***Tuck Everlasting***

***Character and Theme:***

***Mae Tuck:***

Mae is a kind, "potato-shaped" woman. She's more than 100 years old because, 87 years before the start of the novel, she and her family unwittingly drank water from a magical brook that made them immortal. Mae is of the mind that life is meant to be lived, no matter how long or short a person's life might be. She finds her husband Angus's tendency to dwell on his immortality and think of it as a bad thing tiring and unproductive. Mae carries a small music box with her everywhere and after she meets [Winnie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/winnie-foster), she discovers that Winnie's [Granny](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters) thinks that the music comes from elves. In reality, Mae meets her sons, [Miles](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/miles-tuck) and [Jesse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/jesse-tuck), in the wood every ten years and she winds up her music box while she's in the wood. Though Mae accepts her lot in life, she understands that being immortal is hard for Miles and Jesse, who were ready to live adult lives and, because of their immortality, never really got the opportunity to do so. Because of this, she believes that it's extremely important that she and her family make it clear to Winnie that immortality isn't actually something that anyone wants to have. This discussion becomes even more difficult when the [man in the yellow suit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/the-man-in-the-yellow-suit), who heard about the Tucks from his grandmother, arrives to take Winnie away and says he wants to sell the water. To stop him from making Winnie drink the water, Mae hits the man over the head with her rifle and kills him. She accepts that she has to go to jail for this, though her family breaks her out and they run away so that Mae doesn't get sentenced to death by hanging, which would give away the secret.

Mae Tuck is Angus’s wife and the mother of Jesse and Miles. She is gentle and kind. Mae seems to be realistic about her and her family’s situation, and tells Angus that there is no use longing for death when it is unattainable. Mae is also the one to attack (and kill) the man in the yellow suit when he threatens to take over the spring, sell the water, and force Winnie to drink the water and become immortal. For her actions, Mae ends up in jail, but Winnie and the rest of the Tucks break her out. Mae is with Angus at the end of the novel when he visits Winnie’s grave.

She is a middle-aged woman, whose hair has grey running through its brown hue. She is married to Angus Tuck and has two sons, Miles and Jesse. She befriends Winnie when she and her sons, are discovered by the young girl. She promises that they will return her to her family the next day. She is a caring woman, but is tired. She is tired of never changing, never growing. She wants to find some relief and sees a glimpse of it in Winnie. She ends up in jail because of protecting Winnie and her family. She escapes from jail with the help of her family and Winnie. When she returns to Treegap seventy years later, she discovers Winnie chose life and died two years before she returned.

***Winnie Foster:***

Winnie Foster is the 10-year-old main protagonist of the novel. Unhappy with how overprotective her family is, Winnie runs away from home and is taken in by the Tucks, an eccentric family of immortal humans.

As the novel progresses, Winnie is faced with her fair share of conflicts; however, perhaps the most important is her internal conflict over immortality. Despite her young age, Winnie finds herself having to think about life and death, and whether eternal life is worth the risk of eternal unhappiness.

The ten-year-old protagonist of the novel. When the reader first meets Winnie, she's deliberating about running away to escape the stifling care of her [mother](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters), [father](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters), and [Granny](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters), whom she believes pay her too much attention. She tells all of this to a [toad](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/the-toad) on the other side of the [fence](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/symbols/the-fence) outside her house, adding that she wants to make a difference in the world. Though Winnie loses her nerve overnight because she's afraid of being alone, she does decide to take a walk in her family's wood. There, she meets a young man named [Jesse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/jesse-tuck) drinking from a stream, and she's immediately attracted to him. Jesse, his brother [Miles](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/miles-tuck), and his mother [Mae](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/mae-tuck) whisk Winnie away and tell her a fantastical story about becoming immortal after drinking from the stream. Winnie doesn't believe them, as she's not one for fairytales or fantasy stories, but nonetheless agrees to go with her kidnappers to their homestead. There, Winnie is shocked to discover that the Tucks live a happy yet disordered life that’s completely different from her own. She vacillates between being scared and feeling as though the Tucks are dear friends as she gets to know them. Through several conversations with [Angus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/angus-tuck) and Miles, Winnie confronts the fact that she's going to eventually die. She begins to believe Angus that being immortal is a curse, though Jesse invites her to drink the water when she's 17. The next morning, the [man in the yellow suit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/the-man-in-the-yellow-suit) shows up and threatens to make Winnie drink the water so she can help him sell it. Mae clubs the man over the head, killing him. Winnie knows that the man was going to do a horrible thing but also believes that killing is wrong. She decides to help the Tucks break Mae out of jail by taking Mae's place, which she believes is a way of making a difference in the world. A few weeks later, she gives the water that Jesse gave her to the toad. Decades later, Angus discovers that Winnie chose not to drink the water and died at age 78 after getting married and having children.

She is a ten year old girl and the only child of Mr. and Mrs. Foster. Her family owns the biggest house in Treegap and the woods behind their house as well. The family never ventures into the woods and she is always told to stay within the fence, or in the house. She is over-protected by her mother and grandmother and dreams of running away. When she decides to leave the sanctuary of her home, she is kidnapped and taken on an adventure. She is sure her kidnappers are crazy, but she grows to love them. After being returned to her family, she makes one last attempt to help them out of their predicament and helping them to escape. One son, Jesse, has asked her to join him and see the world, but Winnie knows that seeing the world is only second best to living. In the end, she chooses life and dies at the age of 78.

***Angus Tuck:***

Angus (sometimes referred to as simply Tuck) is Mae's husband and the father of [Jesse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/jesse-tuck) and [Miles](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/miles-tuck). He's a sad and withdrawn man, which the narrator suggests is because he's unhappy with his life as an immortal. He dreams of being in heaven and when he later looks at the body of the [man in the yellow suit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/the-man-in-the-yellow-suit), he feels envious. [Winnie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/winnie-foster) is afraid of him at first, but Angus is thrilled to have a real child in the house again. He takes her out onto the [pond](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/symbols/the-boat-and-the-pond) after supper and tries to impress upon her that it's absolutely necessary for everything to grow, change, and die, as that's the only way that the cycle of life and the cycles of nature can continue and support the world's inhabitants. In addition, he says that because he and his family can't die, they're no different than rocks or inanimate objects that don't change. A suspicious man, Angus is worried when someone steals the Tucks' horse, and he is also very concerned about getting Winnie back to her family. Everything that Angus does makes Winnie think that he's especially dear to her, including offering to sit with her until she falls asleep and allowing her to help them break Mae out of jail. Decades after the novel ends, Angus goes alone to the Treegap graveyard to see if he can find Winnie's grave. When he finds her headstone and learns that she was a wife and mother, he cries and salutes her.

