

The Prince of Tarn

written by Hazel Hutchins

genre: FICTION, NOVEL

themes: FRIENDSHIP
COMING OF AGE
FICTION VS REALITY
DEATH/LOSS
MAGIC & FANTASY

suitable for: GRADES 5–8

This is a story about imagination in both the past and the future as Fred, an eleven-year-old, and his father come to grips with the death of Fred's mother. The Prince of Tarn is a character from the stories written by Fred's mother, and one night the fictional Prince shows up Fred's bedroom. As the story unfolds, we learn the reason for his appearance.

★*Alberta Book Award*

Hazel Hutchins bio: Hazel Hutchins is an award-winning novelist and a wryly entertaining chronicler of modern family life. Hazel has written over 20 children's books, and credits her family as the inspiration behind them. Her active imagination uses both real life and magic to move stories in humorous and enlightening ways.

The following activity ideas ...

... are only a start. There are many possibilities for helping students construct meaning from text.

Comprehension activities:

- help readers to extend their general knowledge from prior experience
- develop reading strategies for comprehension
- bring relevance to the act of reading
- foster discussion and reflection through response to the text and illustrations

Before

STARTING THE BOOK

Activities to set the tone or introduce the topic of the book, establish prior knowledge and interest, and develop predictions of what the text will be about.

- A1. •Think of your favorite fictional character. Prepare in your head one sentence that describes a special attribute or feature of your character. Walk about the room and find another student. Stop and introduce your fictional character by saying “I would like to introduce you to my fictional character insert character’s name), who (special attribute).” For example “ I would like to introduce you to Cinderella, who overcame a lot of trouble with sibling rivalry when she was a girl.”
- The other student does the same thing. Then, exchange characters and walk away to meet another student and introduce the new character you just met to that student’s character. Exchange characters again. Continue until you have met and exchanged about half the characters in the class. Then stand with the other students in a circle and take turns introducing the last character you met.
- A 2. In *The Prince of Tarn* the main characters are dealing with the death of a mother and wife.
- Lead a discussion with students about the feelings involved when you miss someone you won’t see again, with questions such as:
- Why, sometimes, do people you are close to have to leave or you do not see them again?
 - How does it feel when this happens?
 - What are different ways people have of dealing with it?

READING THE BOOK

Activities to check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers' reactions.

- B1. •Read the first three chapters, where we are introduced to the Prince of Tarn and see his reactions to Fred's reality.
•Ask students to think of a favorite fictional character and at least five differences between our time and place and the character's fictional setting.
•In pairs, ask students to share lists, then call the class back together.
•Ask for volunteers to role-play their character and take the "hot-seat". Other students take turns interviewing each character, asking questions about how it feels and what it's like to be in a classroom in modern times.

- B2. •As you read through the book up to page 98, notice the change in the illustrations at the beginning of each chapter. Reread pages 65–66 and then page 98 up to:

"He said something about there being forests all grown up around some places."

"Not just some places," said Fred. "Everywhere. Everything being taken back by..."

"Trees," said Rebecca. "Oh, Fred, the trees."

- What is happening to the trees along the margins in Fred's copy of the book?
—What do you think these trees symbolize or stand for?
—What has the Prince of Tarn to do with these trees?

Fred went into the living room and brought the book out to her. Trees rolled, thick and heavy, across the pages now, in places totally obscuring whole sections of writing. (Page 98)

- Illustrate what you think this page would look like in Fred's book by first writing a page of his mother's story and then adding illustrations of trees along the margins that overlap your writing.

READING THE BOOK

Activities to inspire continued reflection and response to the text, bring conclusion to the experience of reading this particular text, and stimulate further extensions.

- C1. •Lead a discussion about the importance of imagination in our lives with questions such as:
—How do you separate the real from the imagined?
—At what age do you know the difference?
—How does imagination affect your life?

“But that’s the way books are, the really good ones,” said Rebecca. “When you finish a story, you don’t think of everything in the book coming to a great halt. You kind of imagine it going on and on—you just can’t watch it happening any more.” (Page 75)

- When do you find yourself imagining?
—What sorts of things do you imagine or dream about?

- C2. •Assign a writing task in journal or diary style on the students’ own hopes for their future. Some quotes from *The Prince of Tarn* may stimulate reflection on the importance of hope:

“It’s a wonderful story. It’s full of hope. It shows how much your mother, even when she was sick for so long, still believed in the goodness of life. I’d forgotten that. And I’d forgotten the importance of Tarn itself.” (Page 80)

He told about his mother’s doodling and her imagination and the trees. He told about the manuscript and the notebooks. He told what his dad had said about her needing so badly to believe in the goodness of life. (Page 114)