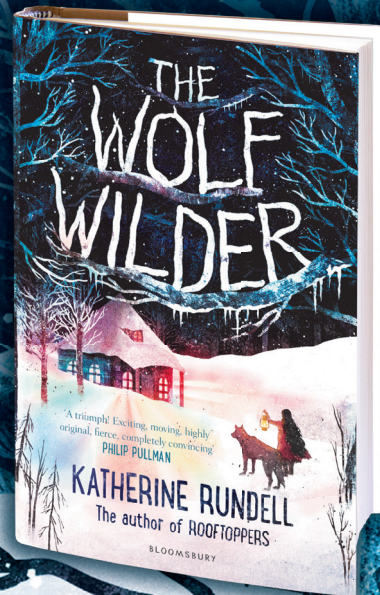


# THE WOLF WILDER

KATHERINE RUNDELL

TEACHERS' NOTES



## IN BRIEF

A timelessly told, lyrical adventure about bravery, friendship and fighting back, set in the stunningly evoked snowbound Russian woods of the early twentieth century.

## IN DETAIL

Feo and her mother, Marina, are wolf wilders. When rich Russian aristocrats tire of keeping wolves as pets, mother and daughter teach the wolves 'how to be bold again, how to hunt and fight, and how to distrust humans' (p.3). But this well intentioned mission threatens their own existence when ruthless General Rakov and his soldiers storm their cottage. A wolf has killed an elk belonging to the Tsar, and blame has been laid at Marina's door. After demanding compensation, the General warns that if Marina doesn't kill the wolves herself, the army will shoot the animals, and take Feo.

Shortly after this brutal encounter, Feo encounters Ilya, a young soldier, and they strike up a friendship. When Ilya hears that Rakov intends to revisit Feo and Marina, he warns them, but too late. The soldiers arrive before they can hide or flee and, while Feo fights back and blinds the General, Marina is arrested and taken to prison in St Petersburg.

Feo and Ilya determine to find Marina and so they and three wolves – Black, White and Grey – journey towards the city through the unforgiving winter. Along the way, while managing to shirk further attacks from Rakov, they encounter Alexei, a revolutionary agitator who believes that Feo's bravery can be harnessed to inspire others to join his cause. Word has spread of the young 'wolf witch' who dared to stand up to Rakov: if a little girl can confront a General, why can't adults?

And then, amidst mounting tension and urgency, it seems that the bravery and resourcefulness of a group of determined children can be more than a match for even the most unjust of regimes ...

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KATHERINE RUNDELL spent her childhood in Africa and Europe and is now a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. Her bestselling novel, *Rooftoppers*, was inspired by summers working in Paris and by night-time trespassing on the rooftops of All Souls. In 2014, *Rooftoppers* won the Waterstones Children's Book Prize and the Blue Peter Award, and was shortlisted for many others.



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### PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Ask students what they think *The Wolf Wilder* is about, based on their response to the title and cover. What kind of book do they think this is going to be? What do they think 'wolf wilder' means?

### FOR DISCUSSION

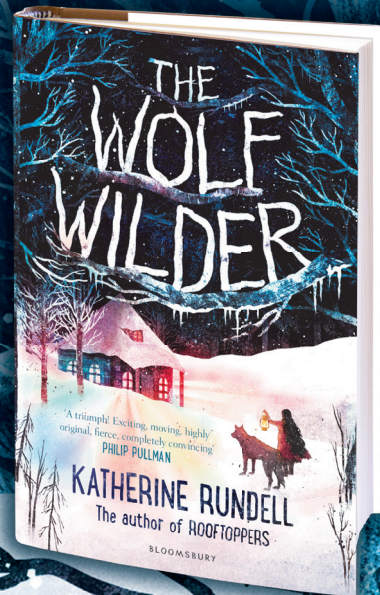
- 1 Why do you think Feo and Marina are wolf wilders? Think about the different risks they are taking by engaging in this practice. Do you think the risks are worth it? Why/why not?
- 2 Related to question 1), think about the risks taken by different characters throughout the novel, for example, Ilya warning Feo and Marina that General Rakov is on his way. What do you think drives people to put their own well-being and safety at risk?
- 3 *A wolf who cannot howl is like a human who cannot laugh (p.3)*. What do you think this means? How would it feel to be 'a human who cannot laugh'?
- 4 *Once upon a time, a hundred years ago, there was a dark and stormy girl (p.5)*. What was your first impression of Feo from this description? What sort of person do you think a 'dark and stormy girl' is? Also consider the description of Feo as having 'a face that says there's a knife in your shoe' (p.172). What does this description suggest about Feo's character?
- 5 *'Wolves are the witches of the animal world' (Marina, p.32)*. What do you think this means? How does it relate to Feo being called a 'wolf witch'?
- 6 *'It's the most talkative weather there is' (Feo, p.38)*. What does Feo mean by this? How can snow be 'talkative'?
- 7 What were your first impressions of Ilya in chapter four? Were you surprised when Feo stood up to him, given that he declares himself to be a soldier and is armed with a gun? Would you have stood up to him like that? Why/why not?
- 8 *'Fear is as dangerous as hatred sometimes' (Feo, p.64)*. How can fear be dangerous? Think about your own experiences. How does fear make you feel and act?
- 9 *'Mama says wilding is helping a wolf work out that she was born to be brave. That's a difficult thing. I don't need help' (Feo, p.73)*. Do you think Feo is brave and doesn't need help? Are there moments when she's not brave? For example, when she's afraid of dancing and talking in front of people. How is it possible for someone to be unafraid of wild wolves, but frightened of such ordinary activities?
- 10 *Wolves are much easier to understand than people (Feo, p.92)*. Why do you think Feo feels like this? What does it reveal about her character? Do you think humans and animals can understand each other?



