



Tuck Everlasting: Social Dilemmas

Grade level: 4-8

Themes and Topics

life, death, family, love, choices, consequences, immortality, life cycles, personal growth, life styles, moral judgment, story elements

Some suggestions for class discussion...

1. The symbol of the wheel in Tuck Everlasting starts with the very first sentence: "The first week in August hangs at the very top of summer, the top of the live-long year, like the highest seat of a Ferris wheel when it pauses in its turning."
Are there other instances of the wheel being used symbolically? What other symbols can be found in the book?
2. Throughout the story the Tucks move on. What do you know about moving and what emotions are connected with moving? Is it a positive or negative action?
3. Tuck said to Winnie, "That's' the way its supposed to be. That's the way it is." Has anyone ever said this to you? Do you disagree or agree with this statement?
4. Why did Winnie decide to keep the Tucks' secret? What do you know about keeping a secret? Can keeping a secret be wrong? Think about secrets you have been involved with – has it been easy – or did you have a problem with it?
5. Various conflicts can make up the plot of the story. A conflict is some problem or struggle that must be overcome. Conflicts can be between people, or between people and some force in nature, such as a storm. People can also have conflicts within themselves. Describe conflicts from the play and identify the type of conflict each is. How would you overcome these conflicts?
6. These words were very important to Winnie, "Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage." What does this quotation mean to you? Can you think when this quotation could apply to your life or that of someone you know?
7. Why do you think Winnie chose not to drink from the spring? What decision would you have made?

Going to School as Jesse

In *Tuck Everlasting*, Jesse told Winnie that he was 104 years old. Winnie did not believe him – but it turned out to be the truth.

What was school life like for a 10 year old in 1786? Here are some interesting facts...

- Most activities centered education and religion.
- By law, a school could be created if there were fifty or more families in a town, and a grammar school if a hundred or more families. However there were no free public schools and families had to pay tuition. Instead of paying tuition some families were subscribers who would help build the school, supply the wood, buy supplies, and find the teacher.
- Religion was the basis for most of the curriculum. The Bible was the primary text in school and the alphabet was often learned using religious poems. A typical schedule often consisted of studying the Bible for four hours and the three R's (reading, writing, and reckoning) for three hours. Little emphasis was placed on reckoning (math)
- School materials were very limited. Written work was accomplished with slate and chalk. Teachers had a textbook and often the only book available to the students would be a dictionary in the front of the room.
- Good behavior was expected, and if rules were broken, punishment was harsh. Fighting could result in being locked in a closet for hours or a whipping. A student answering incorrectly could be embarrassed and teased by other students and the teacher and forced to sit on a stool and wear a hat with a derogatory statement such as "good for nothing baby." Sometimes the stool would have only one leg and if the student fell over, the teacher would deliver a beating.
- With no TV, blogs, IMs, worldwide webs, movies, CDs, and all the things that keep us busy and entertained today, the 1780s world was very limited as far as entertainment was concerned. However, kids did some of the same things that are being done today such as football, playing marbles, sledding, ice-skating.
- Society imposed its own dress code. Up until the age of six, boys and girls wore dresses. After six years old, they dressed as adults. A wealthy child might have his head shaved and get a wig as early as ten. Families who could afford it would order better quality clothes from England.
- Opportunity for career advancement was limited. Often young boys would sign on for four years to be an apprentice. He would be taught skills of the trade along with the three R's. Parents signed an agreement and the student would live with the master who would supply food and shelter for a fee.



Author Page - Natalie Babbitt

Natalie Babbitt has a wizard's way with words. Her fantasy novels are a combination of whimsy and starch, without a trace of the precious; her short stories are full of tricky turns of phrase that surprise the reader by their perfect applicability. Both her novels and short stories reflect Babbitt's early love of folk and fairy tales, with echoes of traditional themes resonating through tales of perilous quests, devilish encounters, and royal families.

Babbitt wields her pen as illustrator as well as writer. At the age of nine, inspired by a John Tenniel illustrated volume of *Alice in Wonderland*, Babbitt decided that she wanted to illustrate children's books. To that end she studied art at Laurel School and Smith College. She did not consider writing herself until she lost her spouse collaborator to his career as college dean, and began writing her own stories so she could illustrate them.

The word classic gets tossed around quite a bit in children's literature, but it is the only word for Babbitt's *Tuck Everlasting*. The story of ten-year-old Winnie Foster and her struggle to decide between immortality and trusting her own life's natural end is told in elegantly simple language that allows readers to ponder complex ethical questions.

