

THE WILDERNESS

Steve McCarthy

WALKER BOOKS

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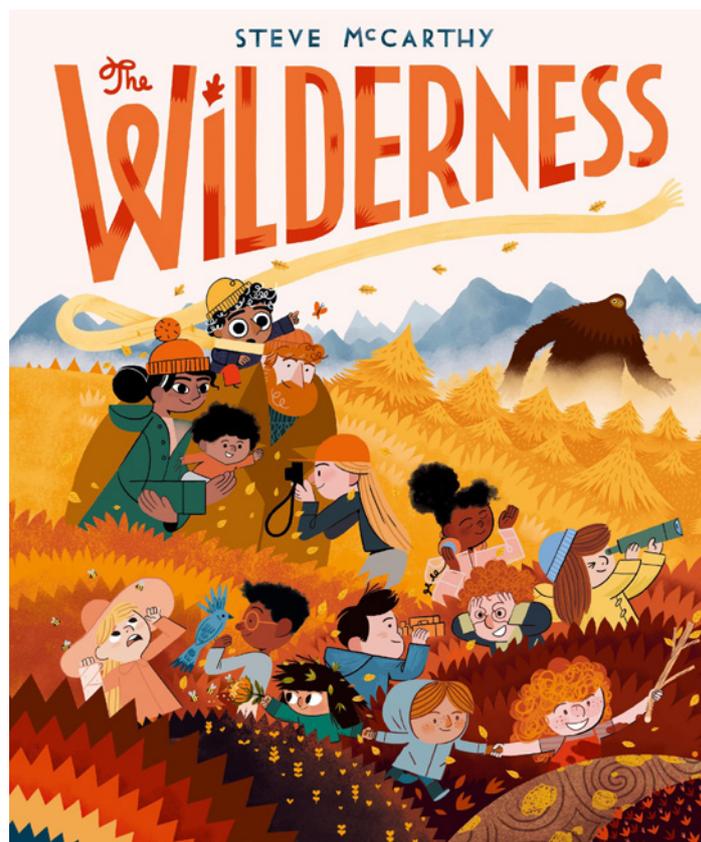
Themes

- Adventure
- Bravery and overcoming fears
- Nature and wilderness
- The unknown
- Family and friendship

Summary The Vasylenko family are adventurers. They all love the wet and the wild, the thrill of exploring the outside world. All that is ... except Oktober. He prefers the warm and safe comfort of the inside world, and for his adventures to take place between the pages of a book. But tomorrow, Oktober has to join his family on a trek into the slimy, grimy and climby wild, where he sees only danger and worry and fears a creature called The Wilderness! Failing to keep his wits about him could be dangerous – it may even get him a bit ... lost. But perhaps getting lost is just what Oktober needs to find himself and maybe even make an unexpected friend.

Judges' Comments This fun and playful picturebook follows the story of the Vasylenko family as they head out to brave the wilds and search for adventure – well, all members of the family except young Oktober, who prefers to find his adventures in the safety of books. Until one day he discovers that maybe The Wilderness isn't as monstrous as he thought. This original tale engages with the importance of dealing with your feelings and shows the transformative potential of a different point of view.

About the Author–Illustrator Steve McCarthy is a Dublin-based designer and illustrator. He has illustrated numerous collections of nursery rhymes for children, including *Sally Go Round the Stars*, *A Sailor Went to Sea Sea Sea* and *The One with the Waggly Tail*. Steve comes from working as a background designer, most notably for the animated feature film *Song of the Sea*, which was nominated for an academy award in 2015. *The Wilderness* is his debut picturebook.



QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. Look at the title, typography and illustration on the front cover. What do you think this book is about? What atmosphere is created?
2. Does the title and/or cover make you want to read the book? Why or why not?
3. What is your first impression of the characters on the cover? What do you think the relationship is between them? Which character interests you the most, and why?
4. Look at the endpapers. Which is your favourite plant, and why?
5. Look at the title page. What do you notice about the names of the children? Do they have anything else in common? Why do you think Oktober is on a separate page? Does Papa Everest's name remind you of anything?

AS YOU READ

Pages 1–2

1. Why do you think Oktober stayed in? Can you tell anything from the look on his face?
2. How are the other children acting in the weather?

