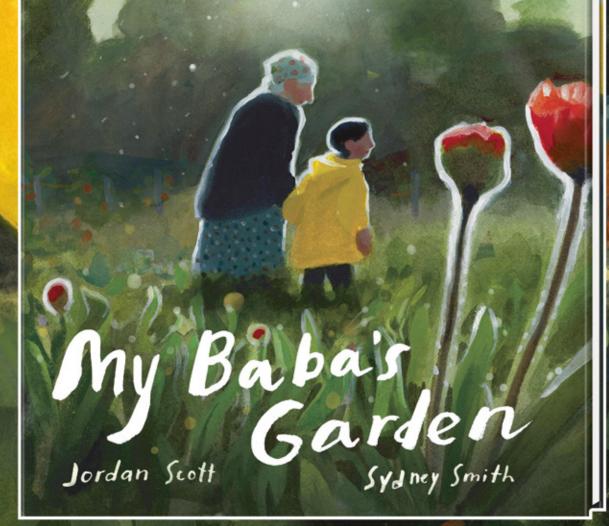
TEACHERS' NOTES



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O ♥ WalkerBooksUK ♥@JScottWrites @SydneyDraws

These notes have been written by the teachers at the CLPE to provide schools with ideas to develop comprehension and cross-curricular activities around this text. They build on our work supporting teachers to use quality texts throughout the reading curriculum. They encourage a deep reading of and reflection on the text, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, rather than in just one sitting. We hope you find them useful.

These notes have been written with children in Key Stage 2 in mind but you will need to differentiate discussions and activities alongside the age and experience of your own children.

Before Reading:

 As you read through the book it would be helpful to use a group journal to organise and store discussions and responses to the text. The journal can be a place to capture reflections on the plot, characters and themes, as well as, how the writer uses language for effect.

Introducing the Text:

- Share the front cover of the book with the children and encourage them to focus on the illustration at this stage, before considering the title more closely. What can you see? Who might these characters be? What suggests that to you? Where do you think they are? Encourage children to think about the body language, the positioning of the human characters within the environment, their movement and intention.
- Invite children to share their emotional response to the cover. How does this image make you feel? What do you think makes you feel this way? Do you think that reflects the feelings of the characters as well? How do you imagine it would feel to be in this place? Children might respond to the illustrator's use of light and colour, the white glow bordering the human figures and some of the flowers, the smudged blurred background, the glow appearing above the tree tops, the white particles floating in the air. All of this might suggest a time of year, or time of day. Children might make connections with their own experiences if they have ever visited similar environments. You may wish to fold back the full cover to reveal the entire illustration so that children can respond to other details within the environment.
- Now, reveal and read the title of the text: *My Baba's Garden*. Invite them to discuss how the title connects with the illustration and their initial impressions of the characters and the setting. *Is this the garden of the title? How does it compare with your own understanding of a 'garden'? What is a garden for? What might you find in a garden? Is there more than one type of garden?* Consider the word '**Baba**'. *Is this a word that the children have heard before? What do you think it means? What suggests that to you?* Consider the use of the determiner '**My**': what does that tell you about who is telling the story? Does it help you to define 'baba'? How might our expectations for the book be different if the author had chosen to use a different determiner or not to use one at all?
- If children have experience of reading the author and illustrator's previous collaboration, *I Talk Like a River*, they may also share their thoughts around that narrative and how it influences their expectations for this book.
- Open the book and turn briefly to the endpapers and then the title page. The endpapers are a bright and vivid yellow, and children might discuss their initial ideas for why this colour might have been selected. They could discuss any feelings they associate with the colour, any connections they make with the cover illustration or to the natural world more broadly.



