

# **The Secret Garden Study Guide**

**The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">The Secret Garden Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 1 - 4.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 5 - 8.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 9 - 12.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 13 - 16.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 17 - 20.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 21 - 24.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 25 - 27.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Symbols and Symbolism.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Settings.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>
<a href="#">Themes and Motifs.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Styles.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">35</a>



# Plot Summary

The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett is a story of rebirth as a result of the power of love. It opens with Mary Lennox, a 10-year-old girl who lives in India with her English parents. She is terribly neglected by them, causing her to be sickly, unpleasant, and demanding. When her parents die in a cholera epidemic, Mary is sent to live with her uncle, Archibald Craven, in Yorkshire, England. Mr. Craven lives in a huge manor house with nearly 100 rooms, most of which are unused since the death of his wife 10 years earlier, an event that has left him bereft. When she arrives at the Misselthwaite estate, the servants let her know that her uncle will pay no attention to her and that she is expected to get by on her own.

Soon after her arrival, Mary learns about a secret garden on the estate that has been locked away for 10 years. She becomes enchanted with the idea of the garden and determined to find it, and eventually she locates it and goes inside. It appears to be abandoned, but she finds a few sprigs of new growth and begins tending to them even though she knows nothing about gardening. Mary befriends Ben Weatherstaff, a gardener on the estate, and questions him about the garden, but he makes it clear that it is not to be discussed. She learns that the garden belonged to the late Mrs. Craven and her husband ordered that it be locked away after her death because it caused him too much pain. Mary also befriends Dickon Sowerby, the brother of her housemaid Martha, who is a great lover of nature and is beloved by every living thing, including every animal he meets, and he begins to help Mary tend to the garden.

After hearing the soft sound of crying from time to time in the house, Mary eventually discovers Colin, the sickly, demanding son of Mr. Craven, who remains secluded in his room and is not expected to live long. Mary and Colin are kindred spirits and when she tells him about the secret garden, he becomes determined to see it for himself. She brings Dickon to meet him and they conspire to take Colin to the garden in his wheelchair, but to keep it a secret from the adults in the house. Just as Mary has grown physically and mentally healthier by spending time in the garden, Colin immediately begins to transform when he enters it and declares that he will now live forever.

As spring comes, the garden begins to thrive along with the health of Colin and Mary. Soon Colin is able to stand and walk, but the children keep this a secret because he wants to surprise his father when he returns from his travels, hoping that his improved health will enable his father to love him. Unbeknownst to the residents of the manor, Mr. Craven has begun a simultaneous transformation as a result of the garden's spiritual power. When he returns to Misselthwaite, he is surprised to find that the garden has been discovered and is now thriving again and thrilled that his son, whom he has come to regret neglecting all these years, has now been made strong and healthy through his connection with nature and the power of love that comes from the secret garden.



# Chapters 1 - 4

## Summary

Chapter 1 introduces Mary Lennox, a young English girl living in India with her parents. Mary's parents did not want her, so they have always ignored her and left her in the care of servants, which has made her very disagreeable. Suddenly there is chaos in her household, and Mary learns that a cholera epidemic has killed several of the servants. Everyone seems to forget about Mary, and she is left on her own. After drinking a glass of wine she finds on a table, she falls into a deep sleep and is awakened when some police officers find her alone in the house. She learns that her parents have died.

In Chapter 2, Mary temporarily goes to live with an English clergyman and his family, where her disagreeable ways cause the other children to nickname her Mistress Mary Quite Contrary. Soon she is sent to England to live with her uncle, Archibald Craven, at his home called Misselthwaite Manor. Her ship is met by Mrs. Medlock, one of her uncle's servants, who tells Mary about the huge house with nearly 100 rooms, most of which have been closed off since Mrs. Craven's death. Mrs. Medlock tells her that her uncle will not pay any attention to her and that she will be expected to keep to herself.

Chapter 3 finds Mary and Mrs. Medlock leaving the train and traveling by carriage across the moors to Misselthwaite Manor. When they arrive, they are met by another servant, Mr. Pitcher, and Mary is shown to the two rooms where she will stay.

In Chapter 4, Mary awakens the following morning and meets Martha, a young housemaid who will care for her. Martha is surprised that Mary does not have dark skin since she comes from India. Mary treats her very rudely. Martha is shocked when Mary expects her to dress her, but Mary curtly explains that this has been her custom. Martha tells Mary about her family, including her young brother Dickon, who can make friends with animals. Mary finds herself becoming interested in him. Martha suggests that Mary explore the grounds and tells her about a secret garden that has been locked away since Mrs. Craven's death. As she searches for the garden, Mary sees a robin redbreast and meets gardener Ben Weatherstaff. She is surprised to see that the gruff old man looks very different when he smiles. She asks Ben about the secret garden, but he says no one can find it and warns her not to meddle.

## Analysis

The book's opening chapters introduce Mary, the main character, as well as several of the book's primary themes. The idea of secrets comes into play in the first chapter when the reader learns that Mary, because of her unpleasant personality and her ugly appearance, is an embarrassment to her parents, who keep her hidden away from the rest of the world. They keep their secret so well that many of their friends do not even



know that she exists. No one thinks to look for her when the cholera epidemic strikes and members of the household begin to die.

Children in literature, particularly books that are aimed at a younger audience, are generally depicted as sympathetic figures, but that is not the case with Mary. She is painted as someone with no redeeming features, but the author makes it clear that the reason for her horrible personality and bad behavior is the fact that her parents never wanted her to begin with and have left her entirely in the care of servants who have no choice but to tolerate her mistreatment of them. This begins to introduce the book's theme of the healing power of love and family by showing the harm that is done when a child fails to receive love and affection. Mary's situation is somewhat cyclical in nature, as people who meet her – the clergyman's family with whom she stays temporarily, for example – dislike her immediately because of her ugly appearance and bad disposition, and she returns their feelings by becoming increasingly disagreeable, thus telling the reader that while love begets love, the opposite is also true.

The issue of secrets comes up again in Chapter 2 when Mary learns that most of the rooms in her uncle's huge homes are locked away, thus appearing secretive, and that she can expect no attention from him. Just as was the case with her parents, Mary will be a secret of Misselthwaite, essentially shut away from the rest of the world and from the love that a child should expect to have.

The author includes a bit of foreshadowing when Basil and the other children give Mary the nickname "Mistress Mary Quite Contrary," referring to a nursery rhyme about gardening. While the name is appropriate given her unpleasant nature, the rhyme itself foreshadows the occupation of gardening that will eventually transform her life.

These chapters include several examples of symbolism, including the moors, which are desolate during the winter months just as Mary's personality is cold and bleak. However, in spite of herself, Mary begins to become a bit interested in the world and people around her, particularly Martha's brother Dickon, Ben, and the secret garden.

## Discussion Question 1

When Mary goes to live with the clergyman's family temporarily, why do the children take an instant dislike to her? Do you think she deserves the way they treat her? What, if anything, makes her behavior understandable?

## Discussion Question 2

As they are traveling to Misselthwaite, Mary sees the moors for the first time. What is her first impression? Why are the moors symbolic of Mary and her personality at this point in the novel?



## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the racial implications of Mary's conversation with Martha in Chapter 4. What prejudices are evident in both characters? What do you think accounts for their feelings?

