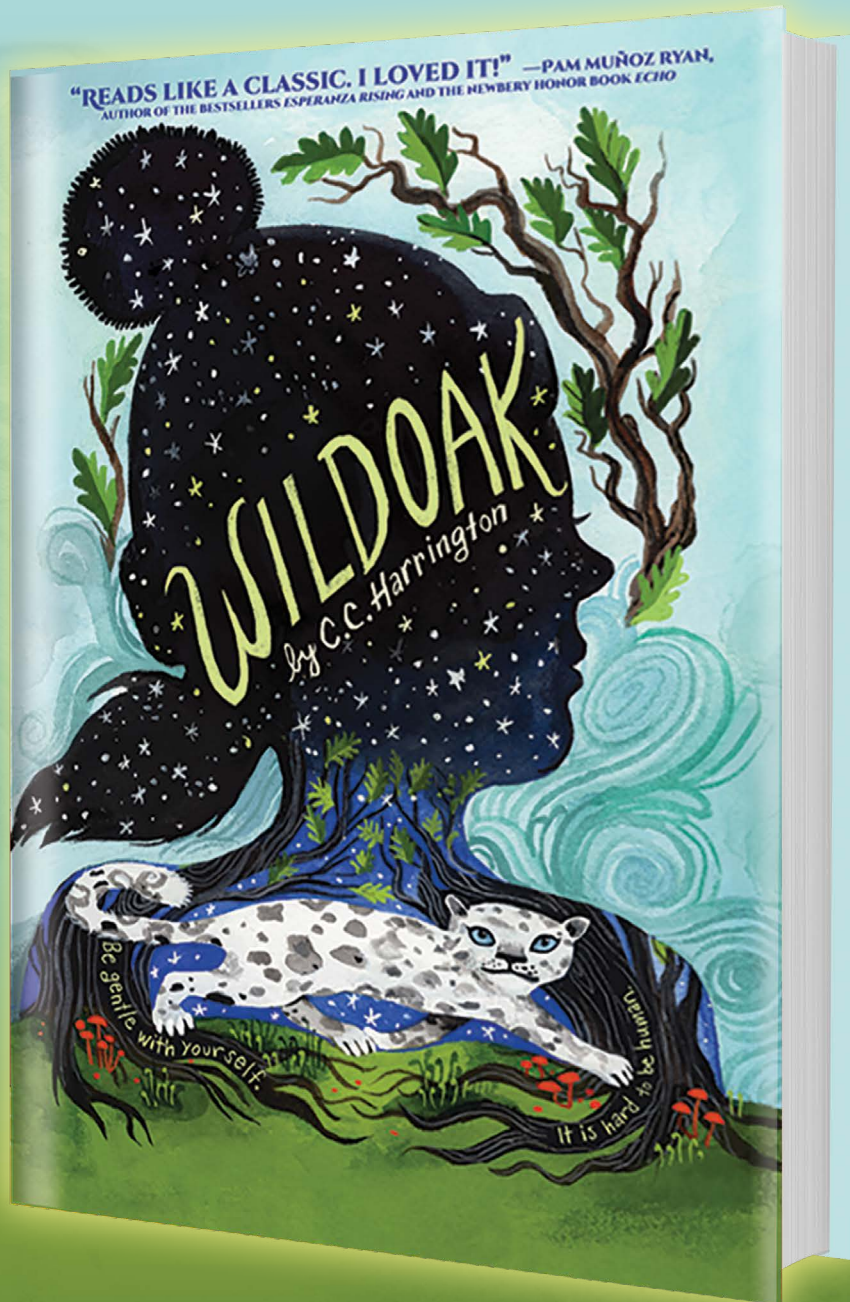


# DISCUSSION GUIDE

# WILDOAK

BY C.C. HARRINGTON

AGES 8-12  
GRADES 3-7

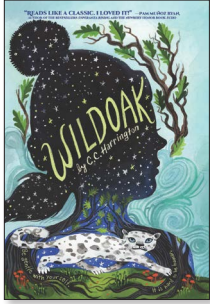


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# ABOUT THE BOOK



Maggie Stephens's stutter makes school especially hard. She will do almost anything to avoid speaking in class or calling attention to herself. So when her unsympathetic father threatens to send her away for so-called "treatment," she reluctantly agrees to her mother's intervention plan: a few weeks in the fresh air of Wildoak Forest, visiting a grandfather she hardly knows. It is there, in an extraordinary twist of fate, that she encounters an abandoned snow leopard cub, an exotic gift to a wealthy Londoner that proved too wild to domesticate. But once the cub's presence is discovered by others, danger follows, and Maggie soon realizes that time is running out, not only for the leopard, but for herself and the forest as well. Told in alternating voices, *Wildoak* shimmers with beauty, compassion, and unforgettable storytelling as it explores the delicate interconnectedness of the human, animal, and natural worlds.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What year does *Wildoak* take place, and where? What do you know about that place and that time period? What can you learn about that time and place from trusted sources? What about that time and place do you think is significant to the story?
2. What does Maggie mean when she thinks to herself, "She would block. She was bound to" (p. 1)? What does the term "block" mean to a person with speech differences? Why would she be willing to hurt herself with the pencil point rather than stay in class?
3. Some people who stutter do not stutter when talking to animals, which is the case for Maggie. Find examples in the text of when Maggie talks to her pets or to Rumpus without stuttering. Why do you think it is easier for Maggie to speak aloud to animals—either the ones in the zoo or the small pets she keeps at home—than to people? What are some other ways that humans can communicate with animals?
4. Why do the shoppers at Harrods decide to buy a snow leopard cub? What do you think they should have considered before making this choice?
5. Why do Maggie's parents decide to send her to visit her grandfather, a man she hardly knows? Compare the different ways Maggie's mother and father react to her challenges at school. Why does her mother think that visiting Maggie's grandfather can help? What will happen if Maggie's stutter does not improve?
6. Compare Maggie's feeling of loneliness at leaving her animals behind to Rumpus's feeling of loneliness at being separated from his sister. Why does his new "owner" want to get rid of him so quickly?
7. Compare Rumpus's reaction to the forest where he is released with Maggie's reaction to her grandfather's house. How do they each find ways to adapt to these unfamiliar places?
8. Describe Maggie's feeling when she finds the photograph her mother put in her suitcase. Why do you think she has no memory of being in Cornwall with her parents when she was younger? Why have they not returned as a family to visit Fred?
