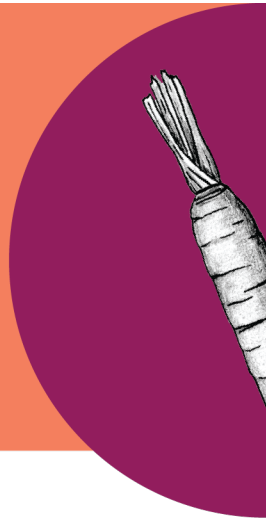


THE **EDIBLE**  
**SCHOOLYARD**  
PROJECT



UNDERSTANDING ORGANIC



UNDERSTANDING ORGANIC: CONNECTIONS  
TO ACTION IN THE GARDEN CLASSROOM





# UNDERSTANDING ORGANIC

## RATIONALE

This curriculum is informed by a desire to give students tools and practices to consider the context of the issues presented within. Issue-based curricula often address large problems without providing a way for learners to connect the content to their lives or to what matters to them. This curriculum explores the topic of organic in a way that provides ample opportunity for learners to make connections to their own assumptions, opinions, and experiences with organic.

*Understanding Organic* is written as a [spiral curriculum](#) in which complex topics are introduced early in the sequence and then layered with meaning in subsequent lessons. This format helps to provide context for students and set up multi-faceted understandings of issues. This is a departure from traditional curriculum approaches that build from simple to complex understandings in a linear fashion. The multiple layers and modes of engagement with topics support students to build meaning and connections with the material.

Throughout the curriculum learners are asked to revisit concepts of organic and complicate those ideas with new perspectives. The practice of returning to a concept and integrating new information is a valuable approach for lifelong learning and is particularly helpful when orienting towards action and engagement. This curriculum is not created for learners to emerge with the same set of understandings, but rather to embrace the iterative process of learning through critical engagement and self-reflection. Learners have the opportunity to build on their understandings of organic, realize how organic relates to their lives, and generate ideas of how they can engage with food systems to create justice-oriented solutions.

## ABOUT THIS CURRICULUM

The curriculum invites the learner to engage with the following essential questions: What is organic and what does it represent? What informs our knowledge of organic? How is change enacted around organic? This curriculum does not offer definite answers to these questions but instead invites a dialogue to solicit the thoughts, opinions, and ideas of the learner. *Understanding Organic* prompts students to learn about organic not only through textual analysis and discussion but also with hands-on explorations of the farming and gardening practices that define organic agriculture.

In the garden classroom students build their gardening skills and knowledge of organic practices and principles. Students use their observations and explorations in the garden to deepen their understandings of the concepts. Having their hands in the soil and practicing cultivating the earth prompt a different type of learning than reading and discussion. This curriculum combines and alternates between approaches to allow students a range of entry-points for discovery and connection.



# UNDERSTANDING ORGANIC

This curriculum prioritizes creating space for open discussions. Accordingly, the learning goals for the first lessons are not for students to be able to recite the definition of organic or list regulations, but rather for them to explore what organic represents to them. *Understanding Organic* details discussion formats that allow students to unpack, complicate, and make sense of their existing knowledge while integrating new information and perspectives.

Another primary skill and learning strategy practiced in this curriculum is textual analysis. As students explore the concepts of organic, they are also given tools to interrogate sources of information and to examine their own reactions and biases to new information. Students are encouraged to build their understanding of organic through careful text and media analysis. The purpose of such analysis is to complicate, critique, and connect, rather than to arrive at a shared set of conclusions.

## **Audience for Lessons**

The lessons in this curriculum are written to a student audience. We feel it is easier for a teacher to read and adapt a lesson written for a student than it is for a student to find their role in a lesson plan written for teachers. Each lesson begins with teacher notes that suggest ways the teacher can adapt the lesson. For example, we suggest all sections that indicate “READ” for the teacher to use as talking points or a script.

## **Core Learning Strategies**

Our four core learning strategies frame the educational approaches and instructional practices that undergird this curriculum.

### ***Core Strategy #1: Consider and Discuss***

The curriculum returns to open discussion as an ongoing practice. Students are introduced to terms and questions around organic and encouraged to find meaning and make connections.

### ***Core Strategy #2: Experience and Notice***

Students are invited to notice their surroundings through hands-on garden activities.

### ***Core Strategy #3: Read and Contextualize***

Students are given tools to engage in rich textual analysis so that they can better understand and analyze the sources they engage with.

### ***Core Strategy #4: Reflect and Connect***

As the curriculum circles back to the topic of organic from various vantage points, students are repeatedly encouraged to pause and draw connections between topics and experiences.

## Goals of the Curriculum

### *Students will...*

- Create a collective definition of organic
- Clarify misconceptions about organic
- Separate out and integrate their own ideas and experiences around organic from what they read, hear, and see.
- Understand that organic is both a regulatory categorization and represents the meanings we assign to it.

### *Curriculum Essential Questions:*

- What is organic and what does it represent?
- What informs our understanding and knowledge of organic?
- How is change enacted around organic?

## Unit Overview

The curriculum consists of three sets of lessons—the Preparatory Lessons, the Core Lessons, and the Extension Inquiries. There is also a set of appendices.

### *Preparatory Lessons*

This preparatory unit sets up the conditions for learning in the curriculum by presenting students with some of the structures for open discussions and the additional practices they will be engaging with throughout the curriculum. Included in this unit are a number of teacher resources, a teacher-facing lesson plan, as well as two student lessons.