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- On the title page, invite them to turn back and forth comparing this image with the front cover. What similarities are there? What patterns do you notice? What is different? As well as some of the differences in this image (the move from day to night, from rural to urban, natural to man-made, etc. and the significant changes in the use of colour and light) children may also note the repetition of the yellow coat. What does that communicate to us as a reader? What clues are being left in the images? When do you think this moment takes place in comparison with the cover? What do you think this story might be about?
- Finally, turn to the next page and read aloud the book's foreword by Jordan Scott entitled 'My Baba'. Clarify that we have clarification here of the meaning of the term 'baba' which some children may already have been familiar with. Discuss whether the children have other terms that they might use to describe their grandparents which might be family nicknames, pet names or words influenced by other languages or cultures. Baba is a common term for grandmother in a number of Eastern European languages, including: Bulgarian, Russian, Czech and Polish. However, children may also have heard 'baba' in the context of other languages, for example, in some South Asian languages 'baba' is a term of respect for an older male, such as a grandfather, or might be used to refer to a man or boy more generally.
- Ask children to summarise what we learn about Scott's Baba and his relationship with her, as well as giving them time to share and note down any questions that they have, anything that they are curious about or would like to find out. What do we know about his grandmother? What impression do we have of her? What words might we use to describe her character or personality? How would you summarise Scott's relationship with his grandmother? What do you think was important to her? And what suggests that to you?
- Children might want to share any personal connections they made when listening to this opening text, perhaps about their own relationships with grandparents or other family members.
- Use a visual organizer, such as a Role on the Wall, to capture children's impressions of Jordan Scott's Baba as described in this foreword. Later, they might compare this with the impression they have of the grandmother as they read this story. For a Role on the Wall, children simply need a generic character outline within and around which they can record their ideas. Ask the children to write words or phrases on the outside of the outline that summarise what they know about her external characteristics – the things she does, her behaviours. On the inside of the outline, children note internal characteristics that might be described or inferred by Jordan Scott's description (e.g., thoughtful, considerate, caring, brave, etc.).
- Children might additionally jot any questions they have onto sticky notes and add those around the edge of the Role on the Wall. Some children might have questions related to Scott's grandparents' emigration and the significance of the reference to World War 2 and life in Poland at that time. This might link to work that has been, or will be, undertaken in History and Geography. Older students may have read other books which take place in Poland during the period that it was occupied by either Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia. They might also use this opportunity to seek clarification around any unfamiliar language from the introduction, such as renovated, chicken coop, or sulphur mill.

Entering into the story - exploring setting:

Turn to the first double page spread of the story. Read the text aloud and take time to explore the illustration carefully. What can we see in the illustration? What do you notice about the style of the illustration? Why might Sydney Smith have used two different drawing styles on this spread – the style with the white background taking up most of the spread, and the painting which borders this? What point of view are we seeing this painting from? Whose eyes are we seeing this through?



