

Seeds and Sunflowers

A Reading A-Z Level R Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,109

Connections

Writing

Aster gives her brother a bag of seeds to thank him. Why? What is she thanking him for? Write an essay explaining your answer, using details from the story as support.

Science

Research the conditions a sunflower needs to grow, including the best time of year for planting and when seeds are harvested. Create a poster that shows how to grow and care for sunflowers.

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\$eeds and \$unflowers\$



Written by Karen Mockler
Illustrated by Nicholas Jackson

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Glossary

accrue (<i>v.</i>)	to increase or build up over time (p. 4)
chronicled (<i>v.</i>)	presented a detailed record of events in the order that they happened (p. 14)
consumer (<i>n.</i>)	a person who buys or rents goods or services and uses them (p. 5)
investment (<i>n.</i>)	property bought to make a profit (p. 12)
license (<i>n.</i>)	a legal document that gives official permission to do, own, or use something (p. 5)
organic (<i>adj.</i>)	grown and produced without chemicals or artificial products (p. 5)
retail (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to stores or businesses that sell things directly to customers (p. 4)
speculatively (<i>adv.</i>)	in a way that shows one is thinking about what might happen or about ideas that are not proven (p. 4)
venture (<i>n.</i>)	a risky project or undertaking (p. 14)

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Focus Question

Whose experience with the sunflowers was more valuable, Mike's or Aster's? Why?

Words to Know

accrue	organic
chronicled	retail
consumer	speculatively
investment	venture
license	

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Correlation

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"Those didn't come from me," said Mrs. McCarthy. She plated up some scrambled eggs and handed them to Mike.

Aster smiled at her brother. "They came from me," she said.

"You bought them?" Mike asked. "Why?"

Aster looked back at her photos and everything captured there.

"That's why," she said.



Mike constructed a scarecrow instead, but the birds ignored it. The squirrels used the scarecrow's hat to launch themselves onto the flowers. By the time the seeds were ripe enough to harvest, there were only a handful left—another money-making **venture** down the tubes.



On the first day of autumn, Mike woke to a bag of sunflower seeds on his pillow—the roasted, salted kind. He carried them to the kitchen, where Aster's photos were spread across the table. The photos **chronicled** the sunflowers from start to finish, along with the birds and the squirrels and the scarecrow. She'd even snapped a couple of the farmer.

Mike studied the photos and watched the sunflowers rise before his eyes. Maybe, he thought, she knew what she was doing after all.

"Thanks for the seeds," he said to his mom.

"What seeds?" she asked.

Mike lifted the bag and shook it.



"I've got another idea," Mike announced. He was sitting at the kitchen table, cracking the shells of sunflower seeds between his molars, spitting them out, then eating the seeds.

"Another idea for making money?" asked Mr. McCarthy.

Mike nodded and pulled another seed out of his bag.

Since the end of second grade, Mike had been trying to pull together sufficient funds to buy a Super Spy kit. A **retail** kit was seventy-five dollars, but Mike's friend Derek had offered to sell his kit to Mike for twenty-five dollars—what a bargain! So far, Mike hadn't managed to get together even that amount, but he was not a quitter.

He held up his favorite snack and narrowed his eyes **speculatively**. What if he grew his own giant sunflowers and harvested the seeds? He could save his allowance dollars and sell the extra seeds at the farmers' market! Then he might **accrue** enough to buy a Super Spy kit.



"I'll cut out the middleman," he explained to his family, "because I'll be the farmer *and* the salesman."

"You'd have to sell an awful lot of seeds to clear twenty-five dollars," Mrs. McCarthy said.

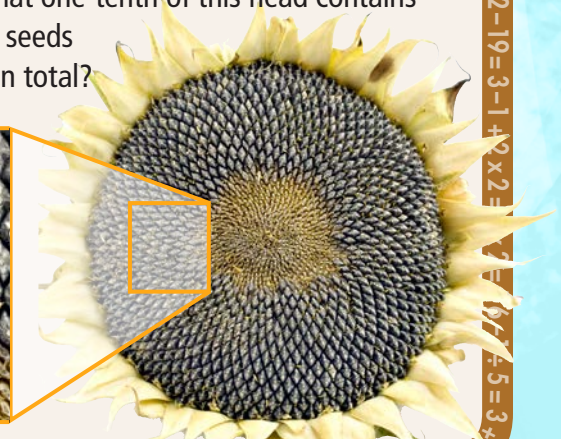
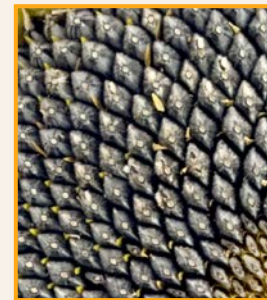
"Aw, they're just birds," Mike mumbled. He wasn't really thinking about the birds, though. He was thinking about Aster, up in the tree, watching the birds.

