

TEACHER'S GUIDE



The Secret Garden: A Graphic Novel

Green-growing secrets and powerful magic await you at Misselthwaite Manor in *The Secret Garden: A Graphic Novel*, a bewitching and vivid adaptation of Frances Hodgson Burnett's beloved tale. True to the spirit of Burnett's work, this graphic novel can be used as an engaging introduction to the classic story, read alongside it for deeper understanding, or analyzed afterward to compare and contrast. This adaptation has been created for a modern audience to provide greater historical context and information on Colonial India in the early 20th Century to best reflect the world beyond the enchanting walls of the titular garden.

Three Reasons to Use Graphic Novels in Your Classroom

- **Reading graphic novels engages the brain in different ways than text alone.** Graphic novels are multimodal texts that require readers to make meaning by combining print and visual literacy skills. They must process information both sequentially and simultaneously within and across panels and pages.
- **Analysis of graphic novels strengthens critical thinking and visual literacy.** The comics format requires readers to use higher-level thinking skills such as inference and synthesis as they analyze how the text and images work together and infer what happens between panels. Graphic novel analysis also requires visual literacy skills such as interpretation and evaluation of images using the elements of art and design.
- **Graphic novels provide access for all readers.** The images in graphic novels provide a scaffold for decoding text, which supports beginning, emerging, and developing readers and English learners. With graphic novels, a wider range of readers can enjoy the emotion, action, and detail of great stories and practice high-level reading comprehension and analysis skills.

How do I teach a graphic novel?

Mostly the same way you teach a text novel! Characters, plot, setting, problems and solutions, and all the other elements of story are part of graphic novel study. So are main ideas, details, point of view, purpose, and citing text evidence. The difference in a graphic novel is that some of the information is in the words, and some are in the pictures, so students must analyze the visual elements and how the visuals and text work together.

In a graphic novel, readers view an entire page of panels, then read the panels in sequence (left to right and top to bottom). Each panel shows a still image, and readers must infer what happens between the panels to create a story. Most of the text in a graphic novel is in the form of dialogue in word balloons. There may also be also captions or boxes that contain "voice-over" narration or other information.

Urge students to slow down and take in the images along with the text and think about what the pictures are telling them. Encourage rereading of panels, pages, and sections.

Here are some general questions that can be used with any comic or graphic novel.

Panels

- What do you see when you look at this page or two-page spread as a whole?
- In what order did you read the panels, and how does that affect your understanding?
- What happens in the gutters or the spaces between the panels?
Notice where you are reading what is on the page and where you are filling in the gaps with your imagination.
- What framing (close-up, zoom, splash) has the creator chosen and why?
- What image or images has the creator chosen to include in each panel? What has been left out?
- What effect do the size and shape of the panels have on your understanding of the story?

Art Style

- How would you describe the art style (sketchy, bold, whimsical, realistic, minimal, manga, etc.)?
- How does the style influence your understanding of and connection to the text?
- What do elements of the comics visual language (motion lines, **emanata**, symbols) tell you?
- How does the artist's use of color affect your understanding of the story?

Emanata: Iconic representations of otherwise invisible ideas or emotions, such as a black scribble over someone's head to show that they are angry or squiggly lines coming from a pie to show heat and scent.

Text

- Is the text dialogue or exposition? How do you know?
- Whose voice are you reading? Are they speaking out loud or thinking? How do you know?
- How do the shapes, colors, and styles of the balloons and captions influence your understanding of the text?
- How does the style, size, and color of the font influence your understanding of the text?

Characters

- What do the characters look like, and what does that tell you about them?
- What are they shown doing?
- What do their facial expressions and body language tell you?



Setting

- What does the setting look like? What information can you find in the background images?
- What does the artist include and leave out?
- How does the setting affect or communicate mood?

The Secret Garden: A Graphic Novel Discussion Questions

These questions focus on the visual elements of the story and how the text and images work together. They are meant to be used alongside a discussion of the story elements, plot, and characters. As students make observations and analyses, encourage them to cite text evidence in both the words and the pictures. When discussing choices made by the authors, ask students to think about the intent and contributions of both writer Mariah Marsden and artist Hanna Luechtefeld.

Before Reading

Have students glance through some of the pages and discuss the art style.

- How would you describe the style of the art in this book?
- How does the art make you feel?
- How realistic is the art? Does it look like the real world? How is it different?
- How does shading affect how you read the images?



