

# WHERE THE RED FERN GROWS

BY WILSON RAWLS



## ABOUT THIS BOOK

Billy Coleman works for two years to save enough money to buy two coon dogs. With his grandfather's advice and his own hard work and patience, Billy and his dogs become the finest hunting team in the area. Old Dan and Little Ann lead Billy to his proudest moment when they win the gold cup in the annual racoon hunting contest.

But the joy of Billy's victory is quickly overshadowed by sadness. Old Dan dies in the claws of a savage bobcat, and Little Ann succumbs to grief for her companion. In his efforts to deal with the death of his beloved dogs, Billy digs the graves himself and buries them among the red ferns.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITY

This story takes place during the Great Depression. What would a person living through this period of history have experienced in their everyday life? What challenges would they have encountered?

## THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

### Determination

In *Where the Red Fern Grows*, Billy Coleman's grandfather says that determination and willpower are good for a man to have. (p. 89) More than anything, Billy wants two hound dogs to train for hunting. How does Billy achieve this? What does Billy's determination to achieve his goal say about his character? At what point would it have been easier to give up? How does setting a goal and working to achieve it help a person grow and mature?

### Responsibility

Define *resilient* and *adaptable*. Was Billy more resilient or adaptable? Find as many pieces of direct evidence in the text as you can to support your answer.

### Family and Relationships

Describe Billy's family. How is his relationship with his father different from his relationship with his mother? What is Billy's relationship with his three sisters like? What role does his family play in helping him realize his goal? How are Billy's values influenced by the Depression?

## Intergenerational Relationships

In *Where the Red Fern Grows*, Billy Coleman says, "I'm sure no one in the world can understand a young boy like his grandfather can." (p. 85) What evidence from the novel indicates this understanding? Encourage students to contrast Billy's relationship with his grandfather to his relationship with his father. Why might it be easier to be a grandfather than a father? How does Billy's grandfather help him achieve his goal?

## INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

### Language Arts

Billy compares himself to Daniel Boone. (p. 9) Ask students to research Daniel Boone and explain why Billy (and later his mother) makes this comparison. Instruct students to write a short paper comparing Billy to Boone.

### Social Studies

*Where the Red Fern Grows* is set in the Ozark Mountains of Oklahoma during the Great Depression. Most of the people in this area made their living by farming or owning a small business. Ask students to find evidence in the novel of financial difficulties. How did the Great Depression create different problems for city dwellers than for those who lived in the country? Have the students research the government's role in helping people like Billy's family through the Depression.

## Social Studies and Science

Billy Coleman is an excellent hunter. How do both science and social studies apply to hunting? Ask students to research the hunting and trapping laws in their state. What state agency regulates hunting laws? Ask the student to find out about the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Then ask them to discuss how this law has changed the sport of hunting. Engage in a discussion about hunting safety rules. Ask the students to create a poster that illustrates one of the rules.

## Science

Billy Coleman learns a lot about raccoons from his grandfather. What does he learn about their behavioral characteristics? Challenge students to locate further information about the animal and identify one unusual fact.

## Math

Billy Coleman works hard to make enough money to buy two hound dogs. Find out the approximate cost of two hound dogs today. Have the students make a list of the jobs they might do to earn money to purchase the dogs. Suppose they are paid \$5.00 per hour for their work. How many hours would they have to work to earn enough money to buy the dogs? Then have them calculate the approximate cost to care for and feed the dogs for one year. They should include such things as dog food and visits to a veterinarian.

## Drama

Billy Coleman enjoys listening to his grandfather's tall tales about raccoon hunting. Ask each student to select a favorite hunting episode from *Where the Red Fern Grows*. Instruct them to tell the story as Billy might have told it to his family, including phrases like "sufferin' bullfrogs" that are indicative of the Ozark Mountains.

## Art

Divide the class into four groups, and assign each group a season of the year. Have them research the types of trees and flowers that grow in the Ozark Mountains. Ask each group to create a picture that illustrates what they might see if they drove through the Ozark Mountains during their assigned season. Allow them to use colored chalk, collage, crayons, markers, or any medium that best illustrates the beauty of the mountains in their particular season.

## Vocabulary

Explain to students the meaning of *colloquialism*. How does language use reflect the time and place of a novel? Ask students to scan Rawls's novels and point out specific colloquialisms. Then have them ask their families about colloquialisms that reflect where they grew up. Create a list of colloquial expressions.

