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Websites: robert-beatty.com
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The questions in this document can be used as writing prompts and/or group discussion prompts for *Willa of the Wood*. For more writing assignment ideas, see the Activities, Assignments, and Quizzes document.

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Content developed by Kim Donehower, Professor of English Education, as well as the author, Robert Beatty.
 Please send feedback to robertbeattyauthor@gmail.com.

COMMON CORE COMPATIBLE

Willa of the Wood and its educational materials are well suited for Common Core and similar state standards.

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Educational materials for *Willa of the Wood*:

1. Prompts for Discussion and Writing
2. Activities, Assignments, and Quizzes
3. Vocabulary

Go to robert-beatty.com/education for links to the PDF files, teacher testimonials, and other resources.

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After Reading the Book

1. **What are forests for?** What are trees for? What are their value? What is the appropriate use of a tree and forested land? What are the different points of view of Willa, Nathaniel, and the loggers about the forests?
2. **Where do prejudices come from, and how can people get past them?** Willa has been taught that homesteaders, and all human beings, are the enemy, that “they kill what they don’t understand” and murder the environment. She is prejudiced against human beings. How does the padaran create this prejudice in the Faeran? What does Willa have to do to overcome her prejudice? What else has to happen for Willa to overcome her prejudice? How does Willa end up thinking about human beings?
3. **What does it take to be an independent thinker?** Willa is the only Faeran in the story who stands up to the padaran, even though she is a child raised to respect the padaran absolutely. What is it about Willa’s thought processes and critical thinking skills that let her resist the padaran’s brainwashing and ultimately lead a rebellion against him? Look closely at the scenes in the book when Willa is observing Nathaniel’s possessions, behaviors, and actions, and the actions and behaviors of the padaran and the other jaetters. Describe her thought processes.



4. **Who owns the land?** Willa believes Nathaniel and the loggers have no right to murder the trees. Nathaniel believes the loggers need a permit to cut trees on land passed down to him by his great-grandfather. The loggers say they need no permit, and are free to take the wood because it is public land. What do each of these characters think about whether land can be owned, by whom, and through what process? What rights do they think owning a piece of land (if they think that's possible) give them? Can a person do anything with land that they own, or should the government be able to prevent them from doing things that might negatively affect the environment? What do you think? If land can be owned, can air be owned? Water? If so, how and by whom? What do you think Willa would say about these things? Nathaniel? The loggers? The Cherokee?
5. **What is “natural” and how can we think about change in a landscape over time?** Willa is surprised when Nathaniel tells her European settlers brought the honey bees to America. Willa has always assumed that they were a natural part of the ecosystem that has always been there. Many people make the mistake of thinking that the way things are now is the way they have always been. How do you think the forests of the story were different when only the Faeran and Cherokee lived there? How do you think it would be different if the newcomers (loggers) had never come, only the homesteaders? If the homesteaders had never come, but the loggers had?
6. **What is Willa’s environmental philosophy?** What is Nathaniel’s? What is the environmental philosophy of the loggers?



7. **What are parks for?** The area in which the story is set becomes the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. This means that it is considered wilderness to be preserved for the good of all people. What do you see taking place in this story that would be the motivation for the creation of a park? What value is there in protecting certain wilderness areas as parks?

8. **What's the power of kindness?** After Willa's first encounter with Nathaniel, when she is back with the Faeran being mistreated by the padaran and the jaettters, she keeps thinking about "one thing," and that is the thing that drives her back to Nathaniel, to rescue the children, and to ultimately change her ideas about humans, the padaran, and the Faeran. What is the "one thing"? How would you describe it? Why is it so important and powerful to her as to lead her to risk her own life and safety, and place in the clan?



Quotes to Think and Write about

There are many quotable moments in *Willa of the Wood* that invite reflection and writing. Choose a quote below, or one of your favorite lines from the book, to think about and explore through writing:

“Sometimes, two things weren’t just two things; they were a pair, and a pair was a thing. Half wasn’t always half, she thought. Sometimes half was whole.” (13)

“Willa spoke to trees, not the men who killed them. How could day ever comprehend night? How could darkness ever know light? How could she say her name to a man such as this?” (20)

“Leaving the ravine of the river far behind them, Luthien climbed up through the rocky, forested ridges of the high ground, taking Willa up the slope of what the Faeran people called the Great Mountain. The Cherokee called it *Kuwa’hi*. But the day-folk called it Clingmans Dome on their maps, made from the ground-up flesh of trees. It seemed as if all the locations in her world had many names, old names and new, night names and day, as if the names, too, were fighting to possess these ancient places.” (30)

“She liked how the white bear was older and stronger than the other bears, but he was *serving* them, *helping* them, *protecting* them. Her mamaw had told her stories about how it had once been the same with the Faeran, that all the members of the clan would work together, protect each other, take care of each other.” (42)



“She knew that this bear had seen so many things with those eyes—the time of the first Cherokee long ago with their skin-piercing blow darts and their spear-slinging atlatls, then the homesteaders hacking their way through the wilderness with their sharpened blades and their killing-sticks, and now the newcomers with their smoking metal beasts. As the white bear looked at her, he seemed to be thinking, *And you see it, too, don’t you, little one? You understand.*” (43)