Babbitt's belief in the existence of the perfect word--"There's always one best word, if you listen for it" --is what makes reading her work such a joy. Her most recent children's book, *Ouch!* (a retelling of a Grimm's) proves Babbitt still has her feel for the perfect word and irreverent humor. A reviewer said about this book: "Read this to everybody you can find . . . Such artistry is a little bit of heaven on earth." How can anyone pass up such good advice?

Books Written by Natalie Babbitt

*Dick Foote and the Shark. Farrar, 1967.

*Phoebe's Revolt. Farrar, 1968.

The Search for Delicious. Farrar, 1969.

Kneeknock Rise. Farrar, 1970.

The Something. Farrar, 1970.

Goody Hall. Farrar, 1971.

The Devil's Storybook. Farrar, 1974.

Tuck Everlasting. Farrar, 1975.

The Eyes of the Amaryllis. Farrar, 1977

Herbert Rowbarge. Farrar, 1982.

The Devil's Other Storybook. Farrar, 1987

*Nellie, a Cat on Her Own. Farrar, 1989.

*Bub; Or the Very Best Thing. HarperCollins, 1994.

Ouch! HarperCollins, 1998.

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Brief Overview of Literary Elements of Fiction

Character

- Character can be revealed through the character's actions, speech, and appearance. It also can be revealed by the comments of other characters and of the author.

Plot

- Plot is the sequence of events that involves the characters in conflict.

Setting

- Setting includes the place and the time period in which the story takes place.
- Setting may or may not have an important influence on the story:

Theme

- Theme is the underlying meaning of the story, a universal truth, a significant statement the story is making about society, human nature, or the human condition.
- A book's theme must be described in universal terms, not in terms of the plot. The plot is the way the universal theme is carried out in that particular book. Themes can be applied to the reader's own life or to other literature.

Style

- Style is the language used in a book, the way the words are put together to create the story.

Point of View

- Point of view depends upon who the narrator is and how much he or she knows.
- Point of view may be:
 - **First person** - uses "I" - **A character is telling the story.**
 - **Second person** - uses "you" - *The author speaks directly to the reader.* Second person is seldom used; it is found most often in nonfiction today.
 - **Third person** - uses "he," "she," or "it" - *The author is telling about the characters.*

Tone

- **Tone** is the author's attitude toward what he or she writes. Think of it as the attitude that you (the reader) get from the author's words. It is the hardest literary element to discuss; often we can recognize it but may not be able to put it into words. The easiest tone to recognize is humor. In describing tone, use adjectives: humorous, mysterious, creepy, straightforward, matter-of-fact, exciting, boring, etc.

A detailed explanation of understanding the literary quality of a fictional novel can be found in *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature*, by Rebecca J. Lukens.



What is this about? – A systematic approach.

It is often difficult for students, when they read texts (articles, reports, novels, poems, etc.) that contain many different ideas and pieces of information along with layers of ideas, to sort out the most important focus. A strategic way to address this concern is to present a systematic way to think about the material.

Use this after the text has been read and it is time to figure out which ideas are most important or interesting.

Directions:

Complete the following statement about [whatever has been read] in at least ten different ways:

_____ is a [story, poem, essay, paragraph, section] about _____

Model:

Tuck Everlasting is a story about:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. immortality | 6. how living forever might not be good |
| 2. family problem | 7. growing up |
| 3. life cycles | 8. making choices |
| 4. making decisions | 9. keeping secrets |
| 5. friendship | 10. life cycles |

Scaffolded Practice: Brainstorming

Students make individual lists. These lists are shared (in pairs, groups or whole class) with students adding other ideas to their lists as they hear them.

Applications:

Depending on the your purpose for the class:

1. Students can choose an idea they would like to write about or explore further
2. Guide discussions about which ideas are central and which are supporting.
3. Ask students to work in groups from the master list of ideas and create an outline of the text or a graphic organizer (wheel, water spring, ferris wheel, etc.)
4. Have students locate the parts of the book that supports their idea of the main focus of the story and read it out loud.
5. Lead a Socratic circle using the main idea the class decides it the most interesting.

Note:

This process reinforces the idea that different readers get different meanings out of texts, while also requiring students to come to some consensus, with the support of the teacher, on the key or crucial ideas needed to comprehend the author's intention in the text.