Angus Tuck is the leader of the Tuck family, the husband of Mae and the father of Jesse and Miles. He wishes he and his family had never become immortal and, unlike his son Jesse, longs for death. Upon seeing Winnie’s grave at the end of the novel, Angus seems to be relieved that she chose mortality.

He is a middle-aged man, broad and large. He is married to Mae and has two sons with her, Miles and Jesse. He talks with Winnie when Mae and the boys bring her home. He tries to get her to understand that immortality is not worth the cost. Never changing, never growing, like the small rowboat stuck in the roots of a tree. He tells Winnie of the sadness from his own experience and hopes she remembers it. He helps his wife escape from jail with his sons and Winnie. He returns to Treegap seventy years later and discovers Winnie's headstone. He tells his wife, Mae, of his discovery before leaving Treegap for good.

***Miles Tuck:***

Miles is [Angus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/angus-tuck) and Mae's oldest son. He's 22, strong, and he's worked as a carpenter and a blacksmith. In the years after he and his family drank the water, Miles got married and had two children, one of whom was his daughter, [Anna](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters). After 20 years of marriage, Miles's wife got suspicious because he never aged and ultimately left him, taking their children and eventually going west. This was heartbreaking for Miles, but he tells [Winnie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/winnie-foster) that it would've been "unnatural" for him to find his wife and children and offer them the water, as his children would've been nearly his age by then. He believes that he needs to make a difference in the world, though he's not sure how to go about doing that since he doesn't have an education. He travels around, working where he can and moving often so that nobody suspects that there's anything amiss about him. Miles teaches Winnie to fish on the [pond](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/symbols/the-boat-and-the-pond) and throws his trout back when she asks him to, though he does try to impress upon her that everything needs to die eventually. After Mae is arrested, Miles uses his carpentry skills to remove the metal window from the jail and get her out.

Miles Tuck is Mae and Angus’s older son. After realizing that Miles does not age, his wife and children abandoned him. Although he does not seem to loathe immortality as much as his father, he also does not seem to appreciate it as much as Jesse does. When Miles takes Winnie fishing, he talks to her about immortality and how although it might seem like a pretty good deal, it isn’t really all it’s cracked up to be. He is the eldest son of Mae and Angus Tuck and is twenty-one years old. He had been married and had two children, a boy and a girl. His wife left him and took the children when she realized that he was not aging. She believed he and his family, were dealing with the devil. Miles is still twenty-one, but has the soul of a much older man. He lives between believing his immortality is a blessing and a curse. He has decided to try to do something good for the world because of it. He is the person that takes the window out of the jail and puts Winnie in the cell before they make their escape.

***Jesse Tuck:***

Jesse Tuck is the first member of the Tuck family whom Winnie encounters. She finds him drinking from a spring which he refuses to let her drink from, and is immediately captivated by him. Jesse stopped aging at age 17 and is therefore described as very good-looking, despite being 104. Jesse enjoys immortality unlike his father, and later in the novel he gives Winnie some water from the spring so that she may become immortal. However, Winnie chooses not to drink it.

Jesse is [Angus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/angus-tuck) and Mae's younger son. He's 17 and [Winnie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/winnie-foster) is immediately attracted to him when she comes across him drinking from the stream in her family's wood. Of all the Tucks, Jesse seems the most relieved to finally share the secret with Winnie. After he, [Miles](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/miles-tuck), and Mae tell Winnie their story, he suggests that life should be enjoyed and remarks that he's seen all sorts of things and, because he's immortal, will get to see much more. He behaves as though he reciprocates Winnie's feelings; he shows off for her and gives her a small flask of the brook's water so that when Winnie is 17, she can drink it and join him in enjoying life eternally. He also suggests that he'd like to get married. Mae, however, explains that because of Jesse's youth, he's not able to settle down. He moves around constantly and works all manner of jobs, from bartending to manual labor. Jesse is, according to his parents, very sad when Winnie never drinks the water and joins him.

He is the youngest son of Mae and Angus Tuck and is seventeen years old. He bonds with Winnie and asks her to drink from the spring when she is seventeen. He wants to marry her and see the world. He visits her at her home and gives her a bottle of the spring water. He is barely a man and lives his life exploring the world. He refuses to see his immortality as a curse and makes the best of the situation. He wants Winnie to join him and tells her to remember, before she goes into the jail cell for Mae. She never sees him again.

***The Man with the Yellow Suit:***

He is middle-aged and has been obsessed with the Tucks for most of his life, spending years searching for them. He is unscrupulous and wants to sell the spring water and make a lot of money. He does not take into consideration the implications for those who drink the water. He does not care; it is all about the money. He uses the discovery of the Tucks to his advantage. He asks the Tucks to join him in the advertising and marketing of the water. They refuse, so he decides to use Winnie, by making her drink from the spring. Mae, however, has had enough and hits him, accidentally killing him.

The villain of the novel. He's never named but is described as being in constant motion and moving like a marionette. He travels to Treegap from the west in search of the Tucks, whom he heard about from his grandmother, who knew Miles’s wife, and his mother; his mother played with [Anna](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters), Miles's daughter, as a girl and told the man in the yellow suit stories about the family that never aged. He dedicates his life to finding them and when he discovers the Tucks with [Winnie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/winnie-foster), he offers to bring them in on his business plan to sell the water to "deserving" people. The way he talks about this betrays that he's extremely classist, as he suggests that the Tucks--who are very poor--aren't deserving people and refers to them as "illiterates" when he speaks to Winnie's parents. He strikes a deal with Winnie's [father](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters) to bring Winnie back in exchange for assuming ownership of the wood. When he attempts to take Winnie away from the Tucks and threatens to make her drink the water so that she can prove to potential buyers how well it works, [Mae](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/mae-tuck) hits him over the head with the butt of her rifle, ultimately killing him.

