

Tuck Everlasting Study Guide

Tuck Everlasting by Natalie Babbitt

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Contents

Tuck Everlasting Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Overview.....	4
About the Author.....	5
Plot Summary.....	6
Prologue.....	8
Chapter 1.....	9
Chapter 2.....	10
Chapter 3.....	11
Chapter 4.....	12
Chapter 5.....	13
Chapter 6.....	15
Chapter 7.....	16
Chapter 8.....	17
Chapter 9.....	18
Chapter 10.....	19
Chapter 11.....	20
Chapter 12.....	21
Chapter 13.....	22
Chapter 14.....	23
Chapter 15.....	24
Chapter 16.....	25
Chapter 17.....	26
Chapter 18.....	27
Chapter 19.....	28

Chapter 20.....	30
Chapter 21.....	31
Chapter 22.....	32
Chapter 23.....	33
Chapter 24.....	34
Chapter 25.....	35
Epilogue.....	37
Characters.....	38
Objects/Places.....	41
Setting.....	42
Social Sensitivity.....	44
Literary Qualities.....	45
Themes.....	46
Style.....	48
Quotes.....	51
Adaptations.....	53
Topics for Discussion.....	54
Ideas for Reports and Papers.....	56
Further Study.....	57
Copyright Information.....	58

Overview

While avoiding the hyper-realism of so many recent novels for children and young adults, *Tuck Everlasting* nonetheless gives a believable and loving portrait of real people in a very difficult, if somewhat fantastic, situation. Winnie Foster is neither an angel nor an anti-hero.

She's simply a young girl with strengths and weaknesses; she is basically good, but far from perfect. The Tucks, at first glance, come across as little more than endearing, slightly mysterious country bumpkins, but we quickly realize, as Winnie does, that there is much more to them than is immediately apparent.

Angus and Mae Tuck are unlettered, but wise in their own way, and they have much to teach Winnie about life.

The central event of the novel—the Tucks offering Winnie immortality—is both intriguing and problematic. Should she accept the offer? Should she consider marrying Jesse Tuck and coming to live with them? Whether she herself chooses to live forever or not, should she keep their secret? The Tucks' slovenly but free lifestyle stands in obvious contrast with everything Winnie hates about her parents' and grandmother's prim, fenced-in, middle-class existence.

Winnie, however, must decide whether the freedom the Tucks represent is right for her. This decision is made even more complex when the unnamed stranger in the yellow suit makes an appearance and, in his overwhelming desire to gain control of the fountain of immortality, threatens both the Tucks and Winnie.

His death at Mae Tuck's hands and her impending execution on a charge of murder add the final components to what is already a difficult and compelling moral problem.

About the Author

Natalie Zane Moore was born on July 28, 1932, in Dayton, Ohio. Her ancestors on both sides came to North America in the 1600s and two of them, Isaac Zane, the White Eagle of the Wyandottes, and Zebulon Pike, the discoverer of Pike's Peak, were renowned adventurers and explorers. Others among her ancestors founded towns throughout West Virginia and Ohio.

Babbitt's father, Ralph Moore, worked in the field of labor relations, but, due in part to the Great Depression and in part, perhaps, to his wife Genevieve's desire that the family better themselves, he switched jobs frequently throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Babbitt has often emphasized the enormous effect that these moves from city to city had on the formation of her personality and on her later writing. Her stories tend to be about young people who, for one reason or another, are lost or separated from home.

In 1954, soon after graduating from Smith College with a degree in art, Natalie Moore married Samuel Babbitt, who became a successful university administrator, holding positions at Yale, Vanderbilt, Kirkland College (where he was president), and Brown. She settled down to the life of a university administrator's wife, hostessing parties and raising three children. In 1964 Babbitt, frustrated and bored, read Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, a book that reawakened her long dormant desire to be an artist.

Her first professional publication, *The Forty-Ninth Magician*, a picture book of her illustrations with text by her husband, appeared in 1966 and was well received. Babbitt wrote and illustrated two more picture books, *Dick Foote and the Shark* (1967) and *Phoebe's Revolt* (1968), before beginning work on her first children's novel, *The Search for Delicious* (1969), which was chosen by the *New York Times* as the best novel of the year for nine- to twelve-year-olds.

Natalie Babbitt has said that she doesn't consider herself a professional writer, by which she means that she doesn't write primarily for the money.

This independence from the financial side of the publishing business has allowed her to craft, slowly and carefully, a series of fine works for older children and young adults. *Kneeknock Rise* (1970) was a Newbery Honor Book. *The Devil's Storybook* (1974) was nominated for the National Book Award. In 1976 *Tuck Everlasting* won the Christopher Award; and her life's work in children's literature earned her the important George G. Stone Award in 1978. In 1982 *Herbert Rowbarge* appeared, Babbitt's personal favorite among all her works, and in 1987 *The Devil's Other Storybook*, a sequel to her earlier, award-nominated collection, was published. Babbitt and her husband currently divide their time between homes in Providence, Rhode Island, and Cape Cod. Virtually all of her books remain in print.

Plot Summary

The book opens with an analogy of a Ferris wheel, the seasons and life. Everything is a cycle and everything is changing, even when some things will return to nearly what they were before, they are never quite the same. The prologue also hints at the chance of people meeting and changing the outcome of all involved. It sets the stage for the reader to be carried away.

Winnie Foster feels trapped and dreams of the day she can gain freedom from her family. She thinks of running away, but backs out at the last minute, knowing she has nowhere to go and no one to help her. In a way, her dream is realized when she runs into Jesse Tuck.

Jesse, his brother Miles and his mother, Mae, kidnap Winnie. She is not scared and does not yell for help. Although she wants to go home, she is finally getting to experience an adventure, freedom; she decides to go without hesitation.

They pass a stranger but don't give him any thought as the group makes its way to a small river so they can talk a little more to Winnie. Then they proceed to the home that Mae shares with her husband and their sons, when they are home. The stranger has decided to follow them.

Angus Tuck greets Mae and Winnie at the door. He is excited to see a child that can change and grow. After they all eat, he takes Winnie out on the pond in a rowboat and tells her why he feels their lives are cursed. Mae, too, gives Winnie the feeling their lives are cursed. In the course of the next few hours, Jesse discloses his perception that their lives are actually blessed, while Miles continually changes his mind.

During this time, the stranger has put into motion circumstances that cannot be stopped. He takes over the Foster's woods, where Winnie met the Tucks and leads the constable to the Tuck's home. The stranger tries to take Winnie back to her family by force. Mae however, decides he is not going anywhere and hits him in the head with the butt of a shotgun. The constable sees this and takes Mae to jail and Winnie home.

Winnie knows it is her fault that Mae is in jail and wants to help. She gets the chance when Jesse comes to her fence to talk with her privately. He asks her several times to drink from the spring when she reaches the age of seventeen, so they can be married and travel the world. She does not answer, but does give him an idea that will help with their escape. She will replace Mae in the jail and give them time to get away.

She meets up with Jesse on the night of the jailbreak and they make the switch. She hears the sounds of the music box drifting into the night. When she is discovered in the cell in the morning, the constable is livid. He yells at her, but eventually turns her over to her parents. Although they understand why she did it, they confine her to the yard and house. She pays for what she did, but at least her friends, the Tucks, are safe.

Seventy years later, Mae and Tuck return to Treegap. Everything has changed, but they find the headstone of their beloved Winnie, who chose life and death over immortality.

Prologue

Prologue Summary

It is August and is extremely hot. The seasons run through the year like a wheel spinning. August is at the top, seeming to stand still and offer no relief. This is the time people make decisions and take action without considering the consequences.

Once during this time, near the village of Treegap, three seemingly unrelated situations occurred. The woods by Treegap became the catalyst of these circumstances. It was that "hub" of individual actions that brought the three situations together.

Prologue Analysis

The author is setting the stage for the story. By using the analogy of the ferris wheel, the author gives the reader the idea that all things operate in a cycle. This story involves three different cycles that converge with one another and the results are life changing.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Cows had created the road to Treegap. It meandered through the field, but as it reached the woods before the village, it arched out around the woods before going toward the town. On the other side of the woods stood the first house of Treegap. It was majestic, but cold and unwelcoming, surrounded by an iron gate. The other houses leading into the village and the village itself, were more hospitable.

The woods belonged to the Fosters, the same family who owned the majestic, cold house. People of the village did not go into the woods because of the Fosters and possibly because of the air of otherworldliness the woods exuded. Winnie Foster had never been in the woods and as far as she knew, no other Fosters had ever gone into the woods either. All the Fosters stayed within the four-foot iron fence that surrounded their house.