## Vocabulary

fretful, tyrannical, veranda, disdain, imploring, appalling, desolation, impudent, discomfited, burly, moor, subservient, meddlesome, imperious, haughty



# Chapters 5 - 8

## Summary

In Chapter 5, Mary is adjusting to life at Misselthwaite, although it is very different from her life in India. She spends most of her time wandering around the moors and searching for the secret garden. One day she sees the robin again and becomes convinced that it lives in the garden, but she is still unable to locate it. Mary begins to grow healthier as she spends more time outdoors, but she finds that she is very lonely. She learns from Martha that Mr. and Mrs. Craven spent long hours together in the garden, but Mrs. Craven fell from a high branch on which she loved to sit and died from her injuries. After that, Mr. Craven could not bear to be in the garden and had it locked away. One day, as she wanders around outdoors, Mary thinks she hears the sound of a child crying, but Martha denies that there is another child in the house.

In Chapter 6, Mary, who is left to fend for herself most of the time, begins to explore various rooms in the house. In some, she finds portraits of people, including some of a young girl who resembles her. She wishes the girl were there so they could play together. In one part of the house, she hears the child crying again. Before she can search for where the cry is coming from, Mrs. Medlock finds her and sends her back to her room.

In Chapter 7, Martha tells Mary that this is her day off and she plans to visit her family. Although Mary has not met Martha's family, she has become fond of them from hearing stories about them. She asks if she could visit them someday. Martha says this will be difficult, but perhaps her mother could help arrange it. Although she wants to meet them, Mary says that the family probably would not like her because no one else does, and she admits that she does not like herself either. After Martha leaves, Mary again goes in search of the garden and runs into Ben, who is in an especially good mood because spring is coming soon. When Mary questions him about the garden, Ben replies that no one except the robin has been inside it in 10 years, and Mary notes that the garden was locked away at about the same time she was born. As she follows the robin and tries to befriend it, Mary finds an old key buried in a mound of dirt and wonders if it is the key to the secret garden.

Chapter 8 finds Mary more determined than ever to find the garden so she can make up her own games and play alone in a place where no one will be able to find her. She carefully looks through the ivy that grows on the walls surrounding what she believes to be the garden, but she cannot find a door. Returning to her room, Mary finds that Martha has returned and has brought her a skipping rope that is a gift from her mother, Susan Sowerby, who was very interested in the stories she told about Mary. Mary goes outdoors to practice skipping rope, and she sees the robin again. When the wind blows aside some of the ivy, Mary finds the door in the wall, opens it with the key she found earlier, and enters the secret garden.



## Analysis

The theme of secrets continues to be brought forth in this section as Mary becomes more fascinated with both the secret garden and the many unused rooms in the manor house. She also learns the reason that the garden has been locked away. Though the reason is not discussed openly, it seems that Mr. Craven is still so bereaved over his wife's death that he forbids the household staff to speak of her. It is as if she had never lived at all. The mysterious sound of crying, which Martha claims not to hear even though Mary knows she is lying, speaks of yet another secret to be revealed.

Even before Mary finds the garden, the restorative powers of nature are at work as she begins to grow healthier after spending time outdoors rather than being locked away as she had been previously.

Mary's growing self-awareness becomes evident in Chapter 7 when she notes that Martha's family probably will not like her because no one else does. She further admits – and realizes for the first time when Martha asks – that she does not like herself. Spending time in the presence of a kind woman like Martha, along with the time spent in nature, is already beginning to elicit subtle changes in Mary, some of which she discerns and others that only the reader sees at this point.

The theme of rebirth is highlighted in this section as it is noted that the garden was locked away at about the same time Mary was born 10 years earlier. It has lain dormant for a decade, just as Mary's personality has been smothered by the lack of love in her life. Spring promises to bring growth to both of them. When she finds the key to the garden, she also finds the key to unlocking her inner goodness and Colin's health.

This section continues to point out the healing power of love in the form of Susan Sowerby, Martha's mother. She has gotten interested in Mary and concerned about her through the stories she has heard from Martha, so much so that she sends Mary the gift of a skipping rope, a motherly gesture unlike any Mary ever received from her own mother. It is when she is practicing with the rope that Mary finally discovers the hidden door to the garden and is able to enter it.

## Discussion Question 1

What makes Mary realize that she is loney? How does she react to this new feeling?

## Discussion Question 2

At the end of Chapter 5, the author says that four good things have happened to Mary. What are they? Why have they been positive developments for her?





## Discussion Question 3

Why is Mary so anxious to find the secret garden? What is it that fascinates her about it? How does this relate to her life up to this point?

## Vocabulary

tapestry, luxurious, abundant, authority, muffled, dialect, vixen, waistcoat, contrary, inactive, governess, exhibit, impudence, trill, gust



## Chapters 9 - 12

### Summary

In Chapter 9, Mary finds that the garden is overgrown, particularly with huge rose bushes, and feels very much abandoned. Since it is winter, nothing is blooming. She hopes that all the plants have not died. She is thrilled when she finds a few green sprigs poking through the ground and spends the rest of the day weeding that area to allow the new growth to come in. Later that evening, Mary tells Martha that she wants some gardening tools. At Martha's suggestion, she writes a letter to her brother Dickon. She asks him to buy some tools on his next trip to the village Thwaite. Mary is excited at the prospect of meeting Dickon and at the news that Martha's mother has invited her to visit their home. When Martha is out of the room, Mary again hears a child crying. When Martha comes back, she again denies that Mary could have heard crying. She leaves abruptly.

In Chapter 10, Mary is spending most of her time in the garden. She has gotten very friendly with Ben and tries to subtly question him about gardening, including how to tell if plants are dead or alive. He tells her that one must wait until spring to know for certain. Ben says that he once cared for the roses of a woman who is now dead and that he still tends them occasionally. When Mary continues to question him, he becomes angry and leaves. Later, as she is walking through the woods looking for rabbits, Mary comes across a boy who is surrounded by animals and realizes it is Martha's brother Dickon. Dickon gives her the gardening supplies she had asked for and asks to see where she plans to plant the seeds. Although she is reluctant to share the garden with anyone, Dickon assures her that he can keep a secret. So, Mary takes him to the garden.

Chapter 11 finds Mary and Dickon entering the garden, which Dickon has heard about from Martha. He looks around to determine which plants are dead and which are alive, and he tells Mary that the garden would be a good home for birds because they would be protected there. When he sees that many of the plants are still alive, Dickon wonders if someone has been tending them from time to time, and he agrees when Mary asks if he will help her with the garden. Mary mentions that she wants to grow flowers shaped like bells to prove wrong the "Mistress Mary Quite Contrary" nickname the children back in India gave her. When she has to go inside for supper, Mary worries that Dickon will disappear and she will never see him again, although she does trust that he will keep the garden a secret as he promised.

In Chapter 12, Mary learns that her uncle has returned. To her dismay, he wants to meet her because Martha and Dickon's mother met him in the village and criticized him for neglecting her. They must meet immediately because Mr. Craven, who travels a great deal of the time, is leaving again the following day. However, when they meet, Mary finds that she does not dislike him, but she rather feels sorry for him because he looks so unhappy. When he asks if she needs anything, she asks for some land on which she can garden. Mr. Craven, touched by the reminder of his late wife, tells her she can have



any piece of the estate she wants. He also gives her permission to visit Martha's family. When she returns to the garden, she finds that Dickon has gone, but he has left a drawing of a bird and a note saying he will return.