“She felt the stab of a strange and unpleasant emotion twisting in her gut, but she quickly hardened her mind. If it had been an animal or a Faeran in this cell, she would have been right to feel sorry for it, but it wasn’t. It was a *human*. Enemy of the clan. Murderer of her people. It wasn’t a *him*. It was an *it*. And she was forbidden to have anything to do with it.” (61)

“I haven’t taken you” she said. And as soon as she said the words, she felt so out of place, so disobedient, to be defiantly separating herself from the clan in this way. *There is no I, only we*. There was the *clan*. There was the *us* and the *them*. There was no *I*. *I* was a person alone. *I* was an impossibility. *I* was something that shriveled alone and died.” (63)

“If you’re not one of them, then who are you?” the boy asked. The question struck her mind like a blow. *Who are you?* It was the second time a human had asked her that question. ‘My name is Willa,’ she said, unsure why she was allowing herself to talk to the human at all.” (64)

“Never forget that you are forever among your people,” her mamaw had told the two of them. ‘In the past, and in the present, and in the future to come’.” (71)



“The people came because they had to come. They watched because they had to watch. They had to be part of the clan, no matter what it was doing. If the clan was cheering, everyone had to cheer. If the clan was hissing, everyone had to hiss. There was no choice in this—no standing against the commands of the padaran or the will of the clan. *There is no I, only we.*” (91)

“But she knew there was no escape. There never had been and there never would be. She was part of this clan, and it was part of her, as inextricable as root and soil.” (93)

“Willa knew from watching the padaran that words had power, the power to persuade and the power to deceive. ‘You have done very well, little one,’ the padaran said, using the term “little one” for Willa as if she wasn’t just a thieving jaetter, but once again a child of the clan, to be protected and honored. *Words have power*, Willa thought again. He knew it. And she knew it.” (103-104)

“This was what she had always wanted. But the only thing she could think of—the only sensation she wanted to feel—was the friendship of the wolves, the acceptance of the bears, and the sight of the glistening lake. And then—to her surprise—she thought about what the human boy had called ‘cookies.’ Those peculiar little lumps she had passed through the mesh of the prison cell. For some reason, it felt like *that*—helping the human boy trapped in the dark prisons of her clan—that strange and dangerous thing that came from the *I* deep inside her instead of the *we* of the clan, had been her most satisfying reward for coming home with her satchel full.” (110)

“Her mind kept returning to one thing: the way the man with his killing-stick had looked at her when he found her wounded in his barn. She remembered the way he had spoken to her in soft tones and found a cloth to tend to her wound. All the other thoughts slipped away into a murky, muddled nothingness, but that one act of kindness dwelled in her mind and her heart like nothing ever had before.” (110)



“We must learn their ways, their language, and their skills, Willa,’ he told her. ‘We must master their tools and their weapons and their way of life, or our clan will die. Do you understand?’ ‘Yes, my padaran,’ she said, marveling at how much he seemed to understand the way the world worked. ‘The day-folk are a violent and hateful people,’ he continued, ‘filled with capabilities beyond our imagining. But they are driven by greed. That’s why we steal from them, for without their money, we have nothing’.” (122)

“There was a part of her that found the familiarity of the words to be reassuring, to know that what she’d known all her life was true. There was a deep satisfaction and sense of well-being in the comfort of knowing who to hate. But the padaran had said, *If they catch you, they will kill you.* And that was where the problem lay. She kept remembering the man with the killing-stick who had cornered her in his barn. He could have shot her again. He could have hurt her or killed her in so many different ways. *But he didn’t.* After that man saw who and what she was, he did not try to harm her. He tried to *help* her. She had been caught, and she hadn’t been killed. But if the padaran was the god of the clan, how could he be wrong? And if he was wrong about this, then could he be wrong about other things, things he’d been telling her all her life?” (126-127)

“She floated with nothing but sadness, no will to move or live. She just let herself be carried by the blood of the earth, with no want or desire or need, other than to go back, to go back in time, to let them steal her satchel if that was what they wanted, to stay crumpled on the floor of the great hall with her voice silent and her eyes cast down, and more than anything, out in that forest, to un-throw that spear.” (140)



“She didn’t understand who or what the padaran was, or how he became the god of the clan, but he had betrayed the . . . What had he betrayed? The Faeran ways? But what were those ways in a world that moved like a river changing from season to season, storm to storm? She didn’t know. What she did know was that he had betrayed *her, her ways, her heart*. He had trapped and killed the animals of the forest. He had captured and imprisoned humans. He had sent his jaetters to kill her mamaw, to silence the last of the ancient whisperers. Willa looked around her at the forest. She had followed the padaran loyally all her life. She had idolized him, struggled for him, stole for him, all for him, all for the clan. *There is no I, only we*. But deep down, what kind of Faeran was he? What kind of Faeran could do these things that he had done? She didn’t know. What she wondered now was what kind of Faeran she was going to become.” (148)

“Willa knew that the day-folk men were wrong. The earth was neither flat nor round. It was *mountains*. [...] She remembered floating through the underworld of Dead Hollow, thinking about the padaran, about the way of the Faeran and what that meant. The Faeran ways and the human ways. The *us* and the *them*. The *we* and the *I*. Maybe there wasn’t just one way, but many. The earth wasn’t flat or round. It was mountains.” (154)

