



Performing Arts Theatre

# A Study Guide to The Secret Garden

## The Story

*The Secret Garden* is the story of Mary Lennox and her discovery of a “Secret Garden” that has been locked up for ten years. Mary is a young girl who is sent to live at Misselthwaite Manor with her uncle in Yorkshire, England, after the death of her parents in India. Once there, she finds her new home to be a gloomy fortress—her uncle is rarely home, and his young son, Colin, never leaves his room, convinced that he is an incurable invalid.

When Mary discovers the strange, walled garden that has been locked up for years, she enlists the help of the gardener's apprentice, Dickon, and together they coax the garden back to life. The garden seems to have a wonderful, magical effect on all who enter it, allowing Mary to help restore Colin's health and repair his broken relationship with his father. This musical version also introduces the large and endearing Sowerby family who serves Misselthwaite Manor and befriends young Mary.



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## About the Author

*The Secret Garden* was the creation of Frances Hodgson Burnett, who first published the story in 1909. Burnett was born on November 24, 1849 in Manchester, England. She was the third of five children. In 1865, Burnett's family moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, in the United States, after the death of her father and the inability to maintain the family business in England. In order to help her family financially, Frances pursued her creativity and love of storytelling and began to earn a regular income from writing, which did help to support her other siblings when her mother died too. Frances Hodgson Burnett had many books published before she died in America in 1924. Among her other well-known books are *The Little Princess* and *Little Lord Fauntelroy*.

## Victorian England

In 1900, the British Empire, ruled by Queen Victoria (1819-1901), included Great Britain and many colonies and territories around the World. One of those colonies was India, where Mary Lennox was born. Mary's father was a British Army officer, and her upper class family lived well despite great famine and plagues in parts of the colony. An infectious disease called cholera took the lives of Mary's parents and several of their servants, but spared Mary herself.

Back in England, Queen Victoria reigned from 1837 until her death in 1901. *The Secret Garden* takes place near the end of the Victorian Era in a part of the Northern English countryside called Yorkshire. The latter years of the Victorian Era were a long period of prosperity for the British Empire, which corresponded with the era known as the Gilded Age in the United States. The Victorian Era was also a period of great industrialization and growth. The number of people living in Great Britain more than doubled, from 16 million to 37 million, causing a huge demand for food, clothes, and housing. Among the lower class, poverty was widespread. Many children had to work rather than go to school, and more than half of them grew up unable to read or write.

Despite the poverty of the lower class, a wealthy upper class still thrived, especially in the British countryside where Mary's uncle, Archibald Craven, lived at Misselthwaite Manor. Children from rich families were luckier than poor children. They were educated, had toys and books, and had servants to look after them. During the last years of the Victorian Era and the early part of the Twentieth Century, more attention was given to all children's education and welfare. Part of that education often included a growing interest in nature, plants, and animals—themes and symbols which are very important in *The Secret Garden*.



## The Secret Garden Word Search



There are 10 words to find! Fill in the blanks and then find them in the puzzle.

Friendship

Mary

Colin

India

England

Orphan

Garden

Flowers

Door

Key

1. The name of the main character is .....
2. She moved to ..... from ..... because she became an .....
3. She discovers a ..... that opens the ..... to The Secret .....
4. She likes to take ..... who is her cousin to the garden to enjoy the .....
5. A main theme of the story is .....

Color these Flowers from *The Secret Garden*