Math Minute

In some situations, knowing the exact count of something is unimportant, impossible, or both! Yet a general number—an *estimate*—may be helpful. In those cases, estimation is a good math skill to use.

A single sunflower can easily produce more than 1,000 seeds. You probably couldn't count them all, nor would you want to, but you can make an estimated guess. Start by trying to count how many seeds are in a section of the head—say, one-tenth of the whole. Then multiply that number by ten. You should come pretty close to the head's actual number of seeds.

If you estimate that one-tenth of this head contains 40 seeds, how many seeds does the head have in total?



Answer: 400



"What are you doing?" Mike asked.

"Watching," Aster said.



Mike told his friend Derek about the birds.

"They're eating my **investment**!" Mike complained.

"Sic Pickles on them," Derek advised. Pickles was Mike's cat. "Bye-bye, birdies."

"Not if I go **organic**," Mike said.

Organic crops didn't come cheap—Mike had learned *that* the hard way with his lemonade stand. If he grew organic seeds, he could charge an arm and a leg for them. Organic farmers had stuck it to him with their pricey organic sugar and lemons. Now it was *his* turn to stick it to the **consumer**!

"You probably need a **license** to sell at the farmers' market," Mr. McCarthy said.

"I'll look into it," Mike said. He was not the kind of guy to be intimidated by a little legal mumbo jumbo.

"Gardening takes patience," said his little sister, Aster.

"I can be patient," Mike said.

After lunch, Mike carried his bag of sunflower seeds out to the backyard. Under the blazing summer sun, Mike could feel himself baking like a potato. He gravitated toward a shady patch of dirt in one corner of the yard, sat down in it, and started digging.

Soon Aster popped her head out of her bedroom window. "You don't want to plant there," she called.

"Why not?" shouted Mike.

"Too shady," she called.

"It's too sunny in the sun!" Mike shouted.

Aster smiled. "They're sunflowers, Mike," she said. Her head disappeared back inside.

Mike sighed and relocated his garden.



"Look how their faces follow the sun," she said.

By September, those faces had filled with seeds. Mike rubbed his hands. "Almost there," he said.

The next time Mike glanced out the window, though, he spied a little brown bird perched on the stem of one of his flowers. Mike watched in horror as the bird reached up and stole a seed. Another bird landed, then another, all eating his crop. It was a sparrow conspiracy!

Mike ran outside, shouting. The startled birds lifted off and flew away.

A little laugh issued from above. Mike looked up to find his sister swinging her legs from a maple branch.



Mike was thrilled at first—it was happening!—but plants were so still, so quiet, and he just had to keep watering them. It was hard to stay interested.

One day he found Aster in his patch, pulling weeds.

“How do you know which are the good plants and which are the bad ones?” Mike asked.

“They’re all good plants,” Aster said, “but the sunflowers are the ones reaching for the sky.”

He also noticed her out there sometimes with their dad’s camera. A good photographer explored different angles and perspectives, but Aster always stood in exactly the same spot, taking exactly the same photo. Mike laughed and shook his head. Crazy kid.



By August, the plants were seven feet tall. When they bloomed, Aster snapped another photo.



After a week of watering, Mike scratched his head.

“Do you think I should’ve removed the shells first?” he asked his mom.

“I don’t think so,” Mrs. McCarthy said. “Just out of curiosity, where did you get your seeds?”

“You got them for me,” Mike said, “at the grocery store.”

Mrs. McCarthy’s eyes widened. “I bought them for you? When did I buy you seeds?”

“A couple weeks ago,” he said.

“Wait,” she said. “Was this a packet of gardening seeds or a bag of snacks?”

Mike shrugged. “Both,” he said.

“Mike,” she said, “your snacks are roasted and salted. Is that what you planted?”

“Right,” Mike said. “Roasted, salted, and organic!”

"Yes," his mom said, "but not alive."

"Seeds are alive?" Mike asked.

