



- 1 Work with a partner. Look at the photo and the title of the text. What do you think the text is about?
- 2 **READING** Read the text and check your predictions.

## Green school in the city

How one inspirational teacher is changing lives



**When you think of the Bronx in New York, green is probably not the first colour you think of. But one inspirational teacher and instructor, Stephen Ritz, is doing something to change that.**

It all began by accident. Stephen was teaching at a school in the South Bronx. Somebody had sent him a box of flower bulbs. Stephen didn't really know what they were so he hid them behind a radiator in his classroom. Then one morning there was a moment of real surprise and excitement when he and his class suddenly noticed all the flowers that had grown next to the radiator.

That gave Stephen an idea. He decided to do something to improve the area where his students live, so he and his class worked on a project in their own neighbourhood. They planted flowers and vegetables and managed to transform some



depressing spots into green areas where local people could meet.

Next, Stephen brought plants back into the classroom. The students planted vegetables in special towers and created an 'edible indoor wall' in the science room. It was a great success.

Although all students under 16 must attend school, in a difficult area like the Bronx students often miss classes. But thanks to his classroom project, attendance in Stephen's classes went up from around 40% to 93%. The students feel responsible for their plants. They realise they have to water them and look after them every day, so they also see that they mustn't miss school. And with better attendance their marks go up.

Importantly, the students also begin to learn about natural, healthy food. As they started to grow their own vegetables, they became more interested in following a healthy diet instead of eating the typical fast food they had eaten before. In fact, the edible indoor wall in Stephen's classroom produces enough food to feed healthy meals to 450 students! The students can even sell some of their vegetables to local shops. Some of his older students have worked as employees of a new company as technicians creating green walls for other schools around the country.

Stephen began his project with older students, but he now teaches younger students, too. He believes young people ought to start learning about healthy diets as early as possible so that they don't pick up bad habits which are then difficult to change.

Many of Stephen's students have special educational needs or are homeless. Stephen's project has really affected them. They have learnt lessons that will help them throughout their lives. They have learnt about responsibility. They have also realised that they'd better eat well if they want to stay healthy. And, finally, they've learnt that you don't have to be a farmer out in the country to grow plants. Anybody can do it. But you must believe that you can make a difference. By teaching all of this, Stephen Ritz is making a massive difference to the lives of his students.

Material courtesy of Green Bronx Machine



Stephen Ritz (second from left) with his students

- 3 Read the text again and answer the questions.

- 1 How did the students react to the first plants in their classroom?
- 2 Why did Stephen and his students plant flowers and vegetables in areas of the Bronx?
- 3 What did Stephen's students do in the science room?
- 4 What effect did Stephen's project have on attendance of his classes and why?
- 5 What effect did the project have on his students' eating habits?
- 6 Why does Stephen think it's important to teach very young students?
- 7 What are two of the things that Stephen's students have learnt from this project?

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### CRITICAL THINKING

**Think! Then compare ideas with your class.**

- What message(s) do you think the text gives about bringing the outside world into the classroom? Give reasons for your answer.

- 5 What do the underlined words in the text mean? Guess and then check in your dictionary.

- 6 **SPEAKING** What about you?

- 1 Would you like to work on a school project like Stephen Ritz's? Why/Why not?
- 2 Does your school ever organise lessons or activities that take place outside the classroom? If so, explain what they are.