

# The Secret Garden

## TEACHER NOTES

By Frances Hodgson Burnett



## Background to the novel

The Secret Garden is a classic story about change, friendship, nature and the consequences of people's actions. It was written in 1910 and first published as a serial. The main character is a 9 year old girl called Mary who blooms from a spoilt, lonely child into a girl who is kind, thoughtful and considerate of her friends and her surroundings. The first extract is from Mary's early life in India and the second from much later in the book.

The texts have been selected to give an idea of the characters in the book and some idea of the story. The purpose of the activities is to encourage children to read the whole book and to develop a variety of literacy skills.

Each activity is designed to be completed in a lesson but might be extended beyond that.

There are some wider curriculum links that can be made and suggestions for these are at the end of the notes.

## 1. Mary Lennox (comprehension)

You will need:

- copies of the text 1 – Mary Lennox
- copies of worksheet 1 – Mary Lennox

Read the first passage around the class. The questions on the worksheet can be used as discussion points or as a written comprehension.

## 2. Brilliant words (descriptive language development)

You will need:

- copies of text 2 – Brilliant words
- copies of worksheet 2 – Brilliant words
- highlighter pens
- dictionaries

Children highlight words in the passage and the context that they occur and then clarify the meaning using a dictionary. They then use them in their own sentences.

## 3. Misselthwaite Manor (questions & describing a place)

You will need:

- copies of text 3 – Misselthwaite Manor
- copies of worksheet 3 – activities a & b
- highlighter pens & coloured pencils.

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Have a class or small group discussion about how Mary might be feeling as she arrives in England in the winter, then read the second passage. Discuss what we learn here about Mrs Medlock and Mr Craven. Children write and swap questions to answer that they might ask if they were moving to a new country. Children choose to draw the house, the trees or a room inside using the description as a guide and highlighting the words they are going to illustrate before they start.

## 4. Martha (grammar/speech & playwrighting)

You will need:

- a single copy text 4 – Martha to read out
- copies of worksheet 4 – activities a and b
- highlighter pens

Much of this passage is written in dialect and demonstrates the difference between the written and the spoken word. After reading the passage to the class, ask them to transpose the last paragraph into standard modern English, taking the contracted words apart. There can be a discussion of the different dialects that present in the class and how they might be presented on paper. Activity 4b demonstrates the different layout for a play.

## 5. Mistress Mary, Quite Contrary (rhymes)

You will need:

- copies of text 2 – Brilliant words
- access to books with nursery rhymes, or the internet has many useful sites that analyse the historical origins of nursery rhymes.
- copies of worksheet 5

The importance of rhyming to spelling has long been established but modern families do not always have experience of the early forms of poems that are Nursery Rhymes, so it is important to have access to plenty of material that will provide the rhymes for this activity if the children do not know them.

## 6. The Key (drama)

You will need:

- a single copy of text 5 – The Key to read out.
- space for drama

In this lovely descriptive passage we see how Mary has begun to change from the sad character she was at the start. Use it as a starting point for drama:

- hot-seat as Mary at the beginning and at this point in the book
- finding the key
- what might be in the garden?

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## 7. Review (summing up)

You will need:

- a copy of the worksheet 6
- all the work done in the project

Encourage reflection about the issues in the story and facilitate further reading.

## Curriculum links

### PSHE

- the neglect of children
- relationships between people and animals
- how people perceive each other
- bullying/teasing

### History & the passage of time

- the origins of Nursery rhymes
- transport changes
- attitudes toward children
- change and decay

### Geography

- India
- Yorkshire
- English dialects

### Art

- The different colours of India and an English winter could be the starting point for art work about warm and cold, paintings or collages using Indian patterns and English ones.
- The leafless trees that nearly touch the ground are vividly described and could be represented in paint or other media.
- The Garden behind the wall is not actually seen in any of these extracts but the children could draw what they think it might look like or each child could create one plant and they could be assembled into a class picture.