“She thought about all the living creatures down there, the wolves in their dens and the bears by the lake, the mother deer and her fawn, the Faeran in their twisted lair, and the Cherokee tending their farms, and the homesteaders in their log cabins, and the newcomers with their iron machines, all coming together, the mist of the mountain, the breath of their world, providing life to them all.” (155-156)

“‘But if I let go of this branch, I’m going to drown!’ she told the otter in the old language. But it was no use talking to him. *Let go, you foolish girl! Let go!* he seemed to be chattering.” “*You can’t fight the current. You can’t swim against it. You swim WITH it!*” (174)



“She did not speak, but she studied him, and she let him study her. And for the moment—for the both of them—that was enough. Her heart beat in her chest as he looked at her. The quills on the back of her neck tingled. *This is my enemy*, she thought. *And he’s seeing me.*” (191-192)

“As she watched him, she felt as if the world was being held still, held in that moment, as if she couldn’t breathe, couldn’t move, her heart slowing to a low, steady thumping beat, as if in that moment she could reach out across the distance between them, and without any knowledge or understanding or words, know what the man Nathaniel was feeling.” (214)

“And as the moon rose from the darkened peak of the Great Mountain looming in the distance, the man Nathaniel came down to the river, and sat beside her in the quiet, and seemed to understand not just her sense of silence, but her sense of loss. He seemed to know, as if from his own experience, that there were parts of her life that he could not understand, words from her past that she longed to hear, but he could not speak.” (215)

“*‘Tia na lochen dar sendal,*’ she said. ‘What’s that mean?’ he asked. We all have our ways to survive,’ she said.” (226) “What is your way to survive?’ he asked again. ‘I survive here,’ she said.” (229)

“Although the words were the same, he was asking a whole different kind of question. And for the first time, it felt like she was beginning to see the hidden beauty of the language they were speaking.” (227)

“Was the man Nathaniel evil for using the trees and animals to survive? She didn’t know the answer to that question anymore. Did that mean she knew more or less about the world?” (229)



“Suddenly, there was a part of her that felt as separated from Nathaniel’s world as she had ever been. But there was another part of her, deeper down, that felt their connection, and knew that at this moment in the flow of time there wasn’t another person in the world who was closer to him than her. They had become twins of the soul.” (241)

“Her palms began to sweat and her stomach churned. Her mind clouded with shame and confusion. He was a living person. How could she have done what she did? She had left the boy lying in a prison cell in the lair of the night-spirits. How could she abandon him in that place? How could she let him suffer like that? How could she let him die? She’d been taught all her life that humans were her enemy, killers of the forest, murderers of her people. But how could she let *anyone* suffer like that?” (254)

“From what she’d seen and experienced all her life in the withered lair of Dead Hollow, love was a rare and tenuous thing, families small and fragile and dying. Love was a thing that shattered. It was a thing that could not last. She had finally found in Nathaniel a place for her heart to live. And it felt like a shaded, magical forest dell unlike any other. But if she succeeded in returning Iska to him, and maybe even his other children if they were still alive, then she knew everything would change. Nathaniel would have his real family back, his *human* family, the family he’d been searching for and yearning for. The family he truly loved. His need for her and her strange night-spirit ways would fade away like mist from the top of the mountain.” (279)



“She had thought there was no one who could help her. But that was wrong. There was someone who could help her. There were *many* who could help her. They all had mothers and fathers to get home to. They all had brothers and sisters like Iska. And she was surrounded by them. There were no animals or trees she could draw on here, but there was something else. In each of these cells there wasn’t an “it.” There was a “he” or a “she.” There was a *human being*, a living, breathing, thinking soul, with wants and desires just like her—someone fighting to survive.” (301)

“She could see it in her mind. She could see it all. The long withering of the Faeran race and the rise of the padaran, god of the Dead Hollow clan. The steel traps, the captured children, and the glistening face. The words of guiding wisdom, the towering strength, and the missing voices. The running parents, the screaming sister, and the red flowing stream beneath the lair. She could see it all. But even through the winter of all of this, there had still been a trace of hope in her mamaw’s voice when she taught her the lessons of old, and there had been a glare of anger in Gillen’s eyes when she saw the injustices in the padaran’s hall—and these were the saplings that might someday grow into the light once more.” (316)

“*Believe*, Willa told herself. *Believe in your people.*” (323)

“He’s disguising himself to look like everything we want our leader to be. It’s all a lie!” (330)



“Protect it, hold on to it,’ her mamaw had pleaded with her before she died. Willa hadn’t understood at the time. But she knew now that her mamaw wasn’t telling her to hold on to the little tree, or to the secret of Naillic’s forbidden name, or even to the ancient lore of the forest. She was imploring her to hold on to what was in her heart: her love, her compassion, her sense of her soul; not just her instinct to blend, but sometimes her willingness to stand up and make herself known, to throw the spear, to spring the trap, to set things in motion that cannot be undone.” (346-347)

“Her mamaw had been watching the decline of the Dead Hollow clan for many years, and Willa came to realize what her mamaw already knew: that the Dead Hollow clan hadn’t started dying because of the arrival of the day-folk, but with the rise of the padaran who came after—the quelling of the Faeran words, the disconnection from the forest, the drowning of love and compassion and sympathy in a swarm of fear and malice and control. Without love there could be no families, no children, no elders. There could be no future.” (347)

