A mysterious, time-travelling fantasy story with appeal for both boys and girls. Intelligent and thought-provoking, the novel deals with concerns that can beset children and explores perplexing and bewildering philosophical ideas about the nature of ‘time’ (often referred to as ‘time-lapse’). The novel offers a springboard into a world of ideas.
### Overview for teachers

#### Context
- About the author
- What’s the story about?
- Themes to look out for

#### Literary techniques

#### Characters
- Tom
- Hatty/Mrs Bartholomew
- The Kitsons
- The Melbournes
- The Aunt
- Abel

#### Setting
- The house
- The garden
- Beyond the garden

#### Structure

#### Narrative techniques

#### Language

#### Special feature
- Personification

### Activities for children

#### Before reading

**Ideas for getting started** – Engaging with the world of the novel
- Changing landscapes
- Debate
- Pictures and objects
- About the Author

#### During reading

**Stopping places** – Developing understanding of narrative and literary techniques
1. End of Chapter III
2. End of Chapter VI
3. End of Chapter X
4. End of Chapter XII
5. End of Chapter XVIII
6. End of Chapter XXIII
7. The end of the novel

#### After reading

**Create and imagine** – Developing a personal response to the novel
- Magical garden
- Older and wiser
- Getting personal
- Time travellers
Every night he was able to steal downstairs as usual, into the garden; and there the feverishness of his chill always left him, as though the very greenness of trees and plants and grass cooled his blood.
Overview for teachers
About the author

Born in 1920, growing up in Cambridgeshire, Philippa Pearce was the first generation in her family to go to higher education, even though she didn’t start school until she was eight years old because of ill health. After leaving university, she worked as an editor as well as a writer. She wrote over 30 novels including ‘Tom’s Midnight Garden’, written in 1958 and winner of the Carnegie Medal in Literature the following year. The novel incorporates ideas of time put forward by J. W. Dunne in his influential work *An Experiment with Time* (1927).

She tragically lost her husband, a former Japanese prisoner of war, after only two years of marriage. They had a daughter together who grew up to become an editor herself. Pearce died of a stroke in 2006.

What’s the story about?

Set during the school summer holidays in the 1950s, Tom Long is sent to stay with his Aunt Gwen and Uncle Alan who live in a cramped flat in a converted old house without a garden, while his brother, Peter, recovers from measles. His aunt and uncle, although well meaning, have little idea how to relate to or entertain a young boy. Tom, during his period of quarantine, is bored, lonely and resentful, so much so that he cannot sleep at night.

One restless night he hears the grandfather clock strangely strike thirteen, so he decides to investigate. Opening the back door of the house, he enters a beautiful, sunlit garden instead of the cluttered and ugly back yard. The magical midnight garden becomes his playground, his release from the stifling realities of the daytime. There is something strange and unnerving about the garden though. People cannot see him; he cannot grab things; he walks through doors - it is like he is a ghost in another reality. It is only Hatty, another lonely child, who is capable of seeing him and together they form a firm friendship.

Tom begins to realise that the midnight garden, and Hatty, are from the Victorian age, a different time period to his own. It also becomes apparent that Tom’s measure of time is different to the time period in the garden. Tom might be gone one day, but when he returns the next night, months and years have fled by in the garden and Hatty is changed as she grows up and becomes a young woman.

Tom becomes increasingly attached to the garden and to Hatty and feels that he would like to spend eternity in the garden with her, instead of returning home to his family. However, he becomes ‘thinner’ to her, less important in her life as she grows up and meets others, including her future husband. It is at this point where the garden is no longer accessible to Tom and he screams at the loss.

The screaming wakes up all the tenants, including old Mrs. Bartholomew who owns the house. She asks to meet Tom and it transpires that she is Hatty and the garden was a projection of her dreams - a dreamtime, a place in time where she relived her life; a place in time that Tom entered and shared through his own dreamtime: both of them longing for a different time to the present.

The old woman and the young boy share a warm and loving hug of friendship that transcends the barriers of age. Tom leaves for home a better, more mature boy than when he arrived.

