



Where the Red Fern Grows Study Guide

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For the novel by Wilson Rawls



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Synopsis

*“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,
who have been called according to his purpose.”*

—Romans 8:28

There is nothing Billy Colman wants more than a pair of hunting dogs, but times are tough for farming families in the Ozarks. “Maybe some day when we can afford it, you can have them,” Billy’s father tells him, “but not right now.”

But Billy doesn’t give up. Determined to get a pair of hunting dogs, Billy finds ways to raise the money. With great patience, Billy saves all the money he can, and after two years he is finally able to buy his hunting dogs.

Billy works with Old Dan and Little Ann as often as he can, training them to track and tree coons, and teaching them how to avoid “Old Ringtail’s” tricks. Though his dogs bring him pleasure, there are trials ahead for Billy as well. But through hard work, patience, and perseverance, Billy ultimately understands how God uses all things in life to answer the prayers of his family.

Chapters 10–13

The fame of my dogs spread all over our part of the Ozarks. They were the best in the country. No coon hunter came into my grandfather's store with as many pelts as I did. Grandpa never overlooked an opportunity to brag. He told everyone the story of my dogs, and the part he played in getting them.

Vocabulary:

The following terms apply to the physical features or terrain of the land. Match each word to its definition.

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. ____ bottoms | a. a submerged, or partly submerged bank of land along a shore |
| 2. ____ eddy | b. a small valley or basin |
| 3. ____ trough | c. a thicket of woody stems |
| 4. ____ channel | d. low land along a watercourse |
| 5. ____ shallows | e. a shallow area in a body of water |
| 6. ____ canebrake | f. the deeper part of a river |
| 7. ____ slough | g. a small whirlpool |
| 8. ____ bar | h. a level surface of land |
| 9. ____ flats | i. a long and narrow or shallow channel or depression |
| 10. ____ hollow | j. a place of deep mud or mire; swamp |

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5. Billy wonders what Old Dan would do if Little Ann got into some kind of predicament. How does Old Dan behave when little Ann falls through the ice?
6. How does Billy save Little Ann from being pulled under the ice?
7. Why do you think Billy's grandfather makes a bet with the Pritchard boys? What are the specifics of the wager they make?

Thinking About the Story:

8. *Irony* occurs when there is a difference between what is expected and what actually happens. For example, *irony* can be seen in Psalm 7: 15, 16:

He who digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit he has made. The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head.

It is *ironic* that the violent person described in the psalm is done in by his own violence.

What is *ironic* about how Rubin Pritchard dies?

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9. An author's *style* is his unique way of writing. Wilson Rawls structures many of the chapters of *Where the Red Fern Grows* by beginning with a statement, problem, or question and then giving the answer as the chapter progresses. For example, Chapter 2 begins with Billy's statement: "I suppose there's a time in practically every young boy's life when he's affected by that wonderful disease of puppy love." The narrator then proceeds to explain what happens when he was affected by this "disease." Likewise, at the beginning of Chapter 7 we read, "Now that I had my pups another obstacle had cropped up." The author then proceeds to tell about that problem and how it is resolved.

Look at the beginning of Chapter 11. What question is presented at the beginning of this chapter? How is it answered by the rest of the chapter?

What statements are made at the beginning of Chapter 12? What happens as a result?

10. The *mood* of a story is the feeling the author creates for the reader. An author sets the mood through the use of words, phrases, or descriptions that have feelings connected to them. For example, if an author wishes to set a mood of gloom or sadness, he may write about cold rain or damp fog.

What moods are evident during the hunt for the "ghost coon" in Chapters 12 and 13? What words, phrases, or descriptions help create these moods?

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7. The family can't afford them.

Thinking About the Story:

8. Billy first tries to get his dogs by begging his parents and being a pest. In Chapter 3, Billy works and saves the money. Billy finds a hunting magazine and sees an advertisement announcing the sale of hunting dogs. He then remembers that his mother once said, "God helps those who help themselves." Because of this, he prays for God to help him and decides to work and save the money.

9. Billy caught and sold crawfish and minnows. He picked and sold vegetables, wild blackberries, and wild huckleberries. He trapped, skinned, and sold possums and skunks. He also saved his money, giving up buying anything for himself.

10. Billy says that God gave him the "heart, courage and determination."

11. Billy's begging makes his mother angry and later very concerned because he has lost weight and isn't sleeping. Billy's whole attitude about getting hunting dogs changes once he starts working toward that goal. He pursues this goal with excitement.

12. Billy has learned to ask God for help. He has also learned hard work, courage, and determination.

Dig Deeper:

13. Answers may vary slightly. Psalm 46:1: God can help Billy through his troubles and be his source of strength. Proverbs 12:11: If Billy works for what he needs, he will have it. Proverbs 14:23: If Billy only *talks* about getting dogs (as in his begging) he probably won't achieve much. Proverbs 18:9: If Billy doesn't work very hard for his goal, it's the same result as if he didn't work at all. Isaiah 50:7: If God is helping Billy in his work, Billy will not be disgraced.

14. Answers will vary.

15. Billy learns that God does answer prayer. He knew it was God who gave him the "heart, courage, and determination" to raise the money through hard work.

Chapters 4–6

Vocabulary:

Answers will vary. Accept reasonable responses.

Questions:

1. Billy sneaks away because it is hard for him to wait to get a ride to town, and he doesn't want his parents to know yet.

2. Billy buys overalls for his father, cloth for his mother, and candy for his sisters. He does this to make amends for leaving home without telling anyone.

3. The teasing of the town children ruins Billy's day.

4. One of the children pulls on an ear of the female pup. Billy can ignore it when the children are teasing him, but he feels as if he must defend his dogs. "I hadn't worked two long hard years for my pups to have some freckle-faced punk pull their ears."

5. The Sheriff admires Billy's "grit," or his hard work and perseverance.

6. Billy hears the cry of a mountain lion. His pups both react strongly to the mountain lion. The male dog runs to the mouth of the cave and bawls out a challenge, and both dogs sit rigidly side by side trying to catch a scent of the animal. Billy's father tells him that a mountain lion won't bother a person unless it's wounded or cornered.

7. Billy finds the names carved into a tree at the fisherman's camp.

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Dig Deeper:

11. When Billy prayed that God would help him finish the job of chopping down the tree, he wondered whether God answered his prayer, or if the tree happened to fall by coincidence.

This time, after he prays for help in saving Little Ann's life, how is Billy's response different?

Read the story about the ten lepers in Luke 17:11–19. Why does Jesus commend the one who returns?

12. Read Philippians 4:6. What does this verse teach us about how to pray?

Do you think it's important to express thankfulness? Why or why not?

13. What words or phrases are used to describe Billy's feelings about the Pritchards at the beginning of Chapter 12?