The cows, for some reason, do not make the road through the trees, which is a good thing. For unbeknownst to the people of Treegap or the Fosters, if the road led through the woods, then the unknown spring under a very big ash tree would be found and that would be devastating.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Here the author introduces the woods and the town of Treegap. This wood will be the center of the conflict, that much is known by the reader. By mentioning that the cows avoid the woods, it becomes apparent that the cows must know something the people in the area do not know. It is the large ash tree and the spring near it that the cows want to avoid, but why it is to be avoided is not known. If an animal does not like a pond, woods, or flower, many country people will leave that pond, woods, or flower alone. It is believed that animals can sense things that humans cannot and the author is using this fact to explain the woods of Treegap.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The same August day, Mae Tuck awoke and decided to go to the woods to meet her sons, Miles and Jesse. She always tried to go there on this day, every ten years, for that is how long the boys stay away.

Mae woke her husband, reminding him that their sons were returning. He was upset because she had disturbed him from a wonderful dream where they were all in heaven and had "never heard of Treegap." Mae argued with Tuck briefly about the dream, telling him that he should not bother even thinking that way, because it would never come true. He ignored her as she prepared to leave. He warned her to be careful because she might be recognized, but she scoffed at his warning and finished getting ready to leave.

When she was ready to go, she grabbed her music box and put it in her pocket. She always kept her music near to her. She put her hair into a bun without using her mirror. Her reflection would be fine; it had not changed in eighty-seven years.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The author introduces Mae and Tuck to the reader. These two people are obviously one part of the three parts that will meet at the woods. The reader is left to wonder what or who is the third.

The author's mention of Mae's reflection remaining the same for eighty-seven years is a foreshadowing of what part of the problem will be. There is something going on in the woods by Winnie's home. The reader begins to wonder if this has anything to do with Mae and her unchanging reflection.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Winnie Foster was the only child of the Fosters. She was sitting in the grass by the fence talking to a toad about running away, telling him she was definitely going to do it soon. Eventually, her mother and grandmother called her into the house. But before she said good-bye to the toad, she finished her one-sided conversation. She decided she would like him for a pet, but only for a moment, because as she thought more about it, she did not want to cage anything. She did not want any animal to feel as she did, caged by her family.

As she left the toad, she reiterated her vow about running away. She told the toad that she would probably be running away the next morning before anyone woke up.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Winnie was briefly introduced before, but now the reader knows that she is a young girl who feels trapped in her home. She wants to escape from her four-foot iron cage. By knowing that Winnie wants to escape and that Mae is coming to the woods, the reader can assume the two will meet, but how it will turn out is still unknown. The reader is still waiting for the third party to this story to appear and that may shed more light on the events.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Winnie was outside again that evening catching fireflies, when a stranger in a yellow suit called a greeting to her. She responded, but was reminded of her grandfather's death by the black ribbon hanging on the front door and tried to act somberly.

The stranger asked her questions about people in the area and she admitted that her family had been here a long time, but she knew of no other people. She told him that her father might know.

Her grandmother appeared and curtly told the stranger to leave, because they knew no one and did not want to know anyone. She was distracted, as soon as she finished her statement, by a melody that sounded like tinkling bells coming from the woods. She exclaimed excitedly to Winnie that it was elf music and that the elves had returned. Winnie thought it sounded like a music box and told her grandmother so, but her grandmother refused to believe it. She stated it had been years since she had heard the music and wanted to tell Winnie's father it had returned. She made sure the gate was locked before turning back toward the house and pulling Winnie with her.

The stranger left the gate as the moon rose. He walked down the road whistling the tune coming from the woods.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The reader is introduced to the third part of the situation, the stranger in the yellow suit. The stranger and Winnie meet and the reader must now wait for Mae to be introduced into this scenario. The reader knows that Mae is in the woods. Winnie, her grandmother and the stranger hear the music from her music box, although the grandmother believes the music is from elves. The time has come for all the individual wheels to come together. The reader still does not know how the three will meet, or the outcome of their meeting, but there is foreshadowing that things are not going to be as harmonious as they have been in the past.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

When Winnie awoke the next morning, she knew she would not run away that day. She had decided she had nowhere to go and no way of getting basic necessities. It was just not possible to break away from her cage. Also, Winnie was afraid of leaving. However, she did decide to slip out of the yard and see the woods. She wondered if the toad would be out by the fence this morning as she made her way to the fence and finalized her decision about visiting the woods.

Winnie had just gotten into the woods and was looking at the leaves and animals when she saw the toad. She told him that she had taken her first step to freedom. He seemed to nod before jumping away. She felt as if the toad had been waiting there for her, to see if she really would run away. She heard the music again from the night before and decided to take a look at the elves playing the music.

She walked further into the woods and saw a large ash tree. Then she saw a young man sitting on the ground, leaning against the trunk of the tree. She watched him play with a pile of pebbles and when he moved the last one, water spouted from the ground. He leaned over, got a drink and sat back down before realizing he was being watched.

He called to Winnie and she moved forward toward him. Jesse introduced himself to Winnie. She asked his age and he told her he was 104, but she did not believe him. She asked again and this time he told her seventeen, which she believed.

She told him she wanted a drink from the spring because she was extremely thirsty, but he refused to let her have any water and placed his foot over the small opening of the spring. She insisted on drinking from the spring, saying the spring belonged to her family. Luckily, Miles and Mae arrived to find Winnie kneeling in front of Jesse who was standing on the spring.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Winnie meets her toad just inside the woods. He seems to be illustrate that Winnie will never run away. She wants her freedom, but wants the security of her stable home too, just as the toad stays outside the fence, but near enough to see her.

Winnie meets Jesse and does not believe he is 104 years old. However, she does believe he is seventeen. The reader doing the math from the introduction of Mae will know that although Jesse looks seventeen, if he is related to Mae in some way, he may truly be 104 years old. The object of the spring is obviously a problematic issue for Winnie and the Tucks as Mae and Miles show up. For whatever reason, the boys and their mother did not want to be discovered, but Winnie found them and now she will

have to learn and keep their secret. However, the reader is still unsure how the stranger will fit into this scenario.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Winnie was picked up and placed on Mae's horse and the group ran from the woods. Jesse and Miles ran on either side of Winnie, with Mae leading the horse. Winnie realized she was escaping, or rather being kidnapped. She was free either way. They all begged her not to say anything, or yell to anyone. They promised not to hurt her and were taking her away just to explain things to her.

As they broke through the trees, the stranger from the night before was standing on the road. Mae made an excuse as they ran past him and finally, took cover in some scrub bushes by the stream. They all sat down to rest and began to tell Winnie the explanation of why she could not drink from the spring. When Winnie started crying, Mae took out her music box to try to subdue the tears. Winnie recognized the music immediately and realized it was not elves. She told them about her grandmother's idea that the music was made by elves. Jesse finally got Winnie to understand they were her friends and they needed her help.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The stranger's appearance on the stretch of road at the exact moment Mae, Jesse, Miles and Winnie leave the woods has all three individual cycles in place. The reader assumes the Tucks have created the problem, but Winnie is almost willingly going with them, that it creates a question of whether the Tucks are actually the problem. The fact that the Tucks are scared and only want Winnie to understand why, makes the reader question their motives again. Maybe the Tucks really are just trying to protect something. They are building trust with Winnie through caring and through the music box. Once the trust is gained, the stranger becomes the problem.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The Tucks told Winnie of how they came to find the spring. Each one of them had taken a drink from the water: Jesse, Miles, Mae, Tuck and the horse. The cat had refused to drink from the spring and although he lived a long life, he eventually died. However, the rest of them never did, even when they had accidents that would normally cause death. They told her of the accidents and the lack of injuries from these accidents that led Tuck to shoot himself to see if their new-found understanding of their life was correct. They had stopped aging and were never going to die.

Miles told Winnie about his wife and children. She left him and took the children, believing that he was working with the devil. The whole community began talking about them as witches and said that they were cavorting with Satan so they packed their belongings and left.

Mae explained Tuck's theory of the spring, but said that he was not sure; it was just a theory. One thing they did know was that no one else could ever know about the spring. It would be devastating, not only to the person who drank from the spring, but to the entire world and history itself.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The author tells of accidents that Jesse and Miles incurred without injury, which, under normal circumstances, would have caused death. This leads to Tuck testing his theory that the family had become unchanging and were never going to die. He proved his theory when he shot himself in the heart, but was not injured and did not die. Tuck did not know why the spring held those powers. He could never prove that theory.

The group tries to explain to Winnie that knowledge of the spring would be bad. However, Mae knows that she has to take Winnie to Tuck so that he can explain it all to her. They have to be sure that she will never tell anyone about this spring, so that the Tucks will be protected.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Mae, Miles and Jesse feel relieved to have finally told someone their secret. They realize that others may have also taken a drink from the spring and share their problem. They have never met anyone with the same secret, however. To Winnie, this was a fairytale and she did not believe in fairytales.

Mae pushed the group to leave. She told Winnie that they would return her to her family, but that Tuck had to talk with her first. Mae promised again to bring Winnie home the following day. Winnie knew there was no changing their minds, so she changed hers and decided to enjoy this adventure and her freedom, while it lasted.

As they traveled, they shared their breakfast with her and were all glad she was with them. She realized, during the long trip to their home, that they may be crazy, but they were her friends and would not hurt her.

