

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Tuck Everlasting

by Natalie Babbitt

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Tuck Everlasting

Notes

This is a charming tale that raises some very serious questions for both children and adults alike. What would it be like to live a life that you know will never end? Without the certainty of death awaiting you, how would you live your life differently, or would you? If given the chance to live such a life, would you take it?

An obvious area of controversy that could arise in the teaching of this novel is religion, and what people believe happens in the afterlife. Some parents, students, or teachers might argue that this book takes a religious idea—everlasting life—completely out of the religious setting and trivializes it by putting it into a fantasy story. There is much mention in the book of the natural cycles present in the world: the seasons, the sun, the water cycle, the human life cycle, etc. However, there is no mention of any type of god, religion, or belief in an afterlife.

One can certainly teach this book as a fantasy and not go into any deeper meanings at all. But one could also expect that some students will want to talk about their own religious views of the afterlife, everlasting life, death, etc. If dealt with even-handedly and intelligently, there should be room for all ideas to surface during a discussion.

What seems at first to be a clever children's story is really a complex, unsettling story, which goes to the heart of our deepest held beliefs about what makes life worth living.

Brief Biography of Natalie Babbitt

Natalie Babbitt was born and raised in Ohio. Her childhood activities included drawing and reading. She particularly enjoyed fairy tales and myths. Through a mother who was an artist, Natalie found encouragement, materials, and a role model for the development of her artistic talent.

Babbitt was trained as an artist at Laurel School in Cleveland, as well as at Smith College. After marrying Samuel Babbitt and raising their three children, Natalie illustrated children's books written by her husband. Later on, she wrote and illustrated her own. She has also written poetry books for young readers and other novels besides *Tuck Everlasting*. She has said she gets equal satisfaction from illustrating and writing.

Natalie Babbitt lives in Providence, Rhode Island, and has three grandchildren.

All references come from the Sunburst Edition of *Tuck Everlasting*, copyright 1975.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the author's use of figurative language throughout the story.
2. define and cite examples from *Tuck Everlasting* of the following literary terms:
 - epilogue
 - figurative language
 - foreshadowing
 - imagery
 - metaphor
 - personification
 - prologue
 - simile
 - theme
 - inference
 - irony
3. understand Babbitt's use of imagery to enhance plot and mood of story.
4. identify possible themes in the story and provide support for them.
5. debate the pros and cons of everlasting life.
6. examine the confusing feelings about growing up and achieving an identity that is separate, yet connected to, one's family.
7. discuss the idea of a person's lifetime being part of the eternal and inevitable cycles found in all of nature.
8. discuss personal greed as a motive for acting without considering the consequences.
9. discuss the theme of everlasting life being a curse.
10. understand why death is as important and necessary for a meaningful life as birth is.
11. infer how the realization and acceptance of death as a natural occurrence may have affected Winnie's life after the story ends.
12. explain how immortality compares to the current trend in American culture of trying to stop or significantly slow down the aging process.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Describe how Babbitt likens the first week in August to being at the top of a Ferris wheel as the story opens. Do you think this is a good metaphor for this idea? Explain.
2. How does the hot, dry, dull day help enhance Winnie Foster's mood when we first meet her?
3. Why do you think Babbitt includes the toad's appearance several times in the story, and makes it a major character by the story's end? Explain its significance to Winnie.
4. Why do you think the Tucks' story leaves Winnie feeling so disturbed?
5. Angus and Miles seem to think eternal life is a burden and a curse while Jesse looks at it as an opportunity for adventure. Why do you suppose they have such different feelings about it? Could it have anything to do with the ages they are when they drink the water? Explain why or why not.
6. Winnie realizes that Mae has deliberately injured the man in the yellow suit, perhaps even with the intent of killing him so that he will not reveal their secret. Winnie then thinks of when she killed a wasp, and how bad it made her feel. Is the author saying that sometimes violent or hurtful action must be taken to prevent something worse from happening? Explain. Discuss your opinion of this idea, and explain why you think this way.
7. Is Winnie right or wrong to go behind her parents' backs to help Mae? Explain. What else could Winnie have done to help Mae, if anything?
8. The man in the yellow suit was planning to make a great deal of money by selling the spring water, and did not care what the end result of his greed might mean for people. Do you see anything like this happening in our world today? Do people, corporations or countries do things out of greed without thinking of the consequences of their actions, or if they do consider the consequences, do they ignore them due to greed? Give examples and explain fully.
9. Why do you think Winnie decided to pour the water on the toad? How might it be different for an animal to experience everlasting life than for a person?
10. By the end of the story, we learn that Winnie did not drink the water and join Jesse. Instead, she married, had children, and died, having lived a normal life span. Why do you think she made this choice? What would you have done, and why?
11. Explain how recognizing and accepting death as a natural, necessary part of life can make it less frightening. Do you think knowing that our lives are temporary makes a difference in how people behave and think and live their lives? Does this knowledge make life more precious or more pointless? Explain.

Tuck Everlasting

Prologue

VOCABULARY

balmy—pleasant; mild
quiver—to shake

1. What does the narrator compare the first week of August to?

2. Describe how the first week in August and being on a Ferris wheel are alike, according to the narrator.

3. What is the atmosphere as the story opens?

Chapter 5

VOCABULARY

amber—golden
battered—well-worn
console—to soothe, comfort
galling—maddening
idle—lazy
interlace—to weave, intertwine
irrelevant—unnecessary
plaintive—sad
precise—exact
prim—proper
rumple—to wrinkle or crease
spurt—gush
timid—shy
venture—an undertaking or adventure

1. How does the narrator personify the sun, and compare it to Winnie at the opening of this chapter?

2. What decision has Winnie come to in the night?

3. What does she decide to do instead of running away?

Chapter 13

1. Who has stolen the Tucks' horse?

2. To where does he ride the horse?

3. What does he tell Winnie's grandmother when she opens the door to him?

Chapter 23

VOCABULARY

ponderous—heavy
remorseless—without pity
plaintive—glum; mournful
lapse—a break
gentility—politeness; being refined
prostrate—exhausted; incapacitated
poised—ready

1. What do Winnie, mother, and grandmother do during the very hot day?

2. What does Winnie notice when she goes outside later in the day?

3. Why does Winnie feel guilty after she goes to bed?