Themes to look out for

- Concepts of time
- Feelings of isolation
- Change
Characters

Tom

At the beginning of the story, Tom is an imperfect hero shown in an unflattering light as immature, spoilt, bitter and resentful. He is unhappy at being ‘exiled’ to his boring aunt and uncle’s place and shows his disdain towards them. As the story develops, Tom’s attitude changes, becoming less selfish and more compassionate and understanding. This is a direct result of his relationship with Hatty - she brings out the best in him. He shows compassion towards her, is willing to go along with her fantastical stories so as not to hurt her feelings and is genuinely horrified and worried when she falls from the tree bough. When Tom’s time-travelling journey ends, finally meeting Hatty, now Mrs. Bartholomew, in the present time, he is ‘without bitterness’ highlighting his new, emotional maturity. He is finally ready to go home.

Tom is a device to explore the ideas of time, how it does not stand still even though we may wish it to. Everything changes, for better or worse - and we have to learn to cope with it.

Hatty/Mrs Bartholomew

Hatty is presented as a child who needs protecting and is deserving of compassion: she is an orphan, distraught and lonely, living in a big house with unsympathetic, resentful relatives - except for one. She is often described as ‘young’, ‘little’, ‘lonely’ and ‘forlorn’ to emphasise her weakness and vulnerability. However, according to her aunt she is ‘a liar, a criminal and a monster’.

She is incredibly imaginative, telling tales - as children do - of how things came to be. In the beginning she and Tom have a lot in common and are one another’s salvation. She is always joyful to see Tom, even as a grown woman, but eventually he becomes less important to her.

Notice how, in the meantime, Pearce portrays Mrs. Bartholomew as someone to be feared, with a dislike of children and her ‘black eyes’ suggest she is not human. Pearce is lulling the reader into a false sense of security so that the discovery at the end of the novel, that she is Hatty, has more impact.

Hatty is a device to show how time moves on, people and things change; ‘Nothing stands still except in our memory,’ states Hatty/the old Mrs. Bartholomew.
**The Kitsons**

Aunt Gwen and Uncle Alan are benign figures; well-meaning, but boring. They provide a spur for Tom’s restlessness and ventures into the garden. Not only do they act as a foil to Tom’s enjoyable and magical time when in the garden, but also present opportunities for Tom to discuss ideas he is grappling with - and for the reader to get another point of view on these ideas. For example, Tom and Uncle Alan discuss the complex idea of ‘What is time?’ near the end of the novel. Uncle Alan provides Tom, and the reader, with some scientific theories - which Pearce explores in her novel.

**The Melbournes**

The Cousins: Hubert, James and Edgar are one-dimensional, stock characters. Hubert is older than the rest so is discounted and rarely appears; James is compassionate and sympathetic towards Hatty whereas Edgar is quite the opposite. They highlight Hatty’s isolation - they are all boys and enjoy playing together. Their fun is contrasted against Hatty’s wish for fun.

**The Aunt**

Again, a one-dimensional, unsympathetic figure designed to show Hatty’s pitiful life as a child. Pearce uses the aunt and Edgar as a device to create tension in the novel. The reader soon realises that whenever they appear, trouble for Hatty will ensue.

**Abel**

Abel’s inclusion in the novel is perplexing and worthy of discussion. In the beginning he fulfills the role of a sympathetic character to Hatty, creating an oasis of care in a setting where there is very little. A religious man, he pretends not to see Tom to begin with, but then calls him a devil and tells him to ‘Get you back to Hell’. Later, this changes and Abel smiles and winks at him. Apart from Hatty, he is the only other person able to see Tom and the reason for this is never explained.
Setting

Each of the settings exist in the 1890s and 1950s.

The house
Tom is confined to the house, quarantined as a result of his brother’s measles. Within the house there is further confinement imposed upon him by his aunt and uncle when he is sent to bed for ten hours. Being confined acts as a spur for Tom to seek adventures and provides a contrast to the magical liberation of the garden, enabling him to relate to Hatty’s confinement and sense of loneliness.

The house also symbolises the idea of the passage of time and the changes that occur over time. Only small shreds of evidence of its former glory exist: the grandfather clock and the bars on the window. Everything else has gone, built on or modified to such an extent that it is barely recognisable. The author acknowledges that time does not stand still and changes will occur, but they are not always for the best. The personification of the house acts to create a sense of unease and mystery. It reflects the life it has held, and still holds, within its walls.

