

## **A STUDY ON THE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS IN GABOR CSUPO'S BRIDGE TO TERABITHIA (2007) MOVIE**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to describe physical appearance, personality, social status, and relationship of main characters. The method is descriptive-qualitative. The researcher employed the method of collecting data, describing, analyzing, and then drawing a conclusion. The unit of data is the intrinsic element of the movie, the characterization of the main characters in Bridge to Terabithia's (2007) movie. The data was collected by the researcher himself. The researcher found that the characters of main characters are; (1) Jesse is a twelve-year-old boy who has straw-colored hair, his arms and legs flew out every which way, lonely, a creative boy, a talented artist, caring, emotional, and cooperative. (2) Meanwhile, Leslie is skinny, 12 years old, has blonde hair, tacky clothing, tomboyish, daring, caring, imaginative, and adventurous. Regarding social status, Leslie is from a rich and educated family and has difficulty socializing with others.

**Keywords:** Bridge to terabithia movie, characterization, literature, main character, movie,

### **INTRODUCTION**

Literature has been used to express someone's feelings in beautiful words. It is said as a medium for expressing ideas. According to Gyasi (1973, as cited in Claudia, 2016: para. 1), literature is a broad sense of writing to express and communicate thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward life. This daily life miniature is the art of writing that is full of expression and idea that comes from the imagination of the author's mind.

Literary work is indeed a work of an author's imagination. It expresses the images and events of daily activities directly or indirectly. Generally, literary work can be divided into three kinds or genres, such as poetry, drama, and prose. Poetry is a form of literature that uses aesthetic and often rhythmic qualifies language to express the daily life of human beings. Drama is a type of literature that is written to be performed in front of an audience by actors. The prose is written language that appears in its ordinary form without line breaks. (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/literature>).

There are so many ways to express ideas or thoughts. One of them is movie. Movie is a modern theater art form that is closely related to drama. Like a drama, a movie communicates visually through action and gesture and verbally through dialogue. (Boggs and Dennis, 1985). A movie is categorized as a literary work because it uses the language of "beautiful" as a means of expression of the author's ideas or thoughts. The movie itself encompasses individual motion pictures, the field of movies as an art form, and the motion picture industry. Movies are produced by recording photographic images with cameras, or by creating images using animation techniques or visual effects.

(<http://en.m.wikipedia.org/film/>). The movie is considered to be an important art form, a source of popular entertainment, and a powerful method for educating or indoctrinating citizens. The visual elements of cinema give motion pictures a universal power of communication.

A movie also describes characters, one of the psychological aspects of a fictional story. Characters are extended verbal representations of human beings in movies. According to DiYanni (2001), a character is an imaginary person that lives in a literary work or movie. Gill (1995) stated that a character is someone in a literary work that has some sort of identity which is made up of appearance, conversation, action, and name. Character refers to the people that the author creates to inhabit their stories. A character has an important role in making the movie story more alive. They give the story a purpose, a reason for the audience to care about what happens in the movie. (Pope, 2005:86). Therefore, characters are the life of a story or movie (Bennet and Royle, 2004:60). They are the objects of the audience's curiosity and fascination, affection, dislike, admiration, and condemnation of a fictional story or movie.

Generally, a character in a movie has two categories. They are major and minor characters. A major character is an important figure and plays an important role in a movie story. The major character always appears in most of a story, either as the subject or as the object. They have a big influence to represent the important thing that a movie wants to deliver to the audience. The major character is well-known as a protagonist in the conflict of a story. The protagonist on one hand is a major character who is generally sympathized. On the other hand, the antagonist is the character who against the protagonist struggles. A major character is always emphasized to tell in the story. (Pope, 2005:133-134). The other character is minor characters. Minor characters are not as important as the major characters, but still play a large part in the movie story. Their action help drives the story forward. They may impact the decisions the protagonist or antagonist makes, either helping or interfering with the conflict. Their appearances in the movie will be brief and infrequent (Pope, 2005:135).