Talk about some of the elements of art:

- **Line:** Are the lines thick or thin? Smooth or rough? Straight, curved, jagged? Long or short? Vertical, horizontal, diagonal?
- **Shape:** What shapes do the lines create? How close or far apart are they? Do they overlap in space? Is every shape outlined?
- **Color:** What colors do you see? Are the colors bright or muted? Dark or light? How do they differentiate the lines and shapes? How do the colors vary in different parts of the story?
- **Pattern and texture:** Where do you see patterns? Where do you see textures? What might certain things feel like if you could touch them?



During Reading

Panel: A frame that contains one segment of the action. Panel shape, size, and placement all convey meaning.

PP. 1–11: As Mary arrives at her new home, how does the art convey mood? How does the **panel** layout on pages 4 and 5 reinforce the mood? How does the mood change in the morning on page 12?

Describe how the art shows this change.

P. 16: How does the art here look different? What do you think this means? Why do you think the authors made this choice? What predictions can you make based on this change in the art style? Look for other places in the story where changes in the art tell you that something different is going on.

PP. 20–23: Look carefully at the wordless sequence that begins as Mary leaves the house. Why do you think the creators chose to leave text out of this part of the story? Looking at the sequence, what do you imagine Mary is thinking? What sounds can she hear?

P. 22: Note the sparkles associated with the bird. What do you think they mean?

Keep an eye out for this visual symbol throughout the book.

P. 26: Why do you think one panel is yellow?

P. 27: Why does Mary's word balloon in the third panel look different from the others? Look for other instances of this type of **word balloon**. Why do you think the authors used these?

Word Balloon: A shape that contains character dialogue. The tail of the balloon points to the speaker.

P. 31: How does the art look different here? Why do you think that is?

Why are there no tails on the word balloons? Who is talking?

What happens in the **gutters** during this sequence of panels?

Gutter: Spaces between panels where the reader must imagine what happens.

P. 32: What does the **sound effect** tell you?

Why is it in all capital letters? What does its size, color, and placement in the panel tell you?

Sound Effect: Words, often nonsensical, that represent a sound. Usually drawn to represent the volume and feeling of the sound through size, color, shape, and font.

PP. 36–37: Why do you think the artist did not draw in the portraits except for one?

P. 38: Why are the fifth and sixth panels on this page colored differently?

P. 48: How does the size of the panels on this page affect the way you read them? Do you read them quickly or slowly? How do they make you feel?

Splash: A large image that takes up all or most of a page, often without panel borders.

P. 53: Why did the creators choose to make this a **splash** page?

P. 54: Do the wordless panels on this page tell a sequential story? What else do you see? Compare this to a montage that you might see in a movie. Look for more "**montage**" pages throughout the book.

P. 56–57: Analyze how the panels on these pages relate to one another. How does the artist lead your eye to what they want you to pay attention to? How do they emphasize specific moments?

Montage: A series of related images collected create a summary of what happens over a period of time.

P. 60: What could the illustrator be trying to tell readers by showing so many parts of the garden in small panels?

P. 61: Pay attention to what the artist has chosen to show in each panel. What are they telling you about Mary?

P. 65: How is this montage page different from the ones on page 54 and page 60? Why?

P. 74–75: Why do you think the creators decided to make this a two-page splash?

P. 86: Why do you think the creators included this image of Dickon's note? Compare it to the letter on page 63 that Mary wrote for Martha. What do these notes tell you about the characters?

p. 87: How are the panels showing Mary's dream different than panels that show her memories?

PP. 91–98: Why do some of the panels in this section show outdoor scenes?

P. 110: What is the symbolic meaning of the image of Dickon? How does the artist convey that information?

PP. 128–129: Compare this two-page splash to the one showing the same view on pages 129–130.

P. 143: How does the artist lead your eye through the panels on this page?

P. 154: Look for the curly lines that first begin to appear on this page. What do they mean? Follow them through the rest of the story and see where they lead.

PP. 165–166: How is the art different in this section? How does the art tell you what is going on? Does it remind you of another scene earlier in the book?

P. 167: What is the new visual motif introduced to represent the change of seasons? Look for it over the rest of the story. What is it telling you?

PP. 176–178: How does the composition of these final panels tell you this is the end of the story?

After Reading

Characters

- How does Mary's appearance change throughout the story? Why is this important?

Character Design: the visual appearance of a character including size, shape, features, facial expressions, colors, etc.

- Look at the **character designs** for the main characters. What information do the visual designs give you about each character? Compare them and analyze how they change over the course of the book.
- Whose point of view do we see throughout the story? Whose inner thoughts are shown? How is this different in a graphic novel than in just text?

