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Study Guide

for

**Bridge to
Terabithia**

by Katherine Paterson



New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

Meet Katherine Paterson



When people ask me what qualifies me to be a writer for children, I say I was once a child. But I was not only a child, I was, better still, a weird little kid, and . . . there are few things, apparently, more helpful to a writer than having once been a weird little kid.

—Katherine Paterson

Katherine Paterson was born in 1932 in China, where her parents were American missionaries. Her first language was Chinese. Because of wars, the family was forced to move from China twice. The second time, Katherine and her family returned to the United States, where they moved frequently, owing to her father's new assignments. When she first entered school, Katherine knew little about the United States and spoke English with a British accent. Before she graduated from high school, she had attended more than a dozen different schools.

Paterson sees her choice of characters—children who are different from their schoolmates—as a reflection of her own childhood experience of having been an outsider in different cultures and frequently the new kid in school. She especially remembers her experiences in a North Carolina elementary school, where “Pansy and her gang of seventh-grade Amazons . . . used to roam the playground,

‘seeking whom they might devour.’” Paterson “could spot them coming across the entire width of the school grounds and would be reduced to jelly on the spot.” At the same school, she worked as a library aide and became an avid reader. “I do not think it would be [too much] to say that [the school library] saved my sanity,” she adds.

After finishing college, Paterson taught school for a year in a small town similar to Lark Creek in *Bridge to Terabithia*. She then spent four years in Japan as a missionary. Returning to the United States in 1962, she married John Paterson, a Presbyterian minister. The couple has four children.

Before Paterson became a full-time writer of fiction, she wrote educational materials. In her spare time, she began writing historical fiction set in Japan. Her first great success was winning the National Book Award for *The Master Puppeteer*, a mystery about a boy's success in a traditional Japanese art.

Bridge to Terabithia, Paterson's first book set outside Japan, won the Newbery Medal in 1978. Three years later, she won another Newbery Medal for *Jacob Have I Loved*, a bittersweet story about twin sisters. She also won the National Book Award a second time for *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, the story of a wise-cracking foster child. Paterson continues to write fiction for young people and is recognized for her understanding of how children cope with difficult situations. She now lives in Vermont, where she enjoys sailing, swimming, and playing tennis. Not surprisingly, her favorite hobby is reading. She describes her attitude toward life and writing in this way:

I see myself as a tiny speck in a vast and marvelous universe, in which every particle is . . . connected, and in which nothing happens to any part that does not affect the whole. . . . Telling stories is what I do, so I try to do it as well as I can.

Introducing the Novel

[W]hen I set out to write I guess my conscious thing is not that I'm going to teach a message but that I'm going to tell a true story, and then I will trust the reader to learn from it whatever he or she wants to or is able to.

—Katherine Paterson

Have you ever dreamed about leaving your problems and cares behind and escaping to a world where everything is just the way you want it? If you are like most people, you have probably dreamed about an imaginary world. Maybe you have even created one, with the help of your family or friends. Katherine Paterson's award-winning novel *Bridge to Terabithia* is about an imaginary world.

The kingdom of Terabithia is the creation of two children who live in rural Virginia. Jess Aarons is a shy boy who feels that his family and friends do not understand him. Leslie Burke has just moved to the rural community with her parents and feels like an outsider. Together they make a hideaway in the woods across a creek from Leslie's home. There they imagine lives different from the ones they lead at school and with their families. But Terabithia is not as safe and secure as it seems. The children's everyday problems do not stop at the castle walls, and real life soon invades the imaginary kingdom.

Katherine Paterson's novel is rich in ideas. As you read the novel, think about how the power of imagination helps Jess and Leslie see beyond everyday life. Think also about why Jess and Leslie reach out to each other for understanding and how people develop the courage to face everyday challenges, both large and small.

THE TIME AND PLACE

Bridge to Terabithia takes place in rural Virginia, not far from Washington, D.C., and its suburbs. The fictional town of Lark Creek may be much like the small town where Katherine Paterson

taught elementary school in the 1950s. The time of the novel is the 1970s, sometimes called the decade of disillusion because of the setbacks and the problems the nation was facing.

