

# Demystifying the Vegetal Symbolisms in the Children's Picture book *Lola Plants a Garden*

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## Abstract

*Vegetal beings are demarcated in the domain of Children's literature. Many research works in children's picture book are given less priority to appreciate and acknowledge the representation of plants kingdom amidst the upping of detrimental crisis of nature and shoot up of technology in this modern world as well. This article concentrates on the representation of vegetal symbolism and its relationship with Children in the children's picture book *Lola plants a Garden*. This picture book was authored by Anna McQuinn and illustrated by Rosalind Beardshaw. Lola plays a fulcrum role in the book; she was elated to grow plants in her garden through book reading with her mother; emotions that she receives when she sows seeds and when the seeds sprout in her garden. The relationship she builds with plants made her to be environmental concern, emotional intelligence and empathy. Eventually, this article results on the role of children's picture book to sculpt nature centered values and encourage children to celebrate nature as a part of their routine; additionally, it moulds children to get rid off from the addiction towards mobile games, social media and smart phones and unfurls their perspectives to create a rapport with plants as their fellow beings and to make children as eco-citizens.*

**Keywords:** *Children, plants, eco-consciousness, vegetal beings, eco-citizen, picture books and Nature.*

## Introduction

In recent studies, representation of plants in the realm of literature is mounting due to the natural disaster and climate changes. Even genres of literature are also pertained to the global crisis and to embody natural ecosystem in literary works, for instance climate fictions, eco-thriller fictions and nautical fictions. Research focuses on Plants in Children literature is also shoot up due to dearth of eco-consciousness and at the same time it also permeates awareness among children about preserving, appreciating and celebrating plants and other botanical beings like trees, climbers, shrubs, flowers and creepers. Children's Picture book is a significant genre in Children's Literature which makes children to learn language, concepts, ideas, moral values and lessons for their academic and professional growth. Additionally, the notion of children's literature and picture books ring similar view; children have been "fostered and embedded social, intellectual and aesthetic change"; it is also an attempt to identify "the changes that are currently taking place—and those that are being resisted—in writing for the young" (Reynolds, 2007, p. 23). It also encapsulates symbolic

development of children to know the abstract concepts in picture book, analogical reasoning about what they read and perceive from both visual and verbal text and moral values, environmental awareness and social emotional development through the usage of social based text and strategies of emotional building . Children will construct meaning out of the picture and words in the picture books. As such the case, plants in children's picture book draws children towards plants; emotionally and amicably attach towards plants and to create and spread an eco-conscious society through plants.

Phytocriticism is a recent approach in literary criticism; It was pruned by John Charles Ryan in his innovative book titled *Plants in Contemporary Poetry: Ecocriticism and the Botanical Imagination*. It commingles the fields of Neurobotany and Literary plants studies by overarching anthropocentric literary studies. Ryan vociferously discusses the significance of representation of plants in literary text by challenging twentieth century Anglophone poets who demean botanical life by scaling down from animal life. Phytocriticism is “attentive to the representation of vegetal life—forests, trees, bushes, flowers, herbs, orchids, wildflowers, garden plants—in cultural artifacts, including, but not limited to, literary works”(Ryan, 2018, p.10). Plants used in the terms of aesthetics, stasis, and standing reserve but material life of plants were ostracized down the ages. Even Aristotle in his *Scientia de anima*, ranked soul of animal and intellectual soul of human beings is higher than vegetal soul of plants. Similarly, the botanical world reflects in scientific, social, and educational realm prejudices animals over plants.

Phytocritics view plants as a being able to behave, decide, feel, learn, and remember. It extends to rethink that plants plays pivotal role in shaping of cultural production in which vegetal life inclined to act in active. “Plants are basis upon which all other life depends upon” (Robbins, 1994, p. 440). Animals and humans life are depended upon plants. It is used as food, medicine, shelter, clothing and luxury items. Plants have a capacity to be a catholicon for many adverse situations in the live of human. Plants act as an able chemist to human in all form of situation that man undergoes in his life. Plants considered as antidote for unnatural circumstances and make the man to get rid off from the state of affliction. Eventually, it consoles the heart and mind of man.

*Lola plants a Garden* starts with a favorite poem that Lola loves to read along with her mother. It starts with “Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow ?” this question follows answer in the next line as with silver bells and cockleshells and pretty maids all in a row. The poem which Lola reads and admires is something concentrated on how to grow a garden. As the

children picture book is accompanied by parents, elders or teacher reading with children, the depiction of the very first page illustrated with Lola and her mother read together the portrayal of the garden in the book. It shows parents seed the value of celebrating nature, conserving the ecosystems and inculcating the habit of upbringing a plant in living space. As the poem inspired her to have garden in her home, Lola wants to plant a garden and her mother says that they have a room near the vegetables. Lola's mother creates a space for plants to grow in her house. Plants and garden become a place of bliss and celebration for Lola. The very next page illustrates that Lola gets book about gardens from the library. It reverberates that how she got inspiration to grow a plants after she read a book on planting a garden. It shows how children imbibe the ecological values they read in a book consciously or unconsciously and convert it into a practice. It also reverberates how she grows emotionally with plants. Even Lola's attire consists of colorful flowers with yellow and red. It reflects that Lola wants to live with flowers and it gives her satisfaction, content and fulfilling her mind when she wears attires which printed with flowers. The lessons Lola learnt from the book cause her to be an eco conscious in her real life as well. Lola chooses her favorite flowers from the books and mommy makes a list of it. Here, flowers symbolized as compassion, peace and bliss for Lola to celebrate the nature and to be aware to preserve and know the flowers name and to recollect it. Even she wants her dresses to be printed with flowers and plants, it propels that she awakens and mould herself to live an eco centered life.

