

# Study Guide for Spirit in the Rainforest

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Eric Wilson makes a point of visiting the places in which he sets his stories. Before writing *Spirit in the Rainforest*, he travelled to the west coast of Vancouver Island, where he walked the white sands of Long Beach, explored the rainforest after dark, and traveled on the Lady Rose. Eric's concern for our environment comes through clearly in this fascinating story.

## Pre-reading suggestions

On a map of Canada, locate British Columbia, Vancouver and Victoria. (Be sure to emphasize that Victoria, not Vancouver, is the capital of B.C. Many children seem to feel that the larger of the two, the one on the mainland, should be the capital.) Most B.C. maps include an enlarged inset map of Vancouver Island. In order to locate the places in this story, a detailed map of the island is needed.

If you would like to read more about this area, check your school or public library for the Spring 1988 edition of *Beautiful British Columbia Magazine*. This was a special edition entitled "Rediscovering Vancouver Island". In particular, a chapter entitled "The West Coast" describes, in words and pictures, the magnificence of the area in which the story is set. Write to the tourism branch of the Government of British Columbia for maps and illustrative brochures. Students may have traveled to the area and could possibly bring in some slides or prints of some of the settings.

Note the list of organizations at the end of the story. If you want to know more about protecting our environment, write to one or more of these groups.

## QUESTIONS

### Literal

1. Why was Tom visiting Vancouver Island?
2. Explain why there was a protest going on.
3. How did Tom find out about the "accident" at the private school on Nearby Island?
4. What is the meaning of the word "Pacific" in Pacific Ocean?
5. Vernya and Major Tosca, on at least three occasions, try to fool insurance companies. Can you tell about two of their insurance "scams"?

### Inferential

6. On page 109, Tom asks Vernya, "But why keep people away? What's going on here?" At this point, why did you think Vernya was trying to keep people away from the old school?
7. The Pacific Rim Highway was paved in the early 1970s. What effect would this have had on communities such as Tofino and Ucluelet?

8. Why do you think the Canadian government established Pacific Rim National Park?
9. Vernya Tosca was willing to sell the trees from her property. Why do you think that other people were trying to stop the logging operation?

### **Critical**

10. The Greenpeace organization is a group of people famous for struggling to protect our environment. How do you feel about people who would bury themselves in the sand to stop advancing bulldozers, or would put themselves in danger by using little rubber Zodiac boats to try to stop huge whaling ships?
11. The "Finnish method" insists that logging companies plant young trees after cutting an area. If a company fails to reforest a cleared area, a large deposit of money is forfeited. What responsibility do you think logging companies have for reforestation programs?

### **Research**

12. Using a detailed map of Vancouver Island, locate each of the following places:
  - Ucluelet (Ukee)
  - Tofino
  - Long Beach
  - Port Alberni
  - Barkley Sound
  - Broken Group Islands
  - Effingham Inlet
  - Cathedral Grove
13. Using the same map, plan a route, by boat, from Port Alberni to Tofino.
14. In pamphlets about Vancouver Island's natural wonders, you should be able to find information about the famous Cathedral Grove.
15. Describe the kind of trees you would see there.

## **ANSWERS**

1. (p. 2) "He'd simply flown out to be a summer guest of a B.C. family his mother had known for years."
2. (pp. 2-3) The owner of Nearby Island had let out a contract to have the island "clear-cut". Environmental groups objected, saying this would mean the destruction of eight-hundred-year-old cedars.
3. (p. 36) Tom did his research at the local library, using newspaper clippings from the vertical file.
4. (p. 46) Pacific means "peaceful".
5. (p. 118) "The simple answer was to fake her death. But of course, the insurance company would want proof before they'd pay up. So, she needed to die at sea, where her body could be lost forever . . ."  
(p. 124) "And now, my darling. It's time to set the school on fire . . . We can make a small

fortune."

(p. 137) " . . . torched their first house for the insurance money."

6. Answers will vary.
7. Answers will vary, but could include comments about increased tourist traffic, easier and quicker delivery of goods to the area by truck rather than by boat, and more logging companies taking an interest in the area.
8. The park was established to help preserve the natural beauty and wildlife in the area.
9. People feared destruction of the island due to having the large old trees removed. Removal of trees usually allows soil erosion to take place, creating additional scars on the landscape.
10. Answers will vary.
11. Answers will vary.
12. Answers will match detailed map.
13. Answers will vary.
14. Cathedral Grove, near Port Alberni, is a protected forest area of massive 800-year-old Douglas firs. Some of the trees are 3 meters across, and as high as 76 meters.
15. Planting seedlings is one method of reforesting an area.