

A colorful illustration of a garden scene. In the center, a young girl with dark skin and braided hair, wearing a yellow and white striped shirt and blue overalls, is clapping her hands with a joyful expression. To her left, a large, smiling orange marigold flower stands prominently. A yellow and black striped bee is flying near the flower. In the bottom left corner, a large brown snail is visible. In the bottom right corner, a red ladybug with black spots is crawling. In the background, a person wearing a green apron over a yellow shirt is partially visible, with their hands clasped in a prayer-like gesture. The garden is filled with various plants, including tomato vines with red tomatoes and green leafy vegetables. A wooden fence and a brick building are visible in the far background.

Mari the Marigold and the Garden Trouble Club

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Behind a small house in a South African township, Lebo and her Gogo had a little vegetable garden.

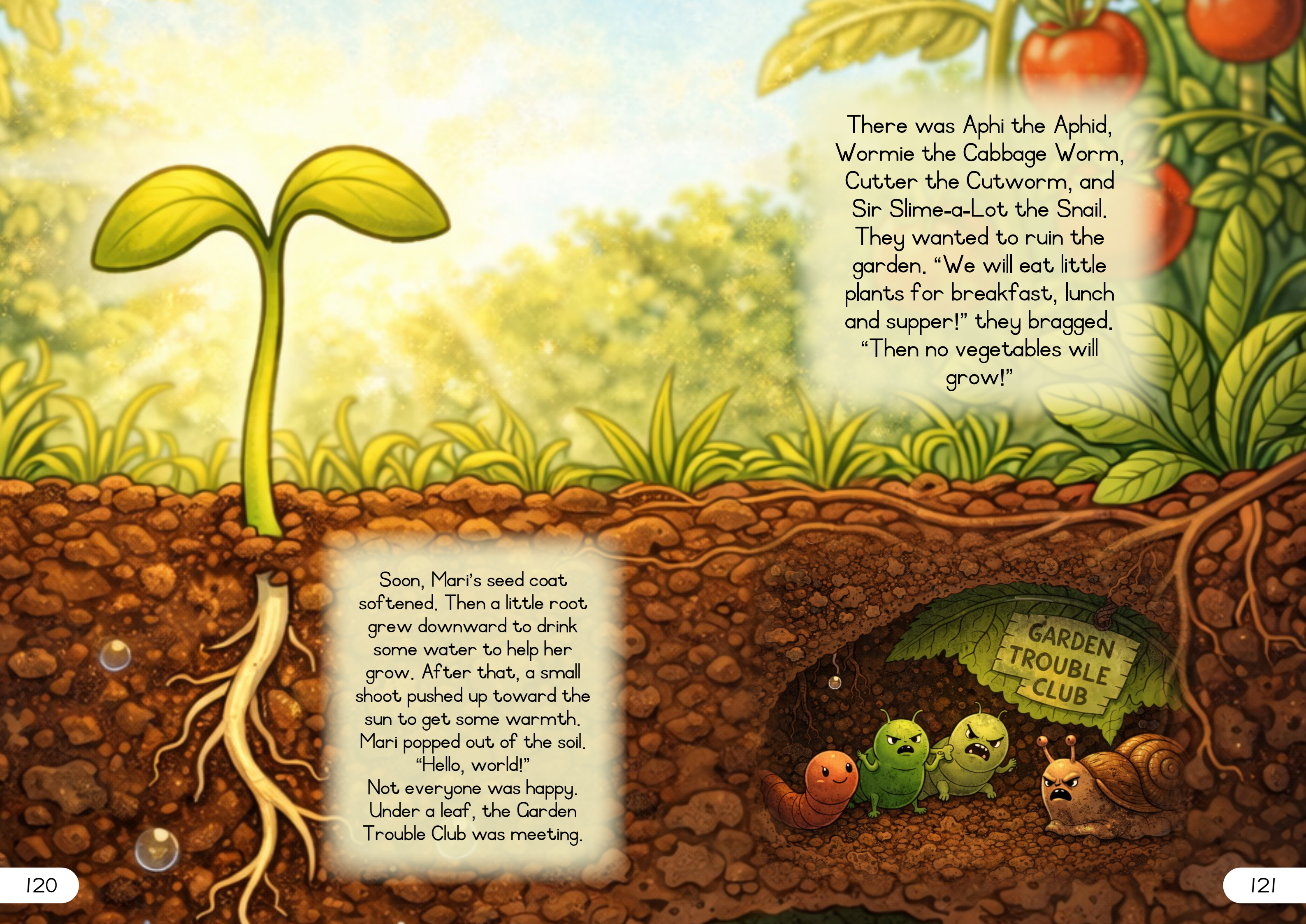
They grew spinach, beans, tomatoes, and carrots to help the family eat healthy food. One day, Lebo planted a tiny seed near the vegetables.



Inside the soil, the seed whispered to an earthworm nearby, named Wiggle, "My name is Mari the Marigold, I am going to be amazing".

Wiggle the Earthworm helped keep the soil healthy by making small little tunnels for air and water. Mari waited in the dark soil. She needed water, warmth, and air to start growing. Lebo and her Gogo watered the soil gently, only enough to make it damp, not muddy.





There was Aphi the Aphid, Wormie the Cabbage Worm, Cutter the Cutworm, and Sir Slime-a-Lot the Snail. They wanted to ruin the garden. "We will eat little plants for breakfast, lunch and supper!" they bragged. "Then no vegetables will grow!"

Soon, Mari's seed coat softened. Then a little root grew downward to drink some water to help her grow. After that, a small shoot pushed up toward the sun to get some warmth. Mari popped out of the soil. "Hello, world!"

