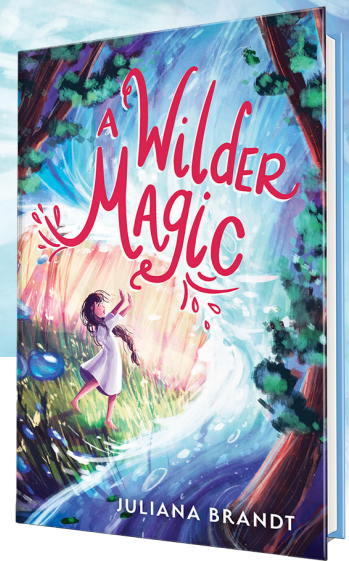


AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE
A WILDER MAGIC
JULIANA BRANDT



Common Core Aligned Teacher's Guide

About the Book

From the author of *The Wolf of Cape Fen* comes a beautiful and lyrical story about one family with magic in their bones, and what happens when we have to give up what we love most.

For generations, Sybaline Shaw's family has lived in an enchanted valley in the Appalachian Mountains, using their magic to help grow the land. But now the government has built a dam that will force the Shaws to relocate, and they're running out of time before their home will be flooded.

Syabline and her cousin Nettle can't imagine life without the valley and its magic, so they decide to stay. Using magic, they build an invisible wall around their home. As the water rises, they learn a terrible truth: the water will continue to rise, leaving them to live beneath the lake itself.

There is also a consequence to using magic selfishly, one that might transform both her and Nettle forever. If she can't find a way to escape, Syballine and the ones she loves could be trapped in the valley forever.

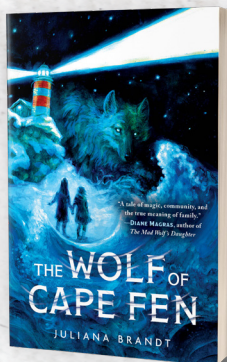
Praise for *A Wilder Magic*

"*A Wilder Magic*, with its beautiful imagery, relevant themes and inspiring female characters, is vividly enchanting." —**SHELF AWARENESS**

"[Kids] expecting a big move may find comfort in Sybaline's eventual acceptance of her need to leave the valley." —**THE BULLETIN OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS**



Also by Juliana Brandt



PRAISE FOR *THE WOLF OF CAPE FEN*

"This intriguing mystery culminates in a startling, literally transforming climax." —**KIRKUS REVIEWS**

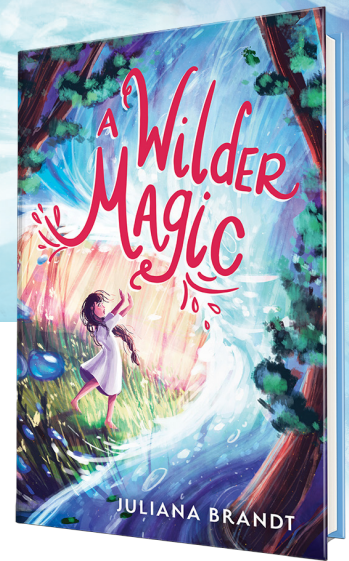
"A stunning seaside fairy tale that will absorb readers until the very end." —**BOOKLIST**

"Mesmerizing." —**SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL**

AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

A WILDER MAGIC

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Historical Context of *A Wilder Magic*

During the Great Depression, President Roosevelt created the Tennessee Valley Authority. It was be the job of the TVA to create dams throughout the Tennessee Valley in Appalachia, in states like North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee. The dams helped bring electricity to the rural mountains, but in the process of their creation, around 14,000 families were displaced from their homes and entire communities were swallowed up by lakes. This is the background and the setting for the story told in *A Wilder Magic*.

Discussion Questions

A Wilder Magic didn't have a title for a very long time! If you had to choose a different title for the book, what would you choose and why? Use details from the text when explaining your answer.

