

GCSE English Literature Unit Plan: Childhood, Coming of Age, and Nature in "The Land Beneath the Light"

Unit Overview

Unit Title: Childhood, Coming of Age, and Nature in "The Land Beneath the Light"

Grade Level: Year 7-10 (GCSE Preparation)

Duration: 4-6 weeks

Text: "The Land Beneath the Light" (selected excerpts) along with related poetry and short stories by Palestinian authors

Curriculum Alignment

Learning Objectives (iGCSE)

1. Explore how childhood and nature are portrayed in "The Land Beneath the Light."

a. iGCSE Literature Standard:

b. Aims of Study (Literary Analysis): Demonstrate knowledge of how a writer uses literary techniques to present themes and characters.

c. Outcome: Students will analyze the depiction of childhood and nature in the text, considering how the writer uses imagery, language, and symbolism to portray these themes. They will evaluate how these themes contribute to the overall meaning of the text.

2. Investigate how these themes relate to characters' identities and their coming-of-age journeys.

a. iGCSE Literature Standard:

Key Skills: Understand how a character's development is influenced by the themes of the text, and analyze how the writer portrays the relationship between personal identity and external factors (e.g., nature, childhood).

Outcome: Students will explore how childhood and nature shape characters' identities and contribute to their development, focusing on how the coming-of-age process is reflected in their relationships with these themes.

3. Select and analyze appropriate textual evidence to support arguments.

a. iGCSE English Literature Standard:

Assessment Objectives: AO1 - Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the text, including appropriate and precise use of evidence to support arguments.

Outcome: Students will be able to select relevant textual evidence (e.g., quotes, symbols, key scenes) that supports their analysis of childhood, nature, and character development. They will explain how this evidence contributes to understanding the text's themes and characters.

4. Develop critical thinking and writing skills through discussion and creative tasks.

a. iGCSE English Language and Literature Standard:

Assessment Objectives: AO3 - Explore and evaluate different interpretations of the text and express ideas clearly. AO4 - Use language and structure effectively to communicate ideas and create a coherent argument.

Outcome: Students will engage in discussions, debates, and creative activities (e.g., written reflections, role-play, presentations) that help them explore the themes of childhood and nature. They will develop their writing skills by crafting structured essays or analytical responses, articulating their ideas clearly and persuasively.

Outcomes (iGCSE)

By the end of the unit, students should be able to:

1. **Analyze** how childhood and nature are depicted in "The Land Beneath the Light," identifying key literary techniques and their effect on the text's themes (AO1, AO2).
 - a. Example: Students will identify how the writer uses descriptive language, metaphors, or symbols to create the atmosphere of childhood or nature, and how this shapes the reader's understanding of these themes.
2. **Examine the connection** between the themes of childhood and nature and the characters' coming-of-age journeys. Students will demonstrate how these themes influence the development of characters' identities and their emotional growth (AO2, AO3).
 - a. Example: Students will analyze how the protagonist's experiences with nature or childhood reflect key aspects of their coming-of-age, such as independence, loss, or self-discovery.
3. **Select and incorporate** relevant and precise textual evidence to support their analysis of how childhood and nature shape characters and the themes of the text (AO1).

- a. Example: Students will choose direct quotes or significant moments from the text that highlight the themes of childhood or nature, explaining how these moments contribute to the characters' development.
4. **Develop and express critical ideas** through discussion and creative tasks, demonstrating an ability to reflect on the text's themes and convey ideas in written and spoken form (AO3, AO4).
 - a. Example: In group discussions, students will share their perspectives on how childhood and nature influence the characters. In written work, they will produce structured essays that critically analyze the relationship between identity and the themes of the text.

Summary of iGCSE Objectives and Outcomes:

By the end of the lesson, students will:

1. **Explore** how the themes of childhood and nature are portrayed and how they develop throughout "The Land Beneath the Light" (AO1, AO2).
2. **Investigate** how these themes shape characters' identities, particularly in their coming-of-age journeys (AO2, AO3).
3. **Select** and **analyze** textual evidence to substantiate their analysis of the themes (AO1).
4. **Engage** in discussion and creative tasks that help deepen their understanding of the text's themes and characters (AO3, AO4).

