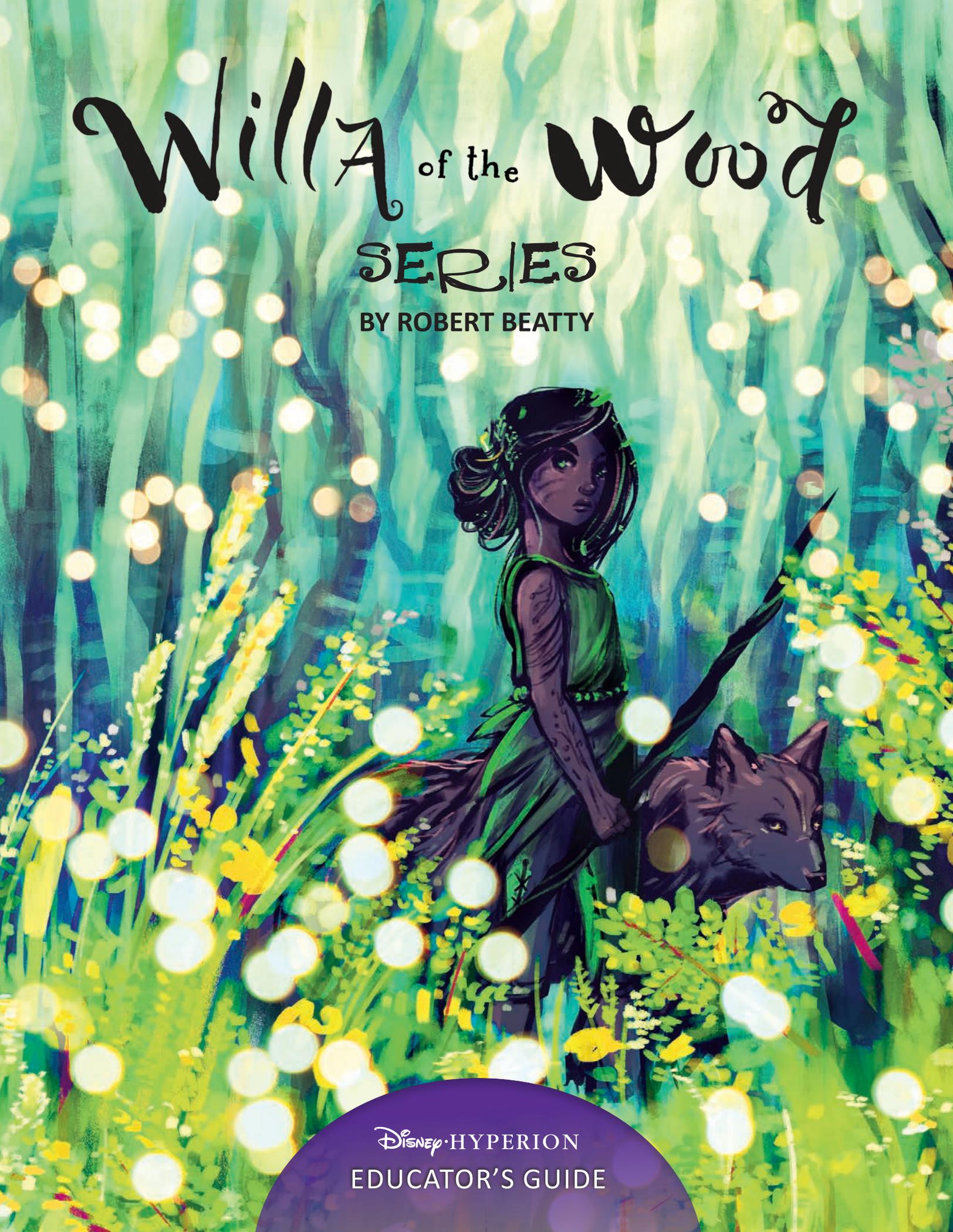


# Willa of the Wood

SERIES

BY ROBERT BEATTY



Disney · HYPERION  
EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

## ABOUT THE SERIES

The Willa of the Wood series is comprised of two novels, *Willa of the Wood* and *Willa of Dark Hollow*. The intriguing stories take readers through an adventure filled with rich imagery and meaningful themes of family, interconnectivity, environmentalism and survival. Willa is a Faeran night-spirit who is determined to help others and connect with the animals, plant life, and day-folk as she travels through the forest. In *Willa of the Wood*, Willa discovers that day-folk (humans) are much different than she was previously told by her padaran leader. Her desire to seek truth leads her on a journey filled with many ups and downs while she gathers answers to her questions. As the series continues to unfold in *Willa of Dark Hollow*, Willa encounters intensified issues of deforestation and destruction in the wood. To figure out the best solution, Willa must reflect upon the connection between past, present, and future. Willa's adventures teach readers the value of preserving nature through action, the meaning of family, and the ways choices can make a difference.

