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Study Guide

for

**Tuck
Everlasting**

by Natalie Babbitt



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Meet Natalie Babbitt



[Natalie Babbitt] is an illustrator, not only with pen and brush, but also with words.

—Kirsten Chapman, interview with the author, 1988

At a young age, Natalie Babbitt knew she wanted to become an illustrator. Her mother, an artist, gave Natalie and her sister art lessons as children. Natalie spent hours practicing her drawing, often using colored pencils. At age nine, she discovered the children's classic *Alice in Wonderland* and fell in love with John Tenniel's pen-and-ink illustrations for the book. His artwork inspired her so that she decided she also would be an illustrator of children's books. "I would draw funny, beautiful pictures in pen and ink," she explains.

Babbitt says, however, that at this early stage of her life "I never thought about writing." Nevertheless, as a child, she loved the fairy tales her mother read aloud to her. Babbitt learned to read before she entered school. These early experiences helped to lay the groundwork for her career as a writer of fantasy books for children.

Babbitt's strong interest in drawing led her to major in art in college. While there, she met her husband. After marrying, Babbitt focused on raising her three children. By the age of thirty, she still had not launched her career as an illustrator. At that time, the 1950s, few women looked for jobs outside the home. Babbitt says, "Women my age and older, having married at a different time, had to meet all the expectations of society before we did anything."

In the mid-1960s, Babbitt decided she would do what she had always wanted to do. She gave her husband, a writer, the idea for a children's book she wanted to illustrate. He wrote the words, and she drew the pen-and-ink illustrations. *The Forty-Ninth Magician* was published in 1966.

With the encouragement of her husband and her editor, Babbitt began to write her own picture books. *The Search for Delicious* was published in 1969, and *Kneeknock Rise* was published in 1970. Both books combine elements of folklore, fairy tale, and myth. In *The Search for Delicious*—which features a group of dwarfs, a mermaid, and a tree dweller—a 12-year-old boy must save his kingdom by discovering the correct definition of the word *delicious*. In *Kneeknock Rise*, a boy investigates a town's fear of a mythical creature that lives on top of a nearby mountain. Babbitt's most popular book, however, is *Tuck Everlasting*, a blend of realism and fantasy, first published in 1975.

Babbitt's books have been praised for their wit, clear and poetic writing style, and themes that address thought-provoking questions about life and human nature. Babbitt says that she writes for children, but her award-winning books are enjoyed by readers of all ages.

Introducing the Novel

For the wood was full of light . . . It was green and amber and alive, quivering in splotches on the padded ground, fanning into sturdy stripes between the tree trunks. . . . and here and there a fallen log, half rotted but soft with patches of sweet green-velvet moss.

—*Tuck Everlasting*

This description of Treegap woods, part of the setting of *Tuck Everlasting*, shows Natalie Babbitt's skill with words. As one expert on children's literature has noted, "No one imitates Natalie Babbitt, because no one can."

Tuck Everlasting is Babbitt's best-loved novel. At the beginning of the story, we meet Winnie Foster. Nearly eleven years old, Winnie has little experience with life beyond her fenced front yard and yearns to spread her wings. Her life changes dramatically when she meets the odd Tuck family and discovers a secret they have kept for many years. Through her adventure with the Tucks, Winnie makes another, far more important, discovery—Winnie discovers herself. Suspenseful, funny, and touching, *Tuck Everlasting* explores a serious question about life and about how it should be lived.

The Tuck family in the novel shares some similarities with Babbitt's real-life ancestors, who were early pioneers. In the late 1700s, some Babbitts journeyed from Connecticut to Ohio to settle. At that time, Ohio was covered with an immense forest where bears roamed and Native Americans lived and hunted. As more and more settlers arrived, the forests were cleared to create farmland. Patches of woods remained. Woods like these are the home of the Tucks at the time Winnie meets them.

