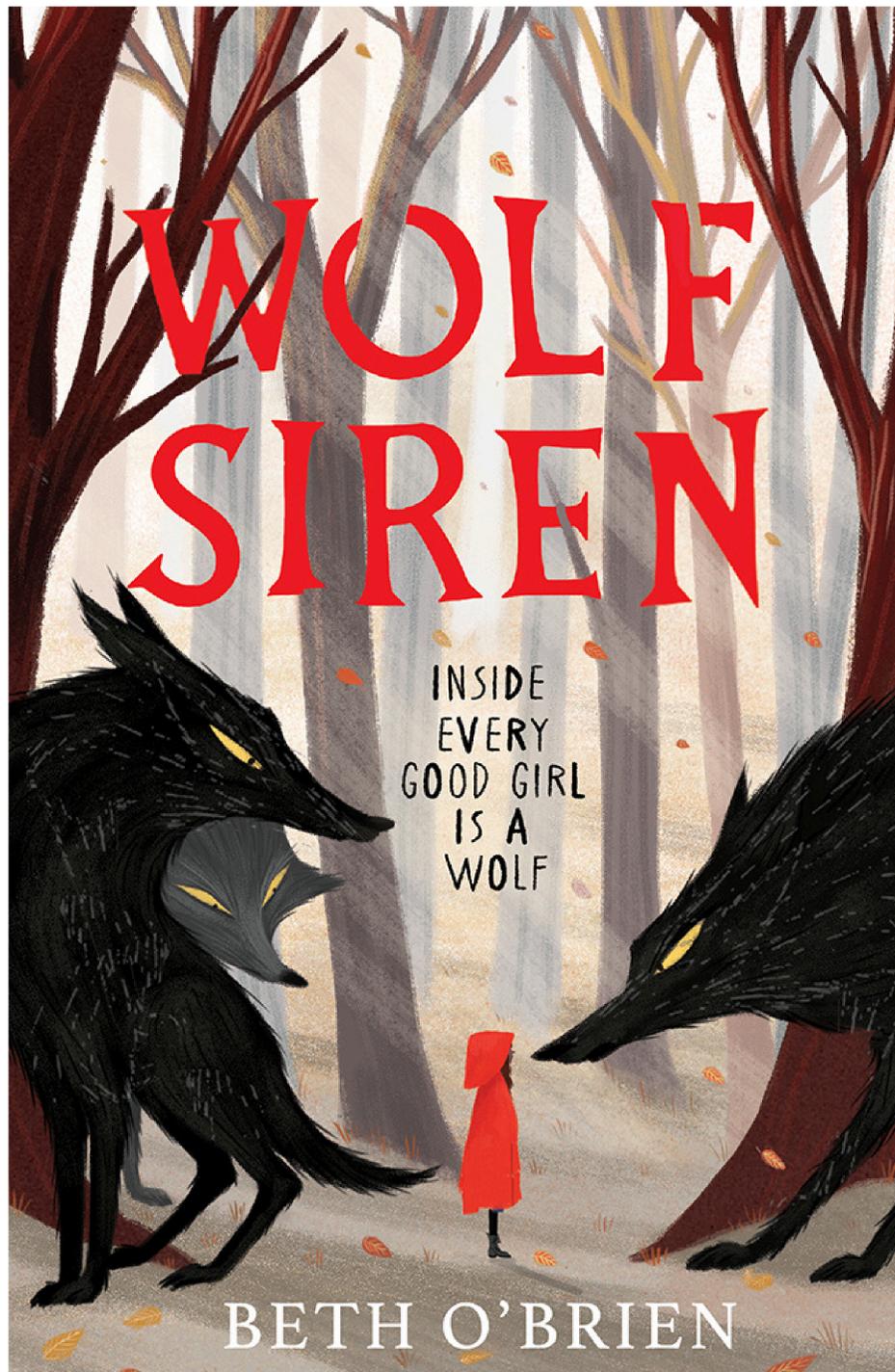


# The Carnegies



## The Carnegie Shortlist 2026 Shadowing Resources



# Wolf Siren

## Carnegie Medal for Writing

**Author: Beth O'Brien**

**Age range: 10+**

### Description:

Led by the vividly portrayed Red, the story draws on the different tropes of Red Riding Hood as we know it and masterfully subverts them. Readers are offered a window into her world and lived experience, and are offered insightful comments on the impact of psychological power. There's a boldness to this reimagined tale that is fresh and exciting.

