

# Application of developmental theories to fictional character



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Child development theories help explain how children continually change over the time in their childhood. Theories like Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development and Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, center on a variety of aspects of development including social, emotional and moral growth. These theories create a base for a framework of the growth milestones children will experience from birth and into early adulthood. Both theorists are some of the many that provide important information of the importance of how childhood social and personality emerges through the interaction of social influences, maturation, and a child's representation of not only the world but of themselves. Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development and Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development provide the influence of significant relationships, the development of social understanding, the growth of personality, and the development of social competence within Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden*.

Mary Lennox was placed in two different settings where she lived that have affected her development during her life. In the beginning of *The Secret Garden*, Mary was belittled as a character and even a child from her parents in India. Her mother was more focused on attending events and going to parties rather than being a parent to Mary and hardly interacted with her daughter. Mary's father is hardly mentioned but even he hardly had any interaction with his daughter as well. " Her father had held a position under the English Government and had always been busy and ill himself, and her mother had been a great beauty who cared only to go to parties and amuse herself with gay people" (Burnett; Ch. 1). This quote proves that Mary

basically did not have her parental figures and her only influence during her development from birth to about nine years of age was her Ayah, her caretaker. Until then the cholera broke out in her household and she lost her Ayah. “ She did not cry because her nurse died. She was not an affectionate child and had never cared much for anyone. The noise and hurrying about and wailing over the cholera had frightened her, and she had been angry because no one seemed to remember that she was alive” (Burnett; Ch. 1).

Mary has been neglected basically most of her ten years of life until she then goes to live with her uncle, Archibald Craven, in his manor. Mary is impacted by adults like Archibald Craven, Mrs. Medlock, Martha Sowerby, Susan Sowerby, Dr. Craven, and especially Dickon. They potentially helped Mary develop in the three child developmental stages in the Misselthwaite Manor.

In Erik Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development, there are eight stages. Mary is only able to go up to the fourth stage which is industry versus inferiority. In the first stage, trust versus mistrust (birth to eighteen months), Mary’s first year of life did not have that much trust. Due to the neglect she received from her parents she did not have that faith and love for them. The fact she only had her Ayah, the only thing she knew and felt is that she was cared for. Although she was fed, clothed, and basically given what she wanted, she did not have what she truly wanted. She longed for affection, direction, or know she existed to her parents. “ During the first stage of psychosocial development, children develop a sense of trust when caregivers provide reliability, care, and affection. A lack of this will lead to mistrust” (Cherry; Understanding Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development). Due to that neglect from her parents, she is delayed in building bonds with other

people since she does not have that proper skill set to do so. The second stage, autonomy versus shame, Mary does not seem to be delayed. “ Children need to develop a sense of personal control over physical skills and a sense of independence...Children who struggle and who are shamed for their accidents may be left without a sense of personal control. Success during this stage of psychosocial development leads to feelings of autonomy, failure results in feelings of shame and doubt” (Cherry; Understanding Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development). Mary is essentially independent and does everything on her own when it comes to toileting herself. In the third stage, initiative versus guilt, is the stage where Mary revolves around the most. Mary takes control and is assertive with the actions she takes and does not gain that feeling of guilt. In the beginning of her stay in the manor, she has no purpose until she began to develop that purpose once she found the garden. “ Children need to begin asserting control and power over the environment. Success in this stage leads to a sense of purpose” (Cherry; Understanding Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development). Children who try to exert too much power experience disapproval, resulting in a sense of guilt. Once she began working on the garden, bringing the garden life, building meaningful relationships with the adults around her, and helping her Colin, she was finally seen and brought life back to the manor. She gained the skill of being competent. In the fourth stage, industry versus inferiority, is the last stage Mary was able to reach. “ Children need to cope with new social and academic demands. Success leads to a sense of competence, while failure results in feelings of inferiority” (Cherry; Understanding Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development).

What caused her behavior to change with others was the influence of Dickon  
<https://assignbuster.com/application-of-developmental-theories-to-fictional-character/>

and Colin. Mary learned to become patient, not afraid to make mistakes, and was open to new ideas thanks to them.

With Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, Mary was presented with an amount of dilemmas and was seen throughout *The Secret Garden* her reasoning behind her judgements of each dilemma. Kohlberg has three levels with six stages which are presented with Mary in the story. The first stage is pre-conventional and Kohlberg says, " Children see rules as fixed and absolute. Obeying the rules is important because it is a means to avoid punishment. At the individualism and exchange stage of moral development, children account for individual points of view and judge actions based on how they serve individual needs" (Cherry; Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development). In the first stage, punishment and obedience, Mary was never really punished for her actions in the story. When her uncle basically forbade her to go into the garden, she did otherwise because she did not care about the rules. The rules were not fixed because she was " Mary Quite Contrary" (Burnett; Ch. 2). In the second stage of level one, self-interest, Mary is only interested in doing what she wants and just serving her own needs before she meets Colin. Once she meets Colin she was willing and able to reciprocate by helping others and moving past self servitude. The second stage is conventional morality which is, " Often referred to as the " good boy-good girl" orientation, the interpersonal relationships stage of moral development is focused on living up to social expectations and roles. There is an emphasis on conformity, being " nice," and consideration of how choices influence relationships" (Cherry; Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development). In the third stage, conformity and interpersonal, Mary begins to do this stage

in the story once she opens up to the adults and Colin in the manor. She is able to see and feel the care and love from others and that it is okay to be cared for and conform to care and love others back. In the fourth stage, authority and social order, she is in the brink of reaching this stage but does not. Mary considers her dear one's close to her around her when making judgements in the last chapter of the book. "Circumstances, however, were very kind to her, though she was not at all aware of it. They began to push her about for her own good...there was no room left for disagreeable thoughts which affected her liver and her digestion and made her yellow and tired" (Burnett; Ch. 27). Post-conventional which is, "Kohlberg's final level of moral reasoning is based on universal ethical principles and abstract reasoning. At this stage, people follow these internalized principles of justice, even if they conflict with laws and rules" (Cherry; Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development). In the fifth stage, social contract, this stage did not stand out as much as the other stages for Mary. The adults in the manor did not really give her many rules and the few they did give her she ignored. Mary roamed around and did what she wanted while led back to the first level so this stage does not necessarily apply to her. As well as in the last stage, universal principles, Mary has not reached this stage as well. She has not reached this point of development in the book and has not developed, "universal ethical principles and abstract reasoning" (Cherry; Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development).

Erikson and Kohlberg both provide important information of the importance of how childhood social and personality emerges through the interaction of social influences, maturation, and a child's representation of not only the

world but of themselves. Through their theories, it is demonstrated with Mary Lennox from *The Secret Garden*. Mary by influence of significant relationships, the development of social understanding, the growth of personality, and the development of social competence was able to show how she matured as a character in the story.

## Works Cited

- Burnett, Frances Hodgson, and Tasha Tudor. *The Secret Garden*. Harper, An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2011.
- Cherry, Kendra. “Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development.” *Verywell Mind*, Verywell Mind, 13 Mar. 2019, [www.verywellmind.com/kohlbergs-theory-of-moral-developmet-2795071](http://www.verywellmind.com/kohlbergs-theory-of-moral-developmet-2795071).
- Cherry, Kendra. “Understanding Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development.” *Verywell Mind*, Verywell Mind, 4 June 2019, [www.verywellmind.com/erik-eriksons-stages-of-psychosocial-development-2795740](http://www.verywellmind.com/erik-eriksons-stages-of-psychosocial-development-2795740).