

Bridge to Terabithia Study Guide

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For the novel by Katherine Paterson



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Synopsis

It is Jess Aarons's ambition to become the fastest runner in the fifth grade, and to achieve this feat, Jess practices all summer. Leslie Burke, the new girl in school, beats Jess in the races, but in spite of this, she and Jess become close friends. Together they create an imaginary kingdom called Terabithia where Leslie is queen and Jess learns to be king.

Together Leslie and Jess explore the limits of their imaginary kingdom, a kingdom threatened by the giants in their lives: teachers, bullies, and Jess's many fears. But with Leslie's help Jess learns to think, to use his imagination, and to stand up to his fears.

Then one day, while Jess is away, Leslie dies in an accident. How Jess learns to handle her death and the pain he feels can help all of us deal with loss.

Terabithia was the special place where Jess was king, but Jess decides that perhaps Terabithia was also a place he had gone to be knighted and grow strong. Now, without Leslie, he must go out into the world for both of them. Jess decides he must give the world beauty and caring to match what Leslie had loaned him in vision and strength. To do this, he begins by building a bridge—the bridge to Terabithia.

Chapters 12 & 13

Vocabulary:

Read each of the following phrases paying attention to the usage of the underlined word. Indicate whether the underlined word is being used as a noun—an object—or a verb—an action. Then define each of the words as they are used in the sentence.

1. have the body cremated
Usage: _____
Definition:
2. into the castle stronghold
Usage: _____
Definition:
3. his throat constricting
Usage: _____
Definition:
4. part of a great procession
Usage: _____
Definition:
5. into thy hands I commend her
Usage: _____
Definition:

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5. When Jess recalls Leslie going into the girls' room to see Janice Avery, what does he realize?

6. When Jess returns to school, what has happened that he notices as soon as he walks into class?

7. What causes Jess's view of "Monster Mouth" Myers to change?

8. What do the Burkes do now that Leslie is gone?

Thinking About the Story:

9. Jess feels that Leslie has left him just when he needed her most.

She had made him leave his old self behind and come into her world, and then before he was really at home in it, but too late to go back, she had left him stranded there—like an astronaut wandering about on the moon. Alone.

What would you say are these two worlds that Jess feels stranded between?

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10. In the context of the whole book, what is the significance of the conversation between Jess and his father in Chapter 12?

11. When Jess brings a wreath into the grove of pines he says “Father, into Thy hands I commend her spirit.” Where do these words come from? What do they mean in this context?

12. After Jess makes a funeral wreath for Leslie and has a procession for her something happens inside him. What is it? Why do you think it happened? What simile is used to describe this feeling?

13. Jess thinks that sometimes “you need to give people something that’s for them, not just something that makes you feel good giving it.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

14. Jess recalls the change that has occurred in him since Leslie came into his life. What does he see has changed?

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15. What does he believe he still has to do? How does he begin doing this with May Belle at the end of the book?

Dig Deeper:

16. In the last chapter, “Building the Bridge,” Jess invites May Belle to become the Queen of Terabithia. What is the “bridge” that Jess is building?

17. What other “bridges” have been built by the end of the story?

Optional Writing Activity:

Have you ever had a loved one die? What comforted and helped you through that time? What are some things that might have helped you? Write a one- to two-page essay discussing these questions. If you have never known anyone who has died, imagine what it would be like to lose a best friend and explain in your essay how you think you might deal with it.

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9. Jess's father got upset and said the teachers were trying to turn Jess "into some kind of a—". Jess understood that there was something strange or weird about being a boy who likes to draw. He decided that it was best to keep this ambition hidden.

10. The author uses the following phrases to describe Miss Edmunds: "long swishy black hair and blue, blue eyes," "soft floaty voice that made Jess squish inside," "she was gorgeous," "beautiful wild creature," "wild beauty," "diamond, sparkling out of that muddy, grassless, ditry-brick setting." Answers will vary. Because Miss Edmunds encouraged Jess's drawing, and because her arrival on Fridays means Jess gets to go to music class, Jess probably exaggerates his feelings about her.

11. Answers will vary. Jess thinks, probably falsely, that he and Miss Edmunds are the only ones in Lark Creek who appreciate things like drawing and music.

12. Answers will vary. She probably does not think he is "the best." She simply was encouraging him because she thought he could draw well.

Dig Deeper:

13. Answers will vary.

14. Answers will vary. From Jess's point of view their relationship seems distant. On weekends when he isn't working, Jess's father sleeps. It seems to Jess that he has been thought too big for hugging since the day he was born. All his dad says to him all evening is "Mighty late with the milking?"

15. The general lesson in these verses is that members of a family should love and respect each other. Answers will vary.

16. Answers will vary.

Chapters 3 & 4:

Vocabulary:

1. awoke; 2. conceited smile; 3. giving out; 4. loathsome; 5. obvious; 6. criticism; 7. reluctantly; 8. comfort; 9. musical; 10. dangerously; 11. drunken; 12. despots; 13. dedicated; 14. stately

Similes:

2. swallowed grasshoppers. Jess's feeling of anticipation compares to swallowing grasshoppers.

3. moths fighting to be freed of cocoons. Quivering boys compares to moths fighting to be set free from their cocoons.

4. a bull. Gary compares to a bull.

5. one of the strings she was strumming. The "zing" that Jess felt compares to a vibrating guitar string.

6. a fat white lazy cloud. Jess drifting across the creek bed compares to clouds drifting across the sky.

7. being under water. Being in the dark places in the woods compares to being under water.

Questions:

1. First impressions are the very first things you think about someone the first time you meet that person. Leslie wears faded, cut-off blue jeans, a blue undershirt, and sneakers with no socks. Everyone else is wearing their spring Sunday best. Leslie makes a poor first impression based entirely on how she looks.

2. When Jess contradicts Gary Fulcher, Fulcher challenges Jess saying, "next though you're going to want to let some *girl* run." Jess invites Leslie to run just to get Gary Fulcher angry.

3. Leslie says that her parents have moved to Lark Creek to reassess their value structure.