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- Re-read the text on the page. Why do you think the author has chosen to layout the language on the page like this? What is the impact of separating the sentence into those four separate sections? What impression do we get of Baba's home from the text and the illustration?
- Children might note any similarities and differences between this text and what they read on the previous page. While the information we are given is similar, the tense and some of the language choices have changed. What is suggested by the shift from past tense to present tense? Who might be telling us this story? Are the narrator and the creator of the drawing the same person? If so, how do you think they feel about their grandmother's home? What suggests that to you?
- Turn the page and read the next spread. How has our view changed? What new information do we have? How does the author and the illustrator help the reader understand the continuity between the images? Invite the children to turn the pages back and forth, following the boy with the yellow jacket from when he gets into the car, to the traffic on the road, to the boy's point of view, to seeing him holding the drawing from beside him. How much time do you think has passed? What suggests that? How do you think he feels about this journey to visit his grandmother? What are our initial impressions of him? Children might draw out phrases like 'every morning' that suggests a practice that has been happening for an extended period of time, from which they might infer family routines and relationships. They might draw out the use of three similes used by the narrator to describe the Sulphur Mill and the mountains.
- Turn over and invite children to respond to the illustration on the left-hand page of the house and its surrounding environment. Once again, invite the children to compare spreads. What does the house look like compared with the boy's drawing? How does the home feel to you in this illustration? What would it be like to live there? Why do you think Baba has ended up living there? What can we tell from the surroundings? How does it compare with our expectations? What did we expect a chicken coop house might look like? (Children might want to explore photos and plans of pre-renovated chicken coops from the pre-WW2 era to compare. For example, page 3 and 11 of this booklet https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1758/m1/ provide an insight into different exteriors and a large interior is photographed on page 29). What might it suggest about people's needs and circumstances at the time that they adapted these into dwellings?
- Read aloud the spread up to "I let myself in and walk into the kitchen...". Before turning the page, discuss what more we learn from the text and the illustration on this half of the spread. His Baba doesn't come to the door and his dad doesn't come into the house with him: what does this suggest about the family routine, about trust, about the boy's independence? Compare the use of the framed image surrounded by a thick white border with the full-page bleed opposite. What does that framing of the image remind them of? Does it change the way they feel about the situation or the home? Continue to invite response to the illustration: for example: what is suggested by the child's body language as well as by his behavior? What do you think his facial expression might look like on these two spreads? How do you think he might be feeling? Why do you think Sydney Smith has painted him facing away from us? What can we see of the interior of the home? What first impressions do we have? As well as the objects in the illustration and the framing of the image, children might also respond to Sydney Smith's use of colour and light and how that makes them feel. For example, the dark corridor leading to the light space beyond, the subdued darker colours, earthy greens, browns and greys, but with splashes of brighter colours – the red of the front door, his wellies and the brake lights on the left-hand side, the yellow coat hung up over the boots after the boy has entered the property. Where have they seen the red previously? Why do you think red and yellow might be significant to the boy's memory of visiting his grandmother? Are their certain colours that you connect with different homes or places or people?



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- Reread from the start, pausing at the ellipsis. Briefly discuss children's predictions for what the next spread could reveal and their expectations for the kitchen scene.
- Without showing them the illustrations, read aloud the text from the next two spreads up to "I sit at the kitchen table and wait to eat." As you read, encourage the children to close their eyes and visualise the scene in their mind's eye. You may wish to read the passage two or three times and give the children appropriate resources to sketch out what they have visualised as you were reading. Afterwards, invite them to share with one another what they have pictured either in their minds or on paper. What stood out to them? How do you think it would feel to be there? What was the most important element of the home to you? What did it remind you of?
- After children have had time to share their own visualisations of the home, allow time for children to explore Sydney Smith's response to Jordan Scott's text on the two double-page spreads. Invite children to compare this visualisation with their own, as well as considering how it compares with their own lived experience and their expectations of life inside a converted chicken coop. What is the first thing you notice in the kitchen? What do you think is important? How do you think it would feel to be there? What suggests that to you?
- As there are so many details on both pages, children might benefit from using a simple viewfinder a piece of black card with a square cut out of the middle. As they slide this around the image, their eye can focus on some of those smaller details and consider what they suggest about the setting, the character and our response to it. Discuss what those details tell them about life for the grandmother, what she values and what it might be like for the boy as he arrives each morning. Children might discuss the contents of the jars and containers, considering what they contain and why keeping the home full of well-stored food might be so important. They might note the flowers some in a vase, but most hanging upside down to dry; the child's painting on the fridge; the glow of the stove with steam lit by the light through the window; the grandmother glowing in the light as she does on the front cover; the decorated bowls. They might consider the dichotomy and balance in the depiction: full but orderly, busy but controlled, basic but rich, rustic and warm. If the children are familiar with *Town is by the Sea* another book illustrated by Sydney Smith they might compare this kitchen with the first spread of that text.

