

First Garden

The White House Garden and How It Grew

by ROBBIN GOURLEY



About the book:

Surrounding the White House, the official home of the president of the United States in Washington, D.C., is a very special plot of land. It has a rose garden and a children's garden, a swimming pool, a basketball court—and a huge grassy area called the South Lawn.

Thomas Jefferson planted fruit trees on the lawn. Woodrow Wilson grazed sheep there. And over the years, the children and grandchildren of presidents have used it as their playground. Now there's an exciting new addition: a kitchen garden full of delicious fruits and vegetables, initiated by First Lady Michelle Obama and planted with the help of students from a local elementary school.

In this beautifully illustrated book, White House history combines with the story of today's First Garden for a celebration of home and community gardening, cooking with local produce—and hands-on enjoyment of every step and every bite.

About the author/illustrator:

Robbin Gourley spent childhood summers on her grandmother's North Carolina farm, an experience that gave her a lifelong appreciation for growing, preparing, and eating delicious food from the garden. She is the author of two cookbooks, as well as an artist and art director. Her first book for children, *Bring Me Some Apples and I'll Make You a Pie*, is a story about the pioneering African American chef Edna Lewis. In a starred review, *School Library Journal* reported, "Gourley's luscious watercolors will have readers salivating as the berries plunk into pails and peach juice drips down chins."

Robbin and her husband have two children, and currently she divides her time between rural Pennsylvania and Brooklyn, New York.

For an audio on how to pronounce the author's name go to:

<http://www.teachingbooks.net/pronounce.cgi?aid=12194>

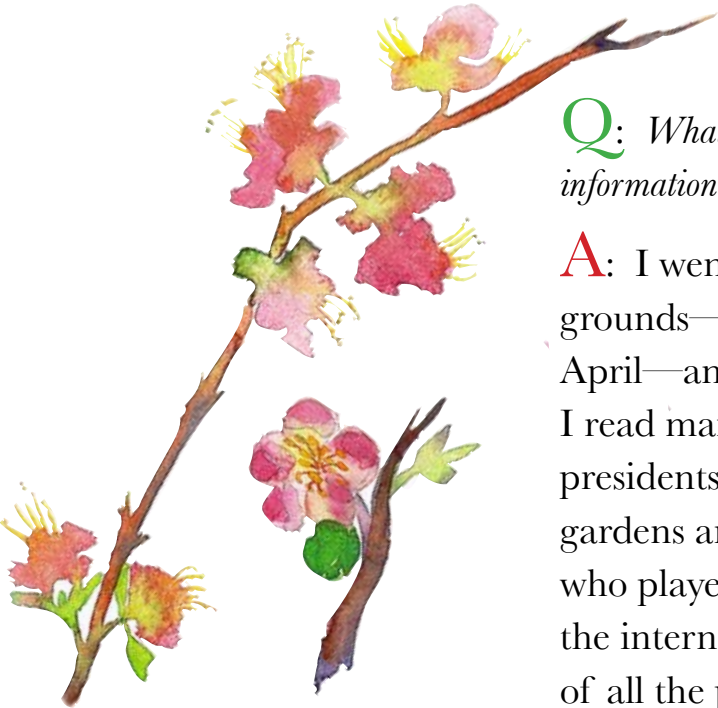
Author/illustrator interview:

Q: *What was the original spark of inspiration for this book?*

A: Fruits and vegetables have long been a source of inspiration for me. I like to look at them, grow them, eat them, and make pictures of them. And encouraging kids to eat well and helping them understand where their food comes from is a cause dear to my heart. In fact, it's the theme of my first book for children, *Bring Me Some Apples and I'll Make You a Pie*. So when Michelle Obama announced the planting of a kitchen garden on the grounds at the White House, I was pretty excited. I was delighted to see recipes inspired by the garden published in newspapers and magazines.



In the summer of 2009, I sent a copy of *Bring Me Some Apples* to Mrs. Obama, Malia, and Sasha. I thought they might enjoy it, because it's about Edna Lewis, a pioneering American chef, who stressed the importance of bringing food directly from the farm to the table. In September, I received a thank you note from the White House, and as I opened it, out fluttered a recipe card for cold cucumber soup. In that moment, I knew what I should do: write and illustrate a story for kids about the White House garden and how it grew.



Q: *What type of research did you do? Where did you go for the information?*

A: I went to Washington, D.C. to visit the White House grounds—open to the public twice a year, in October and April—and I studied all the material provided by the tour. I read many books about the White House, about the presidents and first ladies who were involved in creating the gardens and grounds, and about the presidents' children who played there. I searched for pictures of the gardens on the internet and visited my local library to research images of all the people I planned to mention in the book. And I tracked down every newspaper and magazine article that had been written about Mrs. Obama's garden.

Q: *Which comes first for you, the illustrations or the words? Do they both go through a great deal of revision? What is the process like?*

A: In addition to *Bring Me Some Apples*, I've published two books of recipes. For all three, I started with the pictures. I created numerous "dummies," which are miniature books with sketches in place, so I could see what the final book

might look like. Then I created the text to go along with the art. But for *First Garden*, I started with the text. As it turned out, I wrote too many words because it seemed there was so much to tell. So my editor helped me whittle them down, and *then* I created the illustrations.



