



# THE WILD FOLK

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## TEACHERS' NOTES

### SYNOPSIS

The Wild Folk tells the story of Country girl Comfrey and City boy Tin as they journey to save their world from certain destruction.

The novel starts with two leverets Myrtle and Mallow who are sent to Tin and Comfrey to bring them together to the land of the Wild Folk. But humans have a negative reputation amongst the Wild Folk, and the start of their journey sees them facing danger and mistrust from everyone they meet. There is a great division between humans and Wild Folk (and indeed the Country and the City), and the two children must fight from the very start to overcome the deeply ingrained prejudices of the past.

Tin, Comfrey and the two leverets must journey to find the founder of their land of Farallone – the Elk of Milk and Gold, but to get to her they have to first face the challenges of the dangerous Baba Ithá, who would take great glee in their failure.

The challenges are seemingly impossible, but somehow, Tin and Comfrey complete them and are able to continue their journey. To get to the Elk of Milk and Gold, they must enter the land of the Grizzly-witches who would have no objection to getting rid of them altogether.

Somehow Tin and Comfrey make it to the Elk of Milk and Gold, but when they reach her it is too late. The men from the City have invaded the land of the Wild Folk, and they are hungry for their land and riches. Desperate to save the land and people he has fallen in love with, Tin offers the Brothers (from the City) the ultimate sacrifice – himself. The Wild Folk try to save him, but the Brothers have guns and they have no qualms about using them.

The ghosts of the extinct grizzly bears chase the Brothers away, but the novel ends knowing that the fight to save Farallone has only just begun, and to win it, old prejudices must be pushed aside in order to unite everyone for the good of their world.

## **THEMES**

The novel centres round the idea of the world we live in, and protecting it for the natural beauty it holds. It draws on ideas of environmentalism and what can go wrong when we abuse our natural resources. There are clear moments of mirroring between the world of this novel and ideas of colonialism from the past.

There is also an exploration of prejudice and division, and Tin and Comfrey have to work hard to fight against the ingrained view that all humans are bad. It isn't just the divide between humans and Wild Folk that is explored in the novel, but also the divide between the City and Country, where each has been told stories of the other to suggest that they were responsible for the fall of their world.

Stories are also a central theme. They are something that can be used as currency, something that can be used as a life force, but also something that can be used to manipulate the listener. The Wild Folk shows the power of stories to bring about change.

A final key theme is strength. Tin and Comfrey show that it is not physical strength that is important, but the strength to stand up for what you believe in, even when it seems that to do so will mean you could lose everything else in the process.

## **DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS ACTIVITIES**

### **SYMBOLS**

There are several recurring symbols that feature across the novel. What do you think each of these suggest? Are there any others that you think are important?

- Tin's Fiddleback
- The fiddleback spider
- The Elk of Milk and Gold
- The Fire Hawk
- The Fire Hawk's feather
- Tin's penknife
- Comfrey's spectacles
- Baba Ithá's pearl necklace
- The Bobcat-girl
- The Psalterium
- Old Mother Neeth
- The First Bobcat

### **ANIMALS**

- The only animals allowed inside the walls of the City were the cattle raised in sterile warehouses on sterile grain that supplied protein for the citizens. No one except their keepers ever saw them, and it was said their lifespans were very short, just long enough to become milk and meat.' p19 How does the City see animals? What are their purpose?
- 'Mostly the books showed images of dangerous animals, animals the Star-Priest Brotherhood had eradicated after the Collapse. Even insects were forbidden within the

City. It was, after all, the mosquitoes and flies that had been partially responsible for the devastating spread of the Plagues in the time before.’ p19 Why does the City see animals as dangerous? What does it blame them for? Do you think this is right?

- Two of the main characters in the novel are animals. Why do you think Linsteadt chose to give the leverets such an important role?
- The Wild Folk are presented as having both human and animals characteristics. Why do you think this is? What do you think Linsteadt wanted to show her readers through these features?