The man in the yellow suit is the main antagonist of the novel. After witnessing the Tucks “kidnapping” Winnie, the man starts formulating his evil plots to gain land and money. Later in the novel, the man steals the Tucks’ horse and returns to the Fosters’ home, where he makes Winnie’s parents give up their land in exchange for Winnie’s safety. Since the spring is on the Fosters’ land, he now possesses the spring, and plans to sell the water to the public in addition to forcing Winnie to drink some. In response, Mae Tuck kills him by hitting him over the head with a shotgun.

***Mr. Foster:***

He is Winnie's father. He signs over his woods to the stranger to get Winnie back. When he learns that Mae has hit the stranger, he hopes the stranger dies so the woods will remain his.

Winnie's father is a well-to-do man who owns the woods near the family home. He is so concerned about his daughter's disappearance that he offers to give the man in the yellow suit the woods in order for her safe return.

***Winnie’s Grandmother:***

Winnie's grandmother is a stern woman who insists on order and good behavior, and supervises Winnie closely when she plays in the yard. She shows a gentler side when she charmingly refers to a tune she hears in the evening as elf music. She believes in fairies and mystical creatures.

***The Constable:***

The constable arrests Mae when she kills the man in the yellow suit. However, as he seems to be rather absent-minded, she is able to be broken out easily by Winnie and the rest of the Tucks.

The chief law enforcement official in Treegap. He's a friendly and good-natured man who takes pride in his work. He's not thrilled when the man in the yellow suit drags him out of bed in the middle of the night to ride 20 miles to find [Winnie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/winnie-foster), but he tries to make the best of it by attempting to engage the man in the yellow suit in conversation. The constable witnesses [Mae](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/mae-tuck) hitting the man in the yellow suit, so he arrests her for murder and is proud and excited to be able to lock her up in Treegap's brand-new jail. He's later livid when he finds Winnie in the cell instead of Mae.

He is the man who represents law and order for the past 15 years in Treegap. He is excited about having a real prisoner for his new jail when he arrests Mae for assaulting the stranger. However, his excitement is greatly diminished when he discovers Winnie in Mae's cell the next morning.

***The Toad:***

The toad is a wild toad that [Winnie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/winnie-foster) sees several times on the other side of her cottage's [fence](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/symbols/the-fence). She talks to the toad and tells it about her desire to run away, and she decides to venture into the wood because she's afraid that the toad will laugh at her for losing her nerve. Several weeks after Winnie's adventure, she rescues the toad from a dog that's harassing it and pours the water from [Jesse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/jesse-tuck) over it, making the toad immortal. In the epilogue, [Angus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/angus-tuck) and [Mae](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/mae-tuck) nearly run the toad over when they come across it sitting in the middle of the road.

***Irony:***

***The Man In the Yellow Suit***

The man in the yellow suit is clothed in a color that is often associated with happiness, but in fact he is greedy and cruel. His appearance contrasts with his personality, and in addition to being ironic, suggests that people should not trust first impressions.

***The Reluctant Kidnappers***

Winnie had often been haunted by visions of what it would be like to be kidnapped. But none of her visions had been like this, with her kidnappers just as alarmed as she was herself. (p. 31)

When the Tucks spirit Winnie away from the spring, they are more terrified than the little girl is. Winnie had always imagined that if she were kidnapped, she would be the one who would be frightened - but ironically, her accidental kidnappers are much more frightened than she is!

***Jesse's Age***

“Seventeen?” “That’s right.” “Oh,” said Winnie hopelessly. “Seventeen. That’s old.” “You have no idea,” he agreed with a nod. (p. 28)

When they first meet, Jesse tells Winnie he is seventeen, and she thinks this is a very old age. In fact, Jesse is actually way older than that - he is one hundred and four years old. Ironically, seventeen is actually a very young age for Jesse.

***The Toad in the Road***

At the end of the novel, Tuck and Mae swerve to avoid a toad sitting in the middle of the road, and Tuck says that the creature is acting like it's immortal (p. 140). In fact, this is not just a figure of speech - like the Tucks, the toad really cannot be killed, because this is the toad that Winne poured the water on.

***Metaphors and Similes:***

***Moving Into a Dream (Simile)***

Leaving the cottage was like leaving something real and moving into dream. (p. 121)

Near midnight, Winnie slips out from her parents' cottage and goes to join the Tucks, who are breaking Mae out of prison. Winnie can hardly believe she is daring enough to attempt this, and she deals with a feeling of unreality. Ironically, these events are occurring at night, a time when everyone else is asleep.

***The Paintbox of the Sky (Simile)***

The sky was a ragged blaze of red and pink and orange, and its double trembled on the surface of the pond like colour spilled from a paint box. (p. 60)

In this sentence, the author compares the sky's reflection to a spilled paintbox of distinct colors. The three colors chosen are significant because they are bright, hot colors. Though they are beautiful, they are likened to color spilled from a paint box, which suggests that there might be sadness involved in their beautiful appearance as well. This later becomes clear when Tuck begins to speak about the negativity involved in immortality.

***Closing the Gates (Metaphor)***

Closing the gates of her oldest fears as had the gates of her own fenced yard.

Winnie's parents were overprotective, which led them to set strict rules for Winnie. They discouraged the young girl from going outside, warning her of the danger she will face the moment she steps outside the gate. This quote compares the gates of Winnie's yard to the mental structures that contained her fear of the unknown world. However, when she overcomes her fear and steps out into the world, she lets go of her fear.

***The Ferris Wheel of August (Simile)***

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. (p. 3)

The opening lines of the novel’s Prologue presents a textbook example of how start a story with an image that resonates with everything connected to the theme without spoiling the narrative. This quote evokes the moment a seat at the top of a Ferris Wheel sits precariously between upward and down motion on a hot August day that is the symbolic counterpart to the first half of the year being in the past and the second half of the year still remaining an uncertain future.

This simile is layered with parallel conceptions of time as briefly seeming to stop and like a carnival ride that children look forward to each year while adults recall it with growing nostalgia. It is almost impossible to conceive of a more perfect simile to open a novel about childhood, maturity, and the possibility of living forever.