Themes:

- Fairytales
- Empowerment
- Menstruation
- Disability
- Power
- Injustice
- Personal development
- Sexism – gender roles

### Shadowing Ideas:

1. Beth is partially sighted and writes about navigating shapes and colours. Read pages 19-34, where Red is finding her way through the forest and try a sensory test. Create an easy obstacle course with beanbags in your reading space. Choose a volunteer to blindfold and ask the rest of the group to help them navigate. The volunteer should travel around the room on foot and describe their experience.
2. Wolf Siren is a reimagining of a popular fairy tale. As a group, discuss the fairy tales you can remember, explore the different retellings in your library and experiment with writing your own. Visit <https://surlalunefairytales.com/> for inspiration.
3. Wolf Siren has been described as “a feminist fairy-tale.” Explore what this means and put together a show and tell of feminist books in your library. Check out Kate Mosse's book *Feminist History for Every Day of the Year* for inspiration- <https://www.panmacmillan.com/authors/kate-mosse/feminist-history-for-every-day-of-the-year/9781529066227>

## For Students

### About these Resources

All of these resources are designed to be completed in small discussion groups, ideally your school's Carnegie Medal for Writing Shadowing Group. However, they can easily be done individually. Instead of talking about the tasks, you can write down and keep a record of your ideas.

### Before Reading

- Discuss what you think *Wolf Siren* will be about based on these extracts. You should structure your discussion around the questions below.
  - What other novels do you think it will be like?
  - What genre of novel do you think it will be?
  - What sense do you get of where and when it will be set?
  - If you had to identify three likely themes, what would they be?

Spend 10-20 minutes on this activity.

1. The vivid green of Grandmother's new coat stood out in contrast to the dark browns around us, and a light breeze stirred up the scent of damp earth after a night of heavy rain. I held onto Grandmother's elbow as she guided me along an uneven and slippery path.

2. There is another pain with me today, too. A deep, low ache in my stomach. I ignore it, mostly, but every now and then a wrenching tears through me and, with no one around to see, I double over with the pain of it.

3. Caragh is twenty, with long straggly brown hair that she usually wears down, providing her neck with an extra layer of warmth. But today it is tied back in a ponytail that's already coming loose. She leans heavily on her shovel and wipes sweat from her brow as I join her in the clearing.

4. I know Mother is angry, but I feel as though, of the two of us, I have more reason to be angry at her. I haven't lied to her my whole life. My crime is opposite in its nature. I have been too open with her. Too honest about my love for the woods. Too much like Grandmother.

5. The wolf is waiting. Only her vague outline is visible to me. I wait for her to lead me onwards, but she stays still. As the seconds pass by, I begin to squint around at the trees close by while the wolf watches expectantly.

## During Reading

Warning: Don't read the questions before reading each section.

Read up to the page number listed and then answer the questions. You will probably need to spend about 5-10 minutes answering each set of questions.

*The page numbers are based on the Harper Collins Children's Books edition of the book, first published in the UK in 2025.*

### Read the Prologue

- In what ways does the Prologue remind you of other stories? Which ones does it remind you of – how is it similar and different?
- What did you find interesting or significant in the Prologue? You might like to think about Red, her grandmother, the woods, the wolves, the different roles given to men and women.

### Read chapters 1 and 2

- What do you learn about the woods in these chapters? Why do you think the writer chooses to present the woods like this?
- The lives of men and women in this story seem to be very different. In what ways have you noticed this? Does it make the book more appealing to boys or girls? If so, in what ways?
- What do we learn about village life in these chapters and the relationships between different people? How do you think these relationships will develop as the novel goes on? Which of the characters you have met do you think will have the most significant roles to play?

