

SILVER TALISMAN OR MORAL COMPASS: EMPATHETIC EXPERIENCES  
and SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES WITHIN ELIZABETH ENRIGHT'S  
*THIMBLE SUMMER*

Sustainable living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century spans all aspects of living – how we relate with others, how we alleviate human poverty, illiteracy, and suffering, resolving issues of social injustice, AND caring for and protecting animals, natural ecosystems, flora and fauna, water, and the very air we breathe. Our young children must arrive at an awareness of the appropriate universal concepts helping all to live in a way which perpetuates both nature AND humanity, primarily via the development of empathy for people, place, and, of course, planet.

One method of assisting children in the development of such an overarching empathetic mindset is the sharing of children's literature carrying themes and character models which emphasize sustainable living practices, whether based in nature or relationships with others.

Elizabeth Enright's Newbery award-winning title, *Thimble Summer*, is such a literary work.

Garnet, Enright's nine-year old character, growing up on a mid-western farm in the 1930s, certainly respects nature. She understands that when nature is harsh, her family's standard of living suffers. Yet, she also realizes the crops and plant life fight for life, too. During a drought, she worries over both the vegetables and her father's inability to pay the bills.

Certainly, this character's trials trigger the emotions of a young reader immersed in the pages of *Thimble Summer*. The descriptive language used by Enright leads the reader, page-by-page, straight into a world replete with those who understand, care for, nurture, support, and love – nature, her living creatures, and all human souls.

Thus, this paper, featuring an often-ignored Newbery award winning classic, will flesh out the life experiences (both harsh and joyful), family interactions, and magical opportunities (including the discovery of a silver talisman – the thimble found in the riverbed at the first of the book) which allow the book's protagonist, as well as the young reader vicariously "visiting" Garnet's environs for a time, to grow into an empathetic human being whose moral compass points toward a healthy planet, a healthy global society.

