

The Secret Garden  
by Frances Hodgson Burnett

Chapter 5: Dickon

<b>Author:</b> Adrian Tennant
<b>Level:</b> Pre-intermediate
<b>Age:</b> Teenagers / Young adults
<b>Time needed:</b> 45-60 minutes
<b>Preparation:</b> One copy of the worksheet needed for Activity 2 per student



Activity 1

- Write the following names on one half of the board: *Dickon, Mary, Ben Weatherstaff* and *Mr Craven*. Allow enough space to write notes under each.
- Ask the students what they know about each character.
- Give the students a couple of minutes to discuss their ideas in pairs or small groups.
- Elicit ideas from the students and write a few of these ideas on the board under the appropriate name.
- Write the following words on the other half of the board: *black eyes, crooked shoulders, cross, excited, fresh smell, funny-looking, miserable, old, shy, thin, turned-up nose* and *wide mouth*.
- Ask the students to guess which words are used to describe each of the four characters.
- Encourage the students to discuss their ideas in their pairs or small groups.
- Play the whole recording of the chapter and get the students to check their ideas as it plays.
- Then ask the students to check their ideas again in their pairs or groups.
- Play the recording again, if necessary.
- Check the answers together.

**Key:**

*Mary* – excited, shy, thin, cross  
*Ben Weatherstaff* – old, cross  
*Dickon* – funny-looking, turned-up nose, wide mouth, fresh smell  
*Mr Craven* – crooked shoulders, miserable, black eyes

Activity 2

- Tell the students you are going to give them a worksheet with a brief summary of the chapter.
- Hand out the worksheet and ask the students to read through the summary.
- Explain to the students that there are ten mistakes in the text. Encourage them to read through the summary again and see if they can find the mistakes.
- Put students in pairs or small groups and get them to compare and discuss their ideas.
- Ask students to put away their worksheets while you play the recording through once.
- Encourage the students to look at the summary again and see if they can find the ten mistakes in their pairs/groups.
- Play the recording again, if necessary.
- Check the answers together.

**Key:**

*It rained* It was sunny / The sun shone for nearly a week, but *Mary* was happy when she was in her secret garden. During the week *Mary* didn't see Ben Weatherstaff much saw Ben Weatherstaff a lot. One day she saw him and decided to ask him what flowers he would plant in a garden. He told her that he would plant poppies roses. Later, *Mary* went for a walk. She was sitting under a tree when she met Dickon. A boy was sitting under a tree. He was playing a wooden pipe and there were two squirrels was a squirrel watching him from a branch in the tree.

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Mary and Dickon talked and Mary showed him the secret garden. He told her that not all the roses were dead and Mary was ~~sad~~ happy. Dickon helped Mary in the garden, but then ~~he~~ she had to go to dinner. Mary went back to the house and Martha told her that Mr Craven wanted to see her.

Mr Craven spoke to Mary. She then told Mr Craven that she wanted to plant some seeds and watch them grow. He said she could and that he would be ~~at home~~ away all summer. When she went back to the garden, Dickon ~~was still there~~ had gone.

Activity 3

- 1 Tell the students to imagine that they are either Mary or Dickon and that it's the evening after their first meeting.
- 2 Ask them to write a short diary entry about their meeting. You can provide them with the following questions to help them: *What was he/she doing when you first met? What did you think of him/her? What did he/she look like? What were your feelings? What are your plans for tomorrow?*
- 3 When the students are finished, ask a few of them to read out their diary entries. Alternatively, you could post them on the walls of the classroom.

It rained for nearly a week, but Mary was happy when she was in her secret garden. During the week, Mary didn't see Ben Weatherstaff much. One day, she saw him and decided to ask him what flowers he would plant in a garden. He told her that he would plant poppies. Later, Mary went for a walk. She was sitting under a tree when she met Dickon. He was playing a wooden pipe and there were two squirrels watching him from a branch in the tree.

