

Perceptions of death in tuck everlasting and charlotte's web essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Throughout Children's Literature, there is a reoccurring theme of death and mortality which is viewed in different contexts. The perceptions that people have of mortality seem to be based upon their age. Children are portrayed as being scared of death and longing to live forever, while older age adults have accepted death and instead focus their energies on making their lives more meaningful before they die. This can especially be seen in the novels, Charlotte's Web and Tuck Everlasting. When children are at a young age, they reject the idea of death.

The reason why children view death with a fearful attitude is that they have not yet lived their lives fully and experienced everything, whereas, older people have lived full lives, and are satisfied with their time while alive, resulting in an unsentimental view of death, losing their innocence and attachment to life. In the novel Charlotte's Web, Fern's childhood innocence and attachment to life portrays children's frightened perception of mortality compared to older adults.

When Mr. Arable is about to kill Wilbur, the smallest pig of the litter that was born, she responds by saying, " It's unfair [... The pig couldn't help being born small, could it? If I had been very small at birth, would you have killed me" (White, 3)? Mr Arable was just doing what he would always do if a runt was born and most likely doing what all farmers do, yet, when his daughter actually points out what he is about to do, it makes him stop and think. It is true that it is not the piglet's fault that it is small and by comparing the piglet with herself, Fern forces her father to spare the pig's life, even though he acknowledges there is a big difference between a pig and a little girl. Fern forces her father to think about how innocent Fern still views the world.

<https://assignbuster.com/perceptions-of-death-in-tuck-everlasting-and-charlottes-web-essay-sample/>

This image of innocence is further reinforced when she re-enters the house and there is bacon on the table for breakfast. Fern wished to save the pig, but is too innocent to know that in order to have the bacon to eat, a pig had to die. She still shows an attachment to all life as she has not experienced the wonders of life yet; Fern's life is incomplete. By comparing her life to Wilbur's, Fern is showing her insecurities and fears regarding death. Just as she believes it is not fair that Wilbur has to die right after being born, she does not wish death upon herself so soon either, because she believes that it is not her time to die yet.

In addition to Fern, Wilbur also inherits the same fear for death. After Wilbur is saved from an untimely death caused by the narrow-minded thinking by Fern, he is sold to Mr Zuckerman whom is fattening him up for a Christmas feast. Upon hearing about these plans, Wilbur becomes sad: Wilbur burst into tears. " I don't want to die [...] I want to stay alive, right here in my comfortable manure pile with all my friends. I want to breathe the beautiful air and lie in the beautiful sun" (White, 51). The use of the word " want" in italics suggests that E. B.

White is trying to capture the idea of children being scared of death, and that they do not want to die, but, ultimately have no choice in the matter. They must learn to cope with the idea that one day it will come time to die. The fact that Wilbur mentions many things that he would still like to do while alive shows that he is only young and still has many things that he wishes to experience. Like Fern, this feeling that Wilbur has of unaccomplished tasks that he still wishes to experience shows that people who have no sense of accomplishment in life become scared of death.

<https://assignbuster.com/perceptions-of-death-in-tuck-everlasting-and-charlottes-web-essay-sample/>

As children have not had the time or maturity to experience life the way they imagined it, they are the most prone group to fear of mortality. Similarly to Wilbur, in *Tuck Everlasting* Winnie, a ten-year-old child, echoes the same dim outlook on death. From the beginning of the novel, there is a sense that Winnie has not had much interaction with the world. Her house is describe as, a square and solid cottage with a touch-me-not appearance, surrounded by grass painfully to the quick and enclosed by a capable iron fence some four feet high (Babbitt, 6).

This description of Winnie's house gives the reader a feeling of isolation from the outside world, considering the physical barrier of an iron fence. The isolation described by the appearance of the house serves as a metaphor for Winnie's own life: isolated and severed from the world. Once feeling lonely, she started talking to a toad confessing that, " it would be better if [she] could be like [the toad], out in the open and making up [his] own mind [...] [She'll] never be able to do anything important if [she] stay[s] in here like this" (Babbitt, 15).

Through this statement, Winnie is already demonstrating one of the signs of a fear of mortality: a sense of an unaccomplished, incomplete or un-lived life. Once she becomes acquainted with the Tucks, who are immortal due to drinking out of the spring that grants immortality, Winnie begins to experience things that she has never before, " closing the gate on her oldest fears as she had closed the gate of her own fenced yard, she discovered the wings she'd always wished she had [...] Why, she, too, might live forever in [the] remarkable world she was only just discovering" (Babbitt, 45).

Now that she is free from her controlling parents, as seen by the metaphor of discovering her wings, and finally able to live her life the way she wishes, Winnie has so much to look forward to that she wishes it would never end. She even considers drinking the water that will make her immortal to be able to accomplish this task. As she is just beginning to live her own life, Winnie is afraid that it might all come to a premature end; she reveals her fear of death when Tuck was speaking to her about the circle of life, by repeating the same line as Wilbur did in *Charlotte's Web*: " I don't want to die" (Babbitt, 63).

Even though Tuck reassured her that it was not her time to die yet, she was still afraid of her own mortality. As evident again, the lack of experience of a lived life results in Winnie, a child, being frightened of death. There is a sharp contrast to the views of mortality that adults have compared to children's outlook in the novel *Charlotte's Web*. This difference in how adults perceive death and mortality differently is first demonstrated by Mr. Arable's wish to kill the runt of the litter of pigs, Wilbur.

