

The Green Team

by Diana Noonan

“Grab your sunhats, and follow me to the garden!” said Mr Wetini to the Green Team. “We’ve got a competition to win!”

The Green Team was the school’s gardening group. To win the competition, they would have to use vegetables from their school garden to make a special lunch for Mr and Mrs Farrell, the owners of the local garden centre. The prize was a new wheelbarrow and a set of gardening tools for the school.

“Lots of other schools will be entering the competition,” said Mr Wetini. “If we want to win, Mr and Mrs Farrell have to think our kai is the best.”

Sefa looked at the school garden and gave a big sigh. “The only vegetable here is silverbeet,” he said.

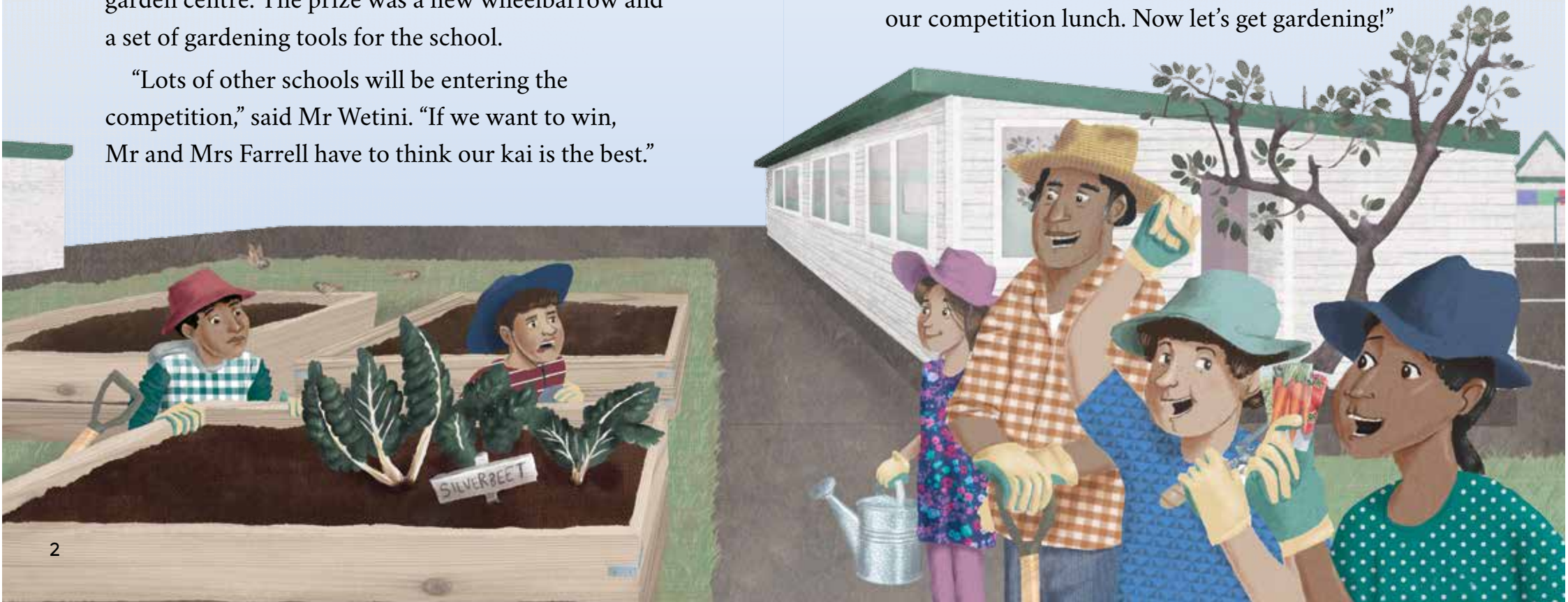
“We can’t make a special lunch with that,” added Ara.

“Silverbeet is *gross!*” said Nico.

“Silverbeet is strong,” said Mr Wetini. “It stayed alive all winter. Now it’s spring, and it’s still growing.”

“But we don’t *have* to use silverbeet to make our special lunch,” said Shai. “That’s why we got these.” She held up some packets of seed.

“That’s right,” said Lucca. “We’ve got three whole months. We can grow lots of different vegetables for our competition lunch. Now let’s get gardening!”



By the end of the afternoon, the group had sown carrot, lettuce, and radish seeds to grow a salad. They'd also sown zucchini seeds so they could make zucchini and egg fritters.

"Did someone remember to plant some eggs?" joked Mr Wetini.

Over the next few months, the Green Team watched and waited for their vegetables to grow. But there was one *big* problem – the weather. It was the coldest spring for years. The sun hardly ever came out. Instead, the rain kept falling, and the wind kept blowing. The garden turned into a big, muddy pond.

"The competition is only a week away," said Sefa, "and our vegetables still haven't grown."

"The silverbeet is looking good," said Mr Wetini.