Materials Needed

- Copies of "The Land Beneath the Light" (selected excerpts)

Bulk school copies can be ordered via info@beaconbooks.net reference 'Lesson Plan'

- Whiteboard and markers
- Notebooks or digital devices for note-taking
- Projector for presentations
- Access to selected poetry and short stories related to the themes (Texts included in this Unit Plan).

Lesson Outlines

- ***Lesson 1: Introduction to the Selected Theme***

- **Objective:** Understand the significance of the chosen theme (childhood or nature) in literature.
- **Activities:**
 - **Warm-Up Activity:** Discuss personal experiences related to **childhood** or **nature**. Students can share stories or journal entries.
 - **Guided Reading:** Read a key passage from "The Land Beneath the Light" that focuses on the chosen theme.

Suggested passages to read:

Chapter 1- Pages 11-15

Chapter 4 – Pages 34-37

Chapter 21 – Pages 213 - 215

- **Discussion Questions:**
 - How does nature or childhood shape the characters' identity?
 - In what ways does the theme influence her journey?
- **Assessment:** Reflective journal entry on a personal experience related to the selected theme.

Lesson 2: Character Development and the Theme

- **Objective:** Analyze how characters develop through their relationship with the selected theme.
- **Activities:**
 - **Read and Discuss:** Continue with "The Land Beneath the Light," focusing on characters' interactions with the theme.

Suggested passages from "The Land Beneath the Light"

Chapter 7 – Page 50-53

Chapter 8 – 63-64

Chapter 21 – 213-215

Chapter 21 – 220 -225

- **Group Activity:** Small groups explore specific experiences tied to the theme.
 - Identify quotes & passages and prepare brief presentations on how nature or childhood is shown in these passages.

Suggested quote examples and connections to consider.

Nature:

‘She looked in the coin jar and there was nothing but a few sheikal and she would need that for food, so she couldn't use it to buy a notebook and pencil. She remembered the apricot trees near Taha’s house. She knew they would be ripe.’ p.51

1. Nature as a Source of Comfort and Escape

The reference to the apricot trees near Taha’s house serves as a reminder of a more peaceful, natural world outside of the immediate struggle of Khadija’s daily life. The apricot trees, a symbol of growth and seasonality, remind her of something beautiful and abundant in the world, even when she is surrounded by the harsh reality of financial scarcity. The fact that the trees will be ripe soon offers her a sense of hope and anticipation in an otherwise bleak moment.

- **Connection to Childhood:** For a child like Khadija, who may not have access to material resources, nature provides a kind of emotional refuge. This can be seen as a common theme in childhood: when other avenues of joy (like material possessions or education) are out of reach, children often turn to nature for solace and inspiration. The apricot trees are not just a memory—they represent a future possibility, something to look forward to.

2. Nature as a Symbol of Survival and Resilience

- In this context, the apricot trees also symbolize resilience and survival. Even though the family lacks money, nature provides something free and nourishing. The ripening apricots are a symbol of nature’s abundance that comes naturally, regardless of human hardship. This juxtaposes the lack of money and material resources with the natural world, which remains a constant source of nourishment and hope. Khadija’s ability to remember the trees and their bounty suggests a deep connection to the natural world—something she can rely on, even if she cannot rely on the material world around her.

3. Nature as a Reminder of Simplicity and Connection

- The apricot trees also represent a simpler way of life, one that may not be dependent on money but on the cycles of nature. The fact that Khadija knows the apricots will be ripe soon, despite her family’s lack of money, shows how in her world, nature offers practical benefits—like food—that are available to her regardless of financial situation. This moment ties into the theme of belonging to nature: Khadija is aware of nature’s timing and its ability to supply the necessities she cannot afford to buy.