Exploring character and authorial language choices:

- Ask children to reread the two spreads which depict the interior of the house, from "...and there she is." Up to "....and wait to eat." What impression do we get of the grandmother from the text and the illustrations on these pages and those leading up to this moment? What words would you use to describe her? What words and phrases help you to understand what she might be like and what she might value? Are there any sections that help you understand the relationship between her and her grandson, and how he feels about her?
- As they did after reading Jordan Scott's introduction, create a Role on the Wall for Baba. As you do so, compare these observations and insights with those that we had about Scott's real grandmother. How would you describe the writing in this picturebook? Do you think that this is non-fiction, like a memoir or biography? Or is it fiction a story but inspired by a real relationship? How do you think real life experiences and relationships can inspire storytelling and fiction?
- Encourage children to share and discuss specific authorial (and illustrator) choices in terms of both vocabulary but also the shaping and structuring of the language. For example, what does the use of figurative language suggest about the grandmother? Children might also draw out the use of lists on both of these spreads how is the language structured in the phrases within these lists? Jordan Scott chooses



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not to use 'and' before the last item in any of these lists – do you like that choice? How does that affect how you read the sentence aloud? Does it change the effect of the writing? What impression does it give of the grandmother or her home?

- Read aloud the next two spreads, up to "...and my Baba walks me to school."
- As with previous spreads, give the children time to reread and to fully explore the spreads, responding to both the text and the illustrations. What do you like about this section of the book? Why do you think Scott and Smith choose to slow the book down to spend these two spreads at the breakfast table? What more do we discover about the two characters? What more do we want to know?
- Discuss the role of 'food' in their relationship and their routines. What do we know about this breakfast meal? It's the same thing every day, it's made from food grown at home, it's a substantial meal – he could 'swim in the bowl', anything that gets spilt still gets eaten, etc. What do these details tell us about the grandmother and her relationship with her grandson?
- Reread the section that begins: "My mum says that my Baba didn't have very much food for a long, long time". How does this connect with what we have seen in the story so far? How does this connect with what we read in the introduction? Why do you think might she have not had very much food? What impact do you think that may have had on her adult life? What does she value?
- If they haven't already done so, encourage the children to think about what Sydney Smith has chosen to illustrate on these pages and how he's chosen to adjust his layout, composure and framing to illustrate the sequence. They might particularly focus on the use of close ups, highlighting small details for the reader, and his change in point of view, where he places the 'camera' in telling the story.
- Turn over and read aloud the first sentence on the next page: "When it rains, my Baba walks slowly." What does this sentence make you think about? What questions does it raise? What possible answers are there to your questions? Discuss Jordan Scott's decision to structure the two clauses in that sentence in this way. What other options did he have? Why might he have made this decision? Why might he want to highlight the significance of the weather and how is this echoed in Sydney Smith's illustrations on this page?
- Read the rest of this spread and give time for children to respond to the reason given for her working slowly and to the impact of the deliberate repetition of the phrase "my Baba walks slowly". Were you surprised by the reason she walked slowly? Why do you think she's looking for worms? Why is it significant that it is raining? Have you ever experienced seeing worms out on the pavement when it is raining?
- Turn over and discuss the immediate visual impact of the page turn what does it feel like to go from the framed panels to a full-page collection of worm close-ups? How does Sydney Smith create the feeling of movement, of 'squirming' in a still image? Why might he have chosen to set it out like that? What does it suggest having the paintings disappear off the edges of the page?
- Read aloud the text under the illustration of the grandmother picking up the worms. Explore some of the language choices made by Jordan Scott. As his language is poetic in nature, you might draw on what Michael Rosen calls the 'secret strings' (*What is Poetry?* Walker Books) language patterns that writers use to create connections. These are assonance, alliteration, imagery, rhythm, rhyme and repetition. Children might draw out the use of a list structure (with no 'and' again), the repetition of the noun 'worms' with only occasional use of a pronoun instead, the assonance (in 'worms squirming', 'gutters' and 'puddles', 'floating' and 'road') and the alliteration (pick, put, pocket). They might also note the invention of a hyphenated



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compound noun ('rain-rivers'). They might consider why Jordan Scott repeatedly focuses on prepositional phrases describing where the worms are: why might that be significant?

