

A Wolf for a Spell by Karah Sutton

Illustrations by Pauliina Hannuniemi

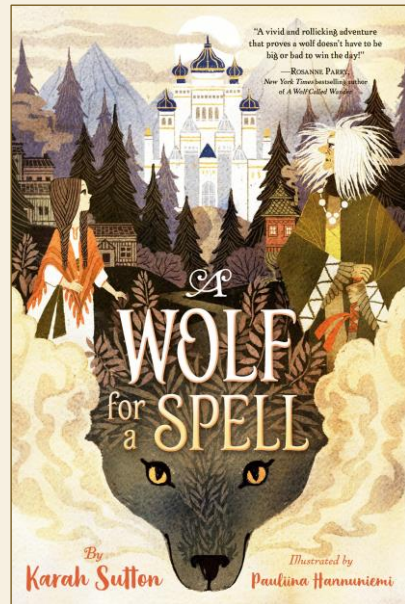
Educator Guide

About *A Wolf for a Spell*:

Since she was a pup, Zima has been taught to fear humans—especially witches—but when her family is threatened, she has no choice but to seek help from the witch Baba Yaga.

Baba Yaga never does magic for free, but it just so happens that she needs a wolf's keen nose for a secret plan she's brewing . . . Before Zima knows what's happening, the witch has cast a switching spell and run off into the woods, while Zima is left behind in Baba Yaga's hut—and Baba Yaga's body!

Meanwhile, a young village girl named Nadya is also seeking the witch's help, and when she meets Zima (in Baba Yaga's form), they discover that they face a common enemy. With danger closing in, Zima must unite the wolves, the witches and the villagers against an evil that threatens them all.



ISBN 13: 978-0593121658
Knopf Books for Young Readers
Ages 8-12, Grade 4-7

The Girl Who Drank the Moon meets *Pax* in this fantastical tale of a wolf who forms an unlikely alliance with Baba Yaga to save the forest from a wicked tsar.

A Junior Library Guild selection, American Booksellers' Association Indies Introduce selection, Indie Next Fall 2020 Top 10

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About the Author

Karah Sutton is a former bookseller and a current children's author. *A Wolf for a Spell* is inspired by her Russian heritage and the fairytales that have enchanted her since childhood. She splits her time between her home town in Kentucky and a house by the sea in New Zealand. *A Wolf for a Spell* is her first novel.

Karah is experienced in talking to groups in person and virtually about a range of topics, including her writing as well as her experience in the video game and film industries. Karah is available for school visits, talks, and other events.



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Praise for A Wolf for a Spell

“Karah Sutton has crafted a vivid and rollicking adventure that proves a wolf doesn’t have to be big or bad to win the day!” — Rosanne Parry, New York Times bestselling author of *A Wolf Called Wander*

“An elegant fairy tale retelling that feels both classic and fresh, *A Wolf for a Spell* beautifully explores the power of generosity, the many ways to be brave, and the magic of finding your own pack. This book is beautiful.” — Anne Ursu, award-winning author of *The Lost Girl*

“Those who have never before ventured into the deep, dark magic of Baba Yaga’s hut will find themselves entranced by Sutton’s engaging style and imagination.” — Sofiya Pasternak, award-winning author of *Anya and the Dragon*

“This delightfully magical tale is filled with everything readers of fantasy and fairy-tale retellings adore: magic, heroism, and whimsy... A must-purchase where fairy-tale retellings and folklore are loved.” — School Library Journal, Starred Review

