

**The Secret Garden**  
by Frances Hodgson Burnett

**Chapter 2: Robin Redbreast**

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| <b>Author:</b> Adrian Tennant          |
| <b>Level:</b> Pre-intermediate         |
| <b>Age:</b> Teenagers / Young adults   |
| <b>Time needed:</b> Approx. 30 minutes |

**Activity 1**

- Write up the following names on the board:  
*Ben*  
*Dickon*  
*Martha*
- Explain to the students that these three people appear in this chapter. You want the students to listen and identify who the people are and what they do.
- Play the recording of the chapter all the way through.
- Put the students in pairs and encourage them to discuss their ideas.
- Play the recording again, if necessary.
- Check the answers together.

**Key:**

*Ben – the gardener*  
*Dickon – one of Martha's brothers*  
*Martha – a servant in the house*

**Activity 2**

- Tell the students that you will do a role-play soon, with one of the students playing the character of Mary.
- Explain to them that you will play the recording again, pausing every now and again. In groups, they should write questions that they want to ask Mary. These could be questions about how she is feeling, what she is doing, etc.
- Play the recording, pausing at least four or five times to give students time to discuss the questions they want to ask.
- Choose one of the students to 'play' Mary and ask them to come to the front of the class.
- Get the other students to ask their questions and 'Mary' to answer them.



**Note:** It's a good idea to choose a strong student who has some imagination to 'play' Mary.

**Activity 3**

- Tell all the students to imagine that they are Mary.
- Ask the students to make notes with a partner about events that most affected Mary in this chapter. Students should consider the people that she met and the events that unfolded.
- Students should then imagine that it is Mary's first evening in Misselthwaite Manor. Based on the notes that they made with their partner, tell the students that they have ten minutes to write a brief entry in Mary's diary.
- Either ask some students to read out their entries to the class or continue for homework.

**Transcript**

When Mary opened her eyes in the morning, there was a young servant girl cleaning out the fireplace in her room. Mary lay and watched her for a few moments and then looked around the room. It was not like a child's room at all. It was strange and gloomy, and there were no toys or books. There was a large window, and through it Mary could see a huge area of land climbing up into the distance. There were no trees on it, and it looked like an endless, purple sea.

'What is that?' Mary asked, pointing out of the window.

'That's the moor,' said Martha, the young servant girl, standing up and looking out. 'Do you like it?'

'No,' answered Mary. 'I hate it.'

'That's because you're not used to it,' Martha said cheerfully, turning back to her work. 'Wait till spring and summer, when the gorse and heather are in flower. Then it smells like honey. The sky looks so high, and the bees and the birds make such a noise humming and singing. Then you'll like it.'

Martha was a round, red-cheeked, cheerful-looking person. She spoke with a strong Yorkshire accent, and Mary listened to her in surprise. She was not at all like the servants Mary had had in India. They always did everything Mary wanted and if they disobeyed her she hit them in the face. Martha did not talk to Mary like she was an important person. But Martha was quite a strong-looking girl and Mary thought that if she hit Martha, Martha might possibly hit her back.

'Are you going to be my servant?' Mary asked Martha, in her proud, unfriendly way.

'I'm Mrs Medlock's servant,' said Martha. 'But I shall clean your room, and bring you your meals.'

'Who is going to dress me?' asked Mary.

Martha sat up and stared at Mary.

'Can't you dress yourself?' she asked, amazed.

'No,' answered Mary, crossly. 'I've never dressed myself. My servants always did it.'

'Well,' said Martha. 'It's time you learnt to do it yourself.'

Mary began to feel horribly lonely and very far away from everything she knew. Suddenly she threw herself down on the bed and started to cry so loudly that Martha felt a little frightened. She also felt quite sorry for Mary. She went to the bed and stood next to her.

'Eh, you mustn't cry like that,' she said. 'I'm sorry, Miss. Do stop crying.'

Mary slowly stopped crying and became quiet. Martha looked relieved.

'It's time for you to get up now,' the maid said. 'Your breakfast is ready next door. If you get out of bed, I'll help you put your clothes on.'

Martha chattered away as she helped Mary to get dressed. Mary listened coldly at first, but slowly she began to be interested.

'There are twelve children in our house, and there's never enough food for all of them,' said Martha. 'They run and play on the moor all day. Mother says the fresh air of the moor fattens them up. She thinks they must eat grass, just like



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Transcript

the ponies! Our Dickon, he's twelve years old and he's found a young pony to play with.'

'Where did he get it?' asked Mary.

'He found it on the moor with its mother when it was little,' Martha told her. 'He started to make friends with it and give it bits of bread. And now it follows him around and lets him get on its back. Dickon's a kind boy and the animals like him.'

Mary had always thought it would be nice to have a pet animal. So she started to feel a little interested in Dickon. And that was a strange feeling for her. She had only ever been interested in herself before.

When Mary went into the room next door, there was a large breakfast laid out on the table. But she had never eaten much, and when Martha put a plate in front of her she pushed it away.

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

'Don't want it?' cried Martha, shocked. 'If our children were here, they'd eat all this up in five minutes.'

'Why?' asked Mary coldly.

'Why?' repeated Martha. 'Because they've never had full stomachs in their lives. They're as hungry as foxes.'

Mary didn't know what it was like to be hungry. She drank some tea and ate a little bit of toast.

'Now put some warm clothes on and go out and play,' said Martha. 'It'll be good for you.'

'Who will go with me?' Mary asked.

Martha stared at her.