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### 1. Mary Lennox

From the beginning of Chapter 1

When Mary Lennox was sent to Misselthwaite Manor to live with her uncle, everybody said she was the most disagreeable looking child ever seen. It was true, too. She had a little thin face and a little thin body, thin light hair and a sour expression. Her hair was yellow, and her face was yellow because she had been born in India and had always been ill in one way or another. Her father had held a position under the English Government and had always been busy and ill himself, and her mother had been a great beauty who cared only to go to parties and amuse herself with gay people. 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 Memsahib she must keep the child out of sight as much as possible. So when she was a sickly, fretful, ugly little baby she

was kept out of the way, and when she became a sickly, fretful, toddling thing she was kept out of the way also. She never remembered seeing familiarly anything but the dark faces of her Ayah and the other native servants, and as they always obeyed her and gave her her own way in everything, because the Memsahib would be angry if she was disturbed by her crying, by the time she was six years old she was as tyrannical and selfish a little pig as ever lived. The young English governess who came to teach her to read and write disliked her so much that she gave up her place in three months, and when other governesses came to try to fill it they always went away in a shorter time than the first one. So if Mary had not chosen really to want to know how to read books, she would never have learned her letters at all.

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## 2. Brilliant words

### From Chapter 2

Mary is still in India. Her family have all died of the Cholera and she is staying with another family while she waits to find out what will happen to her.

Mary had liked to look at her mother from a distance, and she had thought her very pretty, but as she knew very little of her, she could scarcely have been expected to love her or to miss her very much when she was gone. She did not miss her at all, in fact, and as she was a self absorbed child she gave her entire thought to herself, as she had always done. 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. What she thought was that she would like to know if she was going to nice people, who would be polite to her and give her her own way as her Ayah and the other native servants had done.

She knew that she was not going to stay at the English clergyman's house where she was taken at first. She did not want to stay. The English clergyman was poor and he had five children all nearly the same age and they wore shabby clothes and were always quarrelling and snatching toys from each other. Mary hated their untidy bungalow and was so disagreeable to them that after the first day or two nobody would play with her. By the second day they had given her a nickname which made her furious. It was Basil who thought of it first. Basil was a little boy with impudent blue eyes and a turned up nose, and Mary hated him. She was playing by herself under a tree, just as she had been playing the day the cholera broke out. She was making heaps of earth and paths for a garden and Basil came and stood near to watch her.

Presently he got rather interested and suddenly made a suggestion.

'Why don't you put a heap of stones there and pretend it is a rockery?' he said. 'There in the middle,' and he leaned over her to point.

'Go away!' cried Mary. I don't want boys.

Go away!

For a moment Basil looked angry, and then he began to tease. He was always teasing his sisters. He danced round and round her and made faces and sang and laughed.

Mistress Mary, quite contrary, How does your garden grow? With silver bells, and cockle shells, And marigolds all in a row.

He sang it until the other children heard and laughed, too; and the crosser Mary got, the more they sang 'Mistress Mary Quite Contrary'; and after that as long as she stayed with them they called her 'Mistress Mary Quite Contrary' when they spoke of her to each other, and often when they spoke to her.

'You are going to be sent home,' Basil said to her, 'at the end of the week. And we're glad of it.' 'I am glad of it, too' answered Mary. 'Where is home?'

'She doesn't know where home is!' said Basil, with seven-year-old scorn. It's England, of course. Our grandmamma lives there, and our sister Mabel was sent to her last year. You are not going to your grandmamma. You have none. You are going to your uncle.'

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### 3. Misslethwaite Manor

#### From Chapter Two

Now Mary has travelled to England for the first time (the children might like to discuss how the long journey from India might have taken) and she is in a steam train on her way to her Uncle (Mr Craven)'s house in Yorkshire. She is being looked after by Mrs Medlock who is the housekeeper from Yorkshire who is trying to prepare Mary for what she will find at the house.

Mary sat in her corner of the railway carriage and looked plain and fretful. She had nothing to read or to look at, and she had folded her thin little black-gloved hands in her lap. Her black dress made her look yellower than ever, and her limp light hair straggled from under her black crêpe hat. 'A more marred-looking young one I never saw in my life,' Mrs Medlock thought. (Marred is a Yorkshire word and means spoiled and pettish.) She had never seen a child who sat so still without doing anything; and at last she got tired of watching her and began to talk in a brisk, hard voice.

'I suppose I may as well tell you something about where you are going to,' she said. 'Do you know anything about your uncle?' 'No,' said Mary. 'Never heard your father and mother talk about him?' 'No,' said Mary, frowning. She frowned because she remembered that her father and mother had never talked to her about anything in particular. Certainly they had never

told her things. 'Humph,' muttered Mrs Medlock, staring at her queer, unresponsive little face. She did not say any more for a few moments, and then she began again. 'I suppose you might as well be told something – to prepare you. You are going to a queer place.'