Pages 3–4

1. Why do you think Oktober prefers adventures in books than in real life? Which do you prefer?
2. What other sorts of books do you think Oktober might be reading?
3. Look at the facial expressions of each character on page 4. How do you think each one is feeling?

Pages 5–6

1. What do you think each of the siblings is dreaming of?
2. What do their beds tell us about the personality of each character? Look very closely.
3. What do you think The Wilderness actually looks like?

Pages 7–8

1. How does May feel about the monster? What does this tell us about her personality?
2. How does the illustrator create movement in this spread?

Pages 9–10

1. What does Oktober feel when he makes the noise 'Whooft!?' Can you make this noise? And have you ever felt this way?
2. Which of the siblings would you most like to play with, and why?

3. 'The wilderness isn't a monster [...] it's a place filled with many stories and adventures.' Do you have your own wilderness story or adventure to share?

Pages 11–12

1. 'Scared is how you *feel*, but bravery is what you do.' Can you think of a time you were scared but were brave anyway?
2. Does the layout and scale of these images remind you of anything? Like a movie or videogame, perhaps?
3. How many body parts can you spot in the stones on page 12?
4. 'The more we know, the less scary things will be.' Do you agree? Can you think of an example?

Pages 13–14

1. When Mum says 'Whooft!', how are her feelings different to Oktober's? Have you ever felt like this?
2. What sort of treasures do you think August sees?
3. What things can you spot in the clouds on page 14?

Pages 15–16

1. Why do you think the author–illustrator used a comic strip here? Do you like it?
2. How does the shape of Oktober's scarf change between panels? What is this showing us?

Pages 17–18

1. How did you feel when you turned the page? How is this spread different to the previous ones?
2. Can you spot anything hiding in the background?

Pages 19–20

1. How does the author–illustrator show movement and the passage of time?
2. How does the author–illustrator show you how to say 'Aaaaaa ...'? Try saying it aloud together as a class.

Pages 21–22

1. Were you surprised when you turned the page? Have you ever had to turn a book on its side before? Why do you think the author–illustrator does this?
2. Did The Wilderness look how you expected? What was your first impression of them?
3. How do you think both Oktober and The Wilderness are feeling here? Do they have anything in common visually?

Pages 23–24

1. How are size and scale different here compared to the previous page? What does it tell us about how the characters are feeling?

Pages 25–26

1. How does The Wilderness's version of 'Whooft!' compare to Oktober's or his mum's?
2. Have you ever gotten lost? How did you feel? Have you ever explored somewhere off the beaten track? How did that feel?

Pages 27–28

1. Do you recognise any of the landmarks from previous pages?
2. How has the weather changed? What time of day do you think it is?
3. Have you ever seen something from a different point of view?

Pages 29–30

1. Why do you think the author uses small panels of illustrations here?
2. How has Oktober changed, and why?

Pages 31–32

1. Do you think you are reading the book Oktober wrote?

AFTER YOU HAVE READ

1. Do you prefer the indoors or the outdoors? Why?
2. Have you ever been on an exciting adventure? Did you feel scared at all? How did you deal with this?
3. If you have any siblings, how are you different, and how are you similar?
4. Did you enjoy the story? Why or why not? What part of the story did you enjoy the most, and why?
5. Were there any parts of the story where you really wanted to turn the page to find out what happened next? Were you ever surprised when you turned the page?
6. Who was your favourite character, and why? Which character would you most like to go on an adventure with?
7. What time of year do you think this book is set in, and why?
8. How would you describe the setting? Would you like to visit this setting?
9. What was your favourite picture or spread (two facing pages) from the book, and why?
10. Do you like the colours used in the pictures?
11. How did the pictures make you feel?
12. Do you think the cover illustration was a good choice? Would you have picked something else? Why or why not?
13. Do the illustrations show us anything that the text does not mention?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR OLDER READERS

