



## Impactful Environments in *The Secret Garden*

### Topics:

- Literature
- Personal reflection

**Summary:** In this workshop, students learn about the basic touchpoints of Romantic Literature, and focus on one of its tenants, nature as a healing force, and how this applies to Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*. Students are then led in reflecting on the change they see in the characters Mary and Colin initiated by the garden and also reflect on how nature has impacted their own lives. Large group discussion follows this activity where students share their own experiences and discuss the experiences of Mary and Colin in the story.

**Grades:** 6-8

**Time:** 60-90 minutes

### Materials:

- Passages from *The Secret Garden* (provided in Appendix)

### Learning Targets:

- I CAN give examples of how nature has a healing or positive effect on the characters in *The Secret Garden*
- I CAN reflect on a time when nature had a positive influence on me
- I CAN share my opinion on the effect of nature on our lives and on those of the characters in *The Secret Garden*

### Opening/Warm-Up (15 minutes)

#### Introduction (5 minutes)

- Have students begin to walk around the room (giving clear boundaries of where to walk and not walk, for example, "do not go behind the teacher's desk, stay in the center of the room, etc.). Let students know this should be done quietly and that they should be mindful of others in the room (try not to walk into anyone)
- You may have students play with increasing or decreasing their speed to get energy up and help with focus if needed. For example, "On a scale of 1-10, we are walking at about a 5, let's bring it up to an 8 [Students would then increase their pace to what an 8 would feel like, the range of 1 -10 would represent that from slow motion walking (1) to almost running (10)]
- As students are walking around the room, have them think about the following prompt:



- Think about your favorite place to go outside -where is it? Is it your backyard, the beach, a local park, a garden of your own, or somewhere else? Take a moment to really visualize this place.
- Ask students to keep walking and ponder the question for a few moments, then call out “freeze” and have students freeze wherever they are in the room.
- Instruct students to find the person nearest them and discuss their answers. Let students know that after 2 minutes of discussion, people will be asked to share with the whole group.
- Have students share their thoughts.
- Give everyone a follow up question, “What about these places made you so happy? Why did you like being there so much?”

Let students know, *Today, we are going to learn more about The Secret Garden and a style of literature that is associated with it called the Romantic style.*

#### **Quick Overview of Romantic Literature and the Role of the Environment (5 minutes)**

Share with students some of the touchpoints of the Romantic style:

#### **Romantic Style**

- Popular 1798-1832, but we can see its effect in other work as well
- Emphasizes feeling over thinking
- Emphasizes intuition and imagination
- Concern for individual experience’s rather than society
- Features a belief in the innate goodness of people
- Shows nature as healing force

*We are going to focus on the last tenant in this list, “Nature as a healing force”, and look at how this affects the characters in The Secret Garden.*

#### **Review of Characters in *The Secret Garden* -Mary and Colin (10 minutes)**

- Ask students to describe Mary and Colin at the start of the play (or story if students have read the story in class). Teacher or student helper could write responses up on the board so that students may see all the answers.
- Students will likely share that both characters have a negative attitude, are sickly or low energy, and generally seem unhappy.
- Students should keep these words in mind as they do the following activity.

#### **Read Through Passages from *The Secret Garden* (10 minutes)**

- Hand out text from *The Secret Garden* (provided in the Appendix)
- As time allows, read through the two passages as a large group first with teacher or confident readers reading aloud.



- Then, allow students time to re-read the passages on their own, underlining any passages they find particularly interesting, especially as they relate to nature being a healing or positive force.

**Students Write a Short Reflection (20 minutes)**

Once students have had sufficient time to read over the passages, guide them in writing a short reflection essay that addresses the following questions:

- Describe a time when nature had a positive or healing effect on you. Describe the setting/place in specific detail, trying to use the five senses such as sight, sound, smell, and touch.
- Choosing one of the passages from *The Secret Garden*, do you notice Mary or Colin having a similar experience as you? Give an example from your passage to show this.
- *The Secret Garden* was written over 100 years ago, yet we still notice nature having the same positive effects on us today. In your opinion, why do you think this is so?

**Students Share Their Ideas in a Large Group Discussion (10 minutes)**

Allow students time to share about their experiences and also their own ideas about how nature can have a healing or positive effect and why this is a popular theme in Romantic literature.

**Note:** As needed, you may want to encourage students to note that, if they are feeling unwell, going to a doctor or telling a parent is still advisable -but nature can calm our minds and make us feel at peace. When we feel calm and keep a positive attitude, this can start to make us feel better.



## Appendix –

### **The Effect of the Garden on Mary -Taken from *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett**

After she had stared for a while she realized that if she did not go out she would have to stay in and do nothing—and so she went out. She did not know that this was the best thing she could have done, and she did not know that, when she began to walk quickly or even run along the paths and down the avenue, she was stirring her slow blood and making herself stronger by fighting with the wind which swept down from the moor. She ran only to make herself warm, and she hated the wind which rushed at her face and roared and held her back as if it were some giant she could not see. But the big breaths of rough fresh air blown over the heather filled her lungs with something which was good for her whole thin body and whipped some red color into her cheeks and brightened her dull eyes when she did not know anything about it.

But after a few days spent almost entirely out of doors she wakened one morning knowing what it was to be hungry, and when she sat down to her breakfast she did not glance disdainfully at her porridge and push it away, but took up her spoon and began to eat it and went on eating it until her bowl was empty.

### **The Effect of the Garden on Colin -Taken from *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett**

But Colin had actually dropped back against his cushions, even though he gasped with delight, and he had covered his eyes with his hands and held them there shutting out everything until they were inside and the chair stopped as if by magic and the door was closed. Not till then did he take them away and look round and round and round as Dickon and Mary had done. And over walls and earth and trees and swinging sprays and tendrils the fair green veil of tender little leaves had crept, and in the grass under the trees and the gray urns in the alcoves and here and there everywhere were touches or splashes of gold and purple and white and the trees were showing pink and snow above his head and there were fluttering of wings and faint sweet pipes and humming and scents and scents. And the sun fell warm upon his face like a hand with a lovely touch. And in wonder Mary and Dickon stood and stared at him. He looked so strange and different because a pink glow of color had actually crept all over him—ivory face and neck and hands and all.

"I shall get well! I shall get well!" he cried out. "Mary! Dickon! I shall get well! And I shall live forever and ever and ever!"