Imagine you want to turn this book into a movie and need to pitch it to a film director. Write a one paragraph summary of *A Wilder Magic*.

Complete this sentence: "The most important message that can be learned from the story is..." and describe how it relates to your life.

Determine the most important parts of the story for Sybaline that helped her gain the necessary skills, information, and tools to figure out how to escape from beneath the lake. Choose one moment in *A Wilder Magic* that you believe is the most important experience she has as she comes to understand that she needs to leave her home to survive. Summarize what she learned that helped her come to this understanding.

Sybaline's deep love for the land, the magic, and her ancestral home guides her throughout the story. Provide examples of the ways in which Sybaline shows her love for the place she lives.

In *A Wilder Magic*, there isn't a traditional antagonist or "bad guy." Often, Sybaline acts as the antagonist in her own story. Describe three ways in which Sybaline is her own adversary.

What were some of the obstacles Sybaline faced once she made the decision to stay in the valley. How did she handle these obstacles?

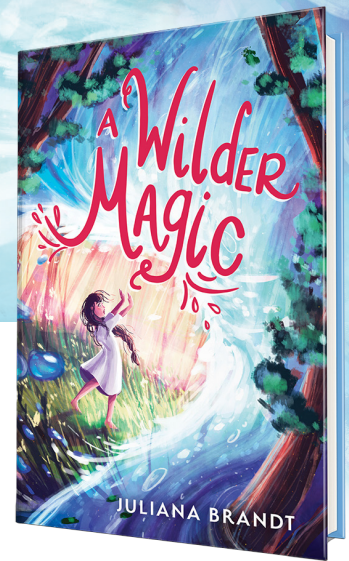
Describe how Sybaline's relationship with the magic changes throughout the story. How does she view the magic at the beginning of the story versus at the end?

Several times throughout the book, characters say or do things indicating to Sybaline that they look down on her or think less of her because of where she's grown up. Identify one of these events and describe how it makes Sybaline feel.

AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

A WILDER MAGIC

JULIANA BRANDT



Examine the setting of *A Wilder Magic*. Choose a character and describe how growing up in the valley and mountains has influenced who they are and the choices they've made.

The following three themes can be found in *A Wilder Magic*. Choose one and determine where it's demonstrated in the text.

- **Home:** *Home can be a place, a dwelling, a person, or something else entirely.*
- **Fear:** *Making decisions out of fear will always lead you down the wrong path.*
- **Change:** *Even when change is scary, it can still help you grow and learn.*
- **Bravery:** *Bravery is a choice you can choose to make in the face of fear.*

Extension: Think-pair-share the following questions: How are the statements above about human nature true or not? How do the above themes develop throughout the text?

A Wilder Magic is written in three parts. Why do you think the author decided to write the book with the following three important parts?

1. Sybaline lives in the valley and tries to find a way to stop the dam.
2. Sybaline and Nettle decide to stay, even while the valley floods. They try their best to survive and keep the valley as their home.
3. Sybaline realizes she needs to find a way to escape.

Graphic Organizers and Projects

Sybaline makes the best choices she can. Often, these choices have unintended consequences.

Complete the following chart and describe what the consequences to her decisions are:

| Decision | Consequence |
|--|-------------|
| Sybaline visits the dam construction site to try and convince her brother to help her destroy the dam. | |
| Sybaline decides to stay in her valley home when her mother moves to the city. | |
| Sybaline uses magic after the bubble closes overhead, even after she and Nettle decide it's no longer safe to use magic. | |

Extension: How do the decisions above show who Sybaline is? Create a "Character in a Box" project. Collect 5-10 items that relate to Sybaline and her character. Be prepared to discuss why you chose each of the items.

AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

A WILDER MAGIC

JULIANA BRANDT



On the following chart, describe how the characters view the magic in the valley, then write a paragraph comparing the similarities and differences.

| Sybaline | Momma | Cedric |
|----------|-------|--------|
| | | |

The following literary devices can be found in *A Wilder Magic*. Find an example of each and explain what is being compared and/or the sensory effect the description has.