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- 11 *'The little wolf girl,' he said. 'I had forgotten you were so small'* (Rakov, p.104). What does this reveal about a) Rakov's character and b) Feo's character?
- 12 *'But fear is for cowards,' Feo had said. 'No, Feo! Cowardice is for cowards. Fear is for people with brains and eyes and functioning nerve endings'* (Ilya, p.120–1). What does Ilya mean by this? Do you agree that 'cowardice is for cowards' and 'fear is for people with brains'? Or do you agree with Feo that 'fear is for cowards'? Give reasons for your answers.
- 13 *'Children are the toughest creatures on the planet. They endure'* (p.121). Consider this belief held by Feo's mother. Do you agree with it? Answer in relation to what happens in the book, and in relation to examples from the real world, or your own life.
- 14 Think about when Feo and Ilya first encounter Alexei. Would you have trusted him? Why/why not?
- 15 *'An agitator is a person who acts against the Tsar ... They are enemies of the government'* (Ilya, p.146). Why do you think Feo's mum and Alexei became agitators? In your answer, refer to what you've learned about the society in which the book is set.
- 16 *'He's got skinny wrists, but a muscly brain'* (Feo, p.160). How can someone have a 'muscly brain'? Do you agree with this assessment of Ilya's character? Give an example of Ilya showing that he has a 'muscly brain'.
- 17 *'I think he's just plain evil' says Feo of Rakov* (p.198). Do you agree with this view of Rakov? More generally, can a person be 'just plain evil', or do you think everyone has some good in them?
- 18 Do you understand why Feo left the village alone (p.214)? Do you think she should have waited to travel with Ilya and Alexei? What would you have done?
- 19 *'The adults, they want us to be quiet and careful, but we have a right to fight for the world we want to live in'* (Feo, p.304). Do you agree with this view? Would you have joined Feo and the village children? Is there anything you'd like to 'fight for' in the world you live in?
- 20 What did you learn about wolves from reading this novel? Did anything surprise you?
- 21 *'That, said Alexei,' surveying their handiwork, 'is the stuff that fairytales are of made of'* (p.256). Do you think this book is a kind of fairytale? Why/why not? Think about what makes a fairytale a fairytale.
- 22 Do you think *The Wolf Wilder* is a good title for this book? Think of three alternative titles.



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### BEYOND THE BOOK

#### WRITING ACTIVITIES

##### ① Writing vivid descriptions

- Reread the descriptions of different kinds of cold on p.118 and, using the author's descriptive language as inspiration, write a paragraph about the sun. Think about your senses, for example: how the sun feels on your skin, how it looks, how it affects your vision, how it changes the way things look and smell.
- 'Cheese and apples are good together. They taste of summer' (p.144). Describe what Christmas, autumn and spring 'taste of' to you.
- Ilya describes dancing as being 'like writing with your feet' (p.116), which is a kind of 'simile'. A simile is a phrase that uses the words 'like' or 'as' to describe someone or something by comparing it with someone or something else that is similar. Come up with your own similes to describe each of the following activities: dancing, swimming, sleeping, eating.

##### ② Write a newspaper report about Feo and the village children storming the city and prison.

#### ART

*The Wolf Wilder* features vivid descriptions of characters' appearances. Read the following excerpts and draw the characters they describe:

- There was a dark and stormy girl.* (p.5)
- The man had a face made of right angles: a jutting nose and wrinkles in angry places, deep enough to cast shadows in the dark.* (p.7)
- Her face was very like Alexei's, Feo saw – the same beautiful high bones and sharp edges – but older, and it was muted where Alexei's sparkled.* (p.134)

#### RESEARCH

Research the 're-wilding' of animals in today's world, for example, wolves in Yellowstone park and lions in Zimbabwe. Why do you think these projects are in place?

### FURTHER READING

#### BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*Rooftoppers*

*The Girl Savage*

#### BY OTHER AUTHORS

*Blood Red, Snow White*, Marcus Sedgwick

*Old Peter's Russian Tales*, Arthur Ransom

*Anastasia's Secret*, Susanne Dunlop

*Angel on the Square*, Gloria Whelan

*The Secret Countess*, Eva Ibbotson

*Wolf Brother*, Michelle Paver

*White Fang*, Jack London