9. What does Fred mean when he says that Wildoak is a "magical place"? Why is he trying to save the ancient trees from being destroyed? What is their importance for him? How does Maggie feel about the forest the first time she explores it? Maggie experiences a "kind of energy flow" through which she receives this message: "Be gentle with yourself. It is hard to be human" (p. 79). What does that message mean to Maggie? What does it mean to you?
10. How do Maggie and Rumpus find each other? How does he learn to trust her? What are the reactions of the villagers when they encounter Rumpus? There is an old saying that people fear what they do not understand. Discuss how this relates to the encounters between Rumpus and the villagers and what happens afterwards.
11. Why does Maggie feel so connected to Rumpus? What does she mean when she says, "You and me, Rumpus . . . we're the same like that" (p. 168)? How does Maggie use the forest to help heal Rumpus's infected paw?
12. What does Maggie learn about her father when she asks Fred why they don't speak to each other? How does Fred's explanation help Maggie understand her father? Using context clues on pages 214–215, what do you think "conscientious objector" means? Use your school or local library, or a trusted Internet source, to research the history of conscientious objectors.
13. What compels Maggie to try to speak at the town hall, even though she knows she will have difficulty getting her words out? Why does Fred finally listen to Maggie when she tells him about Rumpus after the town meeting? Why did he not believe her before? Why do you think she is able to speak to the villagers later, in Fred's driveway, when she could not do it at the town hall?
14. What would you say is the greatest gift Fred gives Maggie during the time she is staying with him? Discuss Fred's comment: "Everybody has something about themselves they want to change . . . but . . . there's room in this beautiful, complicated world of ours for all of us. Just as we are. In fact, there is a need for it" (p. 293).
15. What do you learn from the epilogue, and why do you think the author included it? How did Maggie's time in Cornwall lead to her career as an adult? Discuss how Maggie's story demonstrates the impact that one person can make to change the way people think.



# RESEARCH TOPICS, RESOURCES, AND PROMPTS

Invite students to learn more about these topics by exploring the prompts and resources listed for each. Optional: Ask students to choose an aspect of one of these topics to research in more depth, and host a special event during which each student can share what they've learned and why they believe it's important—just like Maggie does in *Wildoak*.

## WILD PETS

One narrative thread of *Wildoak* begins with an ill-advised birthday gift purchased from Harrods Department Store in London. Read a brief overview of the history of Harrods Pet Kingdom—and the true story of a wildcat purchase that partly inspired *Wildoak*—in the author's note on p. 312. Then read about the real-world impact of keeping wild animals as pets at [bornfreeusa.org/campaigns/animals-in-captivity/the-dangers-of-keeping-exotic-pets](https://bornfreeusa.org/campaigns/animals-in-captivity/the-dangers-of-keeping-exotic-pets).

