

TUCK EVERLASTING

Rated: PG • **Running Time:** 1 hour, 30 minutes
Starring: Alexis Bledel as Winnie; Jonathan Jackson as Jesse; William Hurt as Angus; Sissy Spacek as Mae; Ben Kingsley as the Man in the Yellow Suit; Scott Bairstow as Miles; Victor Garber as Robert Foster; Amy Irving as Mother Foster
Director: Jay Russell

Themes: Immortality, eternal youth, teen romance, relinquishing children, survivor's guilt, seizing the day, valuing stations of life, parental love
Cautions: A man dies from a blow to the head. The film also includes images of people getting shot, torching a home- stead and falling from heights (no fatalities).

Story Summary

Set in 1914's Gilded Age of buckboards, general stores and Edith Wharton, this story immediately introduces us to teens from two families that couldn't be more dissimilar. The only child of wealthy, controlling parents in a home ruled with snobbish propriety, Winnie Foster feels stifled, desperate to be liberated from her world of corsets and croquet. She's a caged songbird. By comparison, the scruffy, globe-trotting Tuck boys return home every now and then to reconnect with their mother, Mae, and father, Angus. Carefree rambling agrees with Jesse Tuck, though his older brother, Miles, seems consumed by brooding melancholy ... and the burden of protecting a family secret.

When Winnie's parents announce plans to send her to a stuffy finishing school, she flees the iron-gated confines of her family's estate into their nearby woods and happens upon Jesse drinking from a spring. Clearly, she has stumbled upon something she wasn't supposed to see. The nervous exchange between these strangers ends with Miles showing up, seizing Winnie and carting her to their backwoods home. Night falls. Winnie's parents are desperate to find her. Meanwhile, a mysterious gentleman in a mustard-colored suit has been tracking the Tucks. He claims to be searching for long-lost relatives, though we sense his agenda may be more sinister.

At first a hostage of the reclusive-yet-hospitable Tucks, Winnie bonds with Jesse, who tenderly expands her horizons. Young love blossoms. Wanting to share these sweet moments forever, he decides to let her in on the big secret: *His family has discovered a spring of eternal life.* Not only has physical aging ceased, but those who drink its water are impervious to injury and death. Technically 104 years old, Jesse will be a spry 17 forever. And he wants Winnie to join him. Miles chimes in with the darker side of their immortality. He had a wife who refused to drink. She left him (convinced he'd made a pact with the devil) and wound up in an asylum. He also lost two young children, then fought

in several wars and saw thousands fall. He remains bitter.

Angus also hopes to dissuade Winnie from drinking. He explains, "One day you'll grow up. You'll do something important. You'll have children, maybe. And then one day you'll go out just like the flame of a candle, [and] you'll make way for new life. That's a certainty. That's the natural way of things. Then there's us. What we Tucks have, you can't call it living. We just *are*. We're like rocks stuck at the side of a stream. ... Don't be afraid of death Winnie. Be afraid of the unlived life."

The man in the yellow suit locates Winnie and the Tucks, then agrees to lead the Fosters to their daughter in exchange for the property containing his secret prize. Just before the search party arrives, this dapper opportunist confronts the Tucks and, when Angus refuses to take him to the spring, threatens Winnie. Mae kills him with a blow from behind. Despite

Winnie's plea on Mae's behalf, the boys' mother waits in jail to hang for murder until her sons mastermind her escape. The reunited family has no choice but to flee town, and as badly as Winnie wants to be with Jesse, she realizes joining them would invite a rabid search. Jesse tells her to drink from the spring, promising to come back for her when it's safe. The question is, *will she do it?* And would you? It's a provocative question at the center of a bittersweet film.



Before You Watch

Sit down with your teen and a stack of magazines that cover a range of interests, including fitness, fashion and glamour. Page through them in search of articles or advertising that subtly preys on a desire to cling to youth. When you find an example, share it and explain why you think it qualifies. Notice how rarely older models are used to sell products that aren't marketed directly to seniors. Why do you think that is?

continued ►

Bible Bookmarks Psalm 92:12-15; Prov. 16:31; Is. 46:3-4, 51:11; Mark 8:35-36; John 6:40; Rom. 8:15-17; 1 Cor. 15:53-57; 2 Cor. 5:1-5; Phil. 1:23-24; 1 Thes. 4:13-18; Rev. 21:4 and 6-7, 22:1-5

Talking Points

1 Ask your teen, “Can you relate to Winnie’s restlessness?” As a parent, can *you* relate to her mother’s desire to keep her a child forever? Explore that common tug-of-war as you saw it in the film and as it may be raging in your home. Why does holding onto someone too tightly usually make him or her more desperate to break free?

