

Chapter Charter: Questions to Guide Your Reading



Chapter 1

- Who is telling the story? When do you think the events take place?
- The narrator helps the old redbone hound. Have you or anyone in your family ever helped a stray animal? If so, when and why?
- What memories does the old dog stir in the narrator?

Chapter 2

- In what way does the action change? How can you tell?
- Billy wants a pair of hunting dogs. Have you ever wanted anything as much as Billy wants these dogs? If so, what was it and did you get it?
- Would you like to be friends with Billy? Why or why not?

Chapter 3

- What is Billy's plan to get his coonhounds? Do you think it will work? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Billy's grandfather helps him get the hounds?
- What might it feel like to work for two years to achieve your dream?

Chapter 4

- Billy walks about forty miles to pick up his puppies. Would you have gone to pick up the puppies yourself or waited for them to be delivered? Explain your answer.
- How do you think Billy feels as he walks through the town of Tahlequah?
- Why are the people in Tahlequah so cruel to Billy?

Chapter 5

- How does Billy feel when he first sees his hounds?
- Do you think Billy should have fought back when the kids teased and attacked him? Why or why not?
- Why do you think the marshal helps Billy?

Chapter 6

- What is special about the way Billy finally names his puppies? What does this scene tell you about Billy's beliefs?
- Why do you think Billy is so happy to buy gifts for his family?
- Why do Billy's parents want to move to town? Would you rather live in a small village or a big city? Explain your reasons.

Chapter 7

- Have you ever trained a pet? If so, how did you do it? If not, how do you think you might go about training an animal?
- Do you think you would be able to trap a coon as Billy does? Why or why not?
- Why does Papa make Billy take down all his traps? Do you agree with Papa's decision? Why or why not?

Chapter 8

- How does Billy feel when hunting season opens? What events in your life make you feel the same way?
- What is your first clue that Little Ann and Old Dan are great hunting dogs?
- When the dogs trap the raccoon in the old sycamore tree, Billy cuts “the giant” down. Do you agree with his decision? Why or why not?

Chapter 9

- Why is Billy so determined to cut down the tree and get the raccoon? When did you last feel as determined as Billy does to achieve a difficult task?
- How would you describe the relationship between Old Dan and Little Ann?
- Billy describes killing the coon as “savage and brutal.” Do you think people should hunt animals? Why or why not?

Chapter 10

- Why do you think Billy is such a successful raccoon hunter?
- How would you feel if you were Billy, catching so many raccoons?
- Old Dan and Little Ann are clever, determined dogs. What experiences have you had with smart, loyal animals?

Chapter 11

- How does Billy rescue Little Ann after her accident? What does this tell you about Billy’s character?
- Would you have rescued Little Ann if you had been in Billy’s shoes? Why or why not?
- How can you tell that Billy is very religious?

Chapter 12

- Would you like to be friends with the Pritchards? Why or why not?
- Do you agree with Billy's decision not to tell his parents about his plans to hunt with Rainie and Rubin? Explain your answer. Would you have told *your* parents?
- Who do you predict will win the bet, Billy or the Pritchards? Why?

Chapter 13

- Do you agree with Billy's decision not to kill the ghost coon? Why or why not?
- Explain how Rubin gets killed. How did his death make you feel?
- How can you tell that Billy is compassionate, kind, and respectful?

Chapter 14

- What event would make you feel as happy as Billy feels about entering the championship coon hunt? Why?
- Who do you think is more excited about the championship coon hunt, Billy or Grandpa? Why?
- What clues from Chapter 1 suggest that Billy will win the championship hunt?

Chapter 15

- What qualities do Little Ann and Old Dan have that make them such great hunting dogs?
- How would you feel if you were Billy, with so much riding on this contest?

- Imagine that you were one of the judges. Would you have awarded Little Ann first prize in the contest? Give your reasons.

Chapter 16

- Is the contest fair to the hunters, dogs, and raccoons? Why or why not?
- Why are raccoons so hard to hunt?
- Imagine you were Billy. How would you feel at the end of this day?

Chapter 17

- In what way does the weather become a character in this chapter?
- Imagine that you were hunting with Billy. Would you have turned back at this point? Why or why not?
- In what ways are Billy and Grandpa alike here?

Chapter 18

- How do you think Billy feels when he sees Little Ann and Old Dan covered in ice?
- Mr. Kyle says, “You can read every day where a dog saved the life of a drowning child, or lay down his life for his master. Some people call this loyalty. I don’t. I may be wrong, but I call it love—the deepest kind of love.” Do you think the dogs are showing loyalty or love? Explain your answer.
- What do you think Mama and Papa will do with the three hundred dollars that Billy wins?

Chapter 19

- Why do you think Old Dan attacks the mountain lion?
- Imagine you were Billy. If you could relive the scene with the mountain lion, what would you do differently? What would you do the same?
- Old Dan and Little Ann die within a short time of each other. How did their deaths make you feel?

