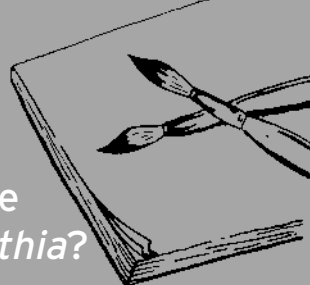


## Opinion: What Have Other People Thought About *Bridge to Terabithia*?



### **It's a winner!**

*Bridge to Terabithia* has won many awards, the most prestigious of which is the 1978 John Newbery Medal. This award is given annually to the author of “the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children” published the preceding year. The selection is made by fifteen librarians on the American Library Association’s Newbery Committee. Look at your copy of *Bridge to Terabithia* and you may see the award, printed in gold, on the cover.

### **Censored!**

Despite its popularity, *Bridge to Terabithia* is often on the Banned Books List of the American Library Association. Paterson has said, “There are folks who believe that children’s books should teach lessons to children. I believe they should tell a story about people as truthfully and powerfully as possible. When you tell a powerful story it nearly always seems to offend somebody.”

One way in which *Bridge* offends some readers is with its use of swear words. Paterson defends her use of profanity in her characters’ dialogue: “Jess and his father talk like the people I knew who lived in that area,” she has said. “I believe it is my

responsibility to create characters who are real, not models of good behavior. If Jess and his dad are to be real, they must speak and act like real people. I have a lot of respect for my readers. I do not expect them to imitate my characters, [but] simply to care about them and understand them.”

Other critics find fault with *Bridge to Terabithia*’s subject matter; they say death is an inappropriate topic for children. Paterson disagrees. “*Bridge* is not considered appropriate for children, because death is not an appropriate topic for children—which I find very sad, because two of my children lost friends by the time they were eight years old. . . . Death was not appropriate for my children, but somehow, as their parents, we had to help them face death.”

Paterson has said she hopes that her book will help others face the death of loved ones. “I feel that *Bridge* is kind of a rehearsal that you go through to mourn somebody’s death that you care about. It’s very *normal* to be angry when someone you love dies—even angry at the person who dies.”

The author has said, “I’m always a little worried when somebody gives *Bridge* to somebody because someone has died, because I always think that it’s too late. They should’ve read it before that.”

### **Why are Jess’s parents so mean?**

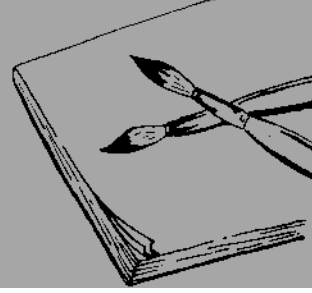
Some critics complain about Paterson’s portrayal of Jess’s parents, saying she made them too mean. Paterson has responded: “All the parents in my stories are seen from their

children's point of view, and it has been my experience that children are very seldom fair in their judgments of their parents." As for Jess's mom and dad, Paterson believes they are "doing the best they can under trying circumstances."

**Thinking about what others think about  
*Bridge to Terabithia***

- Do you think *Bridge to Terabithia* seems like an award-winning book? What other Newbery-winning books have you read? How does *Bridge to Terabithia* compare?
- Do you agree with Paterson that it's important that her characters speak and act like real people, even if that means they use profanity? Why or why not?
- Do you agree with Paterson that reading a book like *Bridge to Terabithia* can help you deal with a death in your own life? Has reading about a difficult experience ever helped you cope with a difficult experience in your life?
- Do you think Jess's parents would have seemed so mean if the story had been told from their point of view? Do you agree with Paterson that children are seldom fair in their judgment of their parents?

## Glossary



- allotted** set aside for a particular purpose
- beseech** to ask someone in a very serious way; to beg
- britches** pants
- brood sow** an adult female pig that's kept for breeding
- clabber** sour curdled milk
- commend** to put in the care of someone
- complacent** overly satisfied with one's situation in life
- conspicuous** stands out; obvious
- contempt** total lack of respect
- discern** to detect; to see with the eyes
- dredge** to come up with; unearth
- falter** to act or move in an unsteady way
- flank** the side of an animal, between its ribs and its hips
- flounce** to move in a lively or bouncy way
- garish** too brightly colored or overly decorated
- grit** the ability to keep on doing something even though it is very difficult
- gunnysack** a large sack made of a loosely woven coarse material
- hernia** a rupture or abnormal body opening

**hypocritical** pretending to have feelings, beliefs, or qualities that one does not have

**intoxicated** excited or made enthusiastic

**laid off** dismissed from work

**liable** likely

**moony** dreamy or absentminded

**mother lode** the main source or supply

**parapet** a low wall or railing along the edge of a roof or balcony

**prospectors** people who explore for valuable minerals or oil

**realm** a kingdom

**reassess** to rethink the importance of something

**rooting** digging around

**shinny** to climb by pulling with the hands and legs

**siege** the surrounding of a place, such as a castle or city, to cut off supplies, and then waiting for those inside to surrender

**sire** a form of address for a king

**snare** a trap for catching birds or animals

**snuffled** breathed noisily and with difficulty

**sporadically** happening at irregular intervals

**stronghold** a fortress or a place that is well protected against attack or danger

**tidings** news or information

**tyrants** people who rule other people in a cruel or unjust way

**utterly** completely or totally

**vain** unsuccessful or futile