

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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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.
4. Jess writes about football, which he hates, but he is afraid that everyone will laugh at him if he writes about drawing.
5. Jess feels like he is being drawn under the water by the power of her words. He can hardly breathe. He feels fear.
6. It slips past his fingertips leaving a dry fossil on the page. It seems dead, lifeless. He cannot capture the "poetry of the trees."

Thinking About the Story:

6. Answers will vary. Jess is embarrassed to show his drawing to Gary. He thinks Gary will make fun of him.
7. Answers will vary. Some of these unwritten rules include the following: The older boys got the upper field for playing ball. The girls took part of the upper field for hopscotch, jump rope, and hanging around and talking. Boys in the third, fourth, and fifth grades ran races on the lower field. Younger boys played King on the Mountain on the slope between the fields. Generally, girls stayed on the upper field and did not cross over to where the boys played. Leslie broke these rules by coming right over to where Jess was. Then she participated in the races and won. She refused to go play hopscotch with the other girls.
8. Jess is stunned. The other boys are also stunned and silent.
9. Answers will vary. Jess is angry that he has lost, and he directs it at Gary Fulcher instead of Leslie.
10. Answers will vary. He felt she had got him into enough trouble.
11. Answers will vary. Jess seems to have decided that he isn't going to be afraid of what other people think anymore. He decides that he is going to be Leslie's friend and ignore people who make fun of him for that.
12. Answers will vary. Leslie recognizes that she and Jess don't fit in very well with the other students.
13. Answers will vary. Jess admires Leslie for her imagination and for the way she proudly doesn't fit in. He imagines himself becoming like Leslie, being more imaginative, being more adventurous and less fearful. He likes to spend time with her because she is helping him become what he wants to be.

Dig Deeper:

14. Jess fears being under water. He fears the deep dark part of the woods. Jess is embarrassed to have these fears. Answers will vary. Having some fears can protect us or help keep us safe from dangerous situations.
15. God is the source of comfort mentioned in these verses. Answers will vary.
16. Jess tries to hide his love of drawing. He tries to become the fastest runner. He pretends to like football. Leslie doesn't try to fit in. On her first day of school she "stood there in front, her eyes saying, 'OK, friends, here I am,'" waiting to be accepted by the other students. She wasn't dressed like the other students. She breaks the playground "rules" by joining the boys' races. Answers will vary.
17. In these verses Paul is saying that he has become like others—identified with them, sympathized with them, followed their rules—in order to preach the gospel to them. Answers will vary. The Bible does tell us to be careful choosing friends (see for example: Proverbs 13:20; 22:24; 28:7), however one good reason for wanting to fit in with a group of peers is that by doing so you are in a position to teach them about your faith.