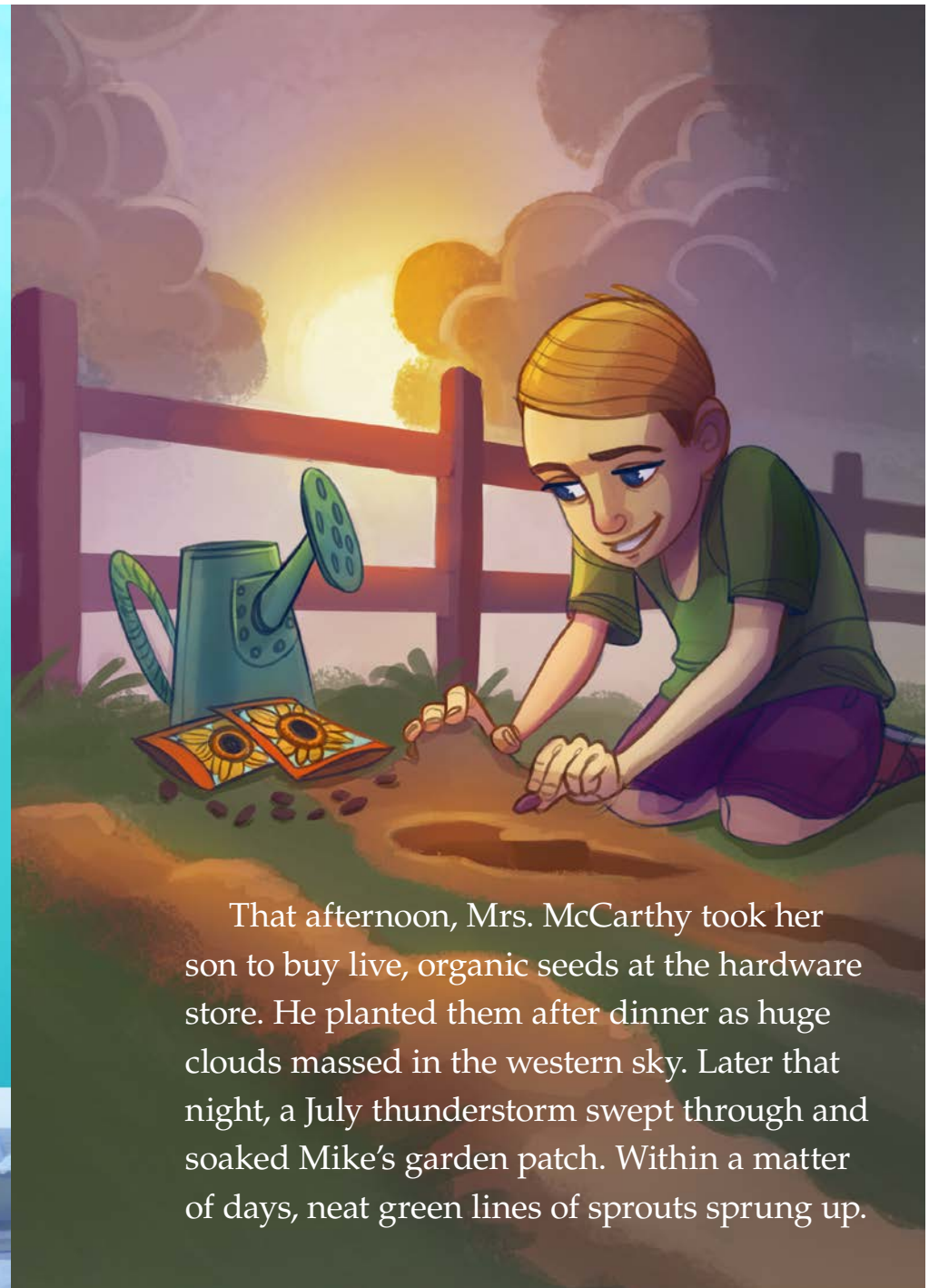
"Gardening seeds are alive," she said.

"The seeds you eat aren't."

"What are you saying?" demanded Mike. "My snacks are dead?"

"In a manner of speaking," said Mrs. McCarthy.

Mike groaned.



That afternoon, Mrs. McCarthy took her son to buy live, organic seeds at the hardware store. He planted them after dinner as huge clouds massed in the western sky. Later that night, a July thunderstorm swept through and soaked Mike's garden patch. Within a matter of days, neat green lines of sprouts sprung up.