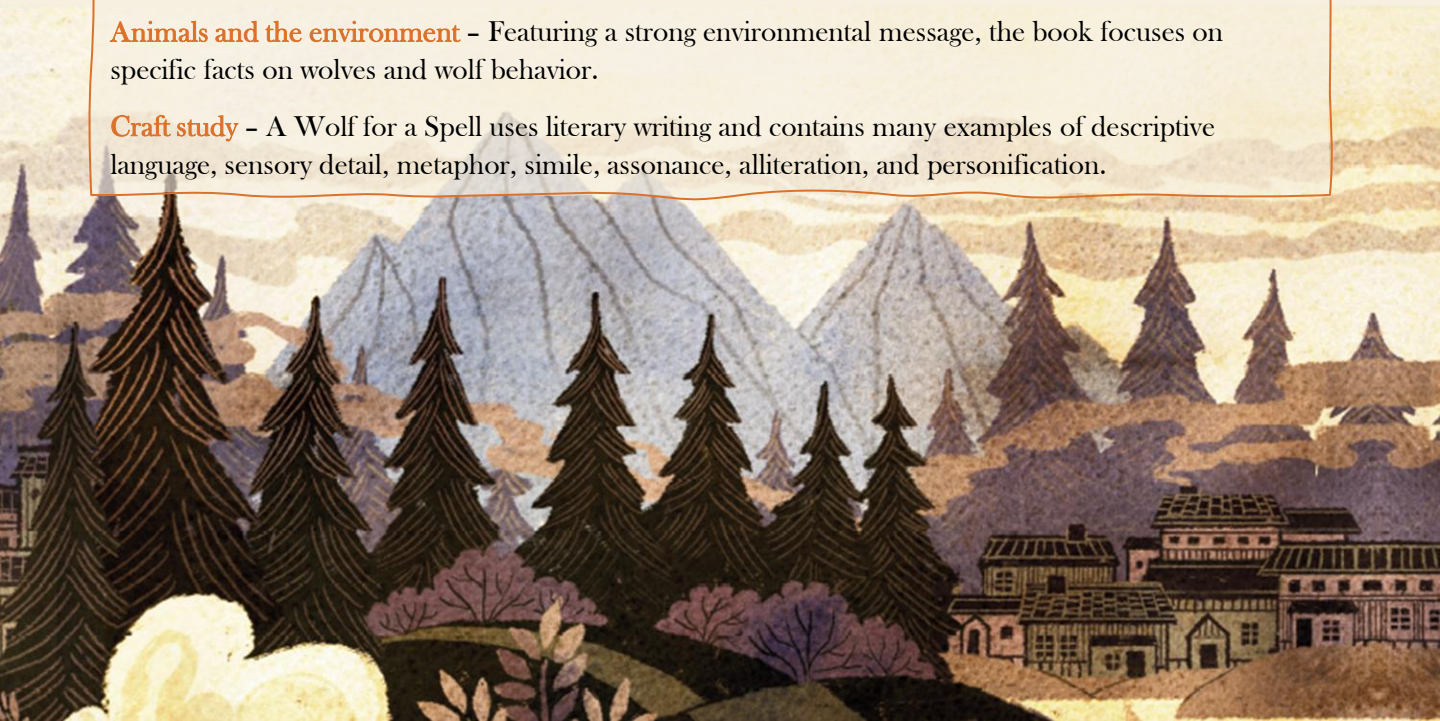
"A charming debut filled with magic and friendship, where a wolf in disguise can learn what it means to be human and a witch finds opportunity to redeem her greatest mistake. Fun and twisty, this fairy tale that evokes imperial Russia has a timeless air." — Publishers Weekly

Classroom Connections:

Russian culture and folklore - Featuring characters known to Slavic fairytales and folklore such as Baba Yaga, Ivan Tsarevich, the Gray Wolf, and the Firebird, *A Wolf for a Spell* can serve as an introduction to these stories. The book also features mention of Russian folk art, clothes, and food.

Animals and the environment - Featuring a strong environmental message, the book focuses on specific facts on wolves and wolf behavior.

Craft study - *A Wolf for a Spell* uses literary writing and contains many examples of descriptive language, sensory detail, metaphor, simile, assonance, alliteration, and personification.



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Pre-reading Questions:

- Look closely at the cover for *A Wolf for a Spell*. What do you think will happen in the story based on the cover alone? What are different ways the title could be interpreted?
- The first sentence of the book is “Fear clenched its jaws around Zima as she recognized the smell of magic.” What images do you think of when reading this sentence? What are some ways you could describe the feeling of being scared?