## Analysis

When Mary enters the garden, she knows nothing about plants or how things grow, so she is unable to tell whether the things she sees are dead or alive, much like her own personality has lain dormant as a result of neglect. However, just as Mary is beginning to see subtle signs of life in herself, she discovers a few green shoots in the garden and begins to cultivate them. Her instincts tell her that the plants need space and light, as she also is beginning to come to life on the wide spaces of the moors. As this section continues, Mary gradually learns more about tending to the garden and at the same time, her own personality begins to open up as her world widens to include Ben and Dickon, and to some extent, her uncle. She is also learning to trust for the first time when she instinctively believes Dickon when he says he will keep the secret of the garden and takes him to it.

Chapter 9 establishes roses as the author's symbol for the late Mrs. Craven, who loved them and cultivated them in her private garden. As the book progresses, the growth of her spiritual presence in the garden coincides with the growth of the roses as they are carefully tended.

This section also introduces Mr. Craven for the first time and Mary is surprised to see that he is not a hunchback, as he had been described to her. In truth, he has become somewhat stooped and pressed down by his extreme misery since his wife's death. Just as Mary has been repressed by the lack of love in her life, so has her uncle when he lost the love of his wife and found nothing to replace it.

The nursery rhyme that spawned Mary's nickname comes back around in this section when she announces that she wants to grow flowers shaped like bells in defiance of that nickname. This is symbolic of the fact that Mary has decided to shed her former disagreeable personality and open herself up to the new people and experiences she is finding in her current surroundings, leaving behind the person she was and the life she led back in India.

Mrs. Sowerby again is shown as a surrogate mother figure to Mary, even though they have never met. In addition to giving her the skipping rope, it is she who takes Mr. Craven to task for ignoring and neglecting Mary, leading to his first meeting with the child on a brief trip back to the manor.

## Discussion Question 1

Mary tells Dickon that he is the fifth person she likes. Who are the other four? Why does she like each of them? Why is this a significant development for Mary?



## Discussion Question 2

Discuss Mary's first meeting with her uncle, Archibald Craven. What surprises each of them about the other? In what ways does their meeting begin to change things for Mary? Do you think that meeting her alters Mr. Craven's coldness toward her? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

What are Mary's first impressions of the secret garden when she gets inside? How are the garden's contents and condition symbolic of Mary herself?

## Vocabulary

hazy, alcove, spade, shilling, dictate, exclaim, drowsy, absorbed, intimate, evidently, obstinant, industrious, wench, prune (verb), stifle, coarse, trifle, liberty, woeful



# Chapters 13 - 16

## Summary

Chapter 13 opens when Mary is awakened by a storm that she thinks sounds like a person weeping. Unable to fall back asleep, she again hears a child crying and sneaks out of her room to trace the source of the sound. Finally, she finds a room with light coming from beneath the door. Inside is a small, sickly-looking boy she learns is Mr. Craven's son, Colin. Mary learns that Colin is her age and was born soon before his mother's death. Although his father sees to it that he has whatever he wants, he refuses to see Colin because he resembles his late wife. Mr. Craven will not let the household staff talk about him. Mary likes Colin immediately, but after she mentions the secret garden to him, she becomes upset when he questions her about it and threatens to use his influence to get the servants to tell him about it since they are under orders to avoid upsetting him. Mary does not tell him that she has found the key to the garden and has even gone inside. Colin tells her that everyone thinks he will not live to adulthood and that his father's brother, who is also his doctor, would probably be happy if he died because he would then inherit the manor. Colin also shows her a portrait of his mother that he keeps covered because he does not to see her laughing when he is so sick and unhappy. Also, he does not want to share her with anyone else. He thinks that if she had not died, perhaps his father would not hate him and he would not be so sick. Before Mary returns to her room, they agree not to tell anyone that they have met.

Chapter 14 finds Mary stuck in the house because it is raining, and she tells Martha that she has met Colin. Martha fears she will be fired because she fell asleep and let Mary enter Colin's room. She says that all the servants fear Colin because he holds so much power over them. Martha is surprised when Mary says she wants to spend time with Colin because he is usually so disagreeable. When she goes back to Colin's room, she compares him unfavorably to Dickon, who can charm animals. He is unlike Colin, who simply orders servants around and threatens them. She wants to show him the moors that she has come to love. She is unsympathetic when he says he is too sick to go outside. She argues that he does not need to die if he does not want to and thinks that meeting Dickon might convince him to want to live. Mrs. Medlock and Colin's uncle, Dr. Craven, are shocked when they find the two children together, but Colin tells them he will see Mary whenever he wants because she makes him forget that he is sick.

In Chapter 15, the rain finally ends. Mary is able to go back to the secret garden. She has passed the rainy days with Colin, and Mrs. Medlock is now happy that they have become friends because Colin has become less unpleasant. Mary wonders how she could get Colin out into the garden without anyone knowing because she thinks it would be as healing for him as it has been for her. She also wants him to meet Dickon. When she arrives at the garden, she finds that Dickon is working there and that the plants have begun to grow and bloom now that spring has finally arrived. The robin also has begun building a nest there. Mary tells Dickon about Colin, but he, along with everyone else in the village, already knows about him although they do not talk about him. Dickon



says that Colin wishes he had never been born, and he agrees with Mary that the garden would be good for him because it would get his mind off illness and death. So, they agree to find a way to bring him there.

In Chapter 16, Mary goes back to her room for lunch. When Martha says that Colin wants to see her, she refuses, preferring to spend time with Dickon instead. When she goes to see Colin later, he seems much worse than before. He threatens to forbid Dickon to come to the manor if Mary prefers to spend her time with him, but Mary replies that she will stop speaking to Colin entirely if he interferes with her friendship with Dickon. After their argument, Mary returns to her room to find several packages from Mr. Craven and is thrilled that he remembered her with thoughtful gifts. She also begins to soften in her anger toward Colin, realizing that he worries about his health, and she decides that she will visit him the next morning.

## Analysis

The book's biggest secret is revealed when Mary discovers Colin, the sickly child who is hidden away in his room and grossly neglected by his father. Mary and Colin are not only cousins, but also kindred spirits in that they are sickly, demanding, disagreeable children who have been denied the love of their parents. The difference between them is that Mary has already begun to evolve because she has now been exposed to affection, friendship, and the restorative power of nature. She is in a position to see Colin in a kind way and to help him as she herself has been helped.

In meeting Colin, Mary is confronted with something of a mirror image of herself. Both children are 10 years old. Both have been neglected and unloved by their parents, and both have developed unpleasant personalities as a result. Seeing these qualities in Mary helps her see her own flaws and their source. She continues the healing process she has already begun. Even though they are very much alike, enough of the old Mary remains to make her unable to trust him, so she hides the fact that she has already located the secret garden and gone inside.

In addition to being something of a secret himself, Colin keeps a secret of his own – the portrait of his mother that is hidden by a rose-colored curtain, further strengthening the rose as a symbol of Mrs. Craven. He keeps the portrait hidden because he wants to keep his mother for himself as a kind of secret. As they part after their first meeting, the two children who have been kept secret from the world agree to keep secret the fact that they have discovered one another.

Even though Colin has not yet been outdoors to see the sun, Mary begins to shed light on his personality by confronting him about his unpleasantness – something he has never encountered before because all the servants fear him. For the first time, he is exposed to the idea that death is not necessarily inevitable and that he might be able to take charge of his own future with the help of Dickon, the character most closely related to the power of nature.



## Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast the characters of Colin and Dickon. Include a discussion of their backgrounds, physical appearance and personalities. Why does Colin have such strong feelings about Dickon even before they have met?

## Discussion Question 2

Why are Colin and Mary immediately drawn to each other? What kinds of changes to they begin to bring about in each other at once?

## Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of the robin in the story thus far? Why does Mary feel so drawn to him?

## Vocabulary

mournful, ajar, immense, falter, indifferent, clutch, vexed, agitated, bewitch, superb, dreary, resentful, sympathetic, inquire, waft, oblige, conceited



# Chapters 17 - 20

## Summary

In Chapter 17, Mary wakes up in the middle of the night because Colin is screaming and throwing one of the temper tantrums he is famous for. Colin's nurse comes to Mary and begs her to talk with him and try to calm him down. Mary goes to his room, but rather than speaking calmly to him, she yells at him, saying that everyone hates him and she hopes he screams himself to death. Since no one ever speaks this way to him, this shocks Colin and he stops. He tells Mary that he is certain his back is growing a hump and he will die soon, but she looks at his back and assures him that he is perfectly fine. Colin says that he would like to go outdoors if Mary and Dickon go with him. Mary talks to him about the secret garden until he falls asleep.

Chapter 18 opens the following morning when Martha tells Mary that Colin wants to see her, but for the first time he has said "please" rather than simply making a demand. Mary stops in to see him briefly before meeting Dickon, who is already in the garden with a group of animals, as usual. Mary practices her Yorkshire dialect as she tells Dickon that she wants him to visit Colin and bring a couple of his animals. She is reluctant to leave the garden because it is beginning to bloom beautifully, but she pulls herself away and goes to Colin's room, where Colin laments the fact that he has no friends. Mary says that she has friends for the first time – Dickon, Ben, the robin and Colin – and when Colin says he is anxious to meet Dickon, Mary finally admits that she found the key to the garden and has been inside, and that she did not tell him earlier because she had been afraid she could not trust him.

Chapter 19 takes place that afternoon as Dr. Craven arrives to check on Colin and is shocked to find him sitting up and talking animatedly with Mary. Colin tells the doctor that he plans to go outdoors soon and that he will allow only Mary and Dickon to go with him and Dr. Craven reluctantly agrees since he knows and trusts Dickon. After leaving Colin's room, Dr. Craven and Mrs. Medlock discuss the changes in him and she tells the doctor that Susan Sowerby, Martha and Dickon's mother, has a healing effect on people and believes that children need to spend time with other children in order to thrive. Back in Colin's room, Mary opens the windows so he can breathe fresh air. Later, Dickon arrives with a number of animals and Colin's excitement about going to the garden increases.

In Chapter 20, the weather turns bad so Colin's trip to the garden has to be delayed for more than a week, but Dickon visits each day with reports on what has been happening on the moor, which builds excitement, and the three spend much time talking about their plans. Colin is delighted that the garden is their special secret and is determined to keep it that way. The household staff is surprised when Colin summons the head gardener, Mr. Roach, to his room and tells him that he plans to go out at 2 that afternoon and that no one is to be in the garden area at that time. While they eat lunch, Colin and Mary discuss their excitement about spring, which neither has experienced because Colin





has never been outdoors and Mary grew up in India, where there is no spring season. After lunch, Colin's nurse gets him ready and a footman carries his wheelchair downstairs, where Dickon meets them, and the three go outdoors alone. Colin is delighted with everything he sees, especially the secret garden, and as his complexion begins to get pink for the first time, he declares that he will get well and live forever.

## Analysis

Even before Colin sees the garden for the first time, its healing powers have begun to have an effect on him. He is becoming less demanding, asking politely to have Mary visit him rather than simply commanding her to do so, and he is even gaining physical strength. This can be attributed to several things that he has been denied his entire life – friendship and love, which he has now found with Mary and Dickon, as well as hope, which has come as a result of his new relationships. He even anticipates going outdoors and experiencing the garden for himself. Mary is also continuing to change as she decides to trust Colin enough to tell him that she has already found and been inside the secret garden.

The theme of nature continues in this section as the garden continues to serve as a symbol of the growth the main characters are experiencing. The rain is unwelcome because it keeps the children inside and away from the garden. However, when they are able to finally return to the garden, they discover that the rain was necessary for the plants to grow.

Although Susan Sowerby does not appear in this section, she is once again seen as something of a universal symbol of motherhood. Her subtle, indirect influence has affected both Mary and Colin in a positive way, and even Dr. Craven talks about the healing effect he has seen when she comes into contact with his seriously ill patients. He notes that when she has visited them, he knows they will now live. This circles back to the fact that the love of a parent – in particular, a mother – has a powerfully healing effect on a child. The denial of that love has a detrimental effect.

Spring again is used as a symbol of awakening, growth, and health as Mary and Colin talk about the fact that neither has ever experienced spring. Both have spent their entire lives in a closed environment – Colin in his room and Mary in the stifling Indian climate. So, although they are unprepared for what it will bring, they are anxious to plunge forward, leaving behind their former unpleasant, unloved selves.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the scene in which Mary is called to Colin's room to calm him down when he has a temper tantrum. Why does the staff turn to her? How does she handle the situation? How is her behavior different from the way others react to his tantrums? How is this significant to their relationship?



## Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the Yorkshire accent that some of the book's characters have? Why does Mary feel it is important for her to speak to Dickon in Yorkshire?

## Discussion Question 3

Describe Colin's reaction when he enters the garden for the first time. How does the garden change him immediately?

## Vocabulary

hysterics, scold, restrain, startle, tantrum, drone, gradual, triumphant, nuzzle, enraptured, astonishing, tiresome, unscrupulous, perplexed, obliged, invalid, sufficient, exaggerated, lenient, trample, alcove



# Chapters 21 - 24

## Summary

In Chapter 21, Dickon pushes Colin's chair around the garden so he can see everything. Colin asks about the large dead tree with the missing branch and Mary and Dickon, not wanting to tell him that it is the tree from which his mother fell, assure him that although the tree itself is dead, it will soon be covered with roses. Suddenly the robin appears and Mary secretly tells Dickon it was sent by magic to distract Colin from the tree. Dickon tells Mary that his mother believes that Mrs. Craven continues to look after her son and perhaps it was she who helped them find the garden so they could take him there. Mary muses to herself that she believes in magic and thinks that Dickon works magic, which is why all living things like him so much. Colin announces that he plans to come to the garden every day and soon he will be strong enough to leave his wheelchair and work with Mary and Dickon. Suddenly the children are shocked to see Ben Weatherstaff looking over the garden wall, furious that they are inside, and Mary assures him that the robin inadvertently showed her the way. Ben is even more shocked to see Colin, who becomes enraged when Ben refers to him as a cripple and with great effort, he stands up to prove that he is strong. Ben bursts into tears of joy and Colin tells him that he must keep the secret of the garden and commands him to come inside.

In Chapter 22, Mary goes to let Ben into the garden and Colin asks Dickon if he worked magic to enable him to walk, but Dickon says it was the magic of nature. When Colin asks Ben what he does on the estate, he says that he is kept on staff because Colin's mother liked him and he confirms that the secret garden belonged to her. Ben says that Colin's mother had asked him to care for the garden if anything happened to her, so he climbed over the wall from time to time to care for it until two years ago when he was physically unable to do it anymore. He assures Colin that he will keep the secret. Colin takes a trowel, turns over some earth and plants a potted rose that Ben brings to him, then he insists on standing up to watch the sun go down.