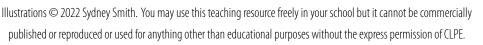
- Invite the children to consider why the grandmother might be collecting the worms in her jar. Encourage
 them to look back at the Role on the Wall poster to ensure that their predictions are based on what they
 know from the text so far.
- Turn over the page and go on to read aloud the next three spreads, sharing the illustrations as you go.
 Pause after reading "This is what we do...".
- As before, invite children to look back over what we've read and look more closely at the illustrations.
 What have more have we found out? What do you like about these pages? Do they remind you of anything? What questions do you have? What do you think the grandmother might mean when she traces the rain on his hand? What is she trying to communicate to him?
- Draw on their knowledge of the world, particularly their knowledge of plants and what they need to grow: What do you know about worms? Why might she want to collect them and bring them back to the garden? Do you think she is doing the right thing? Why/why not?
- Return to the short phrase that ends this section of the book: "This is what we do...". What is suggested by this short phrase? Do you think that this is something that happened once to the boy? What makes you think that? Reflect on some of the grammatical choices Jordan Scott makes in this section, such as choice of tense ("This what we do" not 'did' or 'are doing' its immediate and fundamental). You may also discuss the shift of noun/pronoun from 'My Baba' or 'she' to 'we'. What is the impact of repeating that part of the text, but changing the pronoun? And, how is that shift in focus echoed in Sydney Smith's choices as an illustrator?
- Finally spend some time responding to the double-page illustration of the boy and his grandmother sideby-side on the ground. What does this illustration suggest to us about the characters, their relationship with each other and with the natural world, the importance of green spaces like this and what it takes to care for them. As previously, invite the children to consider what they can see, how it makes them feel, and Sydney Smith's use of materials, composition, layout, colour, light, and lines.
- Invite children to capture any new observations they have made about the grandmother on the Role on the Wall.

Develop knowledge of narrative shapes and patterns:

- Reread the spread that begins "We kneel...' and up to the end of the page. Pause briefly to reflect on the use of an ellipsis and what that might indicate. Then turn the page to reveal the time jump and read aloud the next spread, pausing after "I don't walk much any more."
- Discuss the impact of the page turn. What has changed? How does the illustration enhance our understanding and reinforce some of those changes? Turn back to earlier spreads from the book and compare this with previous illustrations of the child seated at windows or at the table. Where do you think the boy is in this illustration? What can we see in the reflection? How does it feel to be outside looking in? How is this different to other illustrations? How do you think he is feeling? What suggests that to you?
- Consider how the meaning of the sentence on the previous page is altered by the clauses which follow on this spread. What is the effect of the ellipsis and the page turn? How did it make you feel as a reader? How do you imagine Baba feels about the changes? Why do you think might she have made this move? How might things have changed for her?

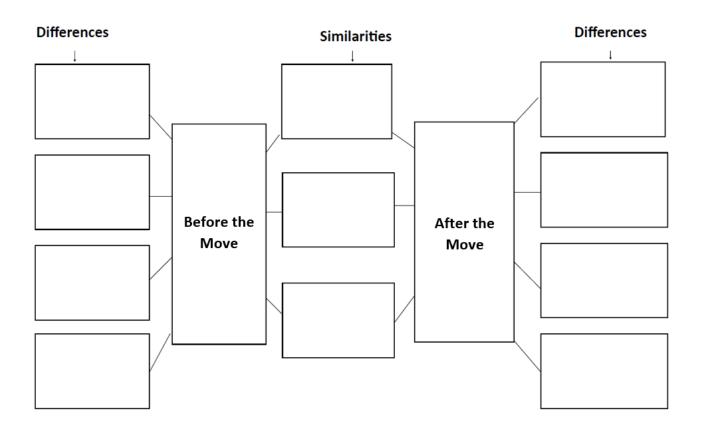


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- Slowly reveal and spend time exploring the next three spreads, two of which are wordless.
- Discuss what we learn about their relationship now that they share a home together. What has changed in their relationship? What has stayed the same? How have their roles in this relationship reversed? You might provide children with a simple visual organiser, such as a 'Double Bubble', to compare the two environments:



