

WILD SONG

by Candy Gourlay

About the book: *Wild Song*

The Philippines, 1904

Sixteen-year-old Luki is the best hunter in her village, but she has to keep it a secret. Hunting is a man's skill. She's expected to marry and raise a family instead.

Chafing against these restrictions, she impulsively accepts an offer from the local American authorities: they're looking for volunteers to travel to the United States for the World's Fair, where Indigenous peoples from around the world will be represented.

Luki and others make the long journey to Saint Louis, Missouri, for the fair, where they're "exhibited" in a replica village. But even as Luki makes friends and discovers a wider world that intrigues her, she learns dangerous secrets and difficult truths. Facing pressures from all sides, she must decide what kind of future she wants after the fair.



About the author: Candy Gourlay

Growing up in the Philippines, Candy Gourlay wondered why all the books she loved only featured pink-skinned children who lived in snow-covered worlds unlike her tropical home in Manila. It took her years to fulfil her dream of becoming an author—and years to learn that Filipino stories too, belong in the pages of books. Candy's novels for young readers have been published to acclaim and listed for many prizes such as the Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Children's Book Prize. She lives in London with her family, where she wages war on the snails in her garden.

Have a look at [Candy's website](#) where she tells us all about herself:

<https://www.candygourlay.co.uk/about-candy>

Candy dedicates this book *Wild Song* to her cousin Susan Quimpo, who was a Filipino activist in the 1970s when students rose up against the brutality of the dictator there. Here is a tribute that Candy wrote about Susan's life:

<https://www.candygourlay.com/2020/07/dear-susan-tribute-to-my-cousin-susan.html>



Photo by: Still Moving Media

Thinking and talking about *Wild Song*

Here are some questions to get you thinking and talking about this book and its themes.

- How did you feel about *Wild Song* when you'd finished it?
- Where were you when you read it?
- Did the cover make you want to read it?
- What kind of a book did you think it was going to be?
- Did it grip you right from the start?
- Did you want to read it right to the end?
- What do you remember most about it?
- Did you skip any parts? Which ones?
- What was the thing you most liked finding out from this book?
- Which character did you like best and why?
- Was there any character you really didn't like? Why not?
- Have you read any other books by this author? Which ones?
- If not, has this book encouraged you to read more by her?
- If you gave up on this book, can you say why?
- What would you tell your friends about this story?

Why do you think this book is called *Wild Song*?

Have a look at the words on the back of the book's cover.

You can find several songs in this story: about the tree where Luki is sitting at the start of the singing of the ocean, and about the call of adventure.

The ocean was singing. And then, slowly, beneath the waves, something moved...a great eye opened... (p 69)

What do you think Luki is seeing here? And probably hearing as well?