- **Emotional Relief:** When Khadija looks at the coin jar and feels the weight of scarcity, the thought of the ripening apricots provides her with a small emotional relief. It serves as a reminder that while material things may be limited, nature's bounty is a comforting constant in her life, and that life goes on despite financial struggles.

4. Contrast Between Nature and Economic Struggle

- The coin jar, with “nothing but a few shekels,” represents the immediate financial limitations Khadija faces, while the apricot trees represent a form of wealth that is not tied to money. The contrast highlights how nature offers a form of wealth that transcends materialism, and it can be a source of sustenance and hope when material resources are scarce.
- **Connection to Childhood and Nature:** For Khadija, this moment demonstrates how nature serves as a lifeline in times of scarcity. It is not only a source of nourishment but also a symbol of continuity—despite the lack of money, the trees will still bear fruit. This reflects how children, especially those in difficult situations, find meaning and solace in nature. It offers them a sense of control, something they can count on, and a reminder that there is more to life than the immediate material concerns.

Childhood:

‘Khadija was due to start to school. She was sure she should have started already but she knew it cost money and she knew her mother didn't have it so she never mentioned its absence in her life.’ p.50

1. Awareness of Economic Realities

Khadija's awareness of her family's financial situation is apparent when she reflects that “she knew it cost money” for her to attend school, and that her mother didn't have it. This shows that, even at a young age, she is conscious of the economic constraints in her household. In many cases, children in situations like Khadija's may not fully understand the complexities of adult responsibilities, but here Khadija is actively aware of the financial burden her mother faces. This early awareness often forces children to mature quickly and can prevent them from expressing their needs or desires for fear of burdening their parents.

2. Suppression of Needs

The fact that Khadija never mentions the absence of school in her life to her mother shows how her childhood desires and needs have been suppressed or silenced due to the practicalities of her situation. This reflects how economic hardship can stifle a child's ability to express themselves and their needs. In an ideal scenario, a child would be able to freely ask for things, such as starting school, but Khadija has learned that her wants are not as important as the immediate financial concerns of her family. This suppression is a subtle sign of the emotional burden children can carry when they feel they need to protect their parents from additional worries.

3. Resilience and Acceptance

The line also suggests a sense of resilience on Khadija's part. She has internalized the fact that school is a privilege she cannot access due to the family's financial situation, and instead of expressing frustration, she quietly accepts the absence of it in her life. This acceptance can indicate how children from disadvantaged backgrounds may develop a sense of resilience, but it also shows how childhood dreams and aspirations can be shaped or limited by external factors beyond their control.

4. Impact on Childhood Identity

Khadija's realization that she "should have started" school but is not allowed to because of money likely shapes her sense of identity as well. Children's sense of self-worth and potential is often influenced by the opportunities they are given, or denied, and Khadija's lack of access to education may cause her to feel like her potential is limited or that her future is shaped by circumstances beyond her control. However, this understanding of limited opportunity also helps develop her character and how she views the world. It may contribute to a sense of responsibility and a mature perspective on life that others her age may not possess.

5. Theme of Social and Economic Inequality

This passage also subtly touches on the broader theme of social and economic inequality and how it affects children's ability to access education, a critical part of childhood development. The fact that Khadija does not even bring up the subject of school shows that in her world, inequality is so entrenched that it is almost a non-issue; it is simply a fact of life that some children are denied opportunities that others take for granted.

- **Assessment:** Write a reflective journal entry about a personal experience related to childhood or nature.

(If used within an Islamic Curriculum) Links to the Quran & Sunnah:

- How does faith influence the characters' journeys?
- What aspects of faith assist them in making decisions?
- How is Islam represented in the text?
- Create a narrative illustrating the theme of childhood or nature in connection with the Quran and Sunnah. Choose any medium: creative writing, poetry, or a play.
- **Lesson 3: Exploring Poetry Related to the Theme**
- **Objective:** Examine how poets convey themes of **childhood** or **nature**.
- **Activities:**
 - **Close Reading:** Analyze selected poems that focus on the chosen theme (suggested poetry can be found below).
 - **Figurative Language Analysis:** Discuss how imagery and language reflect the theme.