Unfortunately, no one notices the stranger hiding in the bushes with them, listening to their secret and then following them to their home.

Chapter 8 Analysis

The relief of telling the secret is apparent when they finish telling Winnie. They have had to harbor this secret unwillingly, to protect others from their fate. They have to move and never settle down, for fear of people accusing them of devil worship, or finding out about the spring. They do all this, throughout their existence, to protect the world.

Winnie's acceptance of the freedom is the acceptance of knowing she can do what she wants. She misses her family but decided to take the adventure in stride. The stranger eavesdrops and learns the secret, then follows the group home.

The author is preparing the reader for the crash of the wheels. It has become obvious that the stranger is not as nice as he portrayed himself when he first met Winnie. However, nothing may be as it seems. The author keeps the tension high and keeps the surprises coming to ensure the reader cannot guess the next set of occurrences.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Mae insisted Winnie take her hat to protect her from the sun. They walked through fields and over hills. Winnie walked a while, rode the horse and was carried by Miles. Finally, Jesse announced they were home then he and Miles raced to the pond beside a little house.

When Mae and Winnie finally arrived at the front door, Tuck was standing there. The boys had told him of the child. Mae introduced Tuck to Winnie and a smile came to Tuck's face as he told Winnie how glad he was that she was there with them.

Mae told him that Winnie knew the secret and Tuck reinforces the story by saying her discovery of them was one of the finest things to happen in about eighty years.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Tuck's smile is appropriate and cherished. The reader knows that Tuck does not find much to make him smile. He dreams of a death that will never come, but he sees something in this little girl that makes him feel truly alive again.

The author uses Jesse's announcement that they are home to emphasize that the boys have returned and that Winnie is part of their family even if only for a short time. Winnie and the Tuck's seem to be happy, even with the circumstances surrounding their meeting.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Winnie's existence, to this point, had been one of order and cleanliness. The Tuck's house was not orderly and was not very clean. It was not dirty, but had cobwebs, dust and things strewn all over. It was far from what she was used to, but she thought it was homey and liked it.

She followed Mae to the loft where Miles and Jesse sleep when they are home. Mae explained to Winnie that the boys leave for ten years, working and saving money. Then they return home at the scheduled time and sometimes have money to help Mae and Tuck. The boys tend to strike out on their own, rarely going to a village together or living nearby one another when they are away from home. They always return to create a happy family, at least for a while, before leaving again.

Mae continued her explanation by telling Winnie that she and Tuck make things to sell. After about twenty years in one place, they move again to ensure no one finds out their secret. Mae stated that she was not sure if their lives were blessed or cursed by the spring, but they go on with their existence the best they can.

Miles and Jess ran into the house and up into the loft. Mae tried to stop them, telling them Winnie was up there, but when they emerged at the top of the stairs, they were still fully dressed and dripping with water. She told them to change and come down for dinner. She and Winnie left the loft.

Chapter 10 Analysis

The author uses Mae to give a brief history of the Tuck's life since they have realized their dilemma. Although she does not come out and say it, Mae insinuates that they no longer live, but merely exist. This is very important. Mae does not know if their existence is a blessing or a curse, which means that the Tucks may have thought it was a blessing at first, but after all these years are beginning to realize that it is a curse. Mae does not say it straight out, but it is obvious from her conversation, that it is how she feels.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Winnie had never eaten in the way the Tuck's ate, in the sense that they ate in the parlor and not at a table. She watched to see what rules she needed to follow, but the only rule that became apparent was that they did not talk. Unfortunately, this quiet time allowed Winnie to think and the thinking began to scare her. The different ways they did things, the crazy story, the kidnapping. She told them she wanted to go home. Miles tried to calm Winnie down by offering to take her out in the rowboat. Jesse said he would take her out, but the argument stopped when Tuck gave the final word that he needed to talk to her, so he was taking her out.

It became apparent to Mae that something was bothering Tuck. She was right in her feelings. He felt something bad was going to happen very soon and he wanted to talk to Winnie immediately to make sure she understood everything before that something happened. It was during this dinner conversation that the stranger was mentioned and Winnie told them that he had stopped to talk to her by her fence the night before. The feeling of rushed necessity intensified as soon as she said it.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Winnie is tired and scared. She wants to go home, but even as she tells the Tucks this, she knows it will be impossible before morning. Tuck still has to talk to her. He has been a little anxious this entire evening. He knows something is going to happen. As they discuss if anyone saw them in the woods, Winnie mentions the stranger. Tuck knows he has to talk to Winnie immediately. The author gives the reader another clue about the bad situation that will follow. The reader now knows that the stranger will possibly destroy the Tucks and perhaps Winnie, as the three individual cycles mesh more closely together.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Tuck took Winnie out on the pond in the little rowboat. He rowed to the far side of the pond, where the little boat got stuck on some roots and could no longer move in the current. He used the stuck boat to help him explain their situation, hoping Winnie would understand. He tried to explain life as a wheel and that from the spring had taken the Tucks off the wheel. He wanted Winnie to understand that they no longer changed and therefore no longer lived. They had been taken off the wheel and put to the side just to watch.

Winnie was suddenly faced, not only with their secret, but with her own mortality. She did not want to die, but Tuck said that dying was part of living and life was worth living. He had to get her to see that the Tucks merely existed, but have not truly lived in many years. He explained that would give anything to grow old and die, but knew it would never happen.

Suddenly Miles appears on the far shore, yelling. Winnie and Tuck can barely hear what he is saying; the horse has been stolen.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The author has Tuck using the wheel in his explanation to Winnie about life. The wheel of life has stopped for the Tucks, but continues for everyone else. The wheel is used throughout the entire story to show how everything fits together. Tuck tells her that the wheel is all just actions on the path to change and death in a person's existence. He would gladly anticipate death if he were allowed to finish living out his normal life. The author is trying to alleviate fears of death, but also to remind people to live their lives and not just exist.

The discovery of the stolen horse is the beginning of the conflict between the Tucks and the stranger, but the reader is unsure how Winnie will fit into this scenario.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

It was the middle of the night when the stranger tied the Tuck's horse to the fence at the Foster's home. The gate was open and the lights were still on, just as he knew they would be. He went to the door and knocked. When Winnie's grandmother answered, he informed her that he knew where Winnie had been taken.

Chapter 13 Analysis

The stranger is the antagonist of the story. He will create the problems the Tucks will face very shortly. The author has hinted about the stranger, but until this moment, the reader is cannot be sure of his role. Another question is how Winnie fits into these circumstances. She is an unknown factor, if she is a factor at all. The author creates this question with the stranger going to Winnie's house to speak to her parents.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Since it was night, there was no use looking for the horse until morning so they all got ready for bed. Mae prepared the sofa for Winnie and tucked her in before retiring herself. Winnie laid there unable to sleep. The sofa was uncomfortable and she was still in her day clothes. Mae had offered her a nightshirt but Winnie had refused.

She laid there listening to the sounds of the night and finally began to relax. Mae came over and asked how she was and if she had "a good talk with Tuck." She apologized to Winnie about her family not being very good hosts and said that they never had visitors. She hesitated a moment, then said she wished they had a child like her and then returned to her own bed.

Tuck came out next to make sure Winnie was fine. He told her to yell if she needed anything. He, too, mentioned how long it had been since a growing, changing child had been with them. He kissed her check and returned to bed.

Winnie was confused. They had freed her and scared her. They were criminals and yet they cared about her wellbeing. Then Jesse arrived at the sofa with a plan. He told her that she should drink from the spring when she was seventeen. Then she would be like him and they could get married and see the world together. He told her to think about it and returned to bed. Winnie, more confused then ever, finally fell asleep a half an hour later.

Chapter 14 Analysis

It is obvious to the reader that Mae and Tuck believe their secret is a curse and Jesse sees it as a blessing, an opportunity to live without fear. The author makes a point of showing the reader that the Tuck's genuinely care for Winnie and that she is beginning to care for them.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The stranger had the attention of Winnie's mother, father and grandmother. He told how he had followed her kidnappers to their home and portrayed them as illiterate and dangerous. Then he told them his plan. He offered to take the constable to find Winnie, in return for Mr. Foster signing the woods over to him. He emphasized his stance: no woods, no Winnie. He left the Fosters no choice in the matter.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The reader becomes aware that the stranger is the nemesis. However, he has not divulged everything. It is obvious there is a reason he wants the woods, but the reader has no way of knowing why at this time.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

The constable and the stranger started out as soon as Mr. Foster had prepared the paperwork for the stranger, giving him the woods. The constable complained about being woken up in the middle of the night, after searching for Winnie all day. He then began to complain about his horse not being strong and fast. His suspicions of the stranger finally became apparent and he asks the stranger why he did not report what he saw immediately.

The stranger told him the same story: that he wanted to see where they were taking Winnie first and then he returned immediately. He added that he had just purchased the woods from his good friends the Fosters, in an effort to build credibility with the constable.

