

# **Literature Circle Guide:**

# **Bridge to Terabithia**

**by Tara McCarthy**

**S C H O L A S T I C**  
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Guide written by Tara McCarthy  
Edited by Sarah Glasscock  
Cover design by Niloufar Safavieh  
Interior design by Grafica, Inc.  
Interior illustrations by Mona Mark

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# To the Teacher

As a teacher, you naturally want to instill in your students the habits of confident, critical, independent, and lifelong readers. You hope that even when students are not in school they will seek out books on their own, think about and question what they are reading, and share those ideas with friends. An excellent way to further this goal is by using literature circles in your classroom.

In a literature circle, students select a book to read as a group. They think and write about it on their own in a literature response journal and then discuss it together. Both journals and discussions enable students to respond to a book and develop their insights into it. They also learn to identify themes and issues, analyze vocabulary, recognize writing techniques, and share ideas with each other—all of which are necessary to meet state and national standards.

This guide provides the support materials for using literature circles with *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson. The reading strategies, discussion questions, projects, and enrichment readings will also support a whole class reading of this text or can be given to enhance the experience of an individual student reading the book as part of a reading workshop.

## Literature Circles

A literature circle consists of several students (usually three to five) who agree to read a book together and share their observations, questions, and interpretations. Groups may be organized by reading level or choice of book. Often these groups read more than one book together since, as students become more comfortable talking with one another, their observations and insights deepen.

When planning to use literature circles in your classroom, it can be helpful to do the following:

- \* Recommend four or five books from which students can choose. These books might be grouped by theme, genre, or author.

- \* Allow three or four weeks for students to read each book. Each of Scholastic's *Literature Circle Guides* has the same number of sections as well as enrichment activities and projects. Even if students are reading different books in the *Literature Circle Guide* series, they can be scheduled to finish at the same time.
- \* Create a daily routine so students can focus on journal writing and discussions.
- \* Decide whether students will be reading books in class or for homework. If students do all their reading for homework, then allot class time for sharing journals and discussions. You can also alternate silent reading and writing days in the classroom with discussion groups.

### Read More About Literature Circles

*Getting the Most from Literature Groups*  
by Penny Strube (Scholastic Professional Books, 1996)

*Literature Circles* by Harvey Daniels  
(Stenhouse Publishers, 1994)

## Using the *Literature Circle Guides* in Your Classroom

Each guide contains the following sections:

- \* background information about the author and book
- \* enrichment readings relevant to the book
- \* Literature Response Journal reproducibles
- \* Group Discussion reproducibles
- \* Individual and group projects
- \* Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet

### Background Information and Enrichment Readings

The background information about the author and the book and the enrichment readings are designed to offer information that will enhance students' understanding of the book. You may choose to assign and discuss these sections before, during, or after the reading of the book. Because each enrichment concludes with questions that invite students to connect it to the book, you can use this section to inspire them to think and record their thoughts in the literature response journal.

### Literature Response Journal Reproducibles

Although these reproducibles are designed for individual students, they should also be used to stimulate and support discussions in literature circles. Each page begins with a reading strategy and follows with several journal topics. At the bottom of the page, students select a type of response (prediction, question, observation, or connection) for free-choice writing in their response journals.

#### ◆ Reading Strategies

Since the goal of the literature circle is to empower lifelong readers, a different reading strategy is introduced in each section. Not only does the reading strategy allow students to understand this particular book better, it also instills a habit of mind that will continue to be useful when they read other books. A question from the Literature Response Journal and the Group Discussion pages is always tied to the reading strategy.

If everyone in class is reading the same book, you may present the reading strategy as a mini-lesson to the entire class. For literature circles, however, the group of students can read over and discuss the strategy together at the start of class and then experiment with the strategy as they read silently for the rest of the period. You may want to allow time at the end of class so the group can talk about what they noticed as they read. As an alternative, the literature circle can review the reading strategy for the next section after they have completed their discussion. That night, students can try out the reading strategy as they read on their own so they will be ready for the next day's literature circle discussion.

#### ◆ Literature Response Journal Topics

A literature response journal allows a reader to "converse" with a book. Students write questions, point out things they notice about the story, recall personal experiences, and make connections to other texts in their journals. In other words, they are using writing to explore what they think about the book. See page 7 for tips on how to help students set up their literature response journals.

1. The questions for the literature response journals have no right or wrong answers but are designed to help students look beneath the surface of the plot and develop a richer connection to the story and its characters.
2. Students can write in their literature response journals as soon as they have finished a reading assignment. Again, you may choose to have students do this for homework or make time during class.
3. The literature response journals are an excellent tool for students to use in their literature circles. They can highlight ideas and thoughts in their journals that they want to share with the group.
4. When you evaluate students' journals, consider whether they have completed all the assignments and have responded in depth and thoughtfully. You may want to check each day to make sure students are keeping up with the assignments. You can read and respond to the journals at a halfway point (after five entries) and again at the end. Some teachers suggest that students pick out their five best entries for a grade.

## Group Discussion Reproducibles

These reproducibles are designed for use in literature circles. Each page begins with a series of discussion questions for the group to consider. A mini-lesson on an aspect of the writer's craft follows the discussion questions. See page 8 for tips on how to model good discussions for students.

◆ **Literature Discussion Questions:** In a literature discussion, students experience a book from different points of view. Each reader brings her or his own unique observations, questions, and associations to the text. When students share their different reading experiences, they often come to a wider and deeper understanding than they would have reached on their own.

The discussion is not an exercise in finding the right answers nor is it a debate. Its goal is to explore the many possible meanings of a book. Be sure to allow enough time for these conversations to move beyond easy answers—try to schedule 25–35 minutes for each one. In addition, there are important guidelines to ensure that everyone's voice is heard.

1. Let students know that participation in the literature discussion is an important part of their grade. You may choose to watch one discussion and grade it. (You can use the Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet on page 33.)
2. Encourage students to evaluate their own performance in discussions using the Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet. They can assess not only their own level of involvement but also how the group itself has functioned.
3. Help students learn how to talk to one another effectively. After a discussion, help them process what worked and what didn't. Videotape discussions if possible, and then evaluate them together. Let one literature circle watch another and provide feedback to it.

4. It can be helpful to have a facilitator for each discussion. The facilitator can keep students from interrupting each other, help the conversation get back on track when it digresses, and encourage shyer members to contribute. At the end of each discussion, the facilitator can summarize everyone's contributions and suggest areas for improvement.

