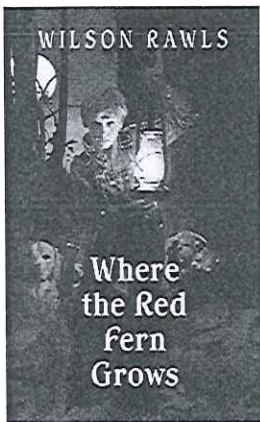


*WHERE THE
RED FERN
GROWS*

By: Wilson Rawls



Activity Packet

Name: _____

Meet Wilson Rawls

Robert Bower, Idaho Falls Post Register



*Long before we moved from the farm, I learned the joy of reading. On winter evenings, Mama would read stories from books that Grandma bought for us . . . After we finished reading [Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*], Mama gave it to me. It was my first real treasure . . . I read it every chance I got. One day while I was working in the fields, I got the idea that I would like to write a book like *The Call of the Wild*. This was quite an ambitious dream for me.*

—Wilson Rawls

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Born in 1913, Woodrow Wilson Rawls was named for President Woodrow Wilson, who took office that year. Rawls grew up on small farms in Scrapper and Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

The Rawls children did not attend school regularly. Wilson learned to read by listening to his mother read aloud. He and his sisters would then take turns reading the material again. He didn't like the fairy tales that his sisters did, but he very much enjoyed *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London. Rawls took the book everywhere and even read it aloud to his dog.

At the age of ten, he decided to write a powerful boy-and-dog story of his own. He couldn't afford paper or pencils, so the first words Rawls wrote were quite literally

scratched into the dust of a country road and the sand banks of a river. When hunting, he would describe the sounds he heard and the places and things he saw.

Although Rawls had little formal education as a child, his family encouraged him to pursue his dream of writing. When Wilson Rawls asked for advice, his father told him that he could accomplish whatever he wanted by trying and never giving up.

The Great Depression, which started with the stock market crash in 1929, forced Rawls to take any job he could find. He worked as a carpenter in Mexico and South America, on five of the major dam projects in the United States, and on the Alcan Highway in Alaska. In addition, he worked in shipyards on the West Coast and lumberyards in British Columbia. At night he wrote his stories, storing them in a trunk at his mother's home.

In 1958 Rawls decided that his writing wasn't worth saving. Without showing his work to anyone else, he burned everything he had written. Manuscripts for five novels were destroyed. He later rewrote one of these as *Where the Red Fern Grows*, which was published in 1961. Rawls's second book, *Summer of the Monkeys*, was published in 1976.

Wilson Rawls died in 1984. He had one regret. He would have liked to have shown a copy of his book to his father and say, "It took a long time, Dad, but I made it."

About the Author

Wilson Rawls was born on September 24, 1913 in Scraper, Oklahoma to Minzy and Winnie Rawls. His early years were spent on a farm in northeastern Oklahoma. Because there were no schools in this part of Oklahoma during this time, his mother taught Wilson and his sisters to read and write. When his mother brought home Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*, Wilson became inspired by what books could offer. He was so moved by this book he decided that someday he would write a book like London's himself!

His first experience in attending a regular school came when he and his family moved to Tahlequah. Due to the pressures of the depression, he didn't finish the eighth grade. Still, he carried with him the desire to write a book. This dream might have seemed impossible to achieve to most children who had little formal education and no money to buy paper and pencils. Yet, Wilson remained encouraged by the words his father spoke to him:



"Son, a man can do anything he sets out to do, if he doesn't give up."

He didn't give up. He worked the next years at odd jobs, such as carpentry, while traveling to North and South America. While working, he wrote as much as he could on whatever paper he could find, and left his writing at his mother's house. But just before he married Sophie Ann Styczinski in 1958, he burned all of his writings, including a manuscript for *Where the Red Fern Grows*.

In 1959, Wilson Rawls became a full-time writer. He chose to rewrite *Where the Red Fern Grows* as his first novel because it reflected his boyhood. It was soon serialized in a magazine, and then published in 1961. He has also written another award-winning book, *Summer of the Monkeys*.

Wilson Rawls, when asked by educators and children how to become a writer, says:

"Do a lot of reading. Read and study creative writing. Do not wait to start writing. You are never too young to start. Do not worry about grammar and punctuation on your first draft. The important thing is to get your story down on paper. Your first work will probably need a lot of rewriting. You can worry about grammar and punctuation then. Remember, the more you write and rewrite, the better you will get. And most important of all, do not get discouraged. If you keep trying and don't give up, you will make it someday. The road can be rough, but the day you see your work in print will make it all worth it. Best of luck!"

(Quotations for this biographical sketch were taken from *Something About the Author*, Volume 22, page 206.)

Introducing the Novel

Wilson Rawls burned the first version of *Where the Red Fern Grows*. “I was sure it was pure trash,” Rawls told a reporter, “and no one would waste time printing junk like that. I also knew my grammar was poor and my vocabulary was zero.”

Later, his wife convinced him to return to writing. She helped him by editing the manuscript. The story he chose to rewrite was based on his boyhood and called “The Secret of the Red Fern.” Rawls sold the story to the *Saturday Evening Post*. The magazine published the novel in three parts as *The Hounds of Youth*. In 1961 the story was published in hardcover as *Where the Red Fern Grows*.

The story of *Where the Red Fern Grows* begins as a man on his way home from work encounters a dogfight. When the man discovers that one of the dogs involved is a redbone hound, memories of his childhood are stirred. The man takes the dog home and cleans and feeds him before sending him on his way. As the man—the adult Billy Colman—watches the hound slowly disappear from sight, his mind drifts back more than half a century to his childhood and to the memories of two good friends—redbone hounds named Old Dan and Little Ann.

Recalling events from the past is a literary device called a **flashback**. Writers use flashbacks for many different purposes. In some novels, flashbacks interrupt the main action of the story to provide background information. In this novel, Rawls begins the narrative with an adult Billy helping an injured dog and then tells the rest of the story as a flashback. In *Where the Red Fern Grows*, the use of flashback allows the author to comment from a distance on events that shaped Billy Colman’s life.

The story, which is now considered a classic, did not sell well for the first several years after it was published. Then Rawls spoke at a teachers’ workshop on children’s books at the University of Utah. “That was the spark,”

Rawls noted, “and the book has been selling ever since.” In 1974 *Where the Red Fern Grows* was made into a movie, which was narrated by Wilson Rawls himself.

After *Where the Red Fern Grows* became popular with students, Rawls began visiting schools. He always took along the manuscript of the book to show students. “I want to stress to them,” he explained, “how important it is to learn to spell, punctuate, and mainly how important it is for them to stay in school.”

When students asked Rawls for advice on becoming a writer, he said:

I always tell them: Do a lot of reading. Read and study creative writing. Do not wait to start writing. You are never too young to start. Do not worry about grammar and punctuation on your first draft. The important thing is to get your story down on paper. Your first work will probably need a lot of rewriting. You can worry about grammar and punctuation then.

Remember, the more you write and rewrite, the better you will get. And most important of all, do not get discouraged. If you keep trying and don’t give up, you will make it some day. The road can be rough, but the day you see your work in print will make it all worth it.

Rawls continued his school visits until he became ill in 1983. He spoke with students in twenty-two states. Although he and his wife had no children, Rawls felt he had many children in the fans who loved his novels.

