



# How does your garden grow?

**Merve Oflaz** exhorts us to cherish our flowers.

Once upon a time, in a land of great gardens, there were countless numbers of flowers with different colours and shapes. Sunflower, Bellflower and Snapdragon were three of these beautiful flowers. They used to bloom and grow under the bright light of their teacher, Mrs Sun. Every morning, they used to wash their petals with the drops of dew and, dancing in the morning breeze, they headed to school.



Sunflower always enjoyed the beauty around her while she was walking along, and Bellflower accompanied her by murmuring sweet melodies. Snapdragon was always in a rush and he usually ran to school. Let's learn more about these three little flowers once they got to the classroom ...

## Sunflower

Sunflower always wanted to see what was going on around her. She turned her head towards her teacher Mrs Sun as she moved. When she could see Mrs Sun, she used to flip her beautiful blonde hair proudly. Anything that reflected light was a work of art for her. She thought that each colour in the rainbow gave a different meaning to the objects it painted.

Whenever Mrs Sun wrote something on the board, Sunflower wanted to copy it all down, neatly and legibly. She used to get quite confused when Mrs Sun asked her to repeat something after her. If there was a word card she could read from, repeating was much easier. If not, she used to try her best to visualise the words in her mind. Then she could pronounce them easily.

Sunflower loved reading. Because she read very fast, she could finish many stories in a short time. She could remember every little thing she had read, even its position on the page. When her friends asked where an



activity was, she could find it in the book immediately. There was one thing she was not happy with. If Mrs Sun explained something orally, she would often miss some parts of it and she would soon completely forget what she had heard.

### Bellflower

Bellflower was Sunflower's best friend. They always used to play together in the schoolyard. Whenever there was a group game, Sunflower and Bellflower were always the champions.

Bellflower loved music and often murmured and hummed. Whenever Mrs Sun turned to face the class, she would see Bellflower moving his lips. She sometimes scolded him for this. Bellflower loved speaking and he was very talkative, but he never wanted to make Mrs Sun unhappy, so he always listened very carefully to his teacher. He was all ears when Mrs Sun explained

something new. This was his favourite way of learning. While studying at home, he would read things aloud and imitate Mrs Sun.

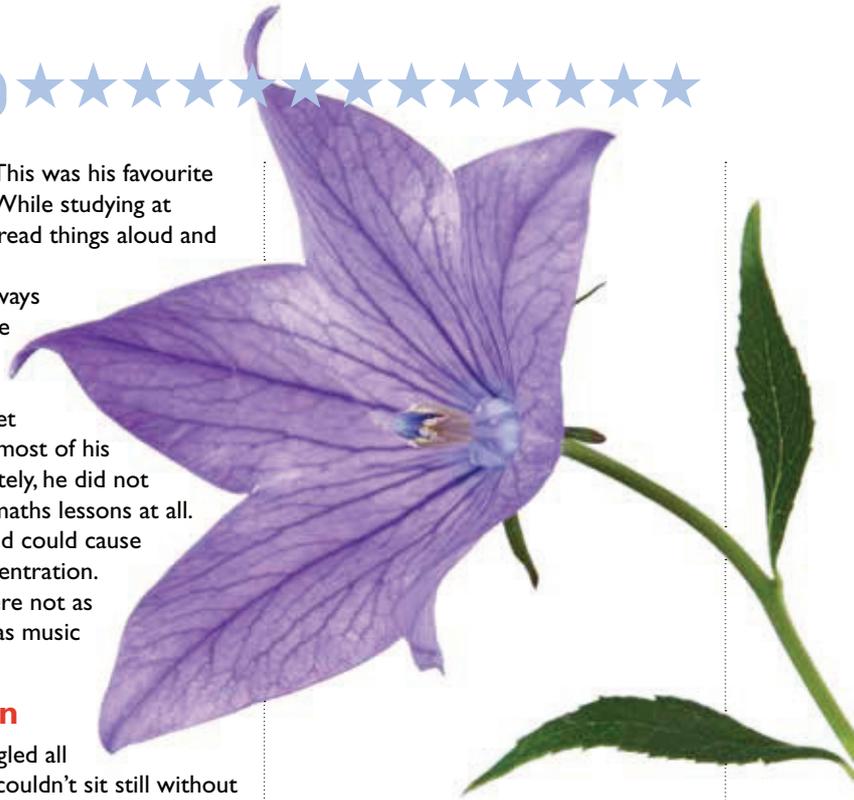
Bellflower always took a very active part in class discussions, and he managed to get good grades for most of his work. Unfortunately, he did not like writing and maths lessons at all. Even a little sound could cause him to lose concentration. These classes were not as exciting for him as music lessons.