The garden
A liberating enchantment for Tom, but a childhood prison for Hatty. She is not allowed to go outside or to climb on the wall to peek at the outside world. However, in her desire to escape the confines she tunnels through hedges that lead to a beautiful, idyllic and unspoilt meadow and river. Pearce describes the garden in wonderful detail, naming many plants. Using a huge amount of concrete nouns rather than abstract nouns lends the garden a reality that it doesn’t actually have. In the 1950s world the garden does not exist, except for a yew tree, and is an alley cluttered with rubbish bins.

Beyond the garden
As the characters get older more of the outside world is revealed. First of all they peek at it from a wall and from a tree, then they wander down to the meadow and river and finally they leave the garden and skate down the river, leading to the sea - a symbol of freedom - and visit Ely Cathedral. This is a world where dangers are hinted at, but never come to fruition. Once they leave the garden, it is no longer accessible to Tom. Symbolically, leaving the garden means leaving their childhood and any protection and predictability that may come with it. In the modern 1958 setting, it is much changed - sadly polluted - revisiting the theme of change over time.

The setting can
- Be a backdrop to the action
- Reflect characters’ experiences
- Symbolise ideas the author wishes to convey
- Have its own culture and values
- Cause conflict and distress
Structure

*Structure is the order or pattern in which a novel is put together and should*

- Maintain the interest of the reader
- Move the action from one episode to the next
- Arouse a reader’s interest in character or situation
- Create a moment of crisis
- Create expectation or surprise

Pearce creates tension in the novel by hinting at a danger that never materializes, including overheard conversations and noises to enhance the idea of mystery and unease; the appearance of Edgar and Hatty’s aunt signals a conflict ahead. To move the plot along, Pearce uses Tom’s letters to Peter to describe what has gone on in the story and also act as a link to his former home.

Narrative techniques

Written in the third person narrative, the author adopts an omniscient (all-knowing) position, presenting all the action and thoughts of each character to the reader, so that the reader sees things from a different perspective. Narrative sympathy for Tom changes in the novel as he matures and as Hatty grows up, seemingly leaving him behind.

Language

Rather than introduce the garden in terms of how Tom or Hatty feel about it, the author uses concrete nouns to describe it; there are hyacinths, wallflowers, pots of geraniums, heavy red poppies and lots more, ensuring that the garden appears real to both Tom and the reader.

As ‘Tom’s Midnight Garden’ is a supernatural novel, creating the right atmosphere is important to make the reader feel they are in a strange world. Pearce uses many words and phrases that create a sense of mystery, unease and danger. In Chapter XXIV, a character is introduced with the words ‘dark shape’, ‘it’, ‘unnaturally tall’ and ‘the figure’. She deliberately withholds information to keep the reader in suspense. She also uses many verbs to suggest that Tom or Hatty may be ghosts - Tom ‘glided’ and ‘slid’ about the house and Hatty ‘haunted the room for Tom,’ adding to the eerie quality of the novel. Once again, creating a sense of mystery is a priority for the writer and another way Pearce does this is by using ellipses to suggest the illusion of the unfinished or unexplained - ‘his bare foot tried to tell him something...’.

Pearce tantalises the reader further in her use of colons revealing or explaining some of the mystery, but only some. For example, in Chapter V, ‘Tom stopped abruptly. On the grey-green of the dewed grass were two clearly defined patches of darker green: footprints.’ So, while it is revealed that the patches were footprints, the reader is still unsure whose footprints they are.

Pearce uses rhetorical questions to show Tom’s bafflement at the situation he is in. It also anticipates the reader’s own bewilderment. After Tom hears the clock strike thirteen he announces, ‘Thirteen? Tom’s mind gave a jerk: had it really struck thirteen?’ (Chapter II).
The use of personification in Chapter II and III, when Pearce describes the house, makes it appear powerful, supernatural and slightly menacing. It feels as though it has a soul of its own, making the reader nervous about what might happen there. The grandfather clock is also personified suggesting that it has been alive and watching the events in the house over time.