THE TIME AND PLACE

The Ozarks, sometimes called the Ozark Plateau, is a highland region located primarily in northwest Arkansas, southwest Missouri, and northeast Oklahoma. It is an area of astonishing beauty. Deep valleys contrast with low mountains and are cut by the waters of numerous winding rivers. The region’s natural resources—thick forests of oak, maple, hickory, and pine; mountain streams; deep caves; and a vast array of plants and animals—make it a fascinating place to

explore. Unusual place names like Pea Vine Hollow, Sparrow Hawk Mountains, and Bluebird Creek add to the area's charm.

During the 1920s, when the novel takes place, daily life on an Ozark farm was difficult. Most residents made do without running water and electricity. School was too far for a daily commute. Some par-

ents taught their children to read and write, but other parents weren't able to do these things themselves, and so couldn't teach their children. Other than an occasional trip into town, families had little contact with outsiders. Their social contact was limited to their closest neighbors.

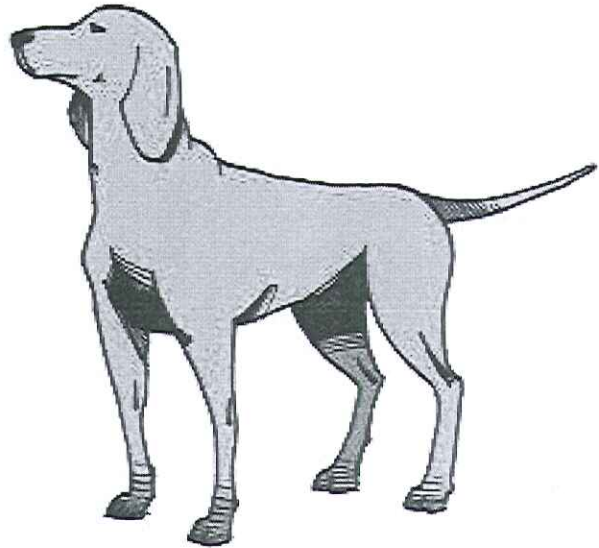
Did You Know?

Several kinds of hounds are mentioned in the novel, including redbones, blueticks, walkers, and blood hounds. All of these hounds pursue game, particularly raccoons, by scent. Each breed has its own desirable hunting characteristics, such as speed and endurance.

Billy's dogs, Old Dan and Little Ann, are redbone hounds. The redbone hound is best known for its loud voice, strong nose (capable of locating and maintaining the scent of a raccoon), persistence, and well-developed treeing instinct. It is comfortable in water and on rough terrain. These dogs are especially brave and tough, willing to take on a bear or even a mountain lion.

Redbones are typical of other hounds in height and weight, ranging from 21 to 26 inches and 45 to 75 pounds. Their color is their most distinctive feature, ranging from a deep red to a light tan.

In general, they are intelligent dogs that have a strong sense that they are hunting



Redbone Hound

for their master, not just themselves. Much less independent than other coon hounds, they tend to be stubborn and make good watchdogs.

Before You Read

Where the Red Fern Grows Chapters 1–7

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Is there anything you would be willing to work a full two years to achieve or acquire?

Journal

Do you have the desire and persistence to wait two years for something you really want? Would you be willing to put away every dime you made from household chores, your allowance, and other sources to get what you want? Record your thoughts and feelings about these questions in your journal.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out what Billy Colman really wants and how he plans to get it.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Raccoons are common animals in the Ozarks region. A raccoon is recognizable by its black “burglar’s mask” pattern around its eyes and its bushy, ringed tail. The tail serves as a brace when the raccoon sits on its haunches and provides balance when the animal is climbing.

Considered to be intelligent animals, raccoons try to confuse their predators by creating a maze of tracks. They avoid predators by running along the tops of fence posts and climbing trees. When forced, raccoons will reveal their strength and fight viciously to survive. Most adult coon hounds have battle wounds from fighting with these ferocious animals. During combat, raccoons will lie on their backs to use their sharp claws and teeth to the best advantage.

Raccoons usually search for food along the water’s edge. Because they dip their food in water before they eat it, humans think raccoons clean their food before eating it. However, raccoons’ sense of touch is heightened when their fingers are wet, which is probably the reason raccoons “wash” their food.

Figurative Language

Writers often use **similes** to describe things in new ways. In a simile, two unlike things are compared using the words *like* or *as*. Similes aren’t meant to be taken literally. They are a kind of figurative language, used for imaginative, descriptive effect.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

allot [ə lot’] v. to parcel out

cur [kur] n. inferior or undesirable dog; mongrel

fester [fes’ tər] v. to cause increasing poisoning or irritation

grit [grit] n. unconquerable spirit

mull [mul] v. to think over at length

muster [mus’ tər] v. to assemble; to gather

wily [wī’ lē] adj. full of cunning

Working For It!

As Billy reads the advertisement for a Kentucky kennel's coon hounds, he realizes that his dream could become a reality. Fortified by this knowledge, he begins a savings campaign. He saves diligently for two years and reaches his goal.

Do you think you could earn and save enough money to buy something you really wanted? For this story-related project, saving for something special is exactly what you are going to try to do! Here are some ideas to help you get started.

What is something you want that is within a realistic price range?

Why do you want this item?

How will your life be enriched by owning this item?

Would you have your parents' support for this purchase if you were to use your own money to buy it? Explain your answer.

How much money does this item cost? _____

How much money would you have to earn each week to buy this item in two months? _____ in six months? _____ in one year? _____

What is a reasonable amount of money you could earn each week? _____

At this rate, how long will it take you to buy this item?

On the back of this page, list as many ways as are possible for you to earn money. Next to each way, write the amount of money that can be generated from this job source and the time commitment the job will take. Then, choose the most realistic job opportunities from your list.

The only thing left now for you to do is to start working!



Math

It took Billy two years to earn fifty dollars. He earned it penny, nickel, dime, and quarter at a time working constantly to meet his goal.

If you were to create an accounting of the money he earned and the ways in which he earned it, what would this record look like?

Use the chart below to help you create an accounting record of Billy's earnings. Use the prices that are suggested to compute his earnings per item sold. Your total must equal fifty dollars.

Record of Earnings: Billy Colman			
Item for Sale	Price per Unit	Quantity Sold	Total Earned
bucket of berries	10 cents		
crawfish, large	5 cents		
crawfish, small	3 cents		
five minnows	1 cent		
roasting ear	1 cent		
bucket of assorted vegetables	5 cents		
opossum hide	15 cents		
skunk hide	25 cents		
		Grand Total	\$50.00

Let's Find Out Together!

There are many types of trees and animals that are described or mentioned in *Where the Red Fern Grows*.

Look at these lists. Working in groups of two or three, choose one or more of these trees and animals to research. You may not choose a topic that has already been selected by another group.

List #1—Dogs

bird dog	coon hounds:	walkers
boxer	redbone	bloodhound
poodle	blue tick	black and tan
collie		

List #2—Ozark Wildlife

night hawk	minnow	opossum
timber wolf	ringtail coon	crawfish
skunk	mountain lion	frog
		gray squirrel

List #3 Ozark Trees

ash	box elder	dogwood
papaw	red oak	birch
sycamore	redbud	burr oak
		water oak

Each research project will include the following things:

- A cover with a realistic, colored picture of the topic
- A thorough, written description of the topic
- An explanation of how and why the topic is mentioned in *Where the Red Fern Grows*

When the research projects are complete, one or more of the group members will present the information to the class in an enjoyable way. It is up to the group members to select the manner in which the oral presentation is made.

