

# 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?

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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 of caged wild animals; 11. mildly, mercifully, with tolerance; 12. scolded, rebuked; 13. gloomy, grisly, gruesome; 14. broom, esp. one made of twigs; 15. stumble, waver, fail, weaken, hesitate.

### *Questions:*

1. They are encouraging Colin to think about the good and beautiful things in the garden. The effect is that Colin wants to go outside and see it himself, and Colin had never wanted to go outside before.
2. "I am going out in my chair this afternoon. If the fresh air agrees with me I may go out every day." None of the gardeners were to be around from two o'clock until Colin sent word that they could go back to their work. The purpose of the orders is to keep Colin's visit to the garden a secret.
3. Ben Weatherstaff says he has heard Colin was "a cripple" and had a crooked back and crooked legs. Colin's pride was insulted and in his anger he stood up to show Ben Weatherstaff he could do it. Ben began to cry because he cared for Colin's mother and was concerned about her son. He is happy that Colin is all right.

### *Thinking About the Story:*

4. The author calls Colin "the Rajah" whenever he is commanding someone to do something. She does this so that the reader can imagine the attitude with which Colin is speaking.
5. Answers will vary. Colin quickly learned that he could not command Mary as he could the servants. Colin has no control over what Mary does. Neither does he have control over what is happening in the garden. Colin still commands the servants like a young Rajah.

### *Dig Deeper:*

6. Answers will vary.
7. True immortality—eternal life—comes through a relationship with Jesus.
8. Mary and Dickon have begun being kind to Colin and encouraging him to think good thoughts. Colin's determination to see the garden and live have helped also.

## *Chapters 22–24*

### *Vocabulary:*

1. copious; 2. impartially; 3. orator; 4. indifference; 5. dervishes; 6. pluck; 7. solemnity; 8. testily; 9. exultation; 10. draughts; 11. condescended; 12. fakir; 13. grandeur.

### *Questions:*

1. Mrs. Craven said that if she was ever to become ill or to go away, Ben was to take care of her roses. Ben climbed over the wall into the garden once a year to tend the roses. Recently his rheumatism prevented him from climbing the wall. He had not been inside for two years. Answers may vary. Ben is faithful, trustworthy, and dependable.