

## Telling Stories: Katherine Paterson

Friday, April 1  
 Grades 6–12  
 11 a.m.–12 p.m.

**Curriculum Connections: Language Arts**

**Language Arts Standards sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 11 & 12**

**Standards 5, 6 & 8 will be met if extension activities are used.**



(C) Samantha Loomis Paterson

### About the Program

Called a “Living Legend” by the Library of Congress, Katherine Paterson sits down with moderator Maria Salvadore in an engaging interview that explores the emotional themes and personal memoirs in her award-winning books *Bridge to Terabithia* and *Jacob Have I Loved*. Mrs. Paterson captivates audiences of all ages with her memorable characters and attention to detail earning her the title of National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature by the Library of Congress and the Children’s Book Council. Mrs. Paterson shares her experiences growing up the daughter of missionaries in China, her love of books and authors like C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkein and also reads several selections from her time-honored books.

### The Importance of People and Books

Katherine Paterson was born in China to missionary parents. World War II started when Katherine was a young girl forcing the family to leave China. Books and stories might have provided comfort and consistency to balance the loneliness created by her family’s frequent moves. Katherine learned to read before entering kindergarten as she listened to her mother read to her older siblings.

After attending college in Tennessee, Katherine Paterson taught for a year in rural Virginia before becoming a missionary herself. Since China was closed to foreigners by the 1950s, Ms. Paterson decided to work as a missionary in Japan. During her four years there, she grew to love the country she had feared as a child.

When Ms. Paterson returned to the United States to study in New York, she met and later married a young Presbyterian minister, John Paterson. It was during her early marriage when writing curriculum material for the Presbyterian Church that her passion - writing for young people – was ignited.

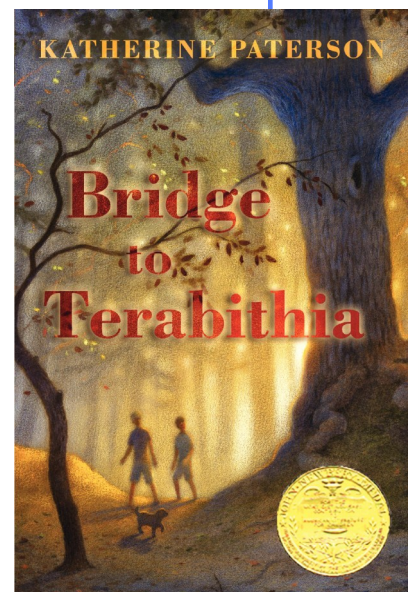
### A Highly Acclaimed Writer

Ms. Paterson submitted a novel for publication at the suggestion of a friend which launched a remarkable writing career. In all of her books, Ms. Paterson places plausible, memorable characters in settings and situations that are authentic and emotionally powerful.

Among the many awards, Ms. Paterson’s books have received two Newbery Medals, two National Book Awards, and the Scott O’Dell Award for historical fiction; and for the body of her work, Ms. Paterson has received the Regina Medal, the Hans Christian Andersen Award, and the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award.

In 2010 Katherine Paterson was named by the Librarian of Congress as the National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature. Dr. James Billington said that, “Katherine Paterson represents the finest in literature for young people. Her renown is national as well as international, and she will most ably fulfill the role of a national ambassador who speaks to the importance of reading and literacy in the lives of America’s youth.”

In her novels, retellings of traditional tales, short books for newly independent readers, and more, Katherine Paterson’s books touch deep emotional chords with readers of all ages.



## Instructional Activities

### Reading/Writing

- \* Read *Bridge to Terabithia*. It is realistic fiction but has elements of fantasy. What role does fantasy play in Jess Aaron's life? In Leslie Burke's? If you were to create an imaginary place, what would you include in it? What would it look like? Write a journal entry as though you and a friend were in your fantastical place.
- \* Read the *Great Gilly Hopkins*. Fantasy is also present although in a different way in this book. What inspired Gilly Hopkins' name? Consider why would the author choose to use a name from a well-known fantasy in a realistic novel?
- \* Each of the characters in Katherine Paterson's books has a distinct personality. Choose two (or more) characters from different books. Describe their unique characteristics. Create a scene in which they meet. Where would you place them (setting)? What would they talk about or how might they interact if they met (dialog; description)?

### Research/History

- \* Read Paterson's *Jacob Have I Loved*. The novel takes place on the fictional Rass Island in the Chesapeake Bay in the 1940s. Find out more about actual Chesapeake Bay islands. How realistic was Paterson's portrait of the geography and topography of the island? If one were to visit a comparable island today, what might have changed? Why or why not?
- \* Paterson's *Day of the Pelican* deals with an Albanian family from Kosovo fleeing a war and genocide. Eleven year old Meli, 13-year old Mehmet, and their family have a difficult time adjusting to the United States. Find out and compare lifestyles in their home country to their new life in Vermont.
- \* Both the *Sign of the Chrysanthemum* and *Of Nightingales That Weep* are set in 12th century Japan. Find out more about this historical period in Japan. What is historically accurate? Fictionalized? What commonalities does 12th century Japan share with the 21st century?

## Books by Katherine Paterson

Select titles in print and available at libraries and bookstores



### Newbery Medal Winners

Bridge to Terabithia (1977)  
Jacob Have I Loved (1980)

### Historical Fiction

Bread and Roses, Too (2006)  
Lyddie (1991)  
Master Puppeteer (1975)  
Rebels of the Heavenly Kingdom (1983)  
Sign of the Chrysanthemum (1973)

### Contemporary Stories

Come Sing, Jimmy Jo (1985)  
Day of the Pelican (2009)  
Flip-Flop Girl (1994)  
The Great Gilly Hopkins (1978)  
Same Stuff as Stars (2004)

### Retellings of Traditional Stories

Angel and the Donkey (1996)  
Parzival: The Quest of the Grail Knight (1998)  
Tale of the Mandarin Ducks (1990)

## Resources

Katherine Paterson's official site: [terabithia.com](http://terabithia.com)

*Bridge to Terabithia*. Dir. Gabor Csupo. Walden Media, 2007. DVD.

Lessons for older students on the Kosovo War; includes additional links to news sources:  
[educationworld.com/a\\_lesson/lesson108.shtml](http://educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson108.shtml)

Overview of the health of the Chesapeake Bay from the US Geological Survey:  
[chesapeake.usgs.gov/overview.html](http://chesapeake.usgs.gov/overview.html)

NCTE/IRA Language Arts Standards: [NCTE.org/standards](http://NCTE.org/standards)