Chapter 23 finds Dr. Craven waiting for the children to return and Mary is taken aback by Colin's rudeness toward him. After the doctor leaves, she tells Colin that everyone has been nice to him despite his rudeness because they thought he was going to die and Colin vows to change his attitude with the help of the magic to be found in the garden. Over the next few months, the garden flourishes as Mary, Dickon, and Ben tend to it and Colin watches with delight. Colin now believes in magic and announces that he is going to make great scientific discoveries about it. He makes a lengthy speech about using the magic of nature to heal himself and enlists the help of Ben, Mary and Dickon to make it happen. They agree that Colin will continue to grow strong by coming to the garden each day, but his improving condition will be kept secret so he can surprise his father when he returns to the manor.

In Chapter 24, the children have agreed to let Dickon's mother in on their secrets, including the existence of the garden and Colin's improving health. However, Mary and



Colin have encountered a problem – their improved health has increased their appetites but they do not want the household staff to know that, so Mrs. Sowerby offers to send extra food to them in secret. Colin continues to practice walking and Dickon speaks to a local wrestler, who suggests other exercises to build muscle, and both Colin and Mary begin doing them. Dr. Craven returns after a two-week absence and is puzzled to see Colin looking so well even though he apparently eats very little, but Mrs. Medlock assures him that the children could not be getting extra food so he agrees to leave well enough alone since both Colin and Mary are obviously thriving.

## Analysis

The idea of nature as magic becomes more overt in this section when the children begin to actively equate the two. While Dickon is depicted as a person of the earth, the concept does not come as naturally to Colin so he declares his intention to study nature and magic.

The author has brought forth the idea of resurrection previously in terms of spring bringing the garden back to life, but that theme becomes more prevalent in Chapter 21. The large tree from which Colin's mother fell to her death is the only part of her garden that is dead, but Dickon – the character most closely associated with nature – makes it clear that it will come to life, in a manner of speaking, when it is covered with roses. Since roses are the symbol of Mrs. Craven, the author again makes her the spiritual center of the garden. Although her death was directly responsible for his father's subsequent neglect of Colin, she will be resurrected when the roses bloom and will also resurrect Colin and eventually his father's love for him. This concept is further highlighted in Colin's declaration that he will not die, but rather will live forever since he has found the garden that he now knows was once his mother's. Colin is also connected to his mother when he plants a rose bush as a symbol of his ownership of the garden.

Secrets are again at the forefront in these chapters. The children learn that, as they had suspected, the garden has not been entirely neglected over the past 10 years as Ben has slipped over the wall to care for it until he became unable to do it anymore. The children who were once kept secret by their parents are now keeping secrets from them as they conspire to keep anyone from knowing about Colin's improved health until he can surprise his father, and Mrs. Sowerby, the book's mother figure, helps them by secretly providing something closely associated with a maternal figure – food and in particular, milk, to help them grow stronger.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Colin so drawn to the dead tree in the garden? Why do Mary and Dickon want to distract his attention from it? Why is it significant that Dickon says it will soon be covered with roses?



## Discussion Question 2

When they return from the garden, why does Mary tell Colin she feels sorry for Dr. Craven? What discoveries about herself has she made that contribute to this conversation with Colin? How does Colin's reaction reflect changes in himself since the character was first introduced?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the concept of magic in the novel. How does the author equate magic with nature? How does she weave in religion?

## Vocabulary

canopy, investigate, crumpet, delicate, indignant, scramble, overpower, spellbound, gnarled, descent, exultation, condescend, overexert, peculiarity, orator



# Chapters 25 - 27

## Summary

Chapter 25 opens with the robin watching the children in the garden. Over time, he observes as Colin grows stronger. The robin compares Colin's movements as he learns to walk with his own efforts to learn to fly. Although he and his mate were fearful for their safety and that of their eggs at first, in time they learned to relax and trust that the children will bring no harm to them. Meanwhile, Colin grows impatient for his father to return so he will no longer have to keep the secret of his good health. When rain forces them to stay inside, Mary suggests that they explore the many rooms in the manor house, reflecting that the closed-off rooms are somewhat like their secret garden. One day, Mary notices that Colin has drawn back the curtain that used to cover his mother's portrait. He tells her that it no longer makes him angry to see her laughing. Mary remarks that it seems like his mother's ghost has been made into a boy. Colin replies that if he were her ghost, perhaps his father would be fond of him. He also says that if his father were fond of him, he would tell him about the magic and perhaps that would make him more cheerful.

In Chapter 26, the children and Ben are back in the garden, where Colin delivers lectures about magic to others. Everyone is very pleased about Colin's improved health. At Ben's suggestion, Colin teaches him a hymn to give thanks for it. Mrs. Sowerby arrives at the garden, having been invited by Dickon, and Colin is thrilled to meet her at last. He is even happier when she agrees that his father will like him now that he is well and strong. She also remarks on Mary's improved appearance, something that Mary had not paid much attention to, although she knew she looked different. Now she hopes that someday she might be as beautiful as her mother. The children show Mrs. Sowerby around the garden. When Colin asks if she believes in magic, she says that she does, although she calls it by different names. As they prepare to leave, Colin says he wishes Mrs. Sowerby was his mother, and she assures him that his own mother is present in the garden and expresses the hope that his father will return home soon.

The book's final chapter begins with the narrator explaining some of the novel's primary themes. As long as Mary and Colin remained disagreeable and shut away from others, they were sickly, weak, and wretched. They were transformed by the beauty of nature and filling their minds with good thoughts. They came alive just as the secret garden did. Meanwhile, Master Craven has been wandering through the most beautiful places in Europe, but he has kept his mind filled with dark, sad thoughts. Eventually he had come to a stream in Austria that was surrounded by forget-me-nots. As he noticed their beauty, he began to feel alive again. He later learned that this took place on the same day that Colin first proclaimed that he was going to live forever. From then on, he began to feel stronger and to notice the beauty around him. One night he has a dream in which he sees his late wife. She tells him that she is in the garden, and this surprises him because he knows the garden is locked and the key is buried. The following day, he receives a letter from Susan Sowerby urging him to come home, and he decides to do



so. As he travels back to Yorkshire, he begins to regret having neglected Colin all his life and wonders if Mrs. Sowerby contacted him because his son's condition had gotten worse. He also decides that when he gets home, he will find the key and reopen the garden. Arriving back at the manor, Mr. Craven asks Mrs. Medlock how Colin is doing, and she replies that he has been spending time with Mary and Dickon and has changed in mysterious ways. He is surprised to learn that Colin is in the garden, which he believes has been locked for 10 years. He's even more surprised when he approaches and hears laughter coming from inside the walls. He is astonished when a tall, strong, healthy boy runs toward him. He almost does not recognize his own son. He asks to see the garden, and the children take him there. They explain that just as it has come to life, so have Colin and Mary. Colin vows that he will never use his wheelchair again. The book ends with Ben telling Mrs. Medlock that she and the other staff members will soon learn about things that have been going on outside. Then she sees Mr. Craven coming toward the house with Colin walking beside him.