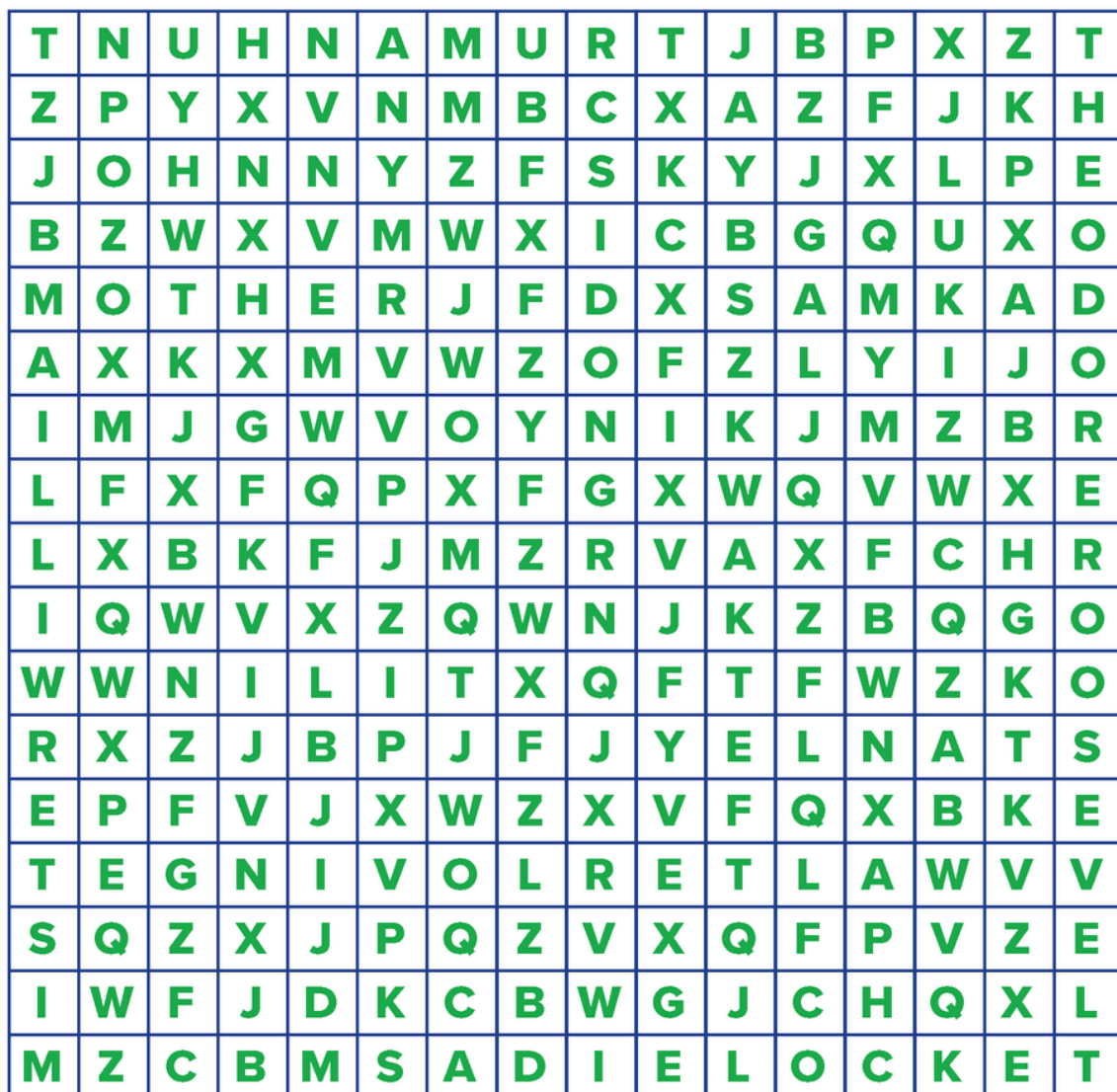
And then I heard it...A song unlike anything we had heard at the World's Fair... It was calling to me. It was home. (p307)



Wordsearch: the people in the story

Here are the names of thirteen characters who appear in *Wild Song*.

Look for them in the squares—across, down, up, and from right to left



LUKI SAMKAD SIDONG TILIN KINYO MOTHER

SADIE LOCKET TRUMAN HUNT JOHNNY STANLEY

THEODORE ROOSEVELT MISTER WILLIAM WALTER LOVING

When you have found the names, talk about each character: who they are and the part they play in the story. Think of at least one word to describe each person.

Choose from this list or add your own description:

impetuous adventurous curious responsive brave mischievous

kind patient artistic caring manipulative helpful loved



More to think and talk about

Wild Song is set in the Philippines in the early 20th century. The main character is Luki, a teenage girl from the Bontok tribe living in the highlands, who travels to America to take part in the 1904 World's Fair in St Louis. She tells her story and how the events and attitudes of the time impact their lives. At the end of the book you'll find a section with information about *What Happened Next*.

Americans in the Philippines in 1904

Get a map of the world, in an atlas or online, and find out where the Philippines is in relation to America, so you can follow the journeys that Luki and Samkad took to America and back. Look for these cities, which were the main stopping places on their journeys: **Manila, Tacoma, St. Louis, and San Francisco**.

