

Realistic  
Fiction

# BRICK BY BRICK

by Paul Mason

illustrated by Stevie Mahardhika



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Graw  
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PAIRED  
READ

A Big Heart

# STRATEGIES & SKILLS

## Comprehension

**Strategy:** Visualize

**Skill:** Point of View

## Vocabulary

assigned, generosity, gingerly,  
mature, organization, residents,  
scattered, selective

## Vocabulary Strategy

Definitions and Restatements

## Content Standards

**Social Studies**

Civics

Word Count: 1,877\*\*

\*\*The total word count is based on words in the running text and headings only. Numerals and words in captions, labels, diagrams, charts, and sidebars are not included.



## Education

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Send all inquiries to:  
McGraw-Hill Education  
Two Penn Plaza  
New York, New York 10121

ISBN: 978-0-02-119160-4  
MHID: 0-02-119160-3

Printed in the United States.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 QLM 15 14 13 12 11 10

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## Essential Question

In what ways can you help your community?

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### Chapter 1

“Stop Right Now!” ..... 2

### Chapter 2

Building a Garden..... 5

### Chapter 3

More Hard Work..... 8

### Chapter 4

Making Up for Lost Ground ..... 11

**Respond to Reading** ..... 16

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**A Big Heart** ..... 17

**Focus on Literary Elements** ..... 20

# CHAPTER 1

## "STOP RIGHT NOW!"

Alec checked the hallway to make sure he was alone. He pulled out a thick black marker. He had just spent most of his lunchtime catching up on math when he should have been playing.

Mr. Burgess had kept him in, telling him something about “not using your time wisely.” Well, he’d show Mr. Burgess.

With a flourish, Alec drew a big S, followed by CHOOOL. He paused to admire his work.

“Alec Johnson!” a cold voice called out. “Stop right now!”

Alec dropped the marker and whipped around, his heart thumping. It was Mr. Burgess. The teacher stood there, glaring at him.

Mr. Burgess took a deep breath. “The principal’s office. Come with me. Now!” His voice was calm, but he sounded disappointed.



Alec sat outside Ms. Ramirez's office waiting for his parents. He counted the ceiling tiles, trying to keep his mind off the trouble he found himself in. When his parents finally arrived, his dad looked flustered, and his mom looked just plain tired.

"Sorry," Alec said in a weak voice.

The school secretary brought them into the principal's office.

"Mr. and Mrs. Johnson," Ms. Ramirez said, shaking Alec's parents' hands and offering them a seat. "It's a shame we're having to meet again to discuss bad news. How many times have we had these meetings so far this year, Alec?"

"Four," Alec whispered.

"And this time, you were caught red-handed defacing school property," said Ms. Ramirez. "This shows a complete lack of respect for the school. Do you have any idea how much of a problem cleaning off graffiti is for the janitor?"

"Or how much it costs the school?" Alec's mom asked.

Ms. Ramirez leaned forward. “You seem to be going through a rough time at the moment, Alec. We’re all worried about you. This just isn’t like you.”

“He seems to have lost his focus,” Alec’s dad added.

“Well, I have an idea how you can make up for this,” said Ms. Ramirez. “First, there will be no recess for two weeks. But I also want you to volunteer at a community organization. My friend Seydou works at the community center. He is starting a new garden, and he needs some helpers. Maybe a little service in the community will sharpen your focus, Alec.”

Alec’s parents nodded, but Alec looked down.

“I’ll let Seydou know you’ll be in touch,” the principal concluded.



## CHAPTER 2

# BUILDING A GARDEN



That weekend, Alec began working at the community center. He swallowed hard when he saw the plot of land he'd be working on. The ground was a tangled mess of old roots and upturned earth. In one corner were a cement mixer, bags of cement, a big pile of gravel, and a few piles of earth-colored bricks.

Seydou was already at work, shoveling earth. He took off his gloves and greeted Alec and his dad. "Pleased to meet you," he smiled. "I'm glad you're here—there's so much to do," he said, waving at the lot.