Character in the movie has characterization. Characterization is the creation of a fictional character. Characterization is built to give impression values toward character. Characterization in a movie is more complicated and detailed than in other literary works because it is visual storytelling. Characterization is a way how a writer of a story writes, presents, and reveals the characters in the story that they write.

There are two ways of characterization; direct and indirect presentation. Direct presentation is the characterization that the writer exposes the characters directly by giving out all their personality from a narrative point of view or from another character's point of view. Meanwhile, indirect presentation is a characterization that the writer exposes the character indirectly by showing the action and reaction of the characters in the story. The readers analyze what the characters are like by themselves. (DiYanni, 2001). The audiences have to deduce for themselves the characteristics of characters by observing his/her thought, behavior, speech, way of talking, appearance, and way of communicating with other characters and also by discerning the response of other characters.

Characterization is a technique or way of showing figures. There are several ways to show character. For the purpose of this study, the researcher only analyzes the

characterization of the main characters based on these aspects: (1) physical appearance which relates to the age, performance, how the main character looks alike, the gender, the color of the skin, eyes, and hair, and whether the characters are beautiful or handsome. (2) Social status which describes how the main characters of life/status (poor or rich), how is his/her education, and treasure dignity. (3) Personality that describes the personality of the main characters, such as the mental condition, the habits of the main character, and the way the main characters behave. (4) Social relationship that discusses the relationship between the main characters and other characters surrounding him/her. (Jones, 1968:84).

The characterization that will be studied in this paper is *Bridge to Terabithia* (2007) movie's main characters. This is a fantasy movie. It was released in USA and Canada on February 16, 2007. The director was Gabor Csupo. It was adapted for a movie by David L. Paterson and Jeff Stockwell. The movie is based on the Katherine Paterson novel of the same name. Walt Disney Pictures distributed the movie in the U.S.A. The movie received positive reviews. Critics called it faithful to the children's movie. They said the movie is imaginative. This movie was nominated for seven awards. It won five of them at the Young Artist Awards. (Wikipedia. 2022, para. 1)

The movie tells the story of two 12-year- old neighbors, Jesse Aarons and Leslie Burke. Jesse Aarons is a fifth grader who wants to be an artist. He lives with his financially poor family in Lark Creek. He rides the bus to school with his little sister, May Belle. He avoids the school bully, Janice Avery. In class, his classmates always tease him. Then a new student his age, named Leslie comes to the school. At recess, Jess enters a running event, for which he had been training at home. Leslie also enters it. She manages to beat all the boys, including Jess. (Kiddle Encyclopedia, 2022: para. 1)

Leslie praises Jess' drawing ability after she sees his notebook at school. They soon become best friends. After school, they go into the woods. There, they swing across a creek on a rope. Jess and Leslie find an abandoned tree house and a broken-down truck on the other side of the creek. They invent a new world, *Terabithia*. The fantasy world reflects their lives. It comes to life as they explore the area. For days after school, Jess and Leslie spend their free time in the tree house and learn about one another. (Kiddle Encyclopedia, 2022: para. 2).

At one morning, Ms. Edmunds, Jess' music teacher, invites Jess to visit an art museum in the city. Jess does not ask Leslie to come with them. When he returns home, his father tells him that Leslie drowned in the river that morning. Jess is very sad to hear this. He visits the Burke family home with his parents to pay their respects. Leslie's father, Bill Burke, tells Jess that she loved him. He thanks him for being a very good friend to her, since she could not make friends at her old school. Jess feels very guilty for Leslie's death. Then, Jess decides to reimagine *Terabithia* and builds a bridge across the river to welcome a new ruler. Jess and May Belle make *Terabithia* even better, with Jess as king and his sister as a princess. (Kiddle Encyclopedia, 2022: para. 3).

