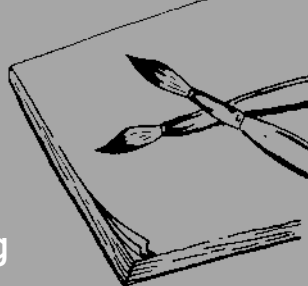


Chapter Charter: Questions to Guide Your Reading



The following questions will help you think about the important parts of each chapter.

Chapter 1

- Why does Jess want to be the fastest kid at Lark Creek Elementary School?
- How important do you think it is to be the best at something?
- What is Jess's family like? How is it like your family? How is it unlike your family?

Chapter 2

- Why doesn't Jess show his drawings to his dad? How do you think it must feel to have to hide something you love from someone you love?
- Why is Miss Edmunds the only person Jess shows his drawings to? How important do you think it is for Jess to have someone like Miss Edmunds in his life?
- How does Jess's family add to his feelings of loneliness?
- Why doesn't Jess seem very interested in befriending Leslie when they first meet?

Chapter 3

- Does Leslie worry much about what people think of her? What about Jess? Which of these two characters are you more like?

- Why does Jess try to keep his distance from Leslie?
- Do you think Jess should have spoken up and asked Leslie if she wanted to run? Why or why not? Do you think you would have?
- What does Leslie mean when she says to Jess, “You’re the only kid in this whole durned school who’s worth shooting”?

Chapter 4

- Why do you think Miss Edmunds chooses to sing “Free to Be . . . You and Me” after meeting Leslie?
- What makes Jess change his mind about Leslie? How does he feel about the way he’d acted before?
- Why do Leslie’s classmates make fun of her when they find out she doesn’t have a television set? Why do some people have a hard time accepting other people’s differences?
- What are some ways Jess shows he’s brave, even when he’s scared?
- Jess’s mother implies that his father likes Jess playing with Leslie about as much as he likes his son drawing. And although Jess hides his drawings from his father, he does not hide Leslie. Why?
- Why does Jess write about football when Mrs. Myers asks the class to write about their favorite hobbies? What is really Jess’s favorite hobby? What does Leslie write about? What would you write about?
- What are some of the major differences between Jess’s and Leslie’s families?
- What do you think Leslie and Jess bring to each other in their friendship?

Chapter 5

- Do you think Jess and Leslie are right or wrong to write a letter to Janice Avery and pretend it is from Willard Hughes? What would you have done, if anything, to get back at Janice for the trouble she caused you and others?
- How does Jess feel about leaving the letter for Janice? How does Leslie feel?

Chapter 6

- Why is it so important to Jess that he give Leslie something special for Christmas?
- Why is Christmas such an unhappy holiday at Jess's house? What does Jess do to try to make it happier?

Chapter 7

- Why is Jess jealous of Leslie's father?
- How does helping to fix up Leslie's house help Jess feel better about himself?
- What do you think of the "rule" at Lark Creek that "you never mixed up troubles at home with life at school"? Do you think the two can be kept separate? Do you think they should be kept separate?
- Why do you think it's so important to Jess and Leslie that Terabithia be kept secret?

Chapter 8

- How might Jess's father being laid off affect Jess and the rest of his family?
- Why do you think Jess's mother worries that Leslie pokes her nose up at her family?

- What is May Belle worried will happen if Leslie dies? Why isn't Leslie worried? Do you think she should be?

Chapter 9

- Why does Jess continue to go to Terabithia even though he becomes increasingly afraid of swinging across the rain-swollen creek?
- Do you think Jess should be ashamed of being afraid to go to Terabithia? Why or why not?
- Have you ever been as afraid of something as Jess is of the water? If so, how did you handle your fear?

Chapter 10

- What do you think Leslie would have said or done if Jess told her that he didn't want to go to Terabithia because he was afraid of swinging over the creek?
- Do you think it's wrong for Jess to be glad to be alone with Miss Edmunds? Do you think he should have thought of asking if Leslie could come with them when she had called? Why or why not?
- How do you think Jess will feel when he learns that Leslie died while he was out enjoying a perfect day with Miss Edmunds?

Chapter 11

- Why is it so hard for Jess to believe that Leslie is dead?
- Have you ever tried to pretend something bad didn't happen, the way Jess does?

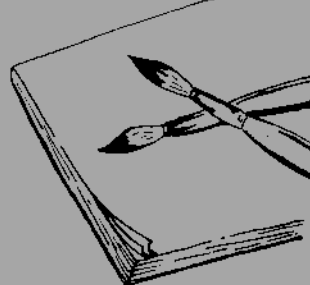
Chapter 12

- Why does Jess throw the paints and paper Leslie gave him into the stream?
- Why does Jess say he hates Leslie when he doesn't mean it?
- How do Jess's father's words comfort Jess?
- What do you think of the way Jess treats May Belle, especially when he hits her in the face? Do you think he should try to make it up to her? If so, how?

Chapter 13

- Jess wonders if Terabithia is still Terabithia after Leslie's death. What do you think?
- How do you think Leslie would have felt about the funeral wreath Jess makes for her?
- How does Jess finally come to accept that it's OK to be scared sometimes?
- How does Mrs. Myers surprise Jess after Leslie's death? Did she surprise you?
- Do you agree with Jess that "it was up to him to pay back to the world in beauty and caring what Leslie had loaned him in vision and strength"? How does Jess begin to do this at the end of the book?

Plot: What's Happening?



“‘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.... It might be a whole secret country... and you and I would be the rulers of it.’”