“So you’re building a garden?” Alec’s dad asked.

“That’s right,” said Seydou. “We want to grow some fruits and vegetables for the community. Sometimes people need a little extra food for their dinner table.” Seydou smiled again. “And you’re here to help,” he said to Alec.

“I guess so,” Alec mumbled.

“Maybe I can lend a hand sometime, too,” said Alec’s dad. “Although I’m sure you’ll work hard—won’t you, Alec?”

Alec kept his eyes on the ground and just nodded.

“I’ll leave you to it, then,” said Alec’s dad.

Alec watched his father walk away, wishing he could go too.

“We’re going to make four vegetable beds with low walls around them. The walls will be made of mud bricks,” Seydou explained. “First, we need to make the ground level. Then we’ll make some bricks.” He pointed out the squares he had laid out with lines of string.



By mid-morning, the sun was beating down on Alec's aching back, and the palms of his hands were rubbed raw, even though he was wearing thick gloves. Sweat trickled into his eyes as he worked. "Moving dirt around in this heat isn't exactly easy," Alec grumbled to himself.

Alec looked at Seydou, who was still shoveling cheerfully. "Seydou is actually enjoying himself, and he isn't even getting paid," thought Alec. He shook his head in disbelief and kept on raking. He couldn't wait to finish up, and he didn't try to hide his feelings.

Every now and then, Seydou stopped to watch his young helper dragging his heels around the site and scowling to himself. Seydou smiled but didn't say anything.



## CHAPTER 3

# MORE HARD WORK

If Alec thought things were going to get easier the following weekend, he was wrong. Alec and Seydou were now ready to start the walls. Seydou took Alec over to the cement mixer and gave him a dust mask and goggles. Clearly, this was going to be more hard work.

Alec looked at the rusty, old cement mixer with dried concrete stuck to its sides. “That looks like a piece of junk,” he scoffed.

“Don’t be fooled,” said Seydou as he started the mixer. “She may be old, but she’s still strong.”

The motor jumped to life, and the mixer rattled and sputtered as it spun like an out-of-control Ferris wheel. Seydou grinned.

Seydou assigned Alec the task of making bricks. He showed him how to make the mixture they needed. It was his own recipe: a healthy amount of builder’s gravel, some clay, a little cement, and finally some water. Seydou explained how to do it safely. Then they stood back to watch the brown sludge roll and slosh in the mixer.

While they worked, Seydou talked about growing up in his home country of Mali, in Africa.

He told Alec how hard it was when he first came to the United States, without his family. “If it weren’t for the generosity of the people at the community center, I don’t know what would have happened to me,” Seydou said.

He poured some of the mixture from Alec’s wheelbarrow into the wooden frame to make the bricks. Alec watched as Seydou gingerly smoothed the wet brick with his trowel and then filled another frame.

“Now it’s your turn,” said Seydou. “I’ll start building the walls with the bricks I made earlier.”



Seydou built up the wall one brick at a time. “In my village back in Mali, we always helped each other,” he said to Alec with a laugh. “Working together at this community center makes me feel like I’m at home.”

Alec had already turned around and was pushing the wheelbarrow away.

One weekend, some younger kids came with their parents to help at the community center. Alec and Seydou showed them how to use a trowel to smooth the mortar and how to put their handprints into a brick before it hardened.

The kids enjoyed making bricks and working on the walls.

“See? Everyone’s lending a hand,” Seydou said.



# CHAPTER 4 MAKING UP FOR LOST GROUND



That week, Alec thought a lot about the garden. He remembered how much fun the kids had working on the garden. Alec also thought about what Seydou had said. He was right. It was good being part of something. Alec couldn't wait to see these gardens finished and full of growing vegetables.

But when Alec arrived at the garden on Saturday, he realized something was wrong. The mixer had been pushed over, the wheelbarrow had been flung into one of the gardens, and tools were scattered everywhere. Alec felt like all their hard work had been for nothing.

