



Wilder Country

MARK SMITH

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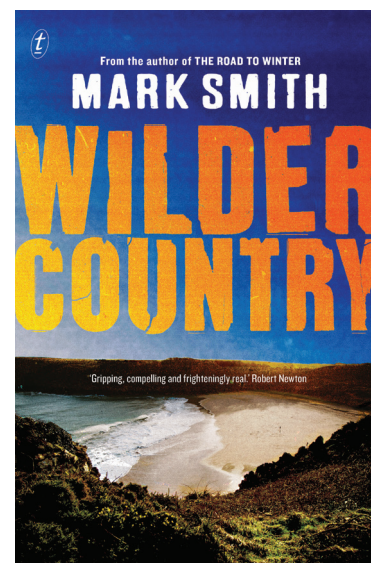
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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 14+

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CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.

SYNOPSIS

A brutal winter has passed, and Finn, Kas and Willow are on a mission to fulfil the promise they've made to Rose—to find baby Hope.

But between the coast and Longley is rugged bushland, a group of angry no-landers and Ramage's gang of Wilders.

When Finn and Kas are faced with the choice of killing in order to survive, they each must make a decision they can live with.

In this action-packed story of friendship, love and survival, Finn and Kas learn about trust, loyalty and how far they're willing to go to protect the ones they love.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Smith lives on Victoria's Surf Coast. His writing has won a number of awards and has appeared in *Best Australian Stories*, *Review of Australian Fiction* and the *Big Issue*. *Wilder Country* is his second book and sequel to *The Road to Winter*.

BEFORE READING

1. Mark Smith's *Wilder Country* is the sequel to *The Road to Winter*. As an accelerated learning opportunity, a book club challenge or holiday homework task, ask that students read the first book in the series.
2. What is Dystopian Fiction? Research the genre and create a poster with the aim of teaching others about this type of literature. Your poster might include images, elements often present in this genre, the types of characters and the setting.
3. Write a creative short story about what might happen if a virus wiped out most of Australia's population. Who would be affected? Who would survive? How would an event like this change how people lived?

WHILE READING

1. What is a 'Siley'? What is a 'No-Lander'? Write a definition for each in your workbook before considering if there are similar people in our world currently.
2. 'I stopped trusting people a long time ago. I don't feel good about it, but it's necessary now.' (p. 10) Why is it important for Finn to reserve trust in the new world he lives in? Why is trusting someone suddenly dangerous?



3. 'Whatever decision she's come to, we're grateful for it because we've been carrying her these last few months.' (p. 20) What decision has Kas come to?
4. "'I wanted you to comfort me but it felt like you just wanted to kiss me and that's not what I needed.'" (p. 22) In what other ways could Finn have comforted Kas?
5. "'Shit you're stubborn!" she says. "I wouldn't be alive if I wasn't.'" (p. 33) In this new world, people lose their life to disease, hunger or are even killed by other people. How does Kas's stubbornness aid her survival?
6. 'Kas finally speaks, her voice low and lonely. "Maybe this is what the world is now." She pokes at the fire with a stick. "Ramage, people like him, they know there're no rules anymore, no one to stop them doing whatever they want.'" (p. 43) Why do some members of the community of Longley act morally, yet people like Ramage and Rat do not?
7. "'I feel like I've been angry my whole life," she says. "Treated like shit for as long as I can remember. It's turned me into someone I never thought I'd be.'" (p. 45) As a 'siley', Kas has been treated as a slave for most of her life. How has this experience and label shaped Kas as a person?
8. After he leaves for Longley, Finn ponders, 'Will I be as fierce and brave as Kas or will it be like the time I had the chance to kill Ramage? Will I back away and leave the dirty work to someone else?' (p. 46) What is preventing Finn from acting like Kas?
9. "'I wish just for once you'd make a decision with your head instead of your heart.'" (p. 81) How does Finn make decisions with his heart? How does Kat make decisions with her head? Can you find examples of each in the text?
10. "'I wish just for once you'd think of someone else. I know you've had a tough time and you never deserved any of it but you're not the centre of the universe.'" (p. 81) Is this an accurate analysis of Kas's personality? Is Kas self-centred or is there another motivation driving her actions?

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

1. 'This is what she's like now, only half with us, hardly joining in, as though it would be some sort of crime.' (p. 5) Why does Kas distance herself from Finn and Willow? What emotions is she experiencing?
2. 'The sea is second nature to me, part of who I am.' (p. 16) Describe Finn's relationship with the ocean. How is it a part of who he is?
3. "'I meant what I said. You're the best thing that's happened to me. When I'm with you I'm not just"—she hesitates a moments—"not just a Siley.'" (p. 45) What is the relationship between Finn and Kas? Why does Finn see her as more than 'just a siley' when others can only see her with this label?
4. Create a character chart including all characters from the text. With three different highlighters, colour the characters who act morally, those who act both morally and immorally and those that simply act immorally. Use this analysis, to discuss what Smith is saying about human nature and morality in the text.

STRUCTURE

1. *Wilder Country* begins and ends at the small coastal town of Angowrie. What other novels use a similar journey and return structure? Why might this be significant?
2. *Wilder Country* is a sequel to Mark Smith's first novel, *The Road to Winter*. Is it important to recognise that the book is a sequel? Why or why not?
3. 'It's been a winter of storms.' (p. 3) How does the season of winter reflect the themes, plot and characters of the novel?