### Read chapters 3 and 4

- How does Red change physically in this chapter? How is her experience of finding out what is happening to her presented?
- What is the story in Red's grandmother Meera's background that explains what is happening to her? How do you think this will affect the story?
- What role do you think Meera has been playing in the woods since she went back?
- What are your thoughts about Red's mother Magenta and how she has kept secrets from Red?
- What did you find particularly significant or surprising in these chapters?

## Read chapters 5 and 6

- What are your thoughts about how Magenta behaves towards her family in these chapters?
- What do you think about the way Red's sister Aeronia reacts to being told she might be a wolfwoman?
- Why do you think a wolf pack has approached the village for the first time in many years, setting off the wolf siren?
- Why do you think Carragh has not come back to the village?

## Read chapters 7 and 8

- What do you think of the mayor when he first appears in the story? What seems to be his role in the village?
- Why do you think only Red and her friend, Delana, are able to get into the woods to search for Caragh? What do they find? What was your response to what you found out?

## Read chapters 9 and 10

- What happens at Caragh's funeral? Why do you think the villagers react to Red in the way that they do?
- What bond is developing between Red and Aeronia? How do you expect their relationship to grow in the rest of the novel?
- Who do you think has dismantled and stolen Red's delivery shed? Why do you think they've done this?
- These chapters end with Red spotting a wolf in the village. What do you think is going on?

## Read chapters 11 and 12

- How is Red's transformation into a wolf presented? Do you think she is happy to turn back into a human? If so, why, and how can you tell?
- What are your thoughts about how Zac and his father behave when Red returns from the woods? How are they presented in contrast to Red? How are male and female characters in the story presented in general? You might like to think about whether the village is divided along gender lines and, if so, where power and influence lie.
- What are your thoughts about the behaviour of the villagers and the way that Aeronia and Red respond? Which characters do you think are going to have the most significant roles to play from this point on and what do you think they will do?

## Read chapters 13 and 14

- What do you expect will happen now that Red, Aeronia and Delana are inside the woods?
- What is Red's response to finding her grandmother in wolf form? What happens at their meeting and how do you think this will be significant for the rest of the book?

### **Read chapters 15 and 16**

- How are the wolves operating now that Red and Aeronia have joined them? How does this contrast to life in the village?
- What are the differences between Red and Aeronia? What do you think this will mean for them as they get older?
- What do we find out about Wilson in chapter 16? How does this fit in with what you know from the novel so far?

### **Read chapters 17 and 18**

- What is your response to Aeronia's death? What about how the different villagers respond?
- With one chapter to go, how do you think the story will resolve itself? Why do you think this?

### **Read chapter 19 and the epilogue**

- What are your thoughts about how the book ends, both at the end of chapter 19 and at the end of the epilogue?

## After Reading

### Initial thoughts

Spend 10-15 minutes discussing the questions below.

- What are your overall impressions of this novel?
- Which moments stick most in your memory and why?
- Which characters do you like best and why?
- Which other novels does it remind you of and why?
- How gripping did you find the story?
- What are your thoughts about how the book was written?
- Based on reading *Wolf Siren*, how likely are you to read other novels by Beth O'Brien?

### What's *Wolf Siren* about?

- Spend one or two minutes writing down a single sentence that begins: '*Wolf Siren* is about ...'
- If you are working in a group, share your different sentences and discuss.
- Next read the sentences below that give further ideas about what the novel is about.
- If you are working in a group, spend 5-10 minutes ordering the sentences, from the one you agree with most to the one you agree with least.
- Finally, decide on the statement you agree with most. It can be one from the list or your own. Write down a few ideas about how *Wolf Siren* relates to your chosen statement.

### *Wolf Siren* is about ...

- The difficulties of transitioning from being a girl to being a woman
- The deep links that women have with nature
- The importance of acting as a community
- The special powers that lie within certain people
- How fear and greed can rip communities apart
- How certain characteristics are handed down across generations
- The importance of respecting the natural world
- The importance of standing up to bullies
- The possibility of making the world a better place.

## Exploring the Novel Further

### Other characters

The novel is told in the voice of Red, who is also the main character. There are several other characters who play a significant role in the novel.

