

Where the Red Fern Grows

The main theme in the novel, *Where the Red Fern Grows*, is love and loyalty. This theme is shown throughout the book in many different ways.

One of the first places where this theme is shown in the book is when Billy cuts down the giant sycamore tree. He doesn't want to cut the big tree down, but he promised his dogs that if they treed a raccoon, he would finish the job. When his father came to see what the matter was and tried to talk him out of finishing the job, Billy tells him, "I just have to get that coon. If I don't, my dogs won't ever believe in me again." (Rawls, p.77) This tells the reader that Billy is loyal to his dogs, that he doesn't want to break his promise to them, even if his promise seems to be impossible. He loves them and doesn't want to disappoint them.

Another place when love and loyalty is demonstrated is when Little Ann comes to the rescue of Old Dan when the Pritchard's blue tick hound attacks him. The text states, "What I saw thrilled me. Faithful Little Ann... had gone to the assistance of Old Dan. I knew my dogs were very close to each other. Everything they did was done as a combination, but I never expected this. ...I could see that Little Ann's jaws were glued to the throat of the big hound. She would never loosen that deadly hold until the last breath of life was gone." (Rawls, p.118) This is evidence that Little Ann was so loyal to Old Dan that she was willing to risk her life to help him. Little Ann is a very small dog, but that doesn't matter if her partner is in danger.

A third example of the theme is when Old Dan and Little Ann saved Billy from the mountain lion. As Billy describes it, "I knew I was trapped. With a terrifying scream he sprang. I never saw my dogs when they got between the lion and me, but they were there. Side by side, they rose up from the ground as one. They sailed straight into those jaws of death, their small, red bodies taking the ripping, slashing claws meant for me." (Rawls, p.193) This example shows the love and loyalty that Old Dan and Little Ann had for Billy. They were willing to die for him and they did.

There are two major types of conflict in *Where the Red Fern Grows*. The first type of conflict is character vs. nature. One of the conflicts that Billy faces against nature is when he must chop down the sycamore tree. The tree is huge and takes him more than a day to chop down, but he perseveres and is able to finally do it. There is also the conflict of character vs. character when Billy takes the bet with the Pritchard brothers. They bet Billy \$2.00 that his dogs can't tree the ghost coon. Billy's dogs do manage to tree the coon, but when Billy won't kill it, the Pritchards get violent. The conflict ends when Rubin accidentally falls on Billy's axe and dies.

Love and loyalty is the major theme throughout *Where the Red Fern Grows*, illustrated many times in the story. There are many more examples throughout the book. The story is full of conflicts as well, which adds to the theme of love and loyalty.