During the 1970s, the United States signed a peace treaty with the North Vietnamese government, ending our country's involvement in the Vietnam War, a conflict that was opposed by many U.S. citizens. Dissatisfaction with their leaders' determination to fight this war was one of the factors that was thought to cause many young Americans to join the "counterculture." The counterculture rebelled against many of the values generally supported by the middle class. Young people chose clothing that was very different from that worn by business people and community leaders. They developed their own distinctive music, which was foreign to the ears of the older generation, and they protested, or openly disagreed with, the actions of persons who controlled government agencies and big corporations.

In this novel, the people of a rural community outside the nation's capital are suspicious of the city family that moves into a run-down farmhouse nearby, calling them hippies. The term *hippies* refers to the young people of the late 1960s and early 1970s who disregarded the fashions of the middle class. Typically, they wore their hair long and wore unconventional clothes.

The rural community to which the urban family moves is located within the large region known as Appalachia. Appalachia is the region in the eastern United States comprising the Appalachian Mountains from south central New York to central Alabama. It includes, therefore, parts of New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama.

The Appalachian range is the oldest mountain system in the United States, older than the large mountain ranges in the West.

These mountains are rich in waterways, minerals such as coal and gravel, ores, gas and oil, and forests. In spite of the natural resources, the most mountainous areas are not suitable for the development of industries and large cities, which have brought wealth to many regions of the United States. The inhabitants of Appalachia tend to live in small communities and farm small pieces of land. In some parts of Appalachia, heads of families hold down jobs in large towns outside the area while other family members live and work on the small farms. This was the case with the Aarons family in *Bridge to Terabithia*. Mr. Aarons leaves home early each morning to drive to a construction job in Washington,

D.C. The children and Mrs. Aarons milk the cow and grow and can vegetables to provide food for the family. In spite of all this effort, the family has little money for luxuries.

In contrast, the Burke family comes to rural Appalachia because they are dissatisfied with their comfortable life in a wealthy suburb of Washington, D.C. They are looking outside the large cities on the eastern seaboard for a sense of peace and an uncomplicated lifestyle. The two families have lived within commuting distance of each other, but are far apart in outlook and aspirations. What they have in common is their concern about their children's futures and their wish for what is best for their children.

Did You Know?

Terabithia, the imaginary kingdom that Jess and Leslie create, is based on another well-known imaginary kingdom. You may have read some of the Narnia books by English author C. S. Lewis, starting with *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and continuing for seven books to *The Last Battle*. In this popular saga, Lewis relates several children's adventures in a

magical world called Narnia, where they meet kings and queens, witches, lions, and unicorns and other fantastic creatures. If you have read any of the Narnia books, look for similarities between Narnia and the kingdom of Terabithia in this novel. What other magical kingdoms have you read about?

Before You Read

Bridge to Terabithia Chapters 1–4

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Some teachers possess special qualities that help them make an important difference in the lives of students. What qualities might make a teacher special to his or her students?

Web It

Make a web listing ways in which teachers can have a powerful and positive influence on their students. Use your own experiences, as well as your imagination, to come up with examples.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how one teacher makes a difference in the life of a boy.

BACKGROUND

Many stories contain a **conflict**, or struggle between two opposing forces. In a novel, the conflict is central to the **plot**, or series of events that make up the story, and involves the main character. The conflict can be internal or external. In an **internal conflict**, the struggle takes place within the main character. In an **external conflict**, the struggle is between the main character and an outside force, such as another character, society, nature, or fate. Sometimes, one kind of conflict reflects another. An external conflict can mirror an internal conflict.

Did You Know?

A regional *dialect* is a variety of language spoken in a particular region and distinguished by features of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation from other regional varieties of the language. Many of the characters in *Bridge to Terabithia* speak an Appalachian dialect. As you read, notice how some characters' spoken words differ from standard written English. For example, the characters often leave the subjects or the verbs out of sentences. At other times, they use incorrect grammar, as when Jess uses a double negative in the sentence "Don't pay me no mind." They also use words in different and colorful ways that are common to the region. Fiction writers use dialect to make their characters seem more real to readers. Notice, however, that some characters in the novel do *not* speak in an Appalachian dialect. As you read, think about possible reasons for the author's having these characters speak standard English.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