***Potato (Metaphor)***

A great potato of a woman with a round, sensible face and calm brown eyes. (p. 10)

This metaphor is used to introduce the reader to Mae Tuck. Mae is warm yet simple, like a potato. A potato is a comforting food, and it is also connected to the earth and the soil. This makes it a suitable metaphor for Mae, who is a simple, nurturing, and homely woman. Though she is not beautiful in a conventional sense, Mae is a gentle and sensible woman. This simple metaphor gives the reader deep insight into Mae's character.

***Imagery:***

***The Man in Yellow***

The villainous presence in the book is practically nothing but imagery. He is identified only by description since the reader never learns his name. His behavior stimulates feelings of anxiety and fear in Winnie, but there’s nothing specifically threatening about him. Each appearance of the man nevertheless has the effect of creating a sense of ambiguous menace.

His description is an ideal example of how the author has mastered the use of imagery to convey useful non-narrative information. Yellow is the light of caution when in traffic, but it does not necessarily indicate an emergency situations. Moreover, yellow is generally a color associated with happiness, but the man in the yellow suit inspires dread instead.

***Summer Days***

The weeks that come before are only a climb from balmy spring, and those that follow a drop to the chill of autumn, but the first week of August is motionless, and hot. It is curiously silent, too, with blank white dawns and glaring noons, and sunsets smeared with too much color. Often at night there is lightning, but it quivers all alone. There is no thunder, no relieving rain. These are strange and breathless days, the dog days, when people are led to do things they are sure to be sorry for after. (p. 3)

This passage uses a number of strategies to convey the imagery of the time of year in which the novel is set. This time of year is "motionless and hot," wedged between spring/early summer and autumn. "Blank white dawns and glaring noons" offer a sense of contrast with the "sunsets smeared with too much color." The author also introduces a sense of foreboding and foreshadowing when she writes, "when people are led to do things they are sure to be sorry for after."

***Treegap Road***

The road that led to Treegap had been trod out long before by a herd of cows who were, to say the least, relaxed. It wandered along in curves and easy angles, swayed off and up in a pleasant tangent to the top of a small hill, ambled down again between fringes of bee-hung clover, and then cut sidewise across a meadow. Here its edges blurred. It widened and seemed to pause, suggesting tranquil bovine picnics: slow chewing and thoughtful contemplation of the infinite. (p. 5)

The road to Treegap was originally forged by cows, who eked out a path in the countryside. "Bee-hung" clover is a beautiful way of expressing the tendency of bees to congregate around fields of flowers, and evokes a warm and relaxing portion of the countryside.

***The Pond***

The water dimpled, and bright rings spread noiselessly and vanished. “Feeding time,” said Tuck softly. And Winnie, looking down, saw hosts of tiny insects skittering and skating on the surface. “Best time of all for fishing,” he said, “when they come up to feed.” (p. 61)

The pond where Tuck takes Winnie to explain why she needs to keep the spring a secret is filled with life. Because of its part in the water cycle, it is a symbol of the cycle of life. Moreover, it is filled with small animals such as insects and fish. Winnie sees "dimples" and "bright rings" created by the busy bugs and the feeding fish; these special details evoke the scenery.

***Symbols, Allegory and Motifs:***

***The Wheel (Motif)***

The wheel is a frequent motif in the book. In the beginning, the author describes the characters as being like spokes in a wheel. In the middle, Tuck describes the cycle of birth and death on the pond as resembling a wheel. At the end, the immortal toad that Winnie gave the spring water to narrowly avoids being crushed by the wheel of the Tuck's cart.

The wheel symbolizes the cycle of life, which is always moving and never stops. Just like a wheel rolls up, people and animals are born, and just like a wheel rolls down, they eventually die. Yet the turning of a wheel isn't cause for mourning or sadness, because all wheels eventually turn to where they were before. Only the Tucks are removed from this cycle because of their immortality.

***The Toad (Motif)***

The toad symbolizes Winnie's freedom and maturity. Early in the novel, Winnie discussed her desire for independence and freedom with the toad, and eventually decided to run away.

At the end of the novel, Winnie poured the spring water on the toad in order to keep it free from harm and safe forever. This act of generosity allowed Winnie to symbolically keep part of herself alive while also enjoying a normal life.

***The Pond (Symbol)***

The pond that Tuck took Winnie to resembled the cycle of life, which the Tucks are removed from. The pond's water travels from river to ocean to cloud to rain then back again, symbolizing the cycles of birth and death. It is also home to many animals that grow, reproduce, and die. Tuck takes Winnie to this place to explain that his immortality has removed him from these beautiful natural cycles, and that she must not make the same mistake.

***Music Box (Symbol)***

Mae's music box is a symbol of the Tuck's humanity and goodness. It is described as the only beautiful thing that Mae owns, and she uses it to soothe Winnie after the girl grows frightened when the Tucks "kidnap" her. Other people know that the music box is a sign of the Tucks, even if they aren't quite sure what it means. For example, Winnie's grandmother refers to it as elf music, and the grandmother of the man in the yellow suit knew that the melody was associated with an immortal family.

The music box is always described as beautiful and good, and it is a major part of the Tuck family legend as well as their influence on other people.

***Winnie's Choice (Allegory)***

At the end of the novel, Winnie chooses to pour the spring water on the toad rather than drinking it herself after her seventeenth birthday. She has decided she wants to protect the toad, which is being harassed by a dog, more than she wants to preserve herself. This shows that she is exercising compassion, and also that she has chosen to take Tuck's words to heart and to live a life that is not disconnected from the cycles of nature.

Though most people do not have to choose whether or not to drink from a magical spring, everyone must make decisions about what kind of life they are going to lead, and these decisions must be made freely and then fully accepted. Winnie lives a long and full life without drinking the spring water, offering inspiration to ordinary people who also must make hard choices in life.

***Quotes:***

Nothing ever seems interesting when it belongs to you—only when it doesn’t.

p. 7

Winnie looks out at the forest, which her family owns, from the gated yard. However, she has never been particularly interested in this area until recently. The quotation above suggests that this is because she has always known that she has the option of visiting it, and so it has never seemed like a priority to do so.

This quote also suggests the reason why Babbitt wrote this book: to convince her daughter that living forever actually wouldn’t be that great after all. The Tucks long for mortality, which Babbitt’s daughter and all other human beings already possess. Like Babbitt's daughter, Winnie will eventually come to see the significance of her own mortality, and will make the best of her life.