“Why would someone destroy our property?” Seydou grumbled angrily as they cleaned up. Alec’s face reddened, and he turned away. Not so long ago, he’d damaged school property. Now, he felt much too mature to do that.

Back at school, Alec tried to make up for lost ground. He raised his hand and participated in class. During math, Mr. Burgess gave him a silent thumbs-up, and Alec allowed himself to smile.

At lunchtime that same day, Alec spotted Mrs. Collins, the librarian, struggling to shelve two carts full of books. He thought of Seydou and the garden.

Alec held open the library door. “How about you shelve one, and I shelve the other?”

“That’s about the best thing I’ve heard all day,” said Mrs. Collins gratefully.



Despite the delay, the garden slowly began to take shape. Seydou and Alec finished the raised vegetable beds—with a little help from Alec’s dad. The low walls looked smooth and solid, and Alec’s bricks were holding firm. Alec and Seydou stood back and admired their work.

Seydou ordered soil and compost to fill the garden beds. It was time to begin planting. Several residents from the neighborhood had arrived armed with tools and seedlings to help with the planting. “You don’t have to be selective about which seedlings you plant,” announced Seydou. “There’s plenty of room.”





Seydou and Alec watched as the neighbors worked. “That’s a fine garden,” Seydou grinned. “You did well, Alec.”

Alec corrected him. “We did well.”

Seydou laughed and patted Alec on the back.

One of the members from the center walked over to them.

“How long will we have to wait for your carrots, Dolores?” Seydou teased.

“A couple of months at least. Good things take time—you should know that,” she chuckled.

Seydou introduced her to Alec. “Ah, so you’re the young man who helped rescue our yard,” Dolores said.

Alec blushed. “I guess I gave Seydou a little help.”

“Well, it looks lovely,” Dolores replied, smiling. “Now, you make sure you come back and pick some of those carrots when they’re ready. They’re for anyone in our community who wants them.”

“Sure,” Alec said, nodding. He let Dolores’s words sink in. *Our* community.

He liked the sound of that.

# Respond to Reading

## Respond to Reading

Summarize how Alec helped his community in *Brick by Brick*. Details from your graphic organizer may help.

Details

↓

Point of View

## Text Evidence

1. How can you tell that *Brick by Brick* is realistic fiction? **GENRE**
2. Is this story told from a first-person or third-person point of view? **POINT OF VIEW**
3. What is a *trowel* (page 9)? Use clues in the paragraph to help you figure out the meaning.  
**DEFINITIONS AND RESTATEMENTS**
4. Imagine you are Seydou. Write about how you might have felt when Alec first started helping to make the garden and how you might have felt when the garden was finished.

**WRITE ABOUT READING**

## Compare Texts

Read about a community food program that was started by a five-year-old boy.

# A Big Heart

In Florida, a charity called Joshua's Heart Foundation provides food for more than 100 homeless people and 450 families every month.

The president of the organization is Joshua Williams. When Joshua Williams was five years old, his grandmother gave him 20 dollars. Joshua gave the money to a homeless man. Just a few months later, he began his own charity to help people in need.

This charity is named after Joshua's warm heart. In 2011, eleven-year-old Joshua was awarded the Prudential Spirit of Community Award.



Joshua Williams was only five years old when he started Joshua's Heart Foundation.

To date, Joshua's foundation has given more than 250,000 pounds of food to those who need it most. This includes the sick, the elderly, and families who don't have much money.

The foundation also runs a backpack program. Backpacks of food are given to children who need them to take home on weekends or during school vacations. The food is healthy and easy to prepare.

Joshua's Heart Foundation depends on volunteers who work for free. People from both school and community groups work for the foundation. As Joshua says, "If people support me, they might help make a difference. When you make a difference, it helps other people."

