Would you boys like to plant gardens?” my father said.

“Yes,” we said.

“Good!” said my father. “I’ll order a catalog.”

So it was settled. But afterward, Huey said to me, “What’s a catalog?”

“A catalog,” I said, “is where cats come from. It’s a big book full of pictures of hundreds and hundreds of cats. And
when you open it up, all the cats jump out and start running around.”

“I don’t believe you,” Huey said.

“It’s true,” I said.

“But why would Dad be sending for that catalog cat book?”

“The cats help with the garden,” I said.

“I don’t believe you,” Huey said.

“It’s true,” I said. “You open the catalog, and the cats jump out. Then they run outside and work in the garden. White cats dig up the ground with their claws. Black cats brush the ground smooth with their tails. Yellow and brown cats roll on the seeds to push them underground so they can grow.”

“I don’t believe you,” Huey said. “Cats don’t act like that.”

“Of course,” I said, “ordinary cats don’t act like that. That’s why you have to get them specially—catalog cats.”

“Really?” Huey said.

“Really,” I said.

“I’m going to ask Dad about it,” Huey said.
“You ask Dad about everything,” I said. “Don’t you think it’s time you learned something on your own for a change?”

Huey looked hurt. “I do learn things by myself,” he said. “I wonder when the catalog will come.”

“Soon,” I said.

The next morning Huey woke me up. “I dreamed about the catalog cats!” he said. “Only in my dream the yellow and brown ones were washing the windows and painting the house! You don’t suppose they could do that, do you?”

“No, they can’t do that, Huey,” I said. “They don’t have a way to hold rags and paintbrushes.”

“I suppose not,” Huey said.

Every day Huey asked my father if the catalog had come.
“Not yet,” my father kept saying. He was very pleased that Huey was so interested in the garden.

Huey dreamed about the catalog cats again. A whole team of them was carrying a giant squash to the house. One had his teeth around the stem. The others were pushing it with their shoulders and their heads.
“Do you think that’s what they really do, Julian?” Huey said.

“Yes, they do that,” I said.

Two weeks went by.

“Well, Huey and Julian,” my father said, “today is the big day. The catalog is here.”

“The catalog is here! The catalog is here! The catalog is here!” Huey said. He was dancing and twirling around.

I was thinking about going someplace else.

“What’s the matter, Julian?” my father said. “Don’t you want to see the catalog?”

“Oh, yes, I—want to see it,” I said.

My father had the catalog under his arm. The three of us sat down on the couch.

“Open it!” Huey said.

My father opened the catalog.

Inside were bright pictures of flowers and vegetables. The catalog company would send you the seeds, and you could grow the flowers and vegetables.
Huey started turning the pages faster and faster. “Where are the cats? Where are the cats?” he kept saying.
“What cats?” my father said.
Huey started to cry.
My father looked at me. “Julian,” he said, “please tell me what is going on.”
“Huey thought catalogs were books with cats in them. Catalog cats,” I said.
Huey sobbed. “Julian told me! Special cats—cats that work in gardens! White ones—they dig up the dirt. Black ones—they brush the ground with their tails. Yellow and brown ones—they roll on the seeds.” Huey was crying harder than ever.
“Julian!” said my father.
“Yes,” I said. When my father’s voice gets loud, mine gets so small I can only whisper.
“Julian,” my father said, “didn’t you tell Huey that catalog cats are invisible?”
“No,” I said.
“Julian told me they jumped out of catalogs! He said they jump out and
work in gardens. As soon as you get the catalog, they go to work.”

“Well,” said my father, “that’s very ignorant. Julian has never had a garden before in his life. I wouldn’t trust a person who has never had a garden in his life to tell me about catalog cats. Would you?”

“No,” Huey said slowly. He was still crying a little.

My father pulled out his handkerchief and gave it to Huey. “Now, blow your nose and listen to me,” my father said.

Huey blew his nose and sat up straight on the couch. I sat back and tried to be as small as I could.
“First of all,” said my father, “a lot of people have wasted a lot of time trying to see catalog cats. It’s a waste of time because catalog cats are the fastest animals alive. No one is as quick as a catalog cat. It may be that they really are visible and that they just move so quickly you can’t see them. But you can feel them. When you look for a catalog cat over your right shoulder, you can feel that he is climbing the tree above your left ear. When you turn fast and look at the tree, you can feel that he has jumped out and landed behind your back. And then sometimes you feel all the little hairs on your backbone quiver—that’s when you know a catalog cat is laughing at you and telling you that you are wasting your time.
“Catalog cats love gardens, and they love to work in gardens. However, they will only do half the work. If they are in a garden where people don’t do any work, the catalog cats will not do any work either. But if they are in a garden where people work hard, all the work will go twice as fast because of the catalog cats.”