Here the poem "I am not your refugee." has been selected. Choose from the suggested discussion areas below:

**Figurative Language in "I Am Not Your Refugee" by Rana Barakat:
Nature and Childhood**

In Rana Barakat's poem "I Am Not Your Refugee," nature and childhood imagery serve as powerful tools to explore the emotional and physical struggles of being uprooted from one's homeland. The figurative language in the poem allows readers to connect with the speaker's experience of displacement, identity loss, and the resilience that defines their connection to both nature and childhood.

- **1. Childhood as Innocence and Loss**

The poem begins with the powerful declaration: "*I am not your refugee.*" This rejection of the label "refugee" immediately places the speaker in contrast with the typical portrayal of displaced people—those whose identity is often reduced to their status as refugees. Instead, Barakat uses childhood imagery to suggest that the speaker's true

identity is rooted in their past, and that this past was marked by innocence, connection to the land, and a sense of belonging.

Example from the poem:

"I am the child who once played / in fields of jasmine and olive trees."

Here, nature is used to evoke the speaker's lost childhood, filled with images of fields of jasmine and olive trees—plants that carry cultural and historical significance in Palestinian culture. The reference to these natural elements conjures a sense of belonging, suggesting that the speaker's childhood was once rooted in these landscapes, full of joy and freedom.

The jasmine and olive trees can also symbolize peace, growth, and continuity. However, as the speaker declares their identity as more than a "refugee," these natural images remind us of the loss that displacement brings—disrupting not only their physical surroundings but also the sense of security and innocence that comes with childhood.

- **2. Nature as a Metaphor for Identity and Displacement**

As the poem unfolds, nature becomes more than a setting or a nostalgic image of childhood. It becomes a metaphor for the speaker's identity and their relationship with the land—a relationship that can never be erased by conflict or displacement. In this way, Barakat uses nature as a symbol of resilience, suggesting that despite being displaced, the speaker's identity is still intertwined with the land.

Example from the poem:

"My roots run deep like the olive tree / The earth will remember my name."

The olive tree is a central symbol in many Palestinian poems and stories, often representing resilience, continuity, and connection to the homeland. Here, the poet uses the tree as a metaphor for rootedness, implying that the speaker's sense of self is still deeply connected to the land, no matter how much time passes or how far they are from it. The roots represent the unshakeable identity that remains even in exile, while the earth remembering their name is a powerful personification of nature, which remains forever tied to the speaker's identity, even if they are forced to live in a refugee camp or a foreign land.

This idea of the earth remembering could also resonate with the way children learn from their surroundings. Just as children grow up connected to the environment around them, so too does the speaker's connection to the land shape who they are and how

they perceive the world. In this way, nature plays an essential role in shaping a child's identity.

- **3. Childhood Innocence and the Struggle to Hold On to It**

As the poem explores the loss of home and childhood, nature also represents the struggle to hold on to a once carefree existence. The speaker reflects on the way their childhood innocence has been overshadowed by the trauma of forced displacement.

Example from the poem:

“You turned my childhood into dust, / But I am still the wildflower / That refuses to be tamed.”

Here, Barakat uses imagery of nature—the wildflower—to express the speaker’s resilience in the face of hardship. The wildflower is often an image of something that grows freely, outside of societal constraints. In the context of displacement, it reflects the speaker’s struggle to maintain their identity and sense of self despite the chaos and violence that have stripped away their home and childhood innocence.

The metaphor of turning childhood into dust powerfully conveys the destruction of innocence, as the carefree days of playing in the fields or with family are replaced with the harsh reality of war and loss. However, the speaker’s declaration that they are still the wildflower highlights their inner strength—the ability to persist and resist being completely tamed or erased.

- **4. The Use of Personification to Convey a Connection to Nature**

In addition to metaphors and imagery, Barakat uses personification to give nature human-like qualities, further emphasizing the connection between the speaker’s identity and the land.

Example from the poem:

“The mountains hold my memories / The rivers carry my tears.”