The Americans had finished their warring and turned their attention to ruling us. So many new laws! (p 3)

In the late 19th century, the United States was building an empire, and after the Spanish-American war in 1898 they took control over Cuba, annexed Hawaii, and claimed Puerto Rico and the Philippines as territories. They did this because they were looking for new markets for their industrial products—and because of their belief in the racial and cultural superiority of America.

From 1899 to 1902, Filipinos fought with the American invaders in the Philippine-American war. Even after the US declared victory, there were further skirmishes for years.

In Bontok we'd become used to Americans changing what was normal. (p 45)

Make a list of all the Americans' rules and changes you find in this story, and make a note next to each one saying how Luki's people felt about it and how you think you would've felt in their place.

Going to America

I had thought of him as a benevolent father, inviting us to come to America so that he could meet us for himself and hold us close. (p 245)

Why did Luki believe this about President Roosevelt? What does she find out about him that changes her expectations?

"It will be grand, it will be an adventure!" (p 36)

Why did some people think this? And why did others speak against taking up the invitation?

What were Luki's and Tilin's main reasons for going to America? Why did Samkad go?

And it enraged me that I had ever believed America would change my life. (p 244)

Even though Luki eventually returns home, do you think she's right in thinking that her life hasn't changed? See what she says below. What differences do you think there could now be in her life?

...I couldn't help thinking about how much more I knew now than when we were making our way over. (p 251)

Imagine her future life. What do you think Luki might be doing ten years on from her American adventure?

Think of when you have visited somewhere new: going on vacation, starting a new school, or moving to a new town. How did you feel before you went there? What did you think it would be like? What was it like when you were actually there? What differences were there from what you had expected?



Being on show

... Theodore Roosevelt, the President of the United States, would like to invite us to visit America. (p 21)

Why did the Americans want to bring people from all over the world and put them on show at the World's Fair?

What do you think about this? How would you feel if this happened to you?

Look at the two descriptions below, showing different aspects of Luki's experience in America and her feelings about it.

They stared at us with wide eyes and big grins on their faces. They reached out as if they were desperate to touch us. (p 73)

I realized that we were just as much an attraction of the fair as all these fine buildings. It certainly made me walk a little bit taller...I felt that I had made the right decision to come to America. (p 133)

What arguments were there for and against Luki's people agreeing to be on show in the World's Fair and agreeing to perform activities which for them had a religious significance?

Explain the arguments in the chart below, and see what further arguments you could add.

ARGUMENTS FOR	ARGUMENTS AGAINST
<i>It certainly made me walk a little bit taller... (p 133)</i>	<i>"There is no reason to sing and dance." (p 131)</i> Why does Samkad say this?
<i>All they could hear were the clinking of coins in their imaginations. (p 197)</i>	<i>"We would never display skulls back home." (p 99)</i> Why not?
	<i>"There is no such thing as a dog feast" (p 197)</i>

Today there are still situations where people enact cultural and historical experiences for audiences, from living history exhibits to performances of traditional dances and ceremonies.

Why do you think people take part in these activities, and why do people watch them?



Igorots

...we may have started out as different peoples—Bontoks, Tinguian and Suyocs—but we were Igorots now... (p 97)

...the whole of America was calling us Igorot and we might as well be at ease with it. (p 100)

This is the collective name that was used for all the different tribes in the Cordilleras, mountains in the north of the Philippines.

What other peoples in this story are generalized under a collective name?

What does this tell you about what the Americans thought of them?

“Indians don't look like one people.” “No, they're not, but it's easier to just call them Indians.”... Oh, just like it's easier to call us all Igorot! (p. 177)

Attitudes and beliefs

But yesterday, two Americas had been revealed to me...One that was unafraid of change, that offered all kinds of choices and adventures and exciting possibility...And then there was the other America, the one that didn't think Igorot children would like to draw with Crayolas. (p 200)

It seemed so ridiculous to divide the world according to skin color. (p 219)

What American laws and practices during this time separated people of color and white people? What impacts did this have on people's daily lives?