THEMES

Survival

1. 'The winter storms have shifted the sand and it'll take me a while to get used to how the wave is breaking.' (p. 1) How does the environment and setting reflect the theme of survival?
2. 'Mum and Dad always said we should help people less fortunate than us, but all the old rules fell away after the virus.' (p. 10) Does the definition of right and wrong change with different contexts or different realities?
3. Throughout the novel, Finn and Kas experience moments of respite from the struggle to survive. Re-read page 18 before reflecting on how Finn is constantly pulled between wanting to enjoy life's simple pleasures and the greater demand of survival.

Ethics

1. 'Somehow, I've avoided killing anyone, so far. It's happened around me but it's been kind of surreal. Kas has killed three men and I'm alive because of it. I know it's changing her; she's done it to protect us and now I'm going to have to make a decision about doing the same.' (p. 116) Finn is hesitant about killing but has benefitted from Kas's violence. Is he still responsible for the deaths of the people Kas killed if he wasn't directly involved?
2. 'But for all the fear and hate and loathing, I can't squeeze the trigger. It's as though another larger, stronger hand covers mine and a voice I remember from years ago whispers in my ear saying, *this isn't us, this isn't us.*' (p. 229) Do you agree with Finn's decision not to shoot Ramage? What arguments are there for and against killing Ramage? Who or what ultimately makes the decision for Finn?
3. "'Don't judge us all the same, kid. When Ramage took over, most of us had no choice. It was follow



him or end up like Ken Butler, dragged from here to Swan's Marsh behind a trail bike." (p. 198) Ramage's men justify their actions by saying they 'had no choice'. Is this a reasonable excuse? Why or why not?

4. "...this is why you'll never win. Mercy's a great quality, kid—but only if everyone's playing by the same rules." (p. 229) Do the 'rules' still apply to Finn if no one else is playing by them?

Environment

1. 'I've never felt fear in the water, though Dad always taught me to respect it, not to take anything for granted, especially when the bigger swells are running.' (p. 16) What kind of relationship does Finn have with Angowrie?
2. Various agricultural and farming practices are shown in the book. What comment or criticism is Smith making of the impact of agriculture on the environment?
3. What kind of relationships with nature do the various characters in the novel have? Are these mostly positive or negative relationships?

RESPONDING

1. "'Should we say some sort of prayer.'" I say. "Who to?" Kas says. There's anger in her voice. "How could any god allow this to happen?" (p. 49) Attempt to put yourself in the position of Kas and Finn. How would your beliefs and values be challenged in a world devoid of laws, social expectations and religions or beliefs?
2. 'The rifle feels strange in my hands, the wood grain worn and shiny. Dad was so anti-guns. He hated them. Now, though, they could be the difference between living and dying.' (p. 67) Organise students for a line debate. Students will line up on opposite sides of the classroom and will argue for and against the use of guns. Each time a student contributes a new argument, they will select a student from the other side of the room to join their team. The winner is the largest team.
3. 'All over town the streetlights flicker for an instant, hold their glow, then die.' (p. 258) What do the lights at the end of the book hint at? Write some ideas for a third book.
4. Smith illustrates the Australian coast, bush and farmland with evocative imagery and description: Select a scene from the text with a poignant physical landscape and illustrate this setting. You should focus on ensuring that the language is communicated thoughtfully with colour, texture and shapes.
5. "'My home's on the coast,'" I say, a little stronger than I intend. "Always has been, always will be." (p. 72) Some people define 'home' as the place where family is, rather than the physical house or landscape itself. Have you ever felt a connection with a physical landscape? In a reflective piece of writing, explain this connection and how the particular environment made you feel.
6. 'I'd swear she's actually enjoying this, her chance at revenge.' (p. 102) Finn is wary if not slightly frightened by Kas's desire for revenge against Ramage. Does revenge ever heal the pain of grief? What danger does a hunger for revenge present? What does Finn illustrate as an alternative for coping with pain and grief? In a letter to Kas, suggest to her some ways of coping with grief other than revenge.
7. On page 122, Finn is eager to know whether or not his gun killed Wilson. He finds out that it didn't and doesn't know how to feel about this. Why isn't he just relieved? Create a list of Finn's values and map how these values connect with the actions and decisions he makes in the book.
8. 'As much as I hate what they did to us, those three were just following orders. Ramage calls the shots.' (p. 130) Is following orders and doing the wrong thing different from doing the wrong thing of your own accord? In an extended piece of philosophical writing and using examples from *Wilder Country* as evidence, aim to answer the question: Is 'following orders' a justification for unjust behaviour?
9. On page 207, it is suggested that war is the nature of humanity. Do you agree with this statement? In a text response essay respond to this question using *Wilder Country* as your evidence.
10. 'It's something I don't want any part of; I'm not here to get involved in a war.' (p. 205) In the text, only a small number of people are satisfied with a simple and quiet life, while others are attracted to war. What attracts an individual to peace? Does it come down to how a person is raised or simply the genetic makeup of an individual? In an extended piece of writing, address these philosophical ideas.