

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Summer of the Monkeys by Wilson Rawls

Book Information

Wilson Rawls, Summer of the Monkeys
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283 Pages
Book Level: 4.8
Interest Level: MG

A fourteen-year-old Ozark Mountain boy attempts to recapture monkeys escaped from a traveling circus.

Topics: Adventure, Rescue/Save; Animals, Dogs; Animals, Monkeys; Humor/Funny, Funny; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 4-6

Main Characters

Daisy Jay Berry's crippled twin sister; a gentle girl who has a special gift with animals

Grandpa Jay Berry's wise grandfather, who is also his friend and confidant

Jay Berry the principal character of the story; a fourteen-year-old boy who meets the challenge of capturing twenty-nine circus monkeys to realize his dream of buying a pony and a .22

Jimbo an intelligent chimpanzee and the leader of twenty-eight circus monkeys

Mama the loving and protective mother of Jay Berry; a religious woman striving to bring up her children properly

Papa a hard-working father who shows understanding and a sense of humor toward his son

Rowdy Jay Berry's dog and true companion

Vocabulary

capers pranks or tricks

hydrophobia rabies

mash crushed grain mixed with malt and fermented to make beer, whiskey, etc.

Synopsis

Life is good for Jay Berry, a fourteen-year-old boy living on his family's Oklahoma farm in the late 1800s. He has a loving family, a grandpa who understands boys, a pocketknife, and a "darn good dog" named Rowdy. The beauty of the Ozarks is a source of wonderment for Jay Berry. He especially enjoys his tramps in the river bottom near his home. It is there that he imagines himself at the center of many storybook adventures.

One day, as Jay Berry explores the river bottom, an unforgettable, real-life adventure begins when Rowdy trees a monkey. While Jay Berry explains the astonishing experience to Grandpa, he learns that thirty monkeys have escaped a circus train wreck. A generous reward is being offered by the circus trainers for the monkeys' safe return. Jay Berry is determined to catch the monkeys, collect the reward, and buy the pony and the .22 he has been dreaming about. Grandpa is just as excited as his grandson and promises to help the boy capture the monkeys.

The effort to capture the monkeys is indeed a challenge. Jay Berry realizes very quickly that he is dealing with highly trained animals. He also discovers that the hundred-dollar monkey, Jimbo, is especially intelligent. In addition, he learns that Jimbo communicates with the other monkeys, and consequently, spoils many of Jay Berry and Grandpa's careful plans to catch them. Although the monkeys cause Jay Berry and his dog to suffer pain and humiliation, the boy never gives up on his quest for the pony and the .22.

Crucial to the plot of the story is Daisy, Jay Berry's twin sister, who was born with a crippled leg. Although the leg can be corrected with surgery, Mama and Papa are unable to afford the operation. Jay Berry recognizes his gentle sister's pain and feels compassion for her.

Everyone's luck changes when Daisy finds a ring of little hillside toadstools--a fairy ring. An Ozark legend says that if one kneels in the middle of the ring and makes a wish, the wish will come true. As Jay Berry kneels in the center of the ring, he unselfishly

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wishes that Daisy's leg be healed.

Later, Jay Berry again shows selflessness. After a rainstorm that frightens the monkeys, he finally leads them home and collects the reward money, but then realizes that a pony and a .22 are less important than his sister's happiness. He gives the money to his parents so that Daisy is able to have the operation, eventually allowing her to run through the fields with her brother---the happiest wish of all come true.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

At one point in the book, Jay Berry makes the decision that he will never tell Daisy that she doesn't see the Old Man of the Mountains. What causes him to make that decision?

Jay Berry is awe-struck by his father's explanation of Daisy's Old Man of the Mountains. Papa tells him that Daisy may be seeing the spirit of Christ and that she may have that special connection because of the pain she suffers. Jay Berry is surprised by the seriousness of his father's answer and also understands Daisy on a deeper, more compassionate level.

Literary Analysis

How does Jay Berry change during the course of the story?

Throughout most of the story, Jay Berry is thinking about himself and the pleasure he will feel when he is able to buy a pony and a .22 with the reward money for capturing the monkeys. Near the end of the book, he discovers that the fulfillment of his dream is empty if he cannot bring happiness to his sister. His unselfishness is a mark of his new maturity.

Inferential Comprehension

In the blacksmith shop, Papa says that Jay Berry will get a pony and a .22 someday if he leads a clean life. Then Papa says, "You'll get help when you least expect it." What does he mean?

Papa is referring to his faith in God's goodness and mercy.

Constructing Meaning

Jay Berry shows great determination in his effort to catch the monkeys. Of course, he is motivated to get a pony and a .22. Have you ever worked hard to get something you wanted? Did you succeed?

Answers will vary.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Plot At the climax of *Summer of the Monkeys*, Daisy discovers a circle of little white toadstools on a hillside--a fairy ring. She is overjoyed because she knows the legend of the fairy ring, which says that whoever kneels inside the fairy ring and makes a wish will have that wish come true. When Jay Berry, Mama, and Papa kneel in the center of the ring, they secretly wish that Daisy's leg will be healed. Daisy wishes for Jay Berry to get his pony and his .22. Each family member has been unselfish in his or her approach to the wish. For an enrichment activity, have the students imagine finding their own fairy ring. Have them write about a wish they would make for someone else. Encourage them to explain why they have chosen that particular person and why the wish is important. As another follow-up activity, introduce the students to the Make A Wish Foundation. Explain the goals of the organization. Contact the foundation to inquire about any projects in which the students might participate.

Understanding Literary Features Although Jay Berry fails several times to catch the monkeys, he perseveres. His determination is admirable. Discuss the importance of one's determination. Encourage students to share stories about their efforts to fulfill a wish. During the discussion,

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highlight famous people like the Wright Brothers, Abe Lincoln, Thomas Edison, and Helen Keller. Have students create personal goals that require determination. Have them explain what steps they will follow to achieve their goals and what challenges they might encounter along the way.

Understanding Characterization Jimbo is an intelligent chimpanzee. He communicates with the other monkeys, shows a sense of humor, and is able to outsmart Jay Berry and his grandpa several times. Gather books about chimpanzees from the library. Have small groups collect information on various chimp topics and give reports. Topics might include: geographical locations where chimps live, famous chimps, the needs of chimps, the physical characteristics of chimps, and the intellectual capabilities of chimps.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors The author of *Summer of the Monkeys* explains that Jay Berry and his family live "smack dab in the middle of the Cherokee Nation" in Oklahoma. There are other references to the Indians of the area as well. As a class assignment, have the students research the Cherokee Nation. Require them to locate and make a general map of the area. Read an account of the Trail of Tears to further their knowledge of Native American history. Discuss what happened to the land set aside for the Indians in Oklahoma.