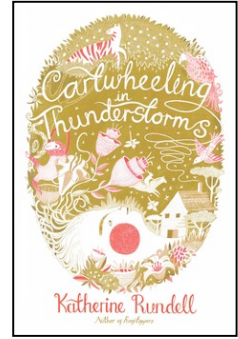


A Curriculum Guide to

Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms

by Katherine Rundell



About the Book

It takes many words to describe Wilhelmina Silver, aka Will, Lil, Wildcat, Madman, Cartwheel. Born on Captain Browne’s farm in Zimbabwe, Will has lived a life of freedom and happiness. Free to roam the dust, grasses, and the several hundred trees, Will learned to ride a horse before she could walk, can outrun most of the boys her age on the farm, and has read all of the books in the Captain’s library. Then Will’s life falls apart. Banished from her life of independence and free rein, she is forced to leave the hot vast lands of her home and attend a girls’ boarding school in the “grizzle” (gray drizzle) of England. Exuberant, loyal, stubborn, willful, brave twelve-year-old Will must learn to live in a tamed world that is much more savage than the one she is forced to leave behind.

Discussion Questions

These discussion questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RF.5.4, 4a) (RL.5.2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10) (SL.5.1, 1a, 1c)

1. From the first page in the story, we learn much about the main character, Wilhelmina. What does the following quote tell us about Will’s personality?

“‘Surely your father can afford a pane of glass?’

“‘I like to be dusty,’ she said, ‘and wet.’ Dust and rain made mud. Mud was full of possibilities.”

2. The men on the farm describe Will as being “stubborn, sha, and exasperating, and wild, and honest and true.” In the men’s opinions, is Will admirable or despicable? How would you describe her?

3. How does Simon prove to Will that appearances are deceptive?

4. Simon and Will are best friends. Explain how they are different, using quotes from the novel to support your answer. How are they similar?

5. Explain why Cynthia is able to get rid of Will by sending her to boarding school even after Captain Browne tells Will’s father, “‘Of course I’ll keep her safe, Will. You know I will. That girl . . . she’s my sunlight.’” Does the Captain keep his promise?

6. Is Cynthia wicked or just self-centered? Discuss, using examples from the book.

7. Compare the description of the school in England with the farm in Zimbabwe. How different are they? Would you rather go to the school in England or live on the farm in Zimbabwe?

8. It only takes a few lines to understand the pecking order in Will's new school. Who is the pack leader? How do we know this?
9. Leewood is a foreign place to Will. In order to make sense of the place, Will keeps comparing it to familiar places. For example she sees the residency as "... like a tobacco barn at home . . . but with a slate roof instead of tin." Can you find other comparisons that Will makes in order to feel more comfortable?
10. Who acts more "savagely": the girls at Leewood or Will? Explain your answer.
11. What does Will think about school? Does Will see it as a place of learning? What do you think? Do you agree with Will?
12. Will thinks that adults don't "understand justice." What is Will's definition of justice? Where in the book are adults unjust? How would you define justice? Is your definition the same as Will's?
13. How does Will use the knowledge she gained from living with her dad in Zimbabwe when she stayed overnight in the zoo and the park?
14. Will comes up with a plan to beg so that she can make enough money for a plane ticket back to Zimbabwe. Why does her plan fail?
15. What are some of the difficulties and hazards that Will experiences while she is homeless and living on the streets of London? Which of these problems would any homeless person face?
16. After reading the news article about herself, what does Will do to disguise herself?
17. What are Daniel's feelings toward his grandmother? How does he describe her? How would you describe her?
18. Daniel doesn't call the police but instead hides Will, brings her food, gives her his grandfather's coat, and befriends her. Why does Daniel help her? Would you help a kid who was a dirty, homeless stranger?
19. Why do the twins, Zoe and Hannah, make friends with Will?
20. How does the title of the story *Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms* relate to the novel? Remember that one of Will's nicknames is Cartwheel. How is she metaphorically "cartwheeling in a thunderstorm"?

Research, Writing, and Speaking and Listening Activities

These discussion questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RF.5.3, 4, 4a, 4b, 4c) (SL.5.1, 1a, 1c, 1d, 2, 4, 5, 6) (RI.5.4, 6, 7, 9) (W.5.1, 2a)

1. Will's vocabulary includes many non-English words. Find ten of these words, and using context clues, come up with your own definitions. Then look in the glossary at the back of the book to find the actual definitions, and have a conversation using some of these "Will words."

2. Katherine Rundell uses many similes in *Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms*:

- Simon says of Will, "Like a caterpillar with no legs."
- "She was uncatchable in this mood, like a bushfire . . ."
- "They watched through the glass his mouth open and shut like a goldfish's . . ."
- "Mrs. Robinson walked on her other side, like a prison guard . . ."

Find six other similes from the novel. Then determine what two things are being compared and explain what the simile means. For example, when Simon compares Will to a "caterpillar with no legs," he is teasing her by insinuating that she is extremely slow. Make drawings or other kinds of visual representations of three of the similes.

3. Draw a storyboard that summarizes the part of the story when Will is at Leewood.

4. Find a group, rehearse, and perform a Readers' Theatre of Chapter 18. After the performance, lead a discussion on why the teachers and girls bully Will. Do the teachers and girls have a right to insist that Will take a bath and have better hygiene?

5. Will is obviously a victim of bullying. Research the manner in which girls commonly bully others, and write an essay on how these tactics apply to Will when she first attends Leewood School. Start with the article by Mike Hardcastle entitled "How Girls Bully, The Covert Tactics Used When Girls Bully." <http://teenadvice.about.com/od/violencebullying/a/girlbullies.htm> Make sure to cite your sources.

6. In an article published by WebMD Magazine, author Susan Davis states, "The topic of girl bullying is not new. Dozens of lay books and scholarly journals have explored the ways 'relational aggression'—tactics such as exclusion, rumor mongering, and Internet harassment—can damage girls' self-esteem. But only recently have researchers begun looking at what bullying does to the bullies themselves. The news is not good." The article can be found here: <http://www.webmd.com/parenting/features/mean-girls-why-girls-bully-and-how-to-stop-them> By Susan Davis, WebMD Magazine.

After reading this article, write a narrative from Samantha's point of view that shows her feelings about Will and about herself.

7. Will thinks to herself, "There was so much she hadn't thought to ask, she thought angrily—about whether money was really important, and about how not to care about being hated, and how to live in the aching cold." What answers and advice would you give Will about these issues? Form a small group, and pretend that you are Will and are asking these questions to a panel of experts. Then, make a video of the experts' responses.

8. “It is real life that takes the real courage, little wildcat.” Define courage. Was Will more courageous while living in her native land of Zimbabwe or while in a more civilized environment in London? According to your definition of courage, make a list of people, whether famous or not, who fit your definition.

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