Visual Symbolism

- How does Mary's appearance change throughout the story? Why is this important?

Visual symbol: Conveys an abstract concept visually. A heart can symbolize love; a heart ripped in two can symbolize loss.

- What does the bird symbolize? How do you know?
- What gardening images are repeated throughout the story (e.g., planting, weeding, watering, growing)? How do these images serve as a **visual symbol**?
- How is the changing of the seasons shown over the course of the book? How do the seasons correspond to the events of the story?

Layout: The arrangement of panels on a page or across pages. Layout creates the flow of the narrative, giving more meaning to the sequence of images than they have individually.

Layout and Panels

- Do you always know what order to read the panels in? How do you know? Why do you think it's so unclear on some pages? Compare the **layout** on page 60 to the layout on page 65.

Activity: Copy the following pages (black and white copies are fine for this exercise) and hand out to small groups of students: pp. 21, 54, 60, 65, 76, 143, 147, 151. Use a highlighter to trace the way your eye moves on the page. Compare with others. Where did you read the panels in the same order and where do they differ? What effect might this have on how you perceived the story?

- There are many panels in which characters' faces are cut off or not shown (e.g., pages 65 and 119). A lot of panels just show feet or hands. Why do you think the creators did this?
- Find all of the splash pages and analyze why the creators chose to use splashes for these particular scenes. Try to identify the role each splash plays in influencing the reader.

Activity: Choose two panels that indicate there is some action that takes place in the gutter between them, for example the last panel on p. 148 and the first panel on p. 149. Strike a "freeze-frame" pose mimicking the characters in the first panel. Then act out what happens between the panels, finishing in a freeze-frame of the second panel.

Colors

- Color can have great emotional impact. How does artist Hanna Luechtefeld use color to convey mood and emotion in this book?
- How would you describe the color palette in this book? This is a deliberate decision by the artist. Why do you think they made this choice? How is your understanding influenced by deviations from the **color palette**?
- How would the book feel different if they had used a bright, primary color palette? How would your reading experience be different if the book had no color and everything was rendered in tones of black, white, and gray?

Color palette: The specific range of colors used in a piece of art.

Activity: Scan a few pages and have students use a photo or image-editing program to adjust the brightness, contrast, and saturation. Alternatively, print out a few pages in grayscale and have students color or paint them. Have students compare different versions and analyze how the visual changes affect the mood.

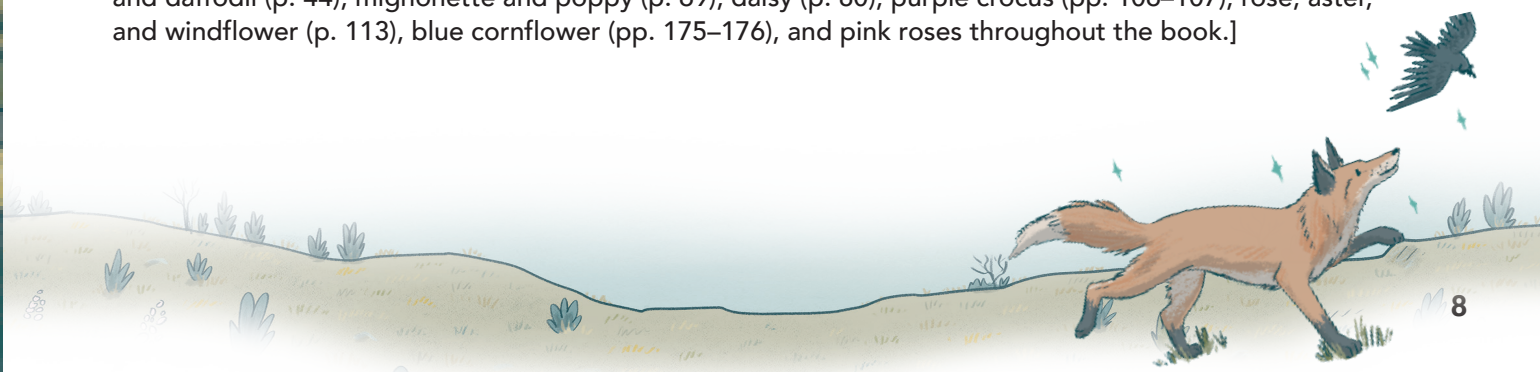
Mood

- Comics artists use a number of elements to convey mood. Think about how the artist's choice for each of these affects the mood as you read.
 - Characters' facial expressions
 - Characters' body language
 - Variations in color
 - Setting or background
 - Detail (how much or how little)
 - Inclusion or omission of text
 - Framing (zooming in closer or viewing from farther away)
 - Panel size, placement, and juxtaposition

Activity: Choose two scenes from the book that have different moods. Compare and contrast these scenes, describing how the art conveys mood and how the mood affects your understanding of the story. A graphic organizer is included on page 10.