“Freedom is all fine and good until it snows,’ one of the other Faeran said.” (356)

“She wasn’t fierce of heart or sharp of claw like many of her animal friends. She wasn’t a leader or a fighter. She had never raised a weapon or struck a blow against anyone or anything, and she vowed that she never would. She was just a Faeran girl, a night-spirit named Willa, trying to find her way.” (359)

“Then she looked up at Nathaniel and said, ‘I just wanted to do one kind thing’.” (374)



“She had always thought of love as the rarest and most delicate of things, and that there must be a limit to the amount of love that a human or a Faeran could give or feel, a limit to how much love there could be in the world. She had thought that once the man Nathaniel had reunited with his real children there would be no place for her. But love wasn’t the stone. It was the river. Love was like the glistening stars in the midnight sky, like the sun that always rises, and the water that always flows.” (375)



Questions as You Read

After you read each of these sections of the book, consider these questions:

Chapters 1-2

1. What do you think the epigraph (page at the beginning of the book) means?
2. What does Willa look like? Draw or paint an image to help you visualize her.
3. What special powers does Willa have?
4. What are homesteaders?
5. What is the homesteader's "white-fanged companion"?
6. What is a clan?
7. Who are the Faeran?
8. What's a padaran?
9. What are jaetters?
10. What does Willa think about homesteaders? What is her relationship to them?
11. How does Willa think about nature? What does she think homesteaders think about nature?
12. What are all the objects Willa describes but doesn't know the names for? (e.g., "metal-wound machine," "small, crumbly lumps")



Chapters 3-5

1. How does the sight of the killing-stick make Willa think about Nathaniel?
2. How has Willa's clan changed over time?
3. Why does Willa break her rule of halves and not steal one of the gold rings?
What does this show about Willa?
4. What do you think has happened to the man and his family, based on what Willa finds?
5. What does the man do that surprises Willa? What did the padaran tell Willa to expect from humans?
6. Why might the man change his violent reaction when he sees Willa?
7. What additional special powers does Willa have?
8. Whom do you think Willa is going to call on for help?



Chapters 6-9

1. Why does Willa think that humans want to capture her? (27) Why do you think the man goes after Willa? Do you think she can trust him? Why or why not?
2. Why might the wolves be following the sick bear with Willa?
3. The bear and the wolf are described as “natural enemies.” (33) What might make it seem “natural” for two groups to be enemies?
4. What is Willa worried might happen if the man and the dog come down into the valley of the lake of the bears? (40-41)
5. Why do you think the bear lets Willa and Luthien pass?
6. Why might the Faeran have stopped taking care of each other, as mamaw describes? (42)
7. The white bear is described on page 43 as looking at Willa as though “you see it too, don’t you, little one? You understand.” Look at this passage—what might the bear think that Willa understands?
8. What does it mean to “belong” to a clan? (44) That “there is no I. There is only we.”? (44)
9. When Luthien takes Willa back to the Faeran, Willa is “reluctant to get off the wolf’s back.” (44) Why might she be reluctant to get back to her clan? Why does she want to be with the wolves instead? (55)



Chapters 10-12

1. Who do you think might be netting birds in the forest, and why?
2. Why don't other Faeran have the same powers as Willa?
3. Who is Gredic and what is his relationship with Willa like?
4. Why do you think that Willa likes to sneak out alone, without the other jaetters?
5. How does Willa escape the jaetters and get to mamaw?
6. Where does mamaw tell Willa that the jaetters have come from?
7. What is a woodwitch and what is a woodwitch's place in the clan?
8. On page 58, Willa is drawn to investigate a human sound when all she wants is to get home to mamaw. When she fears and hates humans, why do you think she decides to go towards the human sound?
9. Why is Willa repulsed by the imprisoned Cherokee boy? Why does she help him nonetheless, especially when she risks being punished herself?
10. On pages 63-64, the boy asks Willa, "if you're not one of them, then who are you?" She answers, "My name is Willa." How do Willa's feeling about her clan and herself start to change when she finds the Cherokee boy imprisoned?

Chapters 13-14

1. Why do you think the clan is imprisoning people like the Cherokee boy?
2. On page 67, Willa vows that she will never go to the prison again. Do you think she will keep her vow? Why or why not?
3. What does Willa and Mamaw's den look like and how is it different from the rest of Dead Hollow?
4. What is the abyss?
5. Who is Alliw and what is her relationship to Willa?
6. What is the River of Souls?
7. What happened to Willa's parents and sister?
8. Page 71 describes a time when "the Faeran and the world were one, and true kinship held the clan together." What is true kinship? What is false kinship?



Chapters 15-17

1. What does mamaw look like? Describe her. What are her powers?
2. Why might Willa and mamaw speak in Faeran when the padaran orders the clan to speak English?
3. Why does the padaran forbid the use of the Faeran language?
4. What does mamaw think about the “day-folk”? About the padaran?
5. Why might mamaw be surprised that the wolves took Willa to the lake of the bears?
6. On page 81, mamaw tells Willa, “there are many dangers outside the lair, but I’m afraid there are even more on the inside?” What does this mean? What dangers might mamaw be referring to?
7. Mamaw also says “sometimes even knowing something brings death.” (82) What might this mean? Knowing what?
8. Willa thinks times might be desperate in the clan because there’s a food shortage, (82) and that could be affecting the padaran’s behavior. What do you think/predict about the padaran and why he is doing what he’s doing?
9. Why have most of the Faeran lost the skills to survive in the forest?
10. Mamaw does not believe the padaran can save the clan. (88) Willa wants to believe he can. Why might Willa believe this? Why might mamaw think the clan cannot be saved by the padaran?



