SYNOPSIS

After the tragedy of losing both of her parents to a cholera epidemic in India, Mary Lennox is sent to live with her uncle, a man she's never met, in England, a place she's never been. Mr. Craven is not looking forward to having his new charge around any more than the young lady is looking forward to being there. Mr. Craven has the servants make ready for the girl's arrival—she is to be neither seen nor heard by the master.

Full of sass and spirit from a pampered upbringing, Mary is not fast to make friends, not that there are many to make out on the moors. In an attempt to bolster her health, Mary spends much of her time outside with the gardener, Ben, and his friend, a robin. During these early days, Mary learns of the special garden Mr. Craven and his late wife had—a garden full of lush and fragrant flowers that has been concealed, left to wither for years. Being of resolute temperament, Mary vows to find this hidden garden for herself. Armed with only the tales gleaned from Ben and Martha, the housekeeper's servant, Mary's curiosity is not quenched. In fact it is only peaked by another mystery—the crying she can hear from another wing of the house—a crying no one will explain to her.

Meanwhile, Martha's brother Dickon brings Mary the supplies needed to plant her own garden, which she is determined to do behind the wall in the secret garden. Things may be looking up outside but they seem to be growing worse for the crying child. She can stand it no longer, and with her curiosity egging her on, Mary goes in search of whoever is weeping. And she finds Colin, Mr. Craven's son, bedridden. Mary discovers that Colin isn't really that ill at all, if only he will agree to go outside and reap the benefits of the fresh air, surely his condition will improve. When finally Colin agrees, Dickon and Mary have a surprise for everyone; the secret garden is open and in bloom again. The magic, beauty, and love that built the garden heal all their aching hearts.

BOOKLIST
Prepared by Leigh Ho Piper, King County Library System

FOR CHILDREN
A Little Princess
Frances Hodgson Burnett
Secret in the Garden: A Peek-Through Book
James Mayhew
Frances Hodgson Burnett:
Beyond the Secret Garden
Angelica Carpenter

Spotlight
Little Lord Fauntleroy
Frances Hodgson Burnett
This is the author's first popular children's book.
A little American boy, Cedric Fauntleroy, moves to England to live with his crusty grandfather.
He must win his grandfather's love to inherit his title and become an English Lord.

FOR ADULTS
Wuthering Heights
Emily Bronte
All Creatures Great and Small
James Herriot

Spotlight
The Art of Tasha Tudor: A Retrospective
Harry Davis
The best-loved illustrator of The Secret Garden, this is the definitive book on Tasha Tudor's art.
It combines well-known images, lesser known illustrations, and biographical text.
Born in 1897, Mary Lennox, Frances Hodgson Burnett's protagonist in *The Secret Garden*, spent the first ten years of her life in British India where her father, a government employee, was posted. Great Britain had assumed control of India in 1858, and the areas that accepted the British Raj (rule or administration) became known as British India. The British Raj brought famine relief and industry to India, along with strong racial and class divisions between Indians and the British.

Despite the rigid socio-economic lines within which people were living at the time, there was an equalizer—cholera. Cholera is a waterborne disease, and one of history's most virulent killers, caused by ingesting water, food, or any other material that has been contaminated by the feces of a cholera victim. During the 19th century, cholera became one of the world's truly global epidemics. India's first cholera outbreak was in Calcutta in 1817 and can be traced back to the centuries of contamination polluting the Ganges River. Infected chamber pots, soiled clothing, and soiled bedding frequently found their way into the city's water supply. It was common for open sewage canals and cesspools to flow into wells and rivers, affecting the drinking, bathing, and irrigation water of an entire town or city. The onset of extreme diarrhea, sharp muscle cramps, vomiting, fever, and then death can all occur within 12 to 48 hours of coming into contact with cholera.

When cholera first started to spread in India, the British viewed it as a disease of the indigenous population. However, widespread outbreaks among both English citizens and India's natives quickly proved this assumption wrong. While in India, Mary's parents were forever fulfilling social obligations and attending countless parties, and it was at one such party that her parents drank contaminated water. Asleep through the party, Mary was the only survivor in her household.

Mary was one among thousands whose family situation changed overnight. Both English and Indian families suffered great loss from the recurring cholera epidemics. In one day, a child could lose a parent, contract the disease, and pass away the next day. Parents were left childless, children were orphaned, and entire family lines died off. The cholera pandemic of 1898-1977 caused approximately 370,000 deaths in India alone. In 1907, cholera ravaged the entire Indian village in which Mary lived. And it was this very outbreak and subsequent tragedy that caused Mary to be sent from her privileged, sheltered life in India to her uncle's home in England, and to the beginning of our story.

**Activity:**
Have your students research other global diseases throughout history (plague, polio, smallpox, HIV) and what was done or is being done to control them. How did these epidemics affect the people and communities who suffered from them?

**EALRs:**
- **Reading**—1.1, 1.5, 2.2, 3.11-2
- **History**—1.1-2
- **Geography**—2.2
- **Health**—2.2-3, 3.1-2, 4.1
When we meet her at the opening of the play, Mary Lennox, an extremely demanding and selfish young girl from British India, speaks very proper British English. She expects to be carried rather than walk short distances, threatens whippings to those she perceives as lower in status, and proclaims that fresh air makes her sick. By the end of the play, Mary has adopted some of the Yorkshire dialect, has become a great fan of the outdoors, and her strong will is now directed toward helping Colin, not indulging herself.

