

*Preview Guide for Parents and Teachers to  
Childsplay's Production of*

*The  
Secret Garden*

**The Characters:**

**Mary Lennox**- A ten-year-old orphan and new resident at Misselthwaite Manor

**Archibald Craven**- Mary's uncle, the hunchbacked master of Misselthwaite

**Mrs. Medlock**- Mr. Craven's housekeeper

**Martha Sowerby**- a local girl employed as a housemaid at Misselthwaite Manor

**Dickon Sowerby**- Martha's younger brother who has a special relationship with birds, animals and all things growing

**Dr. Craven**- Archibald's brother, Colin's uncle and also his doctor

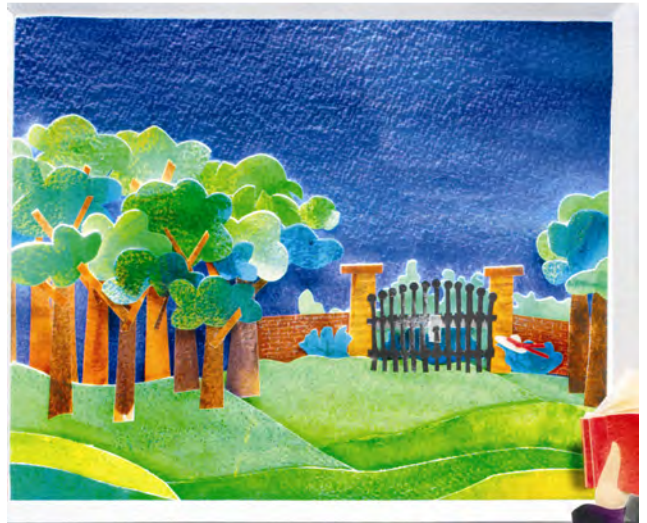
**The Robin**- a musical messenger who befriends Mary and leads her to her discovery of the secret garden

**The Story:**

Set in Edwardian England, *The Secret Garden* traces the friendship of two lonely children, Mary Lennox and her cousin Colin. After her parents' death in a cholera epidemic, Mary travels from India to live in the wilds of Yorkshire with an uncle she has never met. At the opening of the play, Mary is a spoiled and disagreeable child who has been dependent on servants, isn't used to dressing herself and doesn't play. She is befriended by her maid, Martha, who introduces her to the gardens and the moors and her brother, Dickon. Gradually Mary becomes less self-absorbed. She learns to amuse herself outdoors, and one day follows a friendly robin and discovers a forbidden garden at Misselthwaite Manor. Ten years earlier, her uncle's beloved wife had died from a fall in this garden. The memories were so painful that Mr. Craven locked the garden and buried the key. With Dickon's help she works secretly in the garden which has been sadly neglected. Mary's second discovery is her invalid cousin Colin, a petulant tyrant who has been kept isolated in a wing of the manor all of his life. Mary's visits make him feel better, and he and Mary plot with Dickon for him to venture outside. Fresh air, exercise, friendship and their gardening project combine over time, to transform Colin into a healthy young man. He is reunited with his astonished father, and the ending is, naturally, happily ever after.

Most enjoyed by young people ages 6 and up.

**Talk Triggers** – page-to-stage / nature / secrets / families / orphans / England / dialects / friendships / overcoming grief/ change / gardens



*The  
Secret Garden*

By Pamela Sterling

Music by Christopher Limber

Based on the book by Frances Hodgson Burnett

Directed by **Adam Burke**

Scenic Design by **Carey Wong**

Costume Design by **Connie Furr-Solomon**

Lighting Design by **Michael J. Eddy**

Sound Design by **Christopher Limber**

Stage Manager: **Samantha Ries**

**The Cast**

Mary Lennox. . . . . Juliet Drake  
Mrs. Medlock . . . . . Gina Handy  
Martha Sowerby . . . . . Debra K. Stevens  
Dickon Sowerby . . . . . Joey Moore  
Archibald Craven. . . . . Jon Gentry  
Colin Craven. . . . . Jamys Williams  
Ben Weatherstaff. . . . . Dwayne Hartford  
The Robin. . . . . Laurie Trygg

Herberger Theater, Stage West, March/April 2006

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Tempe Diablos

Wells Fargo



## Things to Talk About Before Seeing the Show...

We hope that by using some of the activities in this guide, you can help provide the best possible theater experience for your children.

Discussions before the show will help with the interpretation and comprehension of the production. Discussion and activities after the show will give your students a chance to express their feelings about the production and what they have seen and learned.

**THEATER ETIQUETTE:** It's helpful to review the rules of theater etiquette before seeing a show especially since this may be the first live theater experience for some of your students. Please take a moment to discuss the following pointers prior to seeing the performance.

~ Stay seated during the performance.

~ Be respectful to the performers and other people in the audience by not talking during the performance.

~ Appropriate responses such as applause or laughter are always welcome.

