
FAVORABLY PORTRAYING AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES THROUGH PENPALS: A REVIEW OF *OUTDOOR FARM, INDOOR FARM*

Amanda K. Stinemetz
Fort Hays State University

Abstract

Outdoor Farm, Indoor Farm depicts a wonderful parallel between traditional farming practices and modern technological growing techniques (aeroponics) portrayed through a penpal relationship between two children. The book informs readers about agricultural practices and seasonal growth while also sending positive messages about diversity, independence, and women in science.

Keywords: Lindsay H. Metcalf, agriculture, diversity, women in science, outdoor farm, indoor farm

In *Outdoor Farm, Indoor Farm* (2024) by Lindsay H. Metcalf (illustrated by Xin Li), positive messages abound for young readers, especially through the lens of agriculture. In this text, readers learn about traditional farming practices as they compare to modern technological growing techniques (aeroponics). The varied practices, expectations associated with stages of growth, and developments as they align with the seasons are accompanied by masterful illustrations that are colorful, creative, and captivating. This information about farming, combined with the appealing artwork, is particularly valuable for children living in densely populated or metropolitan areas, as it is visually stimulating in a way that enhances children's understanding of growing practices. Further, the parallel between traditional farming and modern growing techniques is presented by means of penpal communication between children (a boy named Efram and a girl named Emma) whose mothers are the lead farmers and agricultural scientists.

Aside from the agricultural focal point, the text itself celebrates diversity through its creative illustrations. Efram and his mother are presented as African while Emma and her mother are portrayed as Hispanic. This portrayal promotes a positive message about diversity within higher levels of research and management within the agricultural work environment. Additionally, the positive message about independence, strength, and women in science is further communicated by strategic illustrations of both mothers actively farming, researching, repairing equipment, and managing others. Again, the reading presents informative details about the process of growing crops in agriculture; however, diversity is celebrated by its portrayal of people in positions of authority, and women are further elevated because they are represented as leaders and decision makers. This speaks well to children and offers them a valuable, yet subtle, message. Beyond the storyline and visually stimulating artwork, the reading also provides a written summary of the process for growing plants traditionally as well as via aeroponics; moreover, government-sponsored links (including one from NASA Climate Kids) are shared as references for people who wish to independently explore technological resources for growth practices.

This book would be ideal for a primary classroom, as it would positively complement a “seed germination” science project. Given the list of useful government link resources, teachers could easily enlist support and guidance from these websites to enhance students’ learning. To build on the penpal feature of the text, teachers could guide students to writing letters to (or in exchange with) students in a different region of the nation, such as students from Kansas writing to Alaska, or perhaps students in Washington writing to peers in Florida. The final positive element about this book is that it was authored by a Kansas writer, which should inspire students by helping them see themselves in this creation. What I enjoy most about this book is that it informs children about agriculture and provides visually stimulating images to help children see what farming looks like, even though they may live in a city environment.

Author Biography

Amanda Stinemetz, Ph.D., is entering her 19th year of teaching. While finishing her MA, Amanda was central in creating a university-level English as a Second Language (ESL) Program. During this time (2008-2017), she taught and extensively travelled to build international partnerships and recruit students. During her brief time away from Kansas (2018-2021), Amanda served as the Director of Internationalization at Fairmont State University and was also the State Coordinator for DE English. Upon returning to Kansas (from West Virginia), she taught ELA at a rural junior/senior high school. She returned to FHSU in fall 2023 as Assistant Professor of English and is currently the Coordinator of Secondary ELA Teacher Education. She has maintained KATE membership for most of her teaching career; in 2024, she was appointed to the position of English Language Learner (ELL) liaison on the KATE Board. She can be reached at akstinemetz@fhsu.edu.

