

111 Trees — Teaching Guide

About the Book

In a small village in India, a boy grows up to make a huge difference in his community by planting trees to celebrate the birth of every girl. Based on a true story, this book celebrates environmental sustainability, community activism and ecofeminism.

This is the story of Sundar Paliwal, who is from a small Indian village ruled by ancient customs. As he grows to be a man, Sundar suffers much heartbreak and decides it is time for change to come to his village. Sundar is determined to live in a place where girls are valued as much as boys and where the land is not devastated by irresponsible mining. Sundar's plan? To celebrate the birth of every girl with the planting of 111 trees. Though many villagers resist at first, Sundar slowly gains their support. And today, there are over a quarter of a million trees in his village, providing food, water and opportunities for women to earn a living. His efforts have turned a once-barren and deforested landscape into a fertile and prosperous one where girls can thrive.

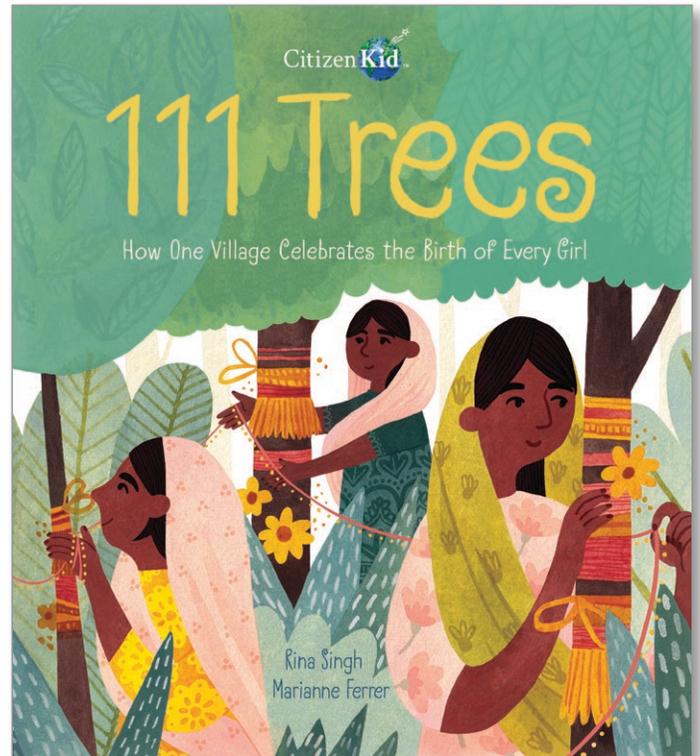
Based on true events in the life of Sundar Paliwal, and written in collaboration with him, Rina Singh's uplifting story shows how one person can make a difference in a community. Beautiful illustrations by Marianne Ferrer sensitively bring the evolution of the village to life. With strong links to the science curriculum, this book offers lessons on environmental awareness, sustainability and stewardship, as well as the concept of ecofeminism. It also explores ideas of social development, community and culture, and the character education traits of responsibility and cooperation. A thoroughly researched author's note with photographs and more information about the village of Piplantri is included.

About the Author

RINA SINGH grew up in a small town in India that didn't even have a public library. However, the library at the Catholic school she attended was well stocked.

When she grew up, she moved to Canada and spent a decade in Montreal, where she got an MFA in creative writing at Concordia University and then a teaching degree from McGill University. She taught in an arts-based school in Toronto for 25 years.

She is the author of many books. She has presented at literary conferences and festivals around the world. She wrote *111 Trees* in her blue house in Toronto surrounded by tall trees, after taking a trip to India, where she met Sundar Paliwal.



ISBN 978-1-5253-0120-9

About the Illustrator

MARIANNE FERRER is a freelance illustrator and graphic design graduate from the Université du Québec à Montréal. She currently lives in Lasalle, Quebec.



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Outline of Activities

Activity One: Group and Choral Read

Activity Two: Tree Planting

Activity Three: Tree Journal

Activity One: Group and Choral Read

Whole Group

Begin by reading aloud the title page and the preface of *111 Trees*. Then, starting with the spread on pages 4–5, go around the room and ask one student to read each page. If your group is too young for a choral reading, read the book aloud and ask students to follow along in their own books.

Stop at the end of each page to review the pictures and details.

Pages 4–5: What do you see in this picture? *Sundar and his mother carrying water pots; a lizard; a lot of rocks; only very small or short plants and shrubs; sand.* What kind of landscape is this? *A desert.*

Pages 6–7: Why do you think Sundar’s mother is crying? *The family doesn’t have enough to eat and their house is too small.* How does Sundar look? *Worried or caring.*

Page 8: What happens to Sundar’s mother? *She dies* or *She is bitten by a snake and dies.*

Page 9: Why do you think Sundar hugs a tree sometimes? *He is pretending the tree is his mom* or *He feels sad and alone.*

Pause here and check in with your students. Some may be having a hard time with this story. It is very sad, but it is also hopeful.

Pages 10–11: What has changed about Sundar? *He now has a mustache* or *He is all grown up* or *He is now a husband and father.* What seems important to Sundar? *His family and the natural world.* The more students talk about how they make inferences, the more their reading skills will develop.

Pages 12–13: How does Sundar look now? *Angry and frustrated.* How does the mine affect the land? *The mine is ruining the land.* Ask students how they think Sundar feels when he quits.

Pages 14–15: Point out to students the hope in the phrase “Sundar brims with ideas.” While Sundar has quit his job and is probably worried about how he will take care of his family, he isn’t hopeless! Ask students to tell you about his ideas.