Like Babbitt's other novels, *Tuck Everlasting* is a fantasy, a type of fiction that usually includes fictional characters and imaginary settings. But unlike many of her novels, *Tuck* takes place in the everyday world. As an "earthbound fantasy," the novel is often compared to E. B. White's *Charlotte's*

Web. Both delicately balance the real and the imaginary. Babbitt's skill as a storyteller makes the unbelievable seem believable.

The term *fantasy* includes many types of fiction, from modern fairy tales to science fiction. A fantasy is a work that takes place in an unreal world or concerns unreal characters and events. A fantasy can feature knights and dragons, talking animals, or time travelers. It can be set in the long-ago past or the distant future. It includes works as different as *Winnie the Pooh* and *Star Wars*. What links these different kinds of writing together is that they all focus on the imaginary.

Fantasies have their roots in folktales, legends, and myths. Folktales are traditional stories that convey the beliefs or customs of a culture. Legends, part fact and part fiction, tell about the great deeds of heroes. Myths are narratives that attempt to explain certain events, such as the creation of the world or forces of nature. These forms of literature came into being hundreds—even thousands—of years ago. The stories were passed along by word-of-mouth for generations before being written down.

Many fantasy writers, such as Natalie Babbitt, Jane Yolen, and Brian Jacques, are fascinated by these early tales and borrow from them in their own stories. For that reason, when you read a fantasy, the plot, characters, or theme may seem familiar. As Yolen points out:

Stories lean on stories, art on art. This familiarity with the treasure-house of ancient story is necessary for any true appreciation of today's literature.

The main source of all fantasy stories, however, is the human heart and mind. Like the ancient, unnamed storytellers, fantasy writers today address our darkest fears and greatest hopes. They also stretch our imaginations by helping us dream and look at the world in new and unusual ways. Speaking of

the importance of the imagination, fantasy writer Paul Fenimore Cooper notes:

*He who lacks imagination lives but half a life.
He has his experiences, he has his facts, he has
his learning. But do any of these really live
unless touched by the magic of the imagination?*

While many fantasies are designed to provide an entertaining escape from the everyday world, the richest fantasies offer insights about the real world. For example, *Charlotte's Web*, which features a talking spider and pig as well as a real-life little girl, helps us understand true friendship. *Tuck Everlasting*, which also has a young girl as the main character, offers insights on an even larger question. The best fantasies, while inviting us to consider the impossible, at the same time have the ring of truth.

THE TIME AND PLACE

Babbitt gives clues that allow the reader to figure out that the events of the novel take place in the 1880s. By providing details about Winnie's high-button shoes and people's use of wagons and horses rather than cars, Babbitt shows the time in which the events occur.

The story takes place in the imaginary village of Treegap. Treegap is based on

Clinton, New York, a small town in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains, where Babbitt and her husband lived. The Adirondack Mountains cover about 12,000 square miles in northeastern New York. In the mid-1800s, people began visiting the Adirondacks to enjoy the scenery, wildlife, and recreational activities.

Babbitt may have been inspired by Norse mythology when she created the woods of Treegap. Though the Foster family owns the woods, Winnie has never entered them. In Chapter 1 we learn that the woods have a huge ash tree at their center.

In Norse myth—part of the traditional culture of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark—a giant ash tree stands at the center of the world and supports the universe. At its base are three holy wells. The tree, like the Norse gods, is immortal, but an evil monster gnaws at its roots. While there are no monsters in *Tuck Everlasting*, the ash tree in the woods of Treegap, like the ash tree in the myth, has water at its base. A small spring bubbles up from underground. In the novel, the spring plays a critical part in the novel's plot and presents an important question for readers.

Did You Know?

The idea of living forever has fascinated humankind for centuries. In the 1300s, medieval chemists tried to discover a liquid that could extend life forever. They called this magical drink the "elixir of life." In China, followers of a religion called Taoism searched for a similar substance called the

"pill of immortality." Some Taoists also thought that people could approach immortality by following certain daily practices. They believed that meditation, breathing exercises, and diet could reverse the normal aging process by changing the body's internal chemistry.