Chapters 18-19

1. What does the central hall of the Dead Hollow lair look like? Visualize and describe it.
2. What does the padaran look like and what are his powers?
3. Who is Gillen and what is her relationship to Willa?
4. What do most of the Faeran look like? Why do they not look like Willa? Why are most of them “anxious to see her fall”? (91)
5. Where does the padaran come from? (95) Who do you think he might really be?
6. What do the jaetters do with what they steal?
7. Why does the padaran call Willa “a creature without a clan,” (99) and how does this make her feel?
8. Willa looks the padaran right in the eye; (100) most Faeran don't. What does this say about Willa?
9. “As the padaran studied her, the malice in his expression slowly changed to something else, something more wary and uncertain.” (100) Why might Willa make the padaran uneasy?



Chapters 20-21

1. Willa notices that the padaran “seemed to live in worry of what his subjects were seeing when they looked at him, what they were thinking at that moment.” (103) What’s your opinion of the padaran based on this scene?
2. On page 105, Willa is described as feeling “strange and lingering shame.” What is she ashamed of? Should she be ashamed of something?
3. If the padaran knows the take is Willa’s, why does he want her to prove it? (106-107)
4. How does Willa prove the take is hers?
5. Willa notes that words are powerful. Look at how she speaks to the crowd and the padaran when she is being questioned about her take. Are Willa’s words powerful? Why or why not?
6. On page 109, we are told that “Gredic and Ciderg and Kearnin and the others knew that Gredic’s time as the leader of the jaetters was waning.” (109) Why do you think this is so?
7. Page 110 refers to “that strange and dangerous thing that came from the *I* deep inside her instead of the *we* of the clan.” (110) What does this mean? What comes from *I* and what comes from *we*? Where does *I* leave off and *we* begin?
8. On page 110, mamaw is described as thinking “*You’re blending in a way that I never taught you. But it’s keeping us both alive.*” (110) What kind of ‘blending’ is Willa doing, and why does it have mamaw worried?
9. Why might Willa think about cookies in the midst of being interrogated by the padaran? (110)
10. Why does her memory of the man “dwell... in her mind and her heart like nothing ever had before”? (110)
11. The padaran wonders of mamaw “just what kind of trickery the old woman had brought into his hall.” (111) Why might he not trust mamaw?



Chapters 22-23

1. As the padaran shows Willa the metal objects he's stolen and bought from humans, he asks her to consider their power. "But the most disturbing thing was that she wasn't even sure *he* knew the answer. He seemed convinced that the power of the humans lay in these strange metal objects, but he didn't seem to truly understand the purpose of the devices." (115) How is Willa's opinion of the padaran changing? What does the padaran seem to think power is? What does Willa think it is?
2. What is the "complicated-looking brass device with spoked metal circles" (115) that the padaran shows Willa?
3. Willa herself wonders why the padaran is showing her his secret collection (118) and why he is telling her his plans. Why do you think he is doing this?
4. Once the padaran takes Willa outside, "Her skin was beginning to crawl. The truth was, she had no idea who he was, where he came from, or how he had come to wield such dominion over the clan." (119) How do you think the padaran has become so powerful over the clan?
5. The padaran tells Willa, "The world is changing...." "If we are to survive, we must change with it. The day-folk homesteaders have been living in these mountains for a hundred years, and now the newcomers are pouring in with their iron machines. We cannot stop them." (121) Is the padaran right? Is his plan for changing the clan a good one?
6. The padaran says of humans that "they fear anything that is different from the place they came from. And that is where we will gain an advantage, for we know these forests and these mountains far better than they do." (123) Do you think this is true? Is this good strategy on the padaran's part?



Chapters 24-25

1. Willa reflects that it is “reassuring to know that what she’d known all her life was true.” (126) What if it turns out not to be true—how do you think Willa will respond?
2. She also notes that “There was a deep satisfaction and sense of well-being in the comfort of knowing who to hate.” (126) Do you agree with this? Can you think of real-life examples of people who feel good because they hate some other group?
3. Willa feels allegiance to the padaran, to mamaw, and to the wolf, Luthien. She chooses Luthien when she saves her from the trap. Why do you think she chooses the wolf, when she knows she and mamaw will most likely be punished or killed?
4. When Willa chooses to defy the padaran and save Luthien, why does she yell at him in “the old language” (130) instead of English?
5. How does Willa trick the padaran into stepping into the leghold trap? What happens to him when she does?



Chapters 26-29

1. Mamaw tells Willa that she is “the last.” (134) The last what?
2. On page 134, Mamaw whispers to Willa “Naillic” and tells her not to “say it out loud unless you wish to destroy everything and everyone, including yourself.” What might this mysterious word mean?
3. On page 135, Willa wonders, “where does a spirit go? Where does the new world begin? Into the boughs of the trees? Into the stone of the earth? Into the flow of the river? Into the ether of the air? It passes from one person to another, each into the other.” What do you think about this?
4. What does it mean to “inspirit the dead”? (138) How does Willa use this ability to escape? What does it do to her in the process?
5. Who are the creatures with “many small, wet hands with tiny fingers” (142) who help Willa?
6. What do the mother deer and fawn do for Willa?
7. On page 148, we are told of Willa that “She knew that she had betrayed her clan. And she had betrayed the padaran. But more than that, she realized, *he* had betrayed *her*.” How has he betrayed her?
8. On page 148, Willa wonders “what kind of Faeran she was going to become.” What kind of Faeran do you think she will become?