How does this transformation occur? From movement to language to social habits, children learn many new behaviors by mimicking those around them—parents, older siblings, and friends. Noted research psychologist Albert Bandura has written extensively about this type of learning, which is called observational learning or social learning. In 1977, psychologist Albert Bandura wrote in “Social Learning Theory” that “learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.”

When Mary leaves India to live in England, she has lost all of the people close to her—people who helped her learn behavior and language as well as people who provided for her care and well being. Knowing her background it is easy to understand Mary’s resentment for everyone and everything around her in her new surroundings. In her first meeting with Martha, a young maid who works in her uncle’s house, Mary yells, “I hate you! And I hate the way you talk! ... And I hate your ugly moor. And I hate this house! ... why won’t anyone obey me?! ... And why did everyone go away and leave me alone?”

Martha responds patiently to Mary, letting her know that though she may feel hatred toward the moors now, once she gets to know them she will most likely change her mind. And slowly, Mary’s hatred for all things unfamiliar begins to melt. She starts to trust Martha, as well as Ben, the gardener, and Martha’s brother, Dickon, whose intense connection with the land the animals fascinates Mary. She starts to see the world through the eyes of these people who are very different from anyone she’s experienced before.

An important turning point in Mary’s development comes when she announces that she wants her gardening skills to be as good as Ben’s and Dickon’s. Once she declares this, she is even more likely to adopt their ways of speaking and acting. As Bandura explains, individuals are more likely to adopt a behavior if the model is similar to the observer, young like Martha and Dickon, or has “admired status,” skilled in the garden like Ben.

The behaviour exhibited by Colin when Mary first finds him in his room is the mirror image of Mary’s own behaviour when she first encountered Martha. That Mary employs the same logic with him that Martha used on her is further evidence of Mary’s transformation.

Mary’s imitation of Martha and Dickon is part of the attachment process she goes through as a complete stranger in a new environment—as well as being a method for learning new behavior, imitation is also often something people do to try to get others to like them. And by the time Mary meets Colin, she has made new friends: “Aren’t you lonely?” Mary asks Colin, “I was lonely in India. But now I have three friends, First the robin, then Martha, and now Dickon. You should get some friends.” And in fact, Colin does become friends with Mary, and with Martha and Dickon—learning new behaviors from all of them along the way.

Special thanks to Libby Hanna, Ph.D., for her contributions to this article.
Although all of England employs the English language, one still finds numerous variations in pronunciation and vocabulary from one area to the next. Regional variations in language are known as dialects. For instance, the way American English sounds different in Brooklyn, New York compared to Houston, Texas is due to their differing dialectics. When there is a distinction in pronunciation it is called an accent; like the way a Brooklyn native sounds different from an upstate New Yorker. The way a person speaks can reveal where they were born and raised, sometimes even identifying their neighborhood.

The dialect we commonly refer to as “British English” or “proper English” is more accurately called Received Pronunciation (RP). RP is what is employed in the Standard English taught in England’s schools and the written English we use. Therefore, the speech heard from an English person cannot only help identify from which region he or she hails, but also whether they’ve had a certain level of schooling.

Characters in *The Secret Garden* provide examples of contrasting British accents. The young boy, Dickon, born and raised in Yorkshire, speaks with an accent that is characterized as, “a flat, unflected manner of speech, with less tonal variation than Standard English,” on www.freedictionary.com. A Yorkshire dialect can sound similar to a Scottish dialect, with words like “nothing” pronounced “nawt.” Evidence of Dickon’s accent is noticeable in the script, both in how it was written and how the actors will pronounce the words given to them. Dickon, who comes from a poor family, says to Mary, “I know secrets about fox cubs an’ birds nests an’ everythin’ wild. If I couldn’t keep ‘em, there’d be nawt safe on th’ moor.”

The story’s protagonist, Mary Lennox, comes from a wealthy and educated family and, therefore, pronounces words quite differently than Dickon. Her’s is what we would commonly consider proper English, or RP. She tells Dickon, “If we worked hard and planted all these bulbs and seeds, we could make it beautiful again, couldn’t we?” Mary’s speech not only tells us that she is not from Yorkshire, it also indicates that she is of a higher social class because she speaks in RP. Dickon and Mary can be identified as being from different social classes as soon as we hear them speak.

Television and the Internet expose a greater number of people, with widely disparate backgrounds, to a greater variety of words and pronunciations. It is possible for anyone who can connect to the Internet to access information in different languages, and even learn those languages via the web, without traveling to a country where the people speak it or even meeting anyone who does. As a result, accents do not indicate social status as accurately as they once did. However, according to linguist Karen Corrigan, within Great Britain accents continue to be a strong indicator of social status. Results from a 1972 survey conducted in England showed that the most important factor people used to determine a person’s class was the way they speak.

Below are some websites that offer a look at, or listen to, different accents from around the world, with a focus on different English accents. The Language Miniatures site (third on the list below) provides a wonderful, easy-to-understand resource on language and linguistics.

http://classweb.gmu.edu/accents/
http://www.ukans.edu/~idea/index2.html
http://home.blueemarble.net/~langmin/

**EALRs:**
Writing—1.1-3
Communication—1.1-2, 2.2

**ACTIVITY:**
Think about how your family sounds when they speak. Do you have a relative who is from somewhere other than the Northwest? How do they use language differently from you? Think of the last time you went on a trip. Did you hear anyone who sounded like they might be from a different place from you? Where do you think they were from?

Now, write their background story...where they’re from, where they went to school, what they like to do for fun, the way their neighborhood affected their childhood.