Is the picture of the girls reading under a tree what Sundar’s village is like now, or what he hopes it will become? What are some clues in the picture that help you know?

Write the word *sarpanch* on the board. What are some words from your communities that mean something similar? *Chief, town manager, mayor.*

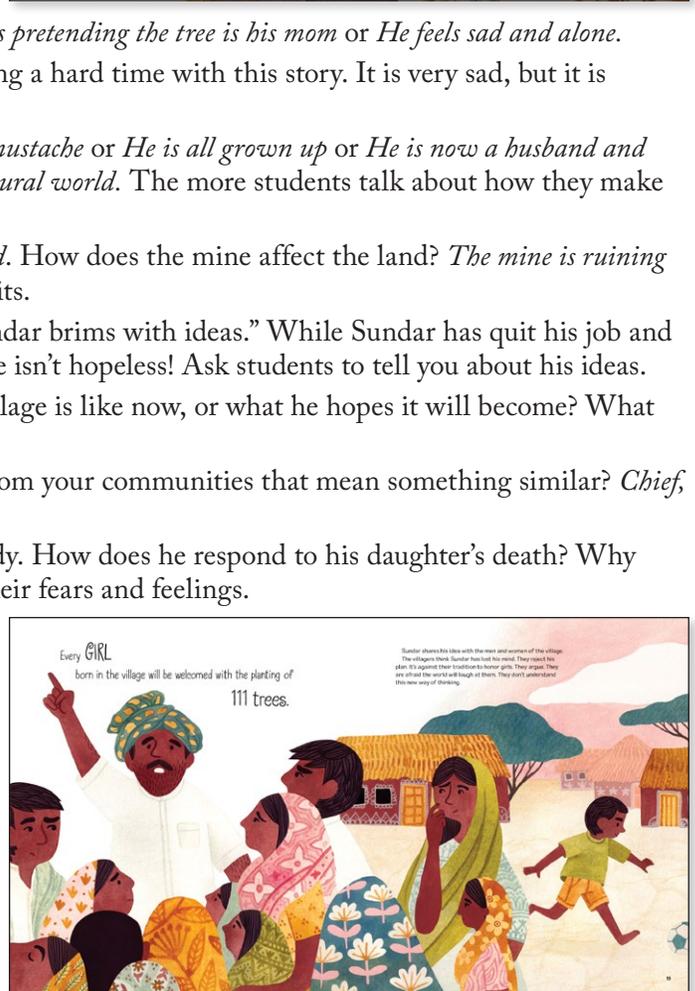
Pages 16–17: Point out that Sundar again faces a terrible tragedy. How does he respond to his daughter’s death? Why does he plant saplings, or baby trees? Let students talk about their fears and feelings.

Pages 18–19: Why do the words on page 18 look different? *Because he is speaking, making an announcement.*

Pages 20–21: What are Sundar’s goals for the village? *Equal treatment of boys and girls; enough resources for the community; school instead of marriage for girls.*

Pages 22–23: How is this picture of the village different from the very first picture (flip to page 4 to remind them)? *There is grass and more plant life; There is a river; The people look happy.*

Pages 24–25: What kinds of trees are people planting when girls are born? *Fruit trees.* Why don’t women need to walk so far to fetch water anymore? *Because rainwater is stored in the new trenches.* Making connections between pages helps students follow the story.



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Pages 26–27: Why do the girls feel bonded, or connected, to the trees? *Because the trees were planted when the girls were born and because the girls know the trees are there to celebrate their lives.* Ask students to tell you what they see in the picture, and again point to the difference in the landscape now as compared to the first picture.

Pages 28–29: How does Sundar look in this picture? *Happy, proud.* Write the names of the kinds of trees on the board and ask if anyone has tried the fruits of any of these trees and how they taste.

Pages 30–31: Ask students to talk about what they see in this picture and if they think Sundar has changed his village for the better.

Read **pages 32–35** aloud to students (even if you've been choral reading to this point) and point to the photographs that make it clear just how real Sundar's story is. The information on these pages will fill in gaps (like what aloe vera plants can do!) and provide details for further discussion about Sundar, gender equity, ecofeminism and more.

Activity Two: Tree Planting

Small Groups

MATERIALS NEEDED

One per group:

- Sapling (the easiest to find in your area) with roots enclosed in dirt and burlap cloth
- Shovel
- Bucket of water
- Journals and pencils

As a large group, discuss the location for the tree-planting activity. Get approval from the school or community center where you plan to plant trees. Travel as a large group to that spot with all materials. Divide students into small groups and place each group several feet away from one another.

Instruct each group to:

1. Dig a hole a little wider and deeper than the burlap root ball of your sapling. Set aside the soil, sod clumps and rocks you uncover.
2. Remove any twine or wire and the burlap from the root ball, and place the root ball in the hole.
3. Fill the hole with dirt but stop a couple of inches from the top. Fill the rest of the hole with water. Let the water soak in, then fill the rest of the hole with dirt.
4. Take the rocks and clumps of dirt from the hole you dug and place them in a circle around the base of the tree. Water again.

As a whole group, plan to come back and water the trees every week or more. Before you leave the grounds, have each student draw a picture of their tree. Tell them to include the date on their drawings.

Activity Three: Tree Journal

Individual Work

Once back in the classroom, or on another day, have students write in their journals about how planting the tree made them feel. Ask them to write about something they would like their tree to celebrate.

Every week for the rest of the year, visit the tree-planting site to water and tend to the trees. Students should draw a picture of their tree on each visit and include the date, so they can see how the tree is growing and changing.

After every visit, have students write in their journals about their tree and reflect on the thing they planted the tree to celebrate.