Back Matter

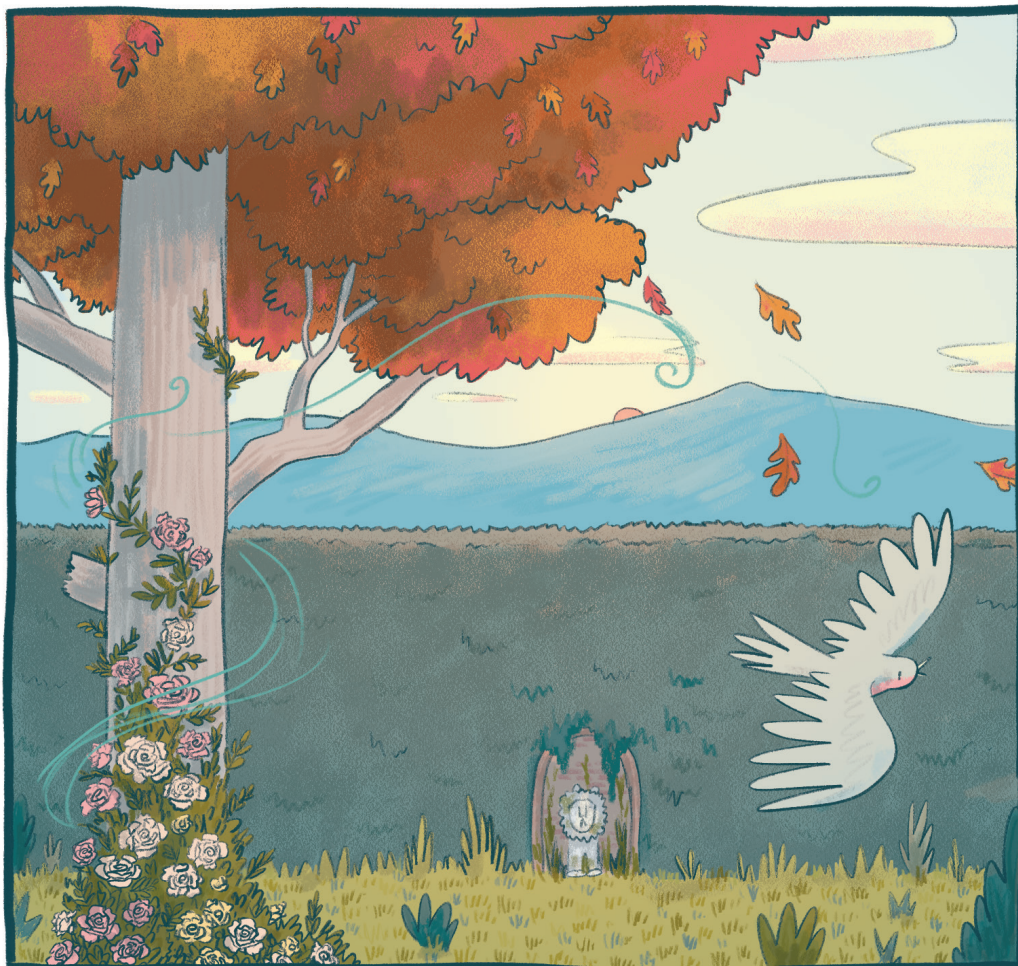
- Places and Spaces: Look for where the ideas and places mentioned in the back matter are depicted in the graphic novel.
- Floriography: Are there hidden meanings in the flowers drawn in the book? Look up the Victorian meanings of the flowers mentioned in the glossary. Where do these flowers appear in the book? How do they function as visual symbols in the story? [Teacher note: Look for pink (or red?) carnation (p.16) , snowdrop, crocus, and daffodil (p. 44), mignonette and poppy (p. 69), daisy (p. 80), purple crocus (pp. 106–107), rose, aster, and windflower (p. 113), blue cornflower (pp. 175–176), and pink roses throughout the book.]



