

The green wars – A2/B1

Two friends take action to create a beautiful green town. But what's the best way to help the environment, and is it worth going to prison for?

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. a truck
2. guerrilla gardening
3. a mayor
4. soil
5. the council
6. a seed
7. bamboo
8. community service

Definition

- a. growing plants without permission on someone else's land or in a public space
- b. a large road vehicle; a lorry
- c. work that someone has to do because they committed a crime
- d. a tall tropical grass that grows very fast
- e. a person who is elected to be the leader of a town or city
- f. the brown material that plants grow in
- g. a small object that a plant produces that grows into a new plant
- h. a group of people who form the government of a town

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Plan 1: Guerrilla gardening

The time is what the army call 'oh-three-hundred-hours' – three o'clock in the morning. We're in the car park of the sports centre. It's empty except for me and my best friend, Janey and an old truck. It belongs to the company that put grass on the town football pitch last week.

'What are we doing here?' I ask.

'Here's the plan,' says Janey. 'First, we take that truck ...'

'I'm going home,' I say. 'Good night.'

'Then, we drive to the Town Hall. And then we use the grass in the truck to cover the high street from top to bottom. Like one great big garden. Are you ready?'

I think about it for a moment. Then I smile.

'OK,' I say. 'Let's go.'

...

Our new green high street is beautiful. But we don't have time to enjoy it. The judge says we committed a crime. She gives me 150 hours of community service. Janey gets 300 hours because it was her idea.

I do my hours and return to my studies. Janey spends her time planning how we're going to do our guerrilla gardening better in future. We want to make the whole town green. Janey's ideas will probably put us both in prison. But someone has to help the planet.

Plan 2: The bamboo forest

Every September, our town has a festival. Crowds of happy people eat hotdogs and wave little flags. Then everyone goes to the park on the edge of town. The mayor gives a speech, and everyone has fun.

I should be at home packing my bags to go and study engineering at university. But, as soon as everyone has gone to the park, Janey picks me up in another 'borrowed' truck. This one is full of soil.

'Get in,' she says. 'There's enough soil to cover the high street from Baker's Street to Humber Road, right past the new shopping centre. I've mixed it with bamboo seeds. It's a kind of seed that grows really, really fast. Before the festival is over, there will be a mini forest in front of the supermarket. No one will be able to get in or out of that street. It really does grow that fast. What do you think?'

Well ... why not? I'll be at university next week anyway. 'Let's do it.'

...

Janey was right, bamboo grows fast. It was as high as your knees before anyone discovered what we had done. By the time the council found someone to cut it down, our bamboo forest was taller than the mayor.

It was great, but they took it away. After what we did last year, they knew it was us. Plus, Janey had bought the bamboo online with her bank card, so it was definitely her. This time, she got six months in prison.

She didn't tell them I had helped her, so I still went to university. But I changed my degree to Agriculture and Wildlife. I wanted to learn all about plants, gardening and farming. I thought it would help Janey and me succeed as guerrilla gardeners.

Plan 3: The vertical farm

I'm wearing my new business suit. My presentation is ready, and there's a small plastic model of my idea on the table. On the other side of the table, my three heads of department are waiting to see my final university project – the vertical farm.

We've seen what happens when we do what Janey says. Now it's my turn.

‘Good morning,’ I say. ‘During my studies I’ve learned a lot about city farming. After university, I want to do something with what I’ve learned.’

I show them the model. ‘This is the high street of my town. This is our shopping centre, and this is an old, nine-floor car park. No one has used it for the last two years and it’s now for sale.’

I start the presentation. They can see my designs on the big screen while I talk.

‘I’ve designed a city farm using the carpark building. There will be eight floors to farm fruit and vegetables. This design will collect rainwater to water the soil. And we will use energy from the sun to power the special growing lights.’

The presentation changes to show the maths of how the farm will make money.

‘I will rent the space to small local farmers. We will sell everything in local shops to be as good for the environment as possible. Also, the ninth floor will be for any local people who want to grow their own food.’

My audience looks interested, but I haven’t finished yet.

‘To prove the project can work, I’ve talked to local people and farmers. I’ve received letters of support and interest from all sides. I also gave this presentation to my bank manager. The bank will give me money, - *if* I can convince the town council to sell me the site.’

I turn off the presentation. ‘Are there any questions?’

...

My project gets the highest marks in my class. But in the real world that doesn’t matter.

The town council didn’t accept my plan. Instead, they decided to sell the site to a company who will destroy the car park and build a block of luxury apartments. The mayor says they will bring new energy to the town. So that’s the end of the vertical farm.

Janey kept getting in trouble while I was away. But she was out of prison when I came back, so I met her for a drink.

‘You should never have changed from my way of doing things,’ she tells me. ‘Nothing sends our message better than covering streets with grass, trees and plants.’

Her latest trip to prison was for doing exactly that, again. But I have just finished university and my future looks good.