clabber [klab'ər] *n.* soured milk

falter [fɒl'tər] *v.* to stumble

grit [grɪt] *n.* courage; toughness

hypocritical [hɪp'ə kɪt'ə kəl] *adj.* pretending to be what one is not or to believe what one does not

muddled [mud'əld] *adj.* mixed up

pandemonium [pən'də mō'nē əm] *n.* total confusion

reassess [rē ə səs'] *v.* to reexamine

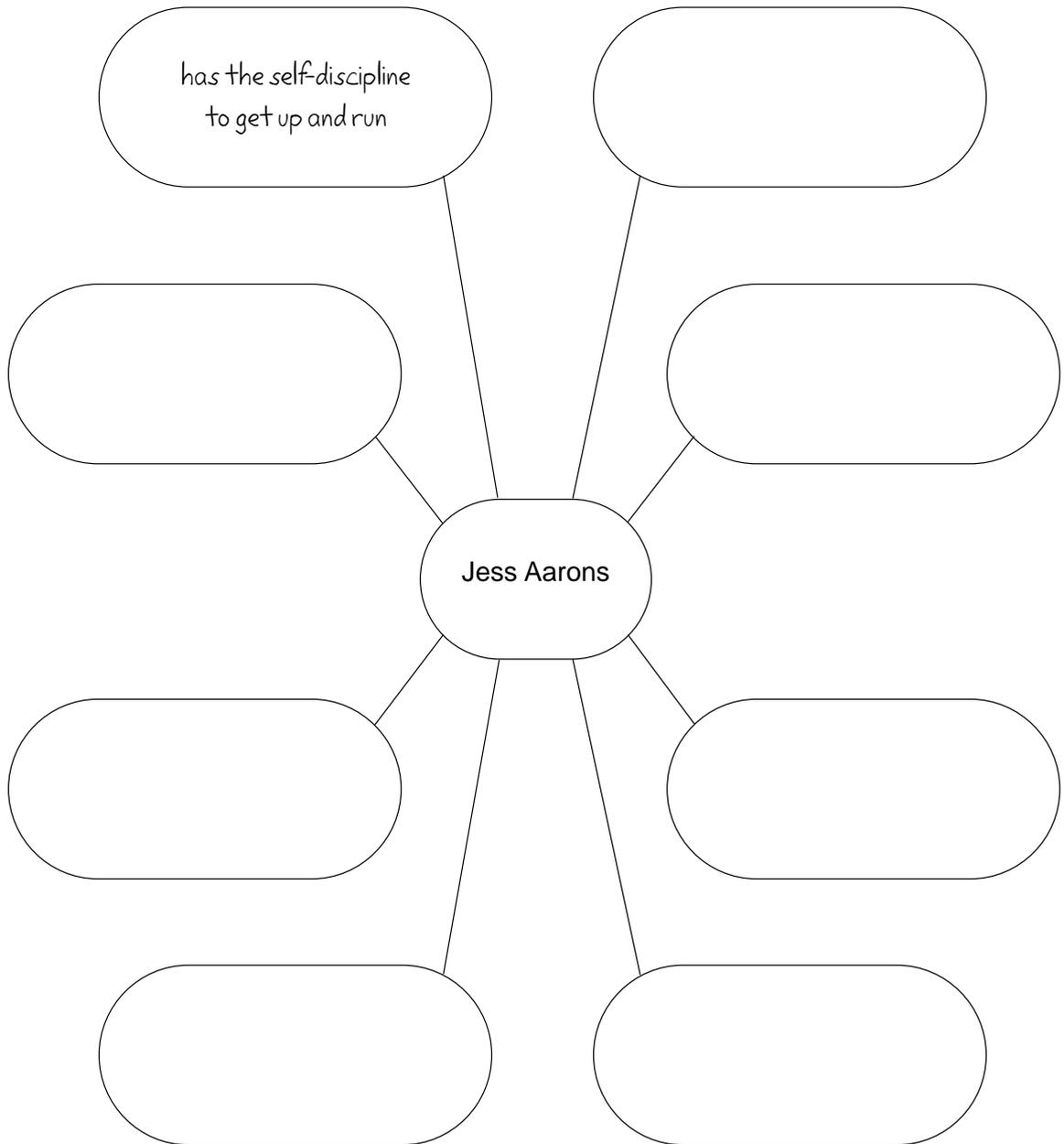
regally [rē'gəl lē] *adv.* like a king or queen

siege [sēj] *n.* attack

Active Reading

Bridge to Terabithia Chapters 1-4

What kind of person is Jess Aarons? You can learn about his personality and character from what he says, does, and thinks. You also can gain insight into his character by paying attention to what other characters say about him. As you read, use the web diagram on this page to list what you learn about Jess's personality and character in this section of the novel.