## COMMON CORE ALIGNMENT

This series allows readers to enter an enchanting world filled with adventure, mystery, and suspense. Within each novel, the focus on Willa's interactions with other characters, plot development, themes such as interconnection, and historical-fiction connections make the text an appropriate selection for a close read, student-led discussions, and research inquiries. This discussion guide provides suggestions aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for Reading: Literature, Writing, and Speaking and Listening. Each question and activity in this guide includes a reference for the CCSS strand, domain, and standard that is addressed. To support instruction or obtain additional information visit the Common Core State Standards website [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org).

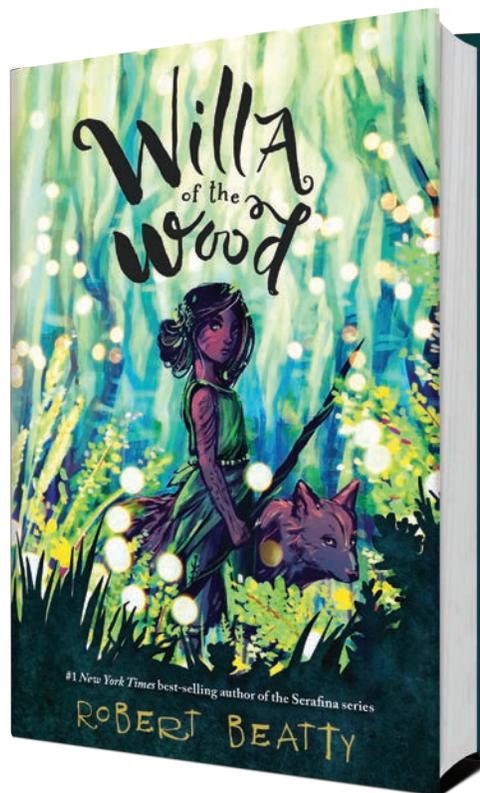
**INSTRUCTIONAL NOTE:** For each of the guiding questions, please encourage students to support their claims with textual evidence. The opportunity to consistently answer text-dependent questions and engage with the novel is critical to success with Common Core State Standards.



## ABOUT THE BOOK

Move without a sound. Steal without a trace. Willa, a young night-spirit of the Great Smoky Mountains, is her clan's best thief. She creeps into the homes of day-folk under cover of darkness and takes what they won't miss. It's dangerous work—the day-folk kill whatever they do not understand—but Willa will do anything to win the approval of the padaran, the charismatic leader of the Faeran people.

When Willa's curiosity leaves her hurt and stranded in the day world, she calls upon an ancient, unbreakable bond to escape. Only then does she discover the truth: Not all day-folk are the same, and the magical foundations that have guarded the Faeran for eons are under attack. As forces of unfathomable destruction encroach on her home, Willa must decide who she truly is. To save the day-folk family that has become her own—and lift the curse that has robbed her people of their truth—Willa will meet deadly force with trusted alliance, violence with shelter, and an ever-changing world with a steady heartbeat of courage.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do the italicized words emphasize for readers throughout the text (e.g., *night-thieves*, *Faeran*, *padaran*)? How do the new vocabulary words help the reader better understand the Faeran? (*Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.5.4; RL.6.4*)
  - a. As you read, create a glossary of Faeran terms by creating a definition for each new word. Be prepared to share your glossary with others. See a few word examples below and expand by adding more terms.