Before You Read

Tuck Everlasting Prologue and Chapters 1–8

FOCUS ACTIVITY

If you had the chance to stay young forever, would you take it? Why or why not?

Think-Pair-Share

With a partner, list possible advantages and disadvantages of never growing any older.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how a mysterious family stays young.

BACKGROUND

The Passage of Time

The time of year is an important feature of the setting in *Tuck Everlasting*. The **prologue**, or introduction, to the novel states that the month is August, and the first paragraph opens with a striking summer image. The author describes a Ferris wheel pausing in its turning, with the top seat hanging in the stillness. This image helps to set the mood, or atmosphere, of the particular August when the novel takes place. Notice that the author describes the first week of August as “motionless, and hot” and August as “the top of the year.” Her description suggests that the year is at a turning point. The opening image also hints that the main character may be at a turning point in her life.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

axis [ak 'sis] *n.* straight line around which something rotates

contemplation [kon 'təm plā 'shən] *n.* process of thinking something through

disheartened [dis härt 'ənd] *adj.* discouraged

implore [im plôr '] *v.* to beg

primly [prim 'lē] *adv.* stiffly; daintily

recede [ri sēd '] *v.* to move backward; to withdraw

rueful [rōō 'fəl] *adj.* sad

venture [ven 'chər] *n.* bold or risky act



Active Reading

Tuck Everlasting Prologue and Chapters 1–8

The Tucks have mixed feelings about living forever. Use the chart to note their attitudes about what has happened in their lives since they drank from the spring. In the second column, summarize in a few words their feelings about living forever.

Character	Comments	Feeling About Living Forever
Angus	Wishes things would change	Bored and sad
Mae		
Miles		
Jesse		

Responding

Tuck Everlasting Prologue and Chapters 1–8

Personal Response

What do you think will happen next in the story? Why?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Briefly describe the Fosters' house and yard. How do they reflect the Fosters' personality?

2. What does Mr. Tuck dream? What does the dream suggest about Mr. Tuck's attitude toward his life?

3. What thoughts does Winnie express to the toad? How does she feel about her life? How does the weather reflect her feelings?

4. What draws Winnie to the woods? What is Jesse Tuck doing when Winnie first sees him? What does she think of Jesse?

5. What secret do the Tucks share with Winnie? Why do they kidnap her? How does Winnie feel about the Tucks?

Responding

Tuck Everlasting Prologue and Chapters 1–8

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. Who overhears the Tucks' secret? How do the actions of this character create suspense, or tension, in the plot?

7. Review your answer to the question in the **Focus Activity**. After reading about the Tucks, would you change your answer? Why? How might the Tucks answer the question?

Literature and Writing

The Story in a Nutshell

In one written paragraph, sum up the part of the story you have read so far. Identify the main character in the novel and give some background about her. Where does she live? What seems to be troubling her? What action does she take that sets the story in motion?

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Mae Tuck says that the spring is “a big, dangerous secret.” Do you agree? In your discussion, consider these related questions: What might happen if the secret was revealed to the public? How would people’s lives be changed for better or worse? How would society be affected? How might the planet be affected? After your discussion, take a vote to find out how many students think the spring should be kept secret.

Learning for Life

News reporters often have to separate fact from fiction. Imagine you are a reporter. You have heard a rumor about a mysterious family that never seems to age. Your editor wants you to find out if the rumor is true. What questions would you ask to try to get to the bottom of this story? Write at least two questions you would ask each major character in the story.



Before You Read

Tuck Everlasting Chapters 9–20

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What changes in life do you look forward to as you think about growing older?

Discuss

What do you think your life will be like when you are a young adult? When you are older still? What joys and pains might come with each stage of life?

