Based on
Where the Red Fern Grows
By Wilson Rawls

About the Book:
Ten-year-old Billy Colman is desperate to have two coon dogs of his own for hunting. His parents can’t afford them, but with the aid of his grandpa, Billy’s dream comes true after two years’ worth of hard work and determination. The relationship between Billy and his pups is undeniable, unbreakable, and so special that it creates jealousy among his neighbors. When Billy is challenged to prove the worth and praise of his dogs as coon hunters, he meets the challenge, but with devastating consequences. After the sadness, can Billy embrace the power that’s found only ... where the red fern grows?

Set the Stage:
Use the following to get the students ready to read:

• What does fate mean to you? What is the definition of this word in the dictionary?
• Have you ever had a special relationship with a pet? Describe that relationship.
• How do you feel about hunting?
• What are some ways that people know animals are angry with them and want to be left alone?
• Have you ever wanted a pet, but your parents wouldn’t allow you to have it? What was the pet? What were your parents’ explanations as to why you couldn’t have this pet?
• What are hound dogs known for being able to do that other dogs can’t?
• If you could have any dog in the world as a pet, what breed of dog would you choose? Why?
• Do you believe that dogs can truly feel their owners’ emotions? Explain your answer.

Review:
After reading the book, discuss the following:

• In the beginning of the story, Billy is reminded of events from the past. What situation leads to Billy’s memories from over half a century ago?
• Describe the setting of the story.
• When Billy was 10 years old, what “disease” did he become infected with?
• What explanations do Billy’s parents give him as to why he can’t have the dogs he desires?
• How does Billy earn enough money to get two coon dogs? How long does it take him to earn the money?
• Who helps Billy get the dogs? Explain your answer with details from the story.
• After Billy gets the dogs from the train station, he encounters an awful experience. What happens to Billy?
• Describe the differences between the two dogs.
• How does Billy decide on names for the dogs? What does he name the dogs?
• Billy’s grandpa gives him some advice on how to catch coons. What advice does he give Billy? Does his advice work?
• Billy makes a promise to his dogs before they catch their first coon. What promise does he make? How does this end up being a problem for Billy?
• How does Grandpa try to help Billy so that he doesn’t have to stand guard at the big tree all night?
• Who ends up catching the coon after the big tree falls? Who kills the coon after the big tree falls?
• What does Mama make for Billy out of his first coon hide?
• Where was the one place Billy wouldn’t take his dogs? Why?
• Describe Little Ann’s near-death experience on the icy river. How does Billy save her?
• Describe the Pritchard family.
• What bet is made between Billy and Rubin Pritchard? Who facilitates this bet? How? How does Billy feel about the bet?
• What tragedy happens after Billy’s coons and Old Blue get into a fight?
• What important newspaper article does Grandpa share with Billy?
• What does Billy realize is frightening to Little Ann?
• Who attends the contest with Billy?
• What happens to Grandpa during the stormiest night of the contest?
• Who wins the contest? What is the reward?
• What exactly is the “devil cat of the Ozarks”?
• What ends up being Old Dan’s fate? Little Ann?
• When Billy realizes what has happened to Old Dan, what does he do in order to try and erase the memory of the situation?
• Describe Little Ann’s actions after Old Dan’s passing.
• Who helps Billy through the trauma of his dogs’ passing? How?
• Where does Little Ann go to die?
• What is the significance of the red fern? Why do you think the author used this plant as the title of his story?

**Student Activity** *(found on the last page of this PDF):*
Students will write a journal entry from Old Dan’s point of view about their time spent in the Ozarks of Oklahoma.

**Related Activities:**
To extend students’ enjoyment of the book, try these:

- **Dog vs. Dog:** Billy’s bloodhounds are aggressive dogs. There are many breeds of dogs that react the same way, and many that act differently. Have students use the list of dog breeds below and research and compare the dogs’ temperaments. Have them name the ones they would prefer for their own pet.
  - Bloodhound
  - Poodle
  - Doberman
  - Chihuahua
  - Yorkshire Terrier
  - Rottweiler
  - Golden Retriever
  - Miniature Schnauzer
  - Beagle
  - Maltese

- **Science Study:** At the conclusion of *Where the Red Fern Grows*, Billy finds a red fern growing by Old Dan’s and Little Ann’s graves. An Indian legend is explained, and a red fern is believed to have been planted by an angel in a spot that is sacred. This makes Billy feel much better about the passing of his dogs. Have students research a red fern plant and ask them to draw a picture of what it looks like and describe the places where it can be found.

- **Working With Words:** It is important to understand the vocabulary in *Where the Red Fern Grows*. Knowing the meanings of some challenging words helps to comprehend the story. Have students define the following words from the story: coaxing, sacrifice, gawked, sycamore, bawling, wade, domain, smokehouse, belligerent, authority, quivered, scolded.

- **Map It Out:** *Where the Red Fern Grows* takes place in a valley by the Ozark Mountains in northeastern Oklahoma. Using a copy of a United States map, an atlas or a globe, ask students to find Oklahoma. See if they can locate the Ozark Mountains. What other landmarks are around this area? Ask students to draw their own outline of the state of Oklahoma on a large piece of construction paper, create a map key, and show the important resources, landforms, cities, and monuments in this state. Have students share the map and then ask them to write a journal entry about how Oklahoma compares to the state in which they live.
Name ____________________________

Diary of Old Dan
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Directions: Imagine you are Old Dan, the dog in Where the Red Fern Grows. Think about the adventures and life you shared with Billy and Little Ann. Write a journal entry from Old Dan’s point of view about your time spent in the Ozarks of Oklahoma. Draw a picture in the box below of your entry, showcasing one of the adventures.

Journal Entry: ____________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Title of Picture: ____________________________________________________________