Mary said nothing at all, and Mrs Medlock looked rather discomfited by her apparent indifference, but after taking a breath, she went on. 'Not but that it's a grand big place in a gloomy way, and Mr Craven's proud of it in his way – and that's gloomy enough, too. The house is six hundred years old, and it's on the edge of the moor, and there's near a hundred rooms in it, though most of them's shut up and locked. And there's pictures and fine old furniture and things that's been there for ages, and there's a big park round it and gardens and trees with branches trailing to the ground – some of them.' She paused and took another breath. 'But there's nothing else,' she ended suddenly.



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### 4. Martha

#### From Chapter Four

Mary is getting to know the kind but firm servant Martha who is charged with looking after her at the house. Mary's relationship with Martha contrasts with the imperious manner she expressed to the accepting Indian servants of her previous life. Martha tells her about her brother Dickon.

Our Dickon, he's twelve years old and he's got a young pony he calls his own.' 'Where did he get it?' asked Mary. 'He found it on th' moor with its mother when it was a little one, an' he began to make friends with it an' give it bits o' bread an' pluck young grass for it. And it got to like him so it follows him about an' it lets him get on its back. Dickon's a kind lad an' animals like him.'

Mary had never possessed an animal pet of her own and had always thought she should like one. So she began to feel a slight interest in Dickon, and as she had never been interested in anyone but herself, it was the dawning of a healthy sentiment. When she went into the room which had been made into a nursery for her, she found that it was rather like the one she had slept in. It was not a child's room, but a grown-up person's room, with gloomy old pictures on the walls and

heavy old oak chairs. A table in the centre was set with a good, substantial breakfast. But she had always had a very small appetite, and she looked with something more than indifference at the first plate Martha set before her.

'I don't want it,' she said. 'Tha' doesn't want thy porridge!' Martha exclaimed incredulously. 'No.' 'Tha' doesn't know how good it is. Put a bit o' treacle on it or a bit o' sugar.' 'I don't want it,' repeated Mary. 'Eh!' said Martha. 'I can't abide to see good victuals go to waste. If our children was at this table they'd clean it bare in five minutes.' 'Why?' asked Mary coldly. 'Why!' echoed Martha. 'Because they scarce ever had their stomachs full in their lives. They're as hungry as young hawks an' foxes.' 'I don't know what it is to be hungry,' said Mary, with the indifference of ignorance.

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## 5. The Key

### From Chapter Seven

She walked away, slowly thinking. She had begun to like the garden just as she had begun to like the robin and Dickon and Martha's mother. She was beginning to like Martha, too. That seemed a good many people to like – when you were not used to liking. She thought of the robin as one of those people. She went to her walk outside the long, ivy-covered wall over which she could see the tree-tops; and the second time she walked up and down the most exciting and interesting thing happened to her, and it was all through Ben Weatherstaff's robin.

She heard a chirp and a twitter, and when she looked at the bareflower-bed at her left side there he was hopping about and pretending to peck things out of the earth to persuade her that he had not followed her. But she knew he had followed her, and the surprise so filled her with delight that she almost trembled a little. 'You do remember me!' she cried. 'You do! You are prettier than anything else in the world!'

She chirped, and talked, and coaxed and he hopped and flirted his tail and twittered. It was as if he were talking. His red waistcoat was like satin, and he pulled his tiny breast out and was so fine and so grand and so pretty that it was really as if he were showing her how important and like a human person a robin could be. Mistress Mary forgot that she had ever been contrary in her life when he allowed her to draw closer and closer to him, and bend down and talk and try to make something like robin sounds.

Oh! to think that he should actually let her come as near to him as that! He knew nothing in the world would make her put out her hand towards him or startle him in the least, tiniest way. He knew it because he was a real person – only nicer than any other person in the world. She was so happy that she scarcely dared to breathe.

The flower-bed was not quite bare. It was bare of flowers because the perennial plants had been cut down for their winter rest, but there were tall shrubs and low ones which grew together at the back of the bed, and as the robin hopped about under them she saw him hop over a small pile of freshly turned-up earth. He stopped on it to look for a worm. The earth had been turned up because a dog had been trying to dig up a mole and he had scratched quite a deep hole.

