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# My Own Secret Garden

Michelle Metz

Because I am a full-time student, single working mother of two youngsters, my spare time is scarce. Regretfully, I have no time to read for my own pleasure. The time I spend on extracurricular reading is limited to the obligatory bed-time story for my children's benefit. Until recently, I scheduled thirty minutes (and not a second more) to this task. Then we began a wonderful piece of children's literature, The Secret Garden. This book changed everything.

The Secret Garden is a tale of a neglected orphan, Mary Lennox, who is sent to live in her uncle's dreary mansion. Once there, her outlook on life is altered drastically. A little robin leads her to an abandoned garden that is in disrepair. She puts all her love and energies into restoring the garden and is greatly rewarded by its magic.

How did this children's story benefit me? Before I read Frances Hodgson Burnett's enchanting story to my children, I approached our reading time as an act of obligation. As I entered Burnett's world, my enthusiasm for this time of day grew. I found myself transported to my own childhood where I first read the story. I noticed that our standard thirty minutes passed much quicker than usual. After the second day on the book, I expanded our reading time from thirty minutes to an hour, which the children appreciated greatly. I believe they enjoyed my enthusiasm and cuddling more than the actual story itself. Their behavior improved. They listened intently and were less hostile about bed-time. I became increasingly patient and allowed my daughter to read certain passages. After each chapter we indulged in discussion about the plot and the pictures. The changes in our reading-time structure made a remarkable difference in our relationship.

I encountered several symbolic parallels between the main character's relationship with her garden and my relationship with my children. That parallel taught me a child's moral. That moral for a child was: Give something your love and attention and it will flourish. That moral and story demonstrated to me that I should turn my energies and affection to my own little garden, my children.