5. Designate other roles for group members. For instance, a recorder can take notes and/or list questions for further discussion. A summarizer can open each literature circle meeting by summarizing the chapter(s) the group has just read. Encourage students to rotate these roles, as well as that of the facilitator.

◆ **The Writer's Craft:** This section encourages students to look at the writer's most important tool—words. It points out new vocabulary, writing techniques, and uses of language. One or two questions invite students to think more deeply about the book and writing in general. These questions can either become part of the literature circle discussion or be written about in students' journals.

## Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet

Both you and your students will benefit from completing these evaluation sheets. You can use them to assess students' performance, and as mentioned above, students can evaluate their own individual performances, as well as their group's performance. The Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet appears on page 33.

## Setting Up Literature Response Journals

Although some students may already keep literature response journals, others may not know how to begin. To discourage students from merely writing elaborate plot summaries and to encourage them to use their journals in a meaningful way, help them focus their responses around the following elements: predictions, observations, questions, and connections. Have students take time after each assigned section to think about and record their responses in their journals. Sample responses appear below.

◆ **Predictions:** Before students read the book, have them study the cover and the jacket copy. Ask if anyone has read any other books by Katherine Paterson. To begin their literature response journals, tell students to jot down their impressions about the book. As they read, students will continue to make predictions about what a character might do or how the plot might turn. After finishing the book, students can reassess their initial predictions. Good readers understand that they must constantly activate prior knowledge before, during, and after they read. They adjust their expectations and predictions: a story that is completely predictable is not likely to capture anyone's interest. A student about to read *Bridge to Terabithia* might predict the following:

*I can see by the front cover that the main characters are a boy and a girl, and that they are in the woods. The characters seem pretty relaxed in this picture, but as I read the back cover, I can tell that something is going to happen that disturbs this feeling of peace.*

◆ **Observations:** This activity takes place immediately after reading begins. In a literature response journal, the reader recalls fresh impressions about the characters, setting, and events. Most readers mention details that stand out for them even if they're not sure what their importance is. For example, a reader might list phrases that describe how a character looks or the feeling a setting evokes. Many readers note certain words, phrases, or passages in a book.

Others note the style of an author's writing or the voice in which the story is told. A student just starting to read *Bridge to Terabithia* might write the following:

*I think that Jess is very competitive. He practices running, and it's obvious that he wants to win the race at school. I also realize that Jess is not a close friend of the other boys in the race. There's a lot of tension about who's qualified to be a contestant and how the racing rules apply to different boys. Jess seem like a person who's fairer than his classmates.*

◆ **Questions:** Point out that good readers don't necessarily understand everything they read. To clarify their uncertainty, they ask questions. Encourage students to identify passages that confuse or trouble them, and emphasize that they shouldn't take anything for granted. Share the following student example:

*Why are the boys so upset about a girl winning the race? Why is Jess so reluctant at first to make friends with Leslie? Is it just because she's a girl? Is it because she seems so different from the other girls he knows?*

◆ **Connections:** Remind students that one story often leads to another. When one friend tells a story, the other friend is often inspired to tell one, too. The same thing happens when someone reads a book. A character reminds the reader of a relative, or a situation is similar to something that happened to him or her. Sometimes a book makes a reader recall other books or movies. These connections can be helpful in revealing some of the deeper meanings or patterns of a book. The following is an example of a student connection:

*A lot of kids I know feel different from most of their classmates. I can see that Jess fits into this category. He's got one teacher that he really likes, Miss Edmunds. He's got a talent for art that he wants to hide from other kids. I'm guessing that Jess will soon recognize Leslie as another outsider like him.*

## The Good Discussion

In a good literature discussion, students are always learning from one another. They listen to one another and respond to what their peers have to say. They share their ideas, questions, and observations. Everyone feels comfortable about talking, and no one interrupts or puts down what anyone else says. Students leave a good literature discussion with a new understanding of the book—and sometimes with new questions about it. They almost always feel more engaged by what they have read.

◆ **Modeling a Good Discussion:** In this era of combative and confessional TV talk shows, students often don't have any idea of what it means to talk productively and creatively together. You can help them have a better idea of what a good literature discussion is if you let them experience one. Select a thought-provoking short story or poem for students to read, and then choose a small group to model a discussion of the work for the class.

Explain to participating students that the objective of the discussion is to explore the text thoroughly and learn from one another. Emphasize that it takes time to learn how to have a good discussion, and that the first discussion may not achieve everything they hope it will. Duplicate a copy of the Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet for each student. Go over the helpful and unhelpful contributions shown on the Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet. Instruct students to fill it out as they watch the model discussion. Then have the group of students hold its discussion while the rest of the class observes. Try not to interrupt or control the discussion and remind the student audience not to participate. It's okay if the discussion falters, as this is a learning experience.

Allow 15–20 minutes for the discussion. When it is finished, ask each student in the group to reflect out loud about what worked and what didn't. Then have the students who observed share their impressions. What kinds of comments were helpful? How could the group have talked to each other more productively?

You may want to let another group experiment with a discussion so students can try out what they learned from the first one.

◆ **Assessing Discussions:** The following tips will help students monitor how well their group is functioning:

1. One person should keep track of all behaviors by each group member, both helpful and unhelpful, during the discussion.
2. At the end of the discussion, each individual should think about how he or she did. How many helpful and unhelpful checks did he or she receive?
3. The group should look at the Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet and assess their performance as a whole. Were most of the behaviors helpful? Were any behaviors unhelpful? How could the group improve?

In good discussions, you will often hear students say the following:

***"I was wondering if anyone knew . . ."***

***"I see what you are saying. That reminds me of something that happened earlier in the book."***

***"What do you think?"***

***"Did anyone notice on page 57 that . . ."***

***"I disagree with you because . . ."***

***"I agree with you because . . ."***

***"This reminds me so much of when . . ."***

***"Do you think this could mean . . ."***

***"I'm not sure I understand what you're saying. Could you explain it a little more to me?"***

***"That reminds me of what you were saying yesterday about . . ."***

***"I just don't understand this."***

***"I love the part that says . . ."***

***"Here, let me read this paragraph. It's an example of what I'm talking about."***



## About *Bridge to Terabithia*

*Bridge to Terabithia* came out of experiences in Katherine Paterson's own life. She taught the sixth grade in Lovettsville, a rural community in northern Virginia. She says, "almost all of my children were like Jesse Aarons. I'll never forget that wonderful class." Later, a friend of her son's was killed by lightning. Of that accident, Paterson writes, "I wrote the book to try to make sense out of a tragedy that seemed senseless."