## AWARDS

Evansville Book Award, Division III,  
Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation (1974)

Young Readers Award, Division III,  
Michigan Council of Teachers of English, Michigan (1980)

Flicker Tale Children's Book Award for the Older Child,  
North Dakota (1981)

Twelfth Annual Children's Book Award, Massachusetts (1987)

New Hampshire Great Stone Face Award (1988)

## BEYOND THE BOOK

### Internet Resources

There is no shortage of resources with more information on topics touched on in this guide. These sites will help you learn more.

#### Ozark Mountains

[ozarkmountainregion.com/](http://ozarkmountainregion.com/)

See what the Ozark Mountain region looks like today.

#### Historical Events

[onthisday.com/](http://onthisday.com/)

Have students research what happened on this day during the years of the Depression.

#### The Great Depression

[kids.britannica.com/kids/article/Great-Depression/353208](http://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/Great-Depression/353208)

This website offers more information on the Great Depression.

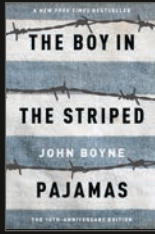
#### Redbone Coonhound Dog Breed

[akc.org/dog-breeds/redbone-coonhound/](http://akc.org/dog-breeds/redbone-coonhound/)

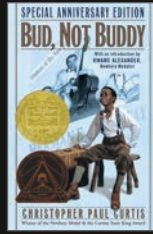
Read more about the dogs Billy raised.



## READ-ALIKE RECOMMENDATIONS



**The Boy in the Striped Pajamas**  
by John Boyne  
HC: 978-0-385-75106-3  
TR: 978-0-385-75153-7  
EL: 978-0-307-49423-8



**Bud, Not Buddy**  
by Christopher Paul Curtis  
HC: 978-0-385-32306-2  
TR: 978-0-440-41328-8  
EL: 978-0-385-72995-6



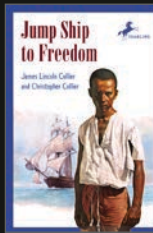
**Clean Getaway**  
by Nic Stone  
HC: 978-1-9848-9297-3  
EL: 978-1-9848-9299-7



**The Great Trouble**  
by Deborah Hopkinson  
TR: 978-0-375-84308-2  
EL: 978-0-449-81819-0



**How I Became a Spy**  
by Deborah Hopkinson  
HC: 978-0-399-55706-4  
EL: 978-0-399-55708-8



**Jump Ship to Freedom**  
by James Lincoln Collier, with  
contributions by Christopher Collier  
TR: 978-0-440-44323-0  
EL: 978-0-307-53351-7



**The Long Ride**  
by Marina Budhos  
HC: 978-0-553-53422-1  
EL: 978-0-553-53424-5



**The Mighty Miss Malone**  
by Christopher Paul Curtis  
HC: 978-0-385-73491-2  
TR: 978-0-440-42214-3  
EL: 978-0-375-89736-8



**Moon Over Manifest**  
by Clare Vanderpool  
TR: 978-0-375-85829-1  
EL: 978-0-375-89616-3



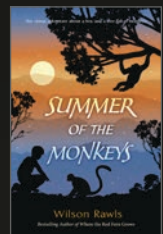
**Navigating Early**  
by Clare Vanderpool  
HC: 978-0-385-74209-2  
TR: 978-0-307-93065-1  
EL: 978-0-307-97412-9



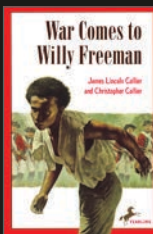
**Paperboy**  
by Vince Vawter  
HC: 978-0-385-74244-3  
TR: 978-0-307-93151-1  
EL: 978-0-307-97505-8



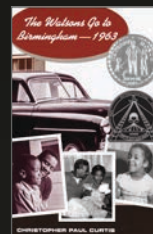
**Planet Earth Is Blue**  
by Nicole Panteleakos  
HC: 978-0-525-64657-0  
TR: 978-0-525-64660-0  
EL: 978-0-525-64659-4



**Summer of the Monkeys**  
by Wilson Rawls  
TR: 978-0-440-41580-0  
EL: 978-0-307-78155-0



**War Comes to Willy Freeman**  
by James Lincoln Collier, with  
contributions by Christopher Collier  
TR: 978-0-440-49504-8  
EL: 978-0-307-54899-3



**The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963**  
by Christopher Paul Curtis  
HC: 978-0-385-32175-4  
TR: 978-0-385-38294-6  
EL: 978-0-385-72985-7



**White Bird: A Wonder Story**  
by R. J. Palacio  
HC: 978-0-525-64553-5  
EL: 978-0-525-64555-9

