In Mary's Garden
Teacher's Guide

Written and illustrated by Tina and Carson Kügler

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About the book:
*In Mary's Garden* is a picture book based on the life of Wisconsin artist Mary Nohl (1914-2001), who created huge sculptures in her yard from cement, stones, and found objects.

About the authors:

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Tina lives in Los Angeles with her husband Carson, three boys and an enormous hairy dog named Harryhausen.  

**Carson Kügler**  
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Carson is currently a storyboard supervisor at Nickelodeon Animation, having worked on numerous animated series at Walt Disney Television Animation and Nickelodeon. *In Mary's Garden* is his first picture book.  
Carson has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, and received his K-12 teaching certification from Silver Lake College, Manitowoc, WI. He has taught high school art and has lead drawing workshops at libraries and other venues.
How to use this guide:

This classroom guide for *In Mary's Garden* is designed for students in kindergarten through 4th grade. Teachers are encouraged to adapt each activity to fit the abilities and ages of their own students. This guide includes suggested activities for art, language arts, social studies, and math, created with content standards in mind.

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**English Language Arts**

**Prediction and Preparation (Before Reading)**

Look at the dust jacket and the opening pages of *In Mary's Garden*. Point out the parts of the book:

- Spine
- Front cover
- Back cover
- Endpapers
- Title page
- Dust jacket
- Jacket flap

What information can be found on the various parts of the book? Where is the publisher located? Where do the author/illustrators live?

Look at the front and back cover. Practice inferring and predicting by looking at the illustration.

Ask students:

Most gardens have flowers or vegetables. Can you see any flowers in Mary's garden? What might make you think her garden is unusual?

Who do you think lives behind this gate? What are they like? Have you ever seen a fence like the one on the back cover?
What is that huge creature peering over the gate? Is he scary or friendly? How can you tell? Is he alive? Does he look similar to the pillars on either side of the gate? Did someone make them?

Who do you see opening the gate? Do you think this is Mary? What can you tell about her based on what she is wearing? Do you think she made the creature next to her?

Look at the gate. What shapes do you see? There are fish, a boat, and lines that look like waves. What color is the gate? Based on the gate, where do you think Mary's garden is?

Read the story aloud.

Comprehension (After Reading)
Ask basic questions:
Who was Mary Nohl?
What did Mary make?
Why do you think she decided to make her art the way that she did?
What materials did she use? How did she find them?
What were the names of her dogs?
How did they help her in the story?

What is young Mary doing when we first meet her on page 3? What do the elements in the illustration tell you about her?

What kinds of things does Mary find? Do they look special or useful to you?

What did Mary learn from her father? What did she build with him, and how did it affect her later in the story?

Compare some of the artifacts Mary sees while traveling with the art she created on the final spread. How are they similar? How are they different?

There are two winters pictured in the book. How is the earlier winter different from the later winter? Is anything the same?
Writing Activities

Travel Postcards
Mary Nohl loved her dogs, and while traveling, would send postcards home to them.

Pretend you are Mary traveling, and seeing some of the artifacts shown on pages 6-7. What would you write on a postcard to your dogs, Sassafras and Basil? Describe what you are seeing on your trip.

My Collection
Mary collected things she found, like stones, buttons, and other cast-off objects. Things that were interesting to her might have looked like trash to someone else. Do you have a collection? What do you collect? When did you start your collection? How do you add to it? Why are the items you collect important to you?

Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary
There is an English nursery rhyme that begins:
Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow?
Can you rewrite the next 2 lines of the poem to describe Mary Nohl and her garden?
What does contrary mean? How would this word apply to Mary Nohl herself, as well as her garden?
Crack the Code

As a child, Mary would send secret messages. Her secret message on page 3 is inspired by the 1913 Naval Phonetic Alphabet, with a word representing a letter. The current version, from 1957, is the commonly-known Alpha-Bravo-Charlie alphabet.

Can you solve Mary’s message? Her message is cut off on the page, what do you think the rest says?

