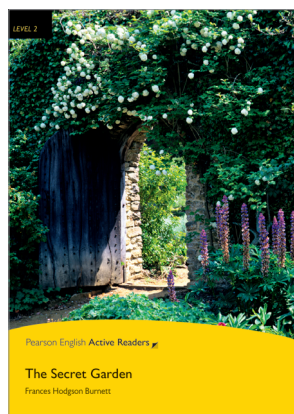


# The Secret Garden

Frances Hodgson Burnett



## About the author

Frances Hodgson Burnett was born in 1849 in Manchester, England. She was the eldest daughter in a family of two boys and three girls. Her father died when she was four and the family fell on hard times and moved to a much poorer area of Manchester, where Frances witnessed the lives of poor people, which she would later deal with in some of her novels. When she was sixteen, the family emigrated to the United States and settled in Tennessee. When she was eighteen, she submitted a story to *Godey's Lady's Book*. Within a few years she was being published regularly in *Godey's*, *Peterson's Ladies' Magazine*, *Scribner's Monthly* and *Harper's*. In 1873, she married Dr Swan Burnett. Burnett's first novel, *That Lass O'Lowries*, which had been serialised in *Scribner's*, was published in 1877. After moving to Washington DC, Burnett wrote the novels *Haworth's* (1879), *Louisiana* (1880), *A Fair Barbarian* (1881) and *Through One Administration* (1883), as well as a play, *Esmeralda* (1881), written with actor-playwright William Gillette. In 1886, Burnett's best-selling book, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, appeared. Burnett had two sons, Lionel, born in 1874 and Vivian, born in 1876. She continued her writing, and in 1905, *The Little Princess* was published. Burnett had been interested in gardens and nature since she was a child and it was while devising a layout for her garden in Long Island that she wrote her most famous book, *The Secret Garden* (1911). Nearly 100 years later it is still read and enjoyed by children. Burnett continued to write until her death in 1924.

## Summary

Mary Lennox is born in India to English parents. Her mother isn't interested in her and she is looked after by an Indian servant. Mary is a spoilt, ill-tempered and

unhealthy child. When she is nine, her parents die and she goes to live with her reclusive uncle in a big old manor house in Yorkshire. Here, Mary meets the housekeeper, Mrs Medlock, and a friendly maid called Martha, who helps to look after her. Mary spends her time in the gardens and meets the gardener and a cheerful robin. One day she finds a secret garden. It has walls all around it and she cannot find a door. For once in her life, Mary is interested in something. The gardener tells her the garden belonged to her uncle's wife, and has been locked since she died ten years before. With the help of the robin, Mary finds a key and the door to the garden. At first, everything looks dead in the garden, but when she finds some little green plants, she decides to make the garden green and beautiful again. Martha's brother, Dickon, an animal lover, brings Mary a spade and some seeds and she shares her secret with him. Together they begin to work on the garden. Mary grows happier and healthier. One night she hears someone crying. She follows the noise and finds Colin, a sickly child, who is her cousin. Colin thinks he is going to be a hunchback, so he stays in bed all the time. Mary and Colin soon become friends and Mary tells him there is nothing wrong with his back. Mary and Dickon decide to take Colin to the garden. Colin begins to help look after the garden and soon he is able to walk again. Mr Craven comes home and is very happy to see his healthy son. The magic of the garden has healed Colin and brought happiness to Mary.

**Chapters 1–3:** Mary Lennox is born in India. Her mother doesn't like children, so she gives Mary to a servant. Then her parents die and the servants run away. Mary is sent to live in England with her uncle, Mr Archibald Craven. She is met in London by Mrs Medlock, who travels with Mary to the house in Yorkshire. Mrs Medlock tells Mary that Mr Craven is strange and a hunchback and his wife is dead. Martha Sowerby, a servant, comes the next morning and tells Mary about her twelve-year-old brother, Dickon, who likes animals. Mary is interested. Martha then tells Mary that she can't go into one of the gardens because Mr Craven closed it when his wife died many years ago.