By personifying the mountains and rivers, Barakat shows how the natural world not only reflects the speaker’s inner state but also carries their memories and pain. The mountains are keepers of history, while the rivers serve as carriers of grief, underscoring the idea that the speaker’s connection to the earth remains strong, even in exile. Nature, in this sense, witnesses the speaker’s suffering and loss, but also holds the power to preserve their identity and memories.

- **Creative Project:** Write a poem or narrative inspired by the themes of **childhood** or **nature**, reflecting personal experiences.

- **Assessment:** Share poems or narratives and discuss interpretations.

Lesson 4: Drama and Performance

- **Objective:** Understand character development through dialogue and performance.
- **Activities:**
 - **Read Selected Scenes:** From a relevant play. You may use the two scenes from ‘The Secret Garden’ Adaptation provided.
 - **Performance:** Groups perform key scenes, focusing on characters' growth through their relationship with the theme.
 - **Discussion:** Analyze how dialogue reflects the journey related to the selected theme.

Suggested dialogue and analysis areas:

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At the start of the play, Mary Lennox is disillusioned and disconnected from her surroundings. The mansion she has moved into feels cold, unwelcoming, and devoid of life—both physically and emotionally. Her dialogue in this scene reveals her sense of alienation, setting up the emotional journey she will undergo.

Key Dialogue:

“How ugly this place is. I’m so tired of looking at all the dead things—no color, no life, just grey walls and cold stones.”

Analysis:

In this line, Mary’s words express discontent and boredom, which is common in childhood when a child feels disconnected from their environment. Her harsh description of the mansion highlights her emotional isolation. The imagery of “no color, no life” and “cold stones” reflects how she feels cut off from warmth, both literally and figuratively. This sets the stage for the journey she will take—her need to find life and belonging is rooted in her dialogue.

• **Scene 2: Mary’s Curiosity About the Secret Garden**

Mary’s curiosity begins to shift the direction of her journey. She’s no longer just passively observing; she starts to ask questions and demand answers, especially when she hears about the secret garden. This dialogue reflects a key moment in her journey—when a new desire for knowledge and self-empowerment emerges.

Key Dialogue:

“But where’s the key? If it’s a secret, surely there must be a key.”

Analysis:

Here, Mary’s determination to uncover the secret mirrors the emotional growth she will experience. By asking about the key, she is not only speaking about the garden but about unlocking parts of herself—her curiosity, her desire for change, and her yearning for something **alive**. This shift in her dialogue marks a significant development, as it shows her willingness to seek beyond what she sees and feel something **more**. The **key** is both a literal object and a metaphor for the access to a different, more fulfilling part of her life.

- **Scene 3: Mary’s Determination and the Role of Nature**

As Mary learns more about the garden and the possibility of finding it, she starts to express more determination. The introduction of Dickon (who represents nature’s ability to heal) furthers her development, as his dialogue introduces the idea that to unlock the garden, Mary must have a certain “heart”.

Key Dialogue:

“It’s not the key you need, Miss Mary. It’s the right kind of heart.”

Analysis:

In this exchange, Dickon’s words reflect a philosophical shift in Mary’s understanding of her journey. The key is not enough; she needs something deeper—emotional growth and the right heart. This moment is crucial because it signals a turning point in Mary’s journey, from seeking external solutions to discovering that true change comes from within. Nature, as symbolized by Dickon’s words and his role in the garden, is not just a place of beauty but also a teacher of emotional resilience.

Scene 4: Unlocking the Garden—Mary’s Transformation

When Mary finally **enters the secret garden**, her dialogue reflects a profound emotional shift. She’s no longer the lonely, bitter child from Act 1; she’s becoming someone more connected to herself, the people around her, and the world of nature.

Key Dialogue:

“It’s... beautiful. (She steps inside.)”

“I was so lonely. I never thought I could feel like this... like I belong.”

