



The Way Past Winter

By Kiran Millwood Hargrave

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F&P Text Level Gradient: W Lexile® Measure: 780L

ABOUT THE BOOK

Mila loves her home, her forest, and her sled dogs. But all is not well in the wintry world where she lives with her sisters, Pípa and Sanna, and their brother, Oskar. Ever since their father mysteriously left five years ago, winter has remained, with never a spring in sight.

And now, a strange scary man, flanked with young boys, has appeared, seeking shelter. By the next morning, they've gone—and they've taken Oskar with them.

Mila is determined to bring Oskar back—even though it means going north, crossing frozen wild-lands to find a way past an eternal winter. She can't imagine everything she'll encounter—untrustworthy mages, harrowing chases, magical waterfalls—but she'll stop at nothing to rescue her brother and set her world back to normal. And if she gets her way, he's not the only one she'll rescue. . . .

Thrilling, vivid, and deeply engrossing, this page-turning adventure of family, resilience, and magic will have every reader believing in the power of love to save the things we hold most dear.



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Discuss as a class some common elements found in fairy tales, and create an anchor chart of these elements. As you are reading, make notes on the chart of the different elements you find.
http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson42/RWT027-4.pdf
2. Discover more about the Hero's journey. Watch the [youtube video](#) on the hero's journey and discuss the [chart that has the essential elements](#) of the journey. Download the [hero's journey graphic organizer](#) and have students keep their own chart of Mila's journey as she embarks on her adventure. As the story unfolds, discuss how Mila is a hero and how the different elements of the journey are found in her story.
3. Describe the most valuable thing you have ever lost. Use details, and all of your senses. Recall how you felt when you discovered it was gone. Did you ever find it again? Were you able to replace it? How does this exercise help us understand what Mila is feeling and thinking throughout the story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the importance of weather in this book, starting with the opening sentence of chapter 1: "It was a winter they would tell tales about." What is the significance of winter, and how does it affect each of the characters in the story?
2. As you begin reading *The Way Past Winter*, notice that it starts with a section called Before, and then moves into a section called Now. This section contains Home, part one; North, part two; and Thule, part three. Why do you think the book is written this way? How does this structure move the story forward and help your understanding of what is happening?
3. What does the title of the book mean? Look at the illustrations and chapter headings to help you understand what might happen in the story. As you read the story, find examples that support your idea of what the title means.
4. Every chapter has a specific title. Use what you have read in the previous chapter to predict what might happen in the next. See if you can notice any patterns about the types of events that the author has chosen to highlight in each chapter title.
5. A symbol is an object used to represent something else. Explain the symbolism of the gold threads throughout this adventure. Does the symbolism change over the course of the story? What about the symbol of Papa's Ring? The heart-tree?
6. What are some of the major themes in *The Way Past Winter*? Some examples might be courage, good vs. evil, family, loss, revenge. Make sure to use specific details from the story to support each of the themes you identify.



7. Family is a crucial part of this story. Describe Mila's family and the relationships within it. For example, contrast Mila's relationship with her sister Sanna to her relationship with her brother Oskar. Why are they so different? As they embark on their journey, each character undergoes some changes. Discuss how these changes impact their own selves and their relationships with others. Choose one of the characters and write a letter from their point of view to one of their siblings explaining why their family means so much to him/her.
8. In the forest where Mila and her brother and sisters live, it's been nonstop winter for five years. Finding food is getting harder and harder, and the forest is giving less each day. When Mila meets the tall stranger, he says that the forest has given enough. What does this mean? Why does he say this?
9. What is the significance of not having your true name till after you're eight? And of not telling anyone your true name? Why do you think this is important in the story?
10. Mila insists that Oskar has been taken. She's sure he would never leave on his own. Sanna believes otherwise. What can Mila do to persuade Sanna to her way of thinking? Do you think Oskar left on his own or was taken? Give three examples that support your argument to persuade Sanna that Mila is right.
11. Sanna is feeling hopeless about the family situation, especially once Oskar is gone. Mila says she is acting more like Papa and giving up. Why does Mila say this? What else has happened (besides the disappearance of Oskar) to make Sanna feel the way she does, and why is Mila so resistant to those feelings?
12. Discuss the significance of the placement of the heart-tree in the forest. Why does it grow where it does? Can you predict what might happen to the heart-tree? At the end of the story, come back and see how your prediction matches what actually happened. (pg. 52-53)
13. What is a mage? (pg. 64) Why should he be feared? Why doesn't Mila quite trust the mage at first?
14. When Rune is describing Thule to Mila, he says that some of us understand that impossible places are possible, that the forest is eternal winter and the island of Thule is eternal spring. What does this mean? Why has eternal winter and eternal spring happened? What role does Eldbjørn play in all of this? (pg. 88)
15. What are some obstacles Rune, Pipa, and Mila face on their journey to Thule? As the characters face and overcome these obstacles, what does this tell us about them? Give examples to support your answer.
16. On this journey, Mila thinks she's not brave, but we see her do brave things. What are some examples of brave things she had to do? What's a time when you had to do something you didn't think you could do? How did you decide to do it?