Not everyone was happy. Under a leaf, the Garden Trouble Club was meeting.



But Mari had friends. Bongi the Bee flew in first noticing that Mari will need some help. She helped the garden by carrying pollen, a special yellow powder, so plants could make vegetables.



Then Lindi the Ladybug arrived. Ladybugs love to eat aphids to keep them from eating the vegetables. Some butterflies came fluttering over the garden too as soon as they noticed the Garden Trouble Club was looking for trouble.





That evening, the Trouble Club attacked. Aphids climbed onto spinach leaves. Wormie nibbled on small seedlings. Cutter tried to bite through a stem. Sir Slime-a-Lot slid toward Mari, leaving a shiny slimy trail. The garden looked like it was losing the battle.

Then Lebo and Gogo came outside. Gogo stayed calm.

She checked the plants carefully. She picked off the worms and snails and moved them away. Then she covered the smallest seedlings with a light net. Lebo placed a soft “blanket” of dry leaves on the soil. “That’s mulch,” Gogo said. “It helps keep water in the soil, so we don’t waste water.”



The next morning, the Trouble Club returned, but the garden was ready. The net blocked the pests from the baby plants. Ladybugs chased the aphids away. The snail slipped on the mulch and got stuck behind a stick, grumbling. The pests argued, bumped into each other, and finally crawled away.





Days passed, and the garden grew stronger. The spinach became big and green. The beans climbed higher. The tomatoes grew round and shiny. And Mari bloomed into a bright orange flower, smiling proudly in the sun. Mari stood tall beside the vegetables. She was not just pretty, she was part of the team. Her smell welcomed helpful insects like bees and ladybugs and repelled insects that only want to harm the vegetable garden.



Lebo clapped her hands.
“We did it!” Gogo nodded.

“When we do smart
farming, care for the
soil, use water wisely, and
protect helpful insects, we
can grow good and healthy
food ourselves.”

Growing food takes
patience and care. When
people and nature work
together, we look one
another.

The End

Garden Facts We Learned



Seeds need water,
warmth, and air
to start growing.



First a root grows down,
then a shoot grows up.



Earthworms help keep
soil healthy.



Growing food takes patience and care. When people
and nature work together, we look one another.

Glossary



Aphid

A tiny bug that sucks juice from leaves and can make plants weak.



Cabbage worm

A small caterpillar that chews holes in leaves (especially leafy vegetables).



Companion planting

Planting "friend plants" close together so they can help each other.



Compost

Old leaves and food scraps that turn into "plant food" for the soil.



Cutworm

A sneaky caterpillar that chews through the stems of small plants near the soil.



Germination

When a seed wakes up and starts to grow into a plant.



Marigold

A bright flower that is easy to grow. It protects a vegetable garden from pests and attracts helpful insects like bees.



Mulch

A blanket on top of the soil (like dry leaves) that helps keep water in.



Pollination

When bees move pollen from one flower to another so plants can make fruits & seeds.



Seedling

A young plant that has just sprouted from a seed.



Snails

Slow, slimy garden visitors that nibble leaves and seedlings.



Stem

The green stalk of a plant that supports the leaves and nutrients.

Seed Sprout Detective

Germination in a Bag



Day 1-2



ROOT UP · SHOOT UP!

Day! 2-4



Activity 1

1) Seed Sprout Detective (Germination in a Bag)

Purpose: See how a seed grows: root down, shoot up.

You will need:

1–2 bean seeds (or sunflower seeds)

Paper towel

Clear zip bag (or clear plastic cup)

Water

Marker

Tape (optional)

Steps

Fold a paper towel to fit inside the bag.

Wet the paper towel so it's damp (not dripping).

Place the seeds between the towel and the clear side of the bag so you can see them.

Seal the bag and label it with the child's name and+ date.

Tape the bag to a window or bright wall (warm spot, not direct hot sun).

Check daily: open briefly if needed and add a few drops of water if it dries out.

Observe and draw:

Day 1–2: seed swells

Day 2–4: root appears (down)

Day 4–7: shoot appears (up)

After the root is a few cm long, plant it gently in a small pot of soil and water lightly.

Extension (quick): Ask children to point with their finger: "Which way is the root going? Which way is the shoot going?"



Activity 2

Garden Helpers vs Garden Trouble Club (Sorting + Mini Role-Play)

Purpose: Understand “helpers” (bee, ladybug, earthworm) vs “trouble” (aphid, snail, worms).

You will need

Two paper plates (or two circles drawn on paper)

Picture cards (draw or print): bee, ladybug, butterfly, earthworm, marigold, aphid, snail, cabbage worm, cutworm

Crayons/markers

Optional: small toy insects or plastic bugs

Steps

Title one plate: “Garden Helpers” and the other: “Garden Trouble Club.”

Spread the insect cards out on the floor/table.

One by one, let children pick a card and decide where it belongs.

After placing each card, ask a simple reason:

“How does it help?” (bee helps plants make food; ladybug eats aphids; worm helps soil)

“How does it harm?” (aphids suck plant juice; snails nibble leaves; worms chew)

Add Mari the Marigold card in the middle and say: “Mari invites helpers and makes trouble bugs want to go away.”

Mini role-play (2–3 minutes):

Choose two kids to be “helpers,” one to two to be “trouble bugs,” one child to be “Mari,” and one child to be “Lebo.”

“Trouble bugs” try to reach “seedlings” (paper leaves).

“Lebo” protects seedlings using pretend netting (a scarf/mesh cloth) and pretend mulch (brown paper pieces).

End by asking: “What smart farming helped the garden?”

Extension: Children draw one helper and one trouble bug and label them.