## Analysis

The book's final chapters bring full circle the connection between nature and the well-being of humans. For the first time, the reader sees the characters from the perspective of a creature of nature, the robin who inhabited the garden before Mary discovered it. Just as the children have been observing nature, he has been observing them. The robin sees the similarity between his own efforts to learn to fly and Colin's struggle to walk. He and his mate are far more protective of their unborn young than Colin's father and Mary's parents ever were of them. So, just as it took time for Colin and Mary to learn to trust each other, it has taken time for the robins to trust that the children who have invaded the garden will not harm them or the eggs that are waiting to hatch.

The reader also learns that although we have not seen his journey, Mr. Craven has been on a path that parallels that of his son. Both of their lives have been altered by the death of Colin's mother and now both have been healed by the power of nature, beauty, and positive thoughts. While Colin has been using the garden to gain strength and good health, Mr. Craven has found a sense of peace in the natural beauty of the places he has visited. At last, the author draws a spiritual connection between father and son as Mr. Craven, although he does not realize it at the time, begins his healing process on the same day that Colin begins his own. This ties the resurrection of Mr. Craven's spirit to the renewed life in the garden and therefore to his connection with his late wife, the spiritual center of the garden.

By the book's conclusion, all secrets have been brought out into the open. Colin has removed the curtain that once covered his mother's portrait. The unveiling is a symbol of his willingness to share her with the rest of the world. The existence of the garden is gradually revealed to more people – first to Mrs. Sowerby, the book's mother figure, and eventually to Mr. Craven. The manor house's long-neglected rooms are now being explored by the children and presumably will come back to life as the house's inhabitants are doing.



## Discussion Question 1

Discuss at least three ways in which the secret garden is a metaphor for Mary and Colin.

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the motif of secrets in the novel. Does the author consider secrets good or bad? Why? What happens when important secrets are revealed?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the character of Mrs. Sowerby as the book's overarching mother figure. How does she compare with Mary's mother? What about Colin's mother? What specific things does she do to "adopt" Mary and Colin as if they were her own children?

## Vocabulary

revelation, dignified, extraordinary, grandeur, bounty, severe, solemnity, inordinate, abide, devour





# Characters

## Mary Lennox

Mary Lennox is the central figure in the novel. She is introduced as a very unlikeable 10-year-old girl who was never wanted by her parents and as such has been ignored by them and cared for by servants. Mary is English but lives in India until a cholera epidemic kills her parents and she is sent to England to live with an uncle she has never met. When she arrives on the Yorkshire moors, she is pale and sickly with a terrible disposition, but she gradually begins to open up to her maid, Martha, who prompts her to become interested in other people for the first time. When Martha tells her about a secret garden on the property that has been locked away for a decade, Mary becomes fascinated with it and is determined to find it. Eventually she locates the garden and with the help of a new friend, Martha's brother Dickon, she begins tending to it, growing healthier and stronger as she spends more time outdoors and simply becomes a happier person. Mary also discovers another secret of the manor house -- her cousin Colin, an invalid boy her own age whose father ignores him because he is a reminder of his mother, who died after a fall in the garden ten years earlier. As the novel progresses, the healing power of nature and the love of others gradually transforms the sullen, demanding Mary into a typical, healthy young girl who embraces life and everything it has to offer, bringing Colin along with her.

## Colin Craven

Colin Craven is the son of Archibald Craven, head of Misselthwaite Manor. He has spent his entire 10 years in his room because he is sickly and widely expected to die, and his father rarely sees him because Colin reminds him of his beloved wife, who passed away shortly after Colin's birth. This situation has made Colin into a demanding, rude, tyrannical child who terrorizes the household staff. However, he meets his match when he is discovered by his cousin Mary, who is not afraid to stand up to him and even challenge him. He becomes fascinated with her tales of a secret garden on the property and becomes determined to leave his room and visit it for himself. The garden transforms Colin as it does Mary and he becomes strong in body and mind as he spends more time there. He also learns to be more introspective and alter the way he treats others as he is healed by the power of nature and friendship, eventually daring to seek the love his father has denied him his entire life.

## Dickon Sowerby

Dickon Sowerby is the brother of Mary's maid, Martha, and the son of Susan Sowerby. He is a young boy of perhaps 12, but wise in the ways of the Yorkshire moors. Dickon has an uncanny ability to communicate with all living things, including every animal and bird he meets, and he has a deep understanding for and love of nature. He is described



as being beautiful and exotic, but it is his inner qualities that attract Mary and Colin to him. Despite his youth, he is considered strong and trustworthy, enough so that Dr. Craven feels comfortable leaving Colin in his care to venture outdoors for the first time. Dickon is portrayed as the spirit of the moors and the natural surroundings that bring healing and peace to Mary and Colin.

## **Archibald Craven**

Archibald Craven is Colin's father and the lord of Misselthwaite Manor. Although he appears in only two brief scenes in the book, he is important because it is his neglect that has made Colin into the sad invalid he has become. Mr. Craven never recovered from his wife's death and allowed it to take over his life, preferring to spend his time aimlessly traveling the world rather than caring for his young son. He is reputed to be a hunchback, but in truth is simply burdened by his own sadness, causing him to have a stooped appearance. Although he is away from home when Colin finds the garden and begins to grow healthier, Mr. Craven mysteriously undergoes the same sort of healing process and returns to build a new relationship with his son.

## **Susan Sowerby**

Susan Sowerby is the mother of Dickon and Martha, and also the symbol of motherhood throughout the book. Unlike Mary's mother, she is kind and loving, and her influence has a profound effect on Mary and Colin, neither of whom has ever experienced a mother's love before.

## **Martha Sowerby**

Martha Sowerby is Mary's young maid. She is significant because she is the first person Mary actually feels friendship toward, and because she introduces Mary to her mother and Dickon.

## **Ben Weatherstaff**

Ben Weatherstaff is one of the gardeners on the property and the only person who knows the location of the secret garden. He is another of Mary's early friends and it is later revealed that he has been secretly tending to the garden since Mrs. Craven's death.

## **Dr. Craven**

Dr. Craven is Archibald Craven's brother and Colin's uncle as well as his physician.



## **Mrs. Medlock**

Mrs. Medlock is the head of the Misselthwaite staff.

## **Lilias Craven**

Lilias Craven is Colin's late mother and the original owner of the secret garden.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## The Secret Garden

The Secret Garden is an abandoned garden at Misselthwaite Manor that has been locked away since the death of Mrs. Craven 10 years earlier. It is the centerpiece of the novel because it becomes a place of healing for its main characters, Mary and Colin.

## Misselthwaite Manor

Misselthwaite Manor is an estate on the moors in Yorkshire, England. It is home to the Craven family and to Mary after her parents die.

## Robin Redbreast

Robin Redbreast is a bird that lives in the secret garden. The robin leads Mary to the garden.

## Roses

Roses are the most significant plant in the novel because they are a symbol of life and of Colin's late mother.

## The Dead Tree

After the garden begins to come to life in the spring, the only dead object left there is a large tree from which Colin's mother fell to her death. It remains in the garden, but it is eventually covered in roses to symbolize that his mother lives on in Colin.

## Magic

As the novel progresses, Colin and Mary come to equate the nature that heals them with magic. Colin becomes determined to study this concept as he grows older.