The constable accepted the explanation and then prattled on about how he did not think the Fosters would ever sell the woods, being the proud, first family of Treegap. The stranger did not answer. The constable then told the stranger about his 15-year career as constable for the town of Treegap, but mentioned that all the serious crimes were handled in Charleyville. He explained that the gallows in Treegap had never been used.

Eventually the stranger tired of the constable. He said he feared for the child's safety and wanted to ride ahead the twenty miles and keep watch until the constable could arrive. The constable agreed with the plan. The stranger gave him detailed directions to the home and rode off.

Chapter 16 Analysis

The author gives the story a twist here. The reader begins to wonder why the stranger wants to go ahead. They know he is up to no good, but is he working with the Tucks? It is hard to imagine when the prior circumstances seemed impromptu. The author has also portrayed this stranger as a man willing to wait until the time is right, but he is also a man of action. It is uncertain whether he will act, or just watch.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Winnie woke early and was looking out of the window as Miles walked down the stairs. She had hoped it would be Jesse, but when Miles offered to take her fishing, she immediately accepted.

Once out on the pond, Miles told her about his son and daughter. She asked why he never told them about his condition and never looked for them. His answer was that it was best this way. During the conversation, Miles handed Winnie a fishing pole. The pole jerked in her hands and then went slack. Miles continued with his tale about how his daughter would be about eighty now and his son would be around eighty-two. He also explained that he wanted to do or find something important one day. Winnie had the same dream and identified with him. Then Miles' fishing pole bent and he brought the trout into the little rowboat.

Winnie just looked at the fish. She was having trouble dealing with her own mortality and the mortality, or immortality of others. She made Miles throw the fish back. He understood her anxiety and they returned to the house.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The author gives the reader insight into Miles view of his life. There are times he sees his immortality as a blessing and other times he sees it as a curse. He is still trying to understand it in his own mind. This becomes apparent when Winnie tells him to put the fish back. He understands her confusion over the thought of living forever and the idea of death.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

The Tucks and Winnie were sitting down to a pancake breakfast when Jesse finally arrived at the table. They were discussing that the fish were not biting this morning, when there was a knock on the door. Miles offered to get the door, but Mae insisted that she would answer it. As she opened the door, Winnie recognized the man standing at the door as the stranger. He introduced himself and asked, very politely, to come in.

Chapter 18 Analysis

The reader now knows that the Tucks do not know this man so he cannot be working with them. It is also apparent that he has no intention of watching the house until the constable arrived. So the reader must consider that there may be more to this man and his schemes than meet the eye.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

When the stranger stepped into the house, he immediately told Winifred that she was safe now and he had come to take her home, but Tuck insisted that they would be the ones to take her home. Eventually, after several comments back and forth, Tuck asked the man to explain himself. Although neither man was angry, the tension between the Tucks and this man was very heavy. Even Winnie could feel it and she stayed by Tuck.

The stranger told his story explaining that when he was a young child living west of Treegap, his grandmother had told him of a friend that had come to stay with her for a short time. She had two children, a boy and a girl and the children had played with his mother. The friend had told his grandmother of the strange family she had married into; she believed them to be witches, because the whole family, including her husband, never seemed to age. Mae jumped up and confronted the stranger; Tuck followed her telling the man to get to the point.

The stranger continued his story. He explained how he had studied philosophy, metaphysics and medicine but found nothing to explain a family that never aged. When he returned to his grandmother after his studies were complete, he brought her a music box as a present. His grandmother suddenly remembered the mother of the strange family had a similar music box. His mother knew the song from playing with the children all those years before and taught him the melody.

Twenty years later, the stranger began to look for the family again. He explained how he had heard the melody his mother taught him several nights before in the wood behind the Foster's home. He then told them how he had seen Mae and the boys taking Winifred away with them, so he followed, heard everything he needed to hear, found out where they were and returned to the Fosters on the Tuck's horse. He finished by saying the Fosters had given him the woods in exchange for returning the daughter.

Tuck called the man a horse thief and asked the purpose of all of this. The stranger explained his scheme of bottling the water in the spring and selling it to worthy people for a very large sum. He insinuated that the Tucks were not worthy people several times during this conversation. He told them he wanted their help with advertising and, of course, he would pay them.

Jesse had heard enough. He could not believe this man wanted them to be "freaks" for him to make a profit. The family jumped up and all started telling him not to tell anyone about the spring. The stranger was now angry. He grabbed Winnie by the arm very hard and started dragging her from the house. Winnie fought the whole time, screaming that she would not go with him.

The stranger opened the door and started to leave with Winnie, when Mae told him to leave the child. She held Tuck's old shotgun like a bat. The man called them stupid and told them they could not stop him. He continued by saying that he would make Winifred drink from the spring and use her. Mae took the gun and hit him on the back of his head. He fell to the ground as the constable came through the trees and saw the end of the argument.

Chapter 19 Analysis

The three wheels have come together. It is obvious that the happiness that had once followed each wheel has been disrupted. The Tucks truly care for Winnie, which becomes apparent when Mae strikes the stranger. Winnie and the Tucks know that no one can ever find out about the spring and they must do everything in their power to protect it.

The author has built the stranger up with an air of mystery, but the plan that he divulges to the Tucks is completely evil and is what would be expected of him. There is a surprise, though, when he threatens to use Winnie in his scheme. From this encounter with the Tucks, the reader sees the stranger as more evil and greedy than before.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

The constable announced the man was not dead, but that he needed to be taken into the house. Mae explained she had done it because the stranger was taking Winnie against her will. The constable could not comprehend what Mae was saying and told them they were kidnappers. Winnie spoke up and stated she had come with them of her own free will.

Finally, the constable understood, but he still had to take Mae to jail, because she hit the man. If he dies, she will be tried for murder and executed. He took Mae and Winnie, told the men that a doctor would be coming out shortly and left. The men took the stranger into the house.

Before the group left, Winnie had told Tuck, "Everything's going to be all right." She knew she was going home, but that was far from her mind. All she could think about was that Mae could not go to the gallows, because she could not die.

Chapter 20 Analysis

The stranger is out of the way, although it may not be forever. The author has made Mae a martyr. She hits the man to save Winnie, her family and the world. Winnie has accepted the Tucks and decides that she will need to help them, Mae in particular.

The author has incorporated Winnie into the Tuck's life. She is one of them, in a matter of speaking and the reader sees the friendship that has brought them together by chance.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Winnie sat in her rocking chair by her bedroom window. Her family had doted on her from the moment the constable brought her home. She told them about the Tucks and said that they are her friends. She asked her parents if they had really given the stranger the woods. Her father admitted he had and she told them what Mae had done to the stranger. Her father immediately said something about getting the woods back, but stopped short of finishing the sentence. Winnie finished it for him, acknowledging that the woods would be theirs again if the stranger died. She said the sentence without emotion. They knew she had changed.

She had changed. There were things that were hers alone, that she only shared with the Tucks. She watched the night sky hoping for rain, hoping the stranger would live and Mae would be saved. The constable arrived at the house and Winnie crept out to the stairs to hear what was being said. The constable told Mr. Foster that the stranger had died and since he had witnessed the incident, Mae would hang.

Winnie overheard the entire conversation. She crawled into bed understanding that Mae had killed the man because she had to. She did it to protect her family and Winnie. Winnie realized then that she had to do something to keep Mae from the gallows. She just did not know what she needed to do.

Chapter 21 Analysis

The author changes things around now. The stranger is out of the way, but the Tucks are now in need of protection. As they protected Winnie, she will now protect them. There is also a resolution involving Winnie. The author lets this resolution come through, when Winnie finishes her father's sentence about death. Although the reader is not sure about how she is dealing with things, they know that she has a better understanding of life than most people.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Winnie's family had changed from the experience, too. When she announced she was going outside, they told her to be careful and to come in if it got too hot, but they did not insist she stay indoors. She walked to the gate and looked at the worn earth. She thought of Mae in the jail and compared her confinement to Mae's.

As she stood there, she saw the toad on the other side of the street. She worried for him and went to get him a drink. She asked her grandmother for a dish of water for the toad. Her grandmother balked at first, but then gave in to Winnie's request. She followed Winnie as Winnie carried the bowl. However, when they got to the place the toad had been, he was gone. She returned to the yard and poured the bowl of water on the parched earth by the gate. Her grandmother returned to house now that Winnie was safely back in the yard. She asked Winnie not to stay out much longer and Winnie agreed.

She sat on the ground and began to think about how she could help Mae. She was not there long before Jesse appeared. He told her how they were going to break Mae out of jail that evening and then leave Treegap. After telling Winnie the plan, he told her a different plan as he handed her a bottle of water. He told her again to drink it when she was seventeen and to come find them. He would leave clues. He asked her to say she would do it and look for them in seven years. Winnie never really responded, but she took the bottle.

