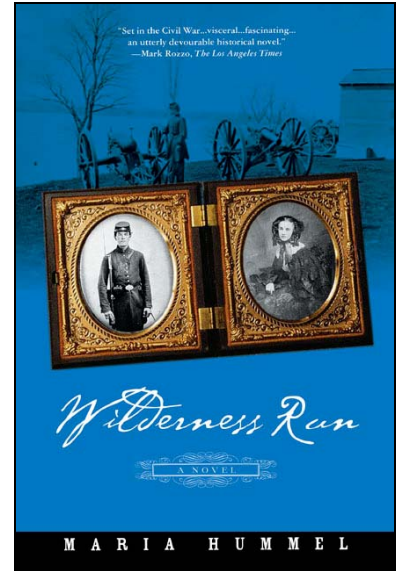


READING GROUP GUIDE

Wilderness Run

by Maria Hummel

St. Martin's Press/Griffin
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Introduction to *Wilderness Run*

Intimate details of nineteenth-century Vermont life and visceral scenes of Civil War battle frame this powerful story of Isabel Lindsey and her cousin Laurence. Their encounter with a runaway slave and attempt to help him threatens to expose a simmering family secret, and catapults the teenagers far from their homeland and into the heart of the war.

A Note From The Author

“The Vermont forests are filled with old stone walls, cellar holes, and mossy wells, the remainders of people who farmed the land in the 19th century. Growing up in these woods, I was fascinated by the untold stories of such remains, and my first novel drew its inspiration from the years before and during the Civil War, when the state was covered in sheep farms, the lumber barons pitched their castles above Lake Champlain, and thousands of young men were called to fight on distant battlefields.

One day I had a vision of two children sitting on the cliffs of a frozen lake and hearing a voice below them, the voice of a runaway slave. Their decision to help him would change the rest of their lives, setting off a chain of events that would lead to one enlisting to fight and another to falling in love. So I began with ice and a winter sky and journeyed all the way to the fiery battle of the Wilderness, for which the book is named.”

Praise for *Wilderness Run*

"An utterly devourable historical novel."—Mark Rozzo, *The Los Angeles Times*

"Hummel's poetically rendered debut novel contains the stuff of great fiction..vivid..intriguing."—Lisa Robinson Bailey, *The Independent Weekly*

"Maria Hummel has heaps of talent and ambition..the reader is treated to delightful, fanciful and imaginative images."—Andrew Cline, *Greensboro NC News & Record*

"A very strong book, fascinating on both its domestic and military sides, rich with incident, romantic, filled with bright and just detail and striking characters."—Fred Chappell, author of *Look Back All the Green Valley*

"A gripping debut, shot through with poetry and violence..radiant." —Nick Flynn, author of *Some Ether*

"Hummel is a master of description and detail...[Her] novel is by turns lyrically poetic and starkly prosaic. She points up the human degradation and waste of young lives in war until it hurts."
—Margaret Grayson, Roanoke, *Virginia Times*

"A driving narrative and vivid characterization." —*Vermont Quarterly*

"Wilderness Run has many pluses, including realistic battle scenes and some lovely writing...dramatic."—Melissa MacKenzie, *Rutland Herald Vermont*

Reading Group Guide Questions

1. In the beginning of the novel, Bel and Laurence each choose to rescue the runaway slave for different reasons. What are these reasons and how do they play out in the rest of the book?
2. Bel's mother Faustina reads the cousins a story about two lovers who communicate for years via a white swan. Over the course of the book, what does the swan mean to Faustina? to Bel? to Laurence?
3. The novel contains many bloody battle scenes. How does Laurence's attitude toward battle and mass killing change from his first battle to his last?
4. Laurence has to make a terrible choice in the river at Bull Run. If you were in the same circumstance, what would you do? How would you face your comrades afterward? Does Gilbert ever forgive Laurence for Pike's death?
5. Descriptions of winter appear often in the novel. What role does the season play in the story? How does the experience of winter differ for Bel and Laurence?
6. How does music influence the lives of the soldiers?
7. Laurence carries Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* into war. How does his relationship to Whitman's poetry change over time?

8. Like many Union soldiers, Laurence's comrades first went to battle to save the Union, not necessarily to end slavery. How and why did these attitudes change over time?
9. In the early war scenes, Addison is a strong if unofficial leader in his company. What happens when he is promoted and given official responsibility for his friends' lives?
10. When Bel's mother falls down the stairs, Bel thinks her father blames her for the accident. Does he? Why or why not?
11. During wartime, desertion is a crime punishable by death. If you were in Laurence's position and had to choose between obeying martial law and saving the lives of your friends, what would you do?
12. How does the novel's language change in the section that describes the Battle of the Wilderness? Does this affect how you perceive that final battle?
13. What kind of woman do you think Bel will become at the end of the novel? How does this differ with your first vision of her on the frozen lake?

Author Biography

A native Vermonter, **MARIA HUMMEL** has won several awards for her poetry and fiction, including a Bread Loaf Fellowship, Randall Jarrell Fellowship, and Academy of American Poets Prize. She has published work in *The Georgia Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Manoa*, and *Los Angeles Magazine*, among others, and a selection of her poetry is collected in *City of the Moon* (Harperprints, 1999). She currently works as a writer and editor at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.