~ Use of cell phones, cameras and any other recording devices are

### FRANCES HODGSON

**BURNETT (1849-1924)** was born in Manchester, England, on November 24, 1849 as Francis Eliza Hodgson. After her father's death, the family moved to Knoxville, Tennessee in 1865. Miss Hodgson began writing for magazines soon after. Her first short stories "Hearts and Diamonds" and "Miss Caruther's Engagement" were published in *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1868. Her first widely known work was a dialect story "Surly Tim's Trouble" which appeared in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1872. Her reputation as a novelist was made

with her story of Lancashire life, *That Lass o' Lowrie's*. A number of other works followed, with *Through One Administration* (1883) and *A Lady of Quality* among the most notable. In 1886 she published *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Her children's books, including *The Secret Garden* (1888) and *Sara Crew* (later rewritten to become: *A Little Princess*) (1909) are what she is best known for today, but her romance novels were very popular during her lifetime. Frances married Dr. L. M. Burnett of Washington D.C. in 1873. In 1898 she divorced Dr. Burnett and married Mr. Stephen Townsend in 1900. This second marriage also came to an end in 1902. Frances became a US citizen in 1905. She died on October 29, 1924.

#### ALLEGORY

[n., A literary, dramatic, or pictorial device in which each literal character, object, and event represent symbols illustrating an idea or moral.]

*The Secret Garden* is first and foremost a good story but it is also an *allegory*. The most conspicuous example is the prolific blooming of the flowers in the garden. These flowers are symbols of first Mary's, then Colin's, physical recovery and emotional rejuvenation. On her arrival at Misselthwaite Manor, Mary is a sullen, petulant and overbearing child. Colin is a tyrannical hypochondriac who throws violent temper tantrums. Before the garden works its magic, both children are bitter and negative. While they are spoiled with material goods, neither child has ever been truly loved. In turn, neither can give love. They despise their surroundings and their circumstances because they have been starved of real human love. In contrast, Dickon is a healthy child

who has been cared for in a loving family, without many material advantages. He is generous, optimistic, and a product of a nurturing environment. At first, the garden is tangled, twisted, isolated and inaccessible due to neglect. It is not until Mary discovers and nurtures it (with help from Ben and Dickon) that the garden returns to its former glory. Fresh air and hard work give Mary and Colin an enthusiasm and appetite they have never known. They bloom and grow along with the foliage in the area.

#### WORDS TO TALK ABOUT:

Here are some words from the play script which may need an explanation:

**cholera:** an acute, infectious epidemic disease which affects the digestive system and is often fatal.

**heathen:** an irreligious, uncivilized or unenlightened person (an insult).

**meddlesome:** interfering

**moor:** a broad tract of open land, usually covered with low shrubs.

**native:** in this play, a person of East Indian heritage.

**pinafore:** an apron-like garment worn over a dress.

**shilling:** old English currency, value of twelve pence (pennies, to us).

**trowel:** small gardening tool.

**tuppence:** old English currency, two pence.

**scullery:** a small room off the kitchen for washing dishes and other chores.

**victuals:** (pronounced vittles) food.

**wench:** a young woman or girl, or a female servant.

**wick:** Yorkshire slang meaning alive.



Many of the words which may be unfamiliar to our audience are of Indian origin, as Mary lived in India.

**ayah:** nanny or nursery attendant

**memsahib:** mistress

**sahib:** master

**verandah:** an open porch extending along the outside of a building

**rajah:** an Indian prince

**salaam:** a greeting

### **Things To Look For When You Watch the Show:**

● Listen for the two types of British accent—the gentry (Dr. Craven, Mr. Craven, Colin, and Mary) speak with one accent while the working folk (Martha, Dickon, Mrs. Medlock and Ben Weatherstaff) speak with a local Yorkshire accent.

● The robin is portrayed by a puppet, manipulated by an actor in period costume. Watch the different ways that the environment changes from scene to scene—set pieces move by rolling and flying.

● The vast, and gloomy moor is almost another character in the play. Look for the ways that the atmosphere of the moor is shown. Watch how the garden changes.

### **Things To Talk About and Do After the Show...**

#### **DISCUSSION**

● All plays have three P's: *People* in a *Place* with a *Problem*. Where does the play take place? Who are the people? What are the problems? What happens at the beginning of the play? The middle? The end?

● Any theatrical production is the result of a collaboration between a number of individuals. Talk about the roles of the director, actors, stage manager, costume, lighting and set designers. What are their

jobs? Can you think of other people who collaborate to make theater happen?

● Martha and Dickon's mother, Mrs. Sowerby, is a character in the book *The Secret Garden*. She doesn't appear in the play. Can you imagine what she is like? What important but unseen role does she play in the plot?

#### **GRAMMAR**

● Here are some commonly used words that come from one of the Indian languages: Bungalow, sari, curry, polo, karma, guru, calico, pajamas, yoga, thug, madras, settee, toddy. Find out their meaning!