Clothes

“Should the Filipinos be exposed to the American public in their dusky birthday robes?” (p 164)

In their new outfits, the men turned into sad, hunched creatures who couldn't look anyone in the eye. (p 166)

Why doesn't it work when the World's Fair organizers try to make the Filipino people wear American clothes?

“It doesn't just change me on the outside, it changes me on the inside.” (p 161)

This is what Sadie Locket says about the clothes she wears for her act in the Wild West Show.

List all the reasons you can think of for wearing clothes.

List the different kinds of clothes you wear for various occasions and purposes. How does each make you feel?

What are your favorite clothes—and what don't you like wearing?

A woman's place

“I will allow you to do it!” (p 31)

Why is Luki so angry when Samkad says this?

“The ancients esteem women. We bear children. We plant the rice, we cultivate the soil. We are the future.” (p 7)

This is what Luki's mother has told her. Do you think this means women shouldn't do the same things as men?

There was so much I wanted to tell her...About wanting things that women weren't supposed to have. (p 155)

What does Luki find out from Sadie Locket about American attitudes toward women?



Luki and Samkad

At the start of this book Luki and Samkad are teenagers who have been childhood friends and are now in love with each other. However their relationship has lots of ups and downs throughout their American adventure.

Here are some quotes following the path of this relationship. Make a storyboard, with a picture and speech bubbles illustrating each quote, telling their story.

But now we were sixteen and everything had changed. (p 5)

"I will allow you to do it!" (p 31)

Then I bent down, scooped up his legs, and heaved him over the side, into the sea. (p 62)

I stayed away even though I wanted to tell him about every new thing. (p 68)

...after they took Tilin away, things changed between Samkad and me. I found myself welcoming his company. (p 128)

I was glad I hadn't married Samkad...I never would've had this much fun. (p 173)

"I wish I had never come to America," Samkad said. "...I haven't protected anyone!" (p 230)

At the beginning of this long journey back... there were only silences between Samkad and me. ...But...something between us was changing. (p 253)

...we stepped off our steamer's tilting deck onto Manila's solid ground. (p 256)

I had left the village because I did not want to become a wife, and now I was returning with a daughter. (p 258)

And now we sat, talking and remembering. (p 262)

The World's Fair at St Louis

At the end of this book the section called *What Happened Next* gives more information about people and events in the story.

Using reference books and online research, see what more you can find out about this 1904 World's Fair.

"It is no ordinary celebration, it is a World's Fair!...The best of America will be on display..." ...there would be grand buildings and statues...and people from faraway lands dressed in different costumes...new technology such as machines that could send and receive messages through thin air, there would be cars that could fly... (p 85-86)

Sadie Locket is a fictional character, but there was certainly a Wild West Show at the Fair—and there was a female American sharpshooter who starred in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show at previous World's Fairs.

She was called **Annie Oakley**—see if you can find out more about her.



Writing and drawing

- **Emotions on seeing a place**

...that first time you took me into the forest. (p 132) And now I could feel my heart racing in my chest again, to the fair's own belting song...like a door had been wrenched open and a new world revealed to us. (p 133)

Think of a place that is special for you. Describe it and say how it makes you feel. Draw a picture of it.

- **Feeling happy**

I had this strange sensation, as if the slight morning breeze was blowing not just on my face, but inside me. It made me smile. (p 154)

Luki is feeling excited about exploring the fair, accompanied by Johnny. Write about a time when you have felt especially happy.

- **Things never seen before**

Here is Luki's description of ice cream, the first time she sees one:

It was a crunchy kind of biscuit rolled into a cone, with something inside, something cold. (p 206)

And here is her description of snow, another new experience:

...I felt something brush against my face. It was just a touch, like a cold fingertip tapping my nose...I felt it again. And again. (p 103)

Pick a familiar object—an airplane, a cell phone, a candy bar, etc.—and imagine you've never seen it before. How would you describe it?