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out what Angus Tuck has to say to Winnie about living and growing.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

The plot of a story is more than just a series of events, one after another. In any plot, one event leads to another, following a pattern of cause and effect. Compare these two examples offered by E. M. Forster, the author of *Aspects of the Novel*, a book about how novels work: (1) “The king died and then the queen died.” (2) “The king died, and then the queen died of grief.” Only the second example, Forster notes, is a plot.

In *Tuck Everlasting*, you can find similar examples of cause and effect in the plot. In the first section, Winnie hears strange music coming from the woods. This event leads her to enter the woods because she is curious about the source of the music. Thinking about cause and effect can help you understand characters’ motives, or reasons for doing what they do. As you read Chapters 9–20, notice how one event leads to another, and think about why each character behaves as he or she does.

Branches of Knowledge

In Chapter 19, the man in the yellow suit says that he studied philosophy and metaphysics to try to find out if people can really live forever. Philosophy is a branch of knowledge, like science or history. The term comes from Greek words that mean “love of wisdom.” Philosophers apply the powers of the mind to explore basic questions about human experience such as What is truth? How do we define goodness or beauty? What moral responsibilities do people have? What is the extent of the universe? How do we know what we know? Metaphysics is one branch of philosophy. Metaphysicians try to sort out appearance from reality. The question that Babbitt poses for readers in her novel is a philosophical one. How would you phrase her question?

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

anguish [ang’gwish] *n.* extreme pain or sorrow

fragrant [frā’grənt] *adj.* sweet-smelling

helter-skelter [hel’tər skel’tər] *adj.* without order; messy

immense [i mens’] *adj.* very large

melancholy [mel’ən kol’ē] *adj.* depressed

pickle [pik’əl] *n.* difficult situation

rave [rāv] *v.* to talk wildly

teeming [tēm’ing] *adj.* filled to overflowing

Active Reading

Tuck Everlasting Chapters 9–20

Winnie has mixed feelings about her experiences with the Tucks. Each of these feelings is an effect caused by a particular event. Use the chart to record her responses to the events that happen while she is with the Tucks.

Event	Winnie's Response
The Tucks take Winnie home to meet Angus.	1. <i>feels happy to be welcomed</i>
Winnie eats supper with the Tucks.	2.
On the pond, Angus talks to Winnie about the wheel of life.	3.
Tuck and Mae talk to Winnie as she falls asleep.	4.
Jesse suggests that Winnie drink the springwater when she is seventeen.	5.
Miles takes Winnie fishing on the pond.	6.
Mae hits the stranger and the constable arrests her.	7.

Responding

Tuck Everlasting Chapters 9–20

Personal Response

When Winnie goes fishing with Miles, she kills a mosquito but asks Miles to let the trout go free. Why would she do that? Would you have done the same? Explain.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Compare and contrast the Tucks' house and way of life with the Fosters'. Which does Winnie seem to prefer? Why?

2. When Mr. Tuck takes Winnie rowing, what does he talk about? How does he feel about living forever? How does Winnie respond to what he says?

3. Why does the man in the yellow suit go to the Fosters' house? What do the constable's remarks about the gallows seem to foreshadow, or predict, for the Tucks?

4. At the Tucks' house, what plan does the man in the yellow suit announce? Why, do you think, does Mae Tuck hit him? How does this scene mark a turning point for Winnie?

Responding

Tuck Everlasting Chapters 9–20

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

5. How does Winnie's talk with Miles when they go fishing relate to her earlier talk with Angus?

6. What suggestion does Jesse make to Winnie? Does her interest in Jesse surprise you? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Images

An **image** is something that you can perceive with one or more of the senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch. Natalie Babbitt uses many images to enrich her writing. Often these images compare two things. For example, she describes Mae Tuck as a “great potato of a woman.” Other images are vivid and colorful descriptions of things or events. Discuss Babbitt's use of images in this section. In writing, describe two images that you find interesting, and explain why they appeal to you and what makes them effective.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Take turns reading aloud Chapter 12, in which Angus Tuck talks to Winnie about why living forever is a bad thing. Then, discuss the points Angus makes about living and dying. Did you find his points convincing? (Think back to the comments you made in the **Focus Activity**.) Could you identify with Winnie when she found it hard to accept the fact that she, too, will die? Do you think the wheel is a good symbol for life? Together, create a collage, poem, song, or dance to express your thoughts and feelings about the “wheel of life.”