Another World

In Chapter VI, Billy describes the sights, sounds, and tastes of Tahlequah for his eagerly listening family. This was his first time ever to see a town, and he was overwhelmed by all that he saw and felt. The town was teeming with people, the schoolyard overflowing with kids, and the streets full of those who stared, laughed, or teased. It was another world for him. He decided he never wanted to live in this other world after the experiences he had in Tahlequah.

Suppose the times have changed, but Billy has not. It is the time in which you live, and Billy has come to your town to get his coon pups. He still has the “country” look, and still is awed by the town.

Look at the town you the in from Billy’s point of view. As you do, answer the questions below.

Where would he go to pick up his pups? _____

Would people in your town stare at Billy? Why? _____

What would he think of the law enforcement officers in your town? _____

Which store in your town would amaze Billy most? Why? _____

What would Billy have purchased for his family in your town? _____

What thing about your town would strike Billy as the most unusual? _____

What would he like most about your school’s yard? _____

On the back of this paper, describe the following “modern” things through Billy’s eyes:

- | | | | | |
|--------------|-------------|---------------|-------|------------|
| television | pollution | diesel trucks | pizza | hairstyles |
| tennis shoes | video games | elevators | malls | skydiving |

Would children in your town make fun of Billy because he is different from them? _____ If so, how? _____

Would you make fun of Billy? _____ Explain your answer on the back of this paper.

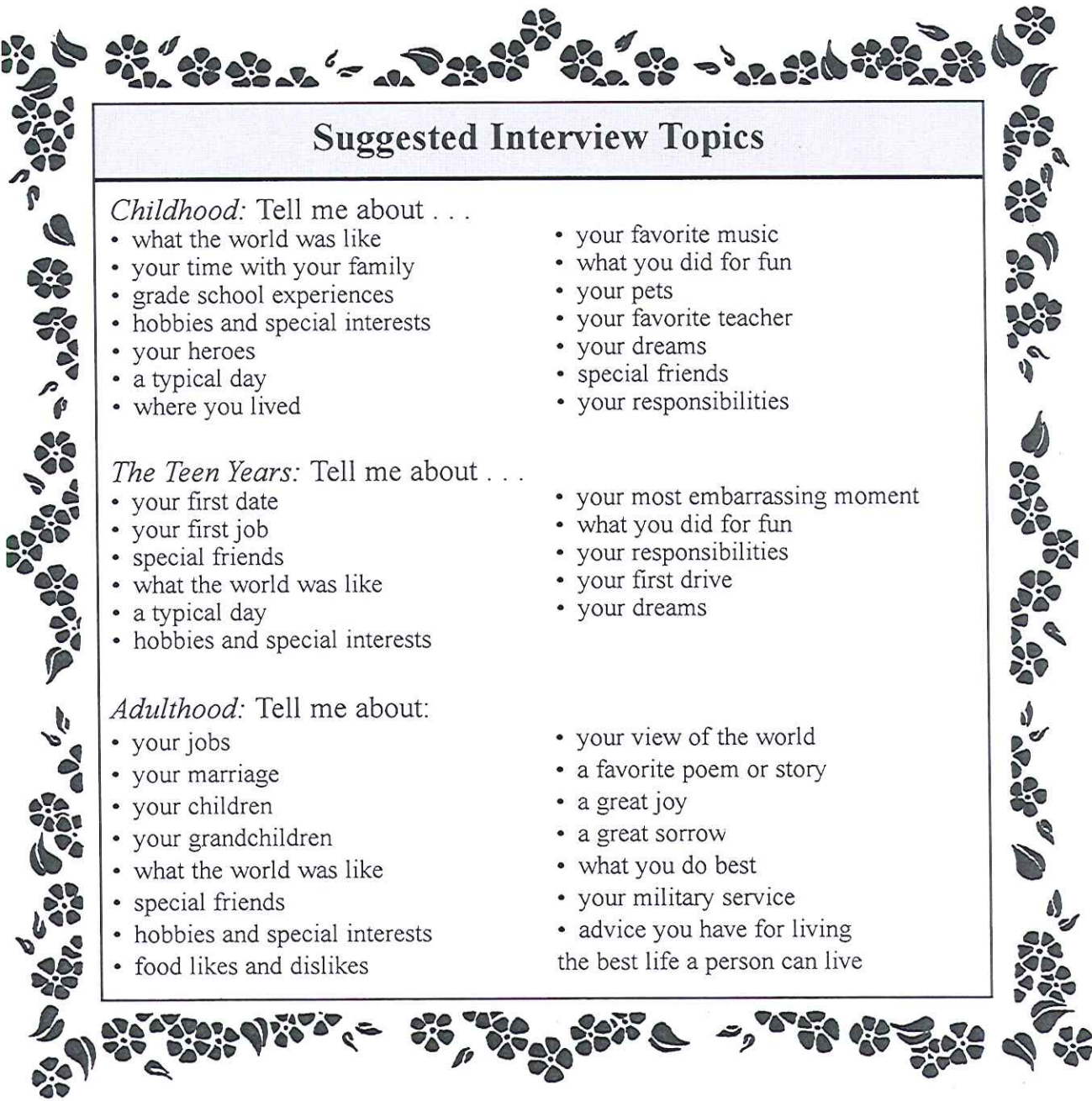
Would Billy want to come back to your town? _____ Why or why not? _____

A Gift of Age

Billy learns a great deal from his Grandpa because he respects him and trusts in his experience.

Do you get the chance to talk with your grandparents or someone else who has lived a long time? What do you like to talk about with them? What do they like to talk about with you?

Interview a person who is at least 50 years old. Use these ideas to help you get started. Be sure to add your own ideas to the interview as well!



Suggested Interview Topics

Childhood: Tell me about . . .

- what the world was like
- your time with your family
- grade school experiences
- hobbies and special interests
- your heroes
- a typical day
- where you lived
- your favorite music
- what you did for fun
- your pets
- your favorite teacher
- your dreams
- special friends
- your responsibilities

The Teen Years: Tell me about . . .

