

Summer of the Monkeys Study Guide

Summer of the Monkeys by Wilson Rawls

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Plot Summary

The Lee family lives in the late 1800s on a family farm on Cherokee land in the middle of the Cherokee Nation. The farm is in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains on the banks of the Illinois River in northeastern Oklahoma. The family includes Bob Lee and Sara Lee, and their twin children Jay Berry and Daisy. Jay Berry and Daisy are both fourteen years old each and because Daisy was born second, Jay Berry refers to her as his little sister. Daisy was born with a crippled leg. Doctors have advised the family that Daisy's leg can be made to function with an expensive operation. For years, the family has been saving money to pay for the operation. One day, a circus train derails near the Lee farm; one car bursts open allowing twenty-nine circus monkeys to escape. The circus offers a huge reward for the capture and return of the monkeys. Jay Berry, with his trusty hound dog Rowdy, discovers the monkeys have taken up residence on the family farmland in an overgrown area called the river bottoms. Jay Berry consults with his canny grandpa and they attempt to catch the monkeys—without much success. Every time, the monkeys prove too wily. Then a very powerful storm rolls through the area. The domesticated monkeys nearly freeze to death and Jay Berry finds them and rescues them. They gladly follow him home to warm shelter and plentiful food. Jay Berry receives the reward money. He wants to spend it on a pony and a rifle, but instead he gives it to his family so they can finally afford the operation on Daisy's leg. Daisy and her mother travel to distant Oklahoma City and the operation is successful. After six long weeks of recovery, Daisy returns home and runs through the meadows with Jay Berry. She brings home a present for her brother. It is a rifle. Jay Berry's grandfather presents him with another present - a pony.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Jay Berry, the narrator and protagonist, is a fourteen-year-old boy who was born c. 1880 in Missouri. Jay Berry is a twin to his sister Daisy. While Jay Berry is healthy and well-formed, Daisy is born with a deformed right leg and must use a crutch to get around. Nevertheless, both Jay Berry and Daisy are happy children. They live with their mother and father in a traditional nuclear family. Jay Berry's father is a hard-working farmer and his mother is a religious woman who is very small, about 100 pounds. When Jay Berry is a newborn his parents inherit sixty acres of farmland in Oklahoma from Jay Berry's maternal grandfather. Jay Berry's grandfather is a store owner in the so-called Cherokee Lands of Oklahoma, near the Illinois River. He traded goods for sixty acres of land and then gave the land to his daughter. The family makes the trip from Missouri, where they were subsistence sharecroppers, and makes their new home in the virgin wilderness of Oklahoma. By the time Jay Berry is fourteen the family farm is well-established and the family lives in a cabin-like home. Jay Berry is content with a pocketknife, a good dog he calls Rowdy, and time to explore the wild areas near the Illinois River Bottoms.

One day the family milk cow, Sally Gooden, escapes - the only thing she particularly is good at. Jay Berry is sent to locate the cow, which he does. He then spends some more time exploring around the Illinois River Bottoms. Rowdy suddenly picks up a scent and runs through the dense foliage barking, eventually treeing something. When Jay Berry catches up he expects to see a squirrel but is flabbergasted to see what he believes is a monkey - he has never seen a real monkey before. He runs home and tells his father, who surmises it must be someone's escaped pet. His mother frets and worries that other strange, wild animals may be living in the River Bottoms. Jay Berry is then sent to town to do some shopping at his grandfather's store.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter 1 is critical to understanding the novel. It introduces the protagonist, nearly all of the major characters, and establishes the setting. It also introduces the monkeys that will consume most of the plot, and establishes the central tension of the narrative - namely, Daisy's bad leg and the family need for money to secure an operation to fix it. Most of the chapter focuses on the area the family lives in—how it was acquired, how it was settled and cleared, and the character and location of the land. The sixty acres are not definitely located but can be generally located somewhere in the neighborhood of present-day Tahlequah, Cherokee County, Oklahoma. The Illinois River noted in the novel is a tributary of the Arkansas River and should not be confused with the larger Illinois River in Illinois. The family values their land and Jay Berry in particular finds it beautiful and captivating. The land is partially cleared during the time of the novel to

permit farming; however, much of the land is still virgin forest, particularly that near the Illinois River Bottoms.