Analysis:

Mary's first words upon entering the garden show her awe and surprise. Her initial feelings of loneliness are replaced by a sense of belonging and peace. This marks the completion of her emotional journey, as she has unlocked not just a physical garden but a new chapter of personal growth. The garden symbolizes not only the healing of the land but also the healing of Mary's own spirit. Her transformation is now complete, and the language she uses—gentle, appreciative, and filled with wonder—reflects her new connection to the world.

- **Assessment:** Reflective journal entry on a character's development.

Lesson 5: Comparative Analysis of the Selected Theme

- **Objective:** Compare the theme of **childhood** or **nature** across different texts.
- **Activities:**
 - **Group Discussions:** Compare how nature or childhood shapes the character experiences in "The Land Beneath the Light" and selected works studied in the unit. (poetry or play scenes, ensure Chapter 21 – 213-215 & Chapter 21 – 220 –225 has been read)
 - **Thematic Connections:** Identify common themes related to **childhood** or **nature**.

Suggested thematic connections:

Thematic Connections: Childhood

- **Childhood as a critical period:** Childhood is portrayed as a transformative time when **identity** is shaped, and characters begin to understand their place in the world.
- **The Secret Garden:**
 - Mary's journey is a process of emotional growth and self-discovery.
 - She navigates the complexities of her own emotional landscape, learning to care for herself and others, symbolized by her care for the garden.
 - Childhood experiences shape Mary's emerging sense of identity and belonging.
- **"I Am Not Your Refugee"** by Rana Barakat:
 - The child in the poem faces the loss of innocence due to the trauma of war and displacement.

- Childhood, in this context, is shaped by hardship, and the loss of home impacts how the child views their place in the world.
- The poem reflects how childhood experiences of displacement and loss shape identity and resilience.
- **The Land Beneath the Light:**
 - Khadija's childhood memories of her homeland and her connection to the natural landscape are integral to her sense of self.
 - Her memories of Palestine and the loss of her homeland shape her identity and influence how she navigates her future amidst conflict.
 - Childhood memories, tied to family, place, and nature, remain central to her resilience and cultural identity.
- **Common Themes Across All Texts:**
 - **Childhood experiences** are a foundation for characters' identity formation.
 - Childhood involves both growth and loss, as characters face transformative challenges.
 - Whether through **nature**, family, or displacement, childhood plays a key role in shaping how characters view their world and their place in it.

Thematic Connections: Nature's Influence on Character and Identity

- **Nature as a powerful force:** Nature shapes the lives, identities, and emotional journeys of the characters in the readings.

The Secret Garden:

- Nature serves as a catalyst for growth—both emotional and psychological.
- Mary's transformation is deeply connected to her care for the garden.

The restoration of the garden symbolizes Mary's personal growth, healing, and emotional connection to her environment.

"I Am Not Your Refugee" by Rana Barakat:

- Nature's loss represents the displacement and disconnection felt by refugee children.
- The separation from familiar landscapes highlights how deeply nature is tied to one's identity and sense of belonging.
- **The Land Beneath the Light:**

- The natural landscape of Palestine is central to Khadija’s memories and longing for home.
- The landscape symbolizes both what is lost and what endures.
- Nature is a symbol of home and personal identity, acting as a marker of heritage and resilience.
- **Common themes across all texts:**
 - Nature shapes characters’ emotional journeys and their sense of self.
 - Restoration of nature, the memory of landscapes, and symbolism of nature's cycles all play significant roles.
 - Nature is not just a setting—it is a living force that influences how characters connect to their past, present, and future.

Example:

In "The Secret Garden", the garden symbolizes a place of healing. As the characters care for the garden, they also grow emotionally and mentally, showing how nature helps restore their lost childhood joy and innocence. The garden becomes a symbol of renewal, just like how childhood can be a time of personal transformation.

- **Assessment:** Write a comparative essay or create a presentation on experiences related to the selected theme.

Lesson 6: Synthesis and Reflection

- **Objective:** Synthesize understanding of the chosen theme across texts.
- **Activities:**
 - **Class Discussion:** Thematic connections among all readings regarding **childhood** or **nature**.