FAERAN WORD FROM NOVEL	DEFINITION ( <i>in your own words</i> )
<b>Padaran</b>	
<b>Jaetters</b>	
<b>Day-folk</b>	

2. How is Willa similar and different from other Faeran? Compare and contrast Willa’s appearance, actions, and beliefs with other Faeran using textual evidence. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.3*)
3. Pay careful attention to character interactions that help develop the story plot. For instance: “She tried to convince herself that taking one of the rings wasn’t breaking her rule of halves, but there was something in her that felt strangely uncertain. 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” (p. 13). What emotion does Willa feel when she considers stealing the ring? What does this scene show the reader about Willa? How does Willa’s choice help develop the plot or theme of the story? Support your response with details from the novel. (*Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.5.5, RL. 6.5*)

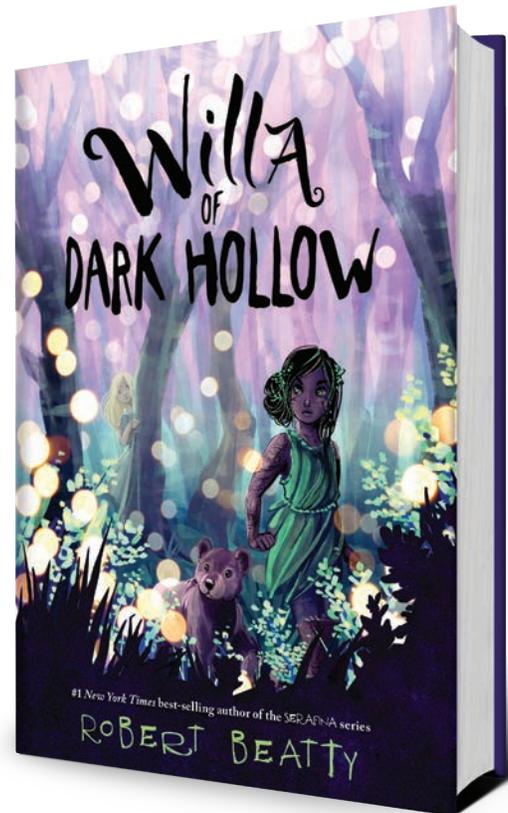
4. Describe Willa's interactions with humans, animals, and plants in the novel. How does each interaction shift or change Willa's opinions and/or views of the world? According to Willa, how do the actions of wolves and bears differ from current Faeran ways? How have the Faeran changed over time? Support your answers with text-based examples. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.3; RL.6.3*)
5. Using imagery from the text, describe Dead Hollow. How and why has it changed over time? How is the deterioration of Dead Hollow impacting Faeran ability to survive and maintain health? What disturbing things are taking place in Dead Hollow? When you read Chapter 51, how are the beehives similar to Dead Hollow? In your opinion, why did the author include the bees in the novel? What was he trying to convey to the reader? (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, RL.6.1*)
6. The novel highlights many different types of family. What does Willa value about family? What questions does Willa have about the death of her family? In Chapter 15, what is revealed about Willa's perception of elderly people in contrast to her Faeran community? How does Willa ensure her grandmother's survival in the clan and embrace her knowledge? Can you think of a time you interacted with a senior citizen and learned something new? Explain. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, RL.6.1*)
7. One of the key antagonists in the story is the padaran. Based upon Willa's descriptions, what are the padaran's character traits? Describe Willa's interactions with the padaran. What is the significance of the phrase "There is no *I*, only *we*" (p. 44)? How do the padaran's actions align with and contradict this phrase? (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.3, RL.6.3*)
  - a. Consider this quote and explain what it suggests about Willa's shifting perspective of the padaran: "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 the most satisfying reward for coming home with her satchel full" (p. 110). How does Willa's perception of the padaran change throughout the story?
8. In Chapter 22, the padaran describes many objects used by day-folk. Can you name each one? Why do you think the padaran is showing Willa his den? What questions does Willa have about the padaran during the visit to the den? What questions did you have as you read? Be specific. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1; RL.6.1*)
9. In Chapter 28, the author packs a great deal of imagery into one concise page. Why do you think the author included such a short chapter? Describe what occurs in Chapter 28 and how Willa is feeling emotionally. How does Chapter 28 expand upon the previous events and connect to the theme of survival in the subsequent chapters? Support your response with textual evidence. (*Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.5.5; RL.6.5*)
10. As the story progresses, what does Willa discover about forest destruction? Explain what it means when she says a tree is "a world" in the following quote: "The memories were aflame in her heart. But the worst memory of all were the birds, the hundreds of birds, their wings twisted and broken, their bodies lying dead on the ground. A nest. A fox. A mantis. A fawn. A tree wasn't a tree. It was a world. And the men with the iron beasts were killing them by the thousands" (p. 182). Do you agree? Why or why not? (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, RL.6.1*)