- ‘But it just can't be true,’ said Tom aloud. The house, which appeared to be following the argument, sighed impatiently. ‘At least, I think it isn't true; and anyway it's muddling.’ Meanwhile you're missing your chance, whispered the house. ‘I can't honourably take it,’ said Tom, ‘because I don't believe the grandfather clock was telling the truth when it struck thirteen.’ Oh, said the house coldly, so it’s a liar, is it? (Chapter II)

- Hurry! Hurry! The house seemed to whisper round him. The hour is passing…passing… (Chapter III)

- And the only light was the moonbeam that glanced sideways through the stairway window and spent itself at once and uselessly on the wall by the window-sill. (Chapter III)
Activities for children
Changing landscapes

Find out how your area has changed since 1890 and 1958. Take photographs to show what has been built. What has been demolished? What has disappeared? How have the people changed? What jobs did they once do? What brought about change? Which era do you prefer?

Debate

What is time? How important is it? Is time-travel possible? Why do fashions in clothes change? How does fashion reflect a society? Which era in history would you like to time-travel to most and why? Do you believe in ghosts?
Pictures and objects

Look at a range of pictures of grandfather clocks. Think of adjectives to describe them. Which one is the most intimidating and why?

Use the Internet and other visual and historical resources to find out about Victorian gardens. Why did Victorians consider their gardens to be so important? What types of plants did they grow? How would the Victorian garden be different from a contemporary, average family garden?

Find pictures of houses from both the Victorian age and the 1950s. How were they different? Consider which you would prefer to live in and why.

About the author

Who was Philippa Pearce?
What facts can you find out about her?

Which other significant authors were writing novels during the 1950s? Which other classic children’s books were written during this period?
Stopping places
Developing understanding of narrative and literary techniques

Things to discuss

Character: Which characters are you introduced to and what do you learn about them? Do your sympathies for the characters change at all in the first three chapters? Do you like Tom? How do you think you are meant to feel about him?

Setting: What do you learn about the setting? In what way do you think the garden is going to be important? In what way do you think the change in the house is going to be important?

What questions do you want answering?

What seems strange to you? How do the irregularities and oddities make you feel?

What are your thoughts about the significance of the grandfather clock? Why might it be locked? Why strike thirteen?

How do you explain the change in the house?

Are the events in the house really happening or is it all in Tom’s head?

How does the house make you feel?

Tone: Pearce creates a sense of mystery in Chapter III. How does she begin to do this?

She uses ellipses to suggest the idea of things being unfinished or unexplained. She also uses questions to highlight the idea of perplexity. Tom reacts ‘dumbfounded’ to events; the items disappearing cannot be explained, there is a door he had never seen opened and the house is personified, which is highly unusual.

Story: What do you think the novel is going to be about?

What do you expect to happen next?
Things to discuss

Character: In your opinion, which of the following characters in these three chapters is going to be most important: Mrs Bartholomew, the man with the ginger beard or the gardener? Why?

Setting: Why do you think the garden is described in so much specific detail?

Tone: How does Pearce create a sense of unease in the last few chapters? Why do you think things have stopped being perfect? Is Tom being watched? What is the effect of changing the setting to night-time in the garden and including a vicious storm? How do these add to the vulnerability felt by Tom and the reader?

What is the effect of using verb phrases like ‘deathly chilling’ and ‘struggling wildly’?

You could...

...work in groups to write down any unanswered questions so far. Discuss what the answers might be and how Pearce has managed to prompt these questions through her literary techniques.

Things to discuss

Character: What are your first impressions of the three boys: Hubert, James and Edgar? What words are associated with Edgar and what words with James? What does that tell you about the characters? Which boy would you prefer to be friends with? Which boy interests you most? Why?

What do you expect to happen when Edgar appears in the novel?

Pearce establishes Edgar as someone to be disliked, who causes trouble, so that his appearance is a device to cause upset and tension within the novel.

What do you think of Hatty? How far do you trust Hatty? Do you believe her stories? How would you describe Tom and Hatty’s relationship so far? What questions would you like answering about Hatty?

Tone: What mysteries have been solved and which still exist? How does this make you feel? Are you glad to have some of the mysteries explained or frustrated that some still exist?

You could...

Go through the novel so far to find evidence of how Pearce creates mystery. For example, in Chapter VI, she uses indistinct descriptions like ‘someone’, ‘figure’ and ‘it’ when introducing a new character to the reader. Pick out some examples of your own and explain how you think mystery is created for the reader.
Things to discuss

Character: How is Harriet’s aunt presented? What does she say, do? How do others react to her? What’s your opinion of Hatty’s aunt?