*Bridge to Terabithia* celebrates a friendship that arises between two people with very different backgrounds. Out of that friendship comes a terrible loss that Jess struggles to understand. The book also explores how hard some people have to struggle against family and environment to express their own creativity.



### About the Author: **Katherine Paterson**

Katherine Paterson was born in Qing Jiang, China. During World War II, she and her family had to move back to the

United States. They lived in towns in North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia. After college, Paterson decided to become a missionary. She hoped to be sent to China but at that time, 1957, Americans couldn't go to China. A friend suggested that Paterson go to Japan instead. One of the reasons that Paterson and her family had to leave China during the war was because of the Japanese invasion of China. She was reluctant to visit the country she thought of as an enemy. Her friend persisted, and Paterson went to Japan. She grew to love the country and its people and language. In fact, until marrying her husband in the United States, Paterson thought she would live in Japan for the rest of her life.

She began writing course material for fifth- and sixth-graders, but she really wanted to write fiction. With four children at home, Paterson decided to take a night class in creative writing. She finished a novel in class, which was her first published work of fiction. Since then, Katherine Paterson has won a number of awards for her books, including the National Book Award in 1979 for *The Great Gilly Hopkins* and the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction for *Jip, His Story*.

### **Other Books by Katherine Paterson**

*Flip-Flop Girl*

*The Great Gilly Hopkins*

*Jacob I Have Loved*

*Jip, His Story*

*Lyddie*

*The Master Puppeteer*

*Park's Quest*

*Preacher's Boy*

*The Sign of the Chrysanthemum*

*Tale of the Manchurian Ducks*

## Enrichment: Friendship

In real life and in fiction, friendships have their ups and downs. The best books about friendship show friends confronting tough situations together and coming out on the other end knowing more about one another and about themselves. Even in books for very young readers, friendship can be presented as hard work as well as great fun. For example, in Marjorie Weinman Sharmat's *I'm Not Oscar's Friend Anymore* and *Mooch the Messy Meets Prudence the Neat*, friends quarrel over little issues, break off their friendship, and then rebuild it through compromise and understanding.

Books for older readers like you deal with more challenging relationships. Cynthia Voigt writes about the sadness of being abandoned in *A Solitary Blue* (a 1984 Newbery Honor Book). The threat of capture and execution by the Nazis is at the heart of Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars* (another Newbery winner). *The Pinballs* by Betsy Byars focuses on the suspicion and trauma that may keep people from forming friendships. But even books that tackle the rougher realities of life include the fun of friendship. In *Number the Stars*, Ellen and Annemarie have occasions to laugh, to play games, and to tell stories. In *Bridge to Terabithia*, Leslie and Jess not only confront serious and disturbing issues, but they also experience joy, play pranks, and make wonderful discoveries.

In books, as in real life, there are many different aspects to becoming or being friends. Relate each example below to a real-life friendship you've had.

You feel like an outsider in a new place, until you make a friend. In Katherine Paterson's *Jennifer, Hecate, Macbeth, William McKinley, and Me, Elizabeth*, a new student is teased by another student. The two students eventually become firm friends.

Family problems can interfere with friendship. In Suzanne Newton's *An End to Perfect*, two girls have to work hard to remain friends when members of their families take different paths in life.

A great friendship can help you develop your own talents. In *Just for the Summer* by Christine McDonnell, a surprising friendship helps the main character realize that she's a talented artist.

Sometimes you can form firm friendships with adults outside your family. In *Two That Were Tough* by Robert Burch, an old man and some kids work together to achieve independence.



You'll find all the aspects of friendship listed above—as well as others—in *Bridge to Terabithia*. As you read, think about how you can make the connection between your own friendships with the friendship in the book. Also think about your favorite books about friendships. Into which categories above would you place them?

## Enrichment: Realistic Fiction

Fiction can be defined as a made-up story. You've probably already read and enjoyed hundreds of works of fiction—all the way from *Winnie-the-Pooh* to *A Wrinkle in Time* to *Number the Stars*. Although the three books just mentioned are all fiction, each is a different kind of fiction. *Winnie-the-Pooh* is a fantasy where animals talk and interact with the child Christopher Robin. As a reader, you know that something like that could never happen in real life. *A Wrinkle in Time* is science fiction; the main characters seem realistic, but the worlds they move through and the problems they encounter are not. A book like *Number the Stars*, on the other hand, is historical fiction. Although the main characters are made up, the situations and settings actually happened in the past.

*Bridge to Terabithia* is realistic fiction. The school and the community in the story are made up, and may not be exactly like yours, but they seem real. The friendship developed between the main characters may not be exactly like a friendship you've had, but based on your own experiences, it will make sense to you. The situations seem as if they could actually happen to someone.

For a long time, writers and publishers of children's books avoided fiction that had a sad ending or an unresolved conflict or that dealt with realistic social problems. The popular books were those like the Horatio Alger stories, in which poor kids always ended up being rewarded, or like the Nancy Drew mysteries, in which the protagonist always solved a problem.

Realistic fiction is probably much closer to your own life experiences. Consider the following realistic fiction situations, and discuss how they relate to your own life or to the lives of people you know:

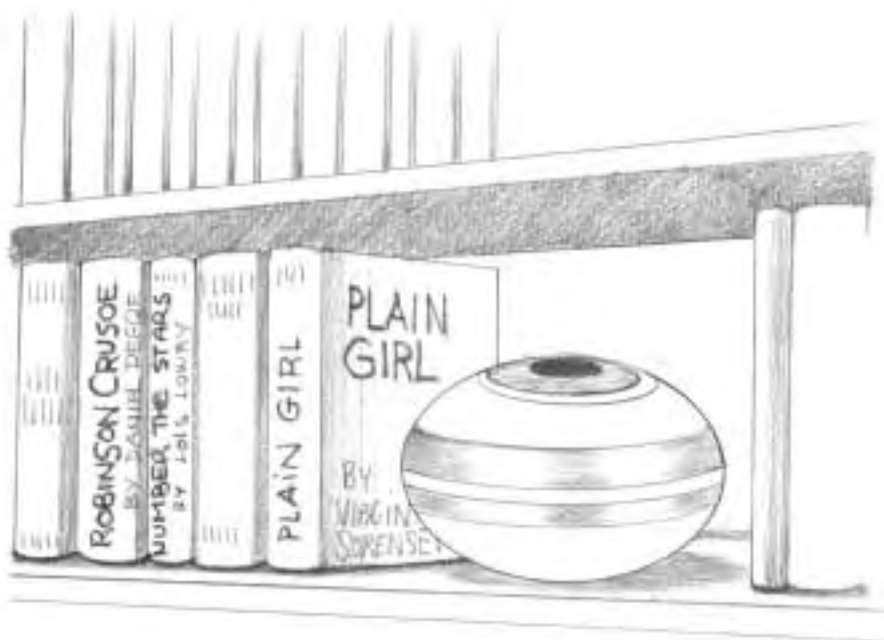
In *Plain Girl* by Virginia Sorenson, the heroine struggles to keep part of her family's cultural heritage while reaching out to new people and to new experiences and ideas.