Here is the 1913 Code:

A- Able      N- Nan
B- Boy       O- Oboe
C- Cast      P- Pup
D- Dog       Q- Quack
E- Easy      R- Rush
F- Fox       S- Sail
G- George    T- Tare
H- Have      U- Unit
I- Item      V- Vice
J- Jig       W- Watch
K- King      X- X-ray
L- Love      Y- Yoke
M- Mike      Z- Zed

Next, use the code to write a message of your own, and exchange with a classmate.
Critical Thinking/Digging Deeper (Grades 2-4)

The Witch's House
In Milwaukee, Mary Nohl's home was known as "The Witch's House" for years. Mary was quiet and shy, so most people didn't know much about her. She didn't show her work in galleries, or make art to sell. Because her sculptures and home looked so unusual, many people misunderstood her. Some tried to damage her sculptures. Some made up spooky stories about her. One of the stories said that Mary's husband had been lost sailing on the lake, and that she built the sculptures so he could find his way home again. In reality, Mary never married or had any children.

Now that you know Mary's real story, what would you tell someone who called her a witch?

The Fate of the Mary Nohl Art Environment
Mary Nohl's lakeside home, built in 1925, is located in Fox Point, Wisconsin (population 6,700), in what is now an affluent, secluded residential neighborhood. Mary's art-filled property is a subject of great controversy, and as a result her life's work is in danger. The John Michael Kohler Art Center, the museum that owns her work, wants to allow the public to see Mary's creations on her property, by making it into a modest, limited-access museum.

In Fox Point, some residents support the museum plans, but a small group of neighborhood residents wants to discourage any visitors and restrict all public access, because they do not want any traffic on their street.

The Fox Point Village Board has the authority to approve the museum plans, but also must keep the opinions of their residents in mind.

What would you do to resolve this dispute?
Art

Art History
What is an Art Environment?
Research one or more of the following, and create a travel poster advertising the site.

• Watts Towers (Simon Rodia)
• The Rock Garden of Chandigarh (Nek Chand)
• Hubcap Ranch (Emanuele "Litto" Damonte)
• Le Palais Idéal (Ferdinand Cheval)
• Fred Smith's Wisconsin Concrete Park (Fred Smith)

How are they similar to or different from the Mary Nohl Art Environment?

Vocabulary term: Vernacular Art
Vernacular art is a genre of art and outdoor constructions by untrained or self-taught artists.
Self-taught art is also known as Naïve Art, Outsider Art, or Art Brut.
Most creators of art environments are vernacular artists and are most often men. However, Mary Nohl attended the Art Institute of Chicago.

Noteworthy Female Artists
Research one of the artists listed below, or a female artist of your own choosing. Create a poster about the artist and their work.

• Berthe Morisot
• Anna Vaughn Hyatt Huntington
• Frida Kahlo
• Faith Ringgold
• Louise Bourgeois
• Georgia O'Keefe
• Helen Frankenthaler
Art Projects:

My Own Art Environment
Mary Nohl covered every inch of the interior and exterior of her home with her unusual art. She said, "I don't know what to call it. It's just as close to what I like as I can get." If you decided to cover your home with art, what would it look like?

Draw your home (house, apartment building, or another location of choice) if you could make it look however you wanted.

Using technology:
In Photoshop (or similar), digitally draw and paint embellishments on top of a photograph of your home.

Upcycled Art Projects
Mary Nohl created her art from objects she found, and objects that would be otherwise be discarded in the trash. There are a wealth of upcycled and recycled art projects that could be integrated with Mary's story, below are a few examples.

Raiders of the Recycling Bin
Create an open-ended maker space with bins of recycled objects to use (cardboard, water bottle caps, buttons, yarn, toilet paper rolls), brass fasteners, glue and tape, safety scissors, and tempera paint. Let your students loose to create whatever they want! Keep these supplies on a book cart for easy transport.

