

***Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls**  
**Vocabulary**

cur

cane-brakes

allotted

minnow

iodine

cinch

civet cat

peroxide

saw-briers

predicament

slough

cyclone

churn dasher

ventilating

buggy

sycamore

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**Short Answer Questions, page 1**

1. Why do you think the narrator didn't keep the stray dog he helped out in the beginning of the story?
2. How was Billy's longing for a dog different from that of most other boys his age?
3. In what mountains did Billy and his family live?
4. How had Billy's family gotten their land?
5. Why was it so hard for Billy's parents to please him and give him the hounds he wanted?
6. What present did Billy's father bring back for him instead of dogs?
7. Billy was able to catch any number of small game, like skunk and rabbit in his traps, but not raccoons; why was that?
8. What stopped Billy when he decided to run away from home?
9. What did Billy find one day when he was looking through some fishermen's camping ground?
10. What did Billy's grandfather give him before Billy left the store, after telling his grandfather about his saved money?
11. What name did the town children call Billy when they heard where he lived?
12. How did Billy react when he finally saw his puppies?
13. What did Billy say to the two elderly women who were snubbed him in town?
14. What kind of school did Billy go to?
15. What differences did Billy notice between the male and female dogs?
16. While sleeping in a mountain cave with his two pups Billy was awakened by a terrible scream, who was screaming?
17. How did Billy name his dogs?
18. What did the slide that Billy had observed at the town school really turn out to be?
19. What did Billy need the most in order to train his dogs for hunting?
20. Why did Billy's grandfather know so much about raccoons?
21. How did the female puppy save the male puppy when they fought their first raccoon?
22. What did a raccoon's tree barking trick mean?
23. What was Little Ann's specialty while hunting?
24. What did it mean when the dogs had "treed" a raccoon?

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**Short Answer Questions, page 2**

25. How did Billy's grandfather make the raccoon stay in the tree and not run away while Billy was resting?
26. Cutting down the big tree turned out to be incredibly hard for Billy – what different hardships did he encounter?
27. What did Billy's mother do with his first raccoon hide?
28. Why did it become so hard for Billy to visit his grandfather in the store when his dogs had grown up?
29. Why did Billy get angry at the other raccoon hunters sometimes?
30. What happened to Little Ann when Billy and his dogs were hunting raccoon their first winter?
31. What happened to Old Dan when Little Ann wasn't around?
32. Who were the Pritchards?
33. How did Rubin Pritchard die?
34. What turned out to be the reason that Billy's grandfather kept tabs on how many raccoons Billy and his dogs caught?
35. What was it about Billy's mother that Billy had been too busy hunting to notice?
36. What was the one thing that was wrong with Little Ann?
37. Who did Billy promise to give the golden cup to if he won the big coon hunting contest?
38. What did Billy's grandfather want Billy to smuggle out past his grandmother and hide in the buggy before the coon hunting trip?
39. Why did Billy get worried when he heard the screech owls the night before the big contest?
40. What contest did Little Ann win all on her own?
41. What unexpected challenge happened on the last day of the coon hunting competition?
42. What happened to Billy's grandfather during the last night of the competition?
43. Why did Old Dan and Little Ann keep trotting around the tree with the raccoon during the storm?
44. Which hunt was the deadliest Old Dan and Little Ann ever had?
45. How did mountain people stop a bleeding out in the wilderness?
46. What was the legend about the red fern?

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**Essay Questions**

1. Describe what kind of problems Billy and his family ran into when Billy started setting his traps around the house.
2. Explain why hunting season made Billy into a nervous wreck before he got his dogs.
3. Describe how Billy finally found a way of getting the dogs he so greatly wanted.
4. How did Billy's grandfather react when Billy showed him the money he had saved?
5. Why do you think Billy had such problems telling his father about getting the dogs?
6. Why do you think Billy wasn't afraid of the mountains or the dark, but very afraid of the town?
7. Billy couldn't understand why the townspeople kept staring at him. Why do you think they did that?
8. Why do you think Billy's father and mother thought it was so important for Billy and his sisters to live in town one day?
9. Explain why Billy's father thought that Billy should only use grandpa's coon-trap once, and then hunt the coons with the dogs after that.
10. Why do you think Billy's mother was worried about him being out hunting at night, in spite of Billy knowing the landscape since he was born?
11. Explain why you think it was so important for Billy to get his first raccoon out of the tree on his own, without help.
12. What do you think Billy meant in the book when he said that girls don't think the same way as boys do?
13. Why do you think that Billy had very mixed feelings, looking back at the big old tree, after the cutting job was done?
14. Describe Billy's two dogs different personalities and their ways.
15. Why do you think Billy didn't want to kill the old ghost coon, after going through all the trouble of finding him?
16. In what ways did the story show that Old Dan and Little Ann were a very close team?
17. Describe the coon hunting competition; what do you think was the real challenge with it?
18. Describe what happened to Little Ann after Old Dan died.
19. Why do you think Billy felt better when he saw that the red fern grew on the graves of his dogs?