The main character in *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe establishes his own world—with its own rules—while living far away from other people.

In *Cider Days* by Mary Stolz, two people with very different backgrounds form a friendship.

*The Mockingbird Song* by Berthe Amoss tells about a child who has to accept a terrible loss.

As you read *Bridge to Terabithia*, write in your journal about the situations and people that you can most identify with. Which people and events seem far away from your own experiences? Does that make the story more or less believable and/or enjoyable to you?



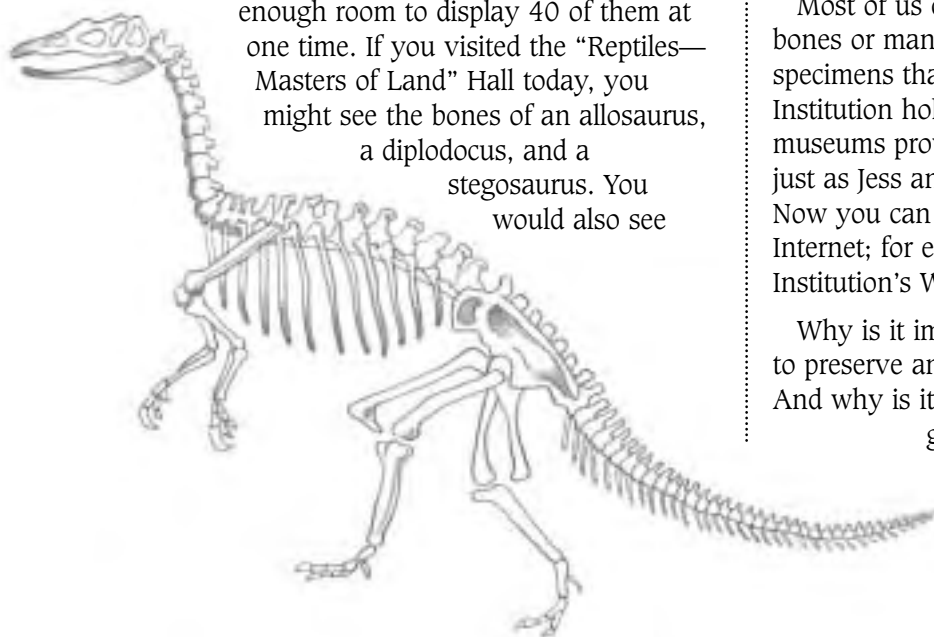
## Enrichment: Amazing Collections

Jess Aarons, one of the two main characters in *Bridge to Terabithia*, is a small-town boy with big dreams. He loves art and wants to become an artist. Jess also wants to move beyond the rigid thinking and set ways of most of the people around him; he wants to meet new people and learn as much as he can about the outside world. His yearnings are partially answered one glorious day when his teacher Miss Edmunds takes him to Washington D.C., to visit the Smithsonian Institution and the National Gallery.

The Smithsonian Institution was established in 1846. An Englishman named James Smithson donated money for the museum. Originally, the Smithsonian was one building; today, it consists of 14 museums and art galleries and the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., and two museums in New York City. More than 140 million artifacts and specimens fill the Smithsonian.

In the book, Jess and Miss Edmunds limited their visit to the main Smithsonian building and the National Gallery of Art, which is now a part of the Smithsonian Institution. There, Jess could have indulged his thirst for information about dinosaurs. The museum has more than 1,500 specimens of dinosaurs, however, there is only

enough room to display 40 of them at one time. If you visited the “Reptiles—Masters of Land” Hall today, you might see the bones of an allosaurus, a diplodocus, and a stegosaurus. You would also see



dioramas—three-dimensional scenes—of dinosaurs hunting for food or feeding at the water’s edge.

On his visit to the Smithsonian, Jess studies dioramas of Native Americans at work, another of his interests. Today, the main collection of Native American art and artifacts is located in the National Museum of the American Indian in New York City. The museum displays robes and headdresses that feature the artistry of Native Americans. It also showcases paintings of Native American leaders, ritual dances, and everyday life that George Caitlin completed in the 1800s. In 2002, the museum will be moved to Washington, D.C.

The National Gallery of Art is just a short distance from the main Smithsonian building. Most of the art in the museum has been donated by collectors who want to share their collections with the public. At the National Gallery, Jess becomes “drunk with color and form and hugeness” as he looks at the paintings. Other works of art are “on loan”—that is, they are displayed for a short time and then returned to their owners. In the 1970s, when *Bridge to Terabithia* was written, a traveling exhibit of art from ancient Egypt was on display. A hanging mobile by the artist Alexander Calder was also installed in the museum during that time period.

Most of us can’t collect great art or dinosaur bones or many of the other artifacts and specimens that museums like the Smithsonian Institution hold and protect. Galleries and museums provide us with a way to enjoy them, just as Jess and Miss Edmunds do in the book. Now you can visit many museums via the Internet; for example, the Smithsonian Institution’s Web site is **[www.si.edu](http://www.si.edu)**.

Why is it important for museums and galleries to preserve and protect artifacts from our past? And why is it important for museums and galleries to share the work with the public? How can a visit to a museum or gallery be a life-changing event?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Bridge to Terabithia*

### Before Reading the Book

#### Reading Strategy:

#### Discovering What You Already Know

Take some time to think about this book. What do you already know about it or its author Katherine Paterson? What kinds of books does Paterson usually write? What pops into your mind when you think about the title, especially the words *bridge* and *Terabithia*? Every reader brings his or her own prior knowledge to a new book. Spend five minutes writing everything you know about this book and its author. Write as fast as you can, and don't censor yourself.



#### Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

**A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. Look at the picture on the front cover. What does it make you think about? What does the picture remind you of?
2. Read the material on the back cover or inside flaps of the cover. Do you think this story is going to be mainly funny or serious? What real-life situations do you think the book will deal with?
3. Write about a friendship that has been or is very important to you. What have you learned from this friendship? How far would you go to help your friend?