Learning for Life

Winnie has trouble falling asleep at the Tucks because her mind is spinning. But gradually the gentle evening sounds replace her busy thoughts, and she begins to relax. Mental health experts have found that thinking about a peaceful and quiet setting can help people relax when they feel tense or preoccupied.

Visualize a place that you find especially peaceful. On a separate sheet of paper, describe the different parts of the scene—sights, sounds, smells, sensations—and explain their soothing effect.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Tuck Everlasting Chapters 21–26 and Epilogue

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What does it mean to grow up? Are there parts of growing up that are both “satisfying and lonely”?

Share Ideas

In small groups, discuss how young people act differently from their elders.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Winnie changes as a result of her experiences with the Tucks.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Tuck Everlasting ends with an epilogue, which follows the final chapter. An **epilogue** is a concluding statement or section added to a novel or play. Epilogues used to be very common in plays about 300 years ago. The epilogue was often a rhyming speech addressed to the audience by one of the actors. Today epilogues are not very common in either plays or novels. Usually the epilogue sums up the main action of the story. It may also provide information about what happened later to one of the characters, as it does in *Tuck Everlasting*.

A Real Fountain of Youth?

In 1503 the explorer Juan Ponce de León was searching for new lands for Spain. Legend has it that rumors about a miraculous spring led him to Florida. Native Americans told him of a magical water source on an island called Bimini that could make old people young again. In 1513 Ponce de León went looking for this island. He landed on the coast of Florida near the site of modern St. Augustine. There he continued to search for, but never found, the fabled “fountain of youth.”

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

accomplice [ə kom'plis] *n.* assistant to a crime

arc [ärk] *n.* curved path

ebb [eb] *v.* to decrease in force or level

impulse [im'puls] *n.* sudden act

indefinitely [in def'ə nit lē] *adv.* for an unlimited time

ponderous [pon'dər əs] *adj.* of great weight

pry [prī] *v.* to pull by using a lever

profoundly [prə found'lē] *adv.* deeply

soothing [sōō'thing] *adj.* comforting

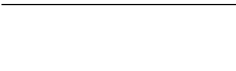


Active Reading

Tuck Everlasting Chapters 21–26 and Epilogue

In Chapters 22–24, the author uses descriptions of the weather to emphasize the dramatic events that occur as well as the dramatic inner changes in the main character. Use the chart to note how the weather changes along with the action.

	Weather	Action
Chapter 22	hottest day of August so far	Jesse tells Winnie about the plan to free Mae from jail; he gives her a bottle of the springwater and reminds her to join him in the future.
Chapter 23		
Chapter 24		



Responding

Tuck Everlasting Chapters 21–26 and Epilogue

Personal Response

Winnie’s actions do make a difference in the world of the novel. Do you think the actions of one person can make a difference in the real world? Explain.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What plan does Miles have to free Mae from jail? How will Winnie help? What will happen if Mae is sent to the gallows?

2. Why does Winnie feel guilty about helping with the jail break? Why does she decide to help anyway?

3. What does Winnie do with the bottle of springwater Jesse gave her? What does this action suggest about what she believes? What does it hint about her future?

Responding

Tuck Everlasting Chapters 21–26 and Epilogue

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. In the epilogue, what parts of the description suggest the passage of time? What has happened to the woods and spring? Why does Tuck say “Good girl” when he sees Winnie’s gravestone?