She realized, as she sat there talking with Jesse, what she could do to help Mae. She told him she would take Mae's place in the cell. No one would notice Mae was missing until morning and that would give them enough time to get far away. Jesse agreed it would work, but he did not think Tuck would like it. In any case, just as Winnie's grandmother called her and asked who she was talking to, they agreed to meet at midnight. Winnie turned and answered her grandmother and when she turned back around, Jesse was gone. She knew tonight she would make a difference in the world.

Chapter 22 Analysis

The author uses Jesse and the bottle to push Winnie into taking immortality, but the reader knows that Winnie has seen so much and learned so much that she is not sure she wants to live forever.

The author also explains more about Winnie's contribution to Mae's escape and protection of the Tucks. The reader sees the exchange between the Tucks and Winnie as Winnie decides to take Mae's place in the jail. She is protecting herself, the Tucks and the world.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Winnie believed the day was the longest day of her life. The air was hot and unmoving and the time seemed to be as unmoving as the air around her. She had hidden the bottle Jesse gave her in a bureau drawer and decided there was nothing left to do but wait. Her family was sitting in the parlor, fanning themselves and drinking lemonade. They were more unkempt than she had ever seen them. She decided she liked this side of them, but did not stay in the parlor with them. She took her lemonade and returned to her room.

Later that evening, Winnie went back out into the yard as the day was cooling down. She noted that the sky had changed, becoming heavier, the clouds thickening. Even the trees of the wood were turning their leaves upside down with the hope of rain. When she went back inside, she told her family it would probably rain. The family wanted the rain, but did not want to close the house up. The wind was finally beginning to blow and give them some relief. However, they closed the windows and retired for the night. Winnie sat in her room listening to the wind moving the gate and trees surrounding the Foster's home.

She had three hours before she was to meet Jesse. She walked around her room, sat in her rocking chair, laid on her bed and thought. She knew she would have to do this, but she was beginning to feel guilty for misusing the trust of her parents again.

She argued with herself, saying they had never told her not to do this and yet she knew they would think it was wrong. She feared what would happen when the constable found her in the morning. She finally decided she would make them understand. She believed whole-heartedly the Tucks needed her to take care of them. Whether this was true or not, she would not let Mae hang.

She started thinking of Jesse, wondering if she would drink the water when she turned seventeen and wondering if she would regret it. She remembered Tuck telling her, "It's something you don't find out how you feel until afterwards." The thought came to her that the Tuck's story may not be true. They were just crazy, but she loved them and then she fell asleep.

She startled herself awake and scrambled to the hallway to check the time. She had five minutes to meet Jesse. It was time to go.

Chapter 23 Analysis

The author uses this chapter to show the conflict within Winnie. She shows the arguments within Winnie's mind and the way she comes to her own conclusions about what she needs to do.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Winnie was surprised at the ease with which she left the house. As she walked down the stairs, no one stirred. She realized she could do this whenever she liked, but she knew she would never do it again. Then she left the house. Jesse was waiting at the gate for her. He took her hand and they ran to the jail. As they neared the jail, Winnie saw the gallows in the yard behind the jail.

A storm was brewing; lightening and low rumblings were warning everyone of the coming storm. Tuck and Miles appeared from the shadows. They hugged Winnie but did not say a word. Miles went to the window of Mae's cell and began removing the nails. Miles stopped only when the constable came to check on his prisoner. Then he returned to his task, removing the nails to remove the window. Once the nails were out, he handed the tools to Tuck and prepared to pull the window from the wall. He stood there and seemed to be waiting for something. Winnie wondered what he was doing. She discovered the answer when a loud crack of thunder surrounded them and Miles pulled on the window. It seemed not to have moved, but with the second round of thunder, the window was out and they pulled Mae to safety. Winnie hugged Mae and Jesse one more time. Jesse told her to remember and she knew what he meant.

Winnie was placed in the cell. Miles put the window back into place with the next rumble of thunder. She waited for Miles to put the nails back into the window, but he did not. The rain came hard and fast. She believed she could feel the dry earth relaxing. By the time she climbed up to see where they were, they were gone, but she thought she heard the music from Mae's music box fading into the night.

Chapter 24 Analysis

Winnie has fulfilled her destiny with the Tucks. She has protected them and saved Mae. The individual wheels are separate once more. However, the author does allow the opportunity for the wheels to meet again, depending on Winnie's decision at seventeen.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

August was almost over and the year was in the downward slope of the cycle. Winnie stood in her yard watching the milkweed and goldenrod across the road. She listened to the change in the songs of the birds. Two weeks had past and the Tucks had not been found. There seemed to be no sign of them anywhere. She was glad they escaped, but it had been a rough two weeks for her.

She sat on the grass and reviewed the night of the escape in her head. As soon as she was settled on the cot, the constable had come into the cell to close the shutter over the window. She had tried to seem larger and breathe heavily feigning sleep. He must have believed it, because he did not return until morning.

Winnie had remained awake all night to give the Tuck's as much time as possible to get away. She feared that if she fell asleep, she would kick off the blanket and be discovered. She had wanted to cough, but could not. She had wanted to investigate a large crash outside, but had to wait until morning. She still remembered every moment of that night and she still trembled when she remembered the face of the constable when he realized Mae had escaped and Winnie was in the cell. He had yelled at her and told her what she had done was a crime. She took all of it staring at the floor. She was eventually released to her parents and on the way home, she noticed the gallows had been destroyed in the storm. She realized that the loud crash she had heard the night before had been the destruction of the gallows.

Her family asked her why she did it. She sobbed, saying the Tucks were her friend and she loved them. The family understood and protected decision and actions. She was, however, confined to the yard. She could not even leave with her mother or grandmother, so she spent her time in the yard. The children around the village would walk by and some would talk to her through the fence. She was no longer considered unfriendly, someone who needed to be avoided.

She sat in the grass by the gate in front of her house thinking that school would be open soon, when the toad appeared in front on her just on the other side of the fence. She noticed him only a moment before she noticed the large dog coming down the street toward her toad. He stopped and looked at Winnie and then the toad. He started barking at the toad. Winnie yelled at the dog to go away. He ignored her and began to paw at the toad. Winnie reached through the fence and grabbed the toad bringing him into the yard and into safety.

She had never touched a toad and felt a little ill, however curiosity won out and she touched him again, feeling the smooth and rough skin. She then ran into the house and returned with a small bottle of water. She thought about the spring in the woods and

how she could always get more if she wanted to when she was seventeen. She poured the water on the toad, making sure that toad would be safe forever.

Chapter 25 Analysis

Winnie's caring about animals led her to use the water of the toad. He was her representation of freedom. When Winnie uses the water on the toad, we see that Winnie believes the Tuck's story. It also foreshadows that Winnie has made her decision between mortality and immortality.

Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

Mae and Tuck returned to Treegap but it was not the Treegap they remembered. The roads were blacktop, the woods were gone and there was a gas station where the Foster's house had been all those years ago. Their horse drawn wagon got many stares. They passed by a new jail with a police car outside of it and made their way to a diner.

Tuck talked to the waiter, asking about the woods. The waiter explained a storm had come through about three years before and the woods caught on fire. After that, it had to be bulldozed. Tuck asked about a spring in the woods, but the waiter knew nothing about it.

After eating, Mae went shopping and Tuck went for a walk. They had both seen the cemetery as they arrived in town. Tuck went to the cemetery and found what he was looking for, the headstone of Winifred Foster Jackson. She had died in 1948, two years before they returned.

As Mae and Tuck left Treegap, Tuck told Mae what he had found. Mae felt sorry for Jesse, but they had all realized long ago that she would not join them. Mae mentioned there was now no reason to return and Tuck agreed as he brought the horse to a stop. He got out and went to the front of the horse. He waited for a truck to pass and then reached down and picked up a toad from the middle of the road. He placed it in the grassy area beside the road. As he got back into the wagon, he said something about the toad thinking it would live forever. Mae said nothing and they proceed out of town with the tinkling melody of Mae's music box following them.

Epilogue Analysis

The author gives the reader the answer to Jesse's question of Winnie. She chose to live, change and die. She had learned too much during those few short days to want anything less. The toad represents Winnie's freedom and her friends, the everlasting Tucks.

Characters

Winnie Foster

She is a ten year old girl and the only child of Mr. and Mrs. Foster. Her family owns the biggest house in Treegap and the woods behind their house as well. The family never ventures into the woods and she is always told to stay within the fence, or in the house. She is over-protected by her mother and grandmother and dreams of running away. When she decides to leave the sanctuary of her home, she is kidnapped and taken on an adventure. She is sure her kidnappers are crazy, but she grows to love them. After being returned to her family, she makes one last attempt to help them out of their predicament and helping them to escape. One son, Jesse, has asked her to join him and see the world, but Winnie knows that seeing the world is only second best to living. In the end, she chooses life and dies at the age of 78.