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections about the book? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

☐ Prediction

☐ Question

☐ Observation

☐ Connection

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Bridge to Terabithia* Before Reading the Book

### For Your Discussion Group

- \* If you have read any other books by Katherine Paterson, share your thoughts about them. Tell about the main characters, summarize the plot, and explain your response to the book.
- \* The setting of *Bridge to Terabithia* is a farming town many miles north of Washington, D.C., during the early 1970s. Discuss how life in a farming community is different from city life. In which place—rural community or big city—are people more likely to accept newcomers who behave in ways they're not used to? Explain why you think so.
- \* Discuss friendship. Why is it so important to have friends? How would you define a friend? Are most of your friends of the same gender—that is, do the boys in the group have male friends only? Do the girls in the group have female friends only?
- \* Brainstorm the following questions: What risks would you be willing to take to form a friendship with a classmate of the opposite gender? Would the opinions of your classmates influence you? If so, how would they influence you? What risks would you be willing to take to develop goals and aspirations that were quite different from those of your family and your classmates?
- \* When you've finished talking about these questions, take some time to write in your journals about the elements of friendship. Your ideas will probably be different from those you had before the discussion.



### **TIP**

The goal of brainstorming is to collect as many different ideas as possible without commenting on them. Everybody's ideas should be included. As a group, you'll probably have many different answers to the questions on these pages. It's not necessary for your group to settle on one correct answer. The important thing is for you to listen to each person's ideas so you can develop a broader, richer understanding of your own.



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Bridge to Terabithia* Chapters 1–2

### Reading Strategy: Recognizing Point of View

In literature, point of view refers to the person from whose angle the story is told. In *Bridge to Terabithia*, we see all the events from Jess's point of view. From the very beginning, we read what Jess thinks about his racing abilities, how he reacts to the chores his parents ask him to do, and what his feelings are toward each of his four sisters. We hear what Jess hears as his sisters talk and feel what he does when he meets Leslie Burke. This is the third-person point of view because Jess is referred to in the third person as *he* or *Jess*. (If the story were written in the first person, Jess would be referred to in the first person *I*.) What would happen if the story were told from *everyone's* point of view? How would that change the story?



### Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

**A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. Put yourself in Mrs. Aarons' place. Write about Jess's racing practice from her point of view.
2. From Jess's point of view, he feels neglected, overworked, and ignored by his parents. Answer the following questions: Why does Jess feel this way? Do you agree or disagree with him, and why? Why does it seem as if Mr. and Mrs. Aarons are ignoring Jess—and are they really ignoring him?
3. In spite of his feelings about his family, Jess is basically a kind person. Write about how he exhibits kindness toward his sister May Belle. What does May Belle do and say that endears her to Jess?

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

☐ Prediction      ☐ Question      ☐ Observation      ☐ Connection

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Bridge to Terabithia***  
**Chapters 1–2****For Your Discussion Group**

Jess feels different from the other kids in his school, and perhaps rightly so! With your group, discuss the following of Jess's traits:

- \* What stops Jess from freely sharing his artistic skills and interests with his family and classmates?
- \* Jess has a crush on Miss Edmunds. What is it about Miss Edmunds that appeals to him? What do you think she represents to Jess?
- \* In his family, Jess is surrounded by girls. As a consequence, what does he expect from girls? Why is Leslie such a surprise to Jess? Why do you think he avoids her first offer of friendship?

**Writer's Craft: Character Development**

Writers reveal or develop their characters chapter by chapter, event by event. For example, in the first chapter of *Bridge to Terabithia*, we get to see Jess as a kid who is intent on winning a race and who copes with his family and his chores as well as he can. Then, in Chapter 2, we learn more about Jess: he's an artist; he loves music; he's shy about connecting with new neighbors; he seems unlike his classmates. As you continue to read the book, you will come to know Jess even better. In your journal, write what you know about Jess so far. Add more clues to his character as you read each chapter.



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Bridge to Terabithia* Chapter 3

### Reading Strategy: Drawing Conclusions

A conclusion is an opinion you reach after carefully considering the facts. For example, by putting all the facts together about Jess's chores on the farm, you can conclude that he has a lot of work to do before and after school, and therefore, he has very little free time. From the reactions in her class to what Leslie is wearing, you can conclude that her classmates think she is weird. Good readers draw conclusions almost automatically as they read. Jot down some conclusions you've reached about the characters or events in *Bridge to Terabithia*.



### Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

**A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. From reading about the first day of school at Lark Creek Elementary, what conclusions do you reach about Jess's attitude toward school in general? Why does he feel this way?
2. From Leslie Burke's behavior as she enters the classroom, what do you conclude about her? Write about several characteristics she seems to have.
3. Jess is obviously very competitive in sports with the other boys in his school, especially Fulcher. Yet he is quite different from Fulcher. Compare and contrast the ways in which Jess and Fulcher approach competition.

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

☐ Prediction      ☐ Question      ☐ Observation      ☐ Connection

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Bridge to Terabithia*

### Chapter 3

#### For Your Discussion Group

- \* At Lark Creek Elementary, girls and boys seem to separate; they do different things and hang out in different places. How do you explain this separation? Discuss whether this behavior is typical at your school.
- \* Jess took a big step in insisting that Leslie be allowed to compete in the race. Yet, after she wins, he seems determined to avoid her. What are some possible explanations for his behavior?
- \* Discuss what Leslie means when she says, “You’re the only kid in this whole durned school who’s worth shooting.” Why does Leslie’s voice seem to be “quivering” when she says this?



#### Writer's Craft: Conflict

**Conflict** is the different struggles a character faces and tries to resolve. One kind of conflict involves the character with an **external**, or outside, person or event, such as Jess's conflict with Fulcher. Another kind of conflict is **internal**, or inside the mind of the character. With your group, discuss the internal conflict Jess may be experiencing as he deals with Leslie after the race. Why does Jess pretend not to hear Leslie when she calls out his name on the bus? What conflict is Jess experiencing as he watches Leslie run toward her home?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Bridge to Terabithia* Chapter 4

### Reading Strategy: Summarizing

To summarize is to state, as briefly as possible, the major ideas or events in a story or a part of a story. For example, to summarize Miss Edmunds' effect on Jess, you might write the following:

*Miss Edmunds' interest in Jess's art, and the message in the songs she sang, gave Jess a glimpse of a way of thinking that was different from his family's.*



As you can see, a summary can boil down the main point of a series of events that may have happened over several pages in a book. Summarizing is an especially valuable skill when you've just read a chapter as full of events as Chapter 4 is in *Bridge to Terabithia*! In summarizing the major things that happen in this chapter, you'll pull together the most important actions and motives of the characters. This will help you better understand what happens in the chapters that follow. Try writing summaries for Chapters 1–3.

### Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

**A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. Summarize why Leslie's family has moved away from the city. What do they hope to find in a rural setting?
2. Explain why you think Jess and Leslie become friends so quickly.
3. What does Janice Avery say and do that makes her so obnoxious? How do you think Leslie and Jess will deal with her as the story progresses?

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

☐ Prediction      ☐ Question      ☐ Observation      ☐ Connection

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Bridge to Terabithia*

### Chapter 4



#### **For Your Discussion Group**

- \* Leslie and Jess's families have very different lifestyles. Discuss these lifestyles, and determine why these two characters form a bond anyway.
- \* Is one friend the leader and the other the follower, or do Leslie and Jess share these roles? Give some examples to support your answers.
- \* Summarize why Jess goes for Leslie's idea of forming "a whole secret country." What makes him so agreeable to this idea?
- \* How is Terabithia different from the outside world? What might be the pluses and minuses of establishing a special, secret world with a friend?

#### **Writer's Craft: Simile and Metaphor**

*She didn't speak directly to Jess, but she gave him a look with those blue eyes of hers that made him zing like one of the strings she was strumming.*

Writers use comparisons to help create clearer pictures for readers. **Similes** are comparisons of two very different things, such as the description above of how Miss Edmunds made Jess feel, that use the words *like* or *as*. **Metaphors** are comparisons that describe something as if it were actually something else. In this chapter, Paterson uses the following metaphor to describe how Jess feels about being able to draw the world around him:

*How could he explain it in a way Leslie would understand, how he yearned to reach out and capture the quivering life around him and how when he tried, it slipped past his fingertips, leaving a dry fossil upon the page?*

What two things is Jess comparing in the metaphor? What other similes and metaphors do you find as you read?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Bridge to Terabithia* Chapters 5–6

### Reading Strategy: Making Predictions



As you follow the plot of an interesting story, you naturally find yourself making predictions, or intelligent guesses, about what's going to happen next. As you finished Chapter 4, you may have predicted that Jess and Leslie would eventually fight back against Janice Avery. As you read Chapter 5, you discovered that your prediction was right on target. Of course, even an intelligent prediction may turn out to be incorrect. An author can often surprise readers with plot twists they haven't thought of. Begin writing down the predictions you make as you read. Then compare them to what happens in the story.

### Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

**A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. Predict what might happen in Chapter 7 between Janice Avery, Leslie, and Jess. Write down several possibilities.
2. What's your opinion about the joke that Jess and Leslie play on Janice? Describe your own reactions to the joke.
3. Think about Brenda and Ellie's reaction to Leslie. How is Leslie different from their ideas of what a girl should be like? Why does their reaction make Jess angry?

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

☐ Prediction      ☐ Question      ☐ Observation      ☐ Connection



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Bridge to Terabithia* Chapters 5–6

### For Your Discussion Group

As you discovered while discussing Chapters 1 and 2, writers develop characters as the story progresses. By the time you finish Chapter 6, you've probably learned a great deal more about Jess and Leslie's characteristics.



- \* What kind of characteristics do Leslie and Jess display in this section? Discuss whether or not the events in Chapter 5 change your opinion of them. Explain your reaction.
- \* How does Jess act toward his father and May Belle at Christmas? Discuss how Jess's thoughts and actions build a more complete picture of him. What feelings and attitudes does he keep to himself? Why does Jess remain silent?
- \* Jess seems better able to express his feelings to Leslie than he does to his own family. Why do you think this is so? Predict what might happen if Jess got to know Leslie's mother and father.

### Writer's Craft: Denotation and Connotation

In writing, **denotation** means directly stating what a character says, does, or feels. In the following excerpt from Chapter 6, Mrs. Aaron's words and Jess's feelings are directly stated or denoted:

*"Jesse Oliver Aarons, Jr., if you can stop playing with those fool cars long enough to milk the cow, I'd be most appreciative . . ."*

*Jess jumped up, pleased for an excuse to leave the track which he couldn't make work to his father's satisfaction, . . .*

**Connotation** is suggesting what a character feels or why he or she should feel that way. It's up to readers to enlarge the writer's suggestion. For example, Chapter 6 ends with the sentence, *"It felt like Christmas again."* Discuss with your group what this sentence suggests or connotes about Jess's feelings. What does he think Christmas should feel like? What event or interaction has made Jess feel that Christmas has arrived?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Bridge to Terabithia*

### Chapters 7–8

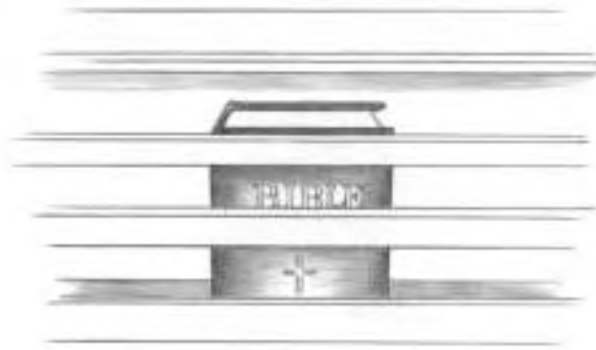
#### Reading Strategy: Comparing and Contrasting

When you compare two or more people or things, you find their likenesses.

When you contrast two or more people or things, you find their differences.

Good readers are constantly comparing and contrasting as they consider the

characters, settings, and events in a story. For instance, in the first chapters of *Bridge to Terabithia*, you probably noticed the similarities and differences between Jess and his classmates. As you continued reading, you could compare Leslie and Jess by identifying the ways in which they're alike and also contrast them by pinpointing their backgrounds and their attitudes toward school. Compare and contrast Jess's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Aarons, and Leslie's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Burke.



#### Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

**A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. Contrast Jess and Leslie's new attitude toward Janice Avery with their previous attitude. What causes the change?
2. Describe Leslie's general behavior as a student. How does her behavior contrast with that of her classmates?
3. As Leslie and Jess's friendship grows, the more likenesses we see between them. Compare the two friends. What traits do they share? What are their strongest bonds?

