**Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory**

**The Bottle of Spring Water**

Imagine if your Nalgene were filled with water that would make you live forever. Pretty sweet deal, right? Well, that's Winnie's situation, and it's put her in kind of a pickle.

First, let's recap. Before he prepares to run out of town with his family, Jesse gives Winnie a bottle of immortality juice—i.e., water from the spring. It's pretty simple: if Winnie drinks it, she'll live forever, just like the Tucks.

This is one hefty temptation, wouldn't you say? It reminds us a little of the serpent in the Garden of Eden who encouraged Eve to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge. (For more about that, check out our discussion of "[Religious Allegory](https://www.shmoop.com/tuck-everlasting/religious-allegory.html).") From that moment, the immortality water comes to symbolize the choice that Winnie will have to make.

She makes the first choice pretty impulsively. After running to get the water and pouring it on the toad, "she stooped and put her hand through the fence and set the toad free. 'There!' she said. 'You're safe. Forever'" (25.17). She's setting him free, just like she wanted to be free at the beginning of the book.

Sure, she still has the power to go back to the spring and get some later-in-life immortality. But are we supposed to assume that she won't? After all, if the water bottle represents the temptation and the choice, once she's given it to her toad friend, maybe she's made a more important choice than we think.

**The Toad**

Winnie's toad friend is more of a toad friend-of-convenience. The little guy doesn't really seem to care about Winnie, but she confides in him anyway because she has no one else to talk to:

*[The toad] gave her not a glance when at last she ran out of pebbles and sat down to tell it her troubles.*

*"Look here, toad," she said, thrusting her arms through the bars of the fence and plucking at the weeds on the other side. "I don't think I can stand it much longer."* (3.2-3)

If he's so detached from our leading lady, why is the toad so important? Well, lucky for us, Winnie does the heavy lifting, explaining herself that she wants what the toad has: freedom.

*"I suppose you're right," said Winnie. "Then you'd be just the way I am, now. Why should you have to be cooped up in a cage, too? It'd be better if I could be like you, out in the open and making up my own mind."*(3.8)

It's easier to free the toad than it is to free herself, that's for sure. So when she makes the choice of eternal life for the slimy guy, it might just be because she's not ready to make that choice for herself. The toad won't worry about the moral and philosophical dilemmas that immortality can get us scratching our heads over. Immortality might be for toads—but maybe, Winnie is telling us, it's not for humans.

**The Music Box**

What is there to the music box? It's just "a little square-shaped object […] painted with roses and lilies of the valley. It was the one pretty thing [Mae] owned and she never went anywhere without it" (2.20). It doesn't have any special powers, and it sure won't make you immortal. But that doesn't mean it's forgettable.

The music itself is something of a staple in Treegap. When Winnie first hears the music, her grandma exclaims, "'Did you hear that, Winifred? That's it! That's the elf music I told you about. Why, it's been ages since I heard it last. And this is the first time you've *ever*heard it, isn't it? Wait till we tell your father!'" (4.24). Hmmm. Why would Grandma think the music came from elves? Probably because it's mysterious—just like the Tucks.

In fact, when Yellow Suit Guy hears the music for the first time, he knows that the story he's heard for so long is true. Bottom line: the music is the one thing the world knows about the Tucks, and it reminds us that they're out there in the world, even if they're always hiding.

Mae and the Music

The box itself—that pretty little object—might also represent Mae's goodness. Think about it. When Winnie is doubting if she should trust the Tucks, Mae hands her the music box.

*Winnie turned the key. It clicked faintly. And then, after several more turns, the music began to play again, brisk from its fresh winding, and merry. No one who owned a thing like this could be too disagreeable. Winnie examined the painted roses and lilies of the valley, and smiled in spite of herself*. (6.20)

After holding it in her hands and listening to its music, Winnie makes the call: the Tucks are good people.

**The Pond and the Rowboat**

This one won't take much brain power—Tuck does most of the work for us. Out on the pond, Tuck lays it all out:

"Know what that is, all around us, Winnie? […] Life. Moving, growing, changing, never the same two minutes together. This water, you look out at it every morning, and it looks the same, but it ain't. All night long it's been moving, coming in through the stream back there to the west, slipping out through the stream down east here, always quiet, always new, moving on." (12.4)

The water of the pond represents life; and life is always moving on. Not so for the Tucks. And Tuck uses the rowboat to describe their not-like-water state:

"[This water] goes on," Tuck repeated, "to the ocean. But this rowboat now, it's stuck. If we didn't move it out ourself, it would stay here forever, trying to get loose, but stuck. That's what us Tucks are, Winnie. Stuck so's we can't move on. We ain't part of the wheel no more. Dropped off, Winnie. Left behind. And everywhere around us, things is moving and growing and changing. You, for instance. A child now, but someday a woman. And after that, moving on to make room for the new children." (12.8)

The Tucks are permanently stuck, while everything around them—Winnie included—continues to move. And guess what? Tuck isn't thrilled about it. Since he can't change his own fate, he wants to help Winnie choose hers. He wants her to live.