## STORIES

- ‘It had been Tin’s most recent stint of many in the Brother’s closet, punishment for keeping the other boys up until sunrise telling stories.’ p20 Why do the Brothers not want Tin telling stories?
- ‘What kept him from giving in entirely to the listless hopelessness that so afflicted many of the other boys was making up stories and telling them, and inventing little contraptions with his hands.’ p24 Why are stories important to Tin?
- ‘Comfrey had only ever heard second-hand stories about people seeing Wild Folk, told by the old grandmothers, tales their own grandmothers had told them, and much more embellished.’ p40 What do stories mean to Comfrey? Is this similar or different to what they mean to Tin?
- The Basket-witch explains to Comfrey that others have come to Olima before her, “But how, child, do you think the tales about the Wild Folk got formed? How can you know where an edge between places really is unless somebody steps over and never returns, or returns in fifty years as an old grey man, with another piece of the map?” p116 Do you think there is any truth to the stories the Country folk have heard about the Wild Folk? How do you think the stories may have changed over time?
- After Sedge tells Comfrey that she should be ashamed of herself and her people, Comfrey starts to doubt everything she had believed in: ‘All the stories that had seemed so clear and solid in her life felt unsteady now. Wasn’t it the City people who were bad, not the Country people?’ p123 How do you think stories are adapted to suit the people that hear them? How would these stories be different in the City?
- Thornton tells Tin and Seb on p152, that “Stories matter, my lads. They tell us how to see the world.” Does everyone use stories for this purpose in the novel? How have people used stories to create their own versions of the world?
- In Thornton’s story of the history of Farallone, he tells Tin and Seb that “They enslaved the ancient people of Farallone to do much of the work for them [...] They were punished for telling these old stories, punished until the names of Elk and First Bobcat and Old Spider Mother were all but lost. Most of them grew sick and died – of new diseases brought by the people of Albion, or of grief. Those who survived did so by hiding what they knew and what they had been, until they themselves forgot.” p157 Why were the ancient people banned from telling the old stories? Why do you think the invaders wanted them to forget their pasts?

- When Tin and Comfrey arrive at The Holy Fool's Inn, Oro asks them for a story, saying "Stories make the world go round, eh? What a delight they are for us Fools. We take tales like other men and women take tea, or toddies." p208 Why are stories important to Oro? What does he mean by 'We take tales like other men and women take tea, or toddies'?
- Myrtle talks about how "the Grizzly-witches always gather at dusk in the big ruined milk barn of the ancient ranch called Pierce, and share stew, and root tea, and the stories they found as they hunted and foraged throughout the day." p318 What does she mean by stories they found? How are stories shown to be a currency throughout the novel?

## **FREEDOM**

- 'He was an orphan, owned by the Brothers at the Fifth Cloister of Grace and Progress since he was born. No matter what he did, what he invented or discovered, even if he did the thing they all tried for each day and figured out how to transmute scrap metals into stargold for the Brothers, would he ever be free? Would he ever be his own and not theirs?' p24 What do you think of the way Tin has to live? Is it fair? What does it remind you of?
- 'His Fiddleback! It was his secret, the only thing that was really his in the whole world. The idea of the Brothers getting their hands on it, taking its miraculous gold for themselves, made him want to break apart with anger, into a hundred little pieces.' p30 Why is Tin so protective of his Fiddleback? What do you know so far about him that would explain this? What does this show us about life in the City?
- Thornton tells Tin and Seb that the Star-Priests (later the Brotherhood) "enslaved the ancient people of Farallone to do much of the work for them, rounding them up from their seasonal homes and forcing them to live in a series of boarding houses, where the wives of the Star-Priests taught them to work hard, to speak the language of Albion, to worship the white towers and the sky." p157 Many elements of the ancient people's freedom was taken away by the Star-Priests, which rights were taken away from them, and why do you think the Star-Priests did this?
- Tin talks about his early journey through Olima, saying "The largeness of the land unsettled him only a little, and its utter lack of discernible pattern – no walls or brick floors or beakers of mercury or terrible gleaming Wall in sight – made him feel light-headed, while his thoughts felt easy and free and glad." p198 Why do you think Tin's thoughts weren't free in the City? How is it different for him now?
- Are Tin and Comfrey free in Olima? What restrictions do they face there?

## **THE WILD FOLK**

- In chapter 3, Comfrey tells us about the Offerings that the Country people leave for the Wild Folk, and how 'In exchange, a certain safety net was maintained.' p39 She says however, that if the Offerings are forgotten, or 'second-best' then that family is at risk of illness or damage to their property, or a lack of food. Do you think this is a fair system? Do the Wild Folk have a right to ask this of the Country people?