Chapters 2 - 4

Chapters 2 - 4 Summary

In town, Jay Berry tells his grandfather about the monkey Rowdy treed. His grandfather tells him that a few days ago a train wreck had cracked open a circus train car, allowing numerous monkeys to escape. About thirty monkeys were not recaptured; these must be the monkeys—at least some of them—that Jay Berry heard and saw. Grandfather says that one monkey is worth one hundred dollars in reward money, and the other twenty-nine monkeys are worth two dollars each: Jay Berry could potentially earn \$158 for capturing the monkeys and returning them to the circus. Grandfather helps Jay Berry wrap some small animal traps' jaws in thick material so they will not damage the monkeys' paws. With the modified monkey traps and his mother's needed items, Jay Berry sets out for home. In Chapter 3 Jay Berry secures his parents' permission to attempt to capture the monkeys. Jay Berry discusses it with Daisy and she warns him not to harm them. Daisy says that the Old Man of the Mountains doesn't like it when boys kill or hurt animals.

In Chapter 4, Jay Berry sets out to capture some monkeys. After finishing his chores, he goes to the river bottoms and sets out his traps, covering them with leaves and baiting them with apples. He watches from a hide as some small monkeys approach the trap. They are prevented by a large chimpanzee - the \$100 monkey - that drops to the ground and scouts the area. The big monkey retrieves the apples without setting off the traps, shares out the fruit, and then looks at Jay Berry in his hide and laughs, turning somersaults. Jay Berry then tries again, this time using twine to tie apples to the trap plates. Again the big monkey intervenes, using sticks to set off the traps and then taking out the apple bait. Jay Berry gathers his traps and considers his options. Then while he is drinking some water from a creek, the big monkey steals his lunch, apples, and traps. Jay Berry becomes very angry and shoots the chimpanzee with his slingshot. The monkeys become agitated and start to chase Jay Berry, who flees from the river bottoms with Rowdy close behind.

Chapters 2 - 4 Analysis

The reward money offered for the capture and return of the monkeys will only be offered if the monkeys are returned healthy. The amount of the aggregate reward of \$158 is substantial. By comparison, the sixty acres of land that the family lives on is probably worth something like \$50; undeveloped Cherokee Lands formally were valued at about 41 to 48 cents per acre. Jay Berry's father notes that a good mule with harness costs about \$100. Jay Berry has always wanted a pony and a .22 rifle, which the reward money from the monkeys would enable him to purchase both with money left over. The significant reward money also ensures that Jay Berry's father will support his attempts to capture the monkeys.



Unfortunately for Jay Berry, the \$100 monkey or chimpanzee is quite intelligent. His first trapping foray is a dismal failure and he spends the whole day attempting to trap a monkey without any results. This initial trip ends with Jay Berry running away, frightened, from the monkeys as they chase him. He notes how big the chimpanzee's mouth and teeth are. In fact, chimpanzees are quite dangerous when angered. Jay Berry initially mistakes the chimpanzee for a boy and the monkey does seem nearly human in intelligence and behavior. In any event, round one goes to the monkeys.



Chapters 5-8

Chapters 5-8 Summary

Jay Berry runs home, tearing up his clothes in the process. At home he is embarrassed to admit that the monkeys have stolen all his gear. Papa later accompanies Jay Berry to the bottoms but they can't find the monkeys. Jay Berry goes to town to consult with Grandpa. Grandpa listens to the story of the monkey trap failure, thinks for awhile, and then fetches a large net from the store. It has a long handle and two lines—one opens the net, one closes it. He tells Jay Berry to dig a hole at night, hide in the hole, and bait the net. When a monkey steps onto the net, Jay Berry will pull the line to close the net and thus catch a monkey. In Chapter 6 Jay Berry spends the rest of the day dreaming about having enough money to buy a pony and a gun. His Grandma feeds him, inspects him, declares him too thin, and feeds him some more. At home, Jay Berry decides to test out the net on Gandy, the family goose. He catches the goose but then can't release it from the net. After a long scene with a bunch of geese, Gandy finally is released. Jay Berry and Papa then go to the bottoms at night and dig a big hole and set the trap.