### Snapdragon

Snapdragon wriggled all the time and he couldn't sit still without fidgeting. He used to play with his hair or swing his legs while listening to Mrs Sun. When he was reading, he always followed the lines of the text with his finger. He also kept moving his hands and arms when he was speaking. He loved raising his hand to answer Mrs Sun's questions and he never cared about whether or not he had the correct answer. He knew that Mrs Sun would never get angry, even if his answer wasn't right.

Snapdragon would jump up immediately to volunteer for drama activities and he found roleplays great fun. He also loved the card games Mrs Sun prepared for them. Once, Mrs Sun made them practise the multiplication table by using some cards, and Snapdragon loved this activity.

The only problem he had was with his writing. His handwriting was very untidy: too thick and scratchy. He was good at learning through the experience of doing an activity. Although he always found it difficult to remember small details, Snapdragon's instincts were strong.



## Helping our flowers to grow

I hope you enjoyed reading about these sweet flowers. Do you think you know any of them? You may even think that you or your students share some of their features. As you will have realised, the flowers in the story represent young learners with different learning styles.

Sunflower is a visual learner, Bellflower an auditory learner and Snapdragon a kinaesthetic learner. Just like these flowers, our students all have different features, likes, dislikes, weaknesses and strengths. What we should do as teachers is to get to know the flowers growing in our classrooms well, so that we can take the best possible care of them. We should strive not to let them fade, and give them the chance to bloom and grow in their own way.

Here are some ways we can nurture our own crop of flowers:

#### ★ Remember that not all flowers are red:

We should always bear in mind that our students have different personalities, skills and abilities. As Rebecca Oxford explains: *'While many language learners benefit from visual imagery, others have aural (sound-oriented), kinaesthetic (motion-oriented) or tactile (touch-oriented) learning style*



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preferences and therefore benefit from linking verbal material with sound, motion or touch.' This should be taken into consideration in all stages of learning, evaluating and assessing.

## ★ Allow each type of flower to find its own path:

Natalie Hess acknowledges that 'it is difficult to provide for individual learning styles'. This is especially true in very large classes and those where the students are at different levels. To ensure that all our students participate in classroom activities, we need to encourage and motivate them. Making them believe in what they can do will open a new path in front of them. Instead of forcing them to do mechanical activities with no purpose, allowing them to discover their hidden talents will change the atmosphere of our classrooms. All this may take some time, but the results will be great.

## ★ Enjoy the beauty of your flowers:

As teachers, we may sometimes be tempted to skip activities which are based on different learning styles. However, if we can spend some time on selecting a range of the right activities to give each and every student a chance to shine, this will make our lives easier. The best thing to do is to let the students express themselves and share their ideas with their peers. This will help them gradually improve their critical thinking skills. Students can be more active in language classrooms when teachers are aware of the impact of learning styles and design their lessons accordingly. Not only will the teacher improve the quality of their own teaching but, by implementing a range of activities involving all types of learners, they will also help the learners to develop their less-dominant preferred learning styles.

## ★ Don't be afraid of re-arranging your flowers:

You cannot learn a language without communicating. When our students do not have the chance to use and practise the target language outside the school, our job is made more difficult. To compensate, it is important that we should provide them with many pair- and groupwork activities which focus on communication. Heather McKay and Abigail Tom state that the use of different groupings (eg whole class, small groups, pairs and individuals) is one of the features of a properly balanced lesson.

## ★ Support your flowers in each phase of their growth:

Never forget that age matters. According to Robert DeKeyser: 'young children are characterized as haptic and manual. They do better if they respond to verbal stimuli with body movements ... As they age, learners develop a preference for a visual and/or auditory learning style.' Gaining an understanding of the nature and abilities of different age groups will definitely have a positive effect on the lessons we design.

## ★ Let your flowers enjoy their growth:

Learning a language is not possible if the students feel nervous or anxious. We should help our students to cope with their fears and to believe in themselves. As Griff Griffiths and Katy Keohane point out: 'If learners feel that what they are asked to do is relevant to their own lives, and that their feelings, thoughts, opinions and knowledge are valued, and crucial to the success of the activities, then they will be fully engaged in the tasks and more likely to be motivated to learn the target language.' This way, they will be enjoying their journey.

## ★ Love your flowers and treat them well:

Developing a good rapport with the students is extremely important. It affects each step of the lesson and has an impact on classroom management as well. According to

Zoltán Dörnyei and Tim Murphey: 'Teachers who share warm, personal interactions with their students, who respond to their concerns in an empathic manner and who succeed to establish relationships of mutual trust and respect with the learners, are more likely to inspire them in academic matters than those who have no personal ties with the learners.'



As Mrs (or Mr) Sun, I'm sure you are touching the lives of your flowers and helping them to gain new skills so that they can improve themselves. With the encouragement and confidence they gain in your lessons, finding the path to follow will be much easier. I hope the flowers blooming in your gardens will be as colourful as the rainbow, so that they will make a difference to other young lives in the future. I know that the process of growing is challenging and stressful – but remember: April showers bring May flowers! **ETP**

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