

Analytical Essay Samples

Sample Written Analysis—*The Secret Garden*

(Quadrant 1)

The Secret Garden, by Frances Hodgson Burnett, **tells the story of** a young girl, Mary, who becomes an orphan after her parents die of cholera. Mary travels from India to the moors of England to live with her uncle, Archibald Craven, whom she has never met. In the beginning, Mary is a disagreeable, spoiled girl who yells at the servants and demands to be waited on. She is lonely because her parents never paid very much attention to her. She keeps to herself in the big old house with nothing to do but look out the window. Finally, Martha, the housemaid, encourages her to go outdoors. It is when she begins to explore the gardens surrounding the manor that she begins to feel healthier and happier. **At the first plot point**, she discovers the key to a locked garden **and** is determined to go in.

At the beginning of the story, the author creates a mood of mystery by setting the story on the English moors. The moors are “miles and miles and miles of wild land that nothing grows on but heather and gorse broom, and nothing lives on but wild ponies and sheep” (p. 24). At first, Mary doesn’t like living at Misselthwaite Manor and even says she hates it. But then, she becomes friends with a robin who seems to ask, “Isn’t the wind nice? Isn’t the sun nice? Isn’t everything nice?” (p. 49). It is the robin who leads Mary to a secret, locked garden and invites her in with his song. **It is only a matter of time before she will unlock the door to the garden and to her heart.**

(Quadrants 2 and 3)

Time tending the garden proves to be a healing process for Mary. Each day she visits the garden to weed, plant, and watch winter turn to spring. She opens her heart to friendship by sharing her secret with Dickon. Spending time in the garden everyday with Dickon seems to soften Mary’s heart; she begins to show kindness, gentleness, and love to others and nature. While living at Misselthwaite Manor, Mary continues to hear a crying voice in the hallway. Eventually she follows the cries to a hidden room where her sickly cousin, Colin, is kept bedridden. Colin is a spoiled boy who has always had his way. Despite his obnoxious behavior, Mary sympathizes with him. **At the midpoint**, Mary sees herself reflected in Colin’s selfish and sickly behavior.

Colin and Mary’s friendship begins to blossom. They read books together and talk about the secret garden. Mary is the only one who can calm Colin down from one of his tantrums. Eventually she becomes determined to help Colin by taking him to the garden where she believes he will be healed, just as she was. She “[wonders] if it would not do [Colin] good to go out into a garden and watch things growing” (p. 140). At first, Colin is hesitant to go outside, fearful that the outdoors will make him sicker. But his desire to be part of the secret is greater than his desire to stay bedridden. **At the turning point**, Colin visits the garden for the first time, **and** it is clear that he, too, will be healed.

Throughout the story, the author uses the locked garden **as a symbol of** life and death. At the beginning of the story, the garden is locked. Archibald Craven chose to lock the garden after his wife’s death. When Mary finds the key, she enters the garden, which represents a place of life and hope. “She unchained and unbolted and unlocked and when the door was open, she sprang across the step in one bound” (p. 152). The garden gives Mary a reason to live, and it is in the garden that she and Colin will be physically and spiritually healed. **The symbols used throughout the story remind the reader that** death is a part of life and the natural world, but so are healing and rebirth.

(Quadrant 4)

As the story concludes, the garden seems to have a magical effect on the children. For the first time Colin feels like he will grow, and he will live. In the garden, “he had made himself believe that he was going to get well, which was really more than half the battle” (p. 235). Colin stands up for the first time and vows that he will learn to walk. He uses his time in the garden to exercise, play, and grow strong. Mary, who has grown strong herself, encourages him. **As the story resolves**, Colin’s father finds him in the garden running and playing like a healthy boy, and he is overcome with joy!

The Secret Garden is a rebirth story, starting with death and despair and ending with life and hopefulness. **Across the story, the mood changes from an atmosphere of** gloominess and foreboding, **to one of** joy and light. **Even the style changes, as the author** slows the reader down to take in the details of the growing garden and the growth of the main character. **The message of the story is that** we can all experience transformation when we open our hearts to love and to the healing power of nature.