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Tuck Everlasting

by

Natalie Babbitt

1975



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Diane Clapsaddle

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The fictional town of Treegap, the wood, and the home of the Tucks in the year 1880 and in the year 1950.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Winnie Foster - Winnie is a ten-year-old girl who as an only child is overly protected and stifled with rules. She desperately wants to run away from this and her decision to leave her yard and go into the Wood sets into motion the plot of the story.

Mae Tuck - The mother of the Tuck family, Mae is very kind and compassionate. She is also quite untidy in her housekeeping, but a loving wife and mother nonetheless.

Angus Tuck - He is the father of the Tuck family and though outwardly gruff, he makes Winnie somehow love him the most of the entire family. He is very wise about drinking from the spring or telling anyone their secret.

Miles Tuck - He is the oldest Tuck child and appears to be about twenty-one or twenty-two years old. When he and Jesse leave home to seek a life away from their parents, he seems more responsible, holding such jobs as carpentry and blacksmithing.

Jesse Tuck - He is the youngest son of the Tuck family and stopped aging at 17. He is a free spirit who does what strikes him at the moment. He is quite handsome and he and Winnie fall in love.

The Man in the Yellow Suit - He is the villain of the story, a strange man who wears unusual clothing and is looking to find the spring, which will give him eternal life and make him a.....

Additional characters are outlined in the complete study guide.

CONFLICT

Protagonist - The protagonist of a story is the main character who traditionally undergoes some sort of change. He or she must usually overcome some opposing force. The protagonist is Winnie Foster who is only ten years old. She is at the stage of life where she is beginning to stretch her wings and look to the world outside her home. However, because she is an only child, her parents are reluctant to let her go, which.....

Antagonist - The antagonist of a story is the force that provides an obstacle for the protagonist. The antagonist does not always have to be a single character or even a character at all. The antagonist is the Man in the Yellow Suit who wants the secret of the spring so badly that he would cheat, lie, steal.....

Climax - The climax of a plot is the major turning point that allows the protagonist to resolve the conflict. The climax is Mae Tuck's escape from jail and Winnie's decision to help her no.....

Outcome - Winnie saves the Toad from a dog that would harm it and then uses the bottle of spring water Jesse had left her to keep it safe forever. She believes, if she wants to, she can find the spring when she is seventeen, drink from it, and then find Jesse. However, the Tucks return to Treegap in 1948 and.....

SHORT PLOT / CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

This story is a fantasy about a family named Tuck who accidentally stumble upon a spring in a wood, which has the ability to give eternal life. They don't realize at first what they have drunk until they realize that their bodies

are not aging and they cannot be hurt or harmed in any way. They travel quietly around the countryside; never staying in one place too long so that people will not realize their secret. Into this family comes.....

THEMES

The great circle of life and how we may be bound by its dictums, but it is for our own good - The most important theme of the novel involves the great circle of life and how we may be bound by its dictums, but it is for our own good. The author seems to be speaking about how death is just as much an integral part of life as living is. We are meant to be born, live, hopefully, a good life, and then die. To disrupt that cycle would have devastating consequences to our world. This is the ultimate lesson that Winnie learns, as shown by her decision to not drink from the spring.

Change / Metamorphosis - The theme of change or metamorphosis is also an important idea. The author especially emphasizes this when she chooses the Toad as Winnie's first friend. He represents through the cycles a toad experiences in its life the change we humans, too, must experience. We are meant to.....

Additional themes are identified in the complete study guide.

MOOD

Overall, the mood is one of the triumph of the human spirit. Despite several setbacks, the Tucks are saved and Winnie goes home a better person. There are moments of darkness when the Man in the Yellow Suit makes threatening demands on the Fosters and the Tucks, but the desire of the.....

BIOGRAPHY OF NATALIE BABBITT

Natalie Babbitt was born on July 28, 1932 in Dayton, Ohio, and grew up there. She said in an interview that she learned from the forays her husband and sister made into writing that it wasn't something you would want to pursue if you didn't like being alone, didn't like editing and revision, and if you couldn't give it your full attention. It took her many years to learn this, but eventually she would come to write many books for young readers. Her first project was a collaboration with her husband on *The Forty-Ninth Magician*, and she wrote thirteen more including *Tuck Everlasting* in 1975 and her most recent novel *Ouch!* In.....