Characters have previously referred to Hatty’s aunt in unflattering terms, but this is the first time the reader meets her.

Is she what you expected? How did you feel at the thought of meeting her?

The author creates a sense of dreaded anticipation within the reader by referring to Hatty’s aunt rather than introducing her straight away.

Structure and Tone: How do you feel after reading the last chapter?

How does it compare with the mood portrayed at the beginning of Chapter XI, The River to the Sea?

Why do you think Pearce put a playful chapter before a chapter of chaos and woe? Were you expecting such a change in mood? What made you feel the way you do?

Pearce uses contrast to emphasise the pity the reader feels for Hatty.

What type of story do you think you are now going to read? What do you think will happen to the mood of the story now?

You could...

Create a relationship diagram with Tom at the centre and the other characters surrounding him showing how close they are to him, or not. Discuss ideas with others in the class.
Things to discuss

Character: Who do you think is the ghost, Hatty, Tom or both? Why? Why can Abel also see Tom? Abel thinks Tom has come from hell, a mischievous spirit intent on killing Hatty. What do you think? Why are we given this other perspective of Tom? How does it affect your feelings about Tom?

Pearce’s prime motive is to create mystery and doubt as to Tom’s true nature and role in the novel. The reader is uncertain as to whether Tom is a ghost, a devilish time-travelling spirit or a boy in a magical dream.

Structure: Why do you think time has fast-forwarded in the novel? How does it make you feel?

Pearce continues to create mystery and a sense of bewilderment by shifting time forward. It adds to the supernatural feeling of the novel. It also acts as a device to show the change in relationship between Hatty and Tom.

What do you think will happen next? How will their relationship develop? Why is Hatty’s timescale different to Tom’s?

Why does Pearce let the reader, through Tom, witness the conversation between James and his mother about Hatty, but not the conversation between James and Hatty?

Describe your feelings for each of the characters now.

Symbolism: The grandfather clock is a recurring symbol in the novel. What do you associate with it whenever it appears?

You could...

Pick out words and phrases that show the theme of being trapped. Who, in your opinion, is more trapped by their surroundings: Tom or Hatty?
Things to discuss

Theme: In Chapter XX, Tom and Hatty discover some mysterious lettering engraved on to the pendulum of the grandfather clock stating ‘Time No Longer’. Using Abel’s bible they trace the quotation and find it is taken from the Book of Revelations. Skim read Chapter XX to find the biblical passage which ends in the words ‘time no longer’. Re-read the section and think about what the words ‘time no longer’ mean to you.

Compare this quotation to the passage in Chapter XXIII when Tom notices the words ‘Exchanged Time for Eternity’ on a memorial tablet at Ely Cathedral. What do the words ‘exchanged time for eternity’ mean to you? How do you think the two quotations relate to each other? What message about time do they give?

How is danger presented at the end of the ‘Skating’ chapter? What do you think will happen next?

You could...

Collect words and phrases from the later part of the novel to do with time and work out what ideas about time are being presented by the author.
**Things to discuss**

**The Story:** What did you think about the ending? Was it the right ending for you or would you have written it differently?

What clues did the author use to help you predict what was going to happen later in the novel?

Explain what your first reaction was after reading the novel. Why do you think that was?

Do you still have questions that you want answering? What makes you curious in this novel?

What is the most important part of the novel?

**Character:** How did Hatty and Tom’s relationship develop? Did it surprise you in any way?

Do Tom’s relationships with other characters change? How? Are you satisfied with the changes or lack of change? Which characters did you like or dislike?

Why do you think Pearce described Hatty in flattering terms and Mrs. Bartholomew in unflattering, fearful terms when they are the same person?

What might each character symbolise?

Who was the most interesting character? What do you think Tom has learnt in the novel? What have you learnt?

**The Setting:** How would you describe the two worlds in the novel? How do they compare and contrast?

Which world would you prefer to be in? How does the garden reflect Hatty and Tom’s experiences?

Why does it confine one and act as a sense of liberation for the other? What might it symbolise?