Responding

Bridge to Terabithia Chapters 1–4

Personal Response

Have you ever known anyone like Leslie? What might it be like to have a friend like Leslie?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. In what ways is Leslie different from the other students at Lark Creek School? How do the other students treat her?

2. How does Jess react when Gary Fulcher wants to see his drawing? What do you learn about Jess from his reaction?

3. Describe the secret place that Leslie and Jess create. Why is this place so special and so important to them?

Responding

Bridge to Terabithia Chapters 1–4

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Why does Jess like and admire Miss Edmunds so much? Look back at your response to the **Focus Activity**. Which examples might apply to Miss Edmunds? Do you think that a teacher like Miss Edmunds could exist in real life? Why or why not?

5. For what reasons might people prefer to live in a place like Lark Creek instead of a well-to-do suburb? Name some advantages and disadvantages of living in each type of place.

Literature and Writing

Character Analysis

How do Jess and Leslie become friends? What interests and feelings regarding other people do they share? How are they different? Write a paragraph or two describing these characters from different backgrounds who become best friends.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

When Leslie explains that her parents have moved to the country to reassess their value structure, Jess observes, “But you’re the one that’s gotta pay.” What do you think Jess means? Do you agree with him? Why or why not? In your group, discuss these questions. Can you think of situations from real life that are similar to the one Leslie faces? Share your ideas with the members of another group.

Learning for Life

Like many young people, Jess has regular household chores to do. Divide a piece of paper into two columns. In the first column, list your regular home chores. In the second, list things you do occasionally when the need arises. Use these two lists to write a job description for your “job” at home.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Bridge to Terabithia Chapters 5–9

FOCUS ACTIVITY

In the past, how have you dealt with classmates who bullied you or tried to control other people?

Sharing Ideas

Work with a partner to make a list of suggestions for dealing with a bully. Think of techniques you have used as well as ones you have read or heard about.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Jess and Leslie try to deal with an especially difficult person in their lives.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Each year, the Newbery Medal is awarded to the most distinguished children's book published the previous year. The award is named after John Newbery, an Englishman of the seventeenth hundreds who was one of the first publishers of books written especially for young people. The medal was first given in 1922. Today, a committee of the American Library Association chooses the winner.

Well-known winners of the medal over the years include *The Voyages of Dr. Doolittle* by Hugh Lofting, *Johnny Tremain* by Esther Forbes, *King of the Wind* by Marguerite Henry, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* by Elizabeth George Speare, *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle, *Souder* by William H. Armstrong, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor, and *Sarah, Plain and Tall* by Patricia MacLachlan. Katherine Paterson, who won medals for *Bridge to Terabithia* and *Jacob Have I Loved*, is one of a handful of authors who have won the Newbery Medal twice. You can find a list of all the Newbery Medal and Newbery Honor books on the Internet at http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/newb_hon.html.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

complacent [kəm plā'sənt] *adj.* self-satisfied

dregs [dregs] *n.* last leftovers

dumbfounded [dum'found'əd] *adj.* shocked; speechless

foundling [found'ling] *n.* orphan

garish [gar'ish] *adj.* showy; tacky

parapets [par'ə pits] *n.* castle walls

prescribed [prē skribd'] *adj.* required

regicide [rēj'ə sīd] *n.* murder of a king or queen

speculation [spek'yə lā'shən] *n.* thinking; wondering

vile [vīl] *adj.* evil; foul; filthy

Active Reading

Bridge to Terabithia Chapters 5–9

The novel has two settings: Lark Creek, a small town in rural Virginia, and Terabithia, an imaginary world. As you read this section, the differences between the two worlds will become clearer. Use the chart on this page to write down words and phrases that describe each world.

Lark Creek	Terabithia
Janice Avery is the giant, the threat.	Imaginary giants threaten the kingdom.