Do you think I was clever enough not to listen to her?

Plan 4: Guerrilla gardening 2.0

This time, I agreed to do part of what Janey wanted.

We drive around town to search for the perfect location. Not in front of the Town Hall or the shopping centre. They are the kinds of places Janey thinks will send the biggest message. But I don’t think these are the best places to choose.

I'm looking for something different. Somewhere that's not in the town centre. Not the best neighbourhood, but a poor one. One that never gets any public money. One where the road is full of holes and the pavement is all broken. I'm looking for somewhere where people don't have cars outside their houses.

We find the perfect place.

One night, we arrive in another 'borrowed' truck. We carefully fill the whole street with soil from one pavement to the other. It's just like Janey's old plans, but this time we plant vegetable gardens in front of every house. We post letters through people's doors with gardening instructions, so the new lucky owners will know what to do. The letters also mention how much money you can save if you grow your own food – you'd be surprised.

In the same neighbourhood, we put grass over those broken old pavements for the kids to play on. Finally, we put up a sign that says, 'Please Walk on the Grass'.

When we've finished, we're both covered in soil and completely exhausted. But Janey puts an arm around my shoulders and smiles.

'Not a bad plan, for you,' she says. 'You're learning!'

...

The people from the town council are extremely angry, of course. They send workers to the street to take it all away. But the people who live there join their arms together to protect their new gardens. Can you believe it?

Just as I hoped, the people in this neighbourhood like what we've done to their street!

Later that day, the mayor goes to the area to explain that what we did is a crime. He isn't very pleased when a local TV reporter arrives.

The reporter asks him, 'The town council hasn't spent any money on this street for 20 years! Now someone else has come and improved it! Why don't you want it to be a place for growing food? Why can't it be a place for children to play and learn?'

It was the main story on the national evening news, and the whole town was delighted. Well, everyone apart from the mayor, of course.

The night after that, Janey and I do it again, but this time we work fast and hard. We just leave big piles of soil, seeds and instructions on as many streets as we can.

People get the idea now, and we can't do all the work ourselves.

We manage three more nights of that before the police catch us.

Plan 5: The right place to fight

So here I am, in prison.

It could be worse. The plan was mainly my idea, but I don't have to stay here too long. That's because it's my first time in prison. Or it's my first time as an adult, at least. But Janey has been in prison many times now, so she gets longer. When I get out of prison, she will still have

two years left. She doesn't mind too much. She's happy that 'Guerrilla Gardening 2.0' was successful.

We're in separate buildings in prison, but we both work on the prison farm. I start teaching Janey some of what I learned at university. Soon she has learned everything I can teach her.

When it's time for me to get out of prison, we say goodbye.

Janey says, 'Don't worry. I'll look after the farm. When you get sent back here for your next green crime, it'll be waiting for you!'

But my next plan does not include returning to prison.

...

Do you remember those piles of soil we left in streets all over town? Half of them are vegetable gardens now. The council doesn't like it, but we chose our locations well. The people that live there are really happy. And politicians don't want to take away gardens from happy people. If they do that, people will remember at election time.

One thing I've learned is this:

If you want to win the battle, choose the right place to fight.

The old mayor is retiring this year, you see. So the next time I try to re-green my town, I'll enter the election for the job of town mayor.

Last year I was a guerrilla gardener.

Next year I'll be the mayor. And our town will be the greenest place in the country.

Story written by Andrew Leon Hudson and adapted by Nicola Prentis.

Tasks

Task 1

Match the plans (1–5) with what happens (a–e).

Plan

1. Plan 1: Guerrilla gardening
2. Plan 2: The bamboo forest
3. Plan 3: The vertical farm
4. Plan 4: Guerrilla gardening 2.0
5. Plan 5: The right place to fight

What happens

- a. Only Janey goes to prison for this plan.
- b. People in the town like this plan.
- c. The narrator thinks he has learned something important that will make this plan work.
- d. The narrator is surprised when this plan doesn't work.
- e. They create a big garden in the centre of town.

Task 2

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. Plan 1 is Janey's idea.	True	False
2. The truck they use belongs to the narrator.	True	False
3. When Janey goes to prison for the first time, the narrator goes to university.	True	False
4. The vertical farm plan includes nine floors for farmers to grow food.	True	False
5. The narrator gets a bad mark from the university for the vertical farm project.	True	False
6. Janey is happy with the results of Guerrilla gardening 2.0.	True	False
7. Janey and the narrator can continue gardening in prison.	True	False
8. The narrator's final plan involves committing a crime.	True	False

Discussion

Did you like the story? Do you think Plan 5 will work?

Answers

Preparation task

1. b
2. a
3. e
4. f
5. h
6. g
7. d
8. c

Task 1

1. e
2. a
3. d
4. b
5. c

Task 2

1. True
2. False
3. True
4. False
5. False
6. True
7. True
8. False