

# Comprehension

## Genre

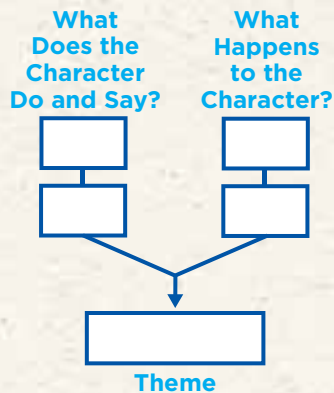
**Fantasy** has invented characters, settings, or other elements that could not exist in real life.



## Make Inferences and Analyze

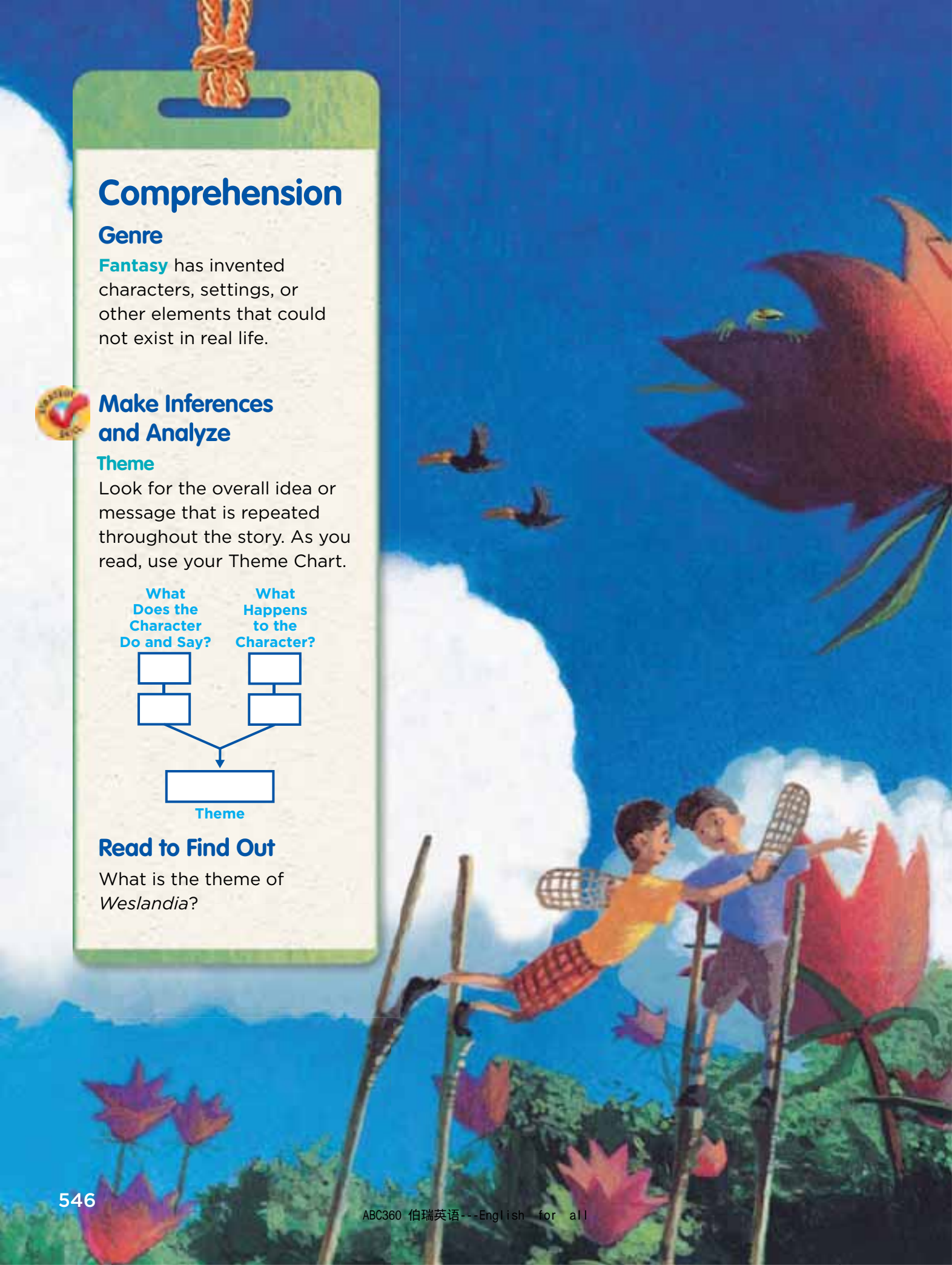
### Theme

Look for the overall idea or message that is repeated throughout the story. As you read, use your Theme Chart.