'You'll go by yourself,' she answered. 'You'll have to learn to play by yourself, like other children. Our Dickon goes off on the moor by himself for hours and hours. That's how he made friends with the pony. There are sheep on the moor that know him, and birds come and eat out of his hand. He always saves a bit of bread for them.'

Mary thought for a moment. There wouldn't be ponies or sheep in the garden, but there might be birds. And they would probably be different from the ones in India. It might be interesting to look at them. And there was certainly nothing to do indoors.

Martha found Mary's coat and hat and a pair of little boots, and showed her the way downstairs.

'If you go that way, you'll come to the gardens,' she said, pointing to a gate.

'There are lots of flowers there in the summer, but they're rather bare right now.' After a moment, she added, 'One of the gardens is locked up. No one has been in it for ten years.'

'Why?' asked Mary. Normally she didn't like to show that she was interested. But this sounded very strange.

'Mr Craven had it shut when his wife died so suddenly. He won't let anyone go inside. It was her garden. He locked the door and buried the key.'

At that moment, they heard a bell ring.

'Mrs Medlock's calling me,' said Martha, and she went inside.

**Transcript**

After Martha had gone, Mary went out into the gardens. There were wide lawns, trees and flower beds, and a large pool with an old grey fountain in the middle. But the flower beds were bare, and the fountain was not playing. Mary could not stop thinking about the locked garden.

'What would it look like now?' she wondered. 'Would the flowers still be alive?' At the end of the path Mary was following, she saw a long wall with a green door in it. She went through the door and found herself in a walled garden.

There were some fruit trees growing against the wall, and a few beds of winter vegetables, but otherwise it was bare. A doorway led from there into another walled garden, and there were several more beyond. Mary walked through the gardens until she came to an orchard – a garden full of fruit trees. The walls seemed to go beyond the orchard, as if there was a garden on the other side. But there was no door in the orchard wall. Mary could see the tops of trees above the wall. As she looked up she saw a bird with a bright red breast sitting on top of one of the trees. Suddenly he started to sing his winter song, as if he had just noticed her and was calling to her.

The bird's cheerful little song gave Mary a pleasant feeling. The big closed house and bare moor had made Mary feel as if she was all alone in this world. But this little bird almost made her smile. She listened to him until he flew away. Then she started to walk back towards the first walled garden. She kept thinking about the locked garden, probably because she had nothing else to do. Then she thought of the little bird with the red breast, and suddenly she stopped.

'I think he was on a tree in the secret garden,' she said to herself. 'I'm sure he was. There was a wall around the place, and there was no door.'

She had reached the door to the first walled garden by now. As she came into it, she noticed that an old man was now digging in the corner. He looked up as she came in, and nodded at her. He had an unfriendly face, and did not look pleased to see her. She walked over and stood watching him in her cold little way. He did not look up again, so at last she spoke to him.

'I can't find the door into the other garden,' she said.

'What garden?' the man said in a rough voice. He stopped digging for a moment.

'The one behind the orchard,' answered Mary. 'There were trees there. I saw the tops of them. A bird with a red breast was sitting on one of them, and he sang.'

To Mary's surprise, the gardener suddenly smiled. He turned around and whistled softly. Then a wonderful thing happened. The bird with the red breast came flying over to them, and landed on the earth near the gardener's foot.

'Here he is,' laughed the old man. 'Where have you been, you cheeky thing?'

The bird looked up at him with his soft black eye. He didn't seem at all frightened. He hopped about, looking for insects.

'What kind of bird is he?' Mary asked.

'Don't you know?' the old man replied. 'He's a robin redbreast. They're the friendliest birds of all. I've known this one since he was a baby. His brothers and sisters flew away, and he was lonely.'

**Transcript**

Mary went a little nearer to the robin and looked at him very hard. 'I'm lonely,' she said. She suddenly realized that this was one of the things that made her feel so cross all the time.

The old gardener stared at her for a minute. 'Are you the little girl from India?' he asked.

Mary nodded. 'What is your name?' she asked.

'Ben Weatherstaff,' he answered. Then he said, with a little laugh, 'I'm lonely too. That robin's the only friend I've got.'

'I don't have any friends at all,' said Mary. 'I've never played with anyone.'

'You're probably a little bit like me,' said old Ben Weatherstaff. 'Neither of us are good-looking. And we're both as cross as we look. I expect you've probably got a horrible temper like me, too.'

No one had ever talked to Mary like that before.

'Do I really look as cross as Ben Weatherstaff?' she thought to herself. 'And do I have a horrible temper?' She felt rather uncomfortable.

Suddenly they both looked up. The robin had flown onto an apple tree close to Mary, and had started singing. Ben Weatherstaff laughed.

'He's decided to make friends with you,' said Ben. 'He likes you!'

Mary moved carefully towards the tree, and looked up.

'Would you make friends with me?' she asked the robin. But she did not say it in her hard little voice. She spoke softly and gently.

At that moment, the robin stopped singing, shook his wings and flew away.

'He has flown over the wall!' cried Mary, watching him. 'He has flown across the orchard into the locked garden.'

'He lives there,' said old Ben. 'He lives there, among the rose-trees.'

'Are there rose-trees? I'd like to see them,' said Mary. 'Where is the door to the garden?'

Ben suddenly became cold and unfriendly once more.

'There isn't a door,' he said roughly. 'There was ten years ago, but there isn't now. Now go and play. I've got to work.'

And he picked up his spade and walked away. He didn't even look at Mary or say goodbye.