17. Sanna says, “The world is so large and we live in such a small part of it.” What does this idea mean and how would you respond to it? (pg. 206) Give an example from your own experience to support your answer.
18. Why does Eldbjørn take only boys? Why are boys needed for the heart-tree?
19. Why is Eldbjørn/the Bear so angry? What is his revenge? (pg. 233) What has mankind done? In your opinion, can it be repaired? What lesson has Mila learned from the Bear? What is her purpose? Is there a lesson for our times? Can you find anything from today that is similar to what Eldbjørn/the Bear is angry about? What do we need to take care of today in order for things to continue to grow and provide for us?
20. Why is Mila’s father the center of Bear’s heart-tree? How does this tie back to the heart-tree in the middle of the forest by Mila’s home?
21. Mila becomes the new guardian of the forest. How was she chosen, and why? (pg 256) Why can’t Rune return to Thule? Why must he give up being the guardian?
22. Why does Pipa choose “Rune” as her given name?
23. When Sanna decides to stay with Geir, she says maybe they will race winter so that it won’t reach them ever again. What does this mean?
24. After you finish the story, reread the Before section. What does it mean to you now? Do you think this section is in the right place? Do things make more sense with it or without it?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Create a book trailer for *The Way Past Winter*. Use a program such as Animoto, Google slides, iMovie, Windows Movie Maker, Shadow puppet EDU (free app), or WeVideo to create the presentation. You can find more tips here:
<https://readingagency.org.uk/young-people/003-skills/5-tips-for-making-a-book-trailer-that-works.html>

Book trailers can also be added to your school library catalog system if available. Pieces of the book trailer should include:

Write a script.	Don't copy the jacket, and make sure text and images align
Start strong.	Grab people's attention right away!
Keep it steady.	Use a tripod when filming (if using a camera or phone).
Keep it simple.	Think of the strongest themes in the book and use those.
Don't just summarize.	Hint at the story and don't spoil the ending!
Choose music carefully.	Watch out for copyright, or compose your own!

2. Write the next chapter for *The Way Past Winter*. What will things look like when Sanna and Geir come back to the forest a year later? What should the chapter heading be? How will things have changed?
3. Create a map of the journey that Mila, Pipa, and Rune took as they traveled toward the Island of Thule. Use techniques suggested at [National Geographic Map Skills for students](#).
4. Select a scene in the book that would make a good Readers' Theater or skit. For the skit, work in groups of four to write a script with original dialogue. Make sure to practice the skit before performing it for the class! For the Reader's Theater, follow the recommendations found in this [Reader's Theater guide](#) from Teaching Books.
5. We know that climate—eternal winter—was how Eldbjørn punished humans for not taking care of the forest. We also know that climate is a major issue for our time. Greta Thunburg has been a vocal voice about climate change and what we can do to help. Research more about Greta [here](#). Compare and contrast what happened in the book with what is happening today. What are some similarities and differences? Make a chart to show the story's climate issues, and climate issues in real life.
6. Create a read-alike page. Make a list of recommendations for readers looking for action/adventure, fairy tales, or another theme from the story. You might title the page something like: "If you liked this . . . try this!" or "If you are looking for adventure and escape . . ."



7. Design a new book cover. What would you include? How would you make sure that major elements and themes were included without giving too much away?
8. In *The Way Past Winter*, the author creates two separate settings and a plot that weaves the characters and the two worlds together in an engaging, action-packed story. Ask students to select four separate, favorite passages of the novel that demonstrate the skill of the author in creating the following topics: (1) specific, believable settings, (2) interesting and well-defined characters, (3) pacing and storyline, and (4) good versus evil (or another theme of your choice). Have students work in small groups assigning each group one of the above four topics. Have students discuss the author's technique with regard to the assigned topic and share their selected passages. Then have students prepare and present an "[Author's Craft](#)" presentation with visual display and illustrations, selected passages, and explanations of the author's technique.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS EXTENSION

The following CC State Standards are addressed in this guide:

Grade Level	Reading	Writing	Speaking & Listening
5th	5.1 - 5.7, 5.9	5.1 - 5.4, 5.7, 5.9	5.1 - 5.2, 5.4-5.5
6th	6.1 - 6.6, 6.9	6-8.1.B, 6-8.1.E, 6-8.2, 6-8.2.B 6-8.7	6.1- 6.2 6.4 - 6.5
7th	7.1 - 7.4, 7.6, 7.9	6-8.8	7.1 - 7.5
8th	8.1 - 8.4, 8.6, 8.9		8.1 - 8.5

Reading Group Guide created by Sharon Haupt, Former District Librarian—San Luis Coastal Unified School District (retired); current Reference Librarian and Children's/YA collection Development, Cuesta College, San Luis Obispo, CA