## **Where the Red Fern Grows by Wilson Rawls**

### **Answers**

#### **Vocabulary**

***Possible vocabulary exercises: find definitions in a dictionary; define in original words; locate the words in the text and re-write them; use original sentences to show the meaning in context. Below are sample definitions.***

cur – a mongrel dog

cane-brakes - dense growths of cane grass

allotted – given, portioned out, particularly land

minnow - a small fish of the cyprinoid family

iodine - a liquid used as an antiseptic for wounds

cinch – a girth for a pack or saddle, a firm grip

civet cat - raccoon-like omnivorous mammal of Mexico and the southwestern United States

having a long bushy tail with black and white rings

peroxide – a compound used as a bleaching agent

saw-briers - a hardy, thorny vine native to southeastern and midwestern North America

predicament – an unpleasant, difficult or even dangerous situation

slough – a swamplike area, a marshy pond, or a hole full of mire

cyclone – a violent rotating windstorm

churn dasher - a container or machine in which cream or milk is agitated to make butter

ventilating - to admit fresh air into a place to replace stale or noxious air

buggy - a small, light, one-horse carriage usually having four wheels

sycamore - any of several trees of the genus platanus having thin pale bark that scales off in small plates and lobed leaves and ball-shaped heads of fruits

#### **Short Answers**

***For the short answer questions, students may answer questions briefly on the page or at greater length on their own paper or in writing journals.***

1. The dog was on a mission to find his way home, the man didn't want to keep the dog and break his heart in the process.
2. Billy didn't just want one dog, but two, and he only wanted coon hounds, no other breed.
3. Billy's family lived in the Ozarks.
4. Billy's mother had gotten the land allotted to her because of her Cherokee blood.
5. Billy's family was poor, and hunting dogs were much too expensive.
6. Billy's father brought Billy three small hunting traps.
7. Raccoons turned out to be too smart for hunting traps.
8. Billy changed his mind about running away when he heard the howling of a timber wolf.
9. Billy found a sportsman's magazine.
10. Billy's grandfather gave him a big bag of fine candy.
11. The town children called Billy a "Hillbilly".
12. Billy started crying when he saw his puppies for the first time.
13. Billy told them that the feathers in their hats were goose feathers painted with iodine.
14. Billy was home-schooled by his mother.
15. The male was tough, strong, and brave, while the female was small, careful, and smart.
16. A mountain lion woke Billy up with its screams.
17. Billy found two names carved into a tree on the camping site where he had first found the magazine with the ads for the kennel.

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### **Answers**

#### **Short Answers, continued.**

18. The slide turned out to be a fire escape.
19. Billy needed a raccoon skin in order to train his dogs for hunting.
20. Billy's grandfather used to have a pet raccoon when he was a boy.
21. The female puppy snuck up behind the raccoon and bore her teeth into his back.
22. A "treebarking trick" was when the raccoon jumped up into a tree and then use his legs to jump far away from the tree, with his scent tricking the dogs into thinking that he was still in the tree.
23. Little Ann's specialty was to find the trail again after a coon had played a trick on the dogs.
24. Treeing a coon meant that the dogs had hunted a raccoon up into a tree.
25. Billy's grandfather put a man-sized scarecrow underneath the tree, tricking the coon to think it was Billy.
26. Billy suffered such hardships as exhaustion, hunger, and severe blisters.
27. Billy's mother made the hide into a cap.
28. It was hard for Billy to visit his grandfather's store because every dog in town wanted to fight Old Dan.
29. The coon hunters teased Billy about his dogs being so small.
30. Little Ann fell through the ice and almost drowned.
31. Old Dan refused to hunt without Little Ann.
32. The Pritchards were a family of trouble-makers who lived up the river.
33. Rubin accidentally fell on Billy's ax, which he had stolen to kill Old Dan.
34. Billy's grandfather wanted to register and enter Billy's dogs in the big coon hunting competition.
35. Billy hadn't noticed that his mother was going to have another baby.
36. Little Ann was gun shy.
37. Billy promised to give the golden cup to his youngest sister.
38. Grandpa wanted Billy to smuggle out a bottle of corn liqueur.
39. Superstition said that it was bad luck to hear a screech owl more than once on a night.
40. Little Ann won the beauty contest.
41. The dogs had to hunt through a vicious sleet storm.
42. Billy's grandfather fell and sprained his foot badly.
43. Old Dan and Little Ann had to keep moving in the storm; if they stopped, they would freeze to death.
44. Old Dan's and Little Ann's deadliest hunt was the hunt against the mountain lion.
45. Mountain people stopped bleeding by mixing blood with soil into a mud and working it into the wound.
46. The legend about the red fern said that the red fern was sacred and the places it grew in were sacred too, and the red fern would never die.

#### **Essay Answers**

***For the essay questions, we suggest a writing journal where students could record answers as they read. Alternatively, a limited number of questions could be assigned to each student. The essay questions can also be used as discussion questions.***