- your first date
- your first job
- special friends
- what the world was like
- a typical day
- hobbies and special interests
- your most embarrassing moment
- what you did for fun
- your responsibilities
- your first drive
- your dreams

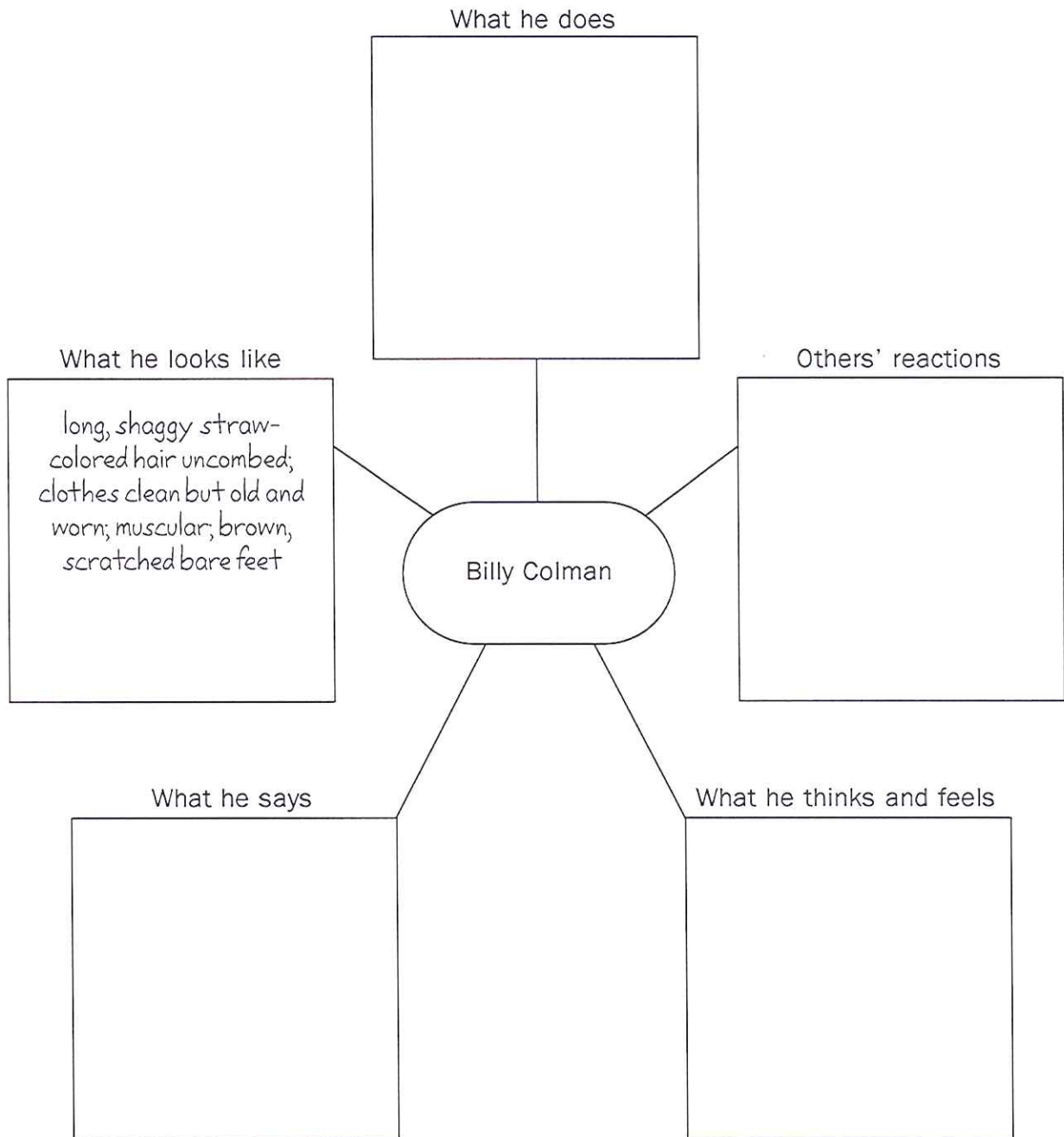
Adulthood: Tell me about:

- your jobs
- your marriage
- your children
- your grandchildren
- what the world was like
- special friends
- hobbies and special interests
- food likes and dislikes
- your view of the world
- a favorite poem or story
- a great joy
- a great sorrow
- what you do best
- your military service
- advice you have for living the best life a person can live

Active Reading

Where the Red Fern Grows Chapters 1-7

Writers develop the personality of their characters through methods of characterization. When using **indirect characterization**, a writer reveals the character's personality by showing what the character does and says and by showing what others think and say about the character. Use the graphic below to note what you learn about Billy Colman's personality in this section.



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Responding

Where the Red Fern Grows Chapters 1–7

Personal Response

Were you surprised that Billy put so much time and energy into saving money for the two dogs? Why or why not?

Based on your response to the **Focus Activity** on page 12, how are you like Billy? How are you different?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Why do Grandpa and Billy keep the secret of the dogs from Billy's father? What does this say about them?

2. Why, in Billy's opinion, do the names carved in the tree seem perfect for his pups?

3. How do the curiosity and stubbornness typical of raccoons enable Billy to trap one?

Responding

Where the Red Fern Grows Chapters 1–7

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Why is Grandpa so surprised when Billy brings in his fifty dollars?

5. Once Billy catches the raccoon to be used for training, his father wants him to be sure that all the nails are pulled from the other traps and that he catches raccoons only with his dogs. Why is Mr. Colman concerned? Do you agree or disagree with what he is trying to teach Billy? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Writing a Letter

Suppose that you have just witnessed Billy Colman coming to town to pick up his dogs. Write to a friend in a nearby town and describe what you saw. Begin with a sentence that summarizes the impression you want to give your friend about this stranger. Then, include a physical description of Billy as well as an explanation of how he was treated by the townspeople. In your letter show how he is different from the other children in town.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

To bring the action to life for his readers, Wilson Rawls chooses active, descriptive verbs. For example, dogs *boil* out of an alley and *scoot* under a barn. A squirrel *barks* a warning, and a boy *spurts* out of a pipe. With your group, search for other examples of interesting verbs, and discuss the kinds of mental pictures they create for you. Compile a collection of your favorite examples of active verbs.

Learning for Life

Based on the steps Billy takes to train his dogs and on your own experience, design a practical and realistic approach to training a dog to walk on a leash, stay, retrieve, or come when called. Once you've decided on a training goal, consider these questions.

- What expectations for change can an owner have? What can she or he expect to happen?
- What preparations should the owner make? What props or aids will he or she need?
- What steps should be taken? In what order?
- What tips can you offer about communicating with a dog during training?
- What important warnings and reminders will help both the animal and owner?



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Where the Red Fern Grows Chapters 8–14

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Would you risk your life to save an animal? Would it depend on whether or not the animal was your pet?

Share Ideas

With a small group, discuss the two questions above. How would you describe the act of putting an animal's life before a human's life? Do you think it's heroic? responsible? irresponsible? foolish? Why or why not?

Setting a Purpose

Read about how Billy's attitude toward animals develops as he gets more experience hunting with his dogs.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Raccoons have been hunted for centuries. Early settlers favored caps made of coonskin for their warmth, durability, and ability to repel water. During the 1920s, when pelts for coats brought eighteen dollars to twenty dollars a piece, raccoons were hunted almost to extinction in some places. Today, synthetic fabrics, game laws, and hunters who are more interested in the sport than the money, offer some protection to the raccoon.

Animal Communication

Is it possible for people and animals to communicate? Many hunters believe that dogs respond to the moods, fears, and uncertainties of their human companions. They believe that fear, confidence, general discomfort, and other emotions are communicated nonverbally to their animals. Therefore, the relationship hunters establish with their dogs often determines how successful the hunt will be.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

begudgingly [bi gruj'ing lē] *adv.* enviously; reluctantly

belligerent [bə lij'ər ənt] *adj.* hostile; aggressive

destine [des'tin] *v.* to determine beforehand

droning [drōn'ing] *adj.* speaking in a monotonous tone

leering [lē'r'ing] *adj.* sly; knowing

limber [lim'bər] *adj.* capable of moving and bending easily

nonchalantly [non'shə länt'lē] *adv.* indifferently; in an unconcerned manner

sidle [sīd'əl] *v.* to move sideways; to advance secretively

slough [slōō] *n.* swamp, marsh, or pond

smirk [smurk] *v.* to smile in a self-satisfied way

Conflict Resolution

At two separate times in *Where the Red Fern Grows*, Billy Colman was put into situations where he was challenged to fight back. He did the best he could to avoid conflict, but when his dogs were involved, he fought back. Billy faced the Tahlequah bully when his dog's ear was pulled. And when Ruben said he was going to kill Billy's dogs with an ax, Billy ran to their defense.

