



1900s Literature Part II – Syllabus

Course Description: An excerpt-based class, students are introduced to primary works of literature from the middle and late 1900s, including *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962); *All Creatures Great and Small* (1975); *Tuck Everlasting* (1975); *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1977), *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (1985); *Number the Stars* (1989); *The Giver* (1993), and poetry with George Ella Lyon (1949-). All texts are included as part of the class; no additional materials required.

Essay Basics or equivalent experience writing five-paragraph essays is strongly recommended.

Course Outline:

Week One: The 1900s Continue

- How History Shaped Literature: 1950-2000
- Tessa Well: *A Wrinkle in Time*

Week Two: On Differences

- James Alfred Wight
- *All Creatures Great and Small*

Week Three: On Hard Topics

- *Tuck Everlasting*
- Themes in Literature
- Literary Devices

Week Four: On History

- Mildred Taylor & *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*
- The Importance of Writing Accurate History
- Exploratory Reading & Writing

Week Five: Writing to Remember

- Patricia MacLachlan
- *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (**note: students will be reading the entire short story, ~8600 words. We will provide a PDF version, but the student may also prefer a hard copy either purchased or borrowed from the library).**)
- What Words Cannot Say

Week Six: Why We Remember

- Lois Lowry
- *Number the Stars*
- Making Connections

Week Seven: Who We Are

- *The Giver*
- Implications of the Past
- Questions to Consider

Week Eight: Where We're From

- George Ella Lyon
- “Where I'm From”

Grading Information: All assignments will be graded using *The Growing Writer Rubric* and averaged to receive a final course grade.



1900s Literature Part II

Lesson Three: On Hard Topics

SAMPLE LESSON

The 1900s brought notable changes to medical care and general living conditions which in turn significantly improved life expectancy in developed nations. For example, average life expectancy in the United States in 1900 was 47.3 years. Fifty years later, the average life expectancy was 68.4 years. Fast forward twenty-five years, and average life expectancy was now nearly 73 years. (1)

Of course, no medical expert has ever been able to claim that humans can live forever. Although we have numerous life-saving medicines and devices at our service nowadays, and although our quality of life in a developed nation is generally quite high, death is still a reality for every human.

Yet, despite its reality, discussing death can be challenging. We often find it hard to paint death in a good light. Many of us fear death or the death of our loved ones. (No judgment if you do—death is a hard, confusing, heart-wrenching concept full of the unknown!)

Interestingly, despite the medical advancements and increased life expectancy of the 1900s, literary works began to explore the reality of death with greater honesty and clarity. The whole concepts of life and death were explored much more deeply in stories for both children and young adults, and in many ways, became stories that adults could appreciate too.

IF YOU COULD LIVE FOREVER . . . WOULD YOU? –

Natalie Moore was born on July 28, 1932 in Dayton, Ohio. As a child, Natalie was inspired to become an illustrator through seeing the beautiful images in one of her favorite books—*Alice in Wonderland*. She loved to draw but had very little interest in writing. After graduating from high school, Natalie attended Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts to study art. Following her college graduation, Natalie married Samuel Fisher Babbitt, and the couple had three children. The family moved several times, and between all of this, Natalie did very little drawing. After a decade of marriage, Natalie and Samuel created a picture book together called *The Forty-ninth Magician*, published in 1966. Samuel wrote the story, and

Natalie brought the story to life through her illustrations. After this, the Babbitts' editor encouraged Natalie to continue her work with children's books even though Samuel was now too busy to participate in the venture. Soon, Natalie turned her attention to children's novels. Her fourth attempt, *Knee-Knock Rise*, won a Newbery Honor in 1971.

Four years later, in 1975, *Tuck Everlasting* was published. This novel explores the question—what if you could drink from a magical spring that would give you eternal life? Would you?

