

Where the Red Fern Grows: A 4th Grade Literary Focus Unit

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Featured Selection

Where the Red Fern Grows by Wilson Rawls. New York: Dell Laurel-Leaf; branch of Random House, 1961.

Where the Red Fern Grows is a fictional novel about a boy and his two coon hounds. The story takes place during the Great Depression in the Ozark Mountains. Billy, the main character, works very hard to save money to order his two coon hounds, Little Ann and Old Dan. Once Billy starts training his dogs to hunt, the three are inseparable. They encounter many adventures together out in the woods. They even win a prestigious hunting tournament. One evening when Billy and the dogs were out hunting, the dogs treed a mountain lion instead of a raccoon. The dogs engaged in a vicious fight with the mountain lion, saving Billy's life. Unfortunately Old Dan is injured, and he does not live through the night. Little Ann is so distraught that Old Dan is gone, she loses her will to live, and she dies shortly after Old Dan. A red fern grows in the middle of Old Dan and Little Ann's graves.

Related Materials

Charlotte's Web by E.B. White. New York: Scholastic Inc, 1952.

- Grade Four

This book explores another human and animal connection along with the idea that death is a part of the life cycle. This fictional novel takes a different perspective, where the animal gives his point of view of the connection between humans and animals.

Shiloh by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 2000.

- Grade Four

Love at first sight is the feeling that came over the boy who found the dog, Shiloh. This fictional novel displays the strong emotions that develop between a dog and a young boy, and how much the young boy will go through to save Shiloh.

Sounder by William H. Armstrong. New York: Harper Trophy, 1969.

- Grade Four

A difficult life style makes *Sounder* and going hunting the two best things in a young boy's life. This fictional novel explores life on plantations after slavery, and how a dog can help give a young boy so much courage and strength to help out his family.

Jim's Dog Muffin by M. Cohen. New York: Dell Publishing, 1984.

- Grade Two

Dealing with the death of a pet is examined in this children's book. The story explores ways to help children comfort classmates when there has been a death in their lives.

Puppy Training for Kids by Sarah Whitehead. New York: Barron's Educational Series Inc., 2001.

- Grade Four

This nonfiction guide can help students learn how to properly take care of a puppy and/or dog. The many steps displayed in this book on how to train a dog can show students how much work people do to train their dogs to be good hunters and pets.

Goals

- Students will explore the powerful relationships between animals and humans, especially the connection between dogs and people.
- Students will examine the feelings and emotions surrounding death, in order to gain a better understanding of how people handle sad things in their lives.
- Students will discover the importance of determination, responsibilities, and family relationships.

State Standards

Language Arts

- 4.2.1 Use the organization of informational text to strengthen comprehension.
Example: Read informational texts that are organized by comparing and contrasting ideas, by discussing causes for and effects of events, or by sequential order and use this organization to understand what is read. Use graphic organizers, such as webs, flow charts, concept maps, or Venn diagrams to show the organization of the text.
- 4.3.3 Use knowledge of the situation, setting, and a character's traits, motivations, and feelings to determine the causes for that character's actions.
Example: After reading *The Sign of the Beaver* by Elizabeth George Speare, tell how the Native American character's actions are influenced by his being in a setting with which he is very familiar and feels comfortable, as opposed to the reactions of another character, Matt.
- 4.4.6 Locate information in reference texts by using organizational features, such as prefaces and appendixes.

Mathematics

- 4.7.8 Make precise calculations and check the validity of the results in the context of the problem.
Example: The buses you use for a school trip hold 55 people each. How many buses will you need to seat 180 people?

Social Studies

- 4.4.4 Explain that prices change as a result of changes in supply* and demand* for specific products.

Unit Plan

Pre-Reading

Activity: The teacher brings in a guest speaker on training specialty dogs, such as hunting dogs, Seeing Eye dogs, or police dogs. Also, coon hounds can be brought into the classroom so the students can have a visual about the types of dogs they will be reading about. Research can be done to explore how coon dogs are able to track other animals.

