Activity 2: Strengthening Relationships

Activity Type: Individual Activity

Link to the Film and Book:

Note: This may be read aloud by a group member/the facilitator for all to hear, or it may be individual reading before the activity.

When Jess builds the wooden bridge to Terabithia at the conclusion of the story, it symbolizes his ability to build bridges with several family members and friends. Throughout the story there are characters with remarkable differences that, through shared experiences and communication, learn to respect and relate to one another.

Jess has a particularly unstable relationship with his father. Although Jess’s dad is a hard-working, loving man (as demonstrated by the care he shows to Jess’s little sisters), he does not pay adequate attention to Jess. Jess longs to be appreciated and loved by his father and must feel a lot of pain when Mr. Aarons writes off his artistic accomplishments and disregards his hard work in their greenhouse. Read the following excerpt from the script, which depicts a confrontation between Jess and his dad.

Reading from the Script

(This could also be a role-play activity in which 2 participants volunteer to act out the scene).

Through the Door of the Greenhouse

Mr. Aarons holds one of the lush miniature roses by his side. And then hurls it across the greenhouse. It shatters where several other plants have already done so.

Jess enters, but Mr. Aarons doesn’t turn to acknowledge him. He picks up another potted rose.

Jess

(extrmely tenuous)
I watered them this morning, and the furnace is all set. I…

Mr. Aarons turns to Jess, on edge, barking angrily.

Mr. Aarons

That’s not enough. Not enough. It doesn’t matter how carefully you look after these. Nothing you do is gonna get the damn things sold.

Mr. Aarons hurls the rose. It shatters among the others.

Jess is startled. What’s going on? Is this his fault?

Jess

I watered them, and did the furnace and… I can still help more.

Mr. Aarons

Yeah. Why don’t you go draw up some money. That’d help. That’d help with the house. And the food. And the clothes. And getting the damn truck fixed. Just go and draw me up a little money. Can you do that. Jess?

He stares at Jess… who finally manages a quiet answer.
JESS
N...no.

MR. AARONS
Well, then...What is it you like so much about all that drawing?

JESS
(halting)
I like to... imagine stuff.

Mr. Aarons laughs. A rueful little laugh.

MR. AARONS
I like to imagine stuff too. I imagined these thousand plants were gonna bring in four dollars each. I imagined that my boss at the store would stick by his agreeing he'd buy them when they budded – even if someone else shows up at the last minute ready to unload a truckload from hell-knows-where for next to nothing! I imagined that this'd all be a way of getting the nursery back on its feet.

Jess doesn't know what to say. What can he say? This is all way beyond him.

JR. AARONS
So you imagine all you want, but just remember it's not gonna get you anywhere.

Mr. Aarons just looks at Jess. Heads out. Deeply confused. Does his father just plain hate him? He looks off towards the woods, towards Terabithia. Needing to go there.

Adapted from Bridge to Terabithia screenplay; Walt Disney Pictures and Walden Media, pp. 54 - 56

**KEY QUESTIONS**

> Does Mr. Aarons hate Jess? Why do you think he takes out his anger on him?

> Why is Mr. Aarons not supportive of Jess's imagination and creativity? Why does he tell him it's not going to get him anywhere?

> Why does this situation make Jess want to venture into Terabithia?

> What would you tell Mr. Aarons to make him more appreciative and accepting of his son?

When Leslie dies, Jess needs his father's affection the most. After seeing his son in pain over the loss of his best friend, Mr. Aarons begins to bridge the gap in their relationship and accept Jess for who he is. Just as the relationship between Jess and his father begins to heal, so do other relationships in the story.
Use the outer boxes of the diagrams below to describe why/how each set of characters are different and have a hard time getting along; in the shared “bridge” section of each diagram describe their similarities and how they find common ground. Follow the example of Jess and his father in the first diagram. Fill in the blanks for the rest.