- Consider how Sydney Smith uses illustration to take on the full weight of the storytelling on the two wordless spreads. How do the pictures tell us what is happening? What more information do we get about how the characters feel and what they might be thinking? What actions do they take ... and why do we think they make those choices? Why do you think Jordan Scott and Sydney Smith chose to move to a purely visual narrative in this section? What do you like about it? Is there anything that you don't like about wordless spreads? As before, they might consider the shape of each frame, how the illustration is composed, what it shows us and what it doesn't, the impact of close-ups on faces and on food, the shifts in points of view and angles between each moment looking up at the boy as he eats the apple slide, then looking down at his grandmother surrounded by the pillows and bedding. They might also note echoes from previous spreads, such as the use of light behind the characters and the return of the colour red: in the bowl, the apples, the skin tones, and the flowers on the bedside table.
- Children might draw on their knowledge of how Jordan Scott selects and shapes language to write a sentence or two to describe one of the moments that takes place on these two spreads. *How could you echo language from earlier in the book, in the same way that the illustrations echo previous actions?*
- Read the next spread. Pause after reading "And I remember..." and invite the children to speculate on what the narrator might remember, and what they think could have prompted his remembering. In an



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echo of the earlier illustrations, Sydney Smith has painted the characters looking away from the reader. *How do you think they might be feeling? What do you imagine they could be thinking?* Children could use sticky notes to add thought bubbles or speech bubbles to reflect the characters' internal monologues or add speech to this moment, if they think it is appropriate.

Read to the end of the book and invite the children to share their thoughts about how the book finishes. Do they like the ending of the story? What do they like about it? Where does the book leave the reader? Why do you think Jordan Scott and Sydney Smith selected this moment for the ending? As before, consider both the text and the illustration: Why do you think the boy starts picking up the worms? Is it for the same reason as earlier in their relationship? Visually, why do you think Sydney Smith returns to the traffic, the hills and the sulphur mill? What does it make you think about?

Responding to the book as a whole:

- Come back to the book again and re-read the entire story as a whole. Allow the children to begin to explore their responses to it through **booktalk** with the help of what Aidan Chambers calls 'the four basic questions'. These questions give children accessible starting points for discussion:
 - Tell me ... was there anything you liked about this story?
 - Was there anything that you particularly disliked?
 - Was there anything that puzzled you?
 - Were there any patterns ... any connections that you noticed? Did it remind you of anything else you've read, experienced or seen?
- The openness of these questions unlike the more interrogative 'Why?' question encourages every child to feel that they have something to say. It allows everyone to take part in arriving at a shared view without the fear of the 'wrong' answer.
- Asking these questions will lead children inevitably into a fuller discussion than using more general questions. You may, for example, ask the children if they had favourite parts of the story, and why this was. Encourage the children to refer to specific elements of both the language and the illustration when sharing their responses.
- As children consider the book as a whole, invite them to turn through the book exploring some the linguistic and visual patterns and echoes. Reflect back on the impact of the switch in location and circumstance, the pause and change in narrative voice during the wordless spreads, and the shifting balance of text and illustration. Look at where moments in the story create echoes or invite comparison, such as the breakfast scene in Baba's chicken coop home compared to the breakfast at the boy's apartment; the repeated use of certain colours; the use of windows in the illustration; the rain scenes on the way to school and the rain at the end of the book, etc. They might also discuss the role that food plays in the book growing food, preparing food, eating food and how this might be one of the key points of connection for the two generations of family in the story.
- Extend the children's thinking through a more evaluative question, such as:
 - Why do you think Jordan Scott chose to write this book?



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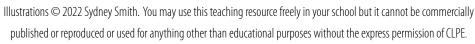
- What do you think the story was about? Do you think it had a moral or a theme? What lessons might it teach a young reader?
- How did the book compare with your original expectations? Was it similar or different? In what way?
- Who do you think would like this book? Why?
- If possible, leave copies of the book in the book corner for the children to revisit and re-read in independent reading time, by themselves or socially in a group.

