

Talking about *The Secret Garden*

by Frances Hodgson Burnett · the free ebook lives at youngreaderguide.org/books/secret-garden/

Warming *up*

Easy openers. Anyone at the table can answer these, including the youngest.

1. You find a buried key, and then a hidden door in a wall. Do you tell anyone? Who makes the list?
2. Which would you want first: the garden, the moor, or a friend like Dickon?

The real *conversation*

Pick two or three, not all of them. Parents answer too, honestly.

1. Mary starts the book sour, bossy, and hard to like, and the book doesn't pretend otherwise. When did you actually start liking her? What changed?
2. Colin has been told he's sick and doomed for so long that he believes it, until Mary simply refuses to. How much of what we can't do is just what we've been told we can't do?
3. The grown-ups in this book mostly fail the children; it takes a robin, a garden, and a boy who charms foxes to fix things. Why do you think the author kept the adults so far away?
4. The garden was locked for ten years because Colin's father couldn't bear to look at his own sadness. Does locking a sad thing away work? What happens to it in there?
5. Mary and Colin chant about 'Magic' half-believing it, and the book half-believes it too. It seems to mean something real: something growing where nothing was. What would you call it?

The big *one*

Save it for last.

Mary gets better by tending things (a garden, a robin, an impossible cousin), not by being tended. Nobody fixes her; she fixes, and it fixes her. What's your secret garden, the thing whose tending would bring you back to life?

Do it *together*

Plant something and name it. One pot, jar, or corner of the yard per person, and a packet of seeds. Each of you names your planting for something you want to grow this year; Colin would have named his 'getting strong.' The standing rule at every book club after this one: you report on your seedling before you report on anything else. Gardens, the book insists, don't hurry; that's the lesson smuggled inside the chore.