Bridge To Terabithia
by Katherine Paterson
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## Teacher Edition

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**Note:** The student worksheets can be found on pages 15–27. Teachers can make copies of these pages to distribute to students.
Welcome to Amplify ELA’s Novel Guides

We created a series of Novel Guides to provide you with a flexible resource for the books you most want to teach. Some of the titles are in the digital library while others will need to be accessed through your school, public, or classroom libraries. We selected one strong aspect of each novel and are having students focus on this element as they explore and analyze a key theme.

Rather than fully built-out lessons, these guides offer lean, targeted instruction that follows Amplify ELA’s pedagogy as students explore great literature. Each Novel Guide provides activities and questions with sample answers for the Teacher Edition, including:

- A complete close reading session, including the text excerpt
- Connected excerpts to extend reading and skill practice
- Guiding questions and activities to support reading the whole book
- An introduction to the book and the author
- Activities that focus on a range of literacy skills
- Project-based learning
- Discussion questions
- Writing Prompts
- Exploration of Writer’s Craft
- Role-playing opportunities
- Collaborative learning
- Social-emotional learning discussion questions, Writing Prompts, or activities
- Standards alignment

The diverse selection of books we chose comprises a range of genres from mystery to non-fiction, and themes from social justice to identity and courage. Students explore classics and contemporary award winners, expand their literacy skills, and discover the rewards that come with close reading compelling texts. The guides are designed to be used flexibly and offer suggestions for implementation.

All the guides are housed in the Amplify Library as downloadable, printable PDFs. They include student worksheets and instructions for the teacher that will take students through a close reading of a passage all the way to the end of the novel.
Part 1

Introduction

About the story

*Bridge to Terabithia* is a powerful coming-of-age tale. The book tells the story of fifth-grader Jesse Aarons and his unlikely friendship with newcomer Leslie Burke. They form a strong bond based in part on the imaginary land they create together and call Terabithia. Their shared fantasy is threatened by unexpected tragedy. Will Terabithia survive?

Themes that align with this guide

This novel guide helps students compare and contrast the twin settings of the novel—the ordinary world of school and chores and the imaginary realm of Terabithia. Students consider the reasons why Jess and Leslie create their imaginary world and the ways in which these twin settings interact. Students also consider some of the challenging life lessons the narrative presents, including the importance of friendship and the difficulty of loss.

About the author

Katherine Paterson was born in China in 1932. The daughter of missionaries, she moved over a dozen times before she turned 18. She originally penned *Bridge to Terabithia* to help her young son, David, cope with the loss of a childhood friend. David gave her permission to publish the book and would eventually produce and co-write the film version of the book.
When and how to use the Novel Guide

Amplify’s Novel Guides can provide flexible teaching options. They can be used at any point in the year or paired with thematically related core units, before or after teaching the units. Or, if you would like to build out lessons, the guides can be used as the foundation for a more fully developed curriculum, based on the titles.

The *Bridge to Terabithia* Novel Guide aligns with the following core units:

- **6A: Dahl & Narrative**
  Roald Dahl relates the delights and challenges of growing up in early 20th century Britain.

- **6D: The Greeks**
  Both the texts in the unit and the novel guide showcase world building.

- **7A: Red Scarf Girl & Narrative**
  Ji-li describes coming of age in a non-conforming family during Mao's Cultural Revolution in China.
They took turns swinging across the gully on the rope. It was a glorious autumn day, and if you looked up as you swung, it gave you the feeling of floating. Jess leaned back and drank in the rich, clear color of the sky. He was drifting, drifting like a fat white lazy cloud back and forth across the blue.

“Do you know what we need?” Leslie called to him. Intoxicated as he was with the heavens, he couldn’t imagine needing anything on earth.

“We need a place,” she said, “just for us. It would be so secret that we would never tell anyone in the whole world about it.” Jess came swinging back and dragged his feet to stop. She lowered her voice almost to a whisper. “It might be a whole secret country,” she continued, “and you and I would be the rulers of it.”

Her words stirred inside of him. He’d like to be a ruler of something. Even something that wasn’t real. “OK,” he said. “Where could we have it?”

“Over there in the woods where nobody would come and mess it up.”