This research focused on the characterization of the main characters in *Bridge to Terabithia* (2007) movie. The writer chose this movie because it is a fantasy movie. The visuals and performances made this movie imaginative. The power of fantasy in this movie is used as means to overcome some problems in the real life of the main characters.

It is also faithful to the children's movie story. It was so interesting to discuss the characterization of the main characters (Jess and Leslie) reflected by their physical appearance, personality, social status, and social relationship in *Bridge to Terabithia* (2007) movie.

The objectives of the study are to find the physical appearance, personality, social status, and social relationship of the main character in the “*Bridge to Terabithia* (2007) movie. Meanwhile, the significance of the study is expected to be able to add scientific treasures in the field of literature, especially in analyzing the intrinsic element like the characterization of main characters. Besides, the study can assist advantageously for the next researcher who would like to conduct research with similar cases as additional reference in literature studies. Finally, this paper provides an advantage for the writer to develop his ability to write a scientific article in the field of literature.

## **METHOD**

This study was conducted using a descriptive-qualitative design. It required the writer to analyze the characterization of the main character in *Bridge to Terabithia* (2007) movie. It was Gabor Csupo's which was adapted for a movie by Paterson and Stockwell. The movie is based on the Paterson novel.

The writer got the data from two sources such as primary and secondary data. The primary data was from *Bridge to Terabithia* (2007) movie. The secondary data was from books, scientific articles, and thesis which were related to the objectives of the study. This is library research or documentary because the writer indirectly analyzed the movie script, performances, and actions of the main characters by watching the movie to get suitable data. For the depth of analyzing the story, the writer takes the characterization of Jess and Leslie as the main characters.

In qualitative research, the instrument of the study was the writer himself (Sugiyono, 2008:22) by watching the movie, reading the movie script, and underlining the dialogues or statements in the movie. The unit of analysis in the research was “*Bridge to Terabithia* (2007) movie directed by Gabor Csupo, especially the characterization of the main characters. The paper research was conducted in the 2022 academic year at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and took place of Mahasaraswati Denpasar University, Bali.

There were some steps to collect the data. They were: (1) watching and understanding the movie, and analyzing every activity; (2) reading the movie script and dialogs of the movie produced; (3) identifying all sentences and dialogues in the movie to get the data; and (4) choosing the data dealing with the problems of study. After collecting the data, the researcher analyzes the data. The steps were: (1) reviewing the collected data; (2) determining the component parts of the characterization of main characters; (3) using theories to analyze the characterization of main characters; (4) drawing the conclusion based on the data analysis.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Jesse Aarons and Leslie Burke are the main characters in *Bridge to Terabithia*'s (2007) movie. The data was analyzed based on the physical appearance, personality, social status, and social relationships of the main characters.

**Jesse Aarons**

**Physical Appearance**

*Jesse's Age and Gender*



**Figure 1. Jesse is a 12-year-boy (Csupó, 2007, 00:06:10)**

In figure 1, it seems Jesse is a 12- year-old boy. He lives in a town named Lark Creek. He is the third child of five children and all of his siblings are girls.

*Jesse's Dress, Hair, and Leg*



**Figure 2. Jess' physical appearance and dress (Csupó, 2007, 00:08:30)**

In the figure above, Jesse dresses in overalls without a shirt underneath when he is going running, so we know he dresses a little on the nerdy side, but that's probably just normal clothing for kids in a rural area. Jesse has straw-colored hair flapped hard against his forehead, and his arms and legs flew out away. He has long-legs for his age.

**Personality**

*Jesse is lonely and lost in the middle of a family of four girls*



**Figure 3. Jesse is between four sisters. (Csupó, 2007, 00:03:33)**

In figure 3 Jesse is the middle son of four sisters. All the attention goes to his younger sisters. His dad is closer to his younger sisters. He gives more attention to them than to Jesse. From this situation, Jesse often gets envious. Jesse envies his younger sisters for receiving more love and attention from his dad. While he has to care for himself.