End of book discussion/essay prompts:

- How familiar were you with Russian fairytales before reading *A Wolf for a Spell*? What are some things you recognize from other fairytales that you know? How are those things similar or different?
- What do you think the author is saying about the relationship between humans and the forest? Do you agree or disagree? Support your answer with quotes from the book.
- Both Zima and Nadya were told to fear others in the village and forest, and they learn to overcome that fear. What is a time when you had to face a fear? Were you able to overcome it? How did it make you feel then and now?

Extension activities:

- Zima often uses natural words to describe things she sees and hears in the human world. Pick an ordinary object and describe it using similes and metaphors from things found in nature.
- Many Russian fairytales feature animals and humans being turned into animals. Rewrite a fairytale (either Russian or otherwise) from the perspective of the animal character.
- The book features many illustrations which show exciting or important moments in the story. What is a scene that doesn't have an illustration? How would you draw it?
- Wolves have a very strong sense of smell. Describe where you are using only what you can smell. What does it tell someone about that place?
- The book mentions Russian foods and clothing such as *kvass* and a *sarafan*. Pick an aspect of Russian culture that is unfamiliar to you and present it to the class.



Questions while reading

Chapter 1: Sentences like “She nudged Leto and pointed with her snout” work to remind the reader that they are immersed in the world of a wolf pack. How does the author use description and senses to convey a wolf’s point of view?

Chapter 2: The author writes from a different character’s point of view in this chapter, this time focusing on Baba Yaga. What are some advantages to telling a story from multiple points of view?

Chapter 3: How does the sentence “But as she approached, she discovered that these trees were unfamiliar too. They crowded around her, strangers looming” work to give a sense of Nadya’s state-of-mind?

Chapter 4: Zima describes the witch’s words as “clinging to her like moss on stone”. What is a way that you could describe something “getting under your skin” without using that phrase?

Chapter 8: Katerina tells a story about nearly having been adopted. Why do you think the author included it? What does this story reveal about Katerina’s character?

Chapters 9: What effect does the following sentence have: “smoke drifted from the chimney in faint snoring breaths”? Why do you think the author described the hut that way?

Chapter 12: The author describes “a sharp sound—almost like the trumpet of a goose—pierced the air, three blasts.” What is the author describing and why do you think she used this way of describing it?

Chapter 20: The author uses a “flashback” to show us something that happened in Baba Yaga’s past. Why do you think she did this?

Chapter 27: Zima has her first glimpses of human life. What are some things that she notices that are unfamiliar to her, which are familiar to most humans? What effect does that have on the story?

Chapter 29: As Nadya observes the castle, what are things she notices that Zima would not? How does the author use their differing points of view to reveal different aspects of being human?

Chapter 32: Zima observes how humans are similar and different to a wolf pack, which is a running theme through the story. What are some other themes that you can identify?

Chapter 35: How do the descriptions of the tsar in this chapter tell the reader what Zima thinks of him? How do they tell the reader what to think of him?

Chapter 40: The author uses short sentences in this passage: “One minute passed. Then two. She lowered her hands and held them close to her chest to warm them. The hut wasn’t coming. And then she heard it. A distant thumping sound bashed through the trees.” What effect do you think this has on the reader?

Chapter 42: The weather gets very intense in this chapter, with a winter storm in full force. Why do you think the author decided for this to happen?

Chapter 45: How has Nadya changed over the course of the story? Have the other characters changed also?

Chapter 49: The final chapters show strong themes of togetherness and family. How is this theme presented throughout the story?

Vocabulary

Chapter 1-2

sinister, hogweed, coexist, alight, Baba Yaga, tension

Chapter 3-4

navigate, signify, unwary, craggy, crevasse, spiteful, jagged

Chapter 5-6

tsar/tsaritsa, amusement, embroidery, conqueror

Chapter 7-8

inseparable, immovable, dishonor, possess, washbasin, disobedient

Chapter 9-10

jostling, fearsome, faultless, reprimand

Chapter 11-13

reeked, bristled, commotion, anticipated, thwart

Chapter 14-16

dislodged, unite, muzzle, looming, concealed

Chapter 17-18

beckoning, untamable, instinctively, frail, sacrifice, preening, knickknacks, perplexing