—Leslie, *Bridge to Terabithia*

Bridge to Terabithia is a story of true friendship and tragic loss. Ten-year-olds Jesse Aarons and Leslie Burke live in a world that often doesn't understand them. When Leslie moves to Jess's town, the two become best friends and create a magical place where they help each other grow strong. Jess must later call on his newfound strength to help him cope with Leslie's tragic death.

The book begins as summer is winding down. Jess awakens early to go out and run in the cow field. Jess has been working hard to make sure that he will be the fastest runner in the fifth grade.

For one day last year, Jess had been “the fastest kid in the third, fourth, and fifth grades” at Lark Creek Elementary. Jess enjoyed beating everyone in the race because it made people look at him

differently. Up until that day, he'd been "that crazy little kid that draws all the time." Jess loves to draw, but almost no one in his family or community respects his ability. Being the fastest runner is a way for Jess to earn everyone's respect.

The next morning, Jess meets Leslie Burke. She tells him, "I thought we might as well be friends. There's no one else close by."

The next time Jess sees Leslie close-up is the first day of school. Like him, she is in Mrs. Myers's fifth-grade class. Leslie is wearing faded cutoffs, a blue undershirt, and sneakers, but no socks. Everyone else is dressed in his or her Sunday best.

During recess, the boys gather to race. Jess is surprised when Leslie Burke comes up beside him and asks him if he's running. "Later," he says, refusing to look at her, hoping "she would go back to the upper field where she belonged." But Leslie stays and Jess asks Leslie if she wants to run. "Sure," she says, grinning. "Why not?" He tells her she can run in the fourth heat with him.

As Jess watches the first three heats, he is more and more confident that he will be the fastest kid in fifth grade. Then it is time for the fourth heat. Jess is running hard when he feels, then sees, someone moving up beside him, then pulling ahead. "The faded cutoffs crossed the line a full three feet ahead of him."

The only consolation to this disappointing start of school is Miss Edmunds's visit to Lark Creek Elementary on Friday. Jess watches as the music teacher greets Leslie with a smile and begins singing "Free to Be . . . You and Me." Jess turns to Leslie

and smiles at her. Leslie smiles back. And Jess “felt there in the teachers’ room that it was the beginning of a new season in his life.”

One day after school, Jess and Leslie are taking turns swinging on a rope across a dry creek bed when Leslie has an idea. “We need a place,” she says, “just for us. It would be so secret that we would never tell anyone in the whole world about it.” She goes on to say that it might be a whole secret country and that she and Jess would be its rulers.

And so they create Terabithia, a magic kingdom in the woods that can be reached only by swinging across the creek bed on the enchanted rope. Jess and Leslie both think it is perfect. “In the shadowy light of the stronghold everything seemed possible.”

Jess and Leslie are soon spending nearly all their free time together. Jess’s older sisters and his classmates tease him about hanging around with a girl. His parents worry about their only son playing with only girls. But Jess doesn’t care what these people say. “For the first time in his life he got up every morning with something to look forward to. Leslie was more than his friend. She was his other, more exciting self—his way to Terabithia and all the worlds beyond.”

As winter turns to spring, Jess and Leslie continue going to Terabithia, but Jess does so with increasing unease. All March it poured, and for the first time in many years there is water in the creek bed, “enough so that when they swung across, it was a little scary looking down at the rushing water below.”

It is raining on Easter Monday, but Jess and Leslie go to Terabithia anyway. When they see how high the stream is, Jess suggests that they forget about going over. But Leslie wants to go. "C'mon, Jess. We can make it," she says. And they do.

The next morning Jess wakes filled with anxiety about the creek and about telling Leslie that he doesn't want to cross it. "It wasn't so much that he minded telling Leslie that he was afraid to go; it was that he minded being afraid." Then, Miss Edmunds calls and asks him to go to Washington with her, to visit the Smithsonian or the National Gallery. Jess is thrilled. After they are on their way, Jess thinks that he might have asked Miss Edmunds if Leslie could have come.

When Jess gets home from his perfect day with Miss Edmunds, his mother sobs and cries out, "O my God. O my God," when she sees him.

"Your girl friend's dead," Brenda says, "and Momma thought you was dead, too."

His father explains that they found Leslie in the creek that morning. "That old rope you kids been swinging on broke," he says. "They think she musta hit her head on something when she fell."

At first, Jess refuses to believe him. When he does accept the truth, however, he is very angry at Leslie for leaving him.

The next day, Jess uses a large branch to cross over to Terabithia. He wants to do something to mourn Leslie's death.

He makes a funeral wreath and solemnly carries it to the sacred grove. "Father," he says, "into Thy hands I commend her spirit."

Then Jess hears his sister May Belle crying for help. She tried to follow him to Terabithia, but froze in fear halfway across the tree branch Jess had put across the creek. Jess slowly helps her across. When May Belle tells Jess how she got scared, Jess tells her that's okay. "Everybody gets scared sometimes," he says. "You don't have to be ashamed."

Jess comes to believe "that perhaps Terabithia was like a castle where you came to be knighted. After you stayed for a while and grew strong, you had to move on." He decides it is time for him to move on. "It was up to him to pay back to the world in beauty and caring what Leslie had loaned him in vision and strength."

Jess begins doing this by building a bridge to Terabithia. When he is finished, he puts flowers in May Belle's hair and leads her across the bridge, telling her that all the Terabithians are standing on tiptoe to see her. "There's a rumor going around that the beautiful girl arriving today might be the queen they've been waiting for," Jess tells her.

Thinking about the plot

- Why is Jess reluctant to be friends with Leslie in the beginning of the story?
- What do Jess and Leslie give to each other in their friendship?
- Why is Terabithia so important to Jess and Leslie?