Mary and Dickon talked and Mary showed him the secret garden. He told her that all the roses were dead and Mary was sad. Dickon helped Mary in the garden, but then he had to go to dinner. Mary went back to the house and Martha told her that Mr Craven wanted to see her.

Mr Craven spoke to Mary. She then told Mr Craven that she wanted to plant some seeds and watch them grow. He said she could and that he would be at home all summer. When she went back to the garden, Dickon was still there.

Transcript

The sun shone down for nearly a week on the secret garden. Mary loved the feeling that when she shut the door, no one knew where she was. Every day, she found more green shoots. They seemed to be coming up everywhere. Mary worked hard digging and pulling up weeds until the shoots had nice clear spaces around them. And the more she worked, the more she enjoyed herself.

During that week, Mary saw Ben Weatherstaff a lot.

He seemed happier to talk to her now. One day, when he seemed to be in a particularly good mood, Mary decided to ask him a question.

'If you wanted to make a flower garden,' she said, 'what would you plant?'

'Sweet-smelling things – but mostly roses,' Ben Weatherstaff replied.

'Do you like roses?' Mary asked.

Ben dug up a weed before he answered. 'Well, yes, I do,' he said. 'A young lady taught me about roses. She had a lot of them in a place she liked. And she loved them like children. But that was ten years ago now.'

'Where is she now?' asked Mary.

'She died,' Ben answered, digging his spade hard into the earth.

'What happened to the roses? Did they die too?' asked Mary, more interested than ever.

'Well, I liked them – and I liked her. So every year I used to go and work on them a bit, cutting them back and weeding around them. And some of them lived.'

'When they have no leaves and look grey and brown and dry, how can you tell whether they are dead or alive?' asked Mary.

'Look along the branches, and if you see some brown lumps,' Ben Weatherstaff replied, 'watch them after the rain.' Suddenly he stopped digging and looked curiously at Mary's excited face. 'Why do you care so much about roses all of a sudden?' he asked.

Mary felt her face grow red. She was almost afraid to answer.

'I – I want to say that – that I have a garden of my own,' she said. 'There is nothing for me to do. I – I have nothing – and no one.'

'Well,' said Ben Weatherstaff slowly. 'That's true.'

He said it in a strange way, and Mary thought he was perhaps feeling sorry for her. She had never felt sorry for herself. She had only felt tired and cross. But now the world seemed to be changing and getting nicer. She realized that she had found another person that she liked. She liked old Ben Weatherstaff, even though he was often so cross.

After Mary had finished talking to Ben, she walked down the long walk at the back of the secret garden. She decided to go up to the wood at the edge of the gardens, and look for rabbits. But as she got near to the wood, she heard a strange low whistling sound. Then she saw a very strange sight.

A boy was sitting under a tree, playing on a rough wooden pipe. He was a funny-looking boy, and he was about twelve. His nose turned up, his cheeks were as red as poppies, and he had round, blue eyes. A brown squirrel was



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watching him from a branch of the tree. And nearby two rabbits seemed to be listening to the noise of his pipe.

When the boy saw Mary, he held up his hand and spoke to her in a low voice. 'Don't move,' he said. 'It will frighten them away.'

Mary stood still. The boy stopped playing his pipe and began to get up very carefully. He moved so slowly, it was as if he wasn't moving at all. At last he stood up. The rabbits hopped away, and the squirrel ran back up the tree, but they didn't seem at all frightened.

'I'm Dickon,' the boy said. 'And I know you are Miss Mary. I've brought you a fork and a spade. They're really good ones! And I've got you some nice seeds, too.'

He had a wide, red mouth and his smile went right across his face. Mary knew nothing about boys, and she felt rather shy.

'Will you show the seeds to me?' she said.

When she came closer to him, she noticed that he had a clean fresh smell of heather, grass and leaves. It was a nice smell. And when she looked into his funny face with the red cheeks and the blue eyes, she forgot that she was feeling shy.

Dickon took out some small paper bags.