**Chapters 4–5:** Mary walks around the gardens and meets Ben Weatherstaff, the gardener, and a friendly robin. Ben is not very nice and Mary wonders if she is as horrible and unfriendly as him. Mary starts going to the gardens every day and she begins to look stronger. One day, Martha tells Mary how Mr Craven's wife died. Then, Mary hears crying

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and tries to find out where it is coming from, but Mrs Medlock sees her and sends her back to her room.

**Chapters 6–8:** Mary goes to the gardens and meets Ben Weatherstaff and the robin. While she is in the garden, she decides that she likes Martha, Dickon, Martha's mother and the robin. The robin shows Mary a key on the ground and the next day Mary finds a door to the secret garden. She enters the secret garden excitedly and starts to work. One day, Mary meets Dickon and together they go to the secret garden and do some gardening. Mrs Medlock takes Mary to see Mr Craven and Mary asks for a small part of the gardens to plant seeds and grow things.

**Chapters 9–10:** Mary hears the crying again and she goes into a room where Colin Craven is in bed. They talk and Colin tells Mary he is sick and is going to be a hunchback. The next day, Mary tells Martha that she has met Colin. Then Mary and Colin talk about the secret garden, Ben Weatherstaff and the robin. Mrs Medlock and the doctor discover Mary with Colin.

**Chapters 11–13:** Mary goes to the garden with Dickon and Colin is angry because she hasn't visited him. They shout at each other and Mary leaves. During the night, Colin is crying and Martha asks Mary to go to see him. Mary goes to Colin's room and she tells him that he is not going to be a hunchback. Then, Mary tells Colin about the secret garden and offers to take him there with Dickon. The next day, a servant puts Colin in his wheelchair and they all visit the secret garden together. Ben Weatherstaff discovers the children there and at first he is angry. Then, Colin walks a few steps with Dickon's help.

**Chapters 14–15:** The children go to the garden nearly every day during the spring and summer. Colin works and gets stronger. Dickon's mother visits the children in the garden and Colin likes her. Then, Mr Craven returns to Yorkshire and he asks Mrs Medlock about Colin. She tells him that Colin has changed and is out in the gardens. Mr Craven goes outside to the secret garden and Mary and Colin come running out. Mr Craven is shocked and happy to see his healthy son.

### Background and themes

**Love:** Recurring themes in Burnett's novels are the transforming power of love and the reversals of fortune. Her stories are very romantic. Someone in them is usually forlorn, sickly or miserable, and there is someone else, who is brave, strong and helpful. The characters have to go

through all sorts of trials and tribulations, but in the end things come out right for everybody in a fairytale sort of way.

**Spoilt children:** In *The Secret Garden*, both Mary and Colin are sickly, unhappy children. Both have absent parents and they feel unloved and unlovable. Mary and Colin are spoilt children and are used to getting their own way. The book shows that spoiling brings misery and unhappiness.

**Health and happiness:** When Mary moves to Yorkshire, she begins to take an interest in the gardens and eventually manages to get into a 'secret' garden that has been neglected since Mrs Craven died. Working in the garden restores Mary's health and brings her happiness. She begins to like people and to believe that people will like her. She shares her garden with Colin and he too grows well and strong. The magic of the garden coming to life after years of neglect transforms the lives of both Mary and Colin. The garden acts as a symbol of their growing personalities.

**Independence:** *The Secret Garden* also encourages independence. It suggests that children should be self-reliant and have faith in themselves. They should listen to their own hearts and consciences because adults are not always right.

**Yorkshire:** Yorkshire is a large county in the north of England. There are many pretty villages in Yorkshire, with stone cottages and attractive churches. There is also a lot of moorland. The Yorkshire moors are very well known in England. They provide magnificent, dramatic scenery and are loved and admired by residents and visitors alike. A small plant called 'heather' grows on the moors. In the summer months these plants are pink and purple and the moors look like a sea of colour.