Responding

Bridge to Terabithia Chapters 5–9

Personal Response

What thoughts did you have at the end of this section, when Jess is unable to sleep?
What experiences of your own did this incident bring to mind?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. How do Jess and Leslie get even with Janice Avery? How does their solution compare with the ones you wrote about in the **Focus Activity**?

2. What gifts do Jess and Leslie exchange at Christmas? How is each gift especially appropriate for the receiver?

3. Compare the reactions of Jess and Leslie to the Easter church service. How does each reaction expand your understanding of the character?

Responding

Bridge to Terabithia Chapters 5–9

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. At the end of chapter 7, you learn that Jess sometimes feels that his life has been as “delicate as a dandelion. One little puff from any direction, and it was blown to bits.” How does this use of figurative language help you better understand Jess’s feelings?
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5. Does your attitude toward Janice Avery change when you learn her secret? How? Why does learning about people’s problems often help us to feel sympathy for them?
-

Literature and Writing

Writing an Evaluation

In chapter 8, Jess’s dad is laid off from his job. As a result, the Aarons family is facing economic hardships. Imagine that you are a social worker employed by the county. Write a memo listing suggestions on how the family can deal with the financial difficulties resulting from the loss of the father’s job. Use information from the novel as well as your own experience and knowledge. Be sure to include suggestions on how to deal with the emotional and psychological problems as well as the financial ones.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Family members can affect the psychological well-being of one another, both positively and negatively. In your group, discuss how this statement applies to the Aarons and Burke families in *Bridge to Terabithia*, citing examples from the text. Then, work together to create a set of ten rules for fostering and maintaining a strong, positive, and healthy family life. Finally, grade the Aarons and Burke families on how well they follow your group’s rules.

Social Studies Connection

Leslie comes from a “huge suburban school” in Arlington with a “gorgeous music room” and a gym. Jess’s school, on the other hand, has fewer resources than Leslie’s old school. How do schools get the money to build gyms, buy computers, and provide music and athletic programs? Where does your school get the funding it needs to operate? In a small group, do some research to find out how your school is funded. You can get information from old newspaper articles, the Internet, or your state board of education. Present your findings to the class in a group presentation.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Bridge to Terabithia Chapters 10–13

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What personal qualities can help a person overcome a difficult situation?

Journal

Write in your journal about a time when you had to deal with a difficult problem. What challenges did you have to overcome? What strengths did you call on to solve the problem?

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Jess addresses a difficult problem and discovers strengths within himself.

BACKGROUND

Plot

The **plot** of a novel is the sequence of events. The plot begins with the **exposition**, which introduces the setting, the main characters, and the conflict. Events that contribute to the conflict (or conflicts) are called the **rising action**. This action leads to the **climax**, the emotional high point of the story. Watch for the climax as you read the last chapters of *Bridge to Terabithia*. Notice how the **falling action**, what happens after the climax, leads to the **resolution**, or final outcome.

Did You Know?

Bridge to Terabithia is an example of a coming-of-age novel—a work that describes how a character passes from youth to maturity. The character has important experiences that help him or her find an identity and a role in the world. Some coming-of-age novels are about a journey, either actual or spiritual. Although Jess does take a short journey in the novel, it is his experiences that carry him from childhood to a place closer to adulthood. Making important decisions, coping with unexpected events, facing certain fears, and weighing complicated problems of right and wrong all move him along on the path toward maturity. In the end, Jess's experiences leave him better prepared to face the challenges of life.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