Have you ever been faced with a situation in which you felt that fighting was the only way out? If so, use the back of this paper to describe the situation and what you did.

What can you do to avoid fighting? Brainstorm for ideas with the rest of your class. Then add your ideas to the ideas below.

Ideas for conflict resolution:

1. **Say you are sorry.** Sometimes these words are the only thing the other person needs. Sometimes it may take a little more: "I'm sorry I broke your pencil. I'll buy you another one."
2. **Count to 10 (or 15 or 20!).** This gives you time to "cool down" a bit and a chance to think before you act. Think about the different choices you have in the situation. Think about the consequences of the different actions you could take. Decide which choice of action is the best one for you.
3. **Take turns telling each side of the problem.** Let the other person go first. Let the person finish all he or she has to say. Then you take your turn. You might start out by saying something like, "Why are you mad?"
4. **Have another person you both respect help you settle it.** Another person can often help you both see the other person's point of view. Teachers, parents, and principals are great ones to help!
5. **Make a joke about the situation** so the other person will not take the conflict so seriously. Laughter eases many tensions!
6. **Walk away!** This is sometimes very hard to do, especially if others are watching to see what you will do. Just remember, even if you think you can win a fight, it's not worth the consequences when you get sent to the principal's office or have to spend the day timed out in your room.
7. **Stay out of trouble.** Remember, the best way to keep a conflict from happening is to avoid it in the first place. Be aware of how your actions might look to other people. Be careful not to hurt people's feelings or embarrass them.

Suppose the Tahlequah youth and Billy, Ruben and Billy, or Rainie and Billy had tried some of these methods!

Work with a partner. Choose one method of conflict resolution and rewrite a scene from the story with a harmonious solution as the outcome of the conflict situation. Dramatize your scenes for the class.

Science

Billy knew exactly what it would take to make him happy. More than anything, he wanted two puppies to raise and train. But he wasn't going to be satisfied with just any dogs. He had to have coonhound pups, and he had to hunt raccoons with them. The desire consumed him, often to the point of weight loss and sleeplessness. How could such a young boy be so obsessed with this desire?

Billy was raised in the Ozarks, an area where coon hunting was a way of life for its inhabitants. He had heard coon hunting stories all his life, and believed at least a part of all of them. He loved to sit in his Grandpa's store and hear the coon hunters tell of the wiley raccoons that could outwit grown men and their dogs, and the sense of pride these men would show as they told how their well-trained dogs finally treed the clever coon. Hunting was in his blood, and he wanted to own the dogs that could outsmart old ringtail!

Raccoon hunting does not only touch the characters in *Where the Red Fern Grows*. Many people, past and present, have been infected with the desire. In the past, Indians and pioneers hunted this native North American mammal for its meat and fur. In the 1920's, these animals were hunted nearly to extinction in some areas because of the popularity of raccoon coats. Now, raccoons are hunted as much, if not more, for sport as for food and fur. Hunters still enjoy the thrill of a nocturnal hunt, a fast-paced chase, the baying of hounds, and a clever coon.

But, in spite of all the hunting, raccoons are still plentiful. A study of their habits and adaptability confirms the reasons why. The raccoon is a fascinating animal. You are bound to increase your appreciation for this amazing animal if you learn more about it.

For this activity, find out more about raccoons. Research their physical characteristics, habits and habitats, natural enemies, degree of intelligence, and relationship with humans.

After you have researched raccoons, research raccoon hunting. Are the methods you discover similar to the methods you have read about in *Where the Red Fern Grows*? How are they the same? How are they different? Are coon hounds still used? Is there any chance that raccoons can become extinct?

After you have completed your research, decide for yourself if you could ever go on a coon hunt. Be ready to explain your choice completely.



Whoop-Meter!

Coon hunters “whoop” to their dogs to encourage them and acknowledge their effort. Billy was no exception, whooping loudly, joyfully, and excitedly!

What do you think the whoops of the coon hunt sound like? Could you imitate a “who-e-e-e” if you tried?

Have a whooping contest in your class. Any member of the class may participate, even the teacher! Rank each participant in length, volume, and style. Use a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being outstanding. The classmate with the highest score wins! Record the scores on the “Whoop-Meter” below.



Participant's Name	Length	Volume	Style	Total
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

Sharing the Responsibility

The characters in *Where the Red Fern Grows* knew that responsibility to get the job done must be shared. Old Dan and Little Ann knew that working together as a coon hunting team made them more effective than hunting individually. Billy realized his place in the coon hunting team and held up his end of that responsibility. He also knew he had a responsibility to his family, and unquestioningly gave his father every cent he earned from his coonskin sales and his coon hunt jackpot.

Are there many jobs that are better done if the responsibilities are shared?