The people would have noticed the giant ash tree at the center of the wood, and then, in time, they’d have noticed the little spring bubbling up among its roots in spite of the pebbles piled there to conceal it. And that would have been a disaster so immense that this weary old earth, owned or not to its fiery core, would have trembled on its axis like a beetle on a pin.

p. 8

Early in the novel, the narrator makes a reference to the hidden spring that has granted the Tucks immortality, identifying this as the reason why the road seems to travel around the forest in Treegap.

With its use of words such as "disaster" and "trembling," this quote suggests that this spring contains a very terrible secret, so severe that it could cause life as we know it to change forever. The suggestions of something hidden also evoke curiosity in the mind of the reader. Lastly, this quotation is an example of the poetic writing that characterizes Natalie Babbitt's novel - phrases like "the weary old earth" and "tremb[ling] like a beetle on a pin" are colorful and evoke an emotional response in the reader.

For Mae Tuck, and her husband, and Miles and Jesse, too, had all looked exactly the same for eighty-seven years.

p. 11

This quotation comes at the end of the chapter where the reader is introduced to Mae and Angus Tuck, very ordinary-seeming couple who wake up and discuss the day ahead. There are a few features of their conversation that seem strange (such as Tuck voicing concern about Mae traveling to Treegap, and Mae replying that she has not been there in ten years), but it is only with the sentence above that it becomes clear that this is no ordinary couple.

This quotation connects with the theme of the magical in the everyday that occurs throughout the book. Though Mae and Tuck seem to all appearances like an ordinary couple, in fact they are far more ancient than they seem and conceal a great secret.

The characters in the stories she read always seemed to go off without a thought or care, but in real life—well, the world was a dangerous place. People were always telling her so. And she would not be able to manage without protection. They were always telling her that, too. No one ever said precisely what it was that she would not be able to manage. But she did not need to ask. Her own imagination supplied the horrors.

p. 22

When Winnie plans to run away, she is a little frightened. She has heard from so many adults that the world is a dangerous place, and that she won't be able to manage by herself. Still, she chooses to run away anyway to get away from her strict mother and grandmother, and this adventure eventually leads to her meeting the Tuck family.

This moment marks a huge coming-of-age moment for Winnie. Despite her fear, she chooses to follow her own path, and as the next quotation reveals, she takes her first steps in the road to adulthood.

People get to wondering.

p. 53

Mae says this when explaining how the miraculous youth of the Tucks began to draw suspicion from their small rural community. Mae here underscores an important trait in humans - curiosity. People always wonder what's happening in the lives of other people, and often start judging without knowing the real story. This is exactly what the Tucks are trying to avoid - they don't want other people to notice the fact that they do not age, and they don't want these other people to start seeking the source of their immortality.

The phrasing of this quote also emphasizes the homey, down-to-earth quality of the Tuck family. "People get to wondering" is slightly grammatically incorrect, which suggests that they are simple, ordinary people, without any special education or status.

"Life’s got to be lived, no matter how long or short,” she said calmly. “You got to take what comes. We just go along, like everybody else, one day at a time."

p. 54

Mae Tuck says this when she is discussing the peculiarity of the Tuck's immortality. She emphasizes that even though she and her family are immortal, they still try to accept their lot with calm and equanimity. This resolution to take things as they come may account for the calm of the Tuck family.

Mae also offers an important life lesson to young Winnie - no moment of life should be wasted, and you should enjoy every moment of life. This is as important a lesson for mortal people as it is for the immortal Tucks.

Still—there’s no use trying to figure why things fall the way they do. Things just are, and fussing don’t bring changes.

p. 54

Mae Tuck says this to Winnie shortly after the family explains the story of their immortality to the young girl. She emphasizes the importance of accepting one's situation.

This is a vitally important lesson for the Tucks, who have been granted an immortality that they did not seek or ask for. However, they do not waste time thinking about why this incident happened and why it happened to them. Such a line of thought would not be beneficial in any way, but rather would only produce more sadness and time wasting.

Your time’s not now. But dying’s part of the wheel, right there next to being born. You can’t pick out the pieces you like and leave the rest. Being part of the whole thing, that’s the blessing. But it’s passing us by, us Tucks. Living’s heavy work, but off to one side, the way we are, it’s useless, too. It don’t make sense. If I knowed how to climb back on the wheel, I’d do it in a minute. You can’t have living without dying. So you can’t call it living, what we got. We just are, we just be, like rocks beside the road.

p. 63

After she learns their secret, Tuck takes Winnie out on the pond near their home in the evening and explains to her why she must keep their secret. In perhaps the most important passage in the book, Tuck explains his philosophy about life and why immortality is not something he enjoys.

For Tuck, both birth and death are part of the cycle of life and neither should be feared. It's the fact that life ends that gives it meaning. Without mortality, Tuck feels useless and separated from the rest of the world, like a rock.

Interestingly, there is no mention of an afterlife in Tuck Everlasting, but death is still described as the natural conclusion to life, and something that encourages people to make the most of their days on this earth.

And then Winnie said something she had never said before, but the words were words she had sometimes heard, and often longed to hear. They sounded strange on her own lips and made her sit up straighter. “Mr. Tuck,” she said, “don’t worry. Everything’s going to be all right.”

p. 104

Winnie says this after Mae is caught by the sheriff after she strikes the man in the yellow suit. The Tuck family is panicking at the thought of Mae being taken to jail and hung on the gallows, because she will not be able to die and this would expose their secret. However, Winnie is determined to make sure that this will not happen.

This is a sign of remarkable maturity from Winnie. Despite the fact that she is the youngest person present, she is determined to take care of the people around her. She fulfills her promise when she helps Mae escape from prison. Winnie's reassurances and her follow-through mark her coming of age as a true adult.

Stone walls do not a prison make.

p. 123, Winnie

As Winnie, Tuck, Angus, and Jesse break Mae out of prison, Winnie thinks of this line, which comes from a poem, “To Althea: From Prison." The poem was written in 1642, during Lovelace's time in prison for supporting an unpopular political position, and was likely addressed to his lover. The poem suggests that true imprisonment comes from ignoring one's true values and by giving up love. Moreover, the poem suggests that innocent people who are imprisoned unjustly can expect to find true freedom.