11. How does Willa's perspective of Nathaniel and the other day-folk change from the beginning to the end of the novel? What interactions help her to better understand humans? What do Willa and Nathaniel have in common? What do they teach one another? In Chapter 45, 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" (p. 229). Why is Willa conflicted? Why is it helpful to ask questions instead of making assumptions when we encounter people with different opinions or views? Cite textual evidence. (*Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.5.6, RL.6.6*)
12. Sometimes when we speak with people who have different experiences, cultural backgrounds, or beliefs to us, it may result in disagreements due to misunderstanding. When Nathaniel insists, "I am not a wolf!" (p. 231), how does Willa resolve the misunderstanding? What were their different perspectives of the term *wolf*? Can you think of a time you had a misunderstanding with someone who had a different perspective? Explain. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, RL.6.1*)
13. Throughout the novel, Willa often references or speaks for the Mountain. For example, she imagines the Great Mountain saying: "You've had enough now, little one. It's time for you to go . . ." (p. 279). Why do you think the author included Willa's thoughts about and interactions with the Mountain? How does the Mountain relate to the events in the story? Cite textual evidence. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, RL.6.1*)
14. Why does Willa decide to help the prisoners? Describe Willa's plan to save them. As she is planning, she realized something: "She had thought there was no one who could help her. But that was wrong. . . . There were *many* who could help her. . . . And she was surrounded by them" (p. 301). Why is this realization important? Based upon her plan, what has Willa learned from other characters in the novel? Provide examples. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, RL.6.1*)
15. Consider the theme of blending in the text. How does the theme align literally and figuratively to the characters of Willa and the padaran? In your opinion, is blending negative or positive? What was her mamaw's concern about the ways Willa blended? How does Willa use her mamaw's advice in the final chapters of the novel? Cite details from the story. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.2, RL. 6.2*)
16. How do the lessons that Willa learned from nature, day-folk, and animals throughout the story help her survive? Support your response with textual evidence. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, RL.6.1*)
17. How are the challenges presented resolved at the end of the book? What is the significance of planting the little tree? What needs to change among the Faeran clan for them to survive? Do you think they can learn the survival skills needed? Why or why not? How do the Faeran respond to Willa when she attempts to help? Why? What are Willa's final reflections about humans, Faeran, nature, and love? (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.3, RL.6.3*)

## ABOUT THE BOOK

This enchanting companion to Robert Beatty's instant #1 *New York Times* best seller *Willa of the Wood* is perfect for any reader who cares deeply about the natural world. Willa and her clan are the last of the Faeran, an ancient race of forest people who have lived in the Great Smoky Mountains for as long as the trees have grown there. But as crews of newly arrived humans start cutting down great swaths of the forest she loves, she is helpless to stop them. How can she fight the destroyers of the forest and their powerful machines?

When Willa discovers a mysterious dark hollow filled with strange and beautiful creatures, she comes to realize that it contains a terrifying force that seems to be hunting humans. Is unleashing these dangerous spirits the key to stopping the loggers? Willa must find a way to save the people and animals she loves and take a stand against a consuming darkness that threatens to destroy her world.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Throughout the novel, Willa is very connected to the trees. Which specific types of trees does she mention? How are trees connected to the story events and plot? In Chapter 2, what does Willa notice about the cut trees? What does the following quote mean: “A tree in the forest didn’t die in the normal sense of the word—it changed shape into a thousand other lives” (p. 7)?
  - a. How does “the Little Tree” that Willa planted in the first novel progress throughout the story? Why is “the Little Tree” significant to the story’s progression? (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.3, RL.6.3*)
2. In Chapter 3, how does Willa respond when she notices the baby and mother bear? Do you think she acted correctly? Think about the quote “She knew that somewhere behind her the hunters were finishing their work, that the mother bear was passing away, and that the Great Mountain would absorb her blood and bones back into the earth to bring life to the trees around her” (p. 20–21). What are important life cycles in a forest? Support your response with textual evidence. (*Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: RL.5.1; RL. 6.1*)
3. In Chapter 6, how does the author describe Dead Hollow? How has the hollow changed in comparison to the first novel? What hopeful and startling discoveries does Willa make in Dead Hollow? Why does Willa state “It was a place of impossibilities” (p. 28)? Be specific. (*Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: RL.5.9*)
4. What major decisions does Willa make in the novel? How do Willa’s choices help the plot progress? What does this quote suggest about Willa’s perspective of decisions: “Had all those been *her* choices? Or were all the branches of the tree of her life already growing by the time she had roots she needed to stand aloft?” (p. 35–36)? Use textual details in your response. (*Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: RL.5.3; 6.3*)