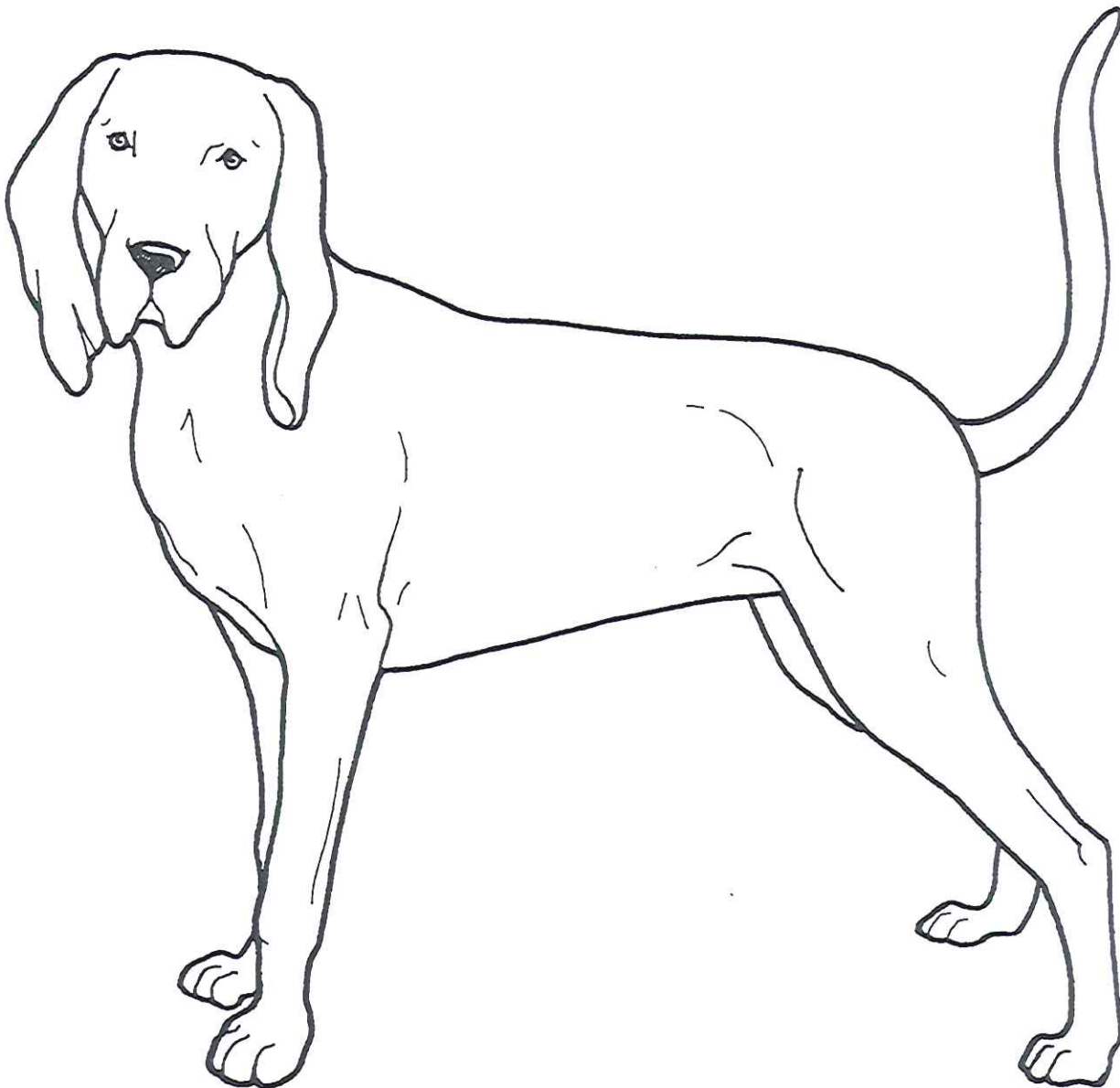
Work in groups of two to four to think of ten jobs that are better and more easily done, if there is a group effort to complete them. In your list, include at least one classroom job and one job at home. When you have finished completing the chart below, choose one of the jobs, and, working in your groups, do it!

Sharing the Responsibility Job Chart			
Type of job	Number of people needed	Completion time if work is done alone	Completion time if work is shared
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			

Art

Billy works hard to prepare Little Ann for the “beauty contest” at the big coon hunt competition. Much to his surprise and joy, she wins!

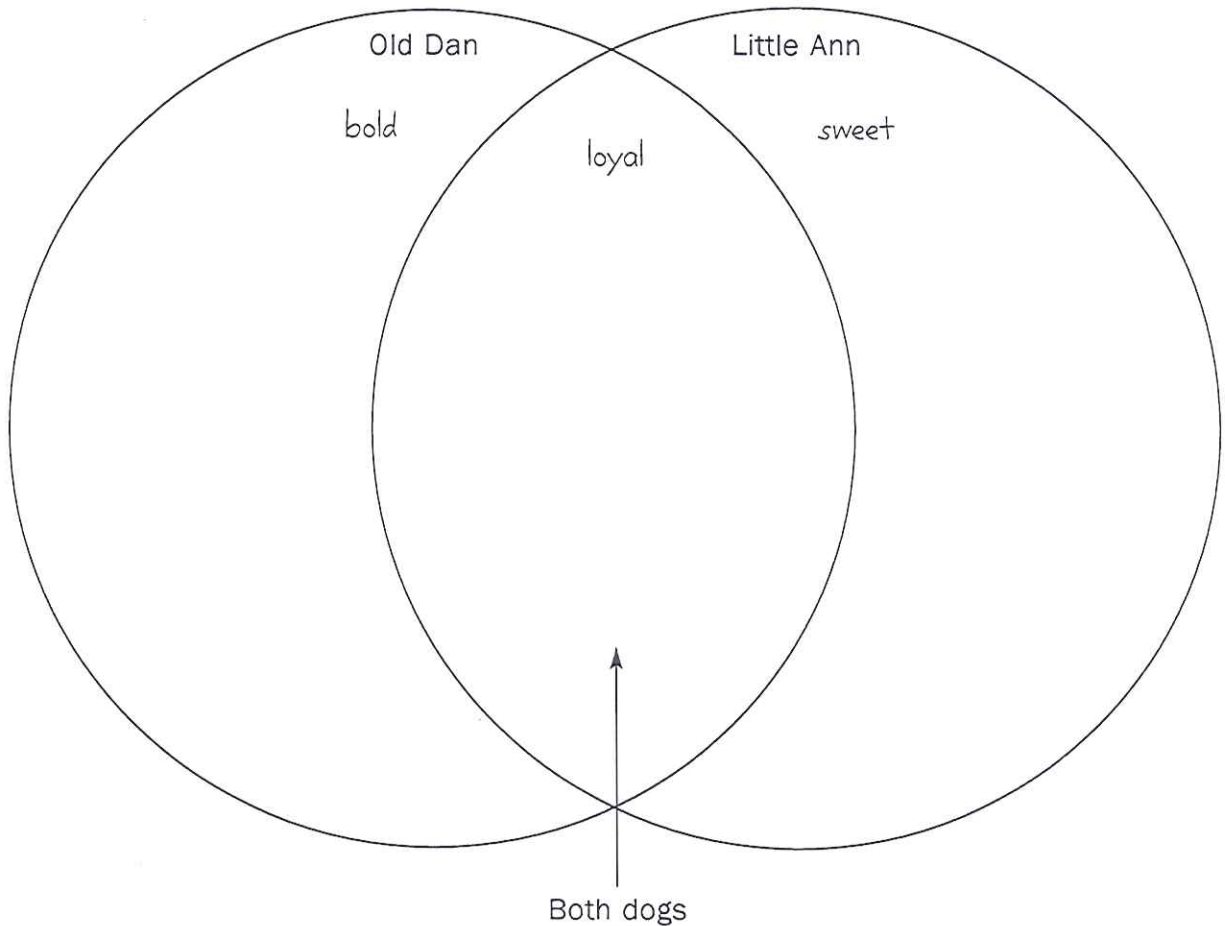
Here is an picture of a coon hound. Fill in the detail needed and color the hound appropriately. Figure out a way to make your dog shine as Little Ann did. Attach all finished pictures to the class bulletin board for a **Coon Hound Beauty Contest**. Ask the principal, another teacher, parent, or local artist to judge the pictures and pick a winner!



Active Reading

Where the Red Fern Grows Chapters 8-14

Old Dan and Little Ann make a great team, even though they are very different dogs. As you read the second part of the novel, fill in the Venn diagram with words and phrases that show how the dogs are similar and how they are different.



Responding

Where the Red Fern Grows Chapters 8–14

Personal Response

How did you feel about Grandpa accepting the Pritchards' bet? Explain the reasons for your feelings.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Why does Billy not give up when his dogs have a raccoon up the "big tree"?

2. Why does Billy not want to kill the ghost raccoon?

3. How does Billy react to the fate of Rubin Pritchard? What does he do the day after the ghost coon hunt?

Responding

Where the Red Fern Grows Chapters 8–14

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Why does Billy risk his life to save Little Ann? How is his response similar to yours in the **Focus Activity** on page 16? How is his response different?