- The Basket-witch tells Comfrey that she knew her name because “that’s the simple part. Wild Folk can see right into ordinary folk, didn’t you know?” p117 Why do you think ordinary folk don’t have the same vision as Wild Folk? Do you think it’s always been this way?
- “The world is very much bigger than you can fathom, Comfrey,” said Salix. “You do not know how one question, one particular path taken or decision made, can affect the whole. How that one little hermit thrush now singing in the firs speaks of the life of the whole forest, and the bobcat hunting voles at the meadow’s edge.” p121 What does Salix mean by this? How could one decision affect the whole world? Why are the Wild Folk seemingly wiser than the City and Country people?
- Why do the Wild Folk mistrust the humans so much? Find three quotes from the novel to support your points.
- Do you think the Wild Folk are prejudiced? Find three quotes to support your point.
- What do the Wild Folk learn from Tin and Comfrey?
- At the end of the novel, the Wild Folk unite with Tin and Comfrey against the Brothers. Why do you think they do this? How have their opinions of humans changed across the novel?

## HUMANS

- Sedge tells Comfrey that “You humans proved your foolishness and your inability to take care of Farallone long ago. You should be ashamed of yourself and of your people.” p119 Is Sedge right? What evidence have you seen so far in the novel to agree or disagree with this statement?
- When Comfrey is told she must go to the Elk to give her the Fire Hawk’s feather, Comfrey believes she isn’t the right person for the task. Rush then says “Don’t underestimate the power of a human hand, reaching out in friendship and in peace. I think that it is precisely because these ills are human-made, that their healing must therefore be human-made too.” p138 Do you believe that Comfrey can complete this task? Where does she show strength in the novel before this moment? Why do you think the healing must be done by humans?
- When Thornton is telling the story of Farallone to the boys on pages 156 and 157, he describes the ‘men in gleaming metal armour’ who took over the land without permission and stripped it of its beauty and resources. What does this remind you of? When in history has this happened before? Did they have a right to do this?
- When the Elk of Milk and Gold approaches them seemingly without fear, Tin thinks ‘It did seem extraordinary that she would walk so calmly towards them, if she knew what they really were. This thought made Tin’s head hurt. Why did being human mean all the wild ones automatically mistrusted them? Why couldn’t they be like hares? How had they become so cut off from the rest of the creatures of the world that every new interaction was tainted by mistrust and fear?’ p338 Why do the wild ones mistrust humans? Is their mistrust justified? Is this similar to the world you live in?

## STRENGTH

- 'The hare understood in that fierce blue glare something of the strength Brother Warren had spoken of. You couldn't change this boy's mind about a thing once it was set.' p65 What does strength mean to you? Why do you think this is a strength for Tin? How might it help him as the novel develops?
- Comfrey doubts her capabilities to carry out her mission, but when Tin first meets her he thinks that 'There was a glow of strength about her that he'd never seen in a City person. All his life he'd been told that Country people were diseased and malformed, and here Comfrey was, rosy and dark with good health.' p188 Why does Tin see Comfrey's strength where she doesn't? How is she different to the people in the City?
- Tin thinks 'I might die too. Just for the feeling of aliveness in my lungs. I would die too, rather than let it fall into the hands of the City and become another wasteland.' p189 Why is he prepared to die for Farallone? How do you think his life in the City has made him think like this?
- Amber explains to Comfrey that "'Your Oddness is in seeing clearly, seeing the interconnections between all things [...] Seeing what others do not, what others have forgotten or are afraid to see.'" p235 Why is this a strength for Comfrey? Who else in the novel has the ability to see what others do not?
- In Chapter 17, Tin chooses to sacrifice himself for the good of Farallone. How is his strength shown in this chapter? How has his portrayal throughout the novel predicted that he would do this?
- When all seems lost in Chapter 17, Comfrey charges at Father Ralstein shouting "'You cannot have them, you cannot have any of them! [...] How dare you? Do you know that you upset the balance of the entire world, and that none of this will survive, not even for your own benefit, if you take the stargold from these creatures' bodies?'" p376 Why can't Father Ralstein see this? Why is it brave of Comfrey to confront him?

## DIVISION

- When Myrtle tells Comfrey that her world is in danger, she explains that "'The Greentwins believe it is. That the way we've sealed ourselves off from each other – City from Country and Country from Wild Folk, so that nobody trusts anyone else or goes between the three – will be our undoing.'" p85 Do you think the Greentwins are right? How has Linsteadt presented a divide between the three elements of Farallone so far?
- 'She thought of herself and the other Country Folk as virtuous, as Good, while the people in the City were Bad.' p126 Why does Comfrey have these views? Is she right? Why do you think there are capital letters in 'Good' and 'Bad'?
- When Comfrey first meets Tin she is frightened when he says he is from the City. Why do you think she reacts like this? What does she think she knows about people from the City?
- When Comfrey tries to accuse Tin of being a spy from the City he says "'You are no better than we are," he cried, "assuming all City people are bad, just like I was taught that all

Country people were diseased savages. Well, I know more about City greed than you ever could, and therefore hate it more than you ever could either.” p187 Is Comfrey wrong in the way she treats Tin? What is he able to see that she can't?