5. Tuck moves a toad out of harm’s way as he and Mae leave Treegap. What do you make of this incident?

Literature and Writing

Dear Tucks

The Tucks never find out what happens to Winnie after they free Mae from jail. Take the role of Winnie, and write a letter to the Tucks about her thoughts and experiences. Would she explain how getting to know the Tucks changed her? Would she talk about what happened to her later in life? Would she have a special message for Jesse or another family member? Be sure to refer to her experiences in the novel, and use your ideas from the **Focus Activity**.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Using a computer at school, create a school “chat room” for discussing the novel. Create a file and give it a name like “TuckTalk.” Include a tag to identify your group. Use the file to post questions about anything that puzzles you as you read the last section of the novel. Each person reading the novel should type in at least three questions. Each time you add a question, read the questions that others have asked. Find one or two that interest you and write a response. Before you launch your chat room, come up with a plan for organizing the questions and answers so they are easy to follow. Be sure to group all the answers to the same question together.

Art Connection

Assemble or draw a collection of objects for a “museum” of *Tuck Everlasting*. Choose objects that will remind people of the characters, symbols, plot, and themes of the novel. Display your drawings on a single piece of posterboard. Arrange three-dimensional objects together on a table. Include a clearly printed label to identify each object and explain its importance in the novel.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Ecclesiastes 3:1–8

Before You Read

Focus Question

Recall a time when you felt restless, in a hurry to be older, or unhappy with an aspect of life. Why might it be important to appreciate each moment and each stage of your life?

Background

This selection is from the King James version of the Bible. These verses give readers an understanding of Judeo-Christian beliefs about the delicate balance of human life on earth.

Responding to the Reading

1. According to verse 1, for what are there proper seasons, or times?

2. What are two pairs of “times” mentioned in verses 2–8? How are the times in each pair related?

3. In your own words, what is the main message of this reading? What problems do you imagine might occur if people ignore this message?

4. **Making Connections** In *Tuck Everlasting*, the Tuck family goes to great lengths to keep people from finding the spring that gives eternal life on earth. In what way are their concerns about the spring supported or explained by these Bible verses?

Learning for Life

This reading explores the idea that there is a time in life for good things and a time in life for bad things. Write a journal entry about how this idea might help you or others to get through difficult times. How might this idea give people both strength and hope? Include at least one example from your life or the life of someone you know.

Fable

The Weaver of Tomorrow

Merrill Moore

Jane Yolen

Before You Read

Focus Question

What would be some advantages of knowing the future? Some disadvantages?

Background

Merrill Moore (1903–1957) was a psychiatrist who wrote hundreds of fourteen-line rhymed poems known as sonnets. His humorous sonnet “Fable” is about one person’s questions and concerns regarding death. Jane Yolen is a writer known for her ability to write new stories in the style of great fables, folktales, and fairy tales. In this original piece, a young woman learns more than she ever expected to know about life and death.

Responding to the Reading

1. In “Fable,” how does the speaker feel about the idea of dying? How do you know the speaker’s feelings?

2. Why might the speaker’s request to avoid death have “more harm in it than good”? What must the speaker learn to accept and why?

3. In “The Weaver of Tomorrow,” why must Vera be apprenticed to the weaver?

4. What does Vera learn from the weaver? How does she feel when she first gains this knowledge?

5. How does Vera feel when she takes the weaver’s place? What has she finally learned?

6. **Making Connections** In *Tuck Everlasting*, Winnie tells Tuck, “I don’t want to die.” Tuck responds, “But dying’s part of the wheel, right there next to being born.” How is Winnie like the speaker in “Fable” and Vera in “The Weaver of Tomorrow”? How is Tuck like the person who responds to the speaker in “Fable”? How is he like the old woman in “The Weaver of Tomorrow”?

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Creative Writing

Work with a partner to create your own story or poem about death and the cycle of life. Your writing can be set in modern times or in the past. It should include at least one character—human, animal, or magical—learning about the end to life and finding a way to deal with this knowledge. Try to think of an imaginative way to describe the cycle of life.