WILLA’S DECISION OR ACTION	IMPACT ON PLOT ( <i>novel progression</i> )
	

5. In Chapter 8, what causes Willa and Hialeah’s disagreement? It’s said that Willa knew “her sister had been struggling with something for a long time . . . beneath the surface, like black mold on the roots between two trees” (p. 44). What do you think is troubling Hialeah? Why? Cite textual evidence. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, 6.1*)
6. Describe the events that lead to Nathaniel’s arrest. Which antagonists are involved in the arrest? How do Willa and Hialeah respond? Why does the arrest cause Willa to reflect upon her interactions with the mother bear? (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, 6.1*)

7. What startling events bring Willa and Jim McClaren together in the woods? Describe McClaren's character traits. What does Willa learn about Jim as they travel through the woods? What does this quote suggest: "He never looked up at the forest around him or paused to listen to its whispering voices" (p. 90)? Why is Willa conflicted about helping McClaren? Do you agree? How might her interactions with McClaren lead to a resolution in the novel? Provide text-based examples. (*Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.5.5, 6.5*)
8. Willa often reflects about her family history. What makes memories powerful? Willa also thinks about fading memories. Why might it be upsetting for memories to fade? Support your response with evidence from the book. What is one of your favorite family memories? Why? (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, 6.1*)
9. In Chapter 18, what does Willa recall about her mamaw's lessons? What are 2–3 important things Willa learned from her mamaw? For example, "The plants, the birds, the wolves, the Cherokee . . . they're all connected, each one keeping the world from breaking" (p. 106). How does the following quote by McClaren contrast Willa's mamaw's lessons: "Those animals don't live in Ohio anymore. . . . But I can tell you this: the farming is good" (p. 112)? (*Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.5.4; RL. 6.4*)
10. In Chapter 21, how do the Faeran respond to Willa? What survival mistakes are they making? What illness is impacting the Faeran? What resources does Willa provide to support healing? Based on the conclusion of *Willa of the Wood*, did you anticipate these challenges for the Faeran? Why or why not? (*Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: RL.5.9*)
  - a. In Chapter 23, Willa understands that "[w]ithout a momma to teach him the skills he needed, there was no way the little cub would survive" (p. 137). How is Charka similar to the Faeran? Do you agree with Willa's solution? Why or why not?
11. Similar to the first novel, Willa often refers to and interacts with the Great Mountain. In Chapter 23, when Willa notices the bare forest, how does she respond and involve the Great Mountain? In Chapter 26, what do the Great Mountain and the Little Tree show Willa in the vision? In your opinion, what can Willa do to help the forest? Cite textual evidence. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, 6.1*)
12. What does this quote suggest: "The magic of this place was tied to the lake, and the lake was tied to the mist and the rain, and the mist was tied to the forest, and the forest to the trees" (p. 145)? In your own words, describe the interconnection of living things in the forest. What does "no *I*, only *we*" (p. 153) refer to in relation to the trees? (*Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.5.4, 6.4*)
13. When Willa returns to Dark Hollow in Chapter 25, what "strange and disturbing things" does she encounter? What brings her a sense of "warmth and safety"? Provide examples from the novel. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, 6.1*)
14. Compare and contrast Adelaide and Willa. How is Adelaide connected to McClaren? How does Adelaide's perspective of the forest differ from McClaren's? As the novel progresses, how do Willa's and Adelaide's perspectives clash? Cite textual evidence. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.3, 6.3*)