After reading, you could also:

- Think about the key themes of family, kindness and connection between generations. You could create a display of books that explore these themes, inviting the children to share them with you or each other.
- Find out more about the crucial role that worms play in our ecology. Discover what children already know about worms and what they might like to find out. Then give them access to appropriately selected books or online sources of information to allow them to find answers to their questions. Challenge them to summarise and communicate what they have found out to other members of the larger group. After they have researched the subject matter, ask them to think about what they might like to do with it. Perhaps they would like to start their own campaign to rescue worms from the school playground and paths when it rains. They could produce posters, leaflets or a speech to explain to the rest of the school what they would like to do and why.
- Start growing vegetables and fruit at school inspired by Baba's garden. If a suitable space doesn't exist to dig a plot or build raised beds, the children could echo the end of the story by growing their own tomatoes in pots on the windowsill. Link this to work in Design and Technology and Science to support their understanding of diet, food and plants.
- Find out more about Sydney Smith and some of the techniques he uses to create his illustrations. Watch this short video (<u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nv5UQGjrzSc</u>) to see Sydney in his studio demonstrating creating a painting inspired by his own book, *Small in the City*. Children could consider how he uses materials including pen, paint, wax and pastel to communicate character and setting. As well as painting, children could also investigate the use of photography to capture light early in the morning or late in the afternoon. *How do the sun's rays, the reflections, the beams and the shadows compare with the light shining through the windows or surrounding the characters in Sydney Smith's paintings*?
- Invite the children to think about the people they feel most connected to, perhaps members of their own family about whom they have significant memories, or about daily routines from their younger days, inspired by the boy and his grandmother in this story. They could use these to craft their own short stories. Give them time to reflect on, map out, draft and subsequently refine their stories, before publishing them, perhaps as their own picturebooks drawing on what they have learnt from Jordan Scott's writing and Sydney Smith's illustration in this book.
- You can find out more about the creation of this book by reading this interview with both Jordan Scott and Sydney Smith: <u>https://afuse8production.slj.com/2023/02/15/shared-rituals-and-easter-sugar-lambs-a-dualinterview-about-my-babas-garden-dual-with-jordan-scott-and-sydney-smith/</u>



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Other titles by Jordan Scott and/or Sydney Smith:

- I Talk Like a River, by Jordan Scott and Sydney Smith (Walker Books)
- Small in the City, by Sydney Smith (Walker Books)
- Town is by the Sea, by Joanne Schwartz and Sydney Smith (Walker Books)
- Footpath Flowers, by Jon Arno Lawson and Sydney Smith (Walker Books)

Suggested titles to further support the exploration of grandchild and grandparent narratives:

- My Grandma and Me by Mina Javaherbin and Lindsey Yankey (Walker Books)
- Julian is a Mermaid by Jessica Love (Walker Books)
- Drawn Together by Minh Lé and Dan Santat (Disney Hyperion)
- Grandad's Camper by Harry Woodgate (Andersen Press)
- Grandad's Island by Benji Davies (Simon and Schuster UK)
- Grandpa Green by Lane Smith (Two Hoots)
- Grandpa's Gift by Fiona Lumbers (Simon and Schuster UK)
- If All The World Were... by Joseph Coelho and Allison Colpoys (Lincoln Children's Books)
- Last Stop on Market Street by Matt de la Pena and Christian Robinson (Puffin)
- The Lines on Nana's Face by Simona Ciraolo (Flying Eye Books)
- My Two Grannies by Floella Benjamin and Margaret Chamberlain (Frances Lincoln Children's Books)
- Storm by Sam Usher (Templar Publishing)
- Tibble and Grandpa by Wendy Meddour and Daniel Egnéus (Oxford University Press)
- When I Was a Child by Andy Stanton and David Litchfield (Hodder Children's Books)





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