- When did Harrods Pet Kingdom stop selling large wild animals, and why?
- Research the history of wild animals kept as pets in the United States. Share your findings with a classmate or small group.
- Do you think people should be allowed to keep wild animals as pets? Write a short statement explaining your reasoning.

## EVERY VOICE MATTERS

Approximately 5% of young people, like Maggie, experience a period of stuttering that lasts over six months. Explore the websites listed below to learn about the organizations working to help young people who stutter. Make a list of ways these programs can make life better for young people, and ways you might be able to help.

- **The Stuttering Association for the Young (SAY)** [say.org/about-say](https://say.org/about-say)  
SAY offers comprehensive and innovative programs in the US that address the physical, social, and emotional impacts of stuttering and help young people who stutter develop the confidence and communication skills they need to thrive.
- **The Stuttering Foundation** [stutteringhelp.org](https://stutteringhelp.org)  
Established in 1947, the Stuttering Foundation provides free online resources, services, and support to those who stutter and their families, as well as support for research into the causes of stuttering.
- **FRIENDS: The National Association of Young People Who Stutter** [friendswhostutter.org](https://friendswhostutter.org)  
FRIENDS is a national organization dedicated to providing support and education to young people who stutter, their families, and professionals, through annual conferences, workshops, and outreach.
- **National Stuttering Association (NSA)** [westutter.org](https://westutter.org)  
The NSA is dedicated to bringing hope and empowerment to children and adults who stutter, their families, and professionals through support, education, advocacy, and research.
- **American Institute for Stuttering (AIS)** [stutteringtreatment.org](https://stutteringtreatment.org)  
AIS provides universally affordable, state-of-the-art speech therapy to people of all ages who stutter, guidance to their families, and much-needed clinical training to speech professionals.

## ENDANGERED SPECIES

Snow leopards like Rumpus are one of many endangered species today. Visit [snowleopard.org/snow-leopard-facts](https://snowleopard.org/snow-leopard-facts) to learn more about the snow leopard and its natural habitat. What efforts are being made to keep this unique animal from becoming extinct? What are the threats to its existence, both in the wild and in captivity? Create a poster or presentation to share what you've learned. Then, explore the websites listed below to learn more about organizations working to prevent the extinction of wild cats and other endangered species.

- **Snow Leopard Trust** [snowleopard.org](https://snowleopard.org)  
The Snow Leopard Trust aims to protect this endangered cat through community-based conservation projects that are based on an improved scientific understanding of snow leopard behavior, needs, habitats and threats.
- **Panthera** [panthera.org](https://panthera.org)  
Founded in 2006, Panthera is devoted exclusively to the conservation of the world's 40 species of wild cats and the vast ecosystems they inhabit.
- **World Wildlife Fund (WWF)** [worldwildlife.org](https://worldwildlife.org)  
WWF is a public charity whose mission is to leverage sound science to conserve nature and reduce the most pressing threats to the diversity of life on Earth.

# RESEARCH TOPICS, RESOURCES, AND PROMPTS (CONTINUED)

## WOOD WIDE WEB

Maggie experiences a feeling of interconnectedness between herself, Rumpus, and Wildoak Forest. Scientific research by ecologist Suzanne Simard and others revealed an intricate system of underground fungal networks through which trees in a forest interact and communicate. To learn more, visit [oneearth.org/welcome-to-the-wood-wide-web](https://oneearth.org/welcome-to-the-wood-wide-web) and watch Simard's TED talk, "How Trees Talk to Each Other," at [ted.com/talks/suzanne\\_simard\\_how\\_trees\\_talk\\_to\\_each\\_other](https://ted.com/talks/suzanne_simard_how_trees_talk_to_each_other).

Seek out Simard's book *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest* (Knopf, 2021) as well as books by forestry expert Peter Wohlleben such as *The Hidden Life of Trees* (Greystone, 2016) and *Can You Hear the Trees Talking?* (Greystone Kids, 2019), and by biologist and educator Robin Wall Kimmerer: *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Milkweed Editions, 2015) and *Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults* (with Monique Gray Smith, Zest, 2022).

How does this research help us to understand the interrelationship of plants and their connection to the human world? What lessons can we learn from the natural world about communication and cooperation? How do these lessons relate to the plot of *Wildoak*? Create a written or visual response to these questions. Then make a list of ways to share what you've learned with your classmates or community.

