

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Bridge to Terabithia is a film directed by Gabor Csupo in 2007. This film is taken from the book *Bridge to Terabithia* written by Katherine Paterson in October 21, 1977, that teaches parents and schools about adolescents' lives (Sarahjane, 2007). The film is said to adopt children's novel faithfully so that it received positive reviews from the audience. As a film, *Bridge to Terabithia* teaches the audience about life of adolescents as stated by Reyes (2018) that film is a medium to teach people about the truth of life. Further, he argues that film is not merely a way to escape, but it can teach people to find truth about life using their imagination.

Terabithia is the story of two kids who are considered as outsiders at their school. However, through their power of imaginations, they get to be rulers of their own kingdom. *Bridge to Terabithia* is not about boyfriend-girlfriend love but more like a best friend love, a platonic one. In the film, the main characters, Jesse is played by Josh Hutcherson, and Leslie is played by AnnaSophia Robb. These two adolescents try to find their real identity despite their unfriendly circumstances. They create a fantasy world called *Terabithia*, which is a reflection of their real lives. *Terabithia* is a kingdom where Jess and Leslie go to solve their problems. They try to conquer their fears or the villains in *Terabithia*, so that they can conquer them in the real world.

Jess' and Leslie's *Terabithia* is a place in between their farms and the forest: the place where they build their 'castle.' They have to cross a creek by swinging on a rope to get it. Leslie and Jess create *Terabithia* based on their conviction that they require a space of their own, a magic space where no one will bother them and where they can hang out in peace. Their first idea about *Terabithia* comes from Narnia books by C.S. Lewis which Leslie lends Jesse. They build a castle in their own imagine land, declare themselves as rulers, and create customs and ceremonies to observe (Paterson, 2018).

Jess and Leslie spend their free time together in an abandoned tree house. They also go to the bridge that has a swinging rope and explore all of the things in the forest. In there they try to let their imagination grow and open their wild minds. Jess and Leslie struggle with their lives, but they choose to create a utopia using their imagination in there.

Jesse Oliver Aarons or Jess is the main character in this film. He plays as a protagonist. He is in the 7th grades. He likes drawing, music and run race. Jesse is a loner, an introvert person. He is quiet, feeling alone in the middle of the crowd and mingling only with certain people who make him comfortable. The writer is interested in Jess's character because Jesse's character is so dynamic. He starts as a person who does not know what to do in his life and ends a person who knows who he is and the objectives in life. As a person, Jess never gives up in any case. Although he gets bullied by his school friends for being a loner and neglected by his father, he does

not get desperate easily. Leslie, in the one hand, is depicted as being tomboyish, kind, and friendly also free-spirited. At the beginning of the film, she is the girl who dresses differently and does not play the same social rules as the other kids do. She is the one who comes up with the idea of Terabithia. According to Sarahjane Blum (2007, pp. 1-4), Jesse and Leslie invent Terabithia to escape the complicated world of adults.

Actually, Jess and Leslie are both having problems they need to fight for in their lives. However, the writer is more interested to discuss Jess because his character is more complex than Leslie. In addition to his development from an aimless individual to a determined individual, he manages to adapt with his school environment and to overcome the troubles of his parents' financial condition. In the writer's opinion, this film touches the psychosocial developments of a person especially regarding one's identity through its storytelling. It also provides inspiration, motivation and new insights about what we have never known before. *Bridge to Terabithia* also gives us another perception on adolescence's search for identity. Every problem the adolescent face has solution no matter the process is long or short.

In short, this thesis will particularly discuss identity development of Jesse's character in *Bridge to Terabithia* as the writer would like to focus on the identity statuses in adolescents today. Children who feel secure and are supported by their primary caregivers have higher level of perceived competence in multiple domains (Kerns, 1996) have higher self-esteem

(Simons & Paternite, 2001) and feel less lonely (Kerns, 1996) compared to those who do not. Kern says,

For other adolescents, this period is one of more gradual and subtle changes. As people recall their own adolescence, there are few experiences that can be as trying – or as exhilarating – as questioning who people really are and more importantly who you would like to be (Kerns, 1996).

One reason of identity changes which happens during adolescence involves the first great reorganization and restructuring of the individual sense of self. It happens when people have intellectual potential to appreciate how significant the changes are. Jess 'experience of identity changes is a starting point to open his self and mind to other people including those of the opposite sex. The theory that the writer uses to help analyze the film is Marcia's theory about identity statuses. The writer decides to choose Marcia's theory because this theory contains four identity statuses which can describe Jess's identity in the movie.

Other reason for choosing Jesse's character in *Bridge to Terabithia* film has not been researched by other scholars. Erikson's theory of personal development, the theory which is the source of Marcia's identity statuses, has been used by Dian Herdiana (2017) to analyze the psychosocial development of Christian Grey's character in *Fifty Shades Trilogy*. Using the theory, she found out that Grey has a traumatic experience in his childhood and his parents reject him. Grey's lack of

affection or love and violent treatments during his childhood disorder causes him to rebel in his teenage life. The writer's study will be different from Herdiana's study as the writer focuses on the fifth stage of the identity development which is developed by Marcia, about identity statuses.

Based on the points which have been discussed above, the writer proposes a study entitled *Jess' Identity Development in Bridge to Terabithia Based on Marcia's Theory of Identity Statuses*. The results of this study will contribute to the field of literature especially on the study of film and identity development.

1.2 Field of the Study

The field of the study is literature especially Jess' identity development.

1.3 Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is Jesse's identity in *Bridge to Terabithia* especially Jess' identity development in his adolescence.

1.4 Problem Formulation

The question to be answered in this study is: What is the identity development of Jesse in *Bridge to Terabithia*?

1.5 Objective of the Study

Regarding the research question mentioned above, the writer aims to describe the identity development of Jesse in *Bridge to Terabithia*.

1.6 Significance of the Study

In this paper, the writer hopes that readers can know more about stages of identity statuses of adolescence life. The writer also expects the results of this study will enrich the readers' knowledge of identity development experienced by the adolescents.

1.7 Definition of Terms

1. Adolescence

This critical development period is conventionally understood as the years between the onset of puberty and the establishment of social independence (Steinberg, 2014).

The term adolescence is also defined as commonly understood to define the period of life between childhood and adulthood (Kaplan, 2014).

2. Identity Development

Identity development is ultimately the result of a lifelong journey. The person that people ultimately become is unique. However the process by which identity develops is similar among individuals. Although identity development is most often associated with adolescence, each developmental stage offers opportunities for re-evaluation and modification (Child Development 'Identity Development', 2018).