2 Talk about the mysterious stranger’s conversation with the clergyman in the cemetery, specifically how a confident Christian could be prepared to face death whenever “it is God’s will” (Rom. 8:15-17, John 6:40, 1 Thes. 4:13-18, 1 Cor. 15:53-57).

3 What does Angus mean when he says, “You can’t have livin’ without dyin’”? Would our days on earth be as precious if we had an unlimited supply? How does the brevity of life make time more meaningful?

4 Beyond a lust for more time, the man in the yellow suit wants to avoid “the stench and rot of old age.” Is aging something to be feared? Why or why not? Does our culture respect the elderly or treat them as a burden? Get God’s perspective on aging from Isaiah 46:3-4, Psalm 92:12-15 and Proverbs 16:31.

5 The villain longs to drink from the spring and lord over others by charging them for that privilege. Contrast this with God’s attitude in Revelation 21:6-7.

6 Winnie discovers freedom in a world devoid of time where the pace is slower. Cavorting with Jesse is said to be “the first time Winnie felt free to explore, to ask questions, to play.” Do you feel free to do those things? Why or why not? Would simplifying your world and slowing down help you enjoy life more?

7 What is a blessing to Jesse is a curse to Miles, who argues, “Immortality ain’t all the preachers crack it up to be.” Read Philipians 1:23-24, 2 Corinthians 5:1-5, Isaiah 51:11, and Revelation 21:4 and 22:1-5. Note differences between the Tucks’ earthbound immortality and the eternal life promised in Scripture.

8 How did you feel about Miles early in the movie? Did your opinion of him change? Why? What does this say about the need to extend grace to difficult people when we don’t know the details of their life story?

9 Angus asks Winnie, “Do you want to stay stuck as you are right now forever?” How would you answer that

question? What would be the advantages? The drawbacks? Do you think Winnie made the right choice?

10 Jesse enjoys traversing the globe and collecting experiences with existential zeal, but there’s a void without Winnie. Compare that “missing piece” to someone who drinks deeply from the cup of life but lacks a relationship with Jesus (Mark 8:35-36).

11 What do you think was going through Winnie’s mind as she watched her mother cherish final moments with her grandmother? What did Angus mean when he advised, “Don’t be afraid of death; be afraid of the un-lived life.” Do you think these moments impacted her final decision about drinking from the spring? If so, why?

12 If your teen has already read the *Twilight* series by Stephenie Meyer, talk about its thematic similarities to this movie, as well as the significant differences in how they played out. What does this say about the storytellers’ values—especially when it comes to life, death, family and romantic love?



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Jesse and Winnie commune with nature; Jackson's Jesse; Spacek's Mae.

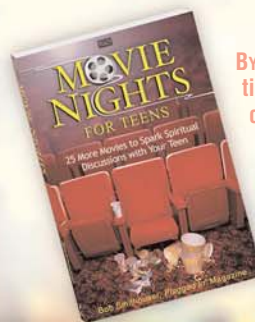
Follow-Up Activity

If you and your teen have creative imaginations and enjoy filling in blanks, each of you could take a few days to invent the rest of Winnie’s life story. What did she go on to do? Whom did she marry? What were her children and grandchildren like? How did she interact with the many cultural changes that would arrive throughout the 20th century? Then go out to dinner and compare notes. After sharing, make it a point to say that these are merely two of an infinite number of possibilities, and that just as many options await modern teens as they proceed to seek God’s will and write their own life stories.

Just for Fun

- Did the young baseball player who taunts Winnie look at all familiar? The actor’s name is Bradley Coryell, slightly older here than when he portrayed bully Big Boy Wilkinson in another *Movie Nights* pick, *My Dog Skip* (available in the book *Movie Nights for Teens*), also directed by Jay Russell.
- This was the feature film debut for television actress Alexis Bledel (*Gilmore Girls*), who learned quickly what it’s like to shoot out of sequence. The very first scene they filmed was her romantic fireside kiss with Joshua Jackson, an actor she had just met. —by Bob Smithouser

A **plugged in** Resource



BY THE BOOK: “Previewing a film ahead of time can help you anticipate how it might connect with your teenager. Be sensitive to ways specific scenes or lines of dialogue could hit close to home.”

—*Movie Nights for Teens*

You can request this resource by contacting Focus on the Family at 800-232-6459 (in Canada, 800-661-9800).