Learn more about organizations working toward conservation and reforestation by exploring the websites listed below:

- **One Tree Planted** [onetreepanted.org](https://onetreepanted.org)  
A nonprofit organization that plants one tree for every dollar donated, with the goal of making it easier for both individuals and businesses to give back to the environment, create a healthier climate, protect biodiversity, and help reforestation efforts. Learn about their free educational resources for grades K-12 at [onetreepanted.org/pages/school](https://onetreepanted.org/pages/school).
- **The Nature Conservancy (TNC)** [nature.org](https://nature.org)  
Founded in 1951, TNC is a global environmental nonprofit working to create a world where people and nature can thrive.
- **Conservation International** [conservation.org](https://conservation.org)  
Building upon a strong foundation of science, partnership, and field demonstration, Conservation International empowers societies to responsibly and sustainably care for nature, our global biodiversity, and for the well-being of humanity.
- **Eden Reforestation Projects** [edenprojects.org](https://edenprojects.org)  
A nonprofit organization that works alongside communities in 10 countries to produce, plant, and protect tens of millions of trees every month, creating jobs that support community members in restoring their local environment and economy long-term.
- **Andes Amazon Fund (AAF)** [andesamazonfund.org](https://andesamazonfund.org)  
AAF works arm-in-arm with indigenous peoples and other communities to conserve the biodiversity, ecosystems, and environmental health of the Andes and Amazon.

## ONE PERSON MAKING A DIFFERENCE

As an adult, Maggie is an advocate for environmental and wildlife conservation. Even one single person can make a real-world impact when they have a deep understanding of another species and a passion for helping that species. The true story of scientist Dr. Jane Goodall's life and her breakthrough approach to species conservation is a remarkable example of this. Learn about Dr. Goodall's work and legacy at [janegoodall.org/our-story](https://janegoodall.org/our-story).

- The Jane Goodall Institute has a youth action program, called Roots and Shoots, dedicated to helping young people to bring about change in their communities. Visit [rootsandshoots.org](https://rootsandshoots.org) for inspiration and hands-on advice.
- Fred and Lord Foy disagree about the value of Wildoak Forest and its natural resources. Are you aware of people in your community who hold differing opinions on environmental issues? Where do you stand on those issues? Research ways to get involved with groups who are working towards the solution you support, or write a letter to the editor of your local paper to share your perspective.
- Using trusted sources, research other people and organizations like the Jane Goodall Institute who are taking action to protect wildlife and the environment. Of the people and organizations you discovered, which person or group inspires you the most, and why?

# ACTIVITIES

## SENSORY OBSERVATION

Many of the chapters written from Rumpus's perspective emphasize the ways in which he uses his senses—the way things look, smell, taste, sound, and feel—to understand his surroundings and the people and things nearby. How might you describe your home, your classroom, or another space using any or all of these five senses? Write, draw, act out, write a song, or find some other way to share your interpretation of that space through your senses.

## SOMEONE ELSE'S "SHOES"

When Rumpus escapes his crate and explores the apartment, his curiosity leads him to knock over a bin full of garbage, and his sharp claws unintentionally damage some of the furnishings. Choose an animal to research, and make a list of that animal's physical features as well as any unique abilities and traits. If you were that animal for a day, how might you experience or interact with a human space like a classroom, kitchen, or swimming pool? Consider how having your chosen animal's physical features and abilities might shape your experience of a specific human space. Write, draw, act out, write a song, or find some other way to share your interpretation of that animal experiencing your chosen space.

## CREATIVE MOOD BOARD

Some authors find it useful to create mood boards, collage-like collections of images, words, sounds, and/or other items, to create a focused vision or mood for their book. If you were to create something that captured the feeling of reading *Wildoak*, what would it include? Feel free to get creative: make a list of items, a digital or physical collage of images, a playlist of sounds or music, or even a menu listing the food you'd like to eat at a *Wildoak*-themed meal!

# FURTHER READING

Share these titles with students interested in reading more stories about the topics and themes in *Wildoak*.

**Adamson, Joy. *Born Free*.** First published in 1960, this story of a lion cub raised in captivity was made into an award-winning movie that alerted the world to the plight of endangered species and how they can be reintroduced to their natural environments.

**Applegate, Katherine. *The One and Only Ivan*.** Winner of the 2013 Newbery Medal, and based on a true story, this novel explores the dilemma of an orphaned gorilla living in a cage at a mall, and the people who campaign to find a better home for him.

**Gold, Hannah. *The Last Bear*.** This novel set on Norway's Bear Island celebrates the friendship between a child and a polar bear, and includes supplemental information about Bear Island and the plight of polar bears in the face of climate change.

**Gold, Hannah. *The Lost Whale*.** A poignant novel about adventure, recovery, and love, told through the eyes of a young boy who finds beauty and hope in the massive grey whales that migrate near his new home.