Mae Tuck

She is a middle-aged woman, whose hair has grey running through its brown hue. She is married to Angus Tuck and has two sons, Miles and Jesse. She befriends Winnie when she and her sons, are discovered by the young girl. She promises that they will return her to her family the next day. She is a caring woman, but is tired. She is tired of never changing, never growing. She wants to find some relief and sees a glimpse of it in Winnie. She ends up in jail because of protecting Winnie and her family. She escapes from jail with the help of her family and Winnie. When she returns to Treegap seventy years later, she discovers Winnie chose life and died two years before she returned.

Angus Tuck

He is a middle-aged man, broad and large. He is married to Mae and has two sons with her, Miles and Jesse. He talks with Winnie when Mae and the boys bring her home. He tries to get her to understand that immortality is not worth the cost. Never changing, never growing, like the small rowboat stuck in the roots of a tree. He tells Winnie of the sadness from his own experience and hopes she remembers it. He helps his wife escape from jail with his sons and Winnie. He returns to Treegap seventy years later and discovers Winnie's headstone. He tells his wife, Mae, of his discovery before leaving Treegap for good.

Miles Tuck

He is the eldest son of Mae and Angus Tuck and is twenty-one years old. He had been married and had two children, a boy and a girl. His wife left him and took the children when she realized that he was not aging. She believed he and his family, were dealing with the devil. Miles is still twenty-one, but has the soul of a much older man. He lives



between believing his immortality is a blessing and a curse. He has decided to try to do something good for the world because of it. He is the person that takes the window out of the jail and puts Winnie in the cell before they make their escape.

Jesse Tuck

He is the youngest son of Mae and Angus Tuck and is seventeen years old. He bonds with Winnie and asks her to drink from the spring when she is seventeen. He wants to marry her and see the world. He visits her at her home and gives her a bottle of the spring water. He is barely a man and lives his life exploring the world. He refuses to see his immortality as a curse and makes the best of the situation. He wants Winnie to join him and tells her to remember, before she goes into the jail cell for Mae. She never sees him again.

The Stranger

He is middle-aged and has been obsessed with the Tucks for most of his life, spending years searching for them. He is unscrupulous and wants to sell the spring water and make a lot of money. He does not take into consideration the implications for those who drink the water. He does not care; it is all about the money. He uses the discovery of the Tucks to his advantage. He asks the Tucks to join him in the advertising and marketing of the water. They refuse, so he decides to use Winnie, by making her drink from the spring. Mae, however, has had enough and hits him, accidentally killing him.

Mr. Foster

He is Winnie's father. He signs over his woods to the stranger to get Winnie back. When he learns that Mae has hit the stranger, he hopes the stranger dies so the woods will remain his.

Mrs. Foster

She is Winnie's mother

Winnie's Grandmother

She is Winnie's grandmother. She believes in fairies and mystical creatures.

The Constable

He is the man who represents law and order for the past 15 years in Treegap. He is excited about having a real prisoner for his new jail when he arrests Mae for assaulting

the stranger. However, his excitement is greatly diminished when he discovers Winnie in Mae's cell the next morning.

Objects/Places

Treegap

It is a little town in the story where Winnie lives and the location of the spring that changed the Tucks forever.

Charleyville

It is a larger town where all the serious crimes are handled.

Treegap Jail

It is a brand new building and the Constable places Mae in one of the cells after she assaults the stranger.

Woods

The woods are owned by the Fosters but harbor a secret spring that gives immortality.

Pond and Rowboat by Tuck's home

The pond is ever-changing and is the place where Winnie begins to understand how important it is to live and not just exist. It is located beside the home of Mae and Angus Tuck.

Setting

Tuck Everlasting is set in the year 1881. Babbitt never specifies a location but has stated elsewhere that what she had in mind was a cross between the heavily-wooded Ohio frontier which her ancestors had helped to tame in an earlier century and the Adirondack foothills of New York where she was living at the time she wrote the book. Winnie Foster lives in a proper, middle-class house with a fenced-in yard on the edge of the town of Treegap. Her family supposedly owns the nearby Treegap wood, but nobody really owns the wood. It is an ancient, mysterious place, something, Babbitt hints, which has been left over from a previous creation. At its center, protected by magic, lies the fountain of eternal life, a tiny, nondescript spout of water at the base of an ancient ash tree.

Babbitt places the fussy propriety of Winnie's home and yard in contrast with the untamed luxuriousness of nature, and, ironically, with the moldering and messy chaos of the Tuck's shack. When Winnie must choose between a return to her family and staying with the Tucks, the setting provides a visual symbol for her choice. Her old life was as limiting as the fence which kept her at home. Life with the Tucks, although seemingly offering an infinity of new choices, might in the end be just as limiting and considerably more chaotic.

Theme and Characters What would it be like to live forever?

Most of us, if we think of eternal life, see it either in generally vague religious terms or as a sort of wishfulfillment fantasy. Our vision of such a life includes the assumption of either a transcendent wisdom which will eliminate all the problems of our current lives or eternal youth, a sort of never-ending summer vacation. But what if, as Babbitt suggests, immortality simply froze people at the age they were when they drank from the fountain? What would it be like going on forever as a tired, latemiddle aged man or woman? As a frustrated husband, still in his prime, but forever separated from his family? As a naive and energetic adolescent, never quite coming of age?

Winnie Foster, a young girl just on the edge of adolescence, is intensely frustrated by the boundaries which her parents have placed on her life. She yearns to see the world and to have adventures. At first, she is attracted to the Tucks' freedom, both from the restraints of a middle-class life style and from the tyranny of aging. Gradually, however, she comes to realize that real joy is only possible in the presence of the change which goes hand-in-hand with the aging process. The Tucks do not change. To use Angus Tuck's own image, they've fallen off the wheel of life.

Angus and Mae Tuck, although uneducated, are endearing and wise in their limited way. Their sons, Miles and Jesse, are, or appear to be, fine young men.

Jesse, in particular, is spirited and attractive.

But ultimately the Tucks are terminally bored and perhaps a bit boring. They have forever, but because each of their days is essentially identical to the last, they, in effect, have nothing. Although Jesse does attempt to convince Winnie to join him in eternal life, his parents make it clear that their situation is far more of a burden than a blessing.

Social Sensitivity

Tuck Everlasting is a popular book with librarians and junior high school teachers, in part because Babbitt has set up for Winnie a series of important, clearly depicted moral dilemmas which younger adolescents are likely to find of great interest. The book has, however, occasionally been criticized by adult readers who disapprove of Winnie's choices. First there is her decision to lie and deny that she was kidnapped by the Tucks. Then there is her need to come to terms with Mae Tuck's killing of the stranger. The crime was in some sense necessary. The stranger, after all, wanted to bottle and sell the water from the fountain at a very high price and tried to force Winnie to drink from it against her will. The implication is that he would then set her up in a sort of freak show. He also threatened to expose the Tucks. After Mae is arrested for murder, Winnie must decide to disobey her parents and help free her from prison.

Finally, and most importantly, she must decide whether or not to take the Tucks up on their offer of eternal life.

Literary Qualities

The first thing that strikes most critics about Babbitt's work is its difference from other modern children's fiction. In the 1960s and 1970s, while an increasing number of writers for children and adolescents were producing work aligned with the new realism, dealing more or less explicitly with the social and political issues of the day, Babbitt was writing a series of books like *Tuck Everlasting*. These gentle, oddly philosophical novels, written in an understated and slightly old-fashioned prose style, are, for the most part, set in a somewhat fantastic, almost invariably pastoral pre-twentieth century world.

Babbitt's fiction, however, also fails to fit comfortably into that other popular genre for young people: high fantasy.

Although connections can be made between *Tuck Everlasting* and, for example, the work of Lloyd Alexander, Alan Garner, or Ursula K. Le Guin, *Tuck* lacks the actively heroic note, the call to arms, the violent action, and the larger than life accomplishments, that are prerequisites to the descendants of Tolkien.

To say that Babbitt's fiction lacks the somewhat exaggerated violence often associated both with new realism and high fantasy, however, is not to say that it is toothless. Babbitt's novels often center around one violent act, the death of a loved one in a carriage accident or shipwreck, or, in the case of *Tuck Everlasting*, the killing of an evil man. Babbitt then proceeds to examine the effect of that violence on the other characters.

Mae Tuck's killing of the stranger, for example, emphasizes to Winnie Foster her own mortality and the potential for immortality which the Tuck's offer her.

Babbitt's work is also somewhat old fashioned in its use of allusions to folklore, mythology, and classic literature. In *Tuck Everlasting*, for example, there are a series of references to the wheel of life and the cycle of the seasons.

Even the supposedly illiterate old Angus Tuck knows that "dying's part of the wheel" and that he and his family have somehow fallen off. The fountain of eternal life, lying at the foot of an ash tree, is clearly a reference to Yggdrasil, the Norse symbol of the universe, an ash tree at whose foot was the fount of immortality. There is also a reference to Richard Lovelace's classic "To Althea, from Prison": "Stone walls do not a prison make/ Nor iron bars a cage."

