

Stanford House Classics - Elementary

THE SECRET GARDEN

Frances Eliza Burnett

literature analysis and response



THE SECRET GARDEN

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Frances Eliza Hodgson Burnett was born in Manchester, England in 1849.

She emigrated to the USA with her family when she was sixteen years old. At the age of eighteen she began publishing stories in magazines.

She wrote her most famous novel, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, in 1886. In 1911 she wrote *The Secret Garden*.

She died in New York in 1924.



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There's Nobody Left

Mary Lennox was born in India where her father worked for the British Government. Her parents did not want a child and they never spent much time with her. Her father was always busy and her mother preferred going to parties. Mary was a lonely little girl. She had an *Ayah*¹ who looked after her and she could do what she wanted because her parents never wanted to hear her crying. She was a selfish² child and everyone disliked her.

One day when she was about nine years old she woke up to find that her Ayah was not near her. There was a strange woman who said, "It is not possible for your Ayah to come today."

Mary was very cross³. "Send me my Ayah!" she said, stamping⁴ her feet. But her Ayah did not come. There was something very mysterious in the air that morning. Nobody was doing normal things, everyone was busy and nobody told her anything. She went into the garden and began to play with her flowers.

Suddenly her mother came out on the verandah. Mary watched her. "How pretty she is!" she thought. She was talking to a young man.

"Is it so very bad?" she heard her mother ask.

"Yes, it's terrible," answered the young man.

At that moment loud crying came from the servants' rooms.

"What's that?" cried Mary's mother.

"Someone has died."

She turned and ran into the house.

At last someone explained to Mary what was happening. Cholera had broken out and everyone was dying. The crying they heard was when her Ayah died. There was panic everywhere.

Nobody thought of the poor little girl. She hid⁵ in her nursery⁶, listening to the crying, and, at last, she fell asleep.

1. Complete the following.

- Mr and Mrs Lennox had child.
- name was Mary.
- They came from but they lived in
- Mary did not have any
- The story begins when Mary is years old.
- Mrs Lennox did not look Mary.

2. Answer these questions.

- Why was Mary able to do what she wanted?
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- Which adjective do we use to describe children who can do or have what they want?
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- What did Mary think of her mother?
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- Why was everybody crying?
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- Why was everybody dying?
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- Why do you think everyone forgot poor Mary?
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- Ayah:** Hindi (Indian) word meaning maid.
 - selfish:** egoistic, one who thinks only about himself.
 - cross:** angry, in a bad mood.
 - stamping:** beating on the ground or floor.
 - hid:** stayed where she could not be seen (to hide; hid; hidden).
 - nursery:** child's room.

When she woke up there was complete silence. Mary did not understand.

Then she heard footsteps and men's voices outside.

"What desolation!" one man was saying. "That pretty woman, and the child, too, I suppose. How tragic!"

When they opened the nursery door and saw Mary they were very surprised. "There's a child here! A child, all alone! Who is she?"

"I am Mary Lennox," said Mary. "Where is everyone?"

They told her that her mother and father had died that night of cholera and everyone had gone away, forgetting all about her.

Mary Goes to England

Mary had liked looking at her mother but she knew very little about her and so she did not miss¹ her at all.

She made the long voyage² to England with an officer's wife who was taking her children to boarding school³. When they arrived in London there was a woman to meet her.

"I'm Mrs Medlock," she said in a sharp⁴ voice. "I am the housekeeper⁵ at Misselthwaite Manor, the home of your uncle, Mr Archibald Craven. He's going to look after you. I have come to take you there. Come. We have a long journey."

They went by train, travelling north. They travelled all day.

Mrs Medlock looked at Mary and thought "What a plain⁶ child she is! And they say her mother was so pretty!"

Mary disliked Mrs Medlock, too. She sat in the corner and stared out of the window at the rain.

"Well," said Mrs Medlock. "Do you want to know where you're going? Misselthwaite Manor is a strange place. The house is six hundred years old and it's on the

3. Write the conversation between Mary and the two men when they tell her what has happened.

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4. Look at this: *Mary had liked looking at her mother.* Many verbs are followed by the "ing" form of the verb. Put the appropriate verb, in the correct tense, in these sentences.

Choose from: *hate, dislike, enjoy, like, continue, keep on.*

- a) Mary playing with other children.
- b) Mary didn't travelling to England.
- c) Mrs Medlock thinking about Mary.
- d) It raining.
- e) Mary's mother going to parties.
- f) Mary meeting new people.

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1. miss: *suffer for someone's absence.*
2. voyage: *journey by sea.*
3. boarding school: *a school where pupils live all the term.*
4. sharp: *acute, without gentleness.*
5. housekeeper: *woman who is responsible for a large family house.*
6. plain: *ordinary, not pretty.*

edge¹ of a moor². It's got about a hundred rooms but most of them are locked. There's a big park and lots of gardens."

"And my uncle?" asked Mary.

"You'll probably never see him. He never wants to see anyone. Not since his wife died."

"Oh," exclaimed Mary, surprised to hear that he was married. "She's dead!"

"Yes, and now he's stranger than before. He doesn't care about anyone. He's got a crooked³ back, too. Most of the time he is away. When he's at home he stays in the west wing⁴."

It sounded like something out of a book. Mary did not feel very happy.

"You'll have to play by yourself," continued the housekeeper. "We will tell you which rooms you can go into. You mustn't go wandering⁵ about the house. You can play outside."

Mary watched the rain and the darkness coming and fell asleep.

Mary's New Home

"Wake up! Wake up!" Mrs Medlock was shaking her. "We have to get out."

It was a quiet little station. The rain was pouring down and a strong wind was blowing. It seemed like the middle of the night. A horse and carriage⁶ was waiting for them.

"Where are we?" asked Mary.

"In Yorkshire," said Mrs Medlock. "We have to cross the moor now. It's a long way to Misselthwaite Manor."

"What's a moor?"

"Look out of the window and you'll see."

But it was quite⁷ dark.

"Is it the sea?" she asked.

"No. It's just miles and miles of wild land where nothing grows except heather and gorse⁸ and the only

5. Describe Misselthwaite Manor.

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6. Draw your dream house.



1. **edge:** border, side.
2. **moor:** high area of open land covered in low vegetation.
3. **crooked:** bent, the opposite of straight.
4. **west wing:** one part of a very large house.
5. **wandering:** going around in no particular direction.
6. **carriage:** vehicle usually pulled by horses (before cars were invented).
7. **quite:** (here) completely.
8. **heather and gorse:** plants that grow on moorland.