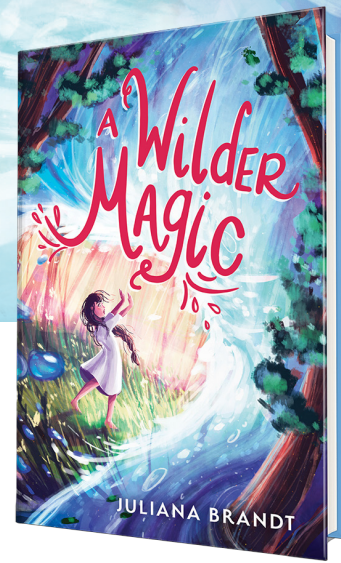
| Literary Device | Quote | Explanation |
|-----------------|-------|-------------|
| Personification | | |
| Alliteration | | |
| Metaphor | | |
| Simile | | |

Extension: How does the figurative language used in A Wilder Magic impact meaning and tone?

AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

A WILDER MAGIC

JULIANA BRANDT



One of the major metaphors in *A Wilder Magic* is the magic system; it is a metaphor that's based around the concept of "transformation." Sybaline is transformed both figuratively (inside her mind and heart) and literally (inside her body). Consider the following chart. How do both her transformations manifest? Why does this transformation happen?

| Figurative Transformation | Literal Transformation |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| | |

At the front of the book is an image of Sybaline's family tree. How did this influence your reading of the book?

Extension: Do one of the following:

1. Choose one of the characters on the tree and write a short story or character description about them.
2. Create a visual representation of your own "Circle of Community and Caring" that includes supportive adults and friends (examples: painting, sketch, photo collage, description, tree representation...)

Several motifs, or patterns, are used throughout *A Wilder Magic*. Create a picture-and-word collage of how one of the following motifs and quotes makes you feel and how it makes you reflect on the story.

1. Hunger: "[Sybaline'd] fed her fear so long, it'd made all her problems worse. It'd turned the place she loved into a thing made of horror and hunger. That had been her fault."
2. Feet: "Sybaline drew back the hem of her dress, so it revealed her feet and shins. Skin tangled with bark below her knee, the grains of wood curving over her shin and drawing soft lines down to her foot. Bending her toes, she winced, noticing how much range of motion she'd lost."
3. Trees and roots: "[Sybaline] saw, suddenly, the way the rest of her life would go: the whole of her body would completely transform sooner rather than later. She would plant herself in the ground, feet burying deep, roots spreading into the earth."

Small group activity: *A Wilder Magic* is written from Sybaline's point of view. Think about the timeline of events and how they might have been different if the story were written from the point of view of another character. Would the events have been the same? How might they have been different? Give one of the following characters to each group to discuss.

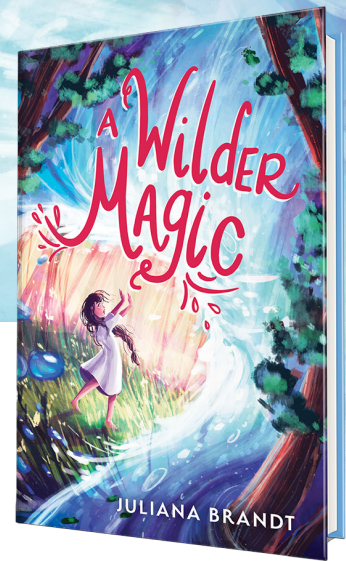
1. Nettle
2. Momma
3. Fisch
4. Benjamin
5. Marlys or Tevi

Extension: Students may have a creative writing option where they pick a scene from the story and write it from the point of view of a different character. They may do a reader's theater, act out the scene, or read it out loud to the class.

AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

A WILDER MAGIC

JULIANA BRANDT



A Wilder Magic does not include a map at the beginning of the book. If it had, how would it have influenced your reading of the story?