**The Trout**

And then Miles caught a fish. There it flopped, in the bottom of the boat, its jaw working, its gills fanning rapidly. Winnie drew up her knees and stared at it. It was beautiful, and horrible too, with gleaming, rainbow-colored scales, and an eye like a marble beginning to dim even as she watched it. The hook was caught in its upper lip, and suddenly Winnie wanted to weep. "Put it back, Miles," she said, her voice dry and harsh. "Put it back right away." (17.33)

This lucky fish was supposed to be breakfast, but Winnie's struggles with the concept of death allow it to live another day. You see, while they've been fishing, Miles and Winnie have been talking a lot about life and death: what it means to live forever and what it means to have to die. Amidst all this chatter, Winnie comes across a mini-version of her own choice—live or die? And she chooses life.

You might think, based on this scene, that Winnie will end up drinking from the spring and joining the Tucks in eternal life. Why do you think she changes her mind?

**Religious Allegory**

An allegory is a story with (count 'em) two levels of meaning. First, there's the surface of the story. You know, the characters and plot and all that obvious stuff. Then there's the symbolic level, or the deeper meaning that all the jazz on the surface represents.

*Tuck Everlasting*is often read as a *religious* allegory, meaning that there's a layer of symbolic meaning to be found in there.

Let's take a look at two of the most common readings:

* First up, Christ allegory. Some scholars say that Winnie is like a Christ figure for the Tucks. The difference? In the Christian tradition, Christ's sacrifice allowed people to have eternal life in heaven. The Tucks, on the other hand, are looking to escape their eternal life, and Winnie's sacrifice allows them to get a taste of mortality.
* Speaking of reversals, *Tuck Everlasting*is often read as a reversal of the story of the Fall. Quick recap: in Genesis, Adam and Eve are told not to eat fruit from the tree of knowledge. But a little serpent comes along, tempts them to do it, and they're kicked out of Paradise. Just like in the novel when immortality is "'something you don't find out how you feel [about] until afterwards'" (12.11), Adam and Eve don't realize their mistake until it's too late. The difference here? Winnie doesn't give in to temptation.

<https://www.shmoop.com/tuck-everlasting/religious-allegory.html>

**Narrative Point of View**

## Who is the narrator, can she or he read minds, and, more importantly, can we trust her or him?

## Third Person (Omniscient)

Our narrator sure knows a lot about a lot. In fact, it seems like she knows everything. She can zoom in and out on all the characters, jump from place to place, and even read the thoughts of the main players.

Let's take a look at the first words of each paragraph in the Prologue:

One day at that time, not so very long ago, three things happened and at first there appeared to be no connection between them.

At dawn, Mae Tuck set out on her horse […]

At noontime, Winnie Foster […] lost her patience at last […]

And at sunset a stranger appeared […]

No connection, you would agree. But things can come together in strange ways. (1.2-6)

There are our three main storylines and the narrator knows them all. This makes him [omniscient](http://www.wordcentral.com/cgi-bin/student?va=omniscient), or all-knowing.

Guess who else is all-knowing? You. Yep, that's right. Think about it. The narrator tells us everything, which means we know more than any of the characters in the book. Think about it. Winnie, the Tucks, and even the toad all go their separate ways, and we're the only ones who get to see it all go down.

How would things be different if Tuck Everlasting were written from Winnie's point of view? What would we miss out on? What would be gain?

**Genre**

Tuck Everlasting is a kids' book. Sure, it has some pretty heavy-duty, mature content. But guess what, world? Young readers can handle it.

Less clear-cut is calling it fantasy. In fact, even though most of the main cast of characters is immortal, Natalie Babbitt doesn't think her work is a fantasy: "Well, everybody thinks my books are fantasy, but they're not" ([source](http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/natalie-babbitt-interview-transcript)). Doesn't get more clear than that. But we don't have to agree. Do you?

**Tone**

Take a story's temperature by studying its tone. Is it hopeful? Cynical? Snarky? Playful?

Removed and Observant

The narrator of *Tuck Everlasting*sure doesn't have an opinion about anything. How do we know? Well, even when describing the slimy man in the yellow suit, she holds back commentary. Take a look at all of Chapter 13 for an example, or if you're feeling lazy at the moment, we'll give you a taste:

*The man in the yellow suit took off his hat and smoothed his hair with long white fingers. Then he knocked at the door.* (13.1)

Shmoop's going to rewrite those sentences with our biased opinion of Yellow Suit Guy in mind:

*The man in the yellow suit, his brain full of schemes, took off his hat and smoothed his greasy hair with long, white, menacing fingers. Then he smirked, knocked at the door, and waited to pounce.*

Quite a difference, right?

To be honest, we're kind of grateful that the narrator doesn't have much of an opinion, because it lets us make up our own minds. Throughout the novel, we (and Winnie!) get five different characters telling us their opinions about living forever—but it's up to *us*to decide how we feel about it.

