

## Natalie Babbitt on Writing



"I write for children because I am interested in fantasy and the possibilities for experience of all kinds before the time of compromise. I believe that children are far more perceptive and wise than American books give them credit for being."

—Natalie Babbitt

**A**lthough Natalie Babbitt started out as an illustrator, she has said, "Now writing is far more important to me than illustrating, for it seems clear that the things I have to say I can say much more effectively with words than I ever could with pictures, in spite of old maxims to the contrary." (As the saying goes, "A picture is worth a thousand words.") Babbitt says that it was all the reading she did as a child that led her to a career in illustrations and, ultimately, writing for children. She believes that it is because she loves words that she is able to use them so effectively in her writing.

Natalie once wrote an essay called, "My Love Affair with the Alphabet." It is about how miraculous the alphabet is. She

wonders “how those twenty-six funny shapes can group themselves in endlessly different ways to make words with endlessly different meanings.” The essay expresses her opinion that the letters of the alphabet on the pages of a book enable us to go to different places, to be someone else entirely, and to accomplish extraordinary things.

### **For aspiring writers**

Natalie Babbitt has said that if you really want to be a writer, you should probably be a reader first. She believes that it is by reading stories that you learn to tell them well. “All of us are storytellers of one kind or another, and I wish you all lots of luck with it if you choose to do it.”

It was through her observation of other people’s writing experiences that she learned an important lesson she likes to share with aspiring writers:

My husband took time out from his academic career to write a novel and discovered that he didn’t enjoy the long, lonely hours that writing demanded. My sister produced a comic novel, which required substantial rewriting. I learned three valuable things from observing my husband’s and sister’s forays into the writer’s world: You have to give writing your full attention. You have to like the revision process. And you have to like to be alone. But it was years before I put any of this to good use.

## You Be the Author!



- **Write the sequel:** Don't you wish you knew what became of Jesse Tuck? Write a story about what happened to Jesse after Mae was freed. How long did he wait for Winnie? Did he fall in love again? Did he get into any trouble? Where do you think he traveled?
- **Be a reporter:** The town of Treegap was certainly in a tizzy the day after Mae's escape from the jail. What might the local newspaper have said of the mysterious circumstances surrounding her disappearance? You be the reporter who gets the story. Interview the townsfolk. Did anyone see anything? Has anyone heard any rumors? Perhaps someone has some gossip to include about Winnie's affection for Jesse Tuck . . .
- **The legend of Treegap Spring:** Doesn't the eternal life-giving spring remind you of an old legend? How do you think it became enchanted in the first place? Was it elves after all? Use your imagination to come up with a magical story about the history of the spring.
- **Keep a diary:** Imagine that you suddenly find out that you are going to stay the age you are today forever. Start a fictional diary. Start your diary on the day you become immortal. How did it happen? At an encounter with a magical being? Or perhaps

after finding an unusual object? Were you with any of your friends or family members? What is it like to see your friends get older? Since you'll never appear older, will you be in the same grade forever? Write a few sentences each day about who you reveal your secret to, what is good about living forever, and what you don't enjoy about it, and anything else that you think is interesting about your new situation.

- **Write as Natalie Babbitt:** Part of what makes this book so special is the wonderful imagery the author uses to describe the simplest objects and situations. Write a story of your own and try using similes, metaphors, and personification the way Natalie Babbitt does. These literary tools will help your writing come alive!

- **Write an advertisement:** If the man in the yellow suit had lived, he would have had to advertise the spring water in order to sell it. Make a poster advertising the water. What would it say? How would he persuade people to pay for the water?

## Activities



- **You be the judge!:** Imagine Mae Tuck hadn't been able to escape. What might her trial have been like? Would the jury believe her story or would they sympathize with the man in the yellow suit? Have a mock trial and find out! You will need a judge, a jury of twelve people, a prosecutor, a defense lawyer, and witnesses for Mae Tuck.
- **Words that paint a picture:** Natalie Babbitt is an artist as well as a writer. Are you? Let's find out! Read over some of your favorite descriptions in the book, and try to draw or paint the scene. Maybe it's the winding road, or the entrance to the wood, or the spring, or the Tucks' house on the pond . . .
- **Back to the future:** When the Tucks return to Treegap in the epilogue, they find the town very different. What would your town look like if you were to return in one hundred years? What has changed? What has stayed the same?
- **Watch the movie:** *Tuck Everlasting*, the movie, came out in 2002 and is now available on video and DVD. Get a group of friends together and watch it. Then, have a "movie group." Talk about how the movie is different from the book. Did everyone like it? Which did you like better?

- **Get a library card:** If you already have a card, head to the library and check out some of Natalie Babbitt's other stories! If you don't have a library card, make sure to get one. You will find endless possibilities for great reading inside the library!

- **Make some flapjacks!:** With the help of an adult, you can enjoy flapjacks just like the Tucks and Winnie did!

### **Ingredients**

3 tablespoons butter

1½ cups all-purpose flour

2 tablespoons brown sugar

1½ teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon salt

1½ cups milk

2 large eggs

1 tablespoon of maple or regular syrup

½ teaspoon vanilla

### **Directions**

1. Melt the butter, either in a small pan on the stove or in a small bowl in the microwave. Let the melted butter cool for several minutes.

2. In a large mixing bowl, combine flour, brown sugar, baking powder, and salt. Mix together with a whisk (a fork will work, too) so it is well combined.

3. In a separate small bowl, combine the melted butter, milk, eggs, syrup, and vanilla. Whisk these ingredients together.

4. Add the liquid mixture to the flour mixture. Whisk together until there are no big chunks of flour. The batter will be lumpy, not smooth. Do not mix too much or else the flapjacks won't be fluffy.
5. Grease the griddle or pan with oil or butter. You could use cooking spray if you prefer.
6. With an adult's help, heat up a griddle or large pan on high heat on the stove.
7. With a ladle or measuring cup, pour about  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup of batter onto the skillet.
8. When the top is covered in bubbles and a few begin to pop, turn over the pancake using a rubber or metal spatula.
9. Cook for about one minute more and lift up an edge to check to see if it's done. The flapjack should be golden brown.
10. Top with butter and syrup!