



Black Gold

Sara Cassidy
Illustrated by Helen Flook

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About the Book

At their new house in the country, Cyrus and Rudy spend the last days of summer selling dahlias, blackberries and tomatoes at their roadside stand. When a neighbor drops off a bin full of red wigglers, Rudy and Cyrus quickly become worm moguls, selling to the area farmers and gardeners. Cyrus uses the worms' castings to grow a cucumber to enter in the fall fair, but at the last moment substitutes a smooth, "perfect," store-bought cucumber from Mexico. He is quickly found out and given "natural" consequences.

Black Gold is the third book in a funny, sweet series about two young brothers who move from the city to the country.

About the Author

Sara Cassidy is an award-winning author of eight books for children and young teens. Her poetry, fiction and articles have been widely published. She lives in Victoria, British Columbia, with her three children. For more information, visit www.saracassidywriter.com.

About the Writing

The story was inspired by a "find the biggest blueberry contest" that Sara saw advertised while visiting Ontario. Sara thought the sometimes snarky and self-centered, but goodhearted and energetic Cyrus would be just the person to try to fake a blueberry entry in order to win. She switched the scene to the west coast, where Cyrus and his brother Rudy live, and turned the blueberry contest into a cucumber contest.

Teaching Ideas—Curriculum Connections

Prereading Ideas

- Cyrus and Rudy moved to the country at the start of summer. How are their lives be different now that they live in the country?
- Why do gardeners like worms?
- Cyrus does something wrong. Does this make him a bad person?

Classroom Discussion Questions

1. What did Cyrus do wrong when he entered El Cucumbro and not Cuke in the fair? (Discuss right and wrong action—i.e. ethics—and forgiveness and making amends.)
2. What makes Rudy anxious? What helps him stop being anxious?
3. What's so good about worms?
4. Are Cyrus and Rudy good brothers to each other? How or how not?
5. What can friends do help friends that are grieving?

Suggested Activities

- Worms! Have a worm bin in the classroom and feed them lunch scraps. Fertilize a school garden with the castings. Learn about life cycles. Release the worms at the end of the year. Make comics, study worm biology, learn what is compostable. More ideas here: www.canadianteachermagazine.com/archives/ctm_teaching_ideas/sept13-worm-bin.shtml
- Write a story about someone dying and how friends and family can make each other feel better.
- Grow cucumbers! Study how plants grow and what they need. Collect seeds from a cucumber and plant them in pots that can be moved outside when the weather is warm.
- Learn about anxiety and make a list of what you can do when you are anxious or a friend is. Make an anti-anxiety kit. The students can suggest what it should have, but examples are a book, skipping rope, joke book, a kaleidoscope, rain stick, felt pens and paper for drawing...

Other Titles and Websites of Interest

Books about worms: <https://happybrownhouse.com/10-books-about-worms>

Marty McGuire Digs Worms! Kate Messner. Scholastic, 2012

From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler. E.L. Konigsburg. Atheneum Books for Young People, 1998.

Other Books by the Author from Orca Book Publishers

Not For Sale (A Cyrus and Rudy story)

Blackberry Juice (A Cyrus and Rudy story)

Seeing Orange

Reviews and Awards

“Rudy has anxiety issues; both the memorial service for Cornelia and starting at a new school are stress-filled. This loving family, however, knows how to work together to help Rudy with his worries. Their calm and wise approach is just one of the winning aspects of this simple, down-to-earth (literally, with all the worms) early chapter book that’s jam-packed with likable, well-realized characters and a compassionate but never didactic message. A worthy addition to collections for budding readers.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*

Not for Sale

Canadian Children’s Book Centre’s Best Books selection

“Cheerful and full of insight...a real winner.” —*Booklist*

“A slice of very funny family life...A heartwarming romp.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

Blackberry Juice

Chocolate Lily Book Award finalist

“Humorous, short and hard to put down.” —*School Library Journal*

“Captivating and entertaining.” —*Resource Links*

Seeing Orange

Chocolate Lily Book Award finalist

Canadian Children’s Book Centre’s Best Books starred selection

“A wonderful little novel for beginning readers.” —*Resource Links*

“Just fantastic.” —CBC Radio