## Read to Find Out

What is the theme of *Weslandia*?



# Weslandia

by Paul Fleischman

illustrated by Kevin Hawkes





“Of course he’s miserable,” moaned Wesley’s mother.  
“He sticks out.”

“Like a nose,” snapped his father.

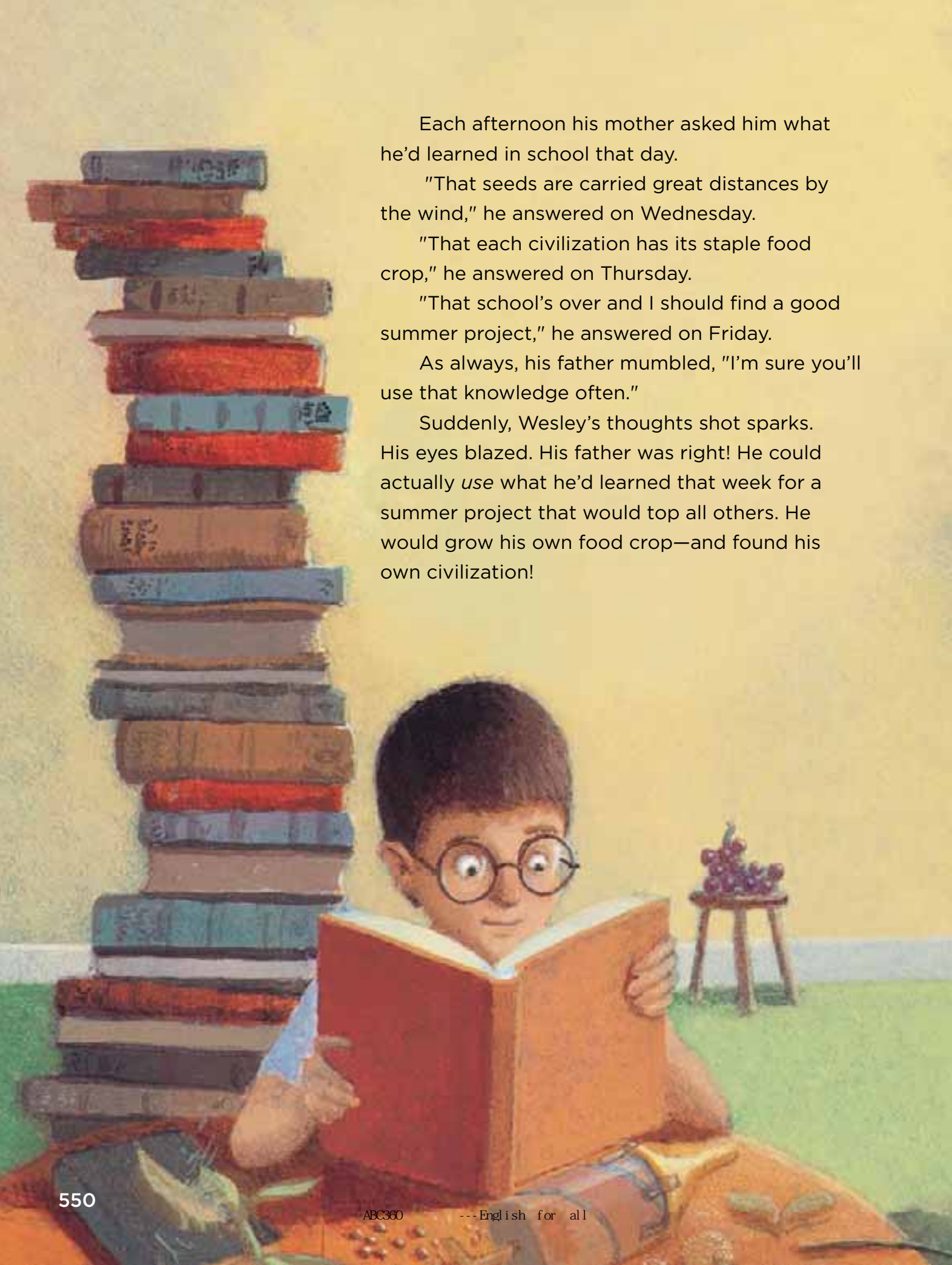
Listening through the heating vent, Wesley knew they were right. He was an **outcast** from the **civilization** around him.