Chapters 30-32

1. On pages 150-151, why does Willa want so badly to climb the mountain?
2. On page 153, the mountain is described as wanting to show Willa something. What might the mountain be trying to show her?
3. How does Willa react when she sees the devastated trees? What does she imagine?
4. On page 154, we return to the line from the epigraph that the world being mountains: "She remembered floating through the underworld of Dead Hollow, thinking about the padaran, about the way of the Faeran and what that meant. The Faeran ways and the human ways. The *us* and the *them*. The *we* and the *I*. Maybe there wasn't just one way, but many. The earth wasn't flat or round. It was mountains." What does this line mean here?
5. On pages 155-156, Willa "thought about all the living creatures down there, the wolves in their dens and the bears by the lake, the mother deer and her fawn, the Faeran in their twisted lair, and the Cherokee tending their farms, and the homesteaders in their log cabins, and the newcomers with their iron machines, all coming together, the mist of the mountain, the breath of their world, providing life to them all." Do you think all these groups can learn to live together with the mountain? Can the mountain provide for them all? Why or why not?
6. On page 159, where do you think the Cherokee might be going, and why? What does Willa infer about where they are going?
7. What is the machine described on pages 154-155? What are the "small piles of red sticks"? (166-167) Describe the newcomers' logging methods.



Chapters 33-36

1. How does Willa escape the ravine and rescue the panther?
2. Why is the panther so valuable to the jaegers?
3. What do the otters teach Willa about escaping in the water?
4. At the end of chapter 36, in the last paragraph on page 185, Willa knows where she is going, but “didn’t want it to be the answer. She didn’t want to take that path.” What is this path, and why doesn’t Willa want to take it, even though she knows she’s going to?

Chapters 37-39

1. How does Willa connect to and try to understand the man through observation?
2. What is the man doing when he is “stealing the water of the river, and then giving it back”? (187)
3. Why does Willa connect with the way the man is splitting wood? (189-190)
4. The man tells Willa, “you’ve come back to me.” (191) He was clearly longing for her to return. Why?
5. Willa describes the man as “my enemy...And he’s seeing me.” (192) Why does she still think of the man this way even though she has been drawn back to him by his kindness?
6. Why does Willa like watching the man from afar, and spend so much time doing so before letting herself interact with him?



Chapters 40-41

1. Why does Willa not want the man and his dog to see her “trapped up in a tree peering down at them like an opossum”? (196)
2. Look at how the man speaks to Willa on pages 197-199, and describe his character. What type of person does he seem to be?
3. How do the man and Willa communicate, at first?
4. Why does Willa keep returning to the forest to hide?
5. Why might the man think Willa is Cherokee? (203)
6. Why is Willa surprised about the man’s asking her whether she is hungry? (200)
7. Why is Willa unsure whether to tell the man her name? (202)
8. On page 203, Nathaniel says, “I’m sorry to hear that,’ ... his voice filled with something she had never heard outside her own den, a tone, an emotion she didn’t have a word for.” What is the word or words for this emotion? Why is Willa so unfamiliar with it?
9. Look at the debate between Nathaniel and Willa on pages 208-209. How would you describe their different relationships with nature?



Chapters 42-45

1. On page 212, Nathaniel “did not tell her where he was going or what he was doing, and it was clear that he didn’t want to talk about it.” Where do you think he is going? Make a prediction.
2. Why does Willa find it healing, “like her soul was swimming in the warm water of the sacred lake of the bears” (212) to be around Nathaniel?
3. On page 214, Willa feels as though, “across the distance between them, and without any knowledge or understanding or words, know what the man Nathaniel was feeling.” What is the name for this ability? Why might Willa be able to do it?
4. What does Willa find odd about English? What does Nathaniel find odd about Faeran?
5. Why does Willa keep practicing her woodland skills? (216)
6. We are told that Willa “hated the dark memories of her old life. She didn’t want to think about the Dead Hollow lair or the padaran. But questions kept sneaking into her mind like worms.” (217) Why can Willa not stop thinking of these things, now that she is free of them?
7. Willa says, “We all have our ways to survive.” (226) What is Willa’s way? What is Nathaniel’s? Later she says, “I survive here.” (229) What might this mean?
8. What might the bees on page 226 symbolize?
9. On page 228, Willa thinks of Nathaniel, “sometimes, over the last few days, it had almost seemed as if he understood the world the way she did. But other times, she grew dismayed by the life he’d been living, and her growing part in it.” What dismays her about Nathaniel’s life? About her part in it?
10. Why might Nathaniel hate being compared to a wolf?
11. On page 229, Willa wonders, “Was the man Nathaniel evil for using the trees and animals to survive? She didn’t know the answer to that question anymore.” What do you think?
12. Why is Willa so surprised to learn that bees, and other things, were originally brought to her area by European settlers?