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

☐ Prediction

☐ Question

☐ Observation

☐ Connection

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Bridge to Terabithia***  
**Chapters 7–8****For Your Discussion Group**

- \* Discuss the contrasts between Jess and Leslie's relationships with their parents.
- \* Then talk about what Jess learns about himself as he works on "the golden room" and spends time with the Burkes. What are some things that particularly interest him about the Burke family?
- \* What are Leslie's reactions to the Easter ceremony at Jess's church? Why is Jess surprised by her reactions?
- \* Jess and Leslie seem to grow closer as they learn more about the differences between their families and their beliefs. Discuss with your group why this is so. Do you think growing closer is usual or unusual among people from different backgrounds? Explain why.

**Writer's Craft: Description**

To get readers involved in a story and its characters, writers use their powers of description. They strive to use the exact words and phrases to tell about sights, sounds, actions, and feelings. The following excerpt from Chapter 7 helps readers hear what Jess hears as he stands outside the girls' room at school:

*There was a quiet minute after the door swung shut behind Leslie. Then he heard Leslie saying something to Janice. Next a string of cuss words which were too loud to be blurred by the closed door. This was followed by some loud sobbing, not Leslie's, thank the Lord, and some sobbing and talking mixed up and—the bell.*

With your group, identify the descriptive words and phrases in the excerpt above that appeal to your sense of hearing. Then skim the chapters you've already read to find and share other great descriptive words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs.



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Bridge to Terabithia* Chapters 9–10

### Reading Strategy: Visualizing

To visualize is to see something in your mind's eye. As you've discovered, good writers use vivid and exact descriptive words and phrases to help readers picture what's going on. Still, every reader will have a unique view of characters and incidents. For example, if each person in your class drew a picture of Janice Avery, Joyce Ann, the Burkes' house, or Terabithia, everyone's picture would be slightly different. And that's great, because your personal visualization of characters and events makes the story become very much your own. Using Katherine Paterson's descriptions, draw a picture of a person or place in *Bridge to Terabithia*.



### Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

**A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. Reread the paragraph in Chapter 9 that begins, "When they got to the bank of the creek, they stopped." Visualize the scene. Then draw a detailed picture that shows how you see Terabithia after days of heavy rain. Use other details from the chapter if you want. Write a caption of at least two sentences for your picture.
2. Write about why Jess is so afraid to go to Terabithia during this time of heavy rain, and why he undertakes the trip anyway. Do you think his fears are well founded? Do you think he's justified in making the same trip again? Explain why or why not.
3. Jess has some conflicting feelings as he sets off for Washington, D.C., with Miss Edmunds. Describe Jess's feelings and explain why he's experiencing them.

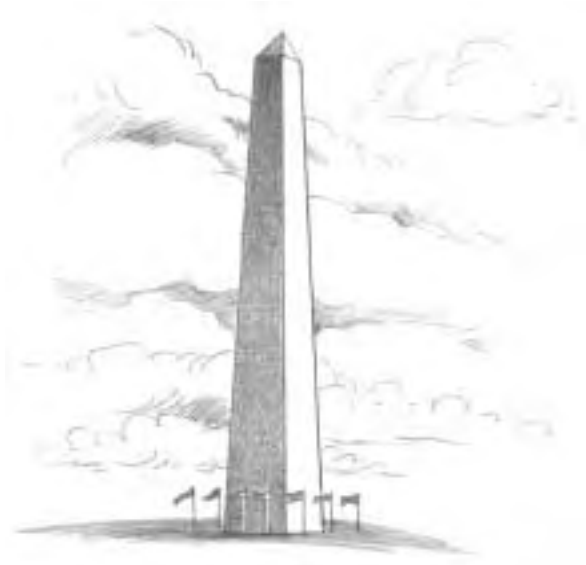
**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

☐ Prediction      ☐ Question      ☐ Observation      ☐ Connection

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Bridge to Terabithia*****Chapters 9–10****For Your Discussion Group**

- \* In these chapters, Jess experiences a number of contradictory feelings. Find and discuss various sections from these chapters in which Jess experiences the following feelings: trust and doubt, fear and courage, honesty and a feeling of being slightly dishonest, and happy relaxation and sudden shock.
- \* Now consider the titles of Chapters 9 and 10. How are they contradictory? How does the very end of Chapter 10 fit with the title of Chapter 9?
- \* Discuss your own contradictory feelings as you reach the end of Chapter 10. Tell what you visualize when Brenda says, “Your girl friend’s dead . . .”

**Writer’s Craft: Atmosphere**

**Atmosphere** is the general feeling or mood of a story. Writers create atmosphere by using imagery and descriptions. Readers can usually state the atmosphere in a word or two. In reading Chapter 9, you probably identify an atmosphere of threat, challenge, or dread as Jess tries to go to Terabithia during the rainstorms. Then, in Chapter 10 as Jess explores Washington with Miss Edmunds, the atmosphere changes. With your group, discuss the change, and list words or brief phrases that summarize it. Talk about how the atmosphere completely changes again in the last few paragraphs of Chapter 10.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Bridge to Terabithia* Chapters 11–12



### Reading Strategy: Recognizing Cause and Effect

In good stories, as in real life, one thing (the cause) leads to another (the effect).

For example, in *Bridge to Terabithia*,

Leslie's independence, imagination, and sense of fun have caused certain changes or effects in Jess: he feels freer to break away from his family's way of viewing life and to express his own artistic nature and imagination. Good readers pay attention to how the events in a story are related; they link causes and effects. Work with a partner to list a series of causes and effects you've discovered in the story so far.

### Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

**A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. What was the cause of Leslie's death? What effect does the news of her death have on Jess at first?
2. It's startling when a major character in a story dies, especially when you feel strongly about that character. Write about your reactions to Leslie's death. In your response, answer the following questions: Did you expect this to happen? Give reasons to support your answer. Does Leslie's death make sense to you in the context of the story? Explain why or why not. What were your first reactions when you learned that Leslie was dead?
3. Write about someone you have lost, either through death or some other kind of separation. What were your feelings at the time? How have you coped with those feelings as time has passed?

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

☐ Prediction      ☐ Question      ☐ Observation      ☐ Connection

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Bridge to Terabithia* Chapters 11–12



### For Your Discussion Group

- \* Psychologists say that when people experience a serious loss, they go through various stages of grief. Discuss how Jess goes through the following stages after Leslie's death:

**Denial:** The person refuses to accept that a terrible event has happened. How does Jess act after his family tells him Leslie is dead? What routine acts does he carry out as if nothing has happened?

**Anger:** The person becomes angry at the loved one who has died and at anyone who accepts this death. Discuss some ways in which Jess displays his anger.