Mary looked at it, not really knowing why the hole was there, and as she looked she saw something almost buried in the newly turned soil. It was something like a ring of rusty iron or brass, and when the robin flew up into a tree near by she put out her hand and picked the ring up. It was more than a ring, however; it was an old key which looked as if it had been buried a long time.

Mistress Mary stood up and looked at it with an almost frightened face as it hung from her finger. 'Perhaps it has been buried for ten years,' she said in a whisper. 'Perhaps it is the key to the garden!'



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### Mary Lennox

What do you think a Memsahib is?

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What do you think an Ayah is?

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What do we find out about Mary's mother?

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What do we find out about Mary's father?

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Highlight all the words in the first paragraph that tell us about Mary's character.

Use as many of these words as you can to write your own description of Mary.

[illegible]

What do we find out about Mary's schooling?

[illegible]

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### Brilliant words

The writer uses lots of descriptive words to explain the characters' feelings. Find the following words in the passage and highlight them. Look up the meanings in your dictionary and write them down, then use the word in a sentence of your own.

Word	Meaning	Sentence
angry		
scarcely		
shabby		
contrary		
polite		
clergyman		
quarrelling		
furious		
self-absorbed		
disagreeable		
anxious		

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### Martha

- a Write the standard English version under each line taking apart contractions (such as don't = do not). Use a highlighter to find the speeches for activity 4b.

'I don't want it,' she said.

.....

'Tha' doesn't want thy porridge!' Martha exclaimed incredulously.

.....

'No.'

'Tha' doesn't know how good it is. Put a bit o' treacle on it or a bit o' sugar.'

.....

'I don't want it,' repeated Mary.

.....

'Eh!' said Martha. 'I can't abide to see good victuals go to waste. If our children was at this table they'd clean it bare in five minutes.'

.....

'Why?' asked Mary coldly.

'Why!' echoed Martha. 'Because they scarce ever had their stomachs full in their lives. They're as hungry as young hawks an' foxes.'

.....

'I don't know what it is to be hungry,' said Mary, with the indifference of ignorance.

.....



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- b Transpose the text 'Martha' into a play script (the first two speeches are done for you). Carry on the conversation using the dialect. You do not need any speech marks, only apostrophes.

[illegible]

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# Mistress Mary Quite Contrary

Basil teases Mary with a rhyming verse. Can you find out the historical origins of the verse?

He sings:

Mistress Mary, quite contrary, How does your garden grow?  
With silver bells, and cockle shells, And marigolds all in a row.

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What other nursery rhymes do the class know? (You may need to do some research for this). Write two of them out below. What do you notice about the position of the rhymes? Highlight them.

[illegible]

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Use the structure of these to help you invent a new rhyme.

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Most rhymes emerged from historical events. Can you find out what Ring a Ring o' Roses was all about?

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## Reviewing what we have done

Good bits	Bad bits

Do you want to read the rest of the book? .....

Why?

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What did you learn from working on this project?

