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## The Role of Trees In A Tree Grows In Brooklyn

Hope in the face of hardship is a recurring theme in much of literature today. As human beings, it is in our DNA to survive---despite circumstances that make it difficult to do so. A human beings innate ability to survive shows itself in the way our bodies interpret danger or difficulty---it is in our blood to crawl and struggle toward the sky regardless of the ground from which we may start from, like trees. In Betty Smith's novel, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, the use of trees allows the reader to interpret the main characters, Francie Nolan, growth as she comes of age. In turn, this allows to reader to understand the strength inherent in all human beings, in addition to the personal strength that one must find within themselves in order to survive the world.

The tree referred to in the story is called the Tree of Heaven by some who live in Francie Nolan's neighborhood. Like Francie, this tree finds a way to grow wherever it is planted, despite the difficulty and impossibility of it all. The Tree of Heaven only grows in the poor part of Brooklyn, where Francie lives. This fact highlights the concept that there is true grit in the poorest parts of society, where people live day by day, and cannot afford even basic necessities. In addition, it allows the reader to understand that this is Francie Nolan's fate by planting such a tree in the yard of a girl who struggles to become. From the beginning, Francie Nolan is a fighter, and survivor. She was a sickly child---the most difficult child that her mother ever gave birth to. Despite her neighbor's claims that Francie is sickly and probably going to die, her mother compares Francie to the Tree of Heaven herself, thereby setting the stage for the rest of Francie's life. Francie's sickliness represents her own social class, permitting the reader to understand that poorer people are no less strong than others, but rather they are forced to be much stronger in order to survive their situation. An example of a contrasting scene in the novel is that of the little rich doll who was giving away a beautiful doll to a girl named Mary. This motif of injustice is prevalent throughout the novel. For example, the novel points out in the story that there was something very sad about the fact that the children are made to grow up before they are supposed to. The sad thing was the injustice of the situation: the fact that the poor are often completely overlooked, weather it is in schools, or the workplace, or even in their own neighborhood, and are unable to get out of the life that they are in. For example, Francie's Aunt Sissy never got to go to school because her mother didn't realize that education in America was free until it was too late. While in the 21st century, there are more services and organizations that help immigrants understand their rights, there were not many people who cared back then. What makes Francie different from the other characters of the novel is the fact that she realizes that she is no tree. When Francie does not enjoy school, she finds a better one. When Francie wants to help her mother, she makes sure that she and Neely save their money, When Francie wants something, she goes out and gets it because as the reader is shown earlier in the story, she is given the capacity to believe that it is possible both through her

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imagination and intellect, and through her mother's teachings of pride. For example, her mother allows her to waste coffee if she pleases because even poorer people need to feel like they can waste something rather than feel as though they are so desperate they will take whatever crumbs they are given. This shows Francie that she is fully capable and deserving of a better life, and that even though she is poor, she can rise up.

In the story, Francie's struggles continue as she grows. It is because she is a very intelligent child in a neighborhood filled with poorer children whom do not have mothers who required them to listen to the bible and Shakespeare each night that Francie does not fit in. Poverty makes something harsh out of everyone---it creates an alcoholic in her father, a worker in her mother, and a survivor out of Francie. This is shown in Francie's school: While it seems as though the children are simply dirty and heathenish, it is clear that they simply have never been taught better. This is also shown in the man who later throws a tree at Francie and Neely: While he knew he shouldn't have been throwing trees at kids, it is made very clear that he does this because he just needs to feed his own family. This allows the reader to see what is beyond the surface, and to understand the reasons behind people's actions, which in turn, allows the reader to understand Francie's own sensitive view of the world from an early age as someone who is out of her element intelligence wise.

The tree, however, is also a reflection of Francie's strength. When that tree is hurled at her and her brother, they show their stubborn and independent will. Their nature mimics that of the tree presented earlier in the story: A tough but puny little thing that shoots up through the cracks of broken stubbornly despite all the impossibilities of it ever reaching the sky. This antithesis of character of the tree shows the reader the truth of humanity: That it endures.

In the last chapter of Betty Smith's timeless novel, the reader is brought back full circle to the tree: realizing that though the tree had been cut down to a stump and burned, it was still there, sending out a branch to continue on in another place in Brooklyn one day. In essence, the role of the tree in the novel, *A Tree Grows In Brooklyn*, is a helpful symbol in the story of a girl who realized that though she was like a tree, she was not one. In today's world, people forget sometimes that poverty and pain are things that one can escape, if only they can find that inherent strength within them that allows humans to survive and thrive on earth. This book is important because it allows the reader to understand that though Francie's life could have been deemed tragic, it wasn't---many people in the stories succumbed to exactly what they were meant to be simply because they believed that that was all they could be. For example, Francie's father died before the age of thirty-five because he ran himself into the ground, not because of some ultimatum on his family. And though Francie lived in poverty and started school late and never got to attend high school, she persisted because she knew she deserved better.

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