15. In Chapter 39, the author writes a very poetic one-page chapter. Describe what occurs and how Willa is feeling emotionally. Why do you think the author includes this chapter? How does it build upon the previous events and connect to the subsequent chapters? Can you think of a poem that you have read with a similar theme? Explain. (*Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.5.5; RL 6.5*).
16. What different types of interconnection are discussed in the novel? Explain what important realizations Willa makes in the following quote: “Willa began to wonder about the interconnections, not just between the people, animals, and trees living in these mountains at this moment, but between the past, present, and future” (233). How does the past inform the present and future? Why is interconnection an important theme in the novel? Cite details from the text. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.2; RL 6.2*)
17. In Chapter 43, Willa and Adelaide make a very important discovery. Were you surprised? Why or why not? How does this discovery impact the story plot and potential resolution of the problems presented? What does this realization suggest about Willa’s grandmother? Consider Willa’s reflection “What seems terribly wrong now might have been her only choice at the time. Do you see? We try to choose the best path, but our choice might only make sense in the time and place we’re in” (p. 248). Based upon this quote, what is Willa’s perception of her grandmother’s actions? Do you agree or disagree? Why? Cite evidence. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.3, 6.3*)
18. How is Willa able to transform Dark Hollow? Using imagery provided by the author, what is the difference between Dark Hollow and Green Hollow? What does this transformation suggest about the future of the Faeran? Support your response with text-based examples. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, 6.1*)
19. The characters move toward resolution of the key issues through several major events. Why is Nathaniel released from prison? What is Nathaniel’s idea to save the Smoky Mountains? How does the logging company respond to the news? What consequences result when massive amounts of trees are removed from the soil? Be specific. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.1, 6.1*)
20. It is critical to consider different perspectives while reading. Throughout the story the Faeran, animals, and day-folk interact in positive and negative ways within the forest. Based upon those interactions, how do the animals perceive day-folk? When Willa seeks the bear’s assistance, how does he respond? What does the bear’s response suggest about the past, present, and future? Based upon the interaction at the lake, why is it important to avoid assumptions or stereotypes about groups of people? Explain. (*Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: 5.5, 6.5*)
21. In the final chapter, what is Willa’s perspective of choice? How does Willa reflect on her own choices and the decisions of others throughout the novel? Where in the book did the author foreshadow this ending of the story? Specifically, how do the plants respond to Willa throughout the novel? In your own words, why is this message important: “The choices we make in our lives aren’t just paths we take, they are the shape we are turning ourselves into” (p. 350)? (*Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: 5.6, 6.6*)

## WORKING WITH THE SERIES: OVERVIEW

### EXPANDING COMPREHENSION: GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. In each story, there are several important themes for the reader to consider. According to the textual evidence, what is one theme that is unique to *Willa of the Wood* and one theme that is unique to *Willa of Dark Hollow*? What is one common theme across both novels? How does the second book in the series build upon and extend themes presented in the first novel? Support your response with examples from the text. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.5.2, RL. 6.2*)
2. Willa is the main character and protagonist of the book, which is told from her point of view. Select one chapter from either novel and explain how Willa's unique perspective impacts the way the characters, setting, and/or events are described. If the book was written from another character's point of view, what might be explained differently? Cite textual evidence. (*Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: RL.5.6, R.L. 6.6*)
3. What is the genre of the Willa series? Think of another novel you've read in the same genre. How are the characters, themes, and plots similar? How do they differ? Support your response with evidence from the novel. (*Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: RL.5.9*)
  - a. Author study connection: Think about the Serafina series written by the same author, Robert Beatty. How did the author include a potential connection to the Serafina series in the Willa novels? Be specific.
4. Think about a text in a different genre (e.g., poetry, informational text) with a similar theme or topic. How are the approaches or information conveyed in the selected text and Willa series similar? How do they differ? Which genre did you enjoy more? Why? (*Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: RL.6.9*)

### CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS: WRITING, RESEARCHING, AND ART PROJECTS

1. Based upon the descriptions of Dark Hollow in both novels, create a digital or paper-based design of the dwelling. For each location outlined in your map, be prepared to orally describe significant events that occurred in that location. Be sure to refer to the text to identify and incorporate relevant imagery presented by the author in your design. (*Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL.6.2*)
2. Willa often grapples with the destruction of the forest and the subsequent impact on the environment. Research facts about the impact of cutting down forests. Then share your argument about why we should or should not engage in deforestation. Specifically, what are the material needs that lead to deforestation and potential consequences? As you share your argument, be sure to make eye contact with your audience, share facts, and articulate the main ideas of your argument. (*Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: SL.6.4*)
3. The protection of wildlife and forests is a central issue to the series. In the acknowledgments section of *Willa of Dark Hollow*, the author states: "This book is a work of historical fiction/fantasy. But if you're interested in the time period, please research the real-life heroes who helped form the park, including Horace Kephart, George Masa, John D. Rockefeller Jr., and the citizens of North Carolina and Tennessee." Research the history of Great Smoky Mountains National Park using online sources and related texts.