## Mrs. Craven's Portrait

Colin has a portrait of his mother hanging in his bedroom, but he keeps it covered with a rose-colored curtain. As the novel progresses and he begins to heal and grow stronger, he uncovers the portrait as a symbol of the ways in which he is opening up and coming to terms with his feelings toward his parents.



## The Moors

Misselthwaite Manor is located on a moor in Yorkshire, England. The moor is used as a symbol for Mary. When she arrives at the manor, it is winter. The moor is cold and desolate, just as she is. As spring arrives, the moor comes to life much as Mary herself does when she experiences the healing effects of nature and the secret garden.

## The Garden Key

After his wife died, Mr. Craven locked her garden and buried the key in the ground. When Mary finds the key that unlocks the garden gate, she is also finding the key to unlocking her own health, personality, and happiness as well as that of Colin.

## Colin's Wheelchair

Colin is unable to walk when the reader meets him, so he must take his first trips outdoors in a wheelchair. However, after he begins to experience the healing effects of the garden, he is able to stand up and leave behind this symbol of his frailty and weakness.

# Settings

## India

The book begins in an undisclosed part of India where the Lennox family lives. Their home is large and filled with servants, but it is an unhappy place for young Mary, who is largely ignored by her parents. Despite the brightness of the sun and the vivid colors, it is a dreary place for an unhappy child. Mary's memories of the place include the ivory present everywhere and the dark skins of the servants who care for her.

## Yorkshire, England

After the death of her parents, Mary is sent to Yorkshire, England, to live with her uncle. While India had been teeming with people, her new home is isolated on a moor that is cold and desolate when she arrives. It seems to be a lonely place with strong storms and wind that whistles in the night. Its occupants are people with dialects that she has never heard and a kind of poverty that she has never experienced. However, as spring arrives, the appearance of the landscape changes. Heather and other plants begin to grow on the moors just as Mary herself is experiencing growth and change.

## Misselthwaite Manor

Misselthwaite Manor is the home of Mary's Uncle Archibald and of Mary after the death of her parents. It is a huge place located on a moor in Yorkshire. It has nearly 100 rooms, but most of them have been closed off and unused since the death of Mrs. Craven 10 years earlier. The unused rooms, which Mary later explores, are gloomy and dark, some with large portraits and ivory objects that remind her of India. The grounds of the manor include long pathways and gardens, all of which are tended by the staff with the exception of the secret garden that has been locked away for many years.

## The Secret Garden

The secret garden is located within a tall wall on the property of Misselthwaite Manor. It is the setting of some of the book's most important scenes. It once belonged to Mrs. Craven, but has been sealed off since her death and now appears overgrown and abandoned. However, when Mary finds the key and enters the garden, she finds that there are signs of life there. She enlists the help of Dickon and Colin to bring it back to life. The garden is the book's most significant setting because it serves as a symbol of the rebirth that Mary and Colin experience.



# Themes and Motifs

## Rebirth

One of the overarching themes of *The Secret Garden* is the concept of rebirth. In a manner of speaking, Archibald Craven died along with his wife when she fell to her death in the garden 10 years earlier. He retreated into his grief and refused to interact with his son because Colin reminded him of his mother. He also had the garden his wife had loved locked away. He buried the key much as we bury the dead in our society. Mary also experiences death after her parents succumb to a cholera epidemic. Her life changes forever when she is sent to live with her uncle. Although he is alive, Colin senses death over his shoulder at all times and is haunted by the portrait of his dead mother, keeping it covered at all times.

Like the people in her life, Mary's environment is dead when she arrives in Yorkshire. Winter has made the moors cold and desolate. When she discovers the secret garden, everything in it appears to be dead. As she looks further, however, Mary finds a few green sprigs and realizes that there are living things in the garden after all. She begins to cultivate them although she has no knowledge of gardening. As spring weather brings new life to the garden and the moors, Mary and Colin soak up the new experiences they are having, including the health benefits of nature and the outdoors, their growing friendships, and the positive attitudes that come with the spring weather, to rejuvenate themselves. Mr. Craven experiences the same sort of rebirth as he casts off his grief. As the book concludes, there is hope that his family will be reborn along with the individuals who comprise it.

## The Healing Power of Love

When the reader meets them, neither Mary nor Colin has ever experienced love in their lives. Mary's parents never wanted her and so they left her to the care of servants, most of whom left after a short time because she treated them so poorly. The death of her parents means little to her because she barely knew them to begin with. Presumably Colin was a wanted child, but his father essentially abandoned him after the death of his wife because he was a reminder of her, so he has grown up in much the same circumstances as Mary. As a result, both are sickly children, and both have terrible tempers and are quite unlikeable.

After her arrival in England, Mary is surprised to find that she likes someone for the first time in her life. The first person to stir these feelings is Martha, her young maid, who has been raised in a crowded household by a loving, nurturing mother. Martha's childhood nurturing shows in her personality and her outlook. By the time she meets Colin, Mary has made other friends in Dickon, Ben, and even the robin who lives in the garden. She is able to understand and relate to the ill-mannered Colin, but she also



sees the ugliness of his behavior. She becomes Colin's first friend just as Martha was hers, and together they begin to transform themselves.

Mrs. Sowerby is an important component of this theme for several reasons. She is seen as the mother figure of the book, not only as the natural mother to Martha and Dickon, but also a sort of adoptive mother to Mary and Colin. It is she who gives Mary the skip rope that sets her on the path to health and helps her find the secret garden. Mrs. Sowerby is also the one who reprimands Mr. Craven for neglecting Mary after she comes to live with him. She later sneaks food to Mary and Colin to help them keep the secret of their improved health and growing appetites. She takes them milk with their food. Milk is clearly a symbol of motherhood.

As the book progresses, it is the love of friends, family, and even nature that enables Mary and Colin to set aside their prior circumstances and evolve into physically and mentally healthy children.

## Secrets

The motif of secrets is central to this novel. Mary herself is a secret when the book begins, as her parents have kept her very existence such a secret that the police are surprised to find her in the house since few people knew she existed. While the villagers know about Colin, the fact that he is hidden away where no one ever sees him makes him something of a secret, even from his father, who ignores him. Colin keeps a portrait of his mother in his room, but it is hidden by a curtain. The garden is the biggest secret of all, locked away since the death of Mrs. Craven and hidden so completely that Mary has difficulty finding the door because of the ivy that has grown around it. Once they find the garden, the children insist that it remain a secret so they can have it for their own. Colin keeps his growing health a secret from the household staff. At first, he does this because he simply wants privacy for his activities in the garden. Later, he wants to surprise his father with the fact that he can now stand and walk. Mrs. Sowerby secretly provides extra food for Mary and Colin after she becomes one of the few people who know the secret of the garden. In the end, all of the book's secrets are revealed and the author depicts this as a positive development, bringing darkness to light and replacing grief and pain with love.



# Styles

## Point of View

The story of *The Secret Garden* is told by a third-person, omniscient narrator who is privy to the action that takes place and to the thoughts and feelings of the characters. This is important because the characters are quite varied and diverse. It is helpful for the reader to get a peek into their individual ways of thinking. It becomes especially important as Mary, the main character, begins to undergo changes after arriving at Misselthwaite Manor. In the beginning, she was portrayed as a selfish, arrogant, somewhat hateful child. It is instructive for the reader to share her journey as she initially begins to see herself as others see her and experiences new feelings for the first time.

While omniscient, the narrator is also subjective, offering commentary on the characters' motivations from time to time, as well as observations about the times in which the story takes place.