As previously mentioned, Fern eventually stopped her father from accomplishing this feat, as he is taken aback by his daughter's innocence. Mr. Arable's intention towards killing the pig shows his unsentimental view towards death. He has lived a longer life than Fern and he knows that eventually all the animals he raises are killed for food, as he has been doing his whole life working on a farm. Furthermore, Charlotte shares these same unsentimental views on death. When she is becoming weak and ready to pass away, Charlotte summarizes her views on death:

After all, what's a life, anyway? We're born, we live a little while, we die. A spider's life can't help being something of a mess, with all this trapping and eating flies. By helping you, perhaps I was trying to life up my life a trifle. Heaven knows anyone's life can stand a little of that (White, 164). Here Charlotte presents the theme of death in the novel. She is completely unsentimental about life and death but states that spending one's life helping others gives meaning and a satisfying life.

Even though Charlotte knows that she has limited time, she can die peacefully knowing that she saved Wilbur's life and this represents a sense of fulfilment in her life. In this case, Charlotte's experience in life consisted of assisting Wilbur and saving him from an untimely death by writing messages in her webs that glorified Wilbur as a pig that is one of a kind. Before her death, Charlotte's last effort is to produce an enormous egg sack, thus continuing the "wheel of life". Charlotte had to die in order to lay her eggs and make room for the next generation of spiders.

This concept of renewal and life is best seen in the novel by the metaphor of the Ferris wheel. Fern spends all afternoon with Henry Fussy, leaving Wilbur and they go on the Ferris wheel together, going "higher and higher into the air" (White, 139). For months after, Fern looks back nostalgically at her time on the Ferris wheel with Henry. Throughout the course of the novel, Fern slowly starts to abandon Wilbur for Henry: she grows up and moves on, metaphorically moving upwards on the Ferris "wheel" on life. This metaphor refers to all living life forms and the inevitable cycle of life.

Just as Fern is growing up, reaching higher and higher on the Ferris Wheel, there is also a sense that it will at one point come down eventually, bringing a close on her life, to make room for new life forms, just as Charlotte had to die in order for her children to be born. After one has taken the full trip on the Ferris wheel, there is a sense of accomplishment in life. Charlotte spent her time on the Ferris wheel, living a fulfilling life by helping Wilbur to live and she eventually accepted that her time was coming to an end.

She did not fear death, but embraced it as she has lived her life, and death is merely a part of it. There is a similar metaphor of a wheel referring to the cycle of life in the novel *Tuck Everlasting*. While on a rowboat with Winnie, Mr. Tuck refers to life as: a wheel, turning and turning, never stopping. The frogs is part of it, and the bugs and the fish, and the wood thrush, too. And people. But never the same ones. Always coming in new, growing and changing and always moving on. That's the way it is supposed to be" (Babbitt, 62). Just like in *Charlotte's Web*, life and death is seen as a part of a never ending cycle.

One spends their life growing and living it to the fullest, only someday to move on to make room for other children. As seen, Mr. Tuck, like Charlotte, also has an unsentimental view about death. Even though he is immortal, he would do anything to be able to grow and eventually die. He embraces death as a part of life; there can be no living without dying (White, 64). Mr. Tuck is envious that he cannot die. Mr. Tuck also brings up a great point that if other people were aware of the spring that can grant immortality, " they'd all come running like pigs to slops. They'd trample each other trying to get some of that water" (Babbitt, 64).

<https://assignbuster.com/perceptions-of-death-in-tuck-everlasting-and-charlottes-web-essay-sample/>

Mr. Tuck is sure that young people would want to drink from the spring if they would become immortal, the problem would lie, as he points out, in “the wheel would keep on going round, the water rolling by the ocean, but the people would’ve turned into nothing but rocks by the side of the road. ‘Cause they wouldn’t know till after, and then it’d be too late” (Babbitt, 64). This argument highlights the fact that younger people are afraid of death and would welcome the idea of living forever in the present because they have not lived their lives, the same feelings that Fern, Wilbur and Winnie all experience.

However, once they have been around, unchanged, for a long period of time, they would be able to experience their life and get a sense of accomplishment. Only once someone has achieved this, are they willing to accept death, but, if they are to drink from the spring, then this would impede their ability to die, and finish their lives, thus not being part of the circle of life anymore (like the Tucks). Being able to die is a natural part of life and this view is only shared when people have had their turn to go around the wheel of life, as described in the metaphor.

Only then will one accept death, which is why children show a constant fear of mortality when the issue of death arises, as they have not lived their lives yet, unlike older adults, who have learned to accept death as the end of a life well lived. As one can see, there is an immense difference between the perceptions of death based on the views of children compared to adults.

Children, like Fern, Wilbur and Winnie all echo the same thought: that they do not wish to die. This is because they only have gotten a little taste of the

life that is ahead of them, and they are not mature enough to grasp the idea of death.

As seen, this results in childhood innocence and an attachment to life. In contrast, adults, such as Charlotte and Tuck, have experienced their lives to the fullest, and have accepted death. They have been on the so-called Ferris wheel of life longer and have come to terms with the fact that death is just a part of life. This shows adults in the novels *Charlotte's Web* and *Tuck Everlasting* having less of an attachment to life, and a more unsentimental view of death. There is a time when everyone must die and only when one has lived a satisfying life will one come to terms with mortality and cease to be afraid of it, which occurs later in life.