In an interview with NPR's Melissa Block to celebrate the novel's 40th anniversary, Babbitt shared what led her to write this story: “One day she [my daughter] had trouble sleeping, woke up crying from a nap. And we looked into it together, as well as you can with a 4-year-old, and she was very scared with the idea of dying. And it seemed to me that that was the kind of thing you could be scared of for the rest of your life. And so I wanted to make sure that she would understand what it was more. And it seemed to me that I could write a story about how it's something that everybody has to do and it's not a bad thing . . . it [death] is around us all the time. And why adults think they have to hide all of that stuff — I think [that's] quite wrong.” (2)

At another point, Babbitt reflected: “I think it's something that everyone thinks of from the time when they realize they can't [live forever]. Even before you're six because you have a pet or a grandmother [whom you've lost] and you begin to wonder about it. So I thought it would be interesting to write a book about real people, ordinary people—not like the people in fairy tales who are always living happily ever after. But, what would [living forever] really be like in the real world.” (3)

Tuck Everlasting, published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux (you might recognize that name from Lesson 1! This was the same company that published *A Wrinkle in Time!*), was well-received despite its honest—and at times hard—look at death. The novel has sold over 5 million copies and has won several awards. In addition, *Tuck Everlasting* has been named to numerous Top 100 lists, including a 2005 “100 Best Books for Children” and a 2007 “Teachers' Top 100 Books for Children.” (4) In a 2012 survey, *Tuck Everlasting* ranked #16 in a list of the “Top 100 Chapter Books.” (5) *Tuck Everlasting* also inspired two film adaptations as well as a Broadway musical. Writer Melanie Rehak stated in a 2002 article for *Times Magazine* that *Tuck Everlasting* was “fiercely loved by children and their parents for its honest, intelligent grappling with aging and death.” (6)

Altogether, Natalie Babbitt wrote twenty books and illustrated four. In 2012, the American Academy of Arts and Letters awarded her the E.B. White Award for her achievements in children's literature. Natalie Babbitt passed away in 2016 at the age of 84.

THEMES IN LITERATURE –

As we view the story of *Tuck Everlasting*, several themes emerge such as wrong vs. right, personality responsibility, change (or the lack thereof), truth, reality, birth and death, life, time, growing up, loyalty, family, and freedom.

Theme in literature is central to the value of reading. Especially if we do not enjoy reading, it is easy to overlook the fact that nearly every author writes with a specific purpose in mind. Authors rarely spend countless hours imagining, planning, and penning stories just for fun. Although writing stories *can* be a lot of fun, being a published author takes hard work, just like anything else. The process can be long and tedious, even discouraging.

When you pick up a book, one of the most important things you can do is to ask, “Why did the author write this book?” Asking this question and finding the answer(s) are at the heart of why the author may have wanted to pen her words and get those words into your hands. This process can be the best gift you can give an author, for she wants you to enjoy her work but also learn and grow from reading her work.

Of course, in this case, we do know a bit about *why* Natalie Babbitt wrote *Tuck Everlasting*. She wanted to help her young daughter and future young readers understand that death is a part of every existence, and not one that we have to ignore or be afraid of. Even still, as we read books like *Tuck Everlasting*, we can ask further questions and explore other themes that run throughout.

One of the best questions we can ask is the following: “What message does the author want the reader to know?” For example, “What is the narrator of *Tuck Everlasting* saying about life and death? (or family or freedom or growing up?)”

LITERARY DEVICES –

Authors often use figurative language as a means of conveying hard topics in easier-to-grasp terms. For example, in *Tuck Everlasting*, Natalie Babbitt often depicts Winnie Foster outside, but within the fence of her yard. The fence is a symbol or metaphor for how caged-in Winnie feels and foreshadows Winnie's desire for freedom. (Little does Winnie know that freedom will not come in the form she imagines.)

As you may already know, there are several common literary devices you might see when reading.

