

The Wolf Wilder

Feo and her mother, Marina, live alone in the snowbound woods of Russia. They are wolf wilders (people who teach tamed wolves to live in the wild). When an infamous Russian general arrests Marina, Feo sets off on a quest to save her. With the help of her trusted wolves and a runaway Russian soldier, Feo travels across the frozen landscape and is swept up in the beginnings of a revolution.

Author

As a child, Katherine Rundell lived in Africa and Europe. She had wanted to be a writer for as long as she can remember. She starts each day with a cartwheel because she believes that reading turns the world upside down and leaves you breathless, like doing a cartwheel. Since 2011, she has written six books for children and is a bestselling author.

Historical context

The Wolf Wilder is set in Russia about a hundred years ago. The book is set just before the Russian Revolution of 1917 when a group of revolutionaries led the peasants and working-class people of Russia in a revolt against the government of Tsar Nicholas II.

There is no such thing as wolf wilding but it is based on a practice involving lions in Zimbabwe. Some people kept lion cubs as pets, soon realising that they were not meant to live among humans. These lions were taught to be wild again – to hunt and be wary of humans.



Characters

Feo

At the start of the book, Feo is a wild character who is only close to her mother and the wolves she has befriended. As the book progresses, she must work with humans to rescue her mother and use her bravery to fight for herself and others.

Ilya

Ilya is a soldier who does not believe in the Tsar's regime. He has dreams and a talent that he would much rather pursue. He becomes a reliable friend and fierce supporter of Feo, and even learns to trust her wolves.

Alexei

Alexei is a revolutionary agitator who wants to use Feo to inspire others. He is a strong, inspiring character who is admired by Feo and Ilya.

Rakov

Rakov is a Russian army general who wants to crush the revolution and destroy wolves and wolf wilders alike. He is a source of much fear in the book and an intimidating adversary.

Themes

- bravery and resilience
- family
- friendship
- nature vs humanity

Settings

Feo and Marina's house

In the beginning, their cosy, wooden house is a sanctuary that protects them from the bitter Russian cold. Both mother and daughter lovingly built the house and made it homely. The sanctuary is disrupted by the Russian soldiers who make sure that Feo and her mother can never go back there.



Woods

The woods are dense with trees and everything is covered with snow. In the woods, Feo roams free and wilds wolves. She also meets Ilya out amongst the trees. Feo's knowledge of the woods is useful when it comes to fleeing from the Russian army and travelling quickly to find her mother.



Castle

The fire-damaged castle was once elegant and some of the fine possessions remain. One side was gutted by a fire, before the events of the book, but the ballroom, library and other rooms were mostly untouched by the flames. The castle is a safe place for the children to stay and prepare for their rescue mission. It also becomes a home for two characters at the end of the book.



Story timeline

These are some of the key chapters in the novel. When you read the chapters, use the questions as starting points for discussion.

Chapter 1

The novel introduces Feo, her mother and their peaceful home. How and why is the peace disrupted?

Chapter 7

Feo, Ilya and the wolves encounter Rakov and he commits a terrible act. How do Feo's skills help them to survive?

Chapter 9

Alexei wants Feo to join his cause. Do you think Feo should help him and why?

Chapter 13

The children prepare to execute their plan. What difficulties do you think they will encounter?

Chapter 15

The children trick their way into St Petersburg, rallying others to join them. What do you think about the ending of the book? What might the people of Russia do next?

Language

The book uses rich, lyrical imagery to describe the characters and settings. Unique, often humorous, descriptions capture characters' qualities. For example, these sentences about Feo illustrate her personality in an amusing way: *'The set of her chin suggested she might have slain a dragon before breakfast. The look in her eyes suggested she might, in fact, have eaten it.'*

Fairy tale

Rundell was inspired by the characters and icy landscapes of Russian fairy tales, such as the stories about Ivan Tsarevich, a character who rides a magical grey wolf. Some readers have also drawn parallels with *Little Red Riding Hood*. In both, a red-caped girl ventures into the woods. However, in *The Wolf Wilder*, Feo sees wolves as companions, rather than creatures to be conquered or feared.

Symbolism

In *The Wolf Wilder*, the wolves symbolise the beauty and untameable qualities of nature. By helping the wolves to be wild again, Feo and her mother restore them to their natural state.



Literary terms

fairy tale

A fairy tale is a traditional story for children that often involves magic, imaginary creatures, royalty and fantasy elements.

figurative language

A word or phrase that has an imaginative meaning rather than a literal meaning. It is intended to describe something precisely to readers or evoke their senses. Similes and metaphors are examples of figurative language.

imagery

Describing something using figurative language that appeals to the senses.

metaphor

Describing something by comparing it to something that has similar characteristics but would usually be considered unrelated. For example, *'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.'*

simile

Comparing one thing to another, often using like or as. For example, Ilya tells Feo, *'It's dancing! It's magical, actually. A kind of slowish magic. Like writing with your feet.'*

symbolism

Using a character, action, animal or object in a novel to represent qualities or ideas

personification

Describing something non-human by giving it human characteristics. For example, *'One wolf was white, one black and one a greyish mix, with black ears and the face of a politician.'*