- Mallow says that the Greentwins “seem to be in the centre of so many different webs.” p247 How are the Greentwins able to connect each part of Farallone?
- After the Grizzly-witch Amurra, tells the prophecy of the City having no wall, Comfrey tells Tin that “Your people will bleed every last Wild Folk for their stupid Star-Breakers, and turn Farallone to a Wasteland again!” p332 Tin is conflicted by her comment ‘They didn't feel like his people at all, but he had been a piece in the great machine of the Cloister for his whole life, without knowing there was any other way to live, and so somehow, he felt complicit. The thought made Tin feel sick.’ p333 Is this fair of Comfrey to accuse Tin of this? Do you think he is complicit in the City's plans? Could he be considered to be responsible?
- Father Ralstein tells Tin that “There are so many riches in the Country that we did not know of [...] Why, it's a sin this knowledge was kept from us so long by the greedy Country people.” p371 Who is committing the sin in this instance? Should the riches be shared? Are the Country people greedy?
- Towards the end of the novel, Comfrey believes she has failed the Wild Folk and Olima, but Rush tells her “It is true, our fight has only just begun, but you and the boy and the leverets have healed a very, very old wound.” p382 What does Rush mean by this? How have Comfrey and Tin healed some of the old divisions?
- When Sedge suggests that the death of the Elk of Milk and Gold was the fault of Tin and Comfrey, Rush is quick to correct her “without them we would not be standing here together. We would be hiding alone, in hate and in fear. Divided, we would never be able to resist the Brothers again. All together, we just might.” p388 Why do you think Sedge is so quick to blame Tin and Comfrey? What is Rush trying to teach her? What can we learn from Rush?
- At the end of the novel, Thornton says “We will heal nothing without loving, without standing by the ones we love. I do not think we have to choose. I think that this is the only way we can ever truly succeed?” p409 What does he mean by this? How has he previously had to choose? How could love save Farallone?

## **STARGOLD**

- Thornton tells Tin that when the Elk of Milk and Gold made the Wild Folk, “some of that final stargold seeped into the bodies of ordinary humans, ordinary plants and ordinary animals. [...] It did not make such a person better in any essential way than another, for all of Creation was made with love. Only it made them able to see more clearly than others, to look sometimes beyond the veil of ordinary reality, to understand the patterns of Farallone itself.” p163 He then tells Tin that he has stargold in his blood. Why is it significant that Tin has stargold in his blood? How do his characteristics reflect the above?
- Oro tells Tin that “Stargold is the life force of Farallone. Those who carry it in their blood have a duty to this land.” p230 How has Tin shown his duty to the land so far?

- At the end of the novel, the Brothers learn that the Wild Folk have stargold inside them. Why is this dangerous? How do you think this will shape the story in the second novel?
- Why do you think the Brothers are so obsessed with stargold? Does it make you think of anything that our world is obsessed with?

## **DIFFERENCES AND PREJUDICE**

- Comfrey notices that the people of The Holy Fools Inn are 'made a little different, and unlike any she had ever seen.' p211. Oro tells her that "'We all have our Oddnesses, you know. They are our gifts, our singular stories. Some carry them outside, that's all.'" p211 Why do you think the people of The Holy Fools Inn have clustered together? Why do you think Oro considers their 'Oddnesses' to be a 'gift'?
- 'The people of The Holy Fool's Inn fit the description of the Country people he had heard time and again from the Brothers a bit better than Comfrey did, but there was so much warmth and strange beauty and kindness about them.' p212 What does Tin mean by this? What was missing in the Brothers' description of Country people?
- Oro tells Mallow that "'We Holy Fools love difference more than we love just about anything. We, after all, are the greatest misfits of all. We fit nowhere. I'm merely fascinated, itching to hear your tale.'" p213 What does Oro mean by the Holy Fools being 'the greatest misfits of all'? Why do they 'fit nowhere'? What can we learn from Oro about differences?
- Amber tells Tin and Comfrey that "'When a child is born Odd in the villages, you know, with a hump like Pieta's, or a head like Oro's, or skin like mine, they are taken away immediately by the midwife, to be exposed on a hill. Left out to die, in other words.'" p244 Why do you think that the Country folk treat the Holy Fools like this? Why would they not protect them?
- Re-read pages 365 -366. How is the City shown to contrast with Olima? How has Linsteadt used language to show a sense of invasion when the brothers arrive?
- In her speech at the end of the novel, Salix praises Tin and Comfrey saying "'They won the trust of all whom they encountered throughout Olima. They were sorely tested, but they proved themselves every step of the way, and taught us something of our own prejudices and our own fears.'" p400 What does Salix mean by this? What examples of prejudice have you seen throughout the novel? What do you think has caused those views, and do you think Tin and Comfrey have broken them down?