Lola visits the garden store next day to buy seeds for her garden. She and her mommy make a garden by sowing the seeds in the garden and marks with seed packets where the flowers are sowed. This occurrence showcases the mother of Lola does not teach her daughter to be one with plants through book reading but takes her to the place to buy the seeds for planting. It reflects Lola's mother stands as an epitome for her to lead a life with eco conscious. Lola's mommy makes her descendants to anticipate for upbringing and preserving plants in the garden. The next illustration in the book splashes that Lola lies in front of the place where she sows the seeds in the garden. She does not have patience to see the seeds sprout in her garden. It echoes she is amazed to see the leaves and flowers which come out of the seed. Lola cannot wait to see the growth of seeds, prior to that she creates her own flower book and her mommy types Lola's favorite poem in her typewriting machine. Lola is excitement to glue the poem on the book she creates by her own. She wants to make strings of bells and finds shells and old beads in order to decor the plants that grow in her garden. She also makes a little chart work of a girl and named it as Little Mary Mary, a character that she read in the

book along with her mommy. These visual and verbal depictions of Lola's attitude to plants spark the way she discovers and renews herself artistically, emotionally and eco consciously.

The next page is splashed with Lola lies in her garden and sees a tiny green shoots from the seed she sowed. She pulls out the weeds that grow around the shoots which grown in her garden. Lola wants to nurture the tiny plants which grow in her garden. She wants to remove off the unwanted weeds which grow near the shoots which come up from the ground. Transactions with plants (e.g., gum trees, melaleuca shrubs, and herbaceous wildflowers) intersect with an awareness of ecological exchanges and a spiritual consciousness of landscape that combine a range of belief systems (Murray, 2012). The communication between Lola and plants reflects Lola's wholeheartedness to protect plants in her garden and she takes privilege in preserving the shoots. Shoots symbolizes the outcome of Lola's consciousness of protecting nature, it also refers to the maturity of Lola in protecting nature as her fellow being and she obsesses the role of eco- citizen. Shoots also refers to Lola's enlightenment in caring and nurturing of plants amidst technology addiction.

The following page depicts the flowers in Lola's garden grow higher and open up to the sun. Lola stands amidst the garden and looks the height of the flowers that she grows in her garden. It invites various living things like butterflies to fly around the flower. The growth of plants and flowers which blooms in the garden shows Lola's happiness is not rely on material things of the world but on the upbringing of flowers, plants and shoots in her garden. Moreover, it gives pride, joy and self- esteem about herself for growing eco conscious. Growth of plants in Lola's garden symbolizes not only the natural process or progress of seeds but it also reflects rewarding, fulfilling and content life of children when they depend on nature and nature centered life.

Lola's father helps Lola to hang shinny bells around the garden like festoons. She wants some place to hang her Little Mary Mary chart in her garden. It seems to be a simple occurrence for readers. But for Lola, it meant to be somewhat stupendous joy for spending time with her father. Plants grow tall, shoots sprout larger and various natural things like butterflies to fly amidst them. This depiction of growth of plants, flowers and shoots emphasizes the level up of growth of Lola in preserving nature as she stands in the ladder to hang the bells. It further sheds light on plants becomes the source of happiness in the family of Lola. Even Lola's mother and father feel happy for their daughter and spend valuable time with their daughter Lola. Plants become a source of

happiness, content, compassion, and permeate ultimate serene in Lola's family. The following page depicts Lola and her mommy plans to bake cup cakes as her friends Orla, Ben and Ty visiting her garden. Lola wears dress which printed with colorful flowers and she hangs flower in her head. She finds happiness in adorning herself with flowers. In this occurrence, Plants symbolize source for cherishing quality time with friends, celebrating and creating memories with friends, and to create awareness to fellow beings about conserving nature.

Lola's friends look at the garden and they love every plants grow in the garden. They share the crunchy peas and sweet strawberries that Mommy grew in the garden. In this occurrence also Lola wears dress which printed with flowers. Here, vegetable beings like peanuts and sweet strawberries stand as a labor of man, excitement of family and content life of human. Children associate themselves with garden and eat snakes which grow in Lola's garden. Then Lola narrates a story about Mary Mary that she read in the book along with her mother. One of her friends interrupts and asks her "What kind of garden will Lola plant next?" it shows Lola's friends also got excited and influenced to see the next plan of Lola in the garden.

Plants stand as a harbinger which propels vision in children's life, as a protector of nature and to celebrate every growth of nature. As plants symbolize plethora of ideas and views about relationship between plants and children, this picture book unfurl the children's view about living a life with eco centered space will bring content, excitement and delight. "Environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imaging nature and humanity's relation to it" (Buell, 1995, p. 2). Parents, teachers and elders need to inculcate in children about human relationship with plants, benefits of plants and consequence of subjugating plants. In this picture book, Parents become facilitator to brush up their child's mind to dispose a life with nature. This picture book also contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection of Children's literature, and Phytocriticism. Moreover, it creates profound imprints in the mind of children about imbibing environmental values, self- discovery of one's character, and to grow emotionally with plants. It also further serves as a catalyst for exploring complex emotions, empathy and artistic faculty of children characters employed in the picture book. Eventually it extends to open up the readers perspectives to live a life as eco-citizen amidst rapid advancement of technological world.

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