ready, Set, Go!

Have students pair up into couples. One is the “Architect” and the other is the “Dreamer.” The Dreamer will close their eyes and describe their dream garden to the Architect who will draw and paint it on the paper. Then, without looking, they will switch until both children have completed a drawing. They will reveal these to each other to see how close they came to the description. These drawings will be taped to form a single piece of art and displayed.

Question: How would you invite your friends to play in your garden?

Variations

• Each student draws their own garden on their own paper. Once all are finished, they can be connected taped together with a paper or string “path” winding through each picture. If teaching remotely, they can be collaged together in an art program.
• Either in pairs or separately, students can use shoe-boxes and found materials to make a diorama of their dream garden.
• Students write about their dream garden in the first person, as if they are exploring it for the first time. Ask them to illustrate it.
• Have students create a garden as a gift for a loved one. What would (mom, dad, grandma) want in their garden?
Think Like an Illustrator

This exercise is to teach the concept of personification and practice brainstorming. The goal is for students to come up with an original character.

Materials:
- 2-3 pieces of drawing paper per student
- 1 piece of notebook paper for brainstorming
- Drawing/writing utensils

Ready, Set, Go!

Ask students if they understand what personification means. Help them break down the word and ask for examples. Many characters in their favorite cartoons, movies and video games are personifications. In *The Selfish Giant*, Snow, Hail, Frost and The North Wind were all personified by winter animals.

In this exercise, students will create their own personification of one of the following: Rain, Sun, Cloud, or Breeze. If you are also teaching weather to students (can be tied in with a discussion of the seasons, as well) you can choose the concepts of Tornado, Hurricane, Tsunami, and Earthquake instead.

Once students have chosen their concept, have them make a list of 3-10 descriptive attributes that they associate with this concept. Example: Sun would be burning hot, dangerous to look at, yellow, red, white, tall (high in the sky), self centered (central in the solar system) and so on.

Then make another list of other figures or animals that can be associated with their chosen concept. This list may rely on stereotypes. Example: The Sun is often associated with a lion. Roosters crow at the sun when it rises. Salamanders can be associated with fire. Apollo was the Greek sun god.

Allow students to be creative and wild in their answers. Once both lists are complete, have the students draw a character that exhibits these attributes. For bonus points, have them write a short story about the character. This lesson would be great to pair with any lesson on mythology.