**You could...**

Start to think about your personal response to the novel by choosing one of the activities in the *Create and Imagine* section.
Create & imagine
Developing a personal response to the novel

Magical garden
Draw a range of flowers from close observation using watercolour paints to create ‘classic’ botanical paintings.

Use a wire frame to create an enlarged flower head. Cover with tissue paper using PVA glue to create a wonderful 3D sculpture.

Display as a ‘class garden’.

Use digital cameras to take photographs of gardens and other natural outdoor settings. Think about ways of adding interest by looking from unusual viewpoints. Upload images to a computer and manipulate using a photo-manipulation package to experiment with tones, size and perspective.

Older and wiser
Interview someone older than you to find out what it was like for them as a child. What music did they listen to? What did they wear? What were they like at school? What were their friends like? Did they enjoy being a child?

How does being a child compare to being an adult?

If they could impart one piece of advice to a child, what would it be?
Getting personal

Choose a favourite object and write examples of personification you might use to describe it. Use these examples and phrases to build a poem about your object using personification to highlight its mystery, power, strangeness or ‘character’. Learn your poem by heart and recite it to an audience.

Time travellers

Prepare questions to hot-seat one or more of the characters from the novel. Find out what they thought about each other and the strange events within the story.

Improvise or script a scene which explores the notion of time travel. Which historical period would you like to travel to? Imagine Tom or Hatty visiting your world. What differences would they notice? How would they react?

Use physical theatre to create a scene in which the grandfather clock, barometer, umbrella stand or other items of furniture reveal what they have seen in their time in the house. Share work with an audience.
Memorable quotes

The stillness had become an expectant one; the house seemed to hold its breath; the darkness pressed up to him, pressing him with a question: Come on, Tom, the clock has struck thirteen - what are you going to do about it?

Hurry! hurry! the house seemed to whisper round him. The hour is passing...passing...

There is a time, between night and day, when landscapes sleep. Only the earliest riser sees that hour; or the all-night traveller, letting up the blind of his railway-carriage window, will look out on a rushing landscape...

Fear made him hurry now; yet, even so, he paused on the threshold of the house and turned back to look at the footprints on the grass: they were still plainly visible although the warmth of the rising sun was beginning to blur their edges. (It did not strike him as odd that his own footsteps, which had crossed the lawn again and again, had left no similar trace).

Visibility...invisibility...If he were invisible to the people of the garden, he was not completely so at least to some of the other creatures. How truly they saw him he could not say; but birds cocked their heads at him, and flew away when he approached.
Hatty had said wistfully that Hubert and James and Edgar used to play at forest outlaws, with bows and arrows made in the garden.

'Why didn’t you?’ asked Tom.

'They said I was too young; and, then, when I was old enough, they said they were too old.’

Suddenly Tom said – he blurted it out before he could help himself:

'What’s it like – I mean, I wonder what it’s like to be dead and a ghost?’

'What is Time – I mean, how does Time work?’ Tom asked his uncle at breakfast.

To whomever may find this. These skates are the property of Harriet Melbourne but she leaves them in this place in fulfilment of a promise she once made to a little boy.

'For Time in the garden can go back,’ Tom reminded himself;

'and she may be a little girl again tonight, and we shall play games together.’

I said to myself: ‘He’s gone; but the garden is here. The garden will always be here. It will never change.’
Afterwards, Aunt Gwen tried to describe to her husband that second parting between them. He ran up to her, and they hugged each other as if they had known each other for years and years, instead of only having met for the first time this morning. There was something else, too, Alan, although I know you’ll say it sounds even more absurd... Of course, Mrs Bartholomew’s such a shrunken little old woman, she’s hardly bigger than Tom, anyway; but, you know, he put his arms right round her and he hugged her good-bye as if she were a little girl.
‘Nothing stands still, except in our memory.’

**Philippa Pearce, Tom’s Midnight Garden**

‘If I were asked to name a single masterpiece of English children’s literature..it would be this outstandingly beautiful absorbing novel.’

**John Rowe Townsend, Children’s author**

‘This novel was great to read. I loved thinking every night that I was there, in the garden playing with Hatty. I’ve read this novel twice now and could read it again and again!’

**Rachel, age 11**

‘This haunting and magical story is one of the best-loved children’s books ever written.’

**Oxford University Press**