● Some words that we use in America are called by a different word or mean something different in England. For example, what we call a hallway, the British call a corridor; what we call a yard the British call a garden. How many other words like that can you find?

#### **CREATIVE WRITING**

● When Mary arrives in Yorkshire, she finds life very different. Write a letter from Mary to an imaginary friend in India, telling about her new life.

● Write a journal entry as if you were Martha Sowerby or Ben Weatherstaff: "A Day in the Life of Misselthwaite Manor" or Dickon: "A Day on the Moor."

● Many adjectives are used to describe Misselthwaite Manor when Mary first arrives – immense, gloomy, and enormous – and we hear that it is 600 years old and has more than 100 rooms. Write a story about someone's first impressions when arriving at Misselthwaite Manor using these

adjectives and others. Share with the class.

● Mary finds the key to unlock the garden. Imagine you have just found a key. What could it be the key to? Decide what it unlocks and write about how you use it for the first time and what happens when you do.

#### **VISUAL ART**

● Draw a picture of what the garden looks like before Mary discovers it (run down and overgrown) and then draw another picture of the garden after it is in full bloom (neat and cared for).

● Look at some masterpiece examples of still life flower drawings/paintings by famous artists. Bring in a flower, spend time observing it and then sketch its likeness on paper. Line the flowers up on a table and mix up the sketches. See if you can match the sketch with its subject!

#### **CREATIVE DRAMA**

● In pairs, improvise a short scene around one of the following themes: a sick child has a visit from a friend; a girl has a servant assigned to her; a child journeys to a strange, new home with a guardian. Build a detailed background for each character. After rehearsing the scenes, share with the rest of the class.

● This version of *The Secret Garden* is a good example of "story theater," in which the story is told with the aid of narration. The task of narrating is shared among the company of actors who drop out of character when they narrate. Using this technique, prepare a "story theater" production of a well-known tale or a book that you have read together.

## Secret Garden Booklist

Prepared with help from Tim Wadham,  
Youth Services Coordinator for the  
Maricopa County Library District



## Families

*Spyhole Secrets* by Zilpha Keatly Snyder  
*A Summer to Die* by Lois Lowry  
*Swear to Howdy* by Wendelin Van Draanen

## Nature

*Ida B : --and her plans to maximize fun, avoid disaster, and (possibly) save the world* by Katherine Hannigan  
*In My World* by Lois Ehlert  
*Old Turtle* by Douglas Wood  
*Henry Hikes to Fitchburg* by D. B. Johnson

## Books by Frances Hodgson Burnett

*The Secret Garden*  
*Sarah Crew*  
*A Little Princess*  
*Little Lord Fauntleroy*

## Secrets

*The Silent Boy* by Lois Lowry  
*Sixth Grade Secrets* by Louis Sachar

## Friendships

*Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman  
*Frog and Toad are Friends* by Arnold Lobel

## Orphans

*The Orphan Train Quartet* by Joan Lowery Nixon  
*A Family Apart*  
*Caught in the Act*  
*In the Face of Danger*  
*A Place to Belong*  
*The Bad Beginning* by Lemony Snicket (and all the rest of the "Series of Unfortunate Events")  
*Mandy* by Julie Andrews Edwards  
*The Boxcar Children* by Gertrude Chandler Warner  
*Rodzina* by Karen Cushman

## Gardens

*Linnea in Monet's Garden* by Christina Björk  
*The Chalk Box Kid* by Clyde Robbert Bulla  
*The Leaf Men and the Brave Good Bugs* by William Joyce

## Change

*A Packet of Seeds* by Deborah Hopkinson

## Overcoming Grief

*Sun and Spoon* by Kevin Henkes  
*Baby* by Patrician MacLachlan  
*The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* by Judith Viorst  
*Missing May* by Cynthia Rylant  
*The Young Man and the Sea* by W. Rodman Philbrick

## About Childsplay...

Childsplay is a non-profit professional theatre company of adult actors,  
performing for young audiences and families.

**Our Mission is to create theatre so strikingly original in form,  
content or both, that it instills in young people an enduring awe,  
love and respect for the medium, thus preserving imagination and  
wonder, the hallmarks of childhood, which are the keys to the  
future.**

We love to hear from our audience members!  
Send letters, drawings or reviews to:

Childsplay, Inc.  
PO Box 517  
Tempe, AZ 85280  
Call us at 480-350-8101 or  
1-800-583-7831 (in-state)



Email us at: [info@childsplayaz.org](mailto:info@childsplayaz.org) \* Web Site: [www.childsplayaz.org](http://www.childsplayaz.org)

## Internet Sites of Interest



[www.dbg.org](http://www.dbg.org)  
~Desert Botanical Gardens

[www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/secretgarden](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/secretgarden)  
~PBS series on gardening

[www.yorkshirenet.co.uk](http://www.yorkshirenet.co.uk)  
~Yorkshire England Information Center

[www.collectbritain.co.uk/collections/dialects](http://www.collectbritain.co.uk/collections/dialects)  
~a collection of British dialects to listen to