



The Secret Garden

Author: Frances Hodgson Burnett (1849–1924)

Teaching Notes author: Jo Tregenza

Information about assessment and curriculum links can be found at the end of these Teaching Notes.

Synopsis

When her parents are killed by cholera, Mary Lennox is sent from India to live in England with her uncle. Misselthwaite Manor is a foreboding place with many rooms. In the gardens she meets the gardener Ben Weatherstaff and a robin. The robin becomes Mary's first friend. He helps her to find a key and a secret garden. As soon as she enters the garden, it becomes her own world.

One day she hears cries within the manor, and in a room behind a door she finds Colin Craven, her cousin. He cannot walk or stand and is so poorly that he never leaves his bedroom. Mary takes him in his wheelchair to visit the secret garden and here he begins his recovery.

Social and historical context

The story is set in late nineteenth and early twentieth century England, amongst the North Yorkshire Moors. At this time, India was still part of the British Empire. The story is set in a time when many families were extended and people often took in members of their wider family, such as cousins. In the story Colin Craven makes himself better by thinking positively. The author was drawn to this belief after her eldest son died of tuberculosis.

Group or guided reading

Introducing the book

- *(Predicting)* Focus on the words in the title of the book. Ask the children: *Why might a garden be kept secret?*
- *(Clarifying)* Read the introductory passage on page 4 to the children. Do they know what cholera is? Explain that cholera is a disease caused by drinking contaminated water. Talk to the children about the British Empire.

During reading

- *(Deducing)* Read Chapter 1 with the children. Ask: *What can you deduce about Mary's relationship with her mother and father?*
- *(Questioning, Deducing)* Ask the children how they think Mary feels about her future. What comparisons do they think she makes between her former and new life? Encourage them to explain their answers using evidence from the text.

Assessment: Check that children:

- can comment on the development of the characters
- can identify the relationships between the characters.

Independent reading

Objective: Compare the usefulness of techniques such as visualisation, prediction and empathy in exploring the meaning of texts.



Classics

- *(Imagining)* Ask the children to read Chapter 2. Ask them to imagine that they are Mary and they have just been told about the secret garden.
- *(Imagining)* Invite the children to draw a picture of what they think the garden might look like. Then ask them to read Chapters 3–5. Encourage them to adapt their drawing based on what they are reading. Talk about how their images differ before and after reading more of the story. Are some things changed because of what is directly stated, whilst others have been altered because of what has been implied by the writer?

Assessment:

- Can children infer information beyond the literal from the text?
- Ask the children to collect vocabulary from the story that is unfamiliar to them or that they feel is particularly descriptive. Display the vocabulary and provide definitions where necessary.
- Ask the children to finish reading to the end of the story independently.

Returning and responding to the text

- *(Summarising)* When the children have read the whole story ask them to summarise the main themes, e.g. people (like plants) need care and attention in order to grow and develop.

Assessment:

- Can the children understand the themes underlying a whole text?

Speaking, listening and drama activities

Objective: Reflect on how working in role helps to explore complex issues.

- *(Imagining, Deducing, Clarifying)* Challenge the children to create a freeze-frame image of the main characters in the secret garden at the moment that Mr Craven is about to enter. Encourage the children to think very carefully about their facial expressions. Ask them to explain how each person is feeling and why. Together, reflect on how the use of visual strategies such as freeze-frame images, have helped them to understand the story.

Writing activities

Objective: Adapt non-narrative forms and styles to write fiction or factual texts, including poems.

- Re-read Chapter 4, which describes the garden. Ask the children to notice the vocabulary, language and style of the description. Focus particularly on the quality of vocabulary and the range of sentences.
- Provide a range of images of gardens or parks as a stimulus for writing. Discuss gardens that the children have seen.
- Invite the children to write a short description or a poem about a garden that inspires them.

Assessment:

- Can the children write texts that are imaginative, interesting and thoughtful?
- Can the children write short pieces that have varied sentence length and structure and use a wide range of connectives?



Classics

Whole class reads

Books on a similar theme:

- *Tom's Midnight Garden* by Philippa Pearce
- *The Global Garden* by Kate Petty and Jennie Maizels
- *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi* by Chris Van Allsburg
- *The Paradise Garden* by Colin Thompson

Cross-curricular links

Art

- Create observational drawings of plants.

Science

- Discuss life processes common to plants.
- Make links between life processes in familiar plants and the environments in which they are found.

I.C.T.

- Take digital photographs of a garden to create a display. You could use images taken at different times of the year to create a stop-frame animation of a garden growing.