Adaptation

- Select a paragraph from Francis Hodgson Burnett’s original text of *The Secret Garden*. How has it been adapted for this graphic novel? Highlight the text that actually appears on the graphic novel pages. Some excerpts have been provided on pages 11–12.
- Choose a scene from the graphic novel and write it out in prose as you understand it. Compare your text to the original text. Did the graphic novel creators capture the spirit or mood of the original? Did they translate it literally or did they make some changes? Why do you think they made these choices?
- What questions would you ask writer Mariah Marsden and artist Hanna Luechtefeld about their process in adapting this book to a graphic novel?
- *The Secret Garden* has been adapted into several movies and a Broadway musical. How is a graphic novel like a play or a movie? **Dramatize** a scene from the book.

Dramatize: Adapt a story into a play; write a script and act out the story.



Moods: Compare and Contrast

Choose two panels from the graphic novel that have different moods.
Use the graphic organizer to analyze the mood and compare and contrast the panels.

Scene A Page _____ Panel _____

Describe the panel:

Describe the mood:

What do you think contributes to the mood?

How does the mood affect your understanding of the story?

Scene B Page _____ Panel _____

Describe the panel:

Describe the mood:

What do you think contributes to the mood?

How does the mood affect your understanding of the story?

How are the panels alike?

How are the panels different?

Graphic Novel to Original Text

Compare the following excerpts from the original book by Frances Hodgson Burnett to the corresponding pages of the graphic novel.

Graphic novel, pages 4–5

Original Text:

“Eh! We’re on the moor now sure enough,” said Mrs. Medlock.

The carriage lamps shed a yellow light on a rough-looking road which seemed to be cut through bushes and low-growing things which ended in the great expanse of dark apparently spread out before and around them. A wind was rising and making a singular, wild, low, rushing sound.

“It’s—it’s not the sea, is it?” said Mary, looking round at her companion.

“No, not it,” answered Mrs. Medlock. “Nor it isn’t fields nor mountains, it’s just miles and miles and miles of wild land that nothing grows on but heather and gorse and broom, and nothing lives on but wild ponies and sheep.”

“I feel as if it might be the sea, if there were water on it,” said Mary. “It sounds like the sea just now.”

“That’s the wind blowing through the bushes,” Mrs. Medlock said. “It’s a wild, dreary enough place to my mind, though there’s plenty that likes it—particularly when the heather’s in bloom.”

Graphic novel, pages 56–57

Original Text:

One of the nice little gusts of wind rushed down the walk, and it was a stronger one than the rest. It was strong enough to wave the branches of the trees, and it was more than strong enough to sway the trailing sprays of untrimmed ivy hanging from the wall. Mary had stepped close to the robin, and suddenly the gust of wind swung aside some loose ivy trails, and more suddenly still she jumped toward it and caught it in her hand. This she did because she had seen something under it—a round knob which had been covered by the leaves hanging over it. It was the knob of a door.

She put her hands under the leaves and began to pull and push them aside. Thick as the ivy hung, it nearly all was a loose and swinging curtain, though some had crept over wood and iron. Mary’s heart began to thump and her hands to shake a little in her delight and excitement. The robin kept singing and twittering away and tilting his head on one side, as if he were as excited as she was. What was this under her hands which was square and made of iron and which her fingers found a hole in?

It was the lock of the door which had been closed ten years and she put her hand in her pocket, drew out the key and found it fitted the keyhole. She put the key in and turned it. It took two hands to do it, but it did turn.

And then she took a long breath and looked behind her up the long walk to see if anyone was coming. No one was coming. No one ever did come, it seemed, and she took another long breath, because she could not help it, and she held back the swinging curtain of ivy and pushed back the door which opened slowly—slowly.

Then she slipped through it, and shut it behind her, and stood with her back against it, looking about her and breathing quite fast with excitement, and wonder, and delight.

She was standing inside the secret garden.

Graphic Novel to Original Text

Compare the following excerpts from the original book by Frances Hodgson Burnett to the corresponding pages of the graphic novel.

Graphic novel pages 172–174

Original Text:

“Take me into the garden, my boy,” he said at last. “And tell me all about it.”

And so they led him in.

The place was a wilderness of autumn gold and purple and violet blue and flaming scarlet and on every side were sheaves of late lilies standing together—lilies which were white or white and ruby. He remembered well when the first of them had been planted that just at this season of the year their late glories should reveal themselves. Late roses climbed and hung and clustered and the sunshine deepening the hue of the yellowing trees made one feel that one, stood in an embowered temple of gold. The newcomer stood silent just as the children had done when they came into its grayness. He looked round and round.

“I thought it would be dead,” he said.

“Mary thought so at first,” said Colin. “But it came alive.”