5. Billy demonstrates great bravery and strength of character. Does Rawls make this character seem believable, or is he too good to be true? Explain your answer by referring to specific scenes in the book.

Literature and Writing

Letter to the Editor

Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper in the area where Billy lived. Comment on the circumstances and tragic results of Billy's bet with the Pritchards. Include in your letter your opinion about Billy's bet with the Pritchards. Assume that newspaper readers are familiar with the tragedy.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

During this section of the novel, Billy's parents begin to treat him differently, even though they never give up worrying about his welfare. With your group, search for specific examples of the way Billy's mother and father now react to his behavior. Then discuss whether Billy acts any differently now that he is treated this way.

Listening and Speaking

Imagine that you and your dogs have successfully treed a raccoon and that the only way to get the animal is by chopping down the tree. Because of the tree's size, chopping it down will take you several days. Plan and deliver a successful argument that will persuade your parents to let you take on this task. Be sure to address their safety concerns as well as their fears about your general welfare.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Where the Red Fern Grows Chapters 15–20

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Predict how Billy, Old Dan, and Little Ann will do in the raccoon-hunting competition.

Chart It

With a group of your classmates, discuss your predictions. What, if anything, has already happened in the book to lead you to this prediction? As you talk about these hints, record your guesses on a chart. Add to your chart as you read the last group of chapters.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out what happens to Billy, Grandpa, and the dogs when they enter the raccoon-hunting competition.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

The field trial, or hunt, tests a hound's ability to find and tree a raccoon. These competitions have historical roots, and they still go on today. On the night of the hunt, dogs and their handlers are grouped in fours. Each group is accompanied by a judge, who also acts as the scorekeeper. Each group drives to the area of its choice, and the hunters turn their dogs loose to hunt for three to four hours.

Field trials no longer result in the death of the hunted animal. The first hound to find a track and bark is given 100 points; the second, 75; the third, 50; and the fourth, 25. These points are maintained as long as the hound barks every ten minutes and does not chase other animals or return to its owner.

The same scale of points is used when the hounds signal that the raccoon is treed. If a raccoon is sighted in the tree, the dogs are given their points, and the group goes on to the next raccoon, leaving the first one unharmed. If a raccoon is not sighted or if there is some other animal in the tree, the dogs lose points.

Suspense

Suspense is a feeling of anxious uncertainty about the outcome of events. Rising out of the conflict, suspense builds to the climax, or the moment of greatest emotional intensity, just before the outcome of the conflict is revealed. Writers create suspense by dropping hints about what might take place or when it might happen.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

flinty [flin' tē] *adj.* resembling flint, a hard mineral

haggard [hag' ərd] *adj.* appearing worn and exhausted

lithe [līth] *adj.* effortlessly graceful

mortal [môrt' əl] *adj.* subject to death; fatal

predatory [pred' ə tōr' ē] *adj.* relating to one that preys, destroys, or devours

scourge [skurj] *n.* a means of causing severe suffering or punishment

Social Studies

When Billy Colman sees the red fern growing between the graves of his dogs, he recalls an Indian legend he has heard.

“I had heard the old Indian legend about the red fern. How a little Indian boy and girl were lost in a blizzard and had frozen to death. In the spring, when they were found, a beautiful red fern had grown up between their two bodies. The story went on to say that only an angel could plant the seeds of a red fern, and that they never died; where one grew, that spot was sacred.”

–Chapter XX

Billy draws great comfort from his belief in this legend. He knows that his dogs have been special, and deserve the recognition the red fern has provided.

Just as the Indians created the legend of the boy and girl, their death, and the growth of a special red fern that is told in *Where the Red Fern Grows*, so do others throughout the world tell legends of people, places, and events. Their legends reflect the cultures, attitudes, and values that are important to them.

What is a legend?

What legends do you know?

Do you believe the legend of the red fern? Explain your answer on the back of this paper.

Research legends that you have heard or those you would like to learn more about. After you have finished your research, share what you have discovered with the class. Here are some subjects:



Robin Hood	Casey Jones	Buffalo Bill Cody	Davy Crockett
King Arthur	Roy Bean	Wild Bill Hickok	Honest Abe
Cleopatra	John Brown	Johnny Appleseed	Jesse James
Hiawatha	Odysseus	George Washington	Annie Oakley
Beowulf	Siegfried	Yoshitsune	Rama
Wyatt Earp	Paul Bunyan	Billy the Kid	Daniel Boone
John Henry	Mike Fink	Pretty Boy Floyd	Sam Bass
Betsy Ross	Pecos Bill	Benjamin Franklin	Uncle Remus
Joe Magarac	Sir Launcelot	Old Stormalong	Antar

The Flashback

Where the Red Fern Grows begins in the present, with a man's memories triggered by the valiant courage of a redbone hound who is in a street fight with some town dogs. What unfolds in flashback form is a beautifully touching story about the loving and fulfilling relationship that can exist between a boy and his dogs. There are many things around us that can trigger memories. As we look at a favorite old plaything, our younger years come flooding back. As we smell the salty smell of an ocean breeze, a wonderful weekend at the shore fills our senses. As we hear a bit of music that brought us comfort in the past, we are again comforted. As we touch a hard-won trophy or ribbon, our struggle for it is relived. As we hold a special gift that was given to us by someone who is no longer alive, we feel that person with us.

What triggers memories for you? Is it a photograph, a story, or a song? Is it a trophy, a stuffed animal, or the smell of baking cookies? What can make you flashback into your past?

For this activity, choose something or someone that causes you to think about the past. Write your choice here.