There were parts of the woods that Jess did not like. Dark places where it was almost like being underwater, but he didn’t say so.

“I know”—she was getting excited—“it could be a magic country like Narnia, and the only way you can get in is by swinging across on this enchanted rope.” Her eyes were bright. She grabbed the rope. “Come on,” she said. “Let’s find a place to build our castle stronghold.”

They had gone only a few yards into the woods beyond the creek bed when Leslie stopped.

“How about right here?” she asked.

“Sure,” Jess agreed quickly, relieved that there was no need to plunge deeper into the woods. He would take her there, of course, for he wasn’t such a coward that he would mind a little exploring now and then farther amongst the ever-darkening columns of the tall pines. But as a regular
thing, as a permanent place, this was where he would choose to be—here
where the dogwood and redbud played hide and seek between the oaks
and evergreens, and the sun flung itself in golden streams through the
trees to splash warmly at their feet.

109 “Sure,” he repeated himself, nodding vigorously. The underbrush was dry
and would be easy to clear away. The ground was almost level. “This’ll be
a good place to build.”

Leslie named their secret land “Terabithia,” and she loaned Jess all of
her books about Narnia, so he would know how things went in a magic
kingdom—how the animals and the trees must be protected and how a
ruler must behave. That was the hard part. When Leslie spoke, the words
rolling out so regally, you knew she was a proper queen. He could hardly
manage English, much less the poetic language of a king.

110 But he could make stuff. They dragged boards and other materials
down from the scrap heap by Miss Bessie’s pasture and built their
castle stronghold in the place they had found in the woods. Leslie filled
a three-pound coffee can with crackers and dried fruit and a one-pound
can with strings and nails. They found five old Pepsi bottles which they
washed and filled with water, in case, as Leslie said, “of siege.”

111 Like God in the Bible, they looked at what they had made and found it
very good.

112 “You should draw a picture of Terabithia for us to hang in the castle,”
Leslie said.

113 “I can’t.” How could he explain it in a way that Leslie would understand,
how he yearned to reach out and capture the quivering life about him
and how when he tried, it slipped past his fingertips, leaving a dry
fossil upon the page? “I just can’t get the poetry of the trees,” he said.

114 She nodded. “Don’t worry,” she said. “You will someday.”

115 He believed her because there in the shadowy light of the stronghold
everything seemed possible. Between the two of them they owned the
world and no enemy, Gary Fulcher, Wanda Kay Moore, Janice Avery,
Jess’s own fears and insufficiencies, nor any of the foes whom Leslie
imagined attacking Terabithia, could ever really defeat them.
Step 1: Close Reading Activity (with sample responses)

1. Underline all the words and phrases in the excerpt that describe how Jess and Leslie feel about the ordinary world they live in.
   
   **Sample response:** “How could he explain in a way that Leslie would understand, how he yearned to reach out and capture the quivering life about him and how when he tried, it slipped past his fingertips, leaving a dry fossil upon the page? ‘I just can’t get the poetry of the trees,’ he said.” / “Between the two of them they owned the world and no enemy, Gary Fulcher, Wanda Kay Moore, Janice Avery, Jess’s own fears and insufficiencies, nor any of the foes whom Leslie imagined attacking Terabithia, could ever really defeat them.”

2. Circle all the words, phrases, and sentences that give clues about Terabithia.
   
   **Sample response:** “secret” / “in the woods” / “a whole secret country” / “you and I would be the rulers of it” / “a magic country like Narnia” / “the only way you can get in is by swinging across on this enchanted rope” / “castle stronghold” / “Leslie named their secret land ‘Terabithia’” / “the animals and trees must be protected” / “everything seemed possible”

3. Based on the passage, where do you think Jess and Leslie live, in an urban setting, a suburban setting, or a rural setting? What makes you think so?
   
   **Sample response:** They live in a rural setting. You can tell because they are surrounded by forests, and also because the text mentions Miss Bessie’s “pasture” and other details relating to farms.

4. What does Jess seem to like most about the forest? What does he seem to dislike most?
   
   **Sample response:** He likes nature and the open skies, but he is afraid of the danger, darkness, and uncertainty.

5. Where did Leslie get the inspiration to create an imaginary land?
   
   **Sample response:** She took inspiration from the Narnia stories, which she shares with Jess so he can understand more about creating a magical land.