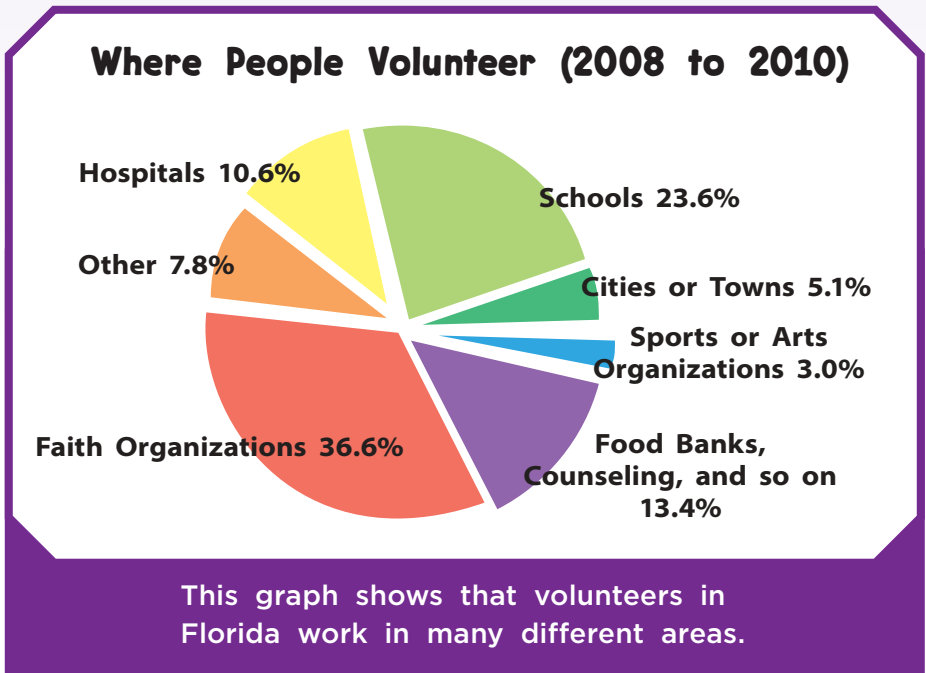


## Food Drives

Many communities run food drives. This is an event where people collect canned and dried foods such as cereal, pasta, and fruits and vegetables. They then distribute the food to people in need. Some workplaces or schools even run challenges to see who can collect the most food.

Joshua's Heart Foundation volunteers are not alone. Did you know that there are around 3 million volunteers in Florida? Altogether, these people give many hours of their time to help their communities.

Look at the graph below. What type of volunteering would you like to do?



## Make Connections

How does Joshua's Heart Foundation help communities? **ESSENTIAL QUESTION**

How are Alec in *Brick by Brick* and Joshua in *A Big Heart* alike? How are they different?

**TEXT TO TEXT**

# Focus on Literary Elements

**Dialogue** Writers have several ways to show us who is speaking and how they sound. Quotation marks show that a character is speaking.

**Read and Find** To figure out who is speaking, look for *said* and then the character's name: "Sorry," Alec said in a weak voice. (page 3)

Using the context of a sentence can help you figure out who is speaking: "How about you shelve one, and I shelve the other?" (page 12) You can figure out that Alec is speaking because the sentence before the dialogue refers to him.

A different verb can tell you *how* the character spoke: "That thing looks like a piece of junk," he scoffed. (page 8)

## Your Turn

Copy this chart.

With a partner, look for examples in the story of the different ways that dialogue is written. Fill in the chart with the examples you find.

Dialogue	Example
Using <i>said</i>	
Using the sentence context	
Using a verb other than <i>said</i>	

## Literature Circles

### Fiction

# Thinkmark

### Characters

Who are the main characters in *Brick by Brick*?  
How did Alec change in the story?

### Setting

Where did *Brick by Brick* take place?  
When did it take place?

### Sequence of Events

What happened first, then, next, and finally  
in *Brick by Brick*?

### Conclusions

What conclusions can you draw about the kinds  
of people who help in their community?

### Make Connections

How is Alec in *Brick by Brick* like someone you  
know or have heard about in real life?

Helping the Community

GR Q • Benchmark 40 • Lexile TK

Grade 4 • Unit 3 Week 2

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ISBN-13 978-0-02-119160-4

MHID 0-02-119160-3



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