"We can't win a competition with silverbeet," said Ara.

"I don't even like silverbeet," groaned Nico.

"Silverbeet is all we've got," said Lucca. "We'll *have* to use it."

"My dad makes some yummy fritters with silverbeet," said Shai. "I could ask him how he makes them."

"Hey," said Sefa. "Why don't we see if we can all find some recipes for special things we can make with silverbeet. We could ask at home."



The next day, everyone brought along silverbeet recipes – there were enough to fill a cookbook!

"I had to show my grandfather a photograph of silverbeet," said Lucca. "He wasn't sure what it was. He calls it 'bietola'."

"My gran wants to come and help us with the cooking," said Nico.

"So does my dad," said Shai.

"Excellent!" said Mr Wetini. "The more helpers, the better."

On the morning of the competition, the school kitchen was full of the sound of chopping, mixing, and beating. Nico's gran was there and so was Shai's father. Ara's mother and Lucca's grandfather had come to help, too. Pots were steaming, and pans were sizzling.



At twelve o'clock, Mr and Mrs Farrell arrived. Shai showed them to their table, and everyone sat down. Then Sefa welcomed the visitors and explained what had happened to their garden. "We had a very cold, wet spring," he said, "but our silverbeet grew well! So we've used silverbeet recipes from around the world."

"These are silverbeet dolmas," said Ara. "They're from Kurdistan, like me!"

"These are silverbeet bhaji," smiled Shai. "They're from India."

"This is silverbeet lasagne," said Lucca. "It's Italian."

"This pie is spanakopita," explained Nico. "It's a kind of Greek silverbeet pie, but it's got pūhā in it too, so it's half Greek and half Māori!"

Sefa unwrapped a warm tinfoil parcel. "This is silverbeet palusami," he said. "It's a bit Samoan and a bit Kiwi."



Nico said a karakia, and then everyone began eating. Ara watched Mr and Mrs Farrell nervously. She saw Mr Farrell take a mouthful of dolma and smile. Then Mrs Farrell ate a piece of bhaji, and she smiled, too. The visitors tried a little of everything. Then they tried a little more ... and some more after that.

When the meal was over, the Farrells were both looking very happy.

"Thank you," said Mrs Farrell as they left. "I didn't know silverbeet could be so tasty!"



Two weeks later, just before the school holidays, a parcel arrived at the school. It was addressed to the Green Team. At lunchtime, Mr Wetini called the group together. Then he opened the letter that came with the parcel.

“Great work, everyone!” he grinned. “We’ve won a special prize in the gardening competition!”

The Green Team cheered.

“Kauri Drive School came first,” he continued, “but it says here that they grew their vegetables in a greenhouse. That means they won’t have been bothered by the wet weather. We’ve been given a special prize for making the best lunch using only *one* vegetable.”

Mr Wetini opened the parcel.

“A worm farm!” gasped Ara. ‘Coo-ool!’

And when Mr Wetini took the lid off the worm farm, there was *another* surprise inside – a giant packet of silverbeet seed!



illustrations by
Josh Morgan

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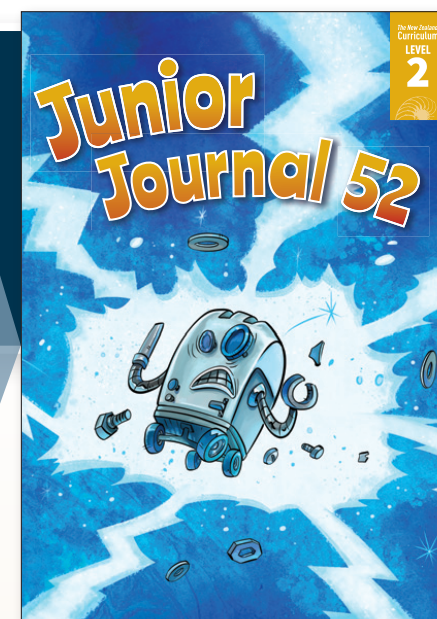
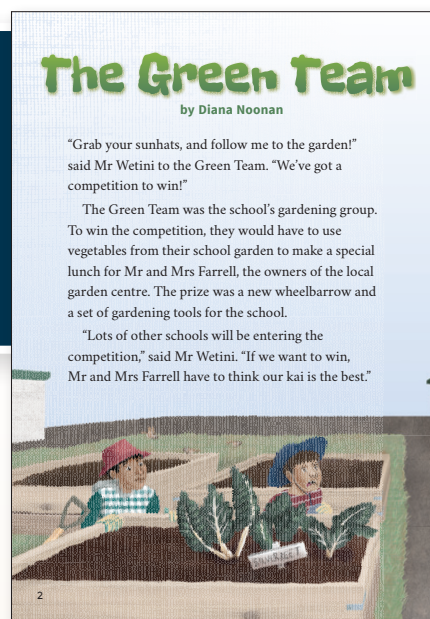
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