1. **Alliteration** is the repetition of beginning consonant sounds. There should be at least two repetitions in a row.
 - Example: *Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.*
2. **Allusion** is a reference to a famous person or event in life or literature.
 - Example: *She is as pretty as the Mona Lisa.*
3. **Foreshadowing** is the use of words, phrases, ideas, or entire scenes that hint at what is to come in the action of a play or a story.
 - Example: The author writes about a picture hanging on the wall, which, at the time, may seem inconsequential. However, later in the story, the picture is a central part of the plot.
4. **Hyperbole** is an exaggeration used to overstate a truth.
 - Example: *I am so hungry I could eat a horse.*
5. **Imagery** is the use of words to create the experience of the five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. (This is what you probably already know as **description**.)
 - Example: T.S. Elliot's "Preludes" demonstrates great use of imagery. In the first stanza alone, he uses such phrases as "smell of steaks," "burnt-out ends of smoky days," "gusty shower," "withered leaves," and "a lonely cab-horse steams and stamps."
6. **Metaphor** is a comparison between two things which are not truly similar. The comparison is implied, without using actual comparison words.
 - Example: *The cat's eyes were jewels, gleaming in the darkness.*
7. **Onomatopoeia** is the use of words which sound like what they mean.
 - Example: *The burning wood crackled and hissed.*
8. **Oxymoron** is two words placed close together which are contradictory, yet have truth in them.
 - Example: *bittersweet, jumbo shrimp, and act naturally*
9. **Personification** is giving human attributes to an animal, object or idea.
 - Example: *The daffodils nodded their yellow heads.*

(NOTE – Personification is often confused with Anthropomorphism, which makes an animal, plant, or material object human-like in behavior, speech, etc. When personification is used, the tree may just 'dance.' When anthropomorphism is used, the tree gets a name, speaks, and has a personality.)

10. A **pun** is a play on words. In this case, one word demonstrates two meanings at the same time, which results in humor.
 - Example: *I was in a big hurry so I scrambled to make eggs for breakfast.*

11. **Simile** is also a comparison between two things which are not truly similar. However, unlike metaphor, the comparison of simile is directly stated through words such as *like, as, or than*.
 - Example: *She danced across the ice, as light as a cloud.*

Assignment 3: Read the excerpts from *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt, attached with this week's lesson. Then, complete and submit both assignment sheets also attached with this week's lesson.

Assignment Sheet 3A: Suppose you could drink from a magical spring that would give you eternal life. While you consider whether or not you should make such a choice, create a list of advantages and disadvantages to living forever. Your list should include at least four advantages and four disadvantages.

Assignment Sheet 3B: Look for some themes and literary devices in *Tuck Everlasting!* Using the provided excerpts, fill out the attached assignment sheet with two themes and one literary device that you find. For each theme, use at least two specific examples or direct quotations from the text as evidence. For the literary device, use the direct quotation in which the device appears and explain the meaning of the literary device and why you think the author chose to use this device to convey the meaning.

Sources –

1. "Life expectancy in the USA, 1900-98." *University of California, Berkeley*, <https://u.demog.berkeley.edu/~andrew/1918/figure2.html>.
2. "The Gift Of Eternal Shelf Life: 'Tuck Everlasting' Turns 40." Interview with Melissa Block for *All Things Considered*, 29 January 2015, <https://www.npr.org/2015/01/29/382383351/the-gift-of-eternal-shelf-life-tuck-everlasting-turns-40>.
3. Mitchell, Hannah. "A Book Guide to *Tuck Everlasting*." *Scholastic BookFiles*, <https://www.scholastic.com/content/dam/teachers/activities/migrated-files-in-body/tuck-everlasting-bookfiles.pdf>.
4. "Teachers' Top 100 Books for Children." *National Education Association*, 2007.
5. Bird, Elizabeth. "Top 100 Chapter Book Poll Results." *School Library Journal*, 7 July 2012.
6. Rehak, Melanie. "Film: Falling for a Children's Tale of an Age-Old Wish." *The New York Times*, 6 Oct. 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/06/movies/film-falling-for-a-children-s-tale-of-an-age-old-wish.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.