Chapters 46-47

1. When Willa sees Nathaniel writing, “she didn’t completely understand what he had told her or how it related to the symbols he was marking on the tree skin, but she nodded her head and pretended she did. She didn’t know why she said she understood when she didn’t, other than that she wanted him to think that she did.” (233) Why does she pretend? Why does she want him to think this?
2. When Nathaniel asks Willa whether she would like to sleep in the house, “She knew what he was asking.” (233) This suggests he is asking more than whether she’d like to sleep in the house. What is he really asking?
3. Why does Nathaniel re-name Willa “Willa of the Wood” in the scene on page 234?
4. While Nathaniel is away, Willa walks the course along the river that he walks every day. (238) Why does she do this?
5. Why is Willa reluctant to explore the meadow while Nathaniel is gone? (240)
6. On page 241, we are told that Nathaniel and Willa have “become twins of the soul.” How has this happened? What does “twins of the soul” mean?
7. Do you think it would really “destroy everything” (241) if Willa asked Nathaniel about the graves? Why might she think this?



Chapters 48-52

1. Willa sees learning the writing system for English as “magic.” (244) Why might this seem magic to her? What is magic about it?
2. On page 245, Nathaniel says, “I’m so sorry, Willa,” he said, saying it with such sympathy it was almost like he knew the truth of it.” What is sympathy? How do people learn how to be sympathetic? What kind of power does sympathy have in the story?
3. On pages 245-246, Willa thinks about who killed her family. Who do you think killed her family, and why do you think that?
4. What might “The name was the path she must follow” (249) mean and why does she feel this way?
5. On page 252, Willa thinks she has made a “terrible mistake.” What might her “mistake” be and why does she think she made one?
6. On page 254, Willa thinks, “How could she have done what she did? She had left the boy lying in a prison cell in the lair of the night-spirits. How could she abandon him in that place? How could she let him suffer like that? How could she let him die? She’d been taught all her life that humans were her enemy, killers of the forest, murderers of her people. But how could she let *anyone* suffer like that?” Why can she see this now but couldn’t before?
7. In this same passage, Willa wonders “What kind of fear and hatred had lived so deep in her heart that she could abandon a human boy to rot in a dark, wet prison?” (254) What kind of fear and hatred does it take for someone to do this? How did Willa come to have so much fear and hatred of humans?
8. What might the scene at the beehive on page 258 symbolize or foreshadow in the story?
9. How would you describe the newcomers’ relationship with nature? How does it compare to Willa’s and Nathaniel’s?

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10. What happened to Ahyoka and who did it? Who does Nathaniel think broke into his house and took his family away? Who do you think did it? Explain your reasoning.
11. On pages 267-268, the line that “the world was neither flat nor round. It was mountains” is echoed from the epigraph. What do you think this line means now? What might it mean to Willa?
12. Why can't Nathaniel ask the police for protection from the loggers?

Chapters 53-55

1. One of the loggers tells Nathaniel, “It’s a free country, ain’t it!” ... ‘We can do anything we feel like,’ another man said as he chopped the limbs of the tree. ‘Isn’t that what freedom means?’ ‘I’ve got a God-given right to protect my land,’ Nathaniel said, brandishing his rifle.” (271) Who do you think has a right to cut trees on this land? What do you think of how the loggers define freedom? How does Nathaniel argue he has a right to the land?
2. How does Willa stop the fight between the loggers and Nathaniel, and how is this different than the woodcraft she’s used before?
3. After the fight is over, “Nathaniel wrapped his arms around [Willa] in return, holding her like she had never been held—holding her as if she were the very last being on earth he could hold on to.” (276) Why does he do this? How has he come to feel about Willa in this way?
4. When Nathaniel is so upset, why does Willa know “in her heart that she had to go”? (279) Why leave him at this point? Why doesn’t she tell Nathaniel where Iska is so he can rescue him?
5. Willa is worried that if “Nathaniel would have his real family back, his *human* family, the family he’d been searching for and yearning for. The family he truly loved. His need for her and her strange night-spirit ways would fade away like mist from the top of the mountain.” (279) Do you think Willa is right about this? Why or why not?



Chapters 56-57

1. On page 281, Willa thinks of herself as an “enemy” of the clan? Do you think she’s the clan’s enemy?
2. What does Willa mean that “Her life with Nathaniel and Scout had been destroyed by four symbols on a piece of wood and a logger’s gun.”? (282)
3. Willa thinks, “*Now there is an I... I, the woodwitch, the weaver, the jaetter, the thief. Move without a sound, steal without a trace. That’s what I’m going to do, steal without a trace, just like old times.*” (282) Before, Willa had trouble feeling like an “I.” Why can she do so now? How does she define herself as different from the clan? Why does she talk about still being a jaetter?
4. Why do the beavers help Willa break in when they previously have been allies of the Faeran?
5. Willa thinks of one child, “Whoever he had been, he didn’t belong here on the floor of this cell. There had to be someone out there looking for him, someone who loved him, someone like Nathaniel or her mamaw, someone who had been a part of his life, and he a part of theirs.” (286) How is Willa able to connect to humans now as she couldn’t before?
6. Why does Willa think the padaran’s plan is to turn the captured children into jaettters? (289)
7. Willa thinks, “When the padaran took her into his rooms behind the throne, she had seen the fear in the depths of his mind and the lengths to which he would go to save the clan.” (290) Do you think the padaran’s only motivation is to save the clan? What other motivations might he have?