**Larson, Kirby. *Dogs of World War II series (Duke, Dash, Liberty, Code Word Courage)*.** All four of these engaging stories describe the bravery of a particular dog and the young person who allowed them to be taken to help soldiers during the dreadful years of the Second World War. The connections between the dogs, the children who loved them, and the soldiers who trained them are a testimony to the communication between animals and humans.

**Parry, Rosanne. *A Wolf Called Wander*.** Separated from his pack and desperate to find a new home, a young wolf journeys far and wide. Inspired by the true story of a wolf that was tracked through Oregon and California, this book helps the reader understand the plight of a misunderstood wild creature.

**Pennypacker, Sara. *Pax*.** Peter has raised his pet fox from the time he was an orphaned kit, but circumstances have separated them. Pax must learn to cope with life in the wild, while Peter embarks on an impossible trek to find him again.

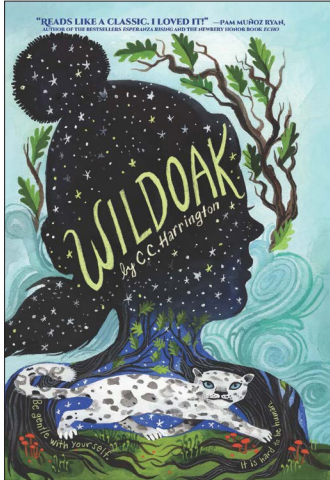
**Rabinowitz, Alan. Illustrated by Cátia Chien. *A Boy and a Jaguar*.** Winner of the 2015 Schneider Family Book Award, this stunning picture book autobiography depicts how, as a young boy who stuttered, conservationist Alan Rabinowitz found hope and purpose when speaking for the animals he loved.

**Scott, Jordan. Illustrated by Sydney Smith. *I Talk Like a River*.** This beautifully illustrated picture book demonstrates with clarity and understanding both the frustration and acceptance of a young boy's speech differences.

**Silvey, Anita. *Untamed: The Wild Life of Jane Goodall*.** One of the most famous wildlife biologists in the world, Goodall made a great impact through her uncanny ability to understand and communicate with other species.

**Vawter, Vince. *Paperboy*.** In this Newbery Honor award-winning novel, a boy who stutters comes of age in the segregated South—during the summer that changes his life.

# PRAISE FOR *WILDOAK*



HC: 9781338803860 • \$18.99  
Ages 8–12 • Grades 3–7  
Also available in ebook and audio

## A Kids' Indie Next List Pick

## A Kirkus Reviews Most Anticipated Book

## An Indies Introduce Pick

★ "Harrington packs her memorably atmospheric debut with compelling issues, but her sharply felt portrayals of two vulnerable youngsters of different species bonding as they find their ways in hostile worlds will make the deepest impression."

—Kirkus Reviews, starred review

★ "Themes of compassion and conservation form the heartbeat of Harrington's eloquent 1963 England-set debut . . . poignant and immersive . . . Maggie's work to speak in defense of Rumpus and Wildoak resounds with realism, building to a nuanced and empowering ending that reverberates with foresight."

—Publishers Weekly, starred review

**"Wildoak reads like a classic. I loved it."**

—Pam Muñoz Ryan, Newbery Honor-winning author of *Echo* and *Esperanza Rising*

**"Wildoak makes us believe the world may well be as mysterious and as lovely as we had hoped."**

—Gary D. Schmidt, Newbery Honor-winning author of *The Wednesday Wars* and *Just Like That*

**"It is rare to encounter a character whose stutter is not portrayed as an obstacle to be overcome, but is instead an important part of her that is embraced and celebrated . . . We need more characters like Maggie."** —Taro Alexander, founder of SAY: The Stuttering Association for the Young



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo © Ana Fallon

CHRISTINA (C.C.) HARRINGTON grew up in the UK. She spent her summer holidays in Cornwall where she loved to climb trees and run barefoot along pebbly beaches. She loves the natural world and believes that stories, much like the roots of an ancient forest, are capable of connecting readers and listeners in essential ways. *Wildoak* is her first book. She graduated from Oxford University with a degree in English Literature and has since worked for a newspaper, taught literacy to children with learning differences and studied printmaking. She now lives in Maryland with her family and a dog who loves to eat manuscripts. You can learn more about her work at [ccharrington.com](http://ccharrington.com).

Watch C.C. Harrington read an excerpt of *Wildoak* at [bit.ly/WildoakReadaloud](https://bit.ly/WildoakReadaloud)

This discussion guide was prepared by  
Connie Rockman, Youth Literature Consultant.



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