'There are lots of poppies, look,' he said. 'They'll grow wherever you throw the seeds.'

He stopped and turned his head quickly.

'There's a robin calling us,' he said. And sure enough they heard a loud twitter from the bushes. Dickon turned towards Mary. 'Does he know you?' he asked.

'He knows me a little,' said Mary. 'Is he really calling us?'

'Oh, yes,' laughed Dickon. He moved closer to the bushes, and made a sound almost like the robin's own twitter. The robin twittered back as if it were answering a question.

'Oh yes, he's a friend of yours,' said Dickon. 'I can see that!'

'Do you understand everything birds say?' said Mary.

'I think I do, and they think I do,' Dickon smiled. 'Sometimes I think perhaps I am a bird, or a fox or a rabbit!'

He laughed, and started telling Mary about the seeds once more. 'Why don't I come and plant them for you?' he said. 'Where's your garden?'

Mary said nothing. Her face turned red and then pale.

'Didn't they give you a bit of garden?' said Dickon.

Mary looked at him.

'I don't know anything about boys,' she said slowly. 'Could you keep a secret, if I told you one? It's a big secret. I think if anyone found out, I would die!'

'I'm keeping secrets all the time,' said Dickon. 'If I told all the other boys about birds' nests and foxes' cubs and things, nothing on the moor would be safe.'

Mary said nothing for a moment. Then she made up her mind.

'I've stolen a garden,' she said, very fast. 'Nobody wants it. Perhaps everything in it is dead already. I don't know. But they can't take it away from me! They can't!' She felt hot and cross again.

'Where is it?' asked Dickon gently.

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'Come with me and I'll show you,' Mary said, getting up. And she led Dickon to the ivy-covered wall and took him through the door into the secret garden.

'Here it is,' she said. 'It's a secret garden. And I'm the only one in the world who wants it to be alive.'

Dickon looked all around. He breathed out in surprise.

'Well,' he almost whispered. 'What a strange and pretty place. It's like walking into a dream.'

For two or three minutes, he stood looking around him while Mary watched him. Then he began to walk softly around.

'I never thought I'd see this place,' he whispered at last. 'Martha told me there was a garden that no one went into. We used to wonder what it was like.'

'Will there be roses?' Mary whispered. 'I thought perhaps they were all dead.'

'No, not all of them,' Dickon answered. 'Look here!'

He walked over to one of the branches and took out his knife. There were lots of shoots on the branch, and most of them were hard, dry-grey. But one was brownish-green.

'This here is a new bit,' said Dickon, pointing at it. 'It's as alive as you or me.'

'Oh, I am glad!' cried Mary.

They went from tree to tree and from bush to bush. Dickon was very strong and clever with his knife. He knew how to cut the dead wood away. And he knew when a branch still had green life in it. He showed Mary how to use the fork, and they went around the garden digging and pulling out weeds.

'There's a lot of work to do here!' said Dickon, looking around happily.

'Will you come again and help me do it?' Mary said. 'Oh, do come, Dickon!'

'I'll come every day if you want me to,' he answered. 'But I don't want it to look like a gardener's garden. It's nice like this, with the roses all running wild. I wouldn't like it all neat and tidy, would you?'

'Let's not make it tidy,' said Mary. 'It wouldn't be a secret garden if it was tidy.'

Dickon stood rubbing his head for a moment.

'It is a secret garden,' he said, 'but someone else must have been in here since it was shut up ten years ago.'

'But the door was locked and the key was buried,' said Mary. 'No one could get in.'

'That's true,' said Dickon. 'But I think someone's cut back these roses a bit in the last ten years.' As he started digging again, he leant forward to smell the freshly-turned earth. 'Oh, when there are things growing, and birds singing and whistling, it makes me feel good.'

They worked harder and more happily than ever. Mary was sorry when she realized it was dinner time.

'I shall have to go,' she said sadly. She didn't want to leave Dickon. It all seemed too much like a dream. She couldn't believe that he would really be there when she came back.

