

Teacher Guide

Grades 5–6

# Bridge to Terabithia

Katherine Paterson

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# BRIDGE TO TERABITHIA

by  
Katherine Paterson

## Teacher Guide

Written by  
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### Note

The 2003 Harper Trophy paperback edition of the novel, ©1977 by Katherine Paterson, was used to prepare this guide. Page references may differ in other editions. Novel ISBN: 978-0-06-440184-5

**Please note:** Parts of this novel deal with sensitive, mature issues. Please assess the appropriateness of this novel for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with them.

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ISBN 978-1-60878-195-9

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### Publisher Information

For a complete catalog, contact—

Novel Units, Inc.  
P.O. Box 97  
Bulverde, TX 78163-0097

Web site: [novelunits.com](http://novelunits.com)

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## Skills and Strategies

### Critical Thinking

Brainstorming, researching,  
creative thinking, predicting,  
compare/contrast

### Comprehension

Evaluating decisions, decision-  
making, cause/effect

### Writing

Poetry, essay, description, letter,  
brochure, summary

### Listening/Speaking

Oral presentation, discussion,  
interview

### Vocabulary

Definitions, parts of speech,  
context clues, synonyms/antonyms

### Literary Elements

Setting, conflict, point of view,  
author's message, symbolism,  
figurative language, theme,  
climax, foreshadowing, tone,  
characterization

### Across the Curriculum

Geography—Washington, D.C.;  
Literature—C. S. Lewis (The  
Chronicles of Narnia), Lloyd  
Alexander (The Chronicles of  
Prydain); Health—physical  
abuse, bullying, stages of grief;  
History—women's movement;  
Religion—Christianity; Art—  
drawing, music, collage; Social  
Studies—censorship



## Chapters Twelve–Thirteen

Jess and his parents pay their respects at Leslie's house. Jess becomes angry about Leslie's death, and he blames her parents for her death. He hits May Belle and throws his paints in the river. His father consoles him and talks to him like a man. P. T. comforts Jess while the Burkes go to Pennsylvania. Jess performs a ceremony in Leslie's honor in the pine grove of Terabithia and helps May Belle cross into Terabithia. At school, Mrs. Myers offers Jess sympathy, and Jess is comforted that he is not alone. He helps the Burkes move out of their house and then builds a bridge to Terabithia, introducing May Belle as the new queen.

### Vocabulary

smothering  
bough  
procession  
commemorate  
traitors  
prior  
emphasis

### Discussion Questions

1. Why doesn't Jess cry when he is at Leslie's house? What happens that causes a change in Jess's behavior, and how does he behave? Is his behavior acceptable? *(Answers will vary. Jess is still in denial. He is thinking about the circumstances surrounding Leslie's death rather than the fact that she is dead. Discovering that Leslie is being cremated sparks Jess's anger—the second stage of grief. He gets mad at Leslie's parents for bringing her to the country, mad at Leslie for leaving him when he needs her most, and mad at May Belle for speaking insensitively about Leslie once he gets home. He hits May Belle and throws away the paints and paper Leslie gave him at Christmas. While Jess should have hit his sister, anger is a natural part of the grieving process and is important for him to experience as he comes to terms with Leslie's death.)*
2. What is significant about Jess's conversation with his father on the creek bank? *(Answers will vary. Jess's father talks to Jess like a man, and it makes Jess hold a meaningful conversation with his father gives Jess strength to face what comes next. Jess feels that his father understands him, and he welcomes his father's comforting presence. Before, Jess was unsure of himself without Leslie; now, he feels strengthened by Leslie's and his father's confidence in him.)*
3. How does Jess honor Leslie? Why are his actions important, and what might you have thought about them? *(Jess makes a wreath in Leslie's honor. After weaving flowers into the pine-bough wreath, he lays the wreath on the pine floor and says a prayer for Leslie's spirit. Answers will vary. Note that funerals often help people find closure. Jess's behavior helps him acknowledge the end of his time with Leslie, and he begins to feel at peace. Leslie would likely have appreciated Jess's wreath and ceremony, as she always loved the ceremonial aspect of ruling Terabithia. It is a good place for Jess to honor Leslie in the place where they experienced both deep sorrow and great joy.)*
4. Why does the author have May Belle approach the creek? What role does she play in May Belle's predicament? *(Answers will vary. Note that May Belle's presence adds a new tone of the story. The sorrow is interrupted by a new need: Jess moves from mourning a lost life to saving a life. May Belle needs help crossing the creek. Jess becomes her hero, helping her off the branch and reassuring her of her safety. Faced with saving his sister, Jess doesn't overcome his fear of the water beneath him and tells May Belle that everyone gets scared sometimes.)*
5. When Jess returns to school after Leslie's death, how does he feel? How does Mrs. Myers respond to Jess? Discuss the importance of community in times of crisis. *(Answers will vary. In spite of himself, Jess hopes to catch a glimpse of Leslie at school. He can't muster the strength to rise for the Pledge of Allegiance and is uncomfortable with others' [even Mrs. Myers'] opinions of him. Mrs. Myers calls Jess outside to offer her sympathies. She, too, is grieving Leslie's death, and having lost her husband, she understands how grief affects a person. She comforts Jess and refrains from rushing his grieving. Jess feels less alone after talking to Mrs. Myers and regrets the bad things he*