flank [flangk] *n.* animal's side

intently [in tent'lē] *adv.* with concentration

leaden [led'ən] *adj.* heavy, like lead

piteously [pit'ē əs lē] *adv.* in a way that arouses pity; pathetically

procession [prə sesh'ən] *n.* parade

relentlessly [ri lent'lis lē] *adv.* without stopping

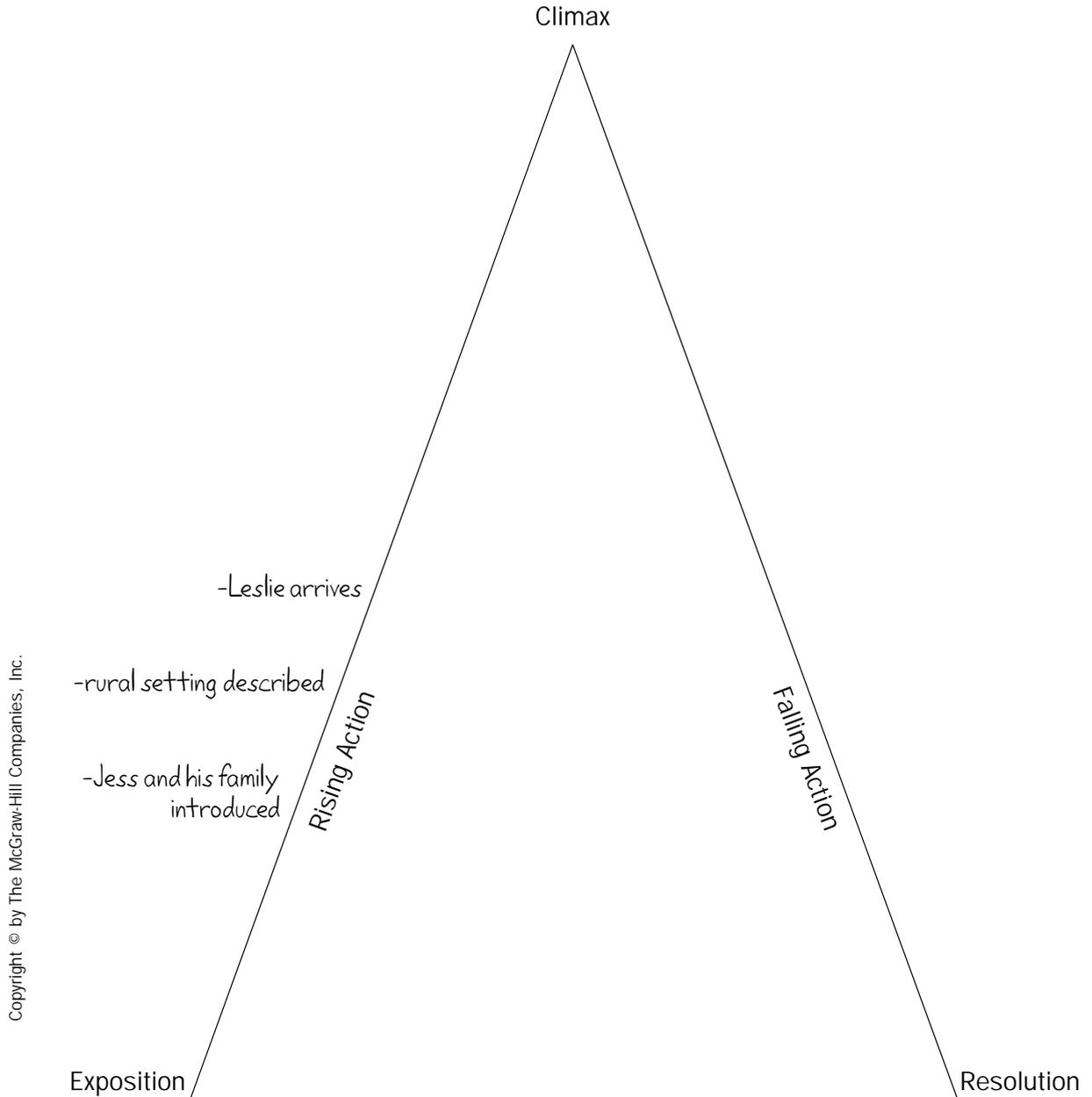
solemn [sol'əm] *adj.* very serious

traitorous [trā'tər əs] *adj.* betraying trust

Active Reading

Bridge to Terabithia Chapters 10–13

As you read the final chapters of *Bridge to Terabithia*, use the diagram to fill in the different plot elements, beginning with the exposition in the early chapters and concluding with the resolution.



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Responding

Bridge to Terabithia Chapters 10–13

Personal Response

How did you respond to the ending of *Bridge to Terabithia*? What other endings might the story have had?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Summarize what happens on the “perfect day” described in chapter 10. What makes the day so perfect for Jess? What news does Jess learn when he gets home?