Summary for childhood theme:

- **The role of childhood in identity:** Reflect on how childhood experiences shape characters' sense of who they are.
- **Loss of innocence:** Explore how childhood often involves confronting the **complexities of the world** and losing innocence.
- **Personal connections:** Encourage students to think about their own childhood and how their experiences have influenced their sense of **self** and **belonging**.

Summary for nature theme:

- **Nature's impact on identity:** Discuss how nature helps characters understand their place in the world.
- **Symbolism of Nature:** Explore the role of nature as a symbol in each text, from healing and resilience to loss and memory.
- **Personal connections:** Encourage students to reflect on how nature impacts their own identity and sense of belonging.

- **Group Project:** Create a multimedia presentation on the themes of **childhood** or **nature**.
- **Assessment:** Final project presentation showcasing insights and connections.

Assessment Strategies

- **Formative Assessments:** Participation in discussions, group activities, and reflective journals.
- **Summative Assessments:** Written responses, comparative essays, and final projects.

Reflection and Adjustments

- After each lesson, evaluate what worked well and what could be improved for future lessons.

Optional Homework

- Re-read a selected chapter and identify additional themes related to childhood or nature for discussion in the next class.

Poetry & Play Excerpts:

Poetry:

"I Am Not Your Refugee" by Rana Barakat

I am not your refugee,

I am not the image you see on your television screens,
not the woman you pity,
not the man you label a "statistic" of your wars.

I am not your memory of tragedy,
not your symbol of suffering,
not the number that you count on your maps
and write in your papers.

I am the daughter of land,
whose soil you tried to erase,
whose soil you try to forget.

I carry it in my skin,
in my blood,
in my words.

I am not your refugee.

I am the land itself,
the stones that still speak,
the trees that still grow,
the wind that blows
from the hills of my home.

I am the heart of every town you destroyed,
the soul of every village you silenced.

I am the memory of every moment
you tried to bury in the dirt.

I am not your refugee,

but I will stand,

rooted in the soil of my ancestors,

demanding the place you have stolen from me.

I will not forget,

I will not be erased.

The Road Not Taken

[Play Audio](#)

BY [ROBERT FROST](#)

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,

And having perhaps the better claim,

Because it was grassy and wanted wear;

Though as for that the passing there

Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden black.

Oh, I kept the first for another day!

Yet knowing how way leads on to way,

I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

Play Excerpts:

The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett

Scene:

The stage is divided into two main areas. On one side, there is a large, dark mansion with heavy, oppressive curtains. On the other side is a small, neglected garden. The stage is dimly lit, except for a spotlight on the garden.

Mary Lennox is sitting alone by the window of the mansion, gazing outside. She looks restless and forlorn.

ACT 1, Scene 3

[Mary Lennox enters, carrying a small basket, looking at the ground as she walks slowly.]

MARY

(to herself)

How ugly this place is. I'm so tired of looking at all the dead things—no color, no life, just grey walls and cold stones. Nothing like the gardens in India... *(pauses, looks around)* ... But this house is filled with secrets. Martha keeps mentioning a secret garden, but no one will tell me anything about it. What's the point of keeping things secret? I want to see it for myself. *(she walks around, observing the garden from a distance)*

(Suddenly, Martha enters from stage left. She's carrying a bundle of cleaning supplies.)

MARTHA

(cheerfully, but also cautiously)

What are you doing here, miss? You shouldn't be outside alone.

MARY

(looking at Martha with curiosity)

Martha, what's the secret garden you keep talking about?

MARTHA

(hesitant, glancing around as if worried someone might overhear)

Oh, it's not much to look at, really. It's locked up tight. It's been that way since—well, since the master's wife died. It's been kept shut ever since.

MARY

(determined)

But where's the key? If it's a secret, surely there must be a key.

MARTHA

(laughs nervously)

I don't know, miss. It's been years since anyone's talked about it. I think the key's been lost... or hidden, perhaps.

MARY

(angrily)

You're hiding something from me, Martha! I want to see it—now.