***Jesse is a creative boy and a talented artist***

Jesse is portrayed as a creative boy. Being creative means bringing something like an idea, a painting, a piece of music, or an invention into existing as long as it is new and original, willing to try something new, finding excitement and pleasure in exploring new things. Jess shows it in the next pictures.



**Figure 4. Jesse colors his sister's pink shoes (Csupó, 2007, 00:04:54)**



**Figure 5. Jesse does his hobby, drawing (Csupó, 2007, 00:14:14)**

The figures show Jesse is creative. On the first day of school, Jesse has a running match. It requires him to wear sneakers. But his old taped-up sneakers have been discarded by his mother because they are very worn out. His mother provides him with the old shoes of his sister, so he covers the pink color of the shoe with a black marker. In this situation, Jesse shows his creativity in making something new.

Jesse also cares most about drawing. He is a talented artist. He ends up investing emotionally in Leslie because she is one of the only people that nourishes his artistic impulses and accepts him for who he is. In the drawing, Jess draws something originally from his mind. He manifests his ideas into paintings. He is creative and talented.

***Jesse cares***

Jesse is depicted to be caring with people around him. The figures below show the personality of Jesse being a caring boy.



**Figure 6. Jesse avoids Leslie from bullying (Csupó, 2007, 00”18:13)**



**Figure 7. Jesse helps Ms. Edmund (Csupó, 2007, 00:36:42)**

In figure 6, Leslie sits in Janice the bully’s designated seat in the school bus, Jesse wonders aloud if she has a “death wish.” He asked Leslie to sit in the right seat to avoid her being bullied by Janice. Furthermore, Jesse and Leslie help Ms. Edmund to take musical instruments to their class. In these actions, Jess show concern for other people, comfort to people who need it, and sacrifice himself to help other. He is caring.

***Jess becomes an emotional person***



**Figure 8. Jesse hits his friend (Csupó, 2007, 01:15:27)**

The death of Leslie changes everything. He who is passive and a loner person becomes an emotional and temperamental person. Indeed when his friend punches him, he usually does not respond to them, but now it is different. He hits his friend harder (Figure 8.). He vents his anger and guilt with rude actions. Jesse also pushes her sister to the ground because she follows Jesse into the kingdom without Jesse's knowledge. Without realizing it, Jesse becomes angry and cannot control his emotions well. He tries to cover up his sadness by releasing it to other people. Jess becomes an emotional person.



***Jesse is portrayed to be a part of mutual cooperation in his daily life***

Jesse's being mutual-cooperative in his life can be seen in the figures below.



**Figure 9. Jesse and Leslie drag materials (Csupó, 2007, 00:27:37)**

In the figures above, Jesse and Leslie make stuff. They drag boards and other materials and build their castle in the place they had found in Terabithia. Finally, Jesse is confident about his skill in building stuff and working together with others. In this situation, Jesse has the spirit of mutual cooperation in solving things in daily life.

**Social Status**

***Poor Family***



**Figure 10. Pink sneakers for Jess (Csupó, 2007, 00:04:05)**

Jess comes from a lower class and poor family. They eat what they have. His father has to work out of town from morning until late in the evening. His mother is a housewife and is busy caring for the house and the family's needs. At one moment, his mother forces Jess to wear his sister's pink sneakers because of their financial constraint to provide the new one for Jess. (Figure 10.).

***Fifth Grade Student***



**Figure 11. Jess draws in his class (Csupó, 2007, 00:02:56)**



Jess is a fifth-grader in Lark Creek School student, a rural Southern area. In his class, Jesse cares more about drawing and the big care race each day at recess.

### **Social Relationship**

Jesse's relationship status can be said non-existent. What he knows is getting up early, going to school, studying, and filling his spare time by drawing to explore and express his imagination. The followings are the facts.

#### ***Prefers to be lonely***

The lazy face at his breakfast time shows he prefers to dwell silently and pays attention to the object in front of his eyes. He chooses not to speak with his sisters or with his mother. The figure below describes it.



