

# UNDER WILDWOOD

written by  
COLIN MELOY

with illustrations by  
CARSON ELLIS

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



## ABOUT THE BOOK

Prue McKeel has been bored in school since returning home from her adventures in Wildwood, but soon she is plunged into a life-and-death struggle when she discovers that her science teacher is actually a shape-shifting assassin sent to track her down. Teaming up with her friend Curtis, who remained in Wildwood as a bandit-in-training, Prue tries to follow cryptic messages to save the magical world from dark forces. Meanwhile, Curtis's sisters, Rachel and Elsie, become entangled in more intrigue when they are left at an orphanage run by a man obsessed with entering and exploiting the Impassable Wilderness.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Compare Prue's distractedness in school to Curtis's training in the bandit camp. What skills is Curtis being taught by Brendan? Why is Prue bored by her lessons in school?
2. Why do Mr. and Mrs. Mehlberg decide to leave Rachel and Elsie at the orphanage? What are the warning signs that this is not a safe place for the girls? Describe the difference between Rachel and Elsie's reactions to the orphanage. What is the importance of Elsie's doll, Intrepid Tina?
3. Iphigenia tells Curtis, "*'Tis the winter of our discontent. I believe one of your Outsider poets penned the line*" (p. 65). What does she mean by quoting this line, and who is the poet?
4. Why does Prue decide to tell her story to Darla in the coffee shop? When does she first realize that Darla is not to be trusted?
5. Why is Joffrey Unthank so obsessed with the Impassable Wilderness? What are his plans for gaining access to the area, and why is he a threat to those who live there? What is his relationship to the other Titans?
6. Why do the rescuers believe that the bandits' camp is the safest place to keep Prue when she is taken back to the Wood? What is the importance of Iphigenia's dream? How does Prue know when Iphigenia has been killed?
7. Why does Prue feel so strongly that she needs to go to the Council Tree? Why do Prue and Curtis and Septimus leave the camp without telling Brendan where they are going?
8. What is the importance of Alister, the young Mystic? When Prue returns to the Council Tree, how does she know she can trust Alister? What does he tell her that gives direction to her quest?
9. Why is Curtis so angry with Prue when they return to find the bandit camp destroyed? What does he mean when he says, "Everything's always about you, isn't it, Prue?" (p. 272)? What brings their quarrel to an end?
10. Why does Desdemona help Unthank with the orphanage, and why does she feel he has betrayed her? What does Unthank do with the children he calls Unadoptable? What discovery do Elsie, Rachel, and Martha make when they are sent into the Impassable Wilderness?
11. Who is Roger Swindon and why does he want Unthank to create a special machine part for him? Why does Unthank stop all other production to work on the special cog, and why does he work on it alone?
12. What is the clue Alister gives to Prue that helps her when she, Curtis, and Septimus fall into the crevice? What help do they receive from the mole world, and how do they help the moles in return? Compare the role of Sybil in the mole world to Iphigenia in the North Wood.
13. How can Elsie find her way into the Impassable Wilderness when Carol and the others cannot? Why was Carol banished from the Wood and why can't he return?

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14. What does Martha tell the other children to convince them to leave the Periphery and return to the Outside? Why does Carol agree to go? Why does Michael disagree with their decision?
15. The last chapter, "Season's End," wraps up all the threads of the story that are happening simultaneously. Which character is aware of all of these parts of the story, and how can he know about all of them at once? What season is coming to an end? What predictions can you make, based on what you have read, for the next volume in the Wildwood Chronicles?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. **INSPIRATION FROM AFAR.** The assassin who pursues Prue and Curtis and the leader she visits take their inspiration from Japanese folklore. Look up information about the *Kitsune* and the *daimyo*. Draw pictures of these characters and write a short description of each from your research. Compare what you have found out about these legends with the characters as they appear in *Under Wildwood*.
2. **WORD BY WORD.** Make a list of all of the unusual and unfamiliar words you encounter while reading *Under Wildwood*, such as: ushanka hat, rictus grin, byzantine, oscillate, maudlin, rhomboid, mandala, olfactory, archaic, ascetic, trebuchet, and epiphany. Look up the definitions of these new words, and keep a list of all of the exciting words you find and their definitions.
3. **THE MYSTERY OF MÖBIUS.** Look up information about the German mathematician August Ferdinand Möbius. Learn how to create a Möbius strip. What are some of the uses for this concept? Why do you think it is difficult to create the machine cog that Unthank tries to make in the story?
4. **REACHING INTO THE REAL WORLD.** Discover what you can learn about the reality of the Portland Underground (otherwise known as the Shanghai Tunnels). What are the differences and similarities between the tunnel in the story and the actual tunnels in the city of Portland, Oregon? What other cities have similar underground histories that can still be seen today?



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

**COLIN MELOY** is the charismatic lead singer and songwriter of the Decemberists, a highly celebrated band that has sold in excess of one million records. *Wildwood* was Colin's debut as a children's author, and *Under Wildwood* is his second book for young readers.

[www.colinmeloy.com](http://www.colinmeloy.com)

**CARSON ELLIS** first rose to prominence as the artist who created the Decemberists' iconic visual look. She's gone on to become a bestselling illustrator, working on such renowned books as the Wildwood Chronicles, *The Composer Is Dead* by Lemony Snicket, and *The Mysterious Benedict Society* by Trenton Lee Stewart.

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GUIDED  
READING  
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