Q: *Which pictures in the book are your favorites—and why?*

A: My favorite illustrations are the portraits of John Adams and Eleanor Roosevelt. I got them to look just the way I wanted them to look: triumphant about the vegetables they had grown. I also like the picture of Mrs. Obama and the kids planting vegetables.

Q: *If you could grow anything you wanted in a backyard garden, what would you choose?*

Is there something you would not put in your garden?

A: I grow tomatoes—my favorite vegetable! I love them as the centerpiece of any meal. They make beautiful sandwiches, sauces, and salads. One of my signature dishes, which I learned from a girlfriend, is slowly roasted tomatoes served with goat cheese. Tomatoes are also easy to grow, and they taste so much better than the ones you buy in the grocery store. There is no vegetable I wouldn't grow—I love them all. The only thing I don't like to grow in a garden is WEEDS!

Pre-reading:

Just by looking at the front cover and the title, predict what type of a book this will be. Will it be nonfiction or fiction? What makes you think so? Do you think it will have historical facts or not? Why? Brainstorm a list of words that come to mind when you hear the word “garden.”

Comprehension and discussion questions:

1. Why didn't George Washington live in the White House? Who was the first president to do so?
2. What is the most surprising fact you learned about the size of the White House?
3. If the president were going to give a speech in a White House garden, which one would most likely be chosen? What are the other parts of the President's Park?
4. Which of the past presidents' children would you have most wanted to play with in the garden? Why? If you lived in the White House, where would you play?
5. What are two ways that Mrs. Obama thinks American families could be healthier? What decision did she make to inspire Americans to eat healthier foods? What did the president think of her idea?
6. Which first lady first asked Americans to grow gardens? How did growing a garden during World War II help support the war effort?
7. Which two presidents mentioned in the book grazed farm animals on the White House lawn? What did these animals provide?
8. How did the students from Bancroft Elementary help Mrs. Obama with the garden? What did they plant?
9. How was Thomas Jefferson an inspiration for the modern garden that Mrs. Obama planted?
10. What vegetable did President Obama decide should be left out of the garden? If you had a garden, which vegetables would you want to plant? Which would you want to leave out?





11. What are the challenges that all gardens face? What are some solutions to these problems? What additional problems did the First Garden have to deal with?
12. What was the first dish made of ingredients from the First Garden? Besides guests at the White House, who else did the garden feed?
13. Describe the harvest party that was hosted for the students who planted the garden. What part would you have enjoyed most?
14. How did the garden provide gifts for guests at a dinner party hosted by Mrs. Obama?
15. Explain how the garden is able to produce certain vegetables throughout the winter.
16. Inspired by this book, create a list of things you can do to eat healthier meals each day.
17. Why do you think the founders of our country encouraged their citizens to plant gardens? Is it still good advice today?
18. In your own words, list three good reasons to garden.
19. Which of the recipes in the back of the book would you most like to try? Why? How can you tell if a recipe is for something you like?
20. Create a list of fruits and vegetables you've never eaten but that you'd like to try.
21. If you were going to write a research report on one of the topics discussed in this book— presidents, the White House, gardening, or cooking with fresh foods—which would you choose and why? What are the first steps a writer must take when he or she begins a project like this book?

Vocabulary:

The following vocabulary words are all related to gardening. After defining each one in your own words, draw a picture to help you remember what it means.

New Vocabulary	Define in your own words	Draw a picture to help you remember the meaning
Annual		
Victory Garden		
Organic		
Shoots		
Seedlings		
Harvest		

Here are some more interesting words used in *First Garden*. Make a checkmark in the box that matches your word knowledge.

New word:	Haven't heard or seen this word before.	Can tell you what it means.	Can use it in a sentence of my own.
Official			
Furnishings			
Informally			
Conserving			
Estimated			
Donated			
Initiative			

Art:

Using colored pencils, paints, collage, or any other medium you choose, design a 4' x 10' garden that considers the following elements: color, texture, and height of plants. Create a list of plants that you would use and indicate why. Try to choose plants that will bloom and harvest in succession, so that you can have fresh produce from your garden for as long as possible!

Artist's study of the illustrations

Focus:	What I noticed	How I can experiment with this in my next piece
The use of color: - palette - vibrancy - consistency		
The use of design: - placement of figures - use of white/negative space - choices in foreground and background		
The use of texture: - how is texture portrayed?		
Your favorite page: -what elements make it stand out?		

History:

Using the book as reference, create a timeline for the White House and its garden. Insert at least three illustrations.

Math:

The First Garden produced more than a thousand pounds of food in its first year, and the bees created thirty-four pounds of honey. Fill out the total number of pounds the garden and bees will produce if they maintain their current output.

	Pounds of food	Pounds of honey
In the first year	1,000	34
By the fifth year		
By the tenth year		

Now calculate how many pounds of food could be produced if the garden was double the size it is now.

Language arts:

After planting a small garden, keep a detailed journal about its progress. Make notes about the weather and temperature and the development of your plants from seedling to mature plant. Thomas Jefferson kept detailed gardening journals such as this, and the gardens at Monticello (his home in Virginia) are some of the most beautiful and productive in the U.S.!

