



Tuck Everlasting
by
Natalie Babbitt

“It goes on,” Tuck repeated, “to the ocean. But this rowboat now, it’s stuck. If we didn’t move it out ourself, it would stay here forever, trying to get loose, but stuck. That’s what us Tucks are, Winnie. Stuck so’s we can’t move on.”

Ten-year-old Winnie Foster feels like she lives in a cage. An only child, she is tired of being closely supervised by her doting mother and grandmother. She yearns to have something that is all her own and to do something important. One day as she walks in the woods, she meets a boy, Jesse Tuck, drinking from a spring. Winnie tries to take a drink too, but, alarmed, Jesse stops her. Soon his mother and brother appear and are surprised and agitated that Winnie has found the spring. They decide to take her to Angus Tuck, the patriarch of the family to find out what they should do. On the way she learns the secret of the spring.

Eighty-seven years ago, the Tuck family drank from the spring and, not only have they stopped aging, they discovered they cannot die. Angus helps Winnie understand how important it is to guard the secret of the spring. Unfortunately, someone else has discovered the secret and plans to sell the water to those he thinks are most worthy. Will he succeed? Will Winnie join the Tuck family by drinking the water? What will happen to the spring?

While *Tuck Everlasting* is a quick read, it introduces serious issues. Be prepared for some good discussions!

Vocabulary

Using context, try writing a reasonable definition for each of these words. Then look them up to see how well you did!

tangent

The road wandered along in curves and easy angles, swaying off and up in a pleasant **tangent** to the top of a small hill.

perversely

Seeing his surprise, and presented at once with choices, Winnie’s mind **perversely** went blank.

perilous

The kitchen came first, with an open cabinet where dishes were stacked in **perilous** towers.

silhouettes

In the fading light, the trees along the banks were slowly losing their dimensions flattening into **silhouettes** clipped from black paper and pasted to the paling sky.

petulance

The man in the yellow suit raised his eyebrows and a nervous **petulance** came into his voice.

ponderous

The sun was a **ponderous** circle without edges, a roar without a sound.

plaintive

Winnie's mother and grandmother sat **plaintive** all afternoon in the parlor, fanning themselves and sipping lemonade.

furrowed

Winnie saw an expression on Mae's face of deep concentration, tip of tongue protruding, brows **furrowed**.

staunchly

This of all things her family understood, and afterward they drew together **staunchly** around her.

catholic

Mae and Tuck clattered on into the village proper, past a **catholic** mixture of houses which soon gave way to shops.

Discussion

1. "We don't deserve no blessings – if it is a blessing. And, likewise, I don't see how we deserve to be cursed, if it is a curse." Discuss the ways not being able to die could be a blessing and/or a curse.
2. Compare the advantages and disadvantages of drinking the water as a child, as a young person, and as an old person.
3. The man in the yellow suit wanted to bottle and sell the water from the spring to selected people. If it were up to you, what criteria would you use to decide who gets the water?

4. Is not being able to die as presented in this book the same as eternal life as taught in the Bible?

Writing Prompts

1. Write a letter to Jesse from Winnie explaining her decision not to drink the water.
2. Given Winnie's choice, what would you do? Why or why not?

Activities

1. Read Natalie Babbitt's book *Knee-Knock Rise* which won the Newbury Honor in 1971, or one of her other books:

The Eyes of the Amaryllis

The Search for Delicious

The Moon Over High Street

2. Do the math – Using the information given, how old is Jesse at the end of the book?
3. Watch the 2002 movie version of *Tuck Everlasting*.

Answers

Activities

2. On her tombstone we find that Winnie was born in 1870. Since she is 10 years old when the book opens, it is 1880 when she meets the Tucks. The Tucks say they drank from the spring 87 years ago, so that would be in 1793. Jesse was 17 years old at the time. Winnie died in 1948. It is two years since Winnie died making it 1950. That means it has been 157 years since the Tucks drank from the stream, and Jesse is 174 years old.

Vocabulary

tangent – touching at a single point

perversely – to behave willfully in an unreasonable manner

perilous – dangerous

silhouettes – a dark image outlined against a brighter background

petulance – the quality of being childishly sulky

ponderous – massive

plaintive – sounding sad

furrowed – tightened in concentration

staunchly – loyally

catholic – a wide variety of things