Chapter 19-20

amiss, decipher, withered, threadbare, unfazed, cryptic

Chapter 21-22

unawares, engulfing, skulked, grudgingly

Chapter 23-24

undeterred, tussle, writhe

Chapter 25-26

kvass, callous, protruding

Chapter 27-28

colossal, jittery, diligent, loping

Chapter 29-30

courtiers, tapestry, illustrious, comprehension, contradict, formidable, contraption, defiance, conspiratorially, brandishing, utmost

Chapter 31-32

distressed, skepticism, punctuating

Chapter 33-34

meander, unsoiled

Chapter 35-36

ashen, mystified, spluttered, fantasized, underestimated, murky, secluded

Chapter 37-38

gruesome, sure-footed, demonstrated, agitated, averted, dislodging, contorting, thrashing, irreversible, descended

Chapter 39-40

skittered, staggered, reassurance, pivoted, certainty, contradict, successor, instructive

Chapter 41-42

astonishment

Chapter 43-44

momentum

Chapter 45-46

solemn, amplified, senseless, churning

Chapter 47-48

skeletal, inhabitants, compulsion, severing, brandished, tendrils, elation

Chapter 49-50

translucent, somber

Name: _____

Write whether each statement about wolves below is TRUE or FALSE.

- _____ 1. Wolves live in dens for their entire lives.
- _____ 2. Wolves have an alpha and an omega of their pack.
- _____ 3. Wolves are highly endangered in some countries.
- _____ 4. Wolves will not respond to human howls.
- _____ 5. Wolves are extremely aggressive and pose a major threat to campers and hikers.
- _____ 6. The eyes of newborn wolf pups are always blue.
- _____ 7. Wolves are the largest member of the dog family.
- _____ 8. Humans can run as fast as wolves.
- _____ 9. All wolves in a pack are always the same color.
- _____ 10. Wolves have been seen to be friendly and playful with ravens

Name: _____

Look at each description from *A Wolf for a Spell*. Next to the terms below, write the # of each quote that corresponds with the literary device. The first has been done as an example.

- 1. “dark tree branches beckoning her with long twig fingers.”
- 2. “Those feelings, that wanting, was a string tied around Nadya’s waist.”
- 3. “Leto lay crumpled like a wilted flower.”
- 4. “As she looked up, she could see two windows glaring down at her.”
- 5. “Without warning, the whole house shuddered and shook.”
- 6. “The omen that tolled under its bubbling current.”
- 7. “She had cooked and cleaned without complaint”
- 8. “The thunk and clang of axes rang through the air”
- 9. “The walls thumped and bumped”
- 10. “The second thought sprouted a seed of worry, of fear.”
- 11. “The words hung in the air, crackling and threatening thunder.”
- 12. “He was big as a boulder and covered in mosslike hair.”
- 13. “Firelight and warmth surged forward, cloaking her and drawing her inside.”
- 14. “Zima recognized its blood-red rubies and the glitter of gold.”
- 15. “her skirts swirled in the current.”

Simile:

Metaphor:

Personification:

1, _____

Onomatopoeia:

Alliteration:

Assonance:

Name: _____

Write whether each statement about wolves below is **TRUE** or **FALSE**.

- FALSE** 1. Wolves live in dens for their entire lives.
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TRUE 3. Wolves are highly endangered in some countries.
FALSE 4. Wolves will not respond to human howls.
FALSE 5. Wolves are extremely aggressive and pose a major threat to campers and hikers.
TRUE 6. The eyes of newborn wolf pups are always blue.
TRUE 7. Wolves are the largest member of the dog family.
FALSE 8. Humans can run as fast as wolves.
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13. “Firelight and warmth surged forward, cloaking her and drawing her inside.”
14. “Zima recognized its blood-red rubies and the glitter of gold.”
15. “her skirts swirled in the current.”

Simile:

3, 12

Metaphor:

2, 10, 11

Personification:

1, 4, 13

Onomatopoeia:

8, 9

Alliteration:

5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15

Assonance:

6, 9, 15