2. How does Jess react to this news? Describe the stages he goes through as he tries to deal with what has happened.

3. What does Jess do after the Burkes move away? Why do you think he does this?

Responding

Bridge to Terabithia Chapters 10–13

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Consider the novel's title. What do you think the bridge might symbolize, or stand for?

5. What is your opinion of Jess's reactions to the events described in chapters 10–13? How do you think you might react in a similar situation?

Literature and Writing

Growth Chart

By the end of the novel, Jess has changed in important ways and has learned a great deal about himself and others. Write a few paragraphs tracing Jess's growth and development over the course of the novel. As you write, consider these questions: What lessons does Jess learn? From whom? What strengths does he discover in himself and in others? What new beliefs and values does he develop? Which experiences are especially valuable to him?

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss psychiatrist, identified five general stages of grieving through which dying people and people who love them often pass. Kübler-Ross called these stages *denial*, *anger*, *bargaining*, *depression*, and *acceptance*. Not all people experience each of these stages, and some people experience them in a different order. In your group, describe what you think each stage means. Then examine chapters 10–13 of *Bridge to Terabithia* to see which of the stages Jess experiences. Identify passages that seem to show particular stages of grieving. Speculate on whether Jess experiences all five stages and why or why not.

Dramatic Monologue

The narrative point of view used in *Bridge to Terabithia* is called **third-person limited**. In this point of view, the narrator reveals the thoughts and feelings of only one character. Paterson chose to tell this story from Jess's point of view. Choose a different character, and create a dramatic monologue in which that character reveals his or her thoughts and feelings about a particular event in chapters 10–13. Examine the text for clues about what to include in your monologue. Present your monologue to the class.



Save your work for your portfolio.

The Dream Keeper and Dream Dust

Langston Hughes

Before You Read

Focus Question

Name one thing that you wish you could be or do or one place that you wish you could visit. What do you think this dream or wish reveals about you?

Background

Langston Hughes (1902–1967) was an African American poet who often wrote about the importance of holding on to dreams. He was a leader of the Harlem Renaissance—a period of outstanding literary vigor and creativity that was centered in the Harlem district of New York City in the 1920s. Hughes knew the importance of self-expression and understood the struggle to be heard and taken seriously.

Responding to the Reading

1. What does the speaker in “The Dream Keeper” want to wrap in “a blue cloud-cloth”? Why?

2. What might the speaker mean when he describes the “fingers of the world” as “too rough”?

3. Explain what dream dust might be. From what is dream dust gathered?

4. According to the speaker, what is the value of dream dust? Why do you think it is not for sale?

5. **Making Connections** In *Bridge to Terabithia*, Jess and Leslie build a dream world of their own—an imaginary world that is more than just a means to entertain themselves. Relate the value and meaning of their dream world to the ideas expressed in the two poems by Langston Hughes.

Creative Writing: A Dream Keeper

As Hughes suggests in “The Dream Keeper,” it can be difficult to hold on to dreams in a world that often treats dreams roughly. Create a book that is your own personal dream keeper. In your book, describe your dreams for the future and your personal philosophy about life. You might also include original poems or illustrations that express who you are as a person.

Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp

from *Arabian Nights*

Before You Read

Focus Question

What is your favorite adventure or fantasy story? What elements of the story do you most enjoy?

Background

Arabian Nights, also called *The Arabian Nights' Entertainment* and *The Thousand and One Nights*, is a collection of ancient tales that originated in the Middle East. The collection is made up of fairy tales, romances, legends, fables, parables, anecdotes, and adventures. Nobody knows who originally wrote the stories or when, but it is believed that the stories had been told orally for several centuries before they were written down. "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp" is one of the well-known stories from the collection.

Responding to the Reading

1. Why does the magician bring Aladdin to the cave? How does he get Aladdin to trust him?

2. What does Aladdin discover about the lamp and the ring? How does his life change after this discovery?

3. How does Aladdin lose the lamp? What happens as a result of his losing it?

4. Summarize what happens after Aladdin is brought before the sultan.

5. **Making Connections** The imaginary kingdom in *Bridge to Terabithia* is based in part on characters and stories that Leslie and Jess know. Compare *Bridge to Terabithia* with "Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp." What themes and ideas appear in both stories?