Chapter 20

- How does the family feel about leaving the Ozarks?
- What is the legend of the red fern?
- How can you tell that Billy has come to accept the death of his beloved dogs?



Plot: What's Happening?

"I suppose there's a time in practically every young boy's life when he's affected by that wonderful disease of puppy love."

—Billy, *Where the Red Fern Grows*

Where the Red Fern Grows is the story of a boy's love for his two hunting dogs. It's also about life in the rural Ozark mountains in the early part of this century, about family, love, and faith.

The story is told by Billy Colman, now an adult. On the way home from work, Billy breaks up a savage dogfight. He rescues the old redbone hound the other dogs were attacking. The dog makes Billy remember his childhood. The next night, after letting the redbone hound go free, Billy thinks about the two red hunting dogs he had as a child. He remembers how much they meant to him.

Then the story flashes back to the past. Billy is still telling the story, but now he is ten years old. Billy, his parents, and his younger sisters live on a farm in the Ozark Mountains in Oklahoma. Have you ever wanted something so badly that it's

more important than food and sleep? That's how Billy feels about hunting dogs. He wants two coonhounds more than anything else in the world, but his papa does not have enough money to buy them. It is the Great Depression and Billy's family, like so many other families, is very poor.

Billy works small jobs for two years and saves up the money to buy the hounds. Only then does he tell his plan to his grandpa, who helps arrange the purchase. Months later, the dogs arrive at the train depot at Tahlequah, more than twenty miles away. Billy is too excited to wait a week for a ride. What does he do? He walks there! Billy takes some food and sneaks out of the house at night without telling anyone his plan.

In Tahlequah, grown-ups as well as kids make fun of Billy because his clothes are patched and he is barefoot. Since the puppies cost less than advertised, Billy has money left over. Because he is generous, he buys nice gifts for his family.

The kindly stationmaster gives Billy his puppies. Billy holds them and cries. He walks through town with the puppies in his sack as people stare and laugh at him. A gang of kids beats up Billy and hurts his puppies. The town marshal breaks up the mob and helps Billy brush off. He gains respect for Billy when he learns how long he worked for the pups. He buys Billy his first bottle of soda pop.

On his long walk home, Billy names the male puppy Old Dan and the female puppy Little Ann. Back at home, Billy gives his family the gifts he bought and tells everyone about his adventures.

During the summer and fall, Billy teaches his hounds how to hunt raccoons. The dogs are quick learners. They make a great team: No raccoon can outsmart Little Ann, and Old Dan is strong and sure. More than that, the dogs are loyal to each other and to Billy.

The dogs trap their first raccoon in a huge sycamore tree. Billy spends days cutting down the tree. When it finally topples over, the coon runs out, and the dogs attack. Billy returns home happily. He believes that God helped him by sending a wind to help knock down the tree.

Billy hunts every night and traps many coons. Grandpa helps him sell the skins. Billy and the dogs have many exciting adventures. During one adventure, Little Ann falls into the icy river and almost dies. Billy saves her.

One day, the cruel Pritchard boys, Rubin and Rainie, bet Billy that his dogs can't "tree" (trap in a tree) the "ghost coon." On the hunt, Rubin accidentally falls on Billy's ax as he tries to kill Billy's dogs. Rubin dies and Billy is very sad.

To make Billy feel better, Grandpa enters him and his dogs in a big coon hunt. Billy, Grandpa, and Papa go to the competition. On the first day, Little Ann wins as the best-looking dog and gets a silver cup.

Billy qualifies for the championship round in which his dogs kill three coons. As Billy hunts, a fierce blizzard strikes. Billy can't find his dogs in the blinding snow! He finally locates the

half-frozen dogs circling a treed coon. When they kill the fourth coon, Billy wins the championship and the three-hundred-dollar jackpot. The rescue party finds Billy, Papa, Grandpa, and the hunters with them. Billy cries when he gets the gold cup. Back home, Billy gives the three hundred dollars to his parents and the gold and silver cups to his sisters.

Soon after, a mountain lion attacks Old Dan and Little Ann. Old Dan dies of his injuries. Two days later, Little Ann loses the will to live and dies. Billy buries her beside Old Dan.

With Billy's prize money and the money he made from selling coonskins, the family moves to town in the spring. There, the children can go to school.

On the day they move, Billy goes to his dogs' graves to say good-bye. He finds a tall, beautiful red fern between the graves. He remembers the Indian legend about a little boy and girl who had been lost in a blizzard and had frozen to death. When their bodies were found in the spring, a red fern had grown between them. According to the legend, only an angel can plant a red fern, which never dies and makes the spot holy. The adult Billy thinks that he would like to go back to his home in the Ozarks. He is sure the red fern is still there.

Thinking about the plot

- How does Billy finally get his puppies?
- Why are the dogs so important to Billy? to his family?
- What part of the story did you find the most exciting? Why?