- **The scene that affected you the most**

Choose a scene from the book that stuck with you and draw it. Or pick one of the examples below to draw.

Scene A

At first America was just a shadow on the horizon...And then it became longer and darker. And soon we could see green swathes that could be trees, and the shapes of rocks...we were sailing between islands... (p 70)

Scene B

The city was called Tacoma and...in the lowering sun, the sweep of brick buildings gleamed like gold. Hundreds of columns of smoke spiraled from every rooftop. It was a hilly place, the buildings seeming to stack one on top of the other. From the boat, the horse-drawn carts moving up and down steep streets looked tiny. Behind the city loomed a great white mountain. (p 70)



More reading

AUTHOR	TITLE & SYNOPSIS	PUBLISHER	ISBN
Books by Candy Gourlay			
Illustrated by Francesca Chessa	<i>Is it a Mermaid?</i> A plump, splashy dugong tries to convince two children that she is a mermaid.	Otter-Barry	978-191-959732
	<i>Shine</i> Myths and ghosts haunt the story of Rosa, who must hide herself away.	Tamarind	978-1848531321
	<i>Tall Story</i> All Bernardo wants is to join his mother and sister in London. But when his visa finally arrives, he has turned into an eight foot giant.	Yearling	978-0385752336
Books about Identity			
George Takei, Justin Eisinger, Steve Scott, Harmony Becker	<i>They Called Us Enemy</i> The Star Trek star's graphic novel recounts his childhood years imprisoned as an enemy alien during World War II.	Top Shelf Productions	978-1603094504
Gene Luen Yang	<i>American Born Chinese</i> This award-winning graphic novel is about growing up with the American Dream when nobody sees anything American about you.	First Second	978-1250811899
Ayesha Harruna Attah	<i>The Deep Blue Between</i> In 1890s West Africa, twin sisters Hassana and Husseina are torn apart by violence and must build individual lives for themselves an ocean apart. But the choices they make may eventually reunite them.	Lerner Publishing Group	978-1728442884
Jennie Liu	<i>The Red Car to Hollywood</i> In 1920s Los Angeles, a Chinese American girl befriends a rising film star.	Lerner Publishing Group	978-1728493213
Catherine Johnson	<i>Freedom</i> 12-year-old Nathaniel is enslaved but when his master sends him on a ship to England, where slavery has ended, he thinks he will soon be free.	Scholastic	978-1407185484



More reading – continued

AUTHOR	TITLE & SYNOPSIS	PUBLISHER	ISBN
Books Set in the Philippines			
Erin Entrada Kelly	<i>The Land of Forgotten Girls</i> Sol and Ming's dad move them from the Philippines to Louisiana where an evil stepmother awaits. Then their father leaves.	Greenwillow Books	978-0062238658
Gail D. Villanueva	<i>My Fate According to the Butterfly</i> Sab has complicated family troubles and then she sees a giant black butterfly, an omen of death, and she knows that she's doomed!	Scholastic	978-1338310504
Marie Miranda Cruz	<i>Everlasting Nora</i> Nora is an informal settler who calls the sprawling Manila North Cemetery her home. When Nora's mother goes missing, she must use all her wits to put her little family back together again.	Starscape	978-0765394590

Wordsearch: Solution





Wild Song

Ages 13 - 18 HC: 979-8-7656-6263-2 • \$19.99 (list)

EB: 979-8-7656-7322-5 • \$33.32 (list) • \$24.99 (S&L)



Candy Gourlay was born in the Philippines and went to an all-girls convent school called St Theresa's College in Quezon City where she discovered a love of reading and writing. Candy began her writing career as a journalist during the People Power Revolution. After marrying her husband and raising three children she began writing novels. Her work now includes *Shine*, *Bone Talk*, and *Wild Song*. Candy now lives in London, UK.

Photo Credit: Still Moving Media