“When you were a boy and had a garden,” Huey said, “did your garden have catalog cats?”

“Yes,” my father said, “my garden had catalog cats.”

“And were they your friends?” Huey said.

“Well,” my father said, “they like people, but they move too fast to make friends.

“There’s one more thing,” my father said. “Catalog cats aren’t in garden catalogs, and no one can order catalog cats. Catalog cats are only around the companies the catalogs come from. You don’t order them, you request them.”

“I can write up a request,” I said.
“Huey can do that very well, I’m sure,” my father said, “if he would like to. Would you like to, Huey?”

Huey said he would.

My father got a piece of paper and pencil.

And Huey wrote it all down:

REQUESTED:
1 dozen catalog cats
all varieties
WHOEVER wants to come
IS WELCOME

OUR GARDEN

We planted tomatoes, squash, onions, garlic, peas, pumpkins, and potatoes. Besides that we planted two special things we saw in the catalog, which were—
Genuine corn of the Ancients! It grows 20 feet high. Harvest your corn with a ladder. Surprise your friends and neighbors.
and
Make a house of flowers. Our beans grow ten feet tall. Grow them around string! Make a beautiful roof and walls out of their scarlet blossoms.

Huey was the one who wanted the house of flowers the most. I wanted the giant corn. My father said he wasn’t sure he wanted either giant corn or a flower house, and if we wanted them, we would have to take care of them all summer by pulling weeds. We said we would.

We planted everything one Saturday. We worked all day long, getting the ground smooth and even, and laying the little seeds down in rows. The whole time I felt the catalog cats were there, swirling their tails in the air.
We finished just before the sun went down.

My mother gave Huey and me baths. She said we were darker than the garden. She said we were dirty enough that she could grow plants on our hands and knees.

When we were clean, we had supper, with chocolate pie for dessert, and went to bed.

Huey went to sleep right away. But I didn’t.

I put my jacket on over my pajamas and went out the back door to the garden. In the dark it looked as if the garden was sleeping. I lay down on the grass. It was cold and a little wet.

I looked up. I thought all the catalog cats were sitting on the roof of the garage, staring at me. Over the top of the garage
was the moon, a little moon with sharp horns. There were birds rustling in the dark branches of the trees.

The seeds were dreaming, I thought. I put my mouth next to the ground, and I spoke to the seeds very softly:

“Grow! And you corn seeds, grow high as the house!”

In just one week the seeds did start to grow, and we watered them and weeded them. By the end of the summer we had vegetables from the garden every night. And the corn did grow as high as the house, although there wasn’t very much of it, and it was almost too tough to eat. The best thing of all was Huey’s house made of flowers. After a while the flowers dropped their petals and turned into beans, and we ate the beans for supper. So what Huey made was probably the first house anyone ever played in and then ate. Catalog cats are strange—but a house you eat for dinner is stranger yet.
Draw or write about a part of the story that surprises or confuses you.
Second Reading

Write **something new you learned** from rereading or from doing an activity during the second reading.

________________________

________________________

________________________

Write **a question you’d like to talk about more**. It can be a question you thought of already or a new question. You can write more than one question if you wish.

________________________

________________________

________________________
Choose one of the topics in the clouds and write or draw a picture about it.

A picture of Julian lying in the garden at night

What Huey’s house made of flowers looks like

What you would say to the seeds to help them grow

Something the story makes you think of
The focus question:

________________________________________________________________________

Your answer to the focus question:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

A piece of evidence from the story that supports your answer:

________________________________________________________________________

Your answer after the discussion (explain how you changed or added to your answer):

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

PAGE ______
Use this page to help you write a paragraph.

Main Idea

Supporting Detail

Supporting Detail

Supporting Detail

Supporting Detail
About the Great Books Foundation

The mission of the Great Books Foundation is to advance the critical, reflective thinking and social and civic engagement of readers of all ages through Shared Inquiry™ discussion of works and ideas of enduring value.

The Great Books Foundation was established in 1947 to promote the reading and discussion of great literature by the general public. In 1962, the Foundation extended its mission to children with the introduction of Junior Great Books. Since its inception the Foundation has helped hundreds of thousands of people throughout the United States and in other countries begin their own discussion groups in schools, libraries, and community centers. Today, Foundation instructors teach hundreds of courses each year, in which educators and parents learn to lead Shared Inquiry discussion as well as a variety of classroom activities that improve students’ critical thinking, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing skills.

The Great Books Foundation’s courses in Shared Inquiry help people get the most from discussion. Participants learn how to read actively, pose fruitful questions, and listen and respond to others effectively in discussion. All participants also practice leading a discussion and have an opportunity to reflect on the process with others. For more information about Great Books materials or courses, call the Great Books Foundation at 800-222-5870 or visit our website at www.greatbooks.org.