**Guilt:** The person feels responsible for the death or feels that he or she could have prevented it in some way. Why does Jess feel guilty about or responsible for Leslie's death?

**Acceptance:** The person accepts the bitter facts of loss. Discuss the point in Chapter 12 in which Jess finally accepts the fact that Leslie is dead. How does Jess's cuddling up with P.T. symbolize both his loss and his acceptance of that loss?

- \* You might also discuss what a person like Jess might do after he has finally accepted his loss. Make some predictions about what Jess may do, and explain what your predictions are based on.

### Writer's Craft: Dialogue

**Dialogue** is the exact words that characters say to one another. Dialogue is easy for the reader to spot because the words are enclosed in quotation marks. It is often preceded or followed by words that tell how the speaker says these words or looks while speaking.

*Her eyes filled up with tears. "Leslie told me about you."*

As in everyday life, what characters say and how they say it help us understand them better. With your group, skim the chapters you've already read to identify and share examples of dialogue that shows how characters feel or think.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Bridge to Terabithia* Chapter 13

### Reading Strategy: Making Inferences

An inference is a conclusion that you reach after studying the facts supplied by the writer. In this chapter, for instance, Katherine Paterson doesn't tell you explicitly, or in so many words, that Jess is recovering from the death of his friend Leslie. Yet, with the facts that are given, you can infer, or reach a valid conclusion, that Jess is going to be all right. Write down some of the facts in the chapter that lead to this inference.



### Writing in Your Literature Response Journal

**A. Write about one of these topics in your journal. Circle the topic you chose.**

1. When Jess wakes up on Saturday morning, he seems ready to resume the task of milking Miss Bessie. What do you infer from this about Jess's state of mind? How has he changed since he first heard of Leslie's death? Do you think Jess still feels guilty? Support your answer with evidence from the story.
2. What does Jess accomplish as he acts out the role of King when he goes back to Terabithia? How do you think he feels after doing this?
3. Firm friends build strong bonds and connect in many different ways. What do you think Leslie learned from her friendship with Jess? What has Jess learned from his friendship with Leslie?

**B. What were your predictions, questions, observations, and connections as you read? Write about one of them in your journal. Check the response you chose.**

☐ Prediction

☐ Question

☐ Observation

☐ Connection



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Bridge to Terabithia* Chapter 13

### For Your Discussion Group

- \* The word *bridge* can refer to a concrete object such as a platform, a passageway, or a structure built across a river. The word *bridge* can also be a metaphor, a word that stands for or symbolizes something else. It can also mean going from one stage of life to another. Brainstorm as many metaphoric meanings as possible for the word *bridge* in the context of this story. Spur discussion by first considering the following question: What are some of the bridges Jess crosses in the story?
- \* How does Jess respond when May Belle gets scared on the tree bridge? What general characteristic does he show that he hasn't shown often before? From Jess's behavior during this incident, what metaphoric bridge can you conclude he's crossed?
- \* What inferences can you make about the future of Terabithia? Will the bridge—both real and metaphoric—be maintained, or will the kingdom fade away? Explain your response.



### Writer's Craft: Theme

In literature, a **theme** is an idea that the story conveys about life. Writers usually don't state their themes directly; in fact, they may not even be aware of all the themes of a book until it's completed. It's up to readers to discover the themes for themselves by putting together the incidents and ideas that the writer has presented. With your group, discuss the themes in *Bridge to Terabithia*. Also talk about other books you've read that have some of the same themes as this book.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Bridge to Terabithia*

### After Reading

Every good story, whether it's science fiction or realistic fiction or biography, contains the following: interesting characters, a problem to be solved, challenges to overcome and decisions to make, and a solution to the problem.

Good stories are moved along by the characters that inhabit them. As readers, we visualize characters in action, hear through dialogue what they say, and observe them changing and developing as the story unfolds. By the end of the story, readers have gotten to know a lot about these characters—certainly much more than they knew when the characters were first introduced.

For example, May Belle seems at first to be just a little pest. By the end of the story, we see her as a child who really loves Jess and is concerned about him.



- \* Choose four characters, other than Leslie, whom you've watched develop as you read *Bridge to Terabithia*.
- \* Imagine the four characters sharing their memories of Leslie and telling about how she changed their lives or what they remember about her. Write a reader's theater script in which the four characters talk about Leslie. Each of the characters should speak at least three or four times.
- \* After you've written your script, ask three classmates to present it with you. Choose roles, rehearse your reading a couple of times, and then present your reader's theater to the class or to another literature circle group.
- \* Get feedback. After your presentation, ask your audience to explain what they liked best about it and any further insights they got about Leslie and the characters you chose. Was there anything the characters said that was unclear, confusing, or unbelievable?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Individual Projects

1. *Bridge to Terabithia* was written in the 1970s, when the hippie way of life was in the news. Research this counter-culture movement. Your research might include interviews with people who were young during that time. Summarize what you find, then write how Leslie's family does and doesn't conform to the hippie idea of what life should be like.
2. Imagine that you're turning *Bridge to Terabithia* into a musical for a stage production. Write the lyrics, or words, for a theme song. You may also want to write music for your lyrics. Your lyrics should be in the form of a poem. Keep in mind that a theme song highlights a major idea in the story.
3. A memorial is often created to help people remember a person or an event. Design a memorial for Leslie that could be placed in Terabithia by Jess or that could be created by the students at school.



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Group Projects

1. With your group, conjure up a place like Terabithia—secret and special!—and write a description of it. In your description, answer the following questions: Where is this magic land located? What is its name? What do you do there? Who is allowed to enter the magic land? Why are they welcome? Who is not allowed to enter the magic land, and why not? What dangers might you face in your magic land? How does being a member of this magic land help you bring out the best in yourself?

After you've completed your description, read it to your classmates. What do they like best about it? What do they want to know more about? Revise your story according to your audience's input.

2. A perfect place, like Terabithia, is also called a *utopia*, from an ancient Greek word meaning "top" or "height." The idea of a utopia is nothing new. Through the ages, people have dreamed about and planned such places, and have even succeeded briefly in setting them up. Investigate real utopias, and write about them for your classmates. Conclude your report with how Terabithia resembles a utopia, and why it might last—unlike other utopias.



# Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet

Student	Helpful Contributions					Unhelpful Contributions				
	shares ideas	asks questions	encourages/ responds to others	listens well	keeps discussion on track	interrupts others	does not contribute to discussion	does not listen	distracts others	is not prepared
1.										
2.										
3.										
4.										
5.										
6.										