Extension: Complete one of the following:

1. Write a short story or description of the valley.
2. Create a collage of images or symbols depicting the valley, dam, and city.
3. Draw or paint your own map of the setting of *A Wilder Magic*.
4. Take a picture of an image that reminds you of a location in *A Wilder Magic* and write a paragraph explaining the connection. (Option: take the class on a photo challenge outside with cameras or phones to do this project together.)

Use the following graphic organizers to write down details you would include in an oral book talk.

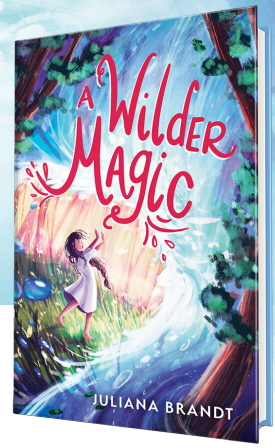
| Book talk focusing on the text | |
|---|--|
| The Hook: <i>Include the biggest "hook" in the first chapters of the story that will grab the listener's attention.</i> | |
| The Content: <i>Include details of the main "meat" of the story. What is the biggest problem the main character must work to solve?</i> | |
| The Cliffhanger: <i>Include a last detail you will give to inspire the listener to want to read the book.</i> | |

| Book talk focusing on personal experience: | |
|---|--|
| Attention Grabber: <i>Include why you first wanted to read the book.</i> | |
| Message: <i>Include the main part of the story that resonated with you. How did the book relate to your own personal experiences?</i> | |
| Motivation: <i>Include a last detail of why you think the listener should read the book also.</i> | |

AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

A WILDER MAGIC

JULIANA BRANDT



The author uses specific language to describe the valley versus the city/the dam. Fill in the following chart with adjectives or phrases that the author uses to show how the valley/mountains made Sybaline feel happy and the city/dam made Sybaline feel unhappy.

| The Valley and the Mountains | The City and the Dam |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| | |

Extension: How do the adjectives the author chose for both the valley and mountains and the city and dam create mood, and make the reader feel about each place?

Cross-Curricular Prompts

History

Research the history in Appalachia of the Tennessee Valley Authority building dams and forcing families to move. Choose one of the following dams below and do a group or individual research project, considering the following questions: *Can you find historical photographs of before and after the dam was created? Were any towns/homes flooded for reservoir lakes? Was construction difficult for those who lived there before the dam?*

1. Fontana Dam in Swain County
2. Ocoee No. 1 and Parksville Reservoir in Tennessee
3. Hiwassee Dam on the Hiwassee River
4. Pickwick Landing Dam on the Tennessee River

Extension: What do you think the experience would have been like for you if you'd lived at one of these dam sites and had to move?

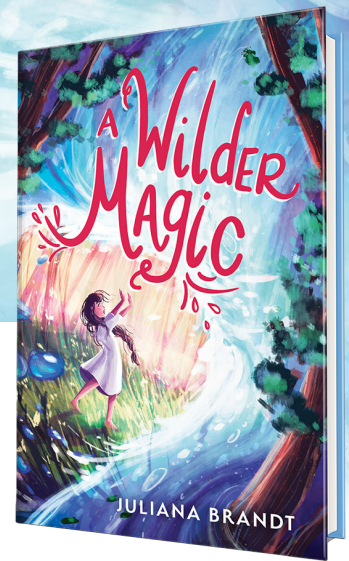
The author never specifies a year during which *A Wilder Magic* takes place, although many hints are included throughout the story. What clues can you find in the text that tells you when the book takes place?

In chapter 8, Sybaline compares her family's forced move to the removal of the Native Americans during the Trail of Tears. Her momma sharply tells her, "Don't you dare bring up what the government did to the Native Americans like that, Sybaline Shaw. What's happening to us is in no way the same as what happened to them; I know I taught you better than that." Why do you think the author decided it was important to include this scene in the story? Research the history of the removal of the Native Americans from Appalachia and the Trail of Tears. Be prepared to discuss why it's important that we don't forget this history.

AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

A WILDER MAGIC

JULIANA BRANDT



Science

Several strange occurrences happen beneath the lake. Choose one of the following from the list and research the science behind why it might have occurred. Create a posterboard or a slideshow depicting these processes:

1. The temperature drops.
2. Fog and mist rises.
3. Water begins seeping up through the ground.
4. Sound echoes sharply off the walls of water Sybaline creates.

Art / Music

Depict the mountains of Sybaline's home through a medium of your choice, such as drawing, painting, collage, or sculpture. Demonstrate visually how the author represented the place through words.

Create your own map of the setting from *A Wilder Magic*. Include places from the book such as Sybaline's home, the gristmill, town, the city, and the dam and construction site.

The cover of *A Wilder Magic* depicts one main scene from the book. This is the scene where Sybaline uses her magic to hold back the water that's flooding her valley. Analyze why the illustrator might have chosen this scene from the story to highlight on the cover. If you could have chosen another scene to have as the cover image, what would it have been and why? *Extension: Create your own cover for A Wilder Magic using the above prompt.*

There are many songs written about dams and the flooding of homes. Create a verse and chorus for your own song about the rising waters of Sybaline's valley.

Journaling Prompts

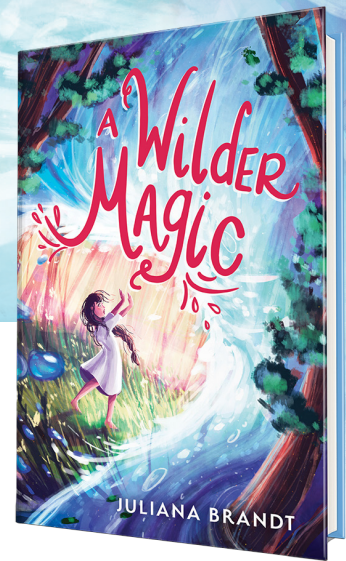
Plot-based questions

- At the end of the story, Sybaline sacrifices herself to try and save her family and friends. Think of a time when you've acted to help family or friends. What happened? Why was it important to help them?
- In chapter 4, Sybaline lies to her momma. Have you ever told a lie that felt important to tell? What was that experience like?
- The events in *A Wilder Magic* are based on the very real history in Appalachia of people being forced to move due to the creation of dams. Think of an event in your life that felt big and important, like moving was for Sybaline. What was that experience like?
- Is there a place in your own life that you love as much as Sybaline loves her valley home? Describe that place and why it's important to you.
- If you're not from Appalachia or you've never visited, consider your feelings about the place before reading the story and after. Did they change?

AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

A WILDER MAGIC

JULIANA BRANDT



Theme-based questions

- Sybaline is connected to the earth through her magic. Think of something you're connected to. What would it be like to have magic that would connect you to that thing?
- Sybaline's opinion and understanding of the magic changes by the end of the story. What's an opinion you've held that's changed? Why?
- Transformation is an important concept in *A Wilder Magic*. Think of an experience that transformed you. What was it and how did you change?
- Family is very important in *A Wilder Magic*. Sybaline is very attached to her family, but despite this, she ultimately decides to make her own choices, ones that differ from those her family makes. Have you ever had to make a choice that was different from ones your family made?
- Sybaline struggles with fear. In fact, she finds it very difficult to admit she's scared: scared of change, scared of moving, scared of leaving her family, and scared of becoming someone new. What might you fear in the same way that Sybaline fears these things?
- Sybaline learns that she needs to be brave despite the many things she's scared of. When have you been brave despite feeling fear?

This guide aligns with the following Common Core Standards:

CSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL. 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W. 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10, 5.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10, 6.3, 6.4, 6.9, 6.10, 7.3, 7.4, 7.9, 7.10