He alone in his town disliked pizza and soda, alarming his mother and the school nurse. He found professional football stupid. He’d refused to shave half his head, the hairstyle worn by all the other boys, despite his father’s bribe of five dollars.

Passing his neighborhood’s two styles of housing—garage on the left and garage on the right—Wesley alone dreamed of more exciting forms of shelter. He had no friends, but plenty of tormentors.

Fleeing them was the only sport he was good at.



A young boy with dark hair and round glasses is sitting on a rug, reading a large red book. To his left is a very tall, precarious stack of books of various colors (red, blue, brown, grey). In the background, there is a small wooden stool with a bunch of purple grapes on it. The scene is set against a plain, light-colored wall.

Each afternoon his mother asked him what he'd learned in school that day.

"That seeds are carried great distances by the wind," he answered on Wednesday.

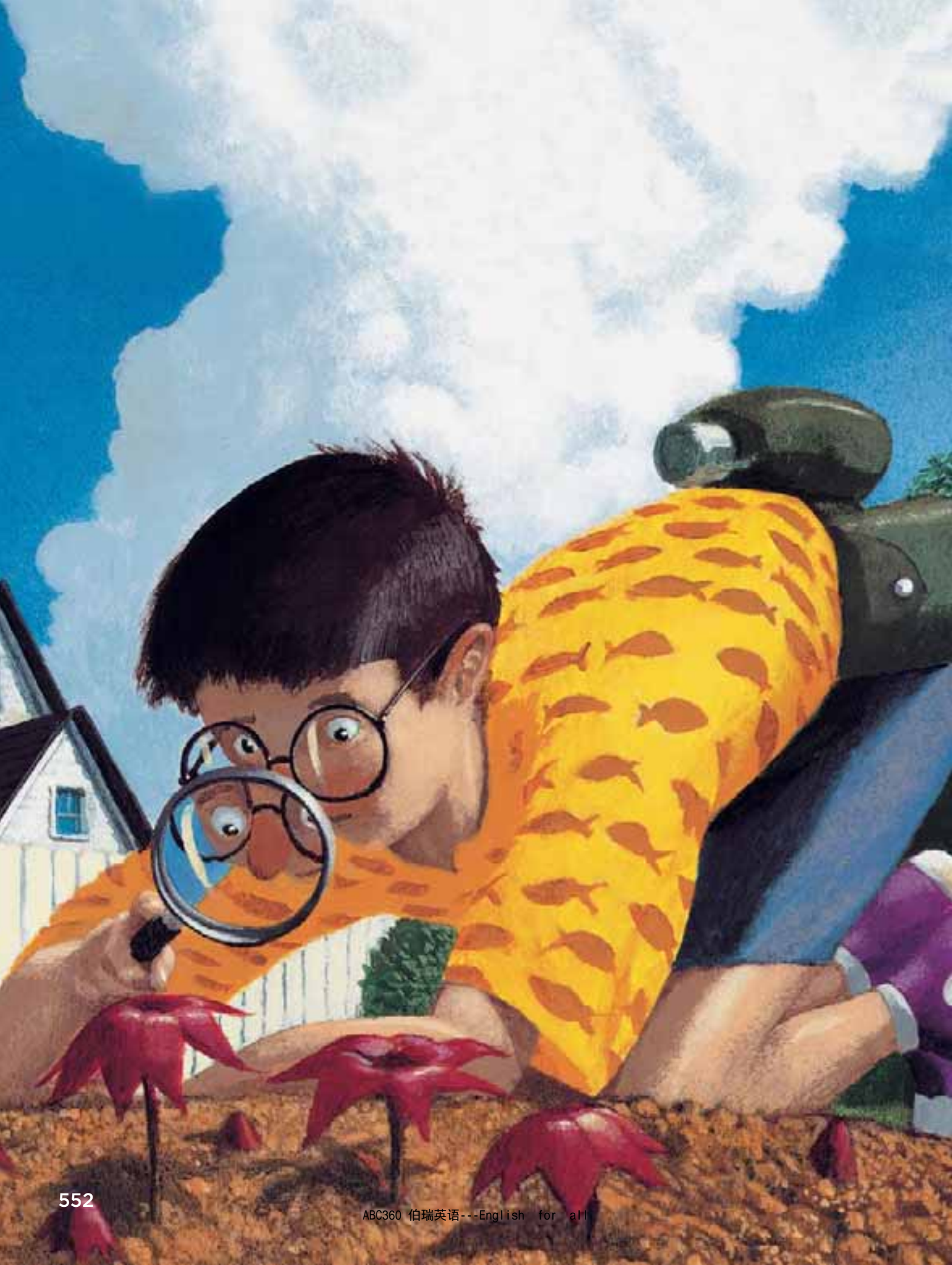
"That each civilization has its staple food crop," he answered on Thursday.