In addition to the book's primary narrator, at two points during the novel brief passages are told from the perspective of the robin who lives in the secret garden. This technique enables the reader to see the garden and the children from a different point of view as the robin observes the changes that have taken place in them.

## Language and Meaning

The story is told in the past tense and chronologically with the exception of the final chapter, in which the story of Mr. Craven's previous journey is told alongside the events that have taken place at Misselthwaite Manor. The language is fairly straightforward. It is typical of the time period, with much of the dialogue being more formal than would be seen today.

The Sowerby family and other local characters speak a Yorkshire dialect that is both foreign and fascinating to Mary. The author writes this dialogue somewhat phonetically. While it can be confusing, the reader soon learns to follow it just as Mary learns to understand and even speak it.

## Structure

*The Secret Garden* is divided into 27 chapters of varying lengths. Each has a title that is either descriptive of something that takes place in that section -- "There Is No One Left" and "A Young Rajah," for example, or a significant quotation that is found within it -- "Might I Have a Bit of Earth?" and "It Has Come!" for example.



The first two chapters take place in India. Mary is living in India when her parents die and she is left alone. Later, she lives temporarily in India with the clergyman's family.

Next she travels with Mrs. Medlock to her uncle's home. The remaining chapters that take place at Misselthwaite Manor.



## Quotes

She had not wanted a little girl at all, and when Mary was born she handed her over to the care of an Ayah, who was made to understand that if she wished to please the Mem Sahib she must keep the child out of sight as much as possible." Chapter 1, The Secret Garden, paragraph 1.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** The fact that she was never wanted and never loved explains why Mary became such a lonely, unpleasant child.

If she had been older she would no doubt have been very anxious at being left alone in the world, but she was very young, and as she had always been taken care of, she supposed she always would be." Chapter 1, The Secret Garden, paragraph 1.

-- Narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** In this section, the narrator provides a glimpse into Mary's mindset after the death of her parents. She is not concerned about her future. Since her parents have never been the ones to take care of her, she assumes more servants will be provided and her life will go on as usual. This also explains much about Mary's imperious attitude toward the household staff.

Since she had been living in other people's houses and had had no Ayah, she had begun to feel lonely and to think queer thoughts which were new to her. She had begun to wonder why she had never seemed to belong to anyone even when her father and mother had been alive." Chapter 2, The Secret Garden, paragraph 5.

-- Narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** This is the first glimpse of potential introspection and subsequent change in Mary. Even though she does not miss her parents, her life has been shaken up, causing her to have new thoughts. For the first time, she begins to think of herself and her upbringing as different from that of other children who have been loved by their parents.

How does tha' like thysel'?" she inquired, really quite as if she were curious to know. Chapter 7, The Secret Garden, paragraph 11.

-- Martha (Chapter 7 paragraph 11)

**Importance:** By asking her if she likes herself, Martha forces Mary to really think about herself and her behavior for the first time. As such, she begins to realize that there are reasons that no one else seems to like her and that she must change herself in order to change her circumstances.

Your father!" gasped Mary. "No one ever told me he had a boy! Why didn't they?"

Chapter 13, The Secret Garden, paragraph 5.

-- Mary (Chapter 13 paragraph 5)



**Importance:** Mary has been living in the manor house for some time now and has met Mr. Craven. So, she is shocked to find that he has a young son no one has mentioned. This is an example of the major secrets that are a central theme of the novel. It also runs parallel to Mary's own early years when her parents' friends did not know of her existence.

No, but he wishes he'd never been born. Mother she says that's th' worst thing on earth for a child. Them as is not wanted scarce ever thrives." Chapter 15, The Secret Garden, paragraph 1.

-- Dickon (Chapter 15 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Dickon makes this statement in response to Mary's question about whether Mr. Craven wishes that Colin would die. It highlights the novel's theme about the healing power of love by making the point that if a child is not loved, it is very difficult for them to grow and thrive. The reader has seen this in Mary, who was sickly until she came to live at Misselthwaite and began to make friends, and now in Colin, who, like Mary, was not wanted.

It was not until afterward that Mary realized that the thing had been funny as well as dreadful -- that it was funny that all the grown-up people were so frightened that they came to a little girl just because they guessed she was almost as bad as Colin himself." Chapter 17, The Secret Garden, paragraph 10.

-- Narrator (Chapter 17 paragraph 10)

**Importance:** Mary is continuing to experience self-reflection in this scene. She is amused because the adults in the house turn to her for help with Colin, but she also has matured enough to realize that it is because her behavior in the past has been similar to his and that she might be the one person to whom he could relate.

We are all three alike -- you and I and Ben Weatherstaff. He said we were neither of us much to look at and we were as sour as we looked. But I don't feel as sour as I used to before I knew the robin and Dickon." Chapter 18, The Secret Garden, paragraph 7.

-- Mary (Chapter 18 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** Mary has not only begun to experience the healing power of love and friendship, she also knows where it is coming from. She is growing not only in health but in self-awareness as well.

I shall get well! I shall get well!" he cried out. "Mary! Dickon! I shall get well! And I shall live forever and ever and ever!" Chapter 20, The Secret Garden, paragraph 1.

-- Colin (Chapter 20 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Colin has only been inside the secret garden for a few minutes, but he has already begun to experience its healing power. Rather than the sickly, obstinate child he has been, he has begun to transform himself.



Mrs. Craven was a very lovely young lady," he had gone on rather hesitatingly. "An' mother she thinks maybe she's about Misselthwaite many a time lookin' after Mester Colin, same as all mothers do when they're took out o' th' world. They have to come back, tha' sees. Happen she's been in the garden an' happen it was her set us to work, nd' told us to bring him here." Chapter 21, *The Secret Garden*, paragraph 10.  
-- Dickon (Chapter 21 paragraph 10)

**Importance:** This firmly establishes Mrs. Craven as the spirit of the secret garden. It also puts forth the idea that she has served as a guiding force not so much for her son as for Mary and Dickon. She has led them to find the garden, to discover Colin's existence, and to take him to the garden to experience its healing power.

They always called it Magic and indeed it seemed like it in the months that followed -- the wonderful months -- the radiant months -- the amazing ones. Oh! the things which happened in that garden!" Chapter 23, *The Secret Garden*, paragraph 7.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 23 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** In this section, the narrator equates magic with the wonders of nature. Nature's magical, healing power becomes a central theme in the book. The world seems to become magical as spring progresses, and magic is seen as the explanation for the miracles that take place as the garden transforms along with the lives of Mary and Colin.

If I were her ghost -- my father would be fond of me," he said. Chapter 25, *The Secret Garden*, paragraph 3.  
-- Colin (Chapter 25 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** Despite the positive changes that have taken place in Colin's health and his attitude, he is missing one important thing -- the love of his father. He realizes that it is his mother's death that alienated his father from him, so he sadly laments that his father might love him if he were her ghost instead of himself.

To let a sad thought or a bad one get into your mind is as dangerous as letting a scarlet fever germ get into your body. If you let it stay there after it has got in you may never get over it as long as you live." Chapter 27, *The Secret Garden*, paragraph 1.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 27 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This quote comes near the book's conclusion. It forth the author's idea that a positive attitude can be healing. This goes along with the book's theme of the power of nature and love to heal. This transformation experienced by Colin and Mary has involved gaining a better attitude toward live and other people.