said about her in the past. Mrs. Myers helps Jess by assuring him that remembering Leslie is okay. Jess benefits by having people around him who care about what he is going through, such as his father, who helps Jess process Leslie's death, May Belle, who keeps him company, and Mrs. Myers, who understands his grief.)

- As Jess understands it, what did Leslie do for him? What must he do in response? (Jess believes Leslie took him “from the cow pasture into Terabithia and turned him into a king” [p. 160]. She gave him courage and vision. She helped him see the beauty and fragility in life and that even enemies are not what they seem. Leslie opened his eyes to the way the world could be, and he believes that it is his responsibility to share his knowledge with the world. He invites May Belle into Terabithia as the new queen, demonstrating how Leslie's legacy has only just begun.)
- Describe how Jess and May Belle's relationship has changed, and predict what it will be like in the future. How did Leslie affect this relationship? (Jess allows May Belle into his and Leslie's secret world. He has come to believe that Terabithia is special only if shared with someone else. He knows that the courage and imagination that Leslie shared with him is Leslie's legacy, and he shares it with the only other person he believes can treat Terabithia with the dignity it deserves—May Belle. May Belle has endured some bullying from Jess, but she loves her brother. Jess has always loved May Belle, even when she annoyed him. Now he treats her as his peer and not just as his younger sister. Just as Leslie “elevated” Jess from the cow field, Jess lifts up May Belle. Predictions will vary.)

### Supplementary Activities

- Literary Devices: Complete your figurative language list. Examples: **Simile**—“The sea had left him stranded there—like an astronaut floating about on the moon” (p. 147); “paints... swirling the current like a booby” (p. 147); “Like a single bird across a storm-cloud sky, a tiny peace winged its way through the chaos inside his body” (p. 153); “shaking like Jello” (p. 157); **Metaphor**—Jess's feeling of being uncomfortable: being mounded (p. 144); **Personification**—“the whole job of foolish little fears running riot inside his gut” (p. 160); “...you just have to stand up to your fear and neck it squeeze you white” (p. 161).
- Creative Thinking: Think about what will happen to Terabithia under May Belle's reign. Complete the Continuing the Story chart on page 23 of this guide. Then, write a three- to four-paragraph summary of a possible sequel to *Bridge to Terabithia* focusing on May Belle's character.

## Character Analysis Blocks

**Directions:** Select a character from the novel to describe using the blocks below.

Who is the character?			
What does the character do?		Why does s/he do it?	
What, if anything, is significant about the character's name?	What is the nature of this character's actions? (reactive, active, important, consequential, secondary)	What is the significance of the novel's time and place to the character?	
What is unusual or important about the character?	How does the character change the story?	Does the character remind you of any other character from another book? Who?	Do you know anyone similar to this character?

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