"That school's over and I should find a good summer project," he answered on Friday.

As always, his father mumbled, "I'm sure you'll use that knowledge often."

Suddenly, Wesley's thoughts shot sparks. His eyes blazed. His father was right! He could actually *use* what he'd learned that week for a summer project that would top all others. He would grow his own food crop—and found his own civilization!





The next morning he turned over a plot of ground in his yard. That night a wind blew in from the west. It raced through the trees and set his curtains snapping. Wesley lay awake, listening. His land was being planted.

Five days later the first seedlings appeared.

"You'll have mighty **bedlam** on your hands if you don't get those weeds out," warned his neighbor.

"Actually, that's my crop," replied Wesley. "In this type of garden there are no weeds."

Following ancient tradition, Wesley's fellow gardeners grew tomatoes, beans, Brussels sprouts, and nothing else. Wesley found it thrilling to open his land to chance, to invite the new and unknown.

The plants shot up past his knees, then his waist. They seemed to be all of the same sort. Wesley couldn't find them in any plant book.

"Are those tomatoes, beans, or Brussels sprouts?" asked Wesley's neighbor.

"None of the above," replied Wesley.

Fruit appeared, yellow at first, then blushing to magenta. Wesley picked one and sliced through the rind to the juicy purple center. He took a bite and found the taste an entrancing blend of peach, strawberry, pumpkin pie, and flavors he had no name for.



### Theme

What message do you think the author wants to get across in the conversations between Wesley and his neighbor?







Ignoring the shelf of cereals in the kitchen, Wesley took to breakfasting on the fruit. He dried half a rind to serve as a cup, built his own squeezing device, and drank the fruit's juice throughout the day.

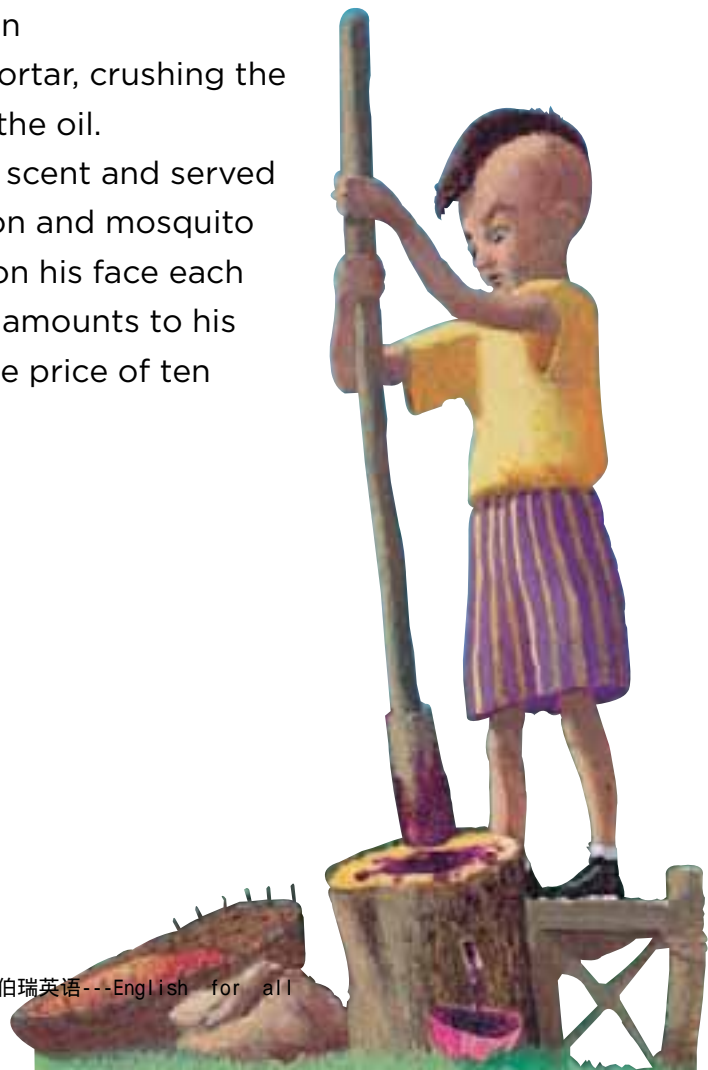
Pulling up a plant, he found large tubers on the roots. These he boiled, fried, or roasted on the family barbecue, seasoning them with a pinch of the plant's highly aromatic leaves.