Create a Setting

Working with a partner, invent an imaginary world. Include places and characters that are similar to those found in a typical adventure or fantasy story. Write a story about an event or a struggle that takes place in that world. Create illustrations or maps to go with your story.

Playing God

Ouida Sebestyen

Before You Read

Focus Question

Name some situations in which people might feel powerless or unable to control their lives.

Background

Ouida Sebestyen is a Texas native who writes novels and short stories for young adults. Sebestyen has said that she wants her stories to celebrate life, love, and family and to show people triumphing over difficult circumstances. In this story, a young man deals with conflict and uncertainty.

Responding to the Reading

1. At the beginning of the story, what is Josh doing? Why?

2. What is Josh's first reaction to the box of puppies? What does he finally decide to do with them?

3. How do the puppies influence Josh's actions and outlook?

4. How do you think Josh feels at the end of the story, when he is sitting with his father?

5. **Making Connections** In *Bridge to Terabithia*, Jess faces many frustrations and struggles. He doesn't always feel understood at home or at school, and he is always learning more about himself and others. Compare Josh in "Playing God" to Jess. What feelings do the two share? How is each affected by his experiences?

Learning for Life: Assessing Skills and Interests

In *Bridge to Terabithia*, Jess is able to express himself through art and creativity, and his friendship with Leslie helps him appreciate life. In "Playing God," Josh struggles to find his own purpose. What special skills and interests do you have? How might you translate these into a career or a set of goals? Get together with a partner and interview each other, asking questions like these: What do you like to do in your spare time? What do you do well? Whom do you admire? After the interviews are completed, review your responses. Then write a statement about what type of career you might want to have. List ways in which you might achieve your goals.

The Bridge Builder

Will Allen Dromgoole

Before You Read

Focus Question

What does it mean to feel responsible for others? In what different ways can people take responsibility for others?

Background

Will Allen Dromgoole (1860–1934), a woman from Tennessee, worked as a columnist for the *Nashville Banner*. Dromgoole began writing for publication when she was about twenty-six years old, following the death of her mother. She wrote out of a need to support herself and to fulfill the wishes of her mother, who had always encouraged her to be a writer. Her stories are noted for their humor, sympathetic characters, and honest reflections on life. In this classic poem, Dromgoole writes about one person's feeling of connection with and responsibility for others.

Responding to the Reading

1. What does the old man do after crossing the wide chasm? According to a fellow pilgrim, why are the old man's actions foolish?

2. Explain the old man's reasoning behind his actions. What does he hope his actions will accomplish?

3. **Making Connections** At the end of the novel, when Jess invites May Belle to Terabithia, Jess manages to turn a place of tragic memories into something positive. In both the novel and the poem, a bridge becomes symbolic of something greater than itself. Explain what the bridge in each work symbolizes. How are Jess's actions like the actions of the old man in the poem?

Art Connection

Think about how a bridge could be the symbol for a connection between persons or places. Then create a painting, sculpture, or poster in which you use a bridge as a symbol. For example, you might show two persons from different countries meeting halfway across a bridge. To gather ideas, think about different ways in which people and places might connect.

The Death of Friends

Virginia Lynn Fry

Before You Read

Focus Question

Think about a time in which you experienced a loss. What images come to your mind when you remember this loss?

Background

Virginia Lynn Fry is an artist and counselor who works with dying people and their families. For more than fifteen years, she has helped children and adults deal with loss through creativity. The piece that you are about to read comes from a collection of true stories about children dealing with the loss of family members or friends.

Responding to the Reading

1. What emotions surround Molly's sudden death? Describe different reactions to the accident and its aftermath.

2. Why are teachers advised not to remove Molly's papers and desk from the classroom?

3. What information does the principal's message include?

4. How does the hospice counselor use art activities to help children deal with their grief? Do you think such activities would be truly helpful? Why or why not?

5. **Making Connections** After Leslie's death, Jess at first has trouble understanding the reality of the tragic situation. Think about the selection that you have just read. Then try to explain the feelings that Jess seems to experience. What is constructive or not constructive about the ways in which different individuals deal with Leslie's death?

Writing About Loss

Write a journal entry about your own feelings about a loss. You may write from experience, or you may try to imagine the feelings you would have in such a situation. If you wish, you may write a poem, write the lyrics for a song, or simply list memories or images that express your feelings.