Because Mae was acting from love for Winnie when she attacked the man in the yellow suit, according to the moral structure of the poem, she is innocent. Moreover, though Winnie is committing a criminal act in helping Mae break out of prison, she is also innocent because she is acting from love.

***Themes:***

***The Purpose of living:***

Tuck Everlasting introduces 10-year-old [Winnie Foster](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/winnie-foster), a wealthy and sheltered girl, as she tries to decide whether or not to run away from home to escape the constant, overbearing supervision of her parents and grandmother. However, after witnessing young Jesse Tuck drinking out of a brook in her family's wood, Winnie is promptly whisked away by the Tuck family, who tell her, puzzlingly, that they can live forever--the four members of the family, [Mae](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/mae-tuck), [Angus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/angus-tuck), [Miles](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/miles-tuck), and Jesse, as well as their horse, haven't aged at all for the last 87 years. As Winnie grapples with this impossible assertion and listens to each of the Tucks tell her about their experiences being immortal and what they feel the purpose of life is, Winnie too is forced to examine her own reasons for living and the questions raised when a person cannot die. Ultimately, Tuck Everlasting suggests that the true purpose of life is to make a difference through forming connections with other people, and in order for that difference to be meaningful, a person must gradually mature and eventually die.

Even though Winnie believes at the start of the novel that, practically speaking, she's too young to make a real difference in the world, she already recognizes that this is one thing she should endeavor to do with her life. As she ponders whether or not to run away one afternoon, she declares to a [toad](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/the-toad) lounging outside her cottage's [fence](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/symbols/the-fence) that she wants to do "something that would make some kind of difference in the world," which, in her understanding, she can't do while she's cooped up in her yard. Winnie's goal is, notably, a concise encapsulation of what the novel suggests the purpose of life should be, though it lacks much nuance or detail. Winnie begins to gain some of this nuance when, at the Tucks' home, she has conversations with all of the Tucks about what they feel the meaning of life is.

Miles Tuck, who is 22 years old, affirms Winnie's suspicion that the purpose of living is to make a difference. He says that it's no good thinking only of oneself; he tells Winnie that "people got to do something useful if they're going to take up space in the world." However, though Miles travels, working as a carpenter and as a blacksmith, he finds that he can't keep a job for too long or else people will get suspicious when he doesn’t age. Because of this forced transience and his lack of education, Miles suggests that he's not able to make as much of a difference in the world as he'd really like to. 17-year-old Jesse, on the other hand, tells Winnie that the purpose of life is to enjoy it and even encourages Winnie to wait until she's his age and drink the water so that the two of them can enjoy life for the rest of time. Notably, the differences between Miles's and Jesse's understandings of what it means to live speak to their age gap and the maturity levels in which they're forever trapped. Miles got married and fathered two children in the years after drinking from the stream; his wife left and took the children after about twenty years of marriage, devastating Miles. His answer reflects his maturity level and suggests that such understanding can only come with age and experience, specifically the experience of having loved and lost people he cared about. In contrast with Miles, Jesse still looks like a teenager and has the mindset of a 17-year-old. Unlike Miles, Jesse has never had to think about the welfare of anyone other than himself. Through this contrast, the novel suggests that it's actually impossible for Jesse to come to a more nuanced understanding of what he can do with his life, as his mindset will forever be that of a selfish and pleasure-seeking teenager. It seems, then, that there is a deep connection between aging and gaining understanding of life’s purpose.

Angus and Mae offer Winnie even broader and more far-reaching explanations of the purpose of living than their sons do. Angus suggests that in addition to making a difference in the world, a person must also die when they've finished making a difference--something that none of the Tucks can do. Similarly, both Angus and Mae make it very clear to Winnie that one of the greatest joys of life is being able to grow, change, and mature, something that none of them--most notably Jesse--will ever be able to do. Mae and Angus ask Winnie to imagine what it would be like if she stopped maturing at age ten, as well as what would happen if everyone stopped maturing. They suggest that as an eternal 10-year-old, Winnie would be stuck, like Jesse, in the early stages of maturity and would never be able to move forward, therefore rendering her incapable of either making a meaningful difference (as there's only so much that even an immortal 10-year-old can do) or developing a more mature idea of what it means to be alive.

The fact that Winnie begins to learn about the purpose of life by connecting with others suggests that, alongside making a difference, making friends is also an important element of being a living person in the world. It's only because Winnie starts to make friends, first with the toad and then with the Tucks, that she's able to make her mark by saving them from their respective fates. When Mae is sentenced to death for killing the [man in the yellow suit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/the-man-in-the-yellow-suit), Winnie does what she can, given her age and maturity level,  by choosing to help the Tucks free Mae from jail. Weeks later, Winnie taps into her sense of empathy again and gives the toad the magic water, thereby saving it from death. All of this suggests that in order to make a meaningful mark on the world, it is necessary to connect with others and ultimately act in service of them. Additionally, in the epilogue, Angus learns that Winnie went on to marry and have children before her death, which suggests that Winnie continued to connect with and support others throughout her life. By illustrating the many different ways that one person could make a difference in the world, and especially by including Winnie's death in this category, Tuck Everlasting suggests that the true purpose of life is to connect with others, make a difference wherever possible, and accept death when the time comes.

***Childhood, Independence and Maturity:***

Tuck Everlasting introduces [Winnie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/winnie-foster) at the very beginning of puberty. She's still a child, but she also shows glimmers of maturity and the desire to explore the world, both of which the novel suggests are necessary precursors to coming of age. By illustrating how Winnie begins to come of age, Tuck Everlasting suggests that the process of reaching maturity is one that begins when a young person begins to understand complex realities and experiment with making independent choices in the face of that complexity.

When the reader first meets Winnie, she appears very much like a child. She hits the iron [fence](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/symbols/the-fence) surrounding her family's cottage with a stick in a childish and thoughtless way, and she believes that she's going to grow up to be just like her [mother](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters) and her [Granny](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters)--that is, she'll grow up to inhabit a stuffy world of "proper" femininity, as modeled for her by these adult women. Winnie appears childlike here because she never questions what her future is going to look like; she blindly trusts the adults around her to guide her towards adulthood. Further, aside from suggesting that she’s not excited about the version of adulthood they represent, Winnie doesn't show any recognition that she has the power to make choices about her future. Despite these qualities that firmly establish Winnie as a child, the novel also suggests that she's at a point in her maturation where she's ready to begin questioning reality. Though she thinks about running away from home and ultimately decides not to, contemplating doing so suggests that she craves independence and the ability to make her own decisions. Further, Winnie’s obvious attraction to 17-year-old [Jesse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/jesse-tuck), whom she meets when she wanders into her family's wood, suggests that her sexual maturity isn't far off either.