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES / ANALYSIS

PROLOGUE

Summary

The Prologue is the author's opportunity to introduce her readers to her main theme – the circle of life. She begins the story in the first week of August, the dog days of summer, and she likens the month to the top of the Ferris wheel, if the wheel were the year. August sits at the top of the year, and during this time, people are often led to do things they are sure to be sorry for later.

She then explains that three events, seemingly unconnected, occur and come together in strange ways: Mae Tuck sets out on her horse for the edge of the village of Treegap as she does once every ten years to meet her sons; Winnie Foster loses her patience and thinks about running away; and a stranger appears at the Foster house looking for someone. At the center of these events is the wood, the hub of the wheel.

She cautions the reader that the hubs of wheels are fixed points and best left undisturbed. For without them, nothing holds together.

Notes

The thematic presentation in the very beginning is very simplistic, but very important. The author is about to

present a simple tale, but one filled with deep meanings. We are already presented with one: the idea of the wheel and its hub as representative of the ever continuance of life and its cycles.

CHAPTER ONE

Summary

The author introduces us to the idea of the road to Treegap. It had been trod out by cows who seemed to have a sixth sense about the wood. The creatures make their way and create their path by going around it, and so there is no path or road *through* the wood. As a result, we, the readers, are led to concentrate on the juxtaposition of the first house along the road, the road itself, and the wood. The wood and the house belong to the Fosters, but they never go there. Their daughter Winnie sometimes stands and looks at it, but she has never seen it.

The author tells us that it's a good thing that the cows were responsible for the wood's isolation, because if they had trodden a road through the woods, people would have come across the giant ash tree at its center. They would have seen the little spring that bubbles up among the tree's roots in spite of the pebbles that have been piled up there to conceal it. That would have been a disaster that would have made the earth tremble on its axis like a beetle on a pin.

Notes

It is important to understand the concept of life as a wheel and its hub as a fixed point. The sun is the hub of the solar system and so the hub of life on earth. The year is like a Ferris wheel ever turning until it reaches the apex just before it turns to the down side of the wheel. This apex is August, a strange month that is a reminder of heat, stillness, and a propensity to make the wrong decisions.

CHAPTER TWO

Summary

This chapter introduces us to the Tucks. Mae, the wife and mother, rises early to take the horse and wagon and meet her boys who are coming home. Her husband, Angus, prefers to stay in bed where he was having a wonderful dream where the whole family was in heaven and had never heard of Treegap. Mae overrides her husband's caution about going into Treegap by saying that she hasn't been there for ten years and no one will recognize her. She decides to husband, asking if he'll be alright, which prompts him to ask what in the world could possibly happen to him. She gets dressed and at the last minute tucks a music box into her pocket. It is the one pretty thing she owns, and she takes it with her everywhere. She adds a large straw bonnet at the last minute and puts it on while smoothing her hair at the same time. She doesn't look at a mirror, because her reflection has ceased to interest her. For Mae Tuck, her husband, and her two sons have looked exactly the same for the last 87 years.

Notes

The author uses foreshadowing to gradually lead the reader to the most fantastic of ideas: the Tucks haven't grown a day older than they were 87 years before. The foreshadowing includes a dream where they are all dead, the realization that Angus isn't afraid of being harmed, and no desire to look in a mirror. All of these examples would only make sense if we knew that the Tuck family is immortal.

CHAPTER THREE

Summary

At the same time that Mae Tuck is rising and planning to meet her sons, Winnie Foster is sitting on the grass just inside the fence around her house talking to a Toad who sits across the road. She tells it while throwing stones near it but not at it, that she has had enough – she's tired of being looked at all the time and bossed around by her parents and her grandmother. She knows that hover over her, because she is an only child, but she desperately wants something that's all hers and a new name that's not worn out from being called so much. She also tells the creature that she might decide to have him for a pet, but when he jumps a few more inches away

from her, it occurs to her that it shouldn't be cooped up any more than she wants to be. She decides she should run away.

Just at that moment, her mother calls for her, and Winnie obediently answers the call. The Toad begins to jump clumsily toward the wood, but Winnie calls after it that it should just wait until morning. It will see then that she is good at keeping her promise to run away.

