Bridge to Terabithia

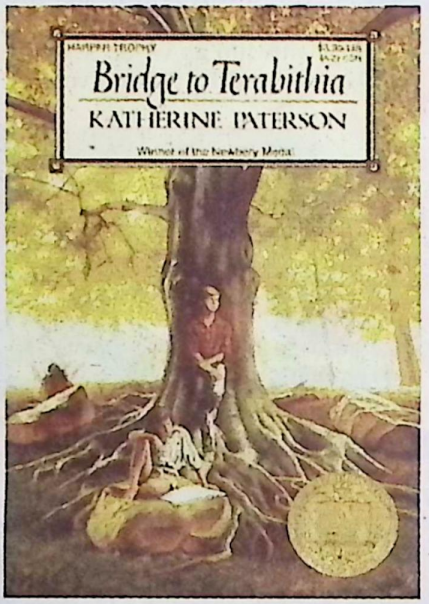
by Katherine Paterson

Reviewed by: Sameeha Suraiya

YOU read books that turn dull afternoons into a few delightful hours spent in flights of fancy that in the end leave you feeling good about yourself for undertaking the task of reading it. And then you find books that delight you not so much for its heart-racing moments as in its power to crack you open, inspire you. The story may not have to deal with extraordinary figures caught in life-changing, colossal circumstances. It can just very well be about people in our everyday lives unconsciously taking part in events that totally turn them around; it can just very well be about a boy and a girl crossing paths and sparking up the most unlikely friendship. So goes the story.

The name Katherine Paterson has spread far and wide with her winning innumerable literary laurels and a wide, eager audience. No stranger to the world of adolescent fiction, Paterson however, chooses not to belong to the bubble-gum crowd. The stories she pens are powerful and often challenges set values and norms. Bridge to Terabithia may seem like another drippy book on friendship; well, it's anything but that.

When Jess Aarons meets Leslie Burke, she is just another annoying girl in his class who has recently moved into their community. His life miserable enough for his four younger sisters, Jess has had enough of girls. He minds the farm when his father is away to town and is a pro at running, having won much recognition. But Jess is not exactly one of the boys who will pick up a fight nor is he one to enjoy those rowdy games that erupt every once in a while. He pretty much stays on his own; he even paints, a hobby that draws much derision from his peers. With the arrival of Leslie, the girl with sparkling green eyes and a spring in her step, things are ready to change.



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The fact that girls have never taken part in running is not big enough a reason for Leslie to stay away from it. She is soon looked upon as the strange kid. With Jess fiercely trying to ignore her inviting and friendly approach towards him, (he already has enough baggage to deal with), the two inevitably trod on towards a path that leads them at first to becoming the strongest of allies, and then companions of the most entrancing mould. The narrow and bleak life of rural Virginia is suddenly magical and full of optimism as the twosome bond in a way that not only affects them but changes people who surround them. Leslie's intellectual parents often forget she is a child, and so for Leslie, being the outsider is as normal as it is for Jess. Jess falters often; he is unsure of himself. Guided by the stronger and more positive Leslie, he is shown to a world of unbridled imagination and thrill. They are drawn together as friends because they both feel "different" and they come to respect and support each other's unique talents. Right behind the creek in the woods they create an imaginary kingdom called Terabithia. For the first time, Jess dares to feel good about himself. Terabithia may just be any favorite place in your own lifea place where you feel safe and free to be who you are. On one rainy spring day, life in Terabithia changes forever. Suddenly, Jess plunges into one of the most difficult experiences of his life. In order to survive, he is forced to think about the true meaning of Terabithia and the legacy that Leslie brings to Jess. By the end of the novel Jess is still struggling. As you read along you will be angered and saddened by the cold shift but the story ends on a warm and encouraging note.

Katherine Paterson is scorchingly honest in her portrayal of emotional journeys where young people struggle against tough odds toward greater strength of character. The book does not sit too heavily on you either and it is definitely worth checking out! Read it and be inspired.