Winnie's decision to leave her fenced yard for the wild of the wood becomes a symbolic representation of her choice to begin her coming-of-age journey. While Winnie's home and yard signify the safe, controlled, and reliable world of childhood, everything outside of them introduces Winnie to the fact that her home and her way of life are only one way of living, an understanding that the novel suggests is essential to becoming a mature individual. However, though the novel suggests that beginning this journey is a simple choice that's as easy as opening a garden gate, what Winnie discovers outside of the gate paints the adult world as one that's simultaneously delightful and terrifying--in every case, it upends Winnie's expectations of what the world should be like. Winnie initially finds the wood extremely pleasant and wonders why she never chose to play in it before this first time. However, the wood soon turns into the setting of her worst nightmare when [Mae](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/mae-tuck), Jesse, and [Miles](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/miles-tuck) kidnap her after she sees Jesse drink from the stream. Further, despite this fear, Winnie calmly observes that her nightmare isn't at all like she'd imagined it would be, which indicates that Winnie is beginning to appreciate that the adult world is more complicated than she'd imagined in her childish nightmares. Similarly, though Winnie's reasoning for not wanting to run away hinges on not wanting to be alone, she soon discovers that with the Tucks, she isn't alone--though she does vacillate between thinking that the Tucks are horrible criminals and dear friends. This impresses upon Winnie the adult world is confusing and scary, but it's also possible to find bright spots in that world even in unexpected places.

Once the [constable](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/the-constable) returns Winnie to her parents after 24 hours away, Winnie has time to reflect on the journey she took and decide how she's going to move forward. Several things remind the reader that Winnie is still very much a child at this point. She again stays inside the fence, per her parents' request, and she seeks comfort from her mother and by sitting in a child-size [rocking chair](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/symbols/winnie-s-rocking-chair) that's much too small for her. All of this suggests that while Winnie may be beginning her coming-of-age journey, she still has a long way to go. As she continues to grow, she will move backwards and forwards between childhood and adulthood, stepping out as she feels ready and retreating back into childish comforts when the world feels too big to handle. Importantly, however, Winnie notices that her parents treat her differently after her adventure, as though something important has happened to her, and she realizes that she now has the power to dictate the course of her own life. Her parents' treatment suggests that, after her journey outside the fence, Winnie is not just a little girl anymore. Having learned more about the world, she understands that she can step out of her comfort zone at any moment and in particular, she understands that stepping out has consequences: her actions changed the Tucks' lives dramatically, caused Winnie's parents to question Winnie's trustworthiness, and introduced Winnie to an entirely different way of living. Through these descriptions of Winnie’s dawning maturity, the novel characterizes coming of age as a process in which children discover their own agency and how it can affect the complexities of the world around them.

***Nature and the cycle of life:***

The narrator of Tuck Everlasting is keenly interested in the natural world; the narration frequently mentions the weather, the animals, and the plants that inhabit Treegap and the surrounding countryside. While the narrator's observations primarily function to illustrate the splendor of the natural world, Angus Tuck takes this appreciation one step further by encouraging [Winnie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/winnie-foster) and the reader to see the natural world as a metaphor for the cycles of life. By engaging with this metaphor and gaining a deeper appreciation of the natural world, Winnie discovers that life needs to remain cyclical--that is, all beings need to experience life and death--in order for the entire world to remain beautiful and functional.

The narrator suggests that the natural world and its cycles are essentially a giant wheel that connects all people to each other in mysterious ways. For example, the narrator takes great care to note that the events of the novel could only take place in the first week of August, which "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." The narrator suggests that this "pause," combined with the way that this metaphorical wheel connects people, is why Winnie meets the Tucks in the wood and why the villainous [man in the yellow suit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/the-man-in-the-yellow-suit) also shows up in the wood at this particular point in time. The wood itself is an important player in this cycle as the narrator asserts that it, not the planet's core, is the center of Winnie and the Tucks' world. To illustrate its central role, the wood contains the ash tree and its magical stream—whose waters can stop a person from aging and allow them to live forever. In other words, per the novel's logic, the water from the brook turns a person into a fixed point at the very center of a metaphorical wheel. While other people, animals, and plants grow, change, and die, a person who can live forever is stuck in time and cannot change, which the novel suggests prevents them from truly living.

When Angus Tuck takes Winnie out on his [boat](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/symbols/the-boat-and-the-pond), he makes a similar point using a natural metaphor on a slightly smaller scale. Angus rows the boat across the pond--which is fed on one end by a stream that continues out the other side--until he reaches the downstream side of the pond and gets the boat stuck in some roots and weeds. Angus then tells Winnie about the water cycle: the water in the pond is very much alive with fish, insects, and plants, even if it looks still. Additionally, on a grander scale, the water currently in the pond will eventually reach the ocean and, some time after that, fall back into the pond as rain. The boat caught in the roots, however, is like the Tucks: stuck and unable to complete the cycle, something that Angus suggests makes him little better than a rock or an inanimate object. As far as Angus is concerned, stopping the cycle of nature or the great wheel of the world is a crime worse than any other and, beyond that, is extremely painful to bear. He explains how Miles's wife took their two children away after 20 years of marriage, when it became impossible to ignore the fact that Miles still looked 22. Miles never got to see his children grow and develop, and he has to live daily with the pain of knowing that he has great-grandchildren out there somewhere whom he can't connect with, as it would be "unnatural" for him to do so as a person who will never get any older.