Themes

Curse v. Blessing

Mae, Tuck and Miles each believed, at times, that their lives are cursed. Mae and Tuck felt that the gift of unchanging immortality destroyed what made them alive. They longed for the changes they would have gone through had they never received their immortality. Miles feels that the immortality has caused him to be able to miss out on things he would have experienced otherwise. He missed seeing his children grow and when he thinks about their ages when he is talking to Winnie, he misses his own mortality.

At times, Jesse, Miles and the stranger see the gift of immortality as a blessing, although for different reasons. Jesse uses his immortality to experience things he probably would never have been able to experience if he were mortal. He has time to make his way and see the world. His ideas are unlimited and unfettered by age. Miles, too, sees this gift as a blessing and wants to find or discover something that will change the world for the better. He has hope where his parents do not. The stranger sees the gift as a blessing of profit and wants to exploit it for his own greed.

Winnie is in the middle of these two perceptions. She can see both sides, but in the end she opts to believe that it is a curse, just as Tuck does and chooses to live her mortal life to the fullest.

Protection v. Greed

Mae, Tuck, Miles and Jesse want to protect their spring from the world. They do not protect for themselves, because only one drink gave them immortality and they no longer have use for it. They protect it from the devastating effects it could have on other people and the world in general. They do not want to see others simply existing because they cannot die. It would overburden the world and cause greed and have many bad repercussions if it were found by the wrong person.

The wrong person is the stranger in the story. He is greedy and believes that the spring can make him rich and powerful. He wants to exploit those who have already attained immortality from the spring and let others drink from it for a hefty price. He is even unscrupulous enough to make a child, Winnie, drink from it to promote his own greed. He does not take into consideration the effect on the world, or on humanity, of giving this water to others. He thinks only of himself and his own destiny.

Winnie is protected by her parents first and the Tucks second. They all want what is best for Winnie and try their best to get her to understand the consequences of decisions. Eventually, Winnie realized that she must protect the Tucks. Knowing what she has to do and the consequences that will result, she still chooses to help the Tucks escape.

Mortality v. Immortality

Mortality is a major issue with all mankind. Everyone is mortal. We are born, we live and we die. It is the way of life. However, you can also view mortality as a never-ending, always changing wheel. You are born, you change due to your decisions, you live the best you know how and enjoy life while you have it and eventually you die and move on.

Just as in mortality, there are two ways to see immortality. There are those who see it as a curse. They dread waking up and dream of death, the end of their useless existence. Miles and Jesse see their immortality as a way of living life to the fullest. They do not have to worry about sickness or death. They can experience everything they want without the constrictions of time. The only problem is that they have to experience them alone, because everyone they love is mortal and will eventually die.

Style

Point of View

The author uses a third person point of view. She is telling the story of six people and the way that their worlds collide and changed each participant. Although it is the story of six people, four of the people can be considered one unit. That unit is the Tuck family; they are one unit because they are a family and share a secret, which they do not think anyone should know. They protect it fiercely. Winnie, though only a child, is the second unit. Even her parents have a subordinate role in her story. She discovers the Tuck's secret and in the end, takes it to her grave. The third unit is the stranger who wants to exploit Winnie, the Tucks and the spring for his own gain.

By using the third person narrative, Babbitt is able to give each unit a compelling storyline and an equal share in the tragedies that follow. Any other point of view would have skewed the storyline and given predominance to a single unit of the story. The story could only be told by an outsider looking into their worlds.

Setting

The setting of the story is Treegap, a rural town in 1880. It is a time of constables, new communities and hangings. The author has made the Tucks over one hundred years old and yet they fit into the countryside and towns when necessary. The author allows the reader to assume that the Tucks watch and learn and the world changes around them.

Winnie is the daughter of one of the first families of Treegap and her world is orderly, clean and pristine. The author takes Winnie into another reality and shows her that there are other factors in the world that can change a person forever.

The stranger, we are told, comes from the west. He is searching for the Tucks and their spring of everlasting life. Other than that, there is little information about him.

At the end of the book, it is 1950. Gas stations have appeared and blacktop road now runs through Treegap. The Tucks are still using a horse and wagon and realize that their time in this part of the world is over. They will leave forever.

Language and Meaning

Natalie Babbitt uses straightforward language that the reader can easily follow. She does not try to impress the reader with large words. She uses the perfect words to get the story across to the reader.

The meaning of the book is an individual response. The story discusses life and death, hope and greed, change and unchanging. However, the most prevalent idea is the fact



that choices have consequences, whether the choice was made on accident or after thorough consideration, the consequences remain the same. The story helps the reader to understand that although living forever may be fun, there is a price to pay. Each decision made in our lives changes our lives and changes possibilities of new decisions and their consequences. It is a circle that only ends when the person dies and has no more decisions to make or consequences to handle.

Structure

The book is set up with a prologue, twenty-five chapters and an epilogue.

The prologue sets the stage for the coming story, letting the reader know that decisions made have consequences to be paid.

The first chapter introduces the woods and the Fosters, mainly Winnie, but does not go into much other detail.

The second chapter introduces Mae and Tuck and gives a hint as to the underlying issue that will produce the conflict within the story.

The third chapter introduces Winnie, who feels caged by her family as much as by the fence surrounding her house and her dreams of running away.

The fourth chapter introduces the stranger and the music of the elves.

The fifth chapter is the story of how Winnie enters the woods and discovers Jesse, Mae, Miles and the spring beneath the large ash tree.

The sixth chapter tells how the Tucks kidnap Winnie and in the process pass the stranger. They make their way to a stream to give Winnie a brief explanation.

The seventh chapter Mae, Jesse and Miles tell Winnie their story and their secret.

The eighth chapter takes Winnie on a journey, with the stranger following them, but hidden from view.

The ninth chapter introduces Winnie to Angus Tuck.

The tenth chapter describes Winnie's home life in comparison to the Tuck's home life.

The eleventh chapter is about dinner in the Tuck's home and Angus' sense that something is going to happen.

The twelfth chapter takes Winnie and Tuck out onto the pond in a rowboat, so that Tuck can explain to Winnie the evil of the spring.

The thirteenth chapter finds the stranger back at the Foster's house with the Tuck's horse, telling the Fosters he knows where their daughter has been taken.



The fourteenth chapter prepares everyone at the Tuck's house for bed. Winnie has a hard time sleeping and Mae tries to comfort her, then Tuck and then Jesse. She finally falls asleep.

The fifteenth chapter reveals part of the stranger's plot.

The sixteenth chapter introduces the constable, who is accompanying the stranger to the Tuck's house. However, eventually the stranger grew bored and left the constable with directions to get to the Tucks.

The seventeenth chapter has Winnie waking up and going fishing on the pond with Miles. Her confusion over mortality becomes apparent with the trout caught by Miles.

The eighteenth chapter has pancakes for breakfast at the Tucks and a stranger at their door.

The nineteenth chapter completes the stranger's plans and brings the conflict to Winnie and the Tucks. Mae defends her family and Winnie, just as the constable comes into the sight of the house.

The twentieth chapter takes Winnie home and Mae to jail.

The twenty-first chapter shows Winnie learning that the stranger died and realizing that she has to save Mae from execution.

The twenty-second chapter is at Winnie's home. Everything has changed. She goes outside and eventually sees Jesse. He tells her of how they plan to free Mae and Winnie tells how she can help.

The twenty-third chapter is the longest day of Winnie's life, as she waits for midnight to help free Mae.

The twenty-fourth chapter tells of Mae's escape and the consequences of Winnie actions.

The twenty-fifth chapter tells of Winnie's punishment and how she saves her toad forever.

The epilogue finishes Winnie's story when Tuck finds her headstone in the Treegap Cemetery.

