

Submitted by Aria Newton of Mansfield, TX, Rogene Worley Middle School

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Dear Wilson Rawls,

I never thought a book could make me feel so many emotions at once joy, determination, heartbreak, and even hope but *Where the Red Fern Grows* did exactly that. Your story of Billy and his two dogs, Old Dan and Little Ann, made me see life in a new way. Before reading your book, I never truly understood what it meant to work hard for something, to love unconditionally, or to deal with deep loss. Now, I don't think I will ever forget.

At first, I admired Billy's determination. He didn't just wish for something, he worked for it. When he wanted his dogs, he didn't beg his parents or wait for someone else to help him. He saved every penny, sacrificed his comforts, and never gave up. That kind of persistence made me reflect on my own life. Too often, I've given up on things because they seemed too difficult or took too long. Billy taught me that if I want something badly enough, I have to work for it, even if it means waiting and pushing through challenges.

Then, there was the love between Billy, Old Dan, and Little Ann. I've always thought of love as something simple, but your book showed me that real love is selfless. Billy and his dogs would do anything for each other, even if it meant risking their lives. That moment in the book when Billy tries to save his dogs from the mountain lion that fierce loyalty is something I will always remember. It made me think about my relationships, especially with my family. Do I show that same level of devotion? Am I willing to put others before myself the way Billy and his dogs did? Your book made me want to be a more caring and selfless person.

But the part of your book that changed me the most was the ending. I won't lie when Old Dan and Little Ann died, I cried. I don't think I've ever cried over a book before, but this one felt different. Losing something or someone you love is one of the hardest things in life. I used to think loss was just pain, something to avoid thinking about. But your book showed me that even in loss, there can be meaning. The red fern, growing where Billy's dogs were buried, was a symbol of love that never fades. It made me realize that even when we lose people (or pets) we love, their impact stays with us. That's a lesson I never expected to learn from a book, but I'm so grateful I did.

Thank you for writing *Where the Red Fern Grows*. It changed how I see hard work, love, and even loss. I may not be training hunting dogs in the Ozarks, but your story made me want to be more determined, love more deeply, and appreciate every moment I have with the people (and animals) I care about.

Sincerely,
Aria Newton