## **THE BABA ITHÁ**

- How does Linsteadt create a sense of fear and intimidation around the Baba Ithá?
- What do Tin and Comfrey learn from each task that the Baba Ithá sets them?
- Why is the Baba Ithá so prejudiced against Tin and Comfrey? Find quotes to support your points.
- 'As the guardian of the fir forest, she was as life-giving as she was dangerous. And in that



moment, gazing down upon them, she was as gentle as the dawn.' p299 why do you think linsteadt has created the Baba Ithá to be a character of two such extreme sides? What have the children taught her through the three tasks?

- Comfrey asks the Baba Ithá how she knew that the tasks they completed would provide them with the gifts that they needed. The Baba Ithá replied saying "sometimes the gift is made by the task and the way that task is carried. Perhaps I had nothing to do with it at all. Perhaps, in completing each task, you made what you needed [...] isn't it said, that the medicine you seek is already within you?" p309 what do you think the Baba Ithá means by all this? Why do you think that Tin and Comfrey had to create/find the things they needed themselves? What have they learned from the Baba Ithá?

## **CREATIVE TASKS**

### **USING A STIMULUS**

- Look at the map of 'The Island of Farallone' at the start of the book. Pick one place that we haven't been to in the book and either:
  - a) Write a story about someone that lives there
  - b) Write a detailed description of that place
  - c) Create a detailed map of that place
- Read the creation story of Farralone from page 152, and recreate it in the form of a storyboard.
- Pick one of the chapter titles and use it as inspiration for a short story.
- 'Tin saw that they left two circles on the wooden shelf, light and dustless, where they'd been standing beside the bronze orrery, the indigo glass bottles, a chess piece, a broom handle, a pincushion filled with marvellous shiny needles, and a battery chipped to the colour of silver.' p227 Pick one of the items above and explain why it is the most special item in the collection, and what it can bring to its owner. Use page 232 for further inspiration.

## **WRITING FROM A CHARACTER'S PERSPECTIVE**

- Image you are either Tin or Comfrey.
  - a) If you are Comfrey, describe the moment when you crossed the border into Olima, and how you felt when you did.
  - b) If you are Tin, describe the moment when you reached the other side of the Wall and how you felt when you did.
- Choose either Tin or Comfrey and write your own speech to give to the Wild Folk at the end of the novel. You should explain why you think it's important to work together to save Farallone, and why they should put their trust in you.

## **THE NEXT INSTALMENT**

- Write the first chapter of the second book in The Wild Folk duology.

## **WRITING TO PERSUADE**

- The Environment – on page 124, Comfrey talks about the code of conduct between humans and the natural world that aims to protect the land, water and animals from any further exploitation. Write a speech persuading people to protect our world. Consider what your priorities are to protect, and what people could do to help these priorities.
- Re-read the section on page 125, where Comfrey talks about the creation of fuel. Research renewable energy sources and create a poster which promotes using one type of renewable energy.
- Both City people and Country people are told rumours that makes them fear and distrust the other. Create a propaganda poster for either the City or the Country, warning its residents about the other.
- Re-read the chapter 'The Holy Fool's Inn'. Plan a social media campaign for promoting differences. You should consider which platform you will use, create a hashtag, and consider images and target audience.

## **PROMOTING THE NOVEL**

- You work in the marketing department for Usborne publishing. Plan a marketing campaign to promote The Wild Folk. Include:
  - A poster to go up in school libraries
  - A bookmark aimed at readers
  - A review of the book (can be written or recorded)
  - An advert in a newspaper or magazine
  - Merchandise to be sold in bookshops