

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Rascal

by

Sterling North

Book Information

Sterling North, Rascal
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Interest Level: MG

The author recalls his adventures with his pet raccoon, Rascal, during his carefree childhood in a small Midwestern town at the close of World War I.

Award: Newbery Honor; State Award; Young Reader's Choice Award/Nominee

Topics: Animals, Raccoons; Biographies/Autobiographies, Biographies/Autobiographies (All); Family Life, Pets; Recommended Reading, NSTA/CBC Outstanding Science; U.S. States/Regions, Wisconsin

Main Characters

Aunt Lillie Uncle Fred's wife, who cares for Sterling when he has the Spanish flu

Bert Bruce a retired man who owns a cabin in the north woods

Herman Sunderland Oscar's father, who is a demanding father with a short temper

Herschel Sterling's older brother, who is in France fighting in World War I

Jessica one of Sterling's older sisters, who cared for him after his mother died

Mr. North Sterling's father

Mrs. Sunderland Oscar's mother, who is a kind, gentle woman

Oscar Sunderland Sterling's friend, who is with Sterling when Rascal is found

Poe-the-Crow Sterling's pet crow, which lives in the belfry of the Methodist church and likes to take shiny things

Rascal the raccoon kit that becomes Sterling's pet

Reverend Thurman a terrible-tempered neighbor of the Norths

Slammy Stillman a twelve-year-old boy who is a bully and never follows the rules; Sterling's enemy

Sterling North an eleven-year-old boy who finds and raises a raccoon kit

Theo one of Sterling's older sisters, who cared for him after their mother died

Uncle Fred the brother of Sterling's father; a hard-working farmer

Wowser Sterling's Saint Bernard

Vocabulary

carburetor a mechanical device that mixes air with gasoline vapor in order to produce an explosion in an engine

creel a wicker basket that is used to hold a fisher's catch

delegation a group chosen to represent the interests of others; one or more persons elected or appointed to represent others; a group sent or empowered to act for others; a group or body of representatives or ambassadors

foil to hinder or ruin the efforts or plans of a person or group; to stop from being successful; to prevent the success of; to cause to fail

intrigued caused to be interested or curious; appealed strongly to; aroused or stirred the interest or curiosity of; attracted; fascinated

naturalist a scholar who observes and studies animals and plants in the field; one who studies Earth's plant and animal species and their history; a person who believes that the world can be understood only in scientific terms

postponed put off until a later time; held over; deferred; shelved

promontory a high point or elevation of land, usually extending to or over water

prosperity a state of economic growth or well-being; material wealth; happiness, usually resulting from financial success or economic health

sulky a light, two-wheeled, one-person carriage or vehicle that is drawn by one horse, used especially in harness racing

Synopsis

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In this autobiographical story, Sterling North recounts the year he is 11 years old and raises a baby raccoon he names Rascal. Sterling and his father live in a small town in southern Wisconsin. His two sisters are grown and have moved away from home, and his brother is in France fighting in World War I. Sterling's mother died when he was 7 years old, and his father is often away on business, so Sterling is often left to fend for himself. He has many pets, including a Saint Bernard named Wowser, Poe-the-Crow, and several skunks.

One evening while Sterling and his friend Oscar are in the woods, Wowser comes upon a raccoon den. They discover a mother raccoon with four babies. All but one of the kits follow their mother into the woods and disappear. Sterling takes the remaining kit, which he names Rascal, home to raise. Sterling and Rascal are best friends and spend all their time together. Rascal even eats in a high chair at the table and sleeps in Sterling's bed.

As Rascal matures, however, the trouble starts. He begins pillaging the neighbors' gardens and raiding the henhouses. The neighbors become angry and demand that Sterling keep Rascal in a cage or on a leash. Some even threaten to kill the mischievous raccoon. Sterling builds a cage and buys a collar and leash for Rascal, but he realizes that Rascal is unhappy with his lack of freedom.

Although it is difficult for Sterling, he decides to release Rascal into the wild. He and Rascal set out toward Lake Koshkonong in the canoe Sterling built himself. They reach the lake and enter Koshkonong Creek, where Sterling removes Rascal's collar and leash. Sterling wants Rascal to decide for himself. When Rascal hears the call of a female raccoon, he plunges into the water to join her. Rascal has made his choice, and Sterling quickly paddles away.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Inferential Comprehension

Several times in the story, the author gave hints to things that happened later in his life. What insights into the future of Sterling and his family does the reader gain?

He would have an accident or an illness that would disable him. He would attend college. His father would live to be ninety-nine years old.

Inferential Comprehension

How did Wowser's relationship with Rascal differ from Poe's?

Wowser liked Rascal and was his guardian. As Sterling carried the baby raccoon home, Wowser often came to sniff and lick Sterling's newest pet. When Rascal was locked inside the cage, Wowser stayed near the cage to watch over Rascal and keep him company, seeming to sympathize with the raccoon. Poe, on the other hand, disliked Rascal from the very beginning and was a rival. Both Poe and Rascal liked shiny things and fought over them. In one instance, Rascal had found a penny, and Poe flew down and took it from him.

Teachable Skills

Drawing Conclusions Drawing Conclusions

Understanding Hist/Cultural Factors

Understanding Historical and Cultural Factors

Comparing and Contrasting Compare and Contrast

Understanding the Author's Craft

Understanding Author's Craft