6. What talents and skills do Jess and Leslie each contribute to the creation of Terabithia?
   
   **Sample response:** Leslie comes up with the most imaginative ideas, while Jess uses his expertise in building things.
7. What are the differences between Jess and Leslie's lives in Terabithia and their lives in the ordinary world?

Sample response: They have stresses and problems in their ordinary life. Jess has troublesome siblings, a lot of household chores, and a limiting home environment. Leslie experiences bullying and other troubles at school, and is having trouble adapting to a new environment. In Terabithia, they are free and they can let their imaginations run wild.

Step 2: Connected Excerpts to Continue Close Reading

Read more about the imaginary land of Terabithia. Continue to compare and contrast that world with the ordinary world in which Jess and Leslie live using the steps listed above.

- Chapter 4, paragraphs 138–150: Jess visits Leslie's home, meets her family. Then they return to Terabithia.
- Chapter 6, paragraphs 20–29: Jess gives Leslie a dog, whom she makes a prince of Terabithia.
- Chapter 7, paragraphs 28–52: They return to Terabithia after a long absence and rid the realm of enemies.
- Chapter 9, paragraphs 49–58: The last time Jess and Leslie visit Terabithia together, Leslie says there is a curse.
- Chapter 13, paragraphs 1–14: Jess returns to Terabithia alone.

Step 3: Writing Prompt

Argumentative

Do you think Jess and Leslie create Terabithia more as an expression of their imagination or as an escape from the difficulties of life? What makes you think so?
Additional Guiding Questions and Projects

Step 4: Guiding Questions to Read the Whole Book (with sample responses)

Use the discussion questions below to guide reading throughout the whole book. Students should come prepared to discuss their answers by referring to evidence from the text. Students should also be prepared to respond to comments made by classmates.

1. **Chapter 1:** What is Jess’s daily routine?

   Sample response: He goes to school and does his household chores.

2. **Chapter 2:** What is the difference between how Jess feels about his drawings and how he thinks others feel about them?

   Sample response: He is excited and energized by his artwork, but he feels like the adults and others in his life don’t like it.

3. **Chapter 3:** How do Jess’s feelings about Leslie evolve over time?

   Sample response: At first, he is suspicious. He was supposed to be the fastest runner and this new student has stolen his glory. But he soon discovers that she is interesting and kind.

4. **Chapter 4:** Leslie tells Jess, "My parents are reassessing their value structure" (28). What do you think she means by that?

   Sample response: She means that they didn’t want to be controlled by money or career anymore; they wanted to focus on their family.
5. **Chapter 5:** Why do you think the title of Chapter 5 is "The Giant Killers"?

   Sample response: The bullies of the school are like mythical giants who they have to try and overcome.

6. **Chapter 6:** In paragraph 25, Jess reflects that "Once in a rare while there was something he could teach Leslie." What qualities does this reveal that Jess sees in Leslie?

   Sample response: Jess thinks Leslie is much smarter and more creative than he is.

7. **Chapter 7:** What discovery did Leslie make about Janice Avery? How did this alter the way Jess and Leslie thought about her?

   Sample response: She discovers that Janice comes from an abusive household. They now feel guilty about their previous treatment of her. Leslie now considers Janice a "half" of a friend.

8. **Chapter 8:** What ideas and questions emerged from Leslie's visit to church?

   Sample response: The children wonder aloud what happens after you die.

9. **Chapter 9:** What is the mood of this chapter? What details or words does the author include that help create this mood?

   Sample response: It feels like something bad is about to happen. Jess looks up at the rope and feels cold in his stomach. He keeps reflecting on danger and darkness.

10. **Chapter 10:** What does Jess like about Miss Edmunds? How does her personality compare with Leslie's?

    Sample response: He likes that she is pretty, that she tells interesting stories, and that she knows a lot that she also shares with him. He also likes that Leslie is imaginative and intelligent, and he learns so much from spending time with her.
11. **Chapter 11:** At the breakfast table, Brenda says to Jess, “You don’t even care. Do you?” (34). Why does she say that? What do you think Jess is feeling at that moment?