1. 'Maybe you just need to see where you've been, from a different point of view?' How might you apply this to your own life?
2. Did you like the endpapers? Why do you think the author–illustrator included these?
3. What words would you use to describe the different characters in the book? Do you think the illustrator does a good job of giving personality to the characters or of showing us how they are feeling?
4. Could you relate to any of the characters?
5. Who is telling the story? Is this a good choice? Do you like when they talk directly to the reader?
6. How does the weather change throughout the story? Why do you think the author–illustrator does this?
7. How would you describe the atmosphere of this book? How do the text and illustrations each create this atmosphere?
8. How would you describe the illustrator's style? Does it remind you of anything? Can you tell that the illustrator has previously worked on animated films?
9. What colour scheme does the illustrator mainly use? Why? Does it ever change? If so, why?
10. How does the illustrator change size and scale throughout the story? How close are we to the characters, and what angle are we viewing them from? What effect does this create?
11. How does the illustrator make use of space throughout the story? Do they use full or empty backgrounds? When do they use framed panels or full bleeds? Why do you think they made these choices?
12. Do you like the typography? When did the illustrator play with the font, and why?
13. Did you enjoy looking at the pictures alongside the text? If you were to take away the words, would you still be able to understand what was happening in the story? If you were to take away the pictures, would anything be lost?
14. What age group do you think this book is intended for and why? Do you think older readers can enjoy picturebooks too?

ACTIVITIES

- Imagine you were packing a bag before setting out on your own adventure into the wilderness. List or draw the top five things you would bring, and tell your classmates why.
- Using the clouds on page 14 as inspiration, use a blue A4 sheet, glue and white cotton wool to create your own cloud art.
- Steve McCarthy created *The Wilderness* as autumn's answer to the Abominable Snowman of winter. Can you create a monster that captures the season of spring or summer? What would they look like? Where would they live? What sort of personality would they have? And what would their name be?
- Bring a small bag on a nature walk with your family or friends, and collect as many different natural items as you can (e.g. leaves, petals, twigs, bark, berries, moss, grass, seeds, shells, stones). Later, using an A3 sheet and some glue, assemble these items to create your very own Wilderness monster.
- Follow each sibling through the pages of the book, and see if you notice anything new about them. Then choose your favourite, and imagine the sort of adventure they might have. Where would they go? What would they bring? Who might they meet? And how might they feel? Try turning this into a comic strip like the one on pages 15–16.

ACTIVITIES FOR OLDER READERS

- Using the plants on the endpapers as inspiration, design your own 'danger of the wild'. Draw a picture of the plant, name it and give it a key characteristic.
- As a class, choose one of the books that Oktober reads:
 - *101 Ways to Avoid Getting Lost in the Wild*
 - *102 Ways to Avoid Getting Eaten*
 - *143 Things in the Wild That Can Give You a Very Itchy Rash*

Work together to list as many 'ways' or 'things' as you possibly can. They can be as serious or as silly as you like. You might even make a class manual with drawings and diagrams.
- 'The more we know, the less scary things will be.' As a class, each write down something you are scared of on a small piece of paper. Fold it over, and hand it to your teacher. The teacher will then redistribute the pieces randomly. Bring your piece of paper home and find out three fun or interesting facts about the thing written on it. Share your facts with your class the next day.
- Research the most dangerous plants in the world, and choose your favourite. Find out how best to deal with this plant if encountered. Share your findings with your class.

- 'Scared is how you feel, but bravery is what you do.' Research a famous adventurer or explorer of your choice. Draw a portrait of them, and write a suitable motto beneath their picture, such as 'If you can dream it, you can do it' or 'Big journeys begin with small steps'. Show your portrait to your class, and share three facts about your adventurer or explorer.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- See the Walker Books book trailer for *The Wilderness* on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXjIabFN-bc>
- On YouTube, watch the trailer for *Song of the Sea*, the animated feature film Steve McCarthy worked on as a background designer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCvR5YBcpR8>
- Check out this 'Wild Yoga Poses' activity sheet by Steve McCarthy with Children's Books Ireland and An Post: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/sites/default/files/2021-09/CBI-ImagineNation-McCarthy.pdf>
- Check out these Children's Books Ireland themed reading lists:
 - Adventure Stories: https://childrensbooksireland.ie/sites/default/files/2021-08/CBI_Book_List_Adventure_Stories.pdf
 - Celebrating Families: https://childrensbooksireland.ie/sites/default/files/2021-08/CBI_Book_List_Celebrating_Families.pdf
 - Overcoming Fears: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/our-recommendations/overcoming-fears>
- Check out these Children's Books Ireland themed reading guides:
 - *Picture This*: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/sites/default/files/2022-09/PT%20Reading%20Guide%202022%20web.pdf>
 - *Mind Yourself* (especially the 'Fears and Phobias' section): https://childrensbooksireland.ie/sites/default/files/2021-08/CBI_ReadingGuide_Mind_Yourself_2020.pdf