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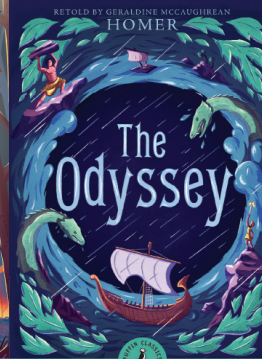
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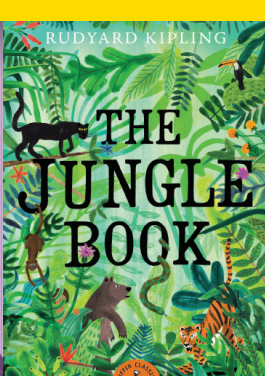
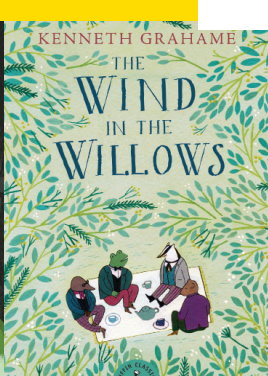
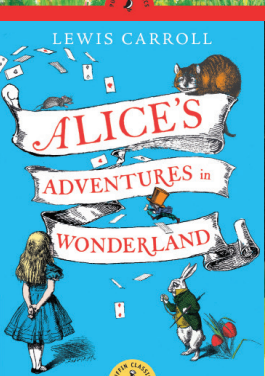
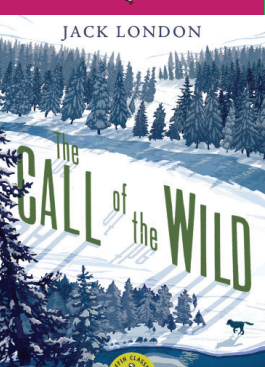
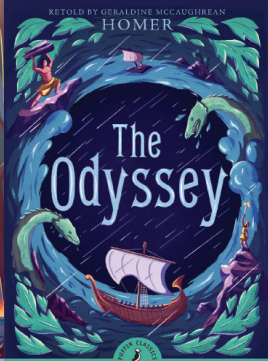
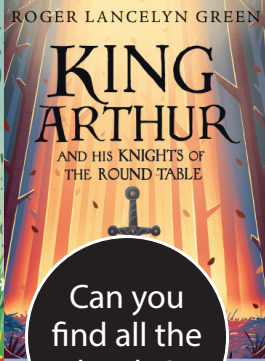
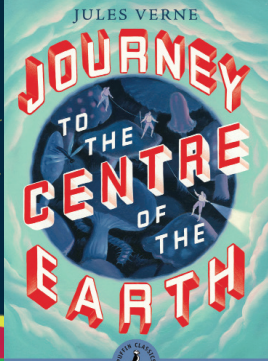
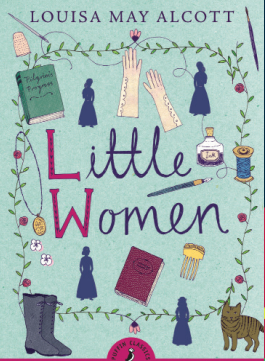




PUFFIN CLASSICS







A	B	H	T	O	M	S	A	W	Y	E	R	N	J			A
L	L	U	F	S	A	W	Q	F	A	F	K	P	O	S	D	N
I	A	C	J	Y	E	C	U	B	K	J	L	D	U	C	M	N
C	C	K	I	N	G	A	R	T	H	U	R	A	R	Z	L	E
E	K	L	U	O	H	L	L	S	D	N	E	F	N	P	A	O
S	B	E	T	Y	A	L	U	V	K	G	D	A	E	D	L	F
A	E	B	P	Q	N	O	F	R	Z	L	S	F	Y	Q	I	G
D	A	E	J	K	S	F	R	A	E	E	U	M	T	W	T	R
V	U	R	N	L	C	T	L	C	H	B	J	S	O	O	T	E
E	T	R	J	A	H	H	E	O	S	O	A	C	T	K	L	E
N	Y	Y	D	S	R	E	K	C	H	O	L	D	H	Y	E	N
T	Q	F	W	E	I	W	O	H	U	K	T	Y	E	X	P	G
U	K	I	S	D	S	I	G	C	L	S	P	K	C	L	R	A
R	C	N	C	H	T	L	G	U	I	E	A	O	E	I	I	B
E	S	N	O	U	I	D	R	L	C	D	E	R	N	T	N	L
S	L	K	C	V	A	D	E	H	E	I	D	I	T	T	C	E
I	U	Y	T	I	N	R	E	P	L	J	H	B	R	L	E	S
N	B	M	O	C	A	H	K	P	K	P	R	K	E	E	S	W
W	I	N	D	I	N	T	H	E	W	I	L	L	O	W	S	D
O	V	A	Y	W	D	I	E	T	O	L	B	S	F	O	G	F
N	B	I	S	L	E	J	R	E	P	K	N	L	T	M	S	O
D	K	Q	S	O	R	B	O	R	I	Y	V	H	H	E	L	P
E	S	T	E	L	S	P	E	P	M	H	O	H	E	N	M	A
R	K	B	Y	O	E	A	S	A	J	I	Q	W	E	K	I	E
L	O	I	E	R	N	T	E	N	R	K	W	I	A	F	O	U
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R	P	A	F	J	X	Z	PUFFIN CLASSIC			N	M	K	D	I	O	H

Can you find all the books?





Adventures in Imagination