**Figure 12. Jess sits at the dining table (Csupó, 2007, 00:03:33)**

When he takes a school bus with other students from his school, he does not interfere with others' business. He prefers to sit alone near the window and does his hobby. Figure 13. portray it.



**Figure 13. Jess draws and sits alone near (Csupó, 2007, 00:14:13)**

#### ***First Close Friend***

He has become friends with a new girl at school named Leslie Burke. He first met her when she beat him and all the other boys in the recess race. This doesn't endear her to him, nor does her disarming cheerfulness. But eventually, she breaks down Jesse's walls and shows him an imaginary land called Terabithia.



Figure 14. Jess and Leslie go to Terabithia (Csupó, 2007, 00:21:32)

## Leslie Burke

### Physical Appearances

*Tomboy, athletic, and a faster runner than all the boys in her grade.*



Figure 15. Leslie's appearance (Csupó, 2007, 00:21:32)

According to the two figures above, Leslie is a skinny, twelve-year-old girl who has blonde hair and wears tacky clothing. She wears lots of layers-tights under capris, arm warmers, and a t-shirt. She wears clothes that weren't too girly, and easy to move in.

She is a boyish girl with a slightly hippie vibe. Leslie primarily wears layers of shirts paired with jackets, straight or cargo pants, armbands, and a single boho braid accessorized with string hair wrap. Leslie's boyishness can also be seen through her action. On her first day of school, Leslie decided to race with the boys instead of hanging out and trying to be friends with the girls. These describe Leslie as tomboyish.

### Personality

#### *Leslie is daring*

Leslie is an optimistic person, so she fights for what is right, fearing no bullies. This dialogue portrays her personality.

*Leslie : That's not fair, is it? Peeing's definitely supposed to be free.*

In this scene, the bullies guard the toilet, demanding money from those who wish to enter the toilet. Leslie is not agreed with it, so she marches with the kids to stop Janice from stealing people's stuff.

Confronting the bullies blatantly is not an option. Leslie has to be strategic in making her plan. She comes up with a plan to embarrass Janice using a fake love letter addressed to her by the most popular boy in her grade, Willard Hughes.

***Leslie is caring***

Leslie does those daring acts is because she cares for other people. Leslie does have not only masculine traits but also feminine traits, and caring is one of them.

*Leslie* : Hey, May Belle! I don't use my Barbies so much anymore. If you want, you can have them.

*Maybel* : To keep for permanent?

*Leslie* : Sure.

In the scene, Leslie asks what Jesse does for fun and that they could do something after school. May Belle chimes in, wanting to join them both but Jesse shuts her out. Feeling bad about May Belle, Leslie gave her the doll to comfort her. This shows that Leslie does listen to what May Belle talks about and remembers what she likes.

Another moment where Leslie combines being tactical and daring with her care for others is when she faces the bullies. Before that moment, Leslie was already thinking of helping the music teacher, Ms. Edmunds. Figure 16. below describes it.



**Figure 16. Leslie and Jess help Ms. Edmunds (Csupó, 2007, 00:36:35)**

Not only compliments him, but Leslie also shows her appreciation through her action in figure 17. below. While Jesse's father gives him a race track for his birthday, Leslie gives him acrylic paint. This shows that she gives a meaningful gift. Giving him a painting set is a sign of encouraging him to draw. Although she spent a good amount of money, she gives Jesse something that he'll be able to use.



**Figure 17. Leslie gives Jesse an acrylic set (Csupó, 2007, 00:35:38)**

### ***Leslie has a vast fantasy or imagination***

Fantasy is like Leslie's habits. She fantasizes about everything that she meets and finds. She is the one who had the idea of having a world only for her and Jesse.