**Sample response:** Jess is most likely in shock. He spends much of the chapter in denial that anything bad has happened. He shows his true emotions when he flees from the house.

12. **Chapter 12:** How has Jess changed since the beginning of the story? What role did Leslie play in that change?

**Sample response:** Jess is less afraid, and he now believes in himself and his own creative imagination more, thanks to the support and inspiration that Leslie gave him.

### Step 5: Extended Discussion Questions
(with sample responses)

1. **How does Jess deal with the loss of Leslie? What are some of the actions he takes to cope? If you knew someone who lost a friend or family member, how might you be able to support them?**

   **Sample response:** Jess doesn’t believe Leslie is dead at first, then he is overwhelmed by the loss of Leslie; his father helps him but he has a hard time doing that since he is uncomfortable showing his emotions. If I knew someone who lost a friend or family member, I would let them talk about it with me. And I would talk to an adult about how to discuss death, if I needed help.

2. **How would you describe Jess and Leslie’s friendship? What are the qualities that you look for in friends? Why?**

   **Sample response:** Jess and Leslie were close friends; they supported and cared for each other; they shared an imaginative world where they could be creative together. I want my friends to be kind and supportive; to be fun and creative; to enjoy the same things I enjoy.
3. Jess and Leslie formed a strong bond even though they were very different kinds of people. How do you make a friend? How do you keep a friend?

Sample response: I make friends by joining sports teams; by joining clubs; by volunteering at ________. I keep friends by being a good listener; helping them when they need me; sharing their interests.

Step 6: Writer’s Craft (with sample responses)

Establishing Character

The author shows the reader throughout the story that Leslie is different from anyone Jess has ever known before. She uses Leslie’s description, habits, language, and other features to reveal aspects of her character.

- **Example 1:** Chapter 4, paragraphs 19–43:
  Leslie uses much more complicated words and sentences than the other students. She also reveals that her family doesn’t have to worry about money, something that Jess has never before considered.

- **Example 2:** Chapter 4, paragraphs 61–63:
  Leslie inadvertently reveals to the class that she doesn’t have a television set. The students react with mockery, unable to relate to this unusual new classmate.

Find at least three other moments in the text that reveal how Leslie is different from all the other kids. Write down three or four ways you think people judge others based on their observations.
Part 4

Summative Projects

Step 7: Writing Prompt

Creative

Pretend that you are the adult Jess. Write a letter, journal entry, or other reflection on how Leslie impacted your life in childhood and beyond.

Step 8: Final Project

A Memorial for Leslie

Create a memorial for Leslie. The memorial could be a poster, diorama, or a digital project such as a fake Facebook posting. Fake facebook templates are available online. Search for “fake Facebook” and options will appear. The memorial should include:

- an image you think best represents Leslie.
- a quote by one of her favorite authors that you think sums up her personality.
- the passage from the book that you think most clearly shows the kind of person she was.
- the title of a song that you think she would like.
- any other details you want to include that would help people remember her.

Be prepared to present and explain your memorial and the choices you made.
Step 9: Challenge

Narnia vs. Terabithia

- Read Chapters 1 and 2 of the novel *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, by C.S. Lewis.
- Make notes on the passages in which Lewis describes Narnia. What is Narnia like? What are the "rules" of this other world? What kind of people or creatures live there?
- Write to answer the questions: What connections do you see between Narnia and Terabithia? Compare and contrast the importance of these fantasy worlds to the children in each of the novels.

Step 10: Extra

How-To Guides

Create a set of guidelines for young people. Choose one of the following topics:

A. How to Make Friends with New People
B. How to Help Others Cope with Loss

- Write down some notes based on what you noticed about your selected topic in *Bridge to Terabithia*.
- Next, perform your own research to collect more ideas for guidelines.
- Compose your set of guidelines, and include at least three.
- Relate as many of your guidelines back to the novel as you can.
- Add an introduction to explain the purpose of your guidelines.
- Share and discuss with your teacher and classmates.

Step 11: Extended Reading

- *Dear Mr. Henshaw* by Beverly Cleary
- *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle
- *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding
- *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices* by Paul Fleischman
- *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by E.L. Konigsburg