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The Secret Garden (Oxford Level 15) curriculum coverage chart

Links to Oxford Reading Criterion Scale:

- Can refer to the text to support opinions and predictions. (R/D) [ORCS Standard 5, 7]
- Can use clues from action, description and dialogue to help establish meaning. (D) [ORCS Standard 5, 8]
- Can identify the effects of different words and phrases to create different images and atmosphere, e.g. powerful verbs, descriptive adjectives and adverbs. (E) [ORCS Standard 5, 17]
- Can sometimes explain different characters' points of view. (D) [ORCS Standard 5, 23]

Comprehension strategies

- Comprehension strategies are taught throughout the Teaching Notes to enable pupils to understand what they are reading in books that they can read independently. In these Teaching Notes the following strategies are taught: *Predicting, Questioning, Clarifying, Summarising, Imagining, Deducing*

ENGLAND The National Curriculum in England: Years 3–4

Spoken language	Pupils should be taught to participate in discussions, presentations, performances and debates (SpokLang.9)
Reading: Word reading	Pupils should be taught to apply their growing knowledge of root words, prefixes and suffixes (morphology and etymology), as listed in Appendix 1, both to read aloud and to understand the meaning of new words that they meet (Y3/4 ReadWord.1)
Reading: Comprehension	<p>Pupils should be taught to develop positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by increasing their familiarity with a wide range of books, including fairy stories, myths and legends, and retelling some of these orally (Y3/4 ReadComp.1iv)</p> <p>Pupils should be taught to understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence (Y3/4 ReadComp.2iii)</p> <p>Pupils should be taught to understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by predicting what might happen from details stated and implied (Y3/4 ReadComp.2iv)</p> <p>Pupils should be taught to understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by identifying main ideas drawn from more than one paragraph and summarising these (Y3/4 ReadComp.2v)</p> <p>Pupils should be taught to participate in discussion about both books that are read to them and those they can read for themselves, taking turns and listening to what others say (Y3/4 ReadComp.4)</p>
Writing: Composition	<p>Pupils should be taught to plan their writing by discussing writing similar to that which they are planning to write in order to understand and learn from its structure, vocabulary and grammar (Y3/4 WritComp.1i)</p> <p>Pupils should be taught to draft and write by composing and rehearsing sentences orally (including dialogue), progressively building a varied and rich vocabulary and an increasing range of sentence structures (Y3/4 WritComp.2i)</p>

SCOTLAND Curriculum for Excellence: Literacy and English experiences and outcomes – Second level

Listening and talking	When I engage with others, I can respond in ways appropriate to my role, show that I value others' contributions and use these to build on thinking (LIT 2-02a)
Reading	<p>I regularly select and read, listen to or watch texts which I enjoy and find interesting, and I can explain why I prefer certain texts and authors (LIT 2-11a)</p> <p>I can select and use a range of strategies and resources before I read, and as I read, to make meaning clear and give reasons for my selection (LIT 2-13a)</p> <p>To show my understanding across different areas of learning, I can identify and consider the purpose and main ideas of a text and use supporting detail (LIT 2-16a)</p> <p>To show my understanding, I can respond to literal, inferential and evaluative questions and other close reading tasks and can create different kinds of questions of my own (ENG 2-17a)</p> <p>I can discuss the writer's style and other features appropriate to genre (ENG 2-19a)</p>

Writing	By considering the type of text I am creating, I can select ideas and relevant information, organise these in an appropriate way for my purpose and use suitable vocabulary for my audience (LIT 2-26a) I am learning to use language and style in a way which engages and/or influences my reader (ENG 2-27a)
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WALES Programme of Study for English: Year 4

Oracy	Learners are able to explain information and ideas using supportive resources, e.g. on-screen and web-based materials (Y4_OracSpea.1)
Reading	Learners are able to accurately identify the main points and supporting information in texts (Y4_ReadComp.1) Learners are able to deduce connections between information, e.g. sequence, importance (Y4_ReadComp.2) Learners are able to use a range of strategies to make meaning from words and sentences, including knowledge of phonics, word roots, word families, syntax, text organisation and prior knowledge of context (Y4_ReadStrat.1) Learners are able to read texts, including those with few visual clues, independently with concentration (Y4_ReadStrat.2)
Writing	Learners are able to use subject-specific vocabulary independently (Y4_WritLang.2) Learners are able to adapt what they write to the purpose and reader, choosing words appropriately, e.g. descriptive, persuasive language (Y4_WritMean.1)

NORTHERN IRELAND Levels of Progression in Communication across the curriculum: Primary Level 3

Talking and listening	Pupils can maintain a role (L3_com_talk.1ii)
Reading	Pupils can recognise, understand and sequence main points (L3_com_read.1i) Pupils can choose and use reading strategies independently (L3_com_read.2) Pupils can make deductions using information from the text (L3_com_read.4ii)
Writing	Pupils can provide supporting detail using an expanding vocabulary (L3_com_writ.2iii) Pupils can use the form appropriately (L3_com_writ.3)