P.S. [Natalie Babbitt said this was intentional](http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/natalie-babbitt-interview-transcript). She's awesome like that.

**Writing Style**

## Descriptive, Metaphoric, and Rich in Imagery

Tuck Everlasting is chock full of figurative language. And author Natalie Babbitt doesn't waste any time getting down to business, using descriptive and metaphoric writing right off the bat:

The first week of August hangs at the very top of summer, the top of the live-long year, like the highest seat of a Ferris wheel when it pauses in its turning. (Prologue.1)

That wheel pops up quite a bit in Tuck, and even becomes a metaphor for life when Tuck himself tells Winnie, "'dying's part of the wheel, right there next to being born'" (12.10).

Babbitt can be sneaky with her metaphors, too:

And Winnie, laughing at him, lost the last of her alarm. They were friends, her friends. She was running away after all, but she was not alone. Closing the gate on her oldest fears as she had closed the gate of her own fenced yard, she discovered the wings she'd always wished she had. And all at once she was elated (8.13)

Did you catch the metaphor in there? We'll give you a hint—it rhymes with shmate. That's right. Our author snuck a metaphor in there without us even noticing the first time around.

## Free Indirect Discourse

Free what? Don't worry—that's just a fancy term for when the narration slips in and out of characters' consciousness. In other words, characters' thoughts, feelings, and words are filtered through the third-person narrator. Here's an example of the narrator channeling Winnie's brain waves:

Was it true? Could they really never die, these Tucks? It had evidently not occurred to them that she might not believe it. They were only concerned that she keep the secret. Well, she did not believe it. It was nonsense. Wasn't it? Well, wasn't it? (14.6)

This really helps us get deep into the minds of the characters—particularly Winnie—without a first-person narration. It's kind of the best of both worlds.

**The Title**

This one seems pretty straightforward, right? Tuck is the name of the immortal family in the book and they, well, last forever. The end.

Not so fast. We have a couple questions to throw your way:

(1) Why isn't the book named after Winnie? Are we wrong to call her our protagonist? Or is it just that Tuck Everlasting sounds better than Winnie the Mortal?

(2) Is it possible that the Tuck of the title refers just to Angus Tuck? It's what he goes by, anyway. If so, are we supposed to think that his opinion of immortality is the one to go with?

That's all. Hey, we told you they were questions, we never said anything about answers.

**The Ending**

At the end of our story that takes place in the way-back 19th century, Winnie dumps her immortality juice on a toad and calls it a day. Hey, she can always go back to the spring for more, right?

Lucky for us (and our poor books which would otherwise be ripped to shreds), that's not the last we hear of Winnie. Out handy dandy epilogue reveals that Winnie never did go back. She didn't drink from the spring, she didn't become immortal, and she didn't join the Tucks.

It looks like Winnie took Tuck's words to heart and decided that the benefits of immortality weren't worth the sacrifices that it would require. This is bittersweet for Tuck: because the spring is gone (thank you, natural disaster), the Tucks are officially on their own forever. And we mean forever.

Little do they know that the middle-of-the-road toad they save could have joined them on their journey.

**Plot Structure**

## Most good stories start with a fundamental list of ingredients: the initial situation, conflict, complication, climax, suspense, denouement, and conclusion. Great writers sometimes shake up the recipe and add some spice.

## *Exposition*

### Setting the Scene

Just in case we needed an extra formal clue that we're beginning with a beginning, Tuck Everlasting starts with a Prologue. The narrator sets the stage for us, explaining where and when everything in the story goes down. We also get kind of a sneak peak at what's to come—namely, Winnie Foster wants to break free of her ten-year-old life at home.

## *Rising Action*

### Meet the Tucks

When Winnie stumbles upon Jesse by the spring, things start to get messy. The Tucks kidnap Winnie and tell her their big secret: they're immortal.Unfortunately for them, the secret's out. A man in a yellow suit has overheard the secret-spilling session and is planning to majorly exploit Winnie and the Tucks.

## *Climax*

### I'm With Them

When Yellow Suit Guy shows up and threatens Winnie and the Tucks, Mae lets him know who's boss—by hitting him over the head with the base of a shotgun. Yeah. Exciting, right? But what really makes this the climax is that it serves as a turning point for our leading lady Winnie. When the constable shows up and accuses the Tucks of kidnapping, she stands up for her newfound family—she's officially with them.

## *Falling Action*

### Jailbreak

The Tucks and Winnie manage to break Mae out of jail, but then they have to say their goodbyes. Winnie is left behind to decide if she should drink the immortality water and join the Tucks. And we're left wondering: what will she choose?

## *Resolution*

### Decisions, Decisions

The resolution helps us answer any questions we have left. And boy do we have questions. In the Epilogue, we find out that Winnie has died. She made the choice that they weren't able to make, passing up immortality for a chance to live a normal life.