Notes

This chapter is the second event that seems unrelated to Mae Tuck or the Man in the Yellow Suit. It introduces Winnie to the reader and presents her great desire to run away from the obedience, the rules, the calling out of her name, the hovering over her, and her lack of freedom. It also introduces the character of the Toad who just happens to be the only one Winnie can talk to. She has no friends and the adults in her life watch her constantly. The Toad, being a creature that begins as a tadpole and changes body and size (metamorphosis), represents the coming change that Winnie will experience. The cycles of life keep moving on.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Winnie Foster - She is a wonderful little ten-year-old girl who changes and grows up over the first week of August in the year 1880. She is just beginning that stage of her life where she will try to assert her independence and face the world on her own terms. She decides to break her parents' rule and go into the wood they own across the road. There she discovers Jesse Tuck and the spring of immortality that he begs her not to drink. She comes to know him and his family over two or three days time and learns to love them while they come to love her as well.

The Man in the Yellow Suit forces all of them to stand up against evil and save the.....

Mae Tuck - She is the mother of the immortal family and sincerely loves Winnie. Like her husband, she is sad that she will never die, but unlike him she accepts her fate and moves on to live forever in the best way she knows how. She is very different from Winnie's mother who is always.....

Angus Tuck - He is the one who is most affected by his immortality. He dreams often that he and his family are in heaven and have lived their lives, rather than being alive forever and impervious to harm. He envies the Man in the yellow Suit, because he has been able to die and he tells Winnie that he

Miles Tuck - He is the oldest Tuck son and the one who is most levelheaded. He is a carpenter and a blacksmith and tells Winnie that he wants to find a way to do something important even though he is going to live forever and no one must know that. He had been married when he discovered his.....

Jesse Tuck - He is the youngest son and the one who is most impetuous. He travels around doing whatever moves him like working in the fields or in a saloon. He is the first of the Tucks that Winnie meets and he is the one with whom she falls in love. He keeps her from drinking the water.....

The Man in the Yellow Suit - He is the villain of the story and seems to be a character reminiscent of the devil. He is greedy and evil and would destroy the world for financial gain. He is deliberately nameless, because he represents all the evil of the world and his destruction by a relatively powerless group of.....

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The author begins with a prologue, which sets the theme and opens clues to the mystery, which will follow. She then follows with 25 chapters, which explore how Winnie Foster “runs away” from a stifling home life only to meet up with the Tucks, a family that accidentally, 87 years before, stumbled upon a

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

The theme of **the great circle of life and how we may be bound by its dictums, but it is for our own good** is the most important of the book. The author is trying to present life as a cycle that is constantly changing and the year as a Ferris wheel with August as its apex. Her intent seems to be to present to her young readers the idea that death is as much a part of life as living is and that it is not to be feared. It is a natural part of the cycle. She shows these ideas in such images as: the Ferris wheel and her discussion of the importance of the hub of the wheel, Angus Tuck’s envy of the Man in the Yellow Suit’s death, Jesse’s desire to.....

The theme of **change or metamorphosis** is an especially prevalent theme. It begins with the Toad, Winnie’s first friend. A toad begins as a tadpole and gradually grows into a body with four legs. So it is a good symbol for the idea of change. It is always present as well wherever Winnie goes as a reminder to the reader that Winnie herself is experiencing a powerful metamorphosis in the first week of August in her tenth year. She begins as a somewhat spoiled and yet lonely girl who wants more than anything to.....

Additional themes are analyzed in the complete study guide.

AUTHOR’S STYLE

The author’s style is to present this story as a fantasy and yet to tell it in such a realistic way, that it seems possible. Winnie’s grandmother talks about elves and there are references to witchcraft. The Toad seems to have almost human qualities and the idea of immortality is in and of itself in....

RISING ACTION

The rising action begins with chapter one when the reader is introduced to the road, the wood, and Winnie’s cottage as well as the character of Winnie. We are also introduced to her.....

FALLING ACTION

The falling action involves the Constable’s discovery of Winnie in the jail cell, the Tucks’ escape, Winnie’s decision to use the bottle of spring water on the Toad and the Tucks’ return to

POINT OF VIEW

The point of view is third person omniscient. Because it is seen through the eyes of an all-knowing, all-seeing omniscient narrator, who is the author herself.