### *Resources and Lessons*

- [Facilitating Open Discussions \[Teacher Resource\]](#)
- [Mindsets for Discussions \[Teacher Resource\]](#)
- [Agreement Setting \[Teacher Resource\]](#)
- [Circles of Connections \[Lesson Plan\]](#)
- [Making Sense of What We Read \[Lesson Plan\]](#)

### *Core Lessons*

The core learning in the curriculum consists of ten lessons framed around topics of organic. These ten lessons are designed to be taught in sequence, starting with lesson one and finishing with lesson ten. The lessons emphasize dialogue, textual analysis, and hands-on gardening experiences.

### ***Lessons in Order***

- Lesson One: [What is Organic?](#)
- Lesson Two: [Principles of Organic](#)
- Lesson Three: [Practices of Organic Farming: Soil Investigation](#)
- Lesson Four: [Practices of Organic Farming: Compost](#)
- Lesson Five: [Discussion on Organic](#)
- Lesson Six: [Practices of Organic Farming: Tillage and Cultivation](#)
- Lesson Seven: [Practices of Organic Farming: Cover Crops](#)
- Lesson Eight: [Analyzing Media on Organic](#)
- Lesson Nine: [Organic and Action](#)
- Lesson Ten: [Introduction to Final Project](#)
  - [Final Project Workbook](#): Lesson ten introduces students to the final inquiry project where they identify a topic from the curriculum that inspires them. They conduct research around how they might take action on that topic. The final project workbook is a creative workbook that students will complete demonstrating their knowledge.

For a scope and sequence that details student objectives, see [Scope and Sequence for Core Lessons](#).

### **Extension Inquiries**

These 12 lessons extend the topic of organic, presenting different engagements that support the core learning of the curriculum. There are recommendations for how the [extension inquiries](#) can extend particular core lessons. However, these lessons may be taught as standalone lessons and do not have a defined sequence like the core lessons.

- [Exploring Organic Certification](#)
- [An Introduction to Regenerative Agriculture](#)
- [The Indigenous Origins of Regenerative Agriculture](#)
- [Indigenous Agriculture: Intercropping](#)
- [Farm Worker Conditions](#)
- [Strawberries and Labor](#)
- [Planting Your Own Garden](#)
- [Organic Food at the Grocery Store](#)
- [Exploring a Community Garden](#)
- [Interview a Community Food Member](#)
- [Tasting the Seasons](#)
- [Farming and Family](#)

## Appendices

The appendices of the curriculum provide instructional support for teachers that support the learning in the curriculum.

- [\*Organic Infographic \[curriculum resource\]\*](#)

This infographic was developed for the curriculum and incorporates statistics and basic information on organic. The infographic also details quotes from discussions with individuals working in organic farming.

- [\*Resources for Social Action Projects \[teacher resource\]\*](#)

The final inquiry project engages students in prep work for what might become social action projects. Social Action Projects are multi-step projects led and carried out by students in order to address an issue or concern in their community(ies). This document provides information and links to resources on social action projects.

- [\*Articles for Extensions \[teacher resource\]\*](#)

This document contains a list of articles that explore issues and topics within organic agriculture and related to organic that are not explored in this curriculum. These resources delve more deeply into these subtopics and can serve as a starting point for building more extension lessons to explore individual issues.

## Assessment

The curriculum provides ongoing opportunities for formative assessments through open discussions, circles of connections worksheets, and other research-based and hands-on activities. Lesson ten of the Core Lessons introduces students to the [final project workbook](#), which is a creative workbook that students will complete to demonstrate their knowledge of, and relationships to, organic. In the workbook, they identify and explore a topic from the curriculum that inspires them. They conduct research around how they might take action on that topic and brainstorm the sorts of action they could take. The ending of the curriculum is a form of beginning, as the [final project workbook](#) sets up the conditions for students to implement a [social action project](#) on the issue(s) that feel important to them.

## Standards

This curriculum is aligned with the [Common Core State Standards](#).

### ***Speaking and Listening:***

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas, and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.2: Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.3: Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

### ***Language:***

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

### ***Writing:***

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

***Reading:***

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.2: Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.3: Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.6: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.7: Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.8: Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.9: Compare and contrast one author's presentation of events with that of another (e.g., a memoir written by and a biography on the same person).



## CURRICULUM CONTRIBUTORS

### **Raquel Vigil**, Designer and Writer

Raquel is the Curriculum Specialist at The Edible Schoolyard Project and a Co-designer of [Edible Education at Home](#). Raquel is an educator and curriculum designer specializing in creative education, food curricula, and land-based pedagogies. She is interested in pedagogy that encourages deep inquiry, critical thinking, and imagination. Before joining The Edible Schoolyard Project, she founded an Urban Agriculture Career Technical Education Program at Mission High School in San Francisco, where she taught for several years. Raquel holds a Masters in Curriculum and Teaching from Teachers College, Columbia University, and a Certificate in Horticulture from the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems.

### **Rachel Mewes**, Writer

Rachel recently graduated from Teachers College, Columbia with a Masters in Curriculum and Teaching and a Sexuality, Women, and Gender Certificate. She is committed to innovative pedagogy that centers student knowledge and actively challenges injustice and oppression. Rachel has facilitated a diverse range of programming for youth and adult audiences and designed curriculum in online, school, museum, and extracurricular settings. She is thrilled to be working with the Edible Schoolyard Project.

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Nick is the Senior Program Manager at The Edible Schoolyard Project and a co-designer of [Edible Education at Home](#). Nick is an educator, cook, curriculum writer, and trainer. For the past seven years he taught cooking to middle and high school youth at the Edible Schoolyard Project in Berkeley, California. Nick is also the lead trainer for the Edible Schoolyard Project, helping educators and school food professionals develop their own edible education programs.

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