**Figure 18. Bubble comes out of Leslie's mouth (Csupó, 2007, 00:16:33)**

In the figure above, Leslie is saying, *"As I swim through the water, bubbles burst from me, wobbling like little jellyfish as they rise. I check my air."* Through fantasy, Leslie tries to reduce her anxiety in order to get comfortable feelings and situations. In the reality, she doesn't like her friends at school because they cannot receive her uniqueness and difference, which is why she created a fantasy land named Terabithia. She and Jesse get their love from the people of Terabithia whom they imagine love and respect them. They can also express their intentions freely and without objects.

### ***Leslie is an adventurer***

Driven by her motto *"Keep your mind wide open"*, Leslie in fact has an exploratory spirit and ability to find joy in everyday life like a childish. This dialogue shows the personality.

- Leslie* : *We need a place. Just for us, where there's no Janice or Hoagers.*  
*Jesse* : *Yeah, but when we go back to school, there they are waiting.*  
*Leslie* : *Yeah, but ... someplace better than just not being at school.*

In the citations above, Leslie shows her adventurous spirit to Jesse. Leslie urges Jesse to explore the land across the rope. Her adventurous soul radiates in Terabithia.

### **Social Status**

#### ***Rich Family***

Leslie and her parents move from Pennsylvania to Lark Creek in order to simplify their lives. It means that Leslie's family is rich. They have a big-luxury house as shown in figure 19. below.



**Figure 19. Leslie points to her luxury house (Csupó, 2007, 00:10:34)**

***Leslie is a fifth-grade student***

In figure 20, Leslie comes to Lark Creek Elementary School as a new student. She and her family just moved from Pennsylvania to Lark Creek.



**Figure 20. Principal escorts Leslie to her new class (Csupó, 2007, 00:07:00)**

**Social Relationship**

***Difficult to Socialize***

In fact, Leslie has difficulties in socializing with others. In school, she wants to be accepted and have friends. However, in the reality, her classmates often make fun of her because of her differences, especially when she said that she didn't have a TV.

*Leslie* : What if you can't watch this program?

*Mrs. Myers* : Inform your parents it's an assignment, I'm sure they won't object.

*Leslie* : But... what if you don't have a TV?

The quotation above happens when Leslie says that she doesn't have a TV. Everyone in Lark Creek has a TV and they are familiar with TV. Therefore, they feel odd because she doesn't have one.

***The Only Friend***

Once Leslie moved into Lark Creek, she doesn't have any friends and she doesn't try to get one either. The only one she tries to befriend is Jesse. The friendship of the two best friends is shown in figure 21.



**Figure 21. The conversation of two friends (Csupó, 2007, 00:22:48)**

## CONCLUSION

The data of this study were taken from the *Bridge to Terabithia (2007)* movie. After analyzing the two main characters in this movie about their characterization, the writer finally found the following result. Jesse's physical appearances are; (1) a 12-year-old of fifth-grade student, (2) dress in overalls, (3) has straw-colored hair flapped hard against his forehead, (4) his arms and legs flew out every which way. Besides, Jesse's personalities are; (1) lonely in his family, (2) an introvert, (3) a creative boy, (4) a talented artist, (5) caring, (6) can accept other people, (7) emotional, and (8) cooperative. In the line with his social status, Jesse comes from a lower-class and poor family. Furthermore, Jesse's social relationships can be said nonexistent. At home, he prefers to dwell silently, does his hobby, and does not interfere with others' business.

Meanwhile, Leslie's physical appearances are; (1) skinny, (2) a 12-years-old of a fifth-grade student, (3) has blonde hair, (4) wears tacky clothing and lots of layers-tights under capris, (5) tomboy, and (6) athletic. In addition, her personalities are; (1) daring, (2) caring, (3) having a vast fantasy or imagination, and (4) an adventurer. Besides, Leslie's social comes from a rich and educated family. In fact, Leslie has difficulties socializing with others because of fear of bullying by his friend. The only one she tries to befriend is Jesse, and they become fast friends. In sum, the movie teaches us that the magic of friendship and the power of imagination can solve the problems of real life.

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