Create a timeline that highlights the major events that led to the region being designated as a national park. Then write an essay on the topic that includes an introduction, key factual points, background of involved advocates, discussion of important events, and concise conclusion. (*Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge: W.5.7, W.6*)

4. In *Willa of the Wood*, some details about a very important painting in Dark Hollow are shared: “But the most striking painting of all depicted what looked like a river that flowed along the length of one of the tunnel walls, but instead of curving lines of water, the River of Souls consisted of thousands of handprints, some large, some small, some put there a thousand years before, and others more recent” (p. 70–71). Research significant monuments, historical sites, and museums that were designed in the United States to remember significant events, people, and contributions. Briefly summarize the findings that were most interesting or impactful. Then create an art piece that represents a significant memory, event, or person from the past. (*Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge: W.5.8, W.6.8*)
5. The conclusion of *Willa of Dark Hollow* may leave the reader wondering what will happen next. Pretend you are the author of the series, and write the first chapter of the next novel. Consider these questions as you brainstorm: What is the chapter or book title? Who are the main characters? What is the major plot? Your initial chapter should provide insight about the theme, plot, protagonists and antagonists. To highlight speaker voice, consider incorporating dialogue with important Faeran terms. (*Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.5.3, W.6.3*)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

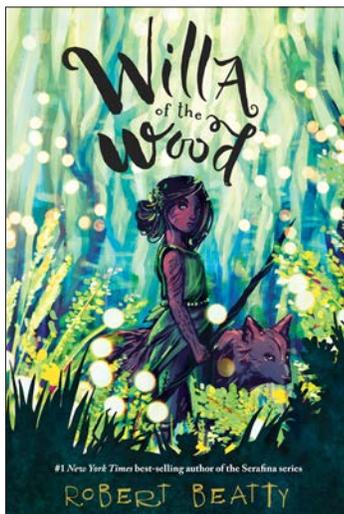
Robert Beatty is the #1 *New York Times* best-selling author of the Serafina series and the Willa of the Wood series. Loved by young readers and adults alike, the Serafina and Willa books are being taught in over a thousand classrooms nationwide and have been translated into over 22 languages. Robert lives in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Asheville, North Carolina, with his wife and three daughters. He writes full-time now, but in his past lives, Robert was one of the early pioneers of cloud computing, the founder/CEO of Plex Systems, the cofounder of Beatty Robotics, and the chairman/CTO of *Narrative* magazine. In 2007, he was named an Entrepreneur of the Year. When asked about the inspiration for his books, Robert said, “The Serafina and Willa books grew out of my desire to write stories about unusual and heroic young girls for my three daughters.” Please visit [robertbeattybooks.com](http://robertbeattybooks.com) for further information on the author and his books.



Photo Credit: Camille Beatty

This guide was written by **Dawn Jacobs Martin, PhD**, an assistant clinical professor at the University of Maryland, College Park. She has spent her career supporting students with disabilities through various roles as a practitioner, researcher, special education director, and teacher educator. She continues to improve the academic outcomes for students with disabilities through teacher development, instructional design, and research in the areas of literacy intervention, social support, and parent involvement. Feel free to contact her with questions at [jacobsdml@gmail.com](mailto:jacobsdml@gmail.com).

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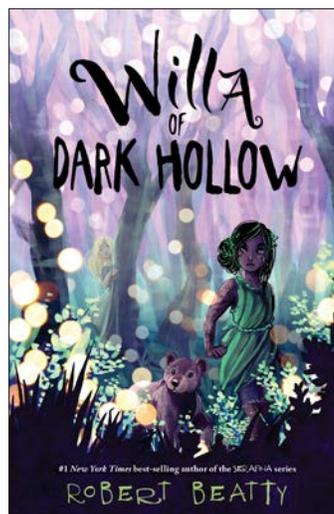
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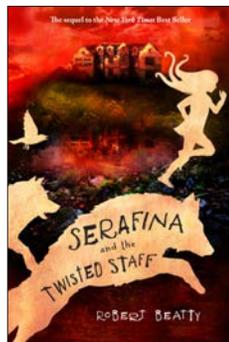
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