

# *The Secret Garden* *Study Guide*



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*For the novel by Frances  
Hodgson Burnett*



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## Synopsis

A sweeping cholera epidemic leaves her orphaned and alone in a strange country, and nine-year-old Mary Lennox is sent to live with an uncle she has never met. For Mary, this is only the beginning of her journey.

Mary lives in India with parents that are far too busy with friends and parties to spend much time with her. She is young, sickly, and a nuisance. Mary grows up with her Ayah (an Indian nursemaid) waiting on her hand and foot, becoming spoiled and tyrannical.

After the epidemic passes, British officers reach the post where the Lennox family lives to find Mary is the only survivor still there. Mary is sent to England to live with her uncle, Mr. Archibald Craven, a hunchbacked recluse, and her only living relative. An accident ten years earlier took the life of his beautiful wife, leaving him lonely and bitter.

When Mary arrives at Misselthwaite Manor she meets Martha, a kindly, down-to-earth servant, and one of twelve children from a neighboring farm across the moor. Martha befriends Mary in spite of Mary's thoughtlessness and tells her about a locked garden. "Mr. Craven had it shut when his wife died so sudden. He won't let no one go inside."

From the day Mary hears of the secret garden, she determines to enter it. Mary's encounter with the garden will change her life, and the lives of others, forever.

## Chapters 10–12

### Vocabulary:

Match the following vocabulary words on the left with the correct definition on the right.

- |                    |                        |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1. ___ reverent    | a. taunting            |
| 2. ___ industrious | b. insult              |
| 3. ___ stifle      | c. hard-working        |
| 4. ___ absorbed    | d. pay homage to, obey |
| 5. ___ salaam      | e. respectful          |
| 6. ___ sarcastic   | f. odd, different      |
| 7. ___ wench       | g. stubborn            |
| 8. ___ queer       | h. smother             |
| 9. ___ flout       | i. totally involved    |
| 10. ___ obstinate  | j. girl                |
| 11. ___ wretched   | k. miserable           |

Explain the meanings of the following underlined words and phrases.

1. Martha looked rather taken aback.
2. He's not half as bad as he looks; even though he seems crabby.
3. The lump in her throat choked her.
4. Mary quavered, "Might I have a bit of earth?"
5. Martha had felt Mary to be a tiresome charge.

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**Questions:**

1. What did Dickon bring Mary? Write two or three sentences describing Dickon's appearance and personality.
2. Why does Dickon start to cut away the dead wood of the roses?
3. Why does Mary fear having to meet Mr. Craven? Why is she glad to hear that he will be going away for the summer? Write a short paragraph describing Mr. Craven.
4. What is a governess? Why doesn't Mary want a governess?
5. When Mr. Craven asks if Mary wants anything, how does she respond?
6. What does Mary say about Mr. Craven after she has met him?

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**Thinking About the Story:**

7. Ben Weatherstaff tells Mary he learned to like roses from a young lady now in heaven. Who do you think he is talking about?

8. Dickon says,

seems like some one besides th' robin must have been in [the garden] since it was shut up ten year' ago. . . . Seems to me as if there'd been a bit o' prunin' done here an' there later than ten year' ago.

Has someone been in the garden? Who do you think has done the pruning?

9. Mary tells Dickon she only likes five people. Who are the five people? Why do you think her list is so short?

10. Think about Mary's personality and how she is beginning to change. How is Mary like the garden?

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### **Dig Deeper:**

Pruning means to cut off needless or undesirable branches or twigs from a vine, tree, or bush to promote fruitfulness or better growth. Listed below are some reasons gardeners prune plants:

- To form each plant or tree to a specific shape
  - To allow enough light to reach the leaves and the fruit
  - To get rid of diseased or dead wood.
  - To prevent the plant from producing too many fruits that would be of poor quality.
  - To regulate the yield from one year to another.
11. The gardener's purpose in pruning a tree, bush, or vine is to improve the plant and make it healthier. Why would pruning have these effects?
  
  12. Read John 15:2; Proverbs 4: 20–27; and Galatians 5: 22–23. How does “pruning” our own unhealthy or bad thoughts make us better? What fruit should we see in our lives?
  
  13. It could be said that Mary has a lot of “dead wood” in her life. The dead wood in Mary includes selfishness, crossness, anger, and hate. How is the “dead wood” slowly being pruned from Mary's life?

## *The Secret Garden Study Guide Answer Key*

more than Colin does. Colin simply despairs when others tell him he will not live to grow up.

6. She has become rosy-cheeked, put on weight, and her hair is fuller. She looks healthier. She has changed in appearance because of all the time she is spending outdoors, playing, exercising, eating healthy meals, and being interested in something that is good (the garden).

7. Answers will vary.

8. These verses tell us to pray about those things that make us anxious and to think about things that are pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy.

### *Chapters 16–18*

#### *Vocabulary:*

Synonyms may vary. 1. unselfish, self-denying, altruistic, chivalrous, heroic; 2. sad, pensive, woe-begone, melancholy, dejected, plaintive; 3. pitiable, lamentable, touching, affecting, mournful, sad, dismal, depressing; 4. fit, throes, passion, outbursts, paroxysms, rages; 5. agonize, squirm, twist; 6. understanding, comprehension, acuteness, penetration, discernment, wisdom, brilliance; 7. murmur, mutter, clatter, chatter; 8. pretense, airs, stiffness, mannerisms, acting; 9. shrew, spitfire, fury; 10. pity, commiserate, condole, sympathize; 11. entranced, overjoyed, fascinated, captivated.

#### *Questions:*

1. Colin becomes angry because Mary had gone to the garden to work instead of coming to see him.

2. Colin had never fought with someone just like himself before. He had never heard that he might live before. Perhaps he was forced to see what he himself acted like and didn't like it.

3. He is a kind man. Mary's heart is warmed toward Mr. Craven. She decides that she will write a thank you letter.

4. Mary began to feel sorry for Colin.

5. Mary tells Colin that there's not a single lump on his back. He starts to believe her because she is angry, unsympathetic, and insists that he is fine.

#### *Thinking About the Story:*

6. Colin calls Mary selfish for going outside instead of coming to visit him. Mary calls Colin selfish for insisting that she visit. Answers will vary.

#### *Dig Deeper:*

7. True friends may tell us things that hurt, but because they are friends they are telling us these things in order to help us. Mary's words to Colin were harsh, but they made Colin calm down, think about how he was acting, and consider that perhaps he wasn't going to die after all. Answers will vary.

8. Colin has become terribly spoiled, afraid, tyrannical, lonely, and ill.

9. God has given us the gift of free will. He also provides us the things we need. God does, however, discipline us to keep us from having our own way completely.

### *Chapters 19–21*

#### *Vocabulary:*

1. loathed, hated, abhorred; 2. unprincipled, having no scruples, morals; 3. puzzled, confused, bothered; 4. fluently, glibly, articulate, garrulous; 5. keen, astute; 6. a person living in seclusion, a hermit;

7. rapture, bliss, emotional excitement; 8. up to this time; 9. mysterious, eerie, weird; 10. a collection