Quotes

"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 it turning." Prologue, pg 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." Chapter 1, pg 8

"I was having that dream again, the good one where we're all in heaven and never heard of Treegap." Chapter 2, pg 9

"It'd be better if I could be like you, out in the open and making up my own mind." Chapter 3, pg 15

"For, through the twilight sounds of crickets and sighing trees, a faint, surprising wisp of music came floating to them and all three turned toward it, toward the wood." Chapter 4, pg 20

"There was a clearing directly in front of her, at the center of which an enormous tree thrust up, its thick roots rumpling the ground ten feet around in every direction. Sitting relaxed with his back against the trunk was a boy, almost a man." Chapter 5, pg 25

"First she was kneeling on the ground, insisting on a drink from the spring and the next thing she knew, she was seized and swung through the air, open-mouthed and found herself straddling the bouncing back of the fat old horse, with Miles and Jesse trotting along either side, while Mae ran puffing ahead, dragging the bridle." Chapter 6, pg 31

"Eighty-seven years before, the Tucks had come from a long way to the east, looking for a place to settle." Chapter 7, pg 37

"Her mother's voice, the feel of home, receded for the moment and her thoughts turned forward." Chapter 8, pg 45

"Winnie's shyness returned at once when she saw the big man with his sad face and baggy trousers, but as he gazed at her, the warm, pleasing feeling spread through her again." Chapter 9, pg 48

"So she was unprepared for the homely little house beside the pond, unprepared for the gentle eddies of dust, the silver cobwebs, the mouse who lived - and welcome to him! - in a table drawer." Chapter 10, pg 50

"After a few minutes, however, it was clear to Winnie that there was at least one rule: As long as there was food to eat, there was no conversation." Chapter 11, pg 56

"The wheel would keep on going round, the water rolling by to the ocean, but the people would've turned into nothing but rocks by the side of the road." Chapter 12, pg 64



"But the thing is, you knowing about the water already and living right next to it so's you could go there any time, well, listen, how'd it be if you was to wait till you're seventeen, same age as me - heck, that's only six years off - and then you could go and drink some and then you could go away with me!" Chapter 14, pg 71-72

"So: I want the wood and you want the child." Chapter 15, pg 75

"And he followed slowly after, yawning, the gap between him and the man ahead lengthening with every mile." Chapter 16, pg 80

"It was beautiful and horrible too, with gleaming, rainbow-colored scales and an eye like a marble beginning to dim even as she watched it." Chapter 17, pg 87

"It occurred to her that he was the dearest of them all, though she couldn't have explained why she felt that way." Chapter 18, pg 91

"With a dull cracking sound, the stock of the shotgun smashed into the back of his skull." Chapter 19, pg 100

"It was as if he were entranced and - yes, envious - like a starving man looking through a window at a banquet." Chapter 20, pg 103

"She had no idea what, but something. Mae Tuck must not go to the gallows." Chapter 21, pg 110

"At midnight she would make a difference in the world." Chapter 22, pg 115

"Outside, the night seemed poised on tiptoe, waiting, waiting, holding its breath for the storm." Chapter 23, pg 120

"Leaving the cottage was like leaving something real and moving into a dream." Chapter 24, pg 121

"'There!' she said. You're safe. Forever." Chapter 25, pg 133

"And soon they were rolling again, leaving Treegap behind and as they went, the tinkling little melody of a music box drifted out behind them and was lost at last far down the road." Epilogue, pg 139

Adaptations

Babbitt insists that there will never be a sequel to *Tuck Everlasting*, though many people have asked for one. She argues that the Tucks themselves, despite their immortality are of interest only in so far as their lives intersect with Winnie Foster's. For this reason she has also turned down a suggested television series based on the book. There is a motion picture version of *Tuck Everlasting*, however, which is generally faithful to the novel and has received good reviews. Filmed in upstate New York by director Frederick King Keller in 1980, it stars Margaret Chamberlain and Paula Flessa. The movie is available on videotape.

Many of Babbitt's other novels, however, share something very important with *Tuck Everlasting*. If Babbitt has one overreaching theme in her work, it may well be the necessity of coming to terms both with the past and the passage of time. The Tuck family has, in effect, been frozen in time. Since they drank from the fountain, nothing has changed. Similarly, in a number of Babbitt's other novels, traumatic events leave characters scarred, frozen, unable to get on with their lives.

In *The Eyes of the Amaryllis* an old woman has lived her entire life mourning the death of her shipwrecked husband. In *Goody Hall* a rich woman has spent years in retreat from the world mourning the death of her husband.

This inability to come to terms with the past has blighted both women's relationships with their children. The Tucks, of course, cannot come to terms with their pasts—they are forever removed from the wheel of life—but the grieving characters in *The Eyes of the Amaryllis* and *Goody Hall* get a second chance. Babbitt's most recent novel, *Herbert Rowbarge*, deals with a man who throughout his entire life has been haunted by the dim recollection of a twin brother from whom he was separated at birth. Like the Tucks, like Mrs. Goody, like the old woman in *The Eyes of the Amaryllis*, he is unable to come to terms with that past and get on with his life.

Topics for Discussion

Why is the toad important to the story?

Why is Tuck so sad about his life? Why is his immortality like a curse?

Why does Jesse perceive his immortality completely different from the rest of his family?

Do you think that it is important to know about the cows and the cat? Explain.

Winnie decides not to drink the spring water. Why does she make this decision? What has influenced her?

What is Mae's reaction when she finds out Winnie has died? Do you think a different reaction would have been better?

What, exactly, did the stranger represent in the story?

What did the Tucks represent in the story?

Why is it important to understand the story in terms of decisions and consequences?

1. Why did the Tucks keep their immortality a secret? Was it merely to protect themselves or did they have a deeper, less selfish motive?

2. Were the Tucks right to want to keep the secret of immortality from the world?

Would other, better educated and more resourceful people have been able to deal with eternal life more successfully?

In their position, would you have gone public with the discovery?

3. Winnie lies about the Tucks kidnapping her and then she herself breaks the law when she helps Mae Tuck escape from prison. Is she wrong to do these things? Is it ever morally correct to break the law?

4. If you were given a chance at eternal life, would you take it? If you would, what would be the best age to do so?

Twelve? Seventeen? Twenty four?

Remember that once you've drunk from the fountain you'll stop aging; you'll be twelve, seventeen, or twenty four forever.

5. Is the stranger an entirely evil man?

Are his motives entirely bad?



6. Why does Winnie decide not to drink the water?

7. Babbitt doesn't show us Winnie's decision to remain mortal; we only find out about it in the epilogue, some seven decades later. Why did Babbitt choose to tell us of Winnie's decision in this way?

8. At the end of the book Babbitt has the ash tree which marked the fountain destroyed by lightning and then the entire area bulldozed, presumably destroying the fountain. Why does this occur?

Do you think it was pure chance?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Throughout *Tuck Everlasting* are references to the "wheel of life," a concept used since ancient times to explain everything from the change of the seasons to the change of human fortunes.

Research the various ways in which the concept has been used in the past and compare them to Babbitt's usage.

2. Throughout the novel Babbitt sets up a contrast between the restricted world of Winnie's fenced-in home and the freedom of the outside world. Part of Winnie's moral dilemma involves her need to choose between these two. Discuss this contrast and the way in which Winnie deals with it. Does she opt entirely for one or the other? Does she, in the end, make a compromise?

3. Although the Tucks' lifestyle seems very simple, Babbitt carefully balances its positive and negative aspects. There is much about the way the Tucks live that Winnie finds attractive, but there is also much that seems appalling or boring. Discuss the Tucks' lifestyle, highlighting its positive and negative aspects.

4. Could Winnie ultimately have been happy with Jesse? Should she have waited until she was old enough and then drunk the water of eternal life?

Using material from the novel, give reasons for your opinion. What would their life together have been like? Does it seem likely that they would have stayed with Mae and Angus Tuck, or do you think they would have gone a different direction?

5. Generally it is assumed that children and young adults prefer to read about characters who are their own age or a few years older than they are. Winnie Foster is around eleven years old, but some critics have argued that the ideas in *Tuck Everlasting* are too difficult for preteens to deal with. How would you respond to that statement? Is *Tuck Everlasting* a children's book or a book for young adults? Aside from the age of the main character, what is there about the book which would seem to make it uniquely suited for either a younger or an older readership?

Further Study

Babbitt, Natalie. "The Great American Novel for Children—And Why Not." *The Horn Book Magazine* 50 (April 1974): 176-175. Babbitt's thoughts on contemporary fiction for children and adolescents. By describing what she dislikes about such books, this essay gives great insight into what Babbitt is trying to do in her fiction.

———. "The Roots of Fantasy." *The Bulletin* 12 (Spring 1986): 2-4. A love of fantasy, Babbitt suggests, is deeply rooted in the human psyche.

———. "Something Has to Happen." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 9 (1985): 7-10.

Babbitt discusses plot motivation and the powerlessness of most children.

Hartvigsen, M. Kip, and Christen Brog Hartvigsen. "'Rough and Soft Both at Once': Winnie Foster's Initiation in *Tuck Everlasting*." *Children's Literature in Education* 18 (Fall 1987): 176-183. Clearly analyzes Winnie Foster's gradual coming to terms with the moral issues with which she is faced.

Levy, Michael M. *Natalie Babbitt*. Boston: Twayne, 1991. This volume in the Twayne United States Authors Series is the first full-length study of Babbitt's fiction.

MacLeod, Anne S. "Natalie Babbitt." In *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*, edited by D. L. Kirkpatrick. New York: St. Martin's, 1978. Brief introduction to Babbitt and her work.

Moss, Anita. "Natalie Babbitt." In *American Writers for Children Since 1960: Fiction*, edited by Glenn E. Estes.

Detroit: Gale Research, 1986. Moss is a fine critic who has written a number of articles on Babbitt's work. This is the most extensive general survey of that work currently in print.

Pflieger, Pat. *A Reference Guide to Modern Fantasy for Children*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984. This book includes extended entries on "Tuck Everlasting," "Angus Tuck," "Jesse Tuck," "Mae Tuck," "Miles Tuck," "Winnie Foster," "The Stranger," and "The Spring" which, taken together, will help the reader review key information on plot, characters, and setting.

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