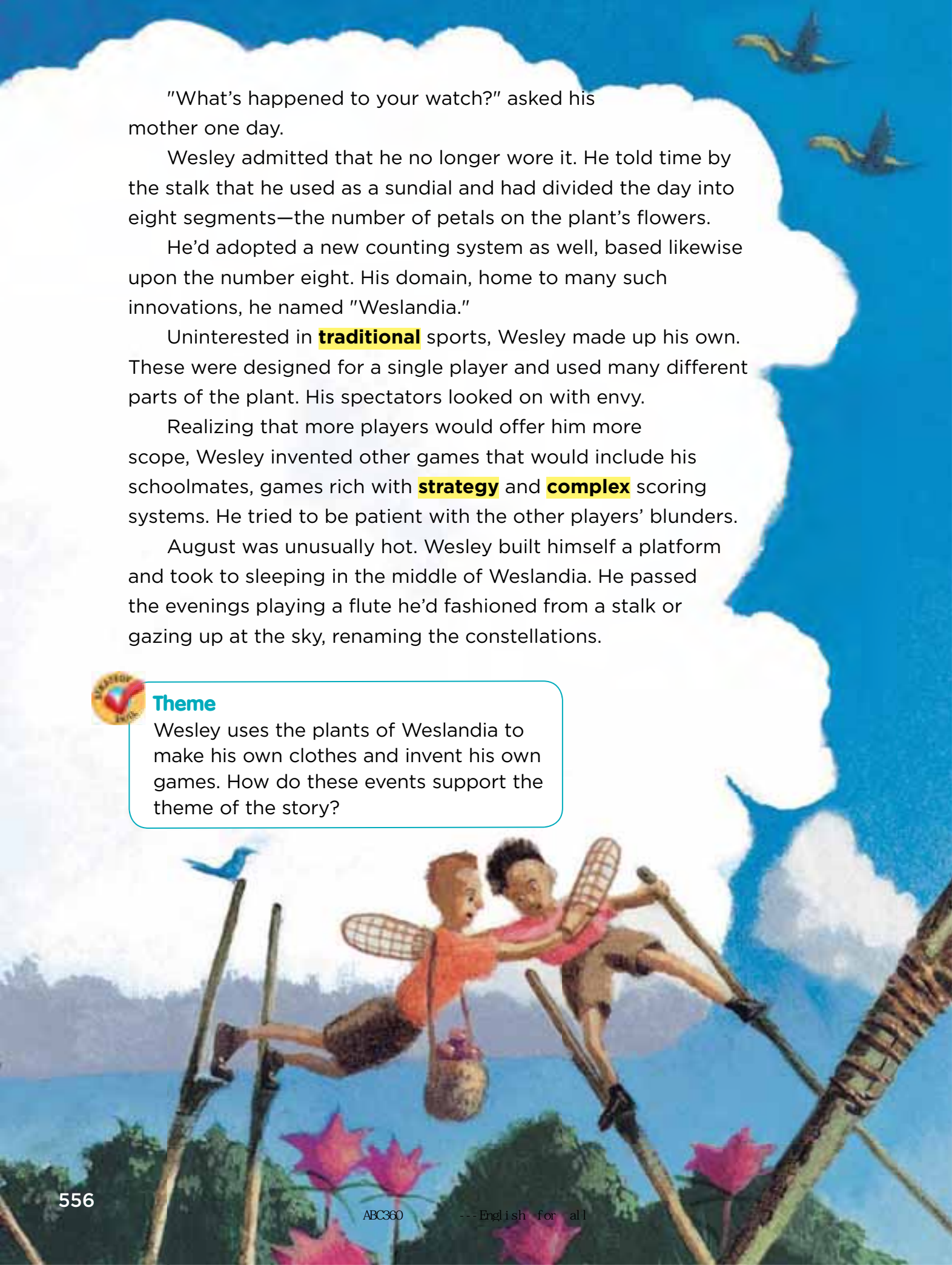
It was hot work tending to his crop. To keep off the sun, Wesley wove himself a hat from strips of the plant's woody bark. His success with the hat inspired him to devise a spinning wheel and loom on which he wove a loose-fitting robe from the stalks' soft inner fibers.