OTHER ELEMENTS

FORESHADOWING

There are several other literary devices that pop up at various times in the story. One of the most prevalent ones is **foreshadowing** which frequently presents clues of something that will happen later in the novel. Some examples of foreshadowing include:

1. The author tells us that August is the month when people make decisions they sometimes regret later and that three seemingly unconnected events are coming together to create new and perhaps dangerous situations. This foreshadows the events of the story as a whole.
2. Angus Tuck keeps having a dream where he and his family are in heaven. This foreshadows his desire to live a natural life that ends in death.....

IRONY

Another element that is important to note is **irony** – when something happens, or is seen, or is heard that we may know, but the characters do not, or that appears opposite of what is expected. Some examples of irony include:

1. It is ironic when Jesse tells Winnie he is 104, because she thinks he's joking and he really is 104.
2. It is ironic when the Man in the Yellow Suit calls the Tucks "criminals," because he is more of a criminal than the Tucks who have seemingly kidnapped Winnie.....

QUOTATIONS - IMPORTANT QUOTES AND ANALYSIS

The following quotations are important at various points in the story: (Edition used: Farrar, 1975)

1. *"The first week of 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."*

(pg. 3; this is an introduction to the theme of the story and the motif of the wheel.)

2. *"Fixed points they are (hubs), and best left undisturbed, for without them, nothing holds together. But sometimes people find this out too late."*

(pg. 4; this is the author's observation that life is like a wheel.)

3. *"And that would have been a disaster so immense that this weary old earth, owned or not to its fiery core, would have trembled on its axis like a beetle on a pin."*

(pg. 8; this is the author's point that the secret of the spring must never be revealed.).....

SYMBOLISM / MOTIFS / IMAGERY / SYMBOLS

Other elements that are present in this novel are **symbols and metaphors**. Symbols are the use of some unrelated idea to represent something else. Metaphors are direct comparisons made between characters and ideas. There are many symbols and metaphors used by the author such as:

1. That would have been a disaster that would have made the earth tremble on its axis like a beetle on a pin.
This comment compares the discovery of the spring by everyone to the destruction of the earth.
2. The Toad is a symbol of metamorphosis or change.
3. The music box symbolizes happiness and a touch of fantasy. It is also the tie.....

Another element found in this book is a motif. A **motif** is a recurring thematic element in the development of an artistic or literary work. There are some motifs in *Tuck Everlasting* as follows:

1. The most important motif is the idea of the wheel and the hub. The wheel, or the Ferris wheel, represents life and death as well as the turning of each year with the month of August at the apex. The spring is its opposite and represents danger to life on earth. For Winnie, it is the only choice she.....

IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

Title: *Tuck Everlasting*

Author: Natalie Babbitt

Date Published: 1975

Meaning of the Title: It refers to the family in the story who accidentally drink from a spring that makes them immortal.

Setting: Treegap, the Wood, and the Tucks cottage in 1880 and 1950

Protagonists: Winnie Foster and the Tuck family

Antagonist: The Man in the Yellow Suit and the human desire to live forever

Mood: Overall, the mood is one of the triumph of the human spirit. Despite several

STUDY QUESTIONS - MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ

1. The Ferris wheel symbolizes
 - a. pleasure and entertainment.
 - b. life and death.
 - c. Winnie's freedom.
2. The three seemingly unconnected events are:
 - a. Mae searching for the boys, Winnie deciding to run away and the Man in the Yellow Suit coming to Winnie's house.
 - b. The building of the new jail, Winnie running away, and Mae killing the Man.
 - c. The Toad hopping into the woods, Winnie meeting Jesse, and Winnie being kidnapped.....

ANSWER KEY

1.) b 2.) a 3.) b 4.) c 5.) b 6.) c 7.) a 8.) c 9.) c 10.) a 11.) c 12.) c 13.) a 14.) b 15.) b

ESSAY TOPICS - BOOK REPORT IDEAS

1. Explain the motif the wheel by using specific examples from the story.
2. Discuss the idea of metamorphosis and how it applies to Winnie and the Toad.
3. How is the wood the hub of the wheel in this story?.....

END OF SAMPLE MONKEYNOTES EXCERPTS

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