The Water of Life

The Brothers Grimm

Before You Read

Focus Question

Why are loyalty and honesty important in the world? Give examples of loyalty and honesty that you have witnessed.

Background

Grimm's Fairy Tales is a classic collection of folklore that includes more than 200 stories. Most of these stories were taken from oral sources—tales that were passed by word-of-mouth from person to person for generations. The collection was put together by German brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. It was first published in two volumes with the title *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (“Children’s and Household Tales”) between 1812 and 1815. It was then revised and expanded several times between 1819 and 1857. The stories in this collection have universal appeal because they share basic truths about human nature and human desires. The selection you are about to read deals with magical water, loyalty, honesty and dishonesty, and problems caused by boastfulness and arrogance.

Responding to the Reading

1. Why is the youngest brother the only one who is able to find the water of life?

2. How does the youngest brother show his loyalty to his brothers? What do the older brothers do that shows their selfishness and dishonesty?

3. When does the King realize the true nature of his youngest son? In what ways is the youngest son rewarded for his honesty and kind nature?

4. **Making Connections** What characters in *Tuck Everlasting* and “The Water of Life” would you identify as greedy and selfish? Support your answer with one fact about each character.

Art Connection

Create a mural that combines some of the important themes, characters, and events of *Tuck Everlasting* and “The Water of Life” in a creative way. Use color and striking images to show the adventures and learning experiences of characters in both tales.

The Circle Game

Joni Mitchell

Before You Read

Focus Question

What is appealing to you about being older than you are now? What kinds of things are you in a hurry to do?

Background

Canadian Joni Mitchell is a singer and songwriter. Since the 1960s, her songs have been recorded by dozens of artists. The song “The Circle Game” was written in 1966. The lyrics to this song describe the circle of life that we all experience.

Responding to the Reading

1. What stages of life does this song include?

2. What kinds of circles does Mitchell talk about for each of the life stages?

3. What is the meaning of the lines “And they tell him, Take your time it won’t be long now / Till you drag your feet to slow the circles down”?

4. In your opinion, is the use of the carousel to represent the circle of life an effective symbol? Why or why not?

5. **Making Connections** Which of the characters from *Tuck Everlasting* could best relate to this song? Why? Why might other characters find it hard to relate to this song?

Writing Lyrics

In “The Circle Game,” the young man in the last verse is twenty years old. Add additional verses about what the man discovers as he ages. You may wish to write about the experiences he has had by the ages of thirty, sixty, and eighty or any other ages you choose. Be sure to repeat the chorus throughout the verses you create.

from Voyages and Discoveries of the Companions of Columbus

Washington Irving

Before You Read

Focus Question

What are some of the most exciting real-life adventure stories you have heard or read about? Why do you find them interesting?

Background

Juan Ponce de León was a Spanish explorer who traveled from Spain to the West at the time of Columbus. He is known as the conqueror of the Island of Boriquen (now Puerto Rico) in 1508 and the discoverer of Florida in 1513. In these two selections, Washington Irving—a nineteenth-century American writer—tells of Ponce de León's legendary quest for a fountain of youth. The explorer believes that finding this fountain will give him eternal youth and make him the greatest explorer who ever lived.

Responding to the Reading

1. Why do stories of the fountain of youth appeal to Ponce de León? According to Irving, why would an explorer like Ponce de León believe such a fantastic story?

2. According to Irving, why was the explorer's journey both successful and unsuccessful?

3. **Making Connections** Compare and contrast Ponce de León with the stranger who wants to sell the magic water in *Tuck Everlasting*. Are their reasons for seeking magic water similar? Is one person more sincere than the other? Explain.

Writing a News Report

Imagine that a fountain of youth is found in some remote area of the United States. Write a short news report that describes what the fountain looks like, how it was found, and how the public reacts to the fountain. Think about the following questions when writing your report: Why was the fountain found? Who has access to it? Will people and businesses treat the fountain with care and respect or with greed and irresponsibility? How will the fountain begin to affect society?