- Write two or three sentences in the voices of 3-4 of these characters, expressing their thoughts and feelings about Red.
  - Aeron (before she dies)
  - Luki
  - Grandmother (Meera)
  - Mother (Magenta)
  - Raif Ulrica
  - Delana
  - Ms Blaeberry
  - Zac Quillem

Spend 15-20 minutes on this activity.

## Exploring *Wolf Siren*

### Who should read this book?

*Wolf Siren* is narrated by a girl and is centred around female characters. But does that mean only girls should read it?

- Write a few paragraphs expressing your thoughts about why boys should read this book.

Spend 20-30 minutes on this activity.

### A book carrying important messages

On one level, this book is an exciting fairy story, giving a very particular take on the 'Little Red Riding Hood' narrative. On another level, though, it is a book carrying important messages.

- Write down your thoughts about what the book has to say about two or three of the following:
  - Attitudes to disability
  - The importance of community
  - Standing up to power
  - The possibility of change
  - Challenging male violence
  - Intergenerational understanding.

Spend 20-30 minutes on this activity.

## Reading the reviews

The extracts, below, are all from reviews of *Wolf Siren*.

- Read all the reviews and discuss which comes closest to your own view of the book.
- Working individually, write your own paragraph expressing your views.
- If possible, share your reviews with others.

You can submit your reviews to the Carnegie Shadowing Scheme website. This can be accessed at:

[carnegies.co.uk/writing-shortlist-2026/](http://carnegies.co.uk/writing-shortlist-2026/)

Give yourself 30-60 minutes to complete this activity.

### A.

*Wolf Siren* is a beautifully written, empowering fairy-tale retelling with strong feminist energy and disability representation (the protagonist, Red, is partially sighted). I will be giving it to both my son and my daughter to read, because I think it would be valuable for both of them as an exploration of courage, difference and solidarity overcoming prejudice.

**Cara Mia, [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)**

### B.

Dark, atmospheric and thought provoking. I loved this book. I thought it would be more fairy-tale-like and it wasn't – it was so much better. Red is blind and isn't allowed into the woods because it's not safe. When her grandmother returns after years away, Red becomes more and more intrigued and things start to change for her. She makes decisions that she wouldn't have made before and begins to find herself. There are light, tender moments and some really dark moments. A super read for anyone who likes a book that they can't stop thinking about long after they've read it.

**Bookgirl888, [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)**

### C.

Hauntingly beautiful and deeply original, *Wolf Siren* completely pulled me in. Beth O'Brien blends mythology, emotion, and lyrical writing in a way that feels almost hypnotic. The main character's voice is powerful, raw, and unforgettable.

Every page feels like a quiet storm full of longing, strength, and mystery. This is the kind of book you read with your heart wide open. Dark and poetic, but with light breaking through at just the right moments. I'm still thinking about the last lines.

Highly recommended for readers who love stories that speak to both the soul and the wild.

**L. Reads, [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)**

### D.

I really liked the fairy tale setting for this novel and thought I'd enjoy reading such a different take on the *Little Red Riding Hood* story. Ultimately, though, I found the book a bit messy, probably because it was trying to do too much. It wasn't just about a girl transitioning into womanhood, it also tried to be about environmental protection, the abuse of power, generational relationships and so on. Too much!

**Anonymous**

## Writing Activities

On your own, or with a partner, complete one or more of these writing activities to help you develop your thoughts about *Wolf Siren* further.

You will need 30-60 minutes for each activity.

### Animal transformation

Some of the most thrilling moments of *Wolf Siren* are when Red and Aeron transform into wolves and we are given a description of what this is like.

- Imagine you have the power to transform into an animal of your choice. Which animal would it be? Write a description of what it would be like to be this animal. You might describe the sensation of running, of being with other animals, or of being around humans.

### Fairy-tale transformation

*Wolf Siren* takes elements of *Little Red Riding Hood* and makes something new from the traditional fairy tale.

- Adapt a fairy tale of your choice into something new. You can set your fairy tale in an imagined past, or in a realistic present. You could even set it in the future!