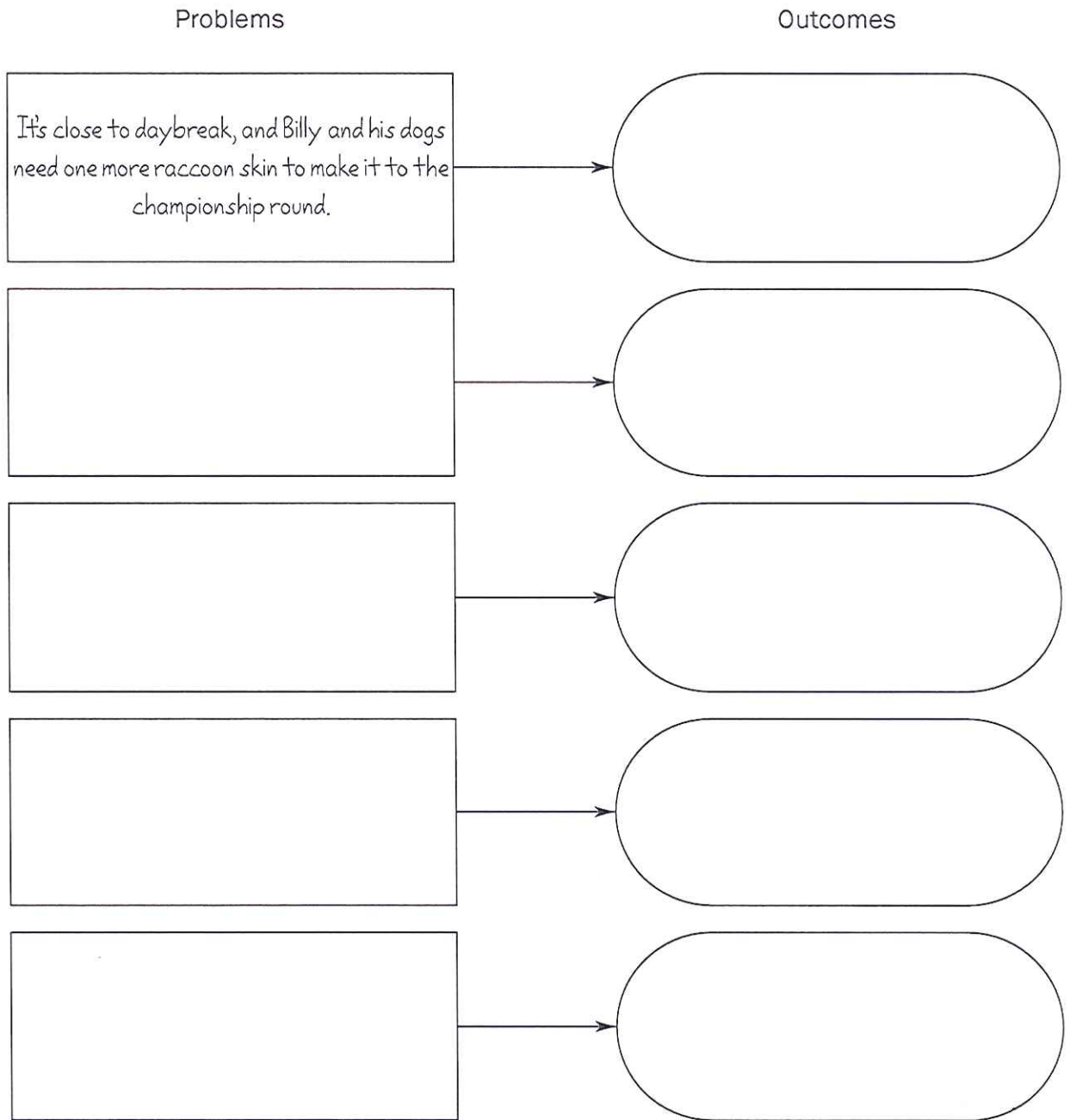

<hr/>
brings back memories of
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>


Create a story that is told in flashback form the way Wilson Rawls tells his. Begin the story in the present, and see, hear, smell, taste, touch the special thing you mentioned above. Then, as your memories come flooding back, tell your story.

Active Reading

Where the Red Fern Grows Chapters 15-20

In this section of the novel, Billy, his family, and his dogs face many life-threatening situations. Use the graphic below to keep track of the problems the characters encounter and the outcomes to those problems.



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Responding

Where the Red Fern Grows Chapters 15-20

Personal Response

Did Little Ann's fate surprise you? Why or why not?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. In what ways are Billy's dogs unusual?

2. How do the other hunters in the contest treat Billy?

3. Why is Billy willing to give his youngest sister the cup?

Responding

Where the Red Fern Grows Chapters 15–20

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. How important are the female characters, such as Billy’s sisters and mother, to the novel? Explain.

5. It is never easy to know what to say to someone who is mourning the death of a beloved animal. What would you say to Billy Colman that might comfort him?

Literature and Writing

Educational Recommendation

Imagine that your teacher is considering whether to keep this novel in the curriculum for the following school year. What would your recommendation be? Write a letter to your teacher, recommending a course of action. In your letter, consider your response to the novel. Also, consider the author’s techniques—such as character development, suspense, theme—and the grade level at which the novel should be read. Make sure that you use specific examples from your novel to prove your point.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Writers often build suspense by dropping hints about events that will occur later in a story. Looking back over the whole novel, you may now understand references that may have seemed unimportant when you first encountered them. These clues to future events are called **foreshadowing**. With your group, look for other examples of foreshadowing in *Where the Red Fern Grows*.

Artistic Interpretation

Many readers visualize scenes and characters as they read a story. Share your visualizations with the class by drawing or painting a favorite scene from *Where the Red Fern Grows*. Use a medium of your choice, such as pen and ink, oils, watercolors, or even collage. With your class, plan a way to display your work for other students in the school.

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Save your work for your portfolio.

Responding

Where the Red Fern Grows

Personal Response

Did you like the ending of the book? Why or why not?

Writing About the Novel

Early in the story, Billy's father says, "There's more to an education than just reading and writing." How does his statement apply to Billy? What kind of education does the boy receive during the course of the story? Use a separate sheet of paper for your response.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Special Scenes

Throughout *Where the Red Fern Grows*, there are special scenes which stay in your mind. Perhaps one of these scenes is the moment when Billy sees his coon hound pups for the first time, or his rather comical slide down the fire escape at the school in Tahlequah. Maybe his win with Little Ann in the beauty contest touched you in a special way, as did the dogs' determination to keep the coon treed during the championship coon hunt, in spite of dangerously cold weather. Wilson Rawls created many scenes such as these, scenes that have etched a place in your memory.

In this activity, work in groups of two to four to select scenes that best represent the group's opinions as you read the questions below. When you have finished your selection, choose one of these scenes to dramatize for your class. Prior to the dramatization, write a brief synopsis of the scene, and explain why this scene is particularly memorable. After your group has practiced the scene, present it for the class. Include a reading of your summary and your reasons for this scene's importance to your group in your presentation.

Which of the scenes in the story:

- made you laugh?
- made you cry?
- caused you to think about something you had never thought about before?
- made you very angry?
- frightened you?
- upset you?
- made you wonder?
- triggered a memory of your own?
- made you happy?
- frustrated you?
- did you want to share with someone else?
- made you want to live in the Ozarks?
- could you visualize strongly?
- did you reread?



Any Questions?

When you finished reading *Where the Red Fern Grows*, did you have some questions that were left unanswered? Write some of your questions here.

Work in groups or by yourself to prepare possible answers for some or all of the questions you have asked above and those written below. When you have finished your predictions, share your ideas with the class.

- What happened to the old redbone hound the narrator of the story saved at the beginning of the book?
- If Billy had not seen the advertisement in the sportsman's magazine, do you think he would have ever gotten his dogs?
- What do you think Billy's father and mother would have done if they had known Billy had such a large amount of money saved?
- If Billy had not been able to get his two coonhounds, do you think he would have gotten over his intense desire to have them in time?
- Could Billy have gotten his dogs without his grandpa's help?
- What happened to Rainie Pritchard?
- Do you think the Pritchards and their blue tick hound killed the ghost coon?
- Would Ruben have killed Billy's dogs if he hadn't tripped?
- Do you think the Pritchard family blamed Billy for Ruben's death?
- What would have happened to Old Dan if Little Ann had drowned in the icy river?
- Could Old Dan have won the beauty contest?
- How would Billy, his father, and his grandfather have felt if Little Ann and Old Dan had not won the coon hunting contest?
- Why didn't Billy keep the gold and silver cups for himself?
- Could Old Dan's life have been saved if Billy had seen the wound far back in the dog's belly, and had carried Old Dan before his entrails had a chance to work themselves out?
- If Little Ann had lived, would she have been a good hunting dog for Billy?
- Will Billy get more dogs?
- Will the Colmans be happy in town?
- Is the legend of the red fern really an old Indian legend?
- Will Billy visit his grandpa at his store in the country again?
- Does the red fern ever die?