

The Last Wild Witch

Written by Starhawk and Illustrated by Lindy Kehoe

About the book:

An Eco-Fable for Kids and Other Free Spirits, *The Last Wild Witch* tells the story of an orderly town that gets a taste of wildness, courtesy of the last wild Witch who lives in the nearby forest.

About the guide:

This guide includes discussion questions and projects appropriate for book clubs, literature circles, library, home and classroom discussions, and is adaptable based on age group, learning ability and reading level. It is intended to provoke thought and insight into the subject and themes of this book including the eternal difference in world views and perceptions between innocence (kids) and experience (adults), the idea that everyone can effect change.

About the author and illustrator *(from the biographies included in the text of the book):*

“Starhawk is one of the most respected voices in modern earth-based spirituality. She is well known as a global justice activist and organizer, whose works and writings have inspired many to action. She is the author or coauthor of ten books, including *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, long considered the essential text for the Neo-Pagan movement.”

“Lindy Kehoe is a painter of magical realms and playful characters. Her art echoes the remembrance of the child heart. She lives in southern Oregon, dreaming of new earth visions. She is a fairy tale writer, creating stories that weave myths of all time.”

Pre-reading Activity:

Have students draw and/or write their ideas for the perfect place to live, then share and discuss specifics (why would they have certain items, locations, etc.). Define and discuss perfection—does that change their perception of their perfect environment? How could their “perfect” environment be made “better”—if that is even possible?

Questions for Discussion:

The narrator of the story describes the town as “perfect.” How is the town perfect? Do you agree and/or disagree? Why or why not?

What makes the forest a “wild” place (it may be helpful to provide various definitions of the word “wild”)? Why do you think the grown-ups think this is a bad thing? Why do you think the children see it as good? Do you agree and/or disagree with either point of view? Why?

Using word association, discuss the word “witch.” Compare and contrast the traditional idea of a witch to the woman portrayed in the story (Use examples of witches portrayed in artwork—Halloween witches as well as paintings—Pre-Raphaelite artists often portrayed witches as youthful and beautiful.). What are the similarities and differences? Where do you think the traditional idea of what a witch is, comes from?

All the witch ever says is, “Have some soup.” Why do you think that that’s all she says? What do you think is in that soup? Is it good, bad or neither? Could she be offering something more than just the soup—if so, what do you think that is?

What do the children do to ultimately save the forest? What impact do their actions have on their town, and their lives?

Projects Across the Curriculum:

Language Arts:

Vocabulary. Have students write out (spelling) and define the following words from the story, then use each word in a sentence that shows that they know the meanings of the words: cauldron, enchanting, flourish, pitiful, disgraceful, frantic, pleasant, scurry, murmur, magnificent).

Writing Rhythmically in Prose. Define RHYTHM, illustrate with poetry and/or music. Discuss how rhythm is not limited to poetry. In *The Last Wild Witch*, Starhawk develops a sense of rhythm through the repetition of key words and phrases. Discuss the purpose of repetition in the story (to establish rhythm and call attention to important themes/action). Read aloud passages to identify rhythm.

Creative Writing Activity—Have students write their own rhythmic prose. Topics in keeping with the theme of the story and discussion questions:

- What the children find in the forest on their way to see the last wild witch
- The witch making her soup—what does she put in it, and what does it do
- A description of the perfect town and what life is like there

Share and discuss student writing. How does the rhythm of the writing add to what they are trying to express about their topic (the dullness of the “perfect” town, the variety of life in the forest, etc.)?

Fables. *The Last Wild Witch* is an eco-fable. Define FABLE, what the eco- prefix denotes, and discuss the role of the MORAL in a fable. Read and share other fables (Aesop, etc.). How are these tales similar and/or different from *The Last Wild Witch*? Discuss the lessons to be learned from *The Last Wild Witch*, and how these lessons are both similar to and different from those in classical fables.

Creative Writing Activity—Have students brainstorm morals that would apply to their own lives, then write and/or perform their own fables.

Resources for fables:

http://childrens-non-fiction.suite101.com/article.cfm/teaching_aesops_fables

<http://webtech.kennesaw.edu/reading/proverbs.htm>

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/2913>

<http://www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/S00000376.shtml>

<http://www.mcwdn.org/fables/fabact.html>

Music:

Drums and drumming. The witch in the story plays a hand drum. Show the students a hand drum and compare to the one used by the witch in the story. Identify the drum parts. Discuss how changing the size and shape of the drum affects the sound it produces. Show and discuss different types of drums.

Have the students sit in a circle. Pass a hand drum around and have each student tap out a beat. Discuss the sounds and rhythms? What do they inspire or make you visualize?

Resources for drum music:

<http://www.raquyandthecavemen.com/>

<http://www.drumjourney.com/>

<http://drumcircles.net/>

<http://www.alternativeculture.com/music/rhythm.htm>

http://www.essortment.com/all/handdrumsconga_rgdv.htm

Art:

Watercolor. Artist Lindy Kehoe did the illustrations for *The Last Wild Witch* using OILS. Explain and experiment with oil painting technique.

Alternative uses for color. Are people blue—literally? Lindy Kehoe uses alternative color choices throughout *The Last Wild Witch*. Discuss how the use of color effects the story being told (examples—children transform into different colors and sprout wings, etc. when they are “wild,” and the final painting which illustrates a night gathering). Discuss color symbolism; what different colors can indicate depending on time, culture, geography etc., then apply to *The Last Wild Witch*; is it appropriate for the story—why or why not? Have students experiment with the use of alternative color—keeping with the theme of the story, have them paint/draw, sculpt etc. a forest. Discuss and explain color choices.

Science:

Forest as ecosystem and habitat. Define FOREST as a habitat. Using illustrations from *The Last Wild Witch*, identify and define the parts (layers) of a forest. If possible, visit preserved parkland and identify the layers of a forest in person, then compare and contrast with the story and illustrations of *The Last Wild Witch*.

Hands-On Activity—Building a Forest: Have each student contribute one item (or more, depending on group size) and make a model of a forest. Discuss what happens when an element is removed from the forest, Cite the story/children’s concerns as examples.

Topics for research and discussion:

- Different types of forests—compare and contrast
- The effect of urbanization (building) on forests (and farmland)
- The effects of deforestation locally and globally
- What can be done to prevent future deforestation*
- What can be done to fix areas that have already been devastated*

Possible cross-curriculum project (Science and Social Studies) to write letters to Congress and Senate with environmental concerns

http://www.defenders.org/wildlife_and_habitat/habitat/forest.php

<http://www.kwiznet.com/p/takeQuiz.php?ChapterID=10251&CurriculumID=7>

http://inchinapinch.com/hab_pgs/terres/d_forest/td_forest.htm

<http://www.hamiltonnature.org/habitats/forest/forest.htm>

<http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/Home/ExperienceWildlifeSubHomePage/kidspagesplaceholder/kidsforesthabitat/tabid/6029/Default.aspx>

<http://edugreen.teri.res.in/explore/forestry/types.htm>

http://www.panda.org/about_our_earth/about_forests/types/

This guide was created by Natalie Zaman, a NJ Certified Teacher (English K-12), co-author of Graven Images Oracle (www.gravenimagesoracle.com) and an editor, writer and co-founder of Broomstix, a new age online magazine for children (www.broomstix.com). Evergreen: A Magical Year of Craft and Ritual, co-authored with Katharine Clark will be available in the Autumn of 2009.