### Discussion activities

#### Before reading

- Discuss:** Write the word 'SECRET' on the board and check that students know the meaning. Ask students to discuss the following questions in groups: *What secrets do people often have?* Encourage them to think about secrets between parents and children, teachers and students, friends, bosses and workers etc.
- Pair work:** Write 'GARDEN' on the board. Ask the students to discuss the following questions: *What can you find in a garden? Do you have a garden? What can you do in a garden?*

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## Chapters 1–3

**While reading** (At the end of p. 3)

- 3 **Pair work:** Ask students to talk about Mary Lennox: *How old is Mary? Is she pretty? Is she a nice girl? What is she like with other people? Does she have any friends? Do you think she wanted to go to England?*
- 4 **Discuss:** Explain to the students that Mary is going to travel to Yorkshire, England by train and the journey is long. Ask them if they have ever been on a long train journey and if they enjoyed the experience. Ask them what they did during the journey to pass the time: *Do you ever travel by train? Do you like it? What can people do when they travel by train? What do you think Mary will do?*

## After reading

- 5 **Write and guess:** Divide the class into two groups and ask one group to look at the picture on page 1 and the other group to look at the top picture on page 6. Ask them to write a description of the picture including one deliberate mistake. Then put the students in pairs and ask them to read out their descriptions to each other. They must listen and look at the picture to identify the mistake.

## Chapters 4–5

### After reading

- 6 **Pair work:** Write the following words on the board: *winter, walls, sing, family, key, crying*. Have the students talk and write in pairs to say how these words were used in Chapters 4–5.

## Chapters 6–8

**While reading** (At the end of Chapter 6)

- 7 **Write:** Put students in pairs to discuss what Mary could put in her letter to Dickon. Get feedback from the whole class and then ask students to write the letter individually.

## After reading

- 8 **Write and guess:** Put students in pairs and ask them to choose a short paragraph from Chapters 6–8. Tell them to write it again, making five changes to words in the text. Students then read out their paragraphs to the other students who identify the mistakes.

## Chapters 9–10

**While reading** (At the end of Chapter 9)

- 9 **Discuss:** Refer students to the title of Chapter 10 and ask them to discuss the following questions in groups: *Why do you think Martha is afraid? What are you afraid of? What were you afraid of when you were younger?*

## After reading

- 10 **Write and ask:** Write 'Why does Colin want Mary to come and see him every day?' on the board and elicit

the answer (Because Colin feels better when Mary is there.). Ask students to write another question about something in Chapters 9 and 10. Check their work as they do this. Now have students walk around asking and answering each other's questions.

## Chapters 11–13

**While reading** (p. 40, after 'She ran out of the room.')

- 11 **Pair work:** Ask students to discuss the following questions in pairs: *Why is Colin angry with Mary? Why is Mary angry with Colin? Do you often get angry with your friends? What about? Then students can write a dialogue between two friends who get angry with each other and act it out for the rest of the class.*

## After reading

- 12 **Write and guess:** Ask students in pairs to choose one picture from Chapters 11–13 and to write a sentence to describe what is happening. Then students can read out their sentences and the other students can guess which picture they are describing.

## Chapters 14–15

**While reading** (p. 51, after 'He told her about Colin's problem with food.')

- 13 **Role play:** Put students in pairs to role play the conversation between Dickon and his mother. You can brainstorm some possible questions that Dickon's mother might ask with the whole class first.

## After reading

- 14 **Write:** Put students in pairs to write a list of all the good things and the bad things that Mary did in the book. Check the answers with the whole class and have a vote about whether she is mostly good or mostly bad.
- 15 **Act and guess:** Put students in small groups and ask them to choose one scene from the whole book. Tell them they have to mime the scene. Give them time to practise and then get them to perform it for the whole class. The rest of the students have to say what is happening.
- 16 **Pair work:** Choose two conversations between two people from the book and organise the students in pairs. Get one pair to read the first conversation, allowing only one student from each pair to listen. The other sits with their hands over their ears. After, have the student who listened to the conversation explain what happened to the one who didn't. Now the students change roles to listen to the second conversation.
- 17 **Write:** Tell students to imagine they are Mary. They have to write a letter to Mr Craven to explain how Colin got better and what they did to help him.