Mary Nohl Art Environment Model
Look online for more photos of the Mary Nohl Art Environment. Recycle a shoebox to create a diorama of Mary Nohl's house and yard. Use elements and principles such as shape, space/perspective, and proportion/scale to create depth. Challenge your students to use other recycled materials in their assemblage.
Recycled Cereal Box Mobile
Mary never did learn to cook, and repurposed her many TV dinner trays into a school of fish that she hung over her dining room table. We will use cereal boxes instead.
You will need:
• Cereal boxes, flattened
• Tempera paints
• String
• Scissors
• Stick (to hang mobile)
Cut cereal boxes into fish shapes (or simple shapes, such as circles, for a younger group). Paint the plain cardboard back with color(s) of choice. Punch a hole in each and tie one end of string to fish, the other to the stick. Hang mobile indoors. Use elements and principles such as shape, color, balance, and unity.

Online suggestions for art projects:
(these links are also embedded at studiokugler.com)
Recycled Robot Art Project

DIY Garden Stones (can embed objects like Mary did, modify to age/grade level)

Tissue Paper Stained Glass
Mary made real stained glass windows from bits of broken glass she found. This kid-friendly version uses tissue paper, wax paper, and liquid starch.

Books featuring recycled art projects:
Good Earth Art by MaryAnn Kohl.

Eco Art by Laurie Winn Carlson.
Social Studies

Mapping Mary's Travels
Mary Nohl traveled around the world, crossing the ocean 12 times in 12 years. She saw artifacts from ancient civilizations and modern-era art as well.

On a world map, first locate Mary's home:
- United States
  - Milwaukee (Fox Point), Wisconsin
- Lake Michigan
  (many of Mary's materials washed up from this lake)

Then locate some of the countries Mary visited on her travels:
- Italy
- Pakistan
- France
- Portugal
- Mexico
- India
- Guatemala
- Polynesia- Rapa Nui (Easter Island)*
- Iran
- Nepal
- Afghanistan
- Peru
- Haiti
- Trinidad

*What is noteworthy about Easter Island? Why do you think Mary Nohl was once referred to as "Fox Point's Easter Island Artist?"

Using technology:
Use Google Maps to map Mary's travel route from her home in Fox Point, Wisconsin to one or more of her destinations.
Math (adapt to age/grade level)

**Grouping and classifying**
Mary carefully organized the objects she found, so she could later find exactly what she needed. Give students a mixture of 3 or more kinds of dried beans (such as black, pinto, and kidney), pretending they are stones found on the beach. Have them sort the beans by color or size. Alternate: use beads, buttons, or blocks.

**Addition**
Mary found 3 smooth stones on the beach. Basil, her dog, found 2 more. How many stones did they find? Create a number model.

Mary needs 12 pieces of driftwood for her sculpture. If she finds 3 pieces on Monday and 5 pieces on Tuesday, how many more pieces does she need? Create a number model.

**Subtraction**
Mary collected 9 smooth stones on the beach. 3 fell out through a hole in her pocket while she was walking. How many did she have left? Create a number model.

Mary has a bucket with 18 pieces of driftwood. She made a mobile with 14 pieces. How many are left? Create a number model.
Ratios
Mary created her outdoor sculptures by mixing cement, beach sand, and water.
A typical ratio Mary could have used is
2 parts cement : 6 parts sand : 1 part water.

How many buckets of sand and water would Mary need to mix with 4 buckets of cement? Create a number model.

How many buckets of cement and water would Mary mix with 3 buckets of sand? Create a number model.

Area
Many of Mary's outdoor sculptures are covered in beach stones.
How did Mary know how many beach stones to collect to complete a sculpture?
Beach stones come in different sizes, but in general, 60 beach stones covers a 1'x1' area.

How many beach stones would Mary need to cover an area that was 5' tall by 2' wide? Create a number model.

How many beach stones would Mary need to cover an area that was 6' tall by 1' wide? Create a number model.
Further reading:


More books to discuss:


Artist Mary Nohl created sculptures out of cement, stones and objects she found.

What do you think she is making? Draw her creation.

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