Chapters 58-62

1. On page 293, Iska says to Willa that he knew she'd come back. How does he know this?
2. Willa compares the imprisoned human children to her sister: "But she knew that if it was Alliw who was imprisoned here, she could never leave her behind. It was the bond that could not be broken." (295-296) Willa has been raised to hate humans. Why does she now feel responsible for them?
3. On page 299, why does Willa think she's not going to survive?
4. Why does Willa suddenly realize that, while "She had thought there was no one who could help her. But that was wrong. There was someone who could help her. There were *many* who could help her"? (301) Why did she not think about this source of help before?
5. We are told about Willa that "Every child she freed put her further from her own freedom." (304) Why is Willa doing this, when originally she only wanted to free Nathaniel's children? Why is she risking so much for all the children?
6. On page 306, how does Willa get Hialeah to trust her?
7. How does Willa escape the guards?
8. Why, in the midst of the escape, does Willa ask Iska how to spell her father's name? (313-314)
9. What does Willa mean when she tells Iska, about the guards and jaetters, "I'm not going to fight them.... And I'm not alone'."? (319) What do you think she's going to do?



Chapters 63-66

1. On page 316, Willa reflects on all the terrible things that have happened in the clan and to her family. Then she thinks, “But even through the winter of all of this, there had still been a trace of hope in her mamaw’s voice when she taught her the lessons of old, and there had been a glare of anger in Gillen’s eyes when she saw the injustices in the padaran’s hall—and these were the saplings that might someday grow into the light once more.” What do “saplings” and “light” refer to here? Do you share Willa’s hope for the clan? Why or why not?
2. On page 320, Willa “lay wounded, tied, and beaten on the floor in front of the padaran, but she did not feel defeated.” Why not?
3. “*Believe*, Willa told herself. *Believe in your people.*” (323) Why should Willa believe in her people?
4. Why does Willa yell at the crowd in Faeran? (324)
5. On page 322, Willa realizes about the padaran “that she knew for sure that her hunch about him was right. *It’s all a trick*, she thought, *a disguise, a blend. It always has been.*” How is what the padaran has been doing a “blend”?
6. How does Willa figure out that the padaran “is not an all-powerful, glistening god. He’s a normal, mortal Faeran just like the rest of us!”? (325)
7. Who does the padaran turn out to be?
8. On page 330, why does the padaran lose his ability to blend?
9. How does Willa get the crowd to agree with her? What about her speech is so persuasive to the Faeran?



Chapters 67-70

1. Why does Gredic want to stay with Willa?
2. Why doesn't Willa "try to dodge him or fight him" (338) now?
3. Willa "knew she should have been happy to see him dead. But she wasn't." (341)
Why not?
4. Why does Willa wrap Gredic's hand around a stick? (342)
5. On page 346, Willa recalls what mamaw had asked her: "Protect it, hold on to it," her mamaw had pleaded with her before she died. Willa hadn't understood at the time. But she knew now..." What is it Willa now understands? What is the "it" mamaw was referring to?
6. On pages 346-347, Willa also realizes what has really been destroying the clan. What is it?
7. How does Willa feel about having destroyed Dead Hollow and broken apart the clan? (351)
8. What do you think "clan-shock" (353) is?
9. Why do the Faeran turn on Willa when she has just saved them from the padaran's rule? (354-355)
10. What does one of the Faeran mean that "Freedom is all good and fine until in snows"? (356)
11. Willa sees that "something had changed in Gillen...and Willa knew there would be others like her." (356) How does Willa know this? What do you think will happen to the Faeran who are left? Explain your reasoning.



Chapters 71-74

1. On page 359, we see how Willa has come to think of herself: “She wasn’t fierce of heart or sharp of claw like many of her animal friends. She wasn’t a leader or a fighter. She had never raised a weapon or struck a blow against anyone or anything, and she vowed that she never would. She was just a Faeran girl, a night-spirit named Willa, trying to find her way.” What do you think of Willa’s self-assessment? Do you agree with all parts of it? How would you describe who Willa has become?
2. On page 363, Willa is confused that Nathaniel’s children waited for her instead of heading straight home. Why do you think this confuses her?
3. Why does Willa feel that “The meadow was not hers anymore. The meadow was Nathaniel’s and his family’s.”? (372)
4. On page 372, Willa looks up at the mountain and feels as though “*The mountain knew*. The mountain had been watching all along, and it was still watching, still with her, and the mountain knew.” (372) What does this mean? What does the mountain know, and why?
5. Willa tells Nathaniel, “I just wanted to do one kind thing.” (374) Why? What is the power of kindness in the story?
6. On page 376, Willa “felt as if she could keep opening her heart to the magic in the world, and the magic in the world would keep filling it.” What is the “magic” referred to here?
7. Why has Willa “always thought of love as the rarest and most delicate of things, and that there must be a limit to the amount of love that a human or a Faeran could give or feel, a limit to how much love there could be in the world.” (375) How does she feel about love now?
8. On pages 375-376, we are told about Willa that “A part of her deep down inside feared that the more she loved the day-folk, the less she would love the forest, that her memory of her forest ways would fade and her powers dwindle.” Do you think this will happen? Is there room in someone for two cultures?