'You – you would never tell?' she asked Dickon.

'Imagine you were a thrush and you showed me your nest. Do you think I'd tell anyone?' Dickon smiled. 'Not me. You're as safe as a thrush.'

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When she got inside, Mary told Martha all about meeting Dickon. But she was very careful. She didn't say anything about the secret garden. Then she ate her dinner as quickly as possible. She was getting ready to go outside again when Martha stopped her.

'I've got something to tell you,' Martha said. 'Mr Craven came back this morning and he wants to see you.'

Mary turned pale.

'Why? Why does he want to see me?' she asked.

'Mrs Medlock says that my mother saw him in the village yesterday,' said Martha. 'And she said something to him but I don't know what she said. He's going away again tomorrow. He probably won't come back again until the autumn or winter. And he wants to see you before he goes. Mrs Medlock is going to come and get you in a minute.'

Mr Craven was sitting in a chair in front of the fire. He was not really a hunchback, but he had high, slightly crooked shoulders. His black hair was white in places.

'This is Miss Mary, sir,' said Mrs Medlock.

'You can leave her here,' said Mr Craven, and he looked over his shoulder at Mary. 'Come here!' he said, as Mrs Medlock left the room.

He was not ugly. But his face was miserable, and he looked worried.

'Are you well?' he asked Mary. 'You are very thin.'

'I am getting fatter,' said Mary, in her stiff little voice.

'I forgot you,' he said. 'I should have got you a teacher, but I forgot.'

What an unhappy face he had! His black eyes hardly seemed to see Mary. It was as if they were seeing something else.

'Please,' said Mary. 'Please don't make me have a teacher yet.'

'That's what Mrs Sowerby said,' said Mr Craven. 'Martha's mother. I met her yesterday, and she was worried about you. She said you should play outside. She thought you should get stronger before you have a teacher.'

'I want to play outside,' Mary answered. She tried to stop her voice trembling. 'It makes me feel strong when I play in the wind from the moor.'

Mr Craven was watching her.

'Where do you play?' he asked.

'Everywhere,' said Mary quietly. 'I run around, and look for things growing up out of the earth. I don't do anything wrong.'

'Don't look so frightened,' said Mr Craven in a worried voice. 'You may do what you like. I am not good at looking after children. I am too ill and I have too many things to think about. But I want you to be happy and comfortable. Play outside as much as you like. You can go anywhere you like. Is there anything you want?' he added suddenly. 'Do you want toys, books, dolls?'

'Could I ...' said Mary, her voice trembling, 'Could I have a bit of earth?'

Mr Craven looked surprised.

'Earth?' he said. 'What do you mean?'

'I want to plant some seeds and watch them grow,' said Mary.

Mr Craven stared at her and put his hands over his face for a moment.

**Transcript**

Then he got up and walked slowly across the room. When he spoke to her again his eyes were soft and kind.

'You can have as much earth as you want,' he said. 'You remind me of someone else who loved the earth and things that grow. When you see a bit of earth you want, take it, child. Make it come alive. Now, you must go. I am tired.' He touched the bell to call Mrs Medlock. 'Goodbye. I shall be away all summer.'

When Mrs Medlock had led Mary back to her own corridor, she ran into her room. Martha was waiting there for her.

'I can have a garden!' Mary cried, excited. 'And I am not going to have a teacher until I am stronger! Mr Craven said that I can do what I like.'

Mary ran as quickly as she could out to the garden. She knew that she had been away for a long time. When she went under the ivy and through the door, she saw that Dickon was not there. The garden fork and spade were lying under a tree, but the secret garden was empty.

'He's gone,' said Mary sadly. 'Oh, was it all just a dream?'

Then she saw a piece of paper lying by the fork and spade. There was a picture on the paper, and some writing. She couldn't see what the picture was at first, but then she realized. It was a bird sitting on a nest. Underneath, the writing said, 'I will come back.'