*(Martha looks uncomfortable, but before she can respond, there's a rustling sound from stage right. Enter **Dickon**, holding a small bundle of flowers.)*

DICKON

(smiling warmly)

Hello, Miss Mary. Didn't see you there.

MARY

(eyeing Dickon curiously)

What are you carrying?

DICKON

(grinning, as he holds out the flowers)

These are my special flowers. You see, I know how to bring things to life. Flowers, plants... even people. They all need a little care.

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MARY

(to herself)

How ugly this place is. I'm so tired of looking at all the dead things—no color, no life, just grey walls and cold stones. Nothing like the gardens in India... *(pauses, looks around)* ... But this house is filled with secrets. Martha keeps mentioning a secret garden, but no one will tell me anything about it. What's the point of keeping things secret? I want to see it for myself. *(she walks around, observing the garden from a distance)*

(Suddenly, Martha enters from stage left. She's carrying a bundle of cleaning supplies.)

MARTHA

(cheerfully, but also cautiously)

What are you doing here, miss? You shouldn't be outside alone.

MARY

(looking at Martha with curiosity)

Martha, what's the secret garden you keep talking about?

MARTHA

(hesitant, glancing around as if worried someone might overhear)

Oh, it's not much to look at, really. It's locked up tight. It's been that way since—well, since the master's wife died. It's been kept shut ever since.

MARY

(determined)

But where's the key? If it's a secret, surely there must be a key.

MARTHA

(laughs nervously)

I don't know, miss. It's been years since anyone's talked about it. I think the key's been lost... or hidden, perhaps.

MARY

(angrily)

You're hiding something from me, Martha! I want to see it—now.

*(Martha looks uncomfortable, but before she can respond, there's a rustling sound from stage right. Enter **Dickon**, holding a small bundle of flowers.)*

DICKON

(smiling warmly)

Hello, Miss Mary. Didn't see you there.

MARY

(eyeing Dickon curiously)

What are you carrying?

DICKON

(grinning, as he holds out the flowers)

These are my special flowers. You see, I know how to bring things to life. Flowers, plants... even people. They all need a little care.

MARY

(muttering under her breath)

Care? I don't care about flowers. But the secret garden... *(her voice grows more insistent)* ...tell me, Dickon, do you know about the secret garden?

DICKON

(pauses, looking at her curiously, then nods slowly)

Aye, I do. It's locked up, as Martha says, and it's been a long time since anyone's tended to it. But there's life still there, if you know where to look. You'd need to have the key, and the right heart.

MARY

(determined, speaking with newfound purpose)

Then I'll find it. I'll find the key, and I'll unlock it.

(Dickon looks at her with a mix of amusement and disbelief.)

DICKON

(teasing)

It's not the key you need, Miss Mary. It's the right kind of heart. And maybe... just maybe, you might find it in the garden itself.

MARY

(muttering to herself, turning away)

The garden... the garden will show me everything.

*The stage lights dim as the focus shifts to the **locked door** of the secret garden. A soft, magical glow hints at the possibility of new life beyond the door. Mary walks toward the door, her curiosity ignited.*

Scene Transition:

*As the curtain closes for the scene change, the sound of rustling leaves and faint birdsong plays in the background, symbolizing the first stirrings of **growth** and **awakening** in both Mary and the garden.*

ACT 2, Scene 4:

*In the secret garden, Mary stands at the door with the **key** in hand. The atmosphere is filled with anticipation.*

MARY

(to herself, breathless)

This is it. I can feel it... it's real.

(She slowly turns the key in the lock, the sound of the lock turning echoes through the theater. The door creaks open. The light from behind the door is warm and inviting.)

MARY

(with awe)

It's... beautiful. *(She steps inside.)*

(As Mary walks through the garden, she touches the overgrown plants, feeling their life beneath her fingertips. The air feels different, full of promise.)

MARY

(whispering to herself, as she breathes in the fresh air)

I was so lonely. I never thought I could feel like this... like I belong. *(she smiles)*