Introduce key words: Ozark Mountains, coon dogs, trapping, the Great Depression

Grouping: Whole Group

Reading

Activity: Teacher will read the first three chapters out loud. During this time the teacher will point out key elements and clues to the story. Teacher will also model good reading skills during this time. As the story moves along the students will be expected to do more independent or buddy reading.

Accommodations: The teacher will give lists of difficult words to the students prior to reading the selection and the teacher will explain what the words mean to help with comprehension. The teacher can also make up graphic organizers to help students monitor comprehension.

Grouping: Whole Group, Individual, and Buddy

Activity: As the students learn more about coon hunting and do some research on training dogs, they gain a better understanding of how to hunt and how animals can trick the dogs. The students will play a physical game where some students are the raccoons, running and hiding from the students who are playing the coon dogs. They can put into practice some of the skills they have learned that coon dogs can do.

Grouping: Whole Group

Responding

Activity: The students will write journal entries after each chapter they read. Journal entries will have topics that cover some of the goals for reading the book. An example would be to have the students write down the relationship Billy shares with his grandfather and compare that to the relationship the students have with one of their family members. Another entry could be how the Great Depression affects Billy's family in the story. Also, the students can reflect on the personalities of the dogs and of their own reactions and feelings when the dogs die in the end of the story.

Grouping: Individual

Exploring

Word Wall Words:

Activity: The students will get into four groups and research the four seasons in the Ozark Mountains. They will create a mural to illustrate what a person would see while they are driving through the Ozarks during a particular season.

- About the Author: Impact of author's life on the story (The author is from the Ozark Mountains)
- Meaning behind the red fern and what is its purpose? Reread this section of book to class
- Explore related books: Discussion of a death of a pet
- Skills to teach: Model and collect examples of colloquialism

Grouping: Small Groups and Partners

Applying

Activities: The students will research how much a coon dog in the present day costs. The students will then come up with a list of jobs they can do to earn the money to purchase the dogs.

The students will get a chance to be the teacher. The students will be divided into groups. Some of the groups will research the hunting and trapping laws of their state (focus on Endangered Species Act of 1973) and the other groups will research the role the government played in the Great Depression to help people. The groups will present the information they found to the class.

Grouping: Individual and Small Groups

Accommodation: Have a list of websites or books available to help direct the students in the search for information. Also, have graphic organizers available so students can organize the information they find. By typing out the main points of their presentations, students will not forget what they want to teach their peers.



Time Schedule



Day 1 Guest speaker and dogs come in. Introduce new vocabulary. Read Chapter 1 to class.	Day 2 Read Chapter 2 to class. Start journal reflections.	Day 3 Read Chapter 3 to class. Setting: Work on murals Chapter 4 read at home.	Day 4 Discuss Chapter 4 Chapter 5 partner read. Mini-lesson: Colloquialisms List	Day 5 Chapter 5 and 6 Family relationships and how they compare to the story
Day 6 Chapter 7 partner read. Chapter 8 read individually Great Depression	Day 7 Discuss chapter 7 and 8 Create list of jobs to earn money for dogs. Read Chapter 9	Day 8 Discuss Chapter 9 Read Chapter 10 to class.	Day 9 Chapter 10 Read Chapter 11 individually Explore how dogs can track animals.	Day 10 Discuss Chapter 11 Read Chapter 12 to the class. Play Coon Chase Game
Day 11 Read Chapters 13 and 14	Day 12 Discuss Chapters 13 and 14 Partner read Chapter 15 Group research project	Day 13 Read Chapter 16 as a class. Read Chapter 17 individually. Finish up Group Research Projects	Day 14 Discuss Chapters 16 and 17 Read Chapter 18 individually. Give presentations of projects	Day 15 Read Chapters 19 and 20 to the class. Discuss end of story and meaning of red fern. Plant a small tree or red fern.



Assignment Check List

- _____ Journal Entries for Each Reading Assignment
- _____ Ozark Mountain Mural
- _____ List of Jobs
- _____ Group Research Project
- _____ List of Colloquialisms found in the book

Websites Used To Create Unit

- <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/redfern/>
- <http://www.ozarkmountainregion.com> (useful for when students research Ozark Mountains for mural project)
- <http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780385323307&view=tg> (created by Pat Scales)