Through all of this, Winnie only gradually begins to understand the necessity of death, something that, at 10 years old, frightens her immensely. At first, she's unconvinced that dying is at all necessary or a good thing. However, while fishing with Miles, a biting mosquito makes her question what the world would be like if mosquitos never died but continued to multiply--eventually, they'd crowd out everything else. Similarly, Angus suggests that if all humans lived forever and multiplied, they--as well as the natural world, which would struggle to support its inhabitants--would suffer as well. While this all begins to push Winnie in the direction of accepting that death is an essential part of the cycle of life on earth, she only truly understands the importance of death when the man in the yellow suit, who wants to bottle the stream's water and sell it to "worthy" people, threatens to force her to drink the water. He believes that a child performing deadly tasks to demonstrate the water's efficacy would be more compelling to potential buyers than an adult performer. To stop this from happening, [Mae](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/mae-tuck) hits the man in the yellow suit over the head with the butt of her rifle, ultimately killing him.

Though Winnie is understandably disturbed that Mae commits murder, she also recognizes that Mae does this to save Winnie, the rest of humanity, and the natural world from the unspeakable fate of never dying. Winnie begins to grasp not that dying isn’t just important—it’s an absolute necessity. Indeed, she chooses to take Angus's advice to not drink the brook's water and eventually dies at the age of 78. The novel suggests that in some way, every death--of a human or an animal--is as important and as meaningful as the death of the man in the yellow suit. While not all deaths remove dangerous people from the world, all deaths create a space for new beings to begin their own journeys around the wheel of life, and this cycle is what keeps the world as a whole in balance.

***Morality, Choices and Friendship:***

In Tuck Everlasting, [Winnie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/winnie-foster) is confronted with a number of choices that would be high-stakes choices for anyone, let alone for a 10-year-old like Winnie. As Winnie thinks over her choices and considers the moral implications of all her options, she begins to understand that morality isn't entirely black and white; nothing is unequivocally good or bad. However, Winnie does come to the conclusion that when she makes decisions that are based on friendship and care for others, those moral gray areas become much easier to accept and live with. Through Winnie’s experiences, the novel suggests that relying on friendship may be the best way to navigate life’s moral ambiguity.

From the start, the novel makes it very clear that every choice, no matter how small and seemingly innocuous, has the potential to carry immense consequences. Winnie initially reasons that her choice to leave her fenced yard is a safe and inconsequential one; in her mind, she's just going for a walk in her family's wood, which she has every right to do. It doesn't take long, however, for her to see that this choice has changed her life forever. The novel draws similarities between this seemingly innocuous choice and the choice that the Tuck family made 87 years ago, when they first drank from the enchanted brook. Like Winnie, they never expected the choice to quench their thirst to have any lasting or negative consequences, and yet, this choice completely transforms their lives. Importantly, what happens to Winnie after she leaves her yard and what happens to the Tucks after they drink from the brook aren't things that they can anticipate or control. [Mae](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/mae-tuck), [Jesse](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/jesse-tuck), and [Miles](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/miles-tuck) bundle Winnie off without her consent, while the Tucks become immortal without choosing to do so. These sudden turns of events impress upon the reader that though a person can do their best to engage with options logically and with an open mind, it's sometimes impossible to know what the consequences of one’s choices will be.

In the events that follow, the novel suggests that one of the most effective ways to make decisions in light of this moral ambiguity is to develop friendships and relationships with others. This, per the novel's logic, introduces people to other points of view and ways of life that are crucial to coming to terms with the moral implications of one's actions. The Tuck family helps guide Winnie in this direction as they implore her to believe their story and agree to keep the stream secret. Notably, they also understand that the choice to tell or remain silent will be Winnie's choice and her choice alone. By respecting her autonomy, the Tucks create space for Winnie to truly consider their stories. As a result, Winnie eventually appreciates their humanity, decides that they're her friends, and learns to trust herself in making morally complex decisions.

Because Winnie considers Mae a friend and thinks that she's a kind and generous person, Winnie ultimately decides that Mae's choice to kidnap Winnie--though wrong from a legal perspective--wasn't wrong in a moral sense. Further, Winnie recognizes that her kidnapping is a relatively minor offense compared to what would happen if the secret of the brook were to get out. This doesn't mean, however, that Mae's murder of the [man in the yellow suit](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/the-man-in-the-yellow-suit) is easy for Winnie to accept. Though Winnie is scared of the man and understands the many negative implications of selling the water, she never fully reconciles the wellbeing of the wider world with the violent, purposeful, and untimely death of a single person. This reminds the reader that Winnie is still in the process of learning to live with this kind of ambiguity, while also suggesting that in some cases, it doesn't actually get easier as a person becomes more mature--even [Angus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/angus-tuck) is disturbed by Mae's actions.

However, Winnie's friendship with Mae ultimately leads Winnie to make moral choices herself, even if Mae's choices to protect Winnie were questionably moral. When Winnie learns that the [constable](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/the-constable) intends to hang Mae for the murder of the man in the yellow suit, she knows that this cannot happen: Mae won't die and will therefore end up giving away the secret she killed a man to protect. Winnie also suggests that because Mae acted for the good of humanity, she doesn't deserve to be punished. To help right the situation, Winnie volunteers to trade places with Mae when Angus, Jesse, and Miles go to break her out of jail, as this will give the Tucks more time to escape. This action represents several major leaps for Winnie. First, it indicates that she understands that her choices have consequences--she could get in a great deal of trouble for helping to free a convicted murderer. Second, it shows that Winnie recognizes that this is a sacrifice worth making for someone she considers a dear friend. Importantly, even Winnie's [mother](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters) accepts the explanation that Winnie behaved as she did because Mae is her friend. This suggests that this reasoning makes sense even to the novel's authority figures, who have presumably had to face similar challenges themselves even though Winnie finds them uninteresting.

Ultimately, Tuck Everlasting leaves the reader with a number of morally ambiguous situations and outcomes. Mae never has to answer for murdering the man in the yellow suit, though she presumably has the rest of time to think about her actions--something that the novel implies could be either fair given the weight of the crime, or overly harsh since Mae will never be able to forget. Similarly, while Winnie kindly gives the magical water from Jesse to the [toad](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/tuck-everlasting/characters/the-toad) when a dog harasses it, it's unclear whether this is truly in the toad's best interests--a dog or other animal could still certainly harass it, and it’s also implied that it could get hit by a car. However, the novel still seems to insist that the true decider of whether a choice or action is moral or not is whether it's intended to care for a friend or another vulnerable individual. This perspective leaves room for moral ambiguity and suggests that the intention behind a choice matters just as much as the action itself.