Unlike jeans, which he found scratchy and heavy, the robe was comfortable, **reflected** the sun, and offered myriad opportunities for pockets.

His schoolmates were scornful, then curious. Grudgingly, Wesley allowed them ten minutes apiece at his mortar, crushing the plant's seeds to collect the oil.

This oil had a tangy scent and served him both as suntan lotion and mosquito repellent. He rubbed it on his face each morning and sold small amounts to his former tormentors at the price of ten dollars per bottle.





"What's happened to your watch?" asked his mother one day.

Wesley admitted that he no longer wore it. He told time by the stalk that he used as a sundial and had divided the day into eight segments—the number of petals on the plant's flowers.

He'd adopted a new counting system as well, based likewise upon the number eight. His domain, home to many such innovations, he named "Weslandia."

Uninterested in **traditional** sports, Wesley made up his own. These were designed for a single player and used many different parts of the plant. His spectators looked on with envy.

Realizing that more players would offer him more scope, Wesley invented other games that would include his schoolmates, games rich with **strategy** and **complex** scoring systems. He tried to be patient with the other players' blunders.

August was unusually hot. Wesley built himself a platform and took to sleeping in the middle of Weslandia. He passed the evenings playing a flute he'd fashioned from a stalk or gazing up at the sky, renaming the constellations.



### Theme

Wesley uses the plants of Weslandia to make his own clothes and invent his own games. How do these events support the theme of the story?



His parents noted Wesley's improved morale. "It's the first time in years he's looked happy," said his mother.

Wesley gave them a tour of Weslandia.

"What do you call this plant?" asked his father. Not knowing its name, Wesley had begun calling it "swist," from the sound of its leaves rustling in the breeze.

In like manner, he'd named his new fabrics, games, and foods, until he'd created an entire language.

Mixing the plant's oil with soot, Wesley made a passable ink. As the finale to his summer project, he used the ink and his own eighty-letter alphabet to record the history of his civilization's founding.

In September Wesley returned to school . . .

He had no **shortage** of friends.





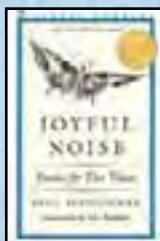
# Meet Weslandia Creators Paul Fleischman and Kevin Hawkes

**Paul Fleischman**, like Wesley, created his own world while he was growing up in California. Paul and his friends invented their own sports, ran a newspaper, and created their own alternative universe. His vivid imagination comes from his father, Sid Fleischman, who also wrote books. Often he would ask Paul to help him with the plot of a story. Words and imagination come naturally to Paul. “They were as much fun to play with as toys,” he said.



## Other books by

Paul Fleischman: *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices* and *Seedfolks*



**Kevin Hawkes** says he learned how to draw by practicing, practicing, and practicing some more. As a child he drew pictures and used modeling clay to mold sculptures, such as a life-size sculpture of a mountaineer. Today Kevin makes a “dummy” book for each book he illustrates. These first sketches help him create the unique images that bring stories like *Weslandia* to life.



Find out more about Paul Fleischman and Kevin Hawkes at [www.macmillanmh.com](http://www.macmillanmh.com)

## Author's Purpose

How is *Weslandia* different from real life? Do you think the author wrote this fantasy story mainly to entertain? Why or why not?

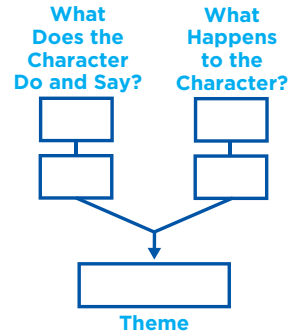


## Comprehension Check



### Summarize

Use your Theme Chart to help you summarize the ways that Wesley's life changes during the summer. Include information about the theme of the story in a summary of *Weslandia*.



### Think and Compare

1. Describe the theme of this story in one or two sentences. Explain how the author uses theme to connect the characters and events. **Make Inferences and Analyze: Theme**
2. Using evidence from the text on page 556, explain how Wesley uses sports to win over his schoolmates. **Analyze**
3. Wesley names a plant *swist* because of the sound its leaves make in the wind. Rename five items you own on the basis of the sounds they make. Create a dictionary entry for each new word. **Synthesize**
4. Describe some of the elements that make up a **civilization** according to your reading of *Weslandia*. **Apply**
5. Reread "Juanita and the Cornstalk" on pages 544-545. In what ways are Wesley and Juanita alike? How are they different? Use examples from both selections to support your answer. **Reading/Writing Across Texts**