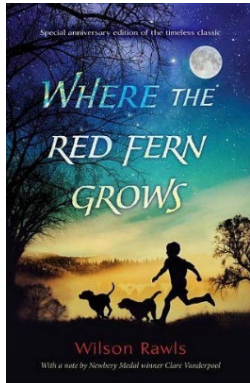


Finalist, Middle School Category



Essayist: Priya, age 10, George Washington Middle School

Advocating for: *Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls

“You were worth it, old friend, and a thousand times over” is from *Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls. This is a powerful book about hard work, determination, and grief. This book has impacted my life because it helped me when my dog was dying. Others should read it because it has fantastic character growth, and it still leaves you thinking after it ends.

You know it’s a good book when you get attached to the characters. The story takes place in the 1920s, at a farm in the Oklahoma Ozarks, and is about hardwork paying off. The main character Billy wants to get two hunting hounds to help him hunt, but they cost 50 dollars! Billy works hard to save every penny he earns until he is able to buy two hounds. He names them Old Dan & Little Ann. This story is about all the things they endure together, the contests they win, and, finally, the pain Billy endures when losing two companions. Even after the hounds die, they are still giving to Billy’s family, and because of the money that the dogs earned in hunting contests, Billy’s family can move to the city. Even though I was only a young girl when I heard this story, I still felt greatly attached to the characters.

When this book was first read to me, I was seven years old with my old dog Bingo by my side. When my mom read the ending, we all just broke down because we all knew deep down that Bingo had lived a good life; one that was coming to an end. This novel helped me deal with Bingo’s death because it brought awareness about my dog to me. I believed that if we had buried Bingo, a red fern would have grown over his grave. Bingo has changed my life and impacted many others’. Bingo helped people overcome their fear of dogs and many of them own a dog now. I connect deeply with this book because I lost Bingo shortly after this book was read to me.



People should read this book because it only takes one book to feel like you've known the character your whole life. Billy starts young and works hard towards something he wants with all his heart. He grows from a ten-year-old who wants two dogs, to a young man who has two accomplished, intelligent, and loyal companions. Even after you finish the book, it leaves you thinking: *What more could Billy and his dogs have done if they hadn't left for the city and if the dogs hadn't died?* At the end of the book, Billy isn't ready for a new dog, which shows that he is still greatly impacted by the death of his dogs. This book is beautifully written, and it only takes a single novel to connect deeply with the story and the character.

In conclusion, this is a story about hard work, determination, and grief. The main character wants something with all his heart and works hard to get what he wants. Other people should read this book because it has amazing character growth, and is a beautiful story. It has impacted my life, and I believe that if others read it, it will change their lives too.