In Chapter 7, Jay Berry wakes very early and goes to the bottoms where he hides in the hole. A snake and a wasp bother him but eventually he manages to catch two monkeys in the net. As he starts to leave the \$100 monkey confronts him and the entire pack of monkeys then swarm over Jay Berry and rowdy, biting and clawing. Dropping the net, Jay Berry flees. At home he again presents himself dismally to his family. In Chapter 8 Daisy nurses Jay Berry and Rowdy back to health. It takes Jay Berry three days to recover from his many bites and scratches so that he can get out of bed. He then shamefacedly goes back to Grandpa and admits that he has lost the net and has only scars to show for it. Grandpa chuckles and then mentions that he has received a letter from the monkey trainer. The letter says that the \$100 monkey's name is Jimbo and suggests the best way to catch Jimbo is to make friends with him. Jay Berry is leery of this approach but with Grandpa's urging decides to give it a try—he will attempt to befriend Jimbo.

Chapters 5-8 Analysis

This segment of the novel transitions Jay Berry from viewing the monkeys as dumb animals to viewing them as crafty, intelligent animals. It also sees him abandoning his essentially oppositional methodology of capturing the monkeys by force and stratagem to a more subtle methodology of manipulation. Two attempts have been made to capture the monkeys—one by small-animal trap and one by butterfly net. Without the interference of the trained chimpanzee, either method would have been successful. Unfortunately for Jay Berry, all the monkeys realize the chimpanzee as their leader—and the chimpanzee seems just about as smart as Jay Berry. By now, the major conundrum of the narrative - how will Jay Berry catch the monkeys - is well established.



The narrative presupposes that Jay Berry eventually will capture the monkeys and get the reward money; this is heavily insinuated throughout the development of the first chapters. The late-narrative crisis of Jay Berry's spending of the money continues to become apparent to the reader - will he buy a pony and gun or pay for his sister's operation - but Jay Berry is not yet cognizant of that distant decision.

The monkey attack on Jay Berry is comical, but is also a serious danger. As he mentions, in particular the chimpanzee Jimbo has "teeth like a pitchfork" (p. 125) and could easily cause serious harm or death to a human. The other monkeys easily overpower him and do significant injury through biting and scratching. Rowdy also is easily overpowered and does not manage to bite a monkey. Secondary infection and communicable diseases such as rabies are a real threat to health. While Papa Lee laughs about the encounter, Mama Lee's horrified response probably is more suitable to such an event.



Chapters 9-12

Chapters 9-12 Summary

Jay Berry fetches several apples and heads back into the bottoms. He has a hard time convincing Rowdy to accompany him but finally succeeds by pretending to cry when Rowdy won't come. In the bottoms, Jay Berry smells the distinctive odor of fermenting fruit and hears the monkeys. He discovers that the monkeys have found a sour mash fermenting setup in the river bottoms. The fermenting units are hidden by the Gravely brothers, neighbors of the Lee family who are whiskey bootleggers. The monkeys have opened the mash barrel and are using a dipper to drink from it. Jay Berry approaches the monkeys and calls out to Jimbo by name, trying to be friendly. Jimbo takes an apple and then hands Jay Berry a dipper of sour mash. Apparently not realizing it already contains a lot of alcohol, Jay Berry gags it down to appease Jimbo. Jimbo then serves Rowdy. Jay Berry and Rowdy then begin freely to sample the sour mash with the monkeys and after a little while Jay Berry realizes they are all drunk; he then goes to sleep. He wakes up several hours later with a pounding headache and discovers his pants have been stolen. He staggers home and Daisy discovers that he is drunk. Mama puts him to bed. In Chapter 10, he awakens with a massive hangover but feels better after he vomits. Mama scolds him about being a drunk and Daisy nurses him. He spends the day in bed sick and then recovers, as does Rowdy. Jay Berry swears off drinking alcohol for the rest of his life; his also is mortified that a monkey has stolen his pants. Mama makes him new pants and then he visits Grandpa to tell the sad tale. Grandpa thinks the episode is very funny and then decides that it's time to visit the library to see what can be learned out of books about catching monkeys. Jay Berry agrees to meet him early in the morning the next day for a visit to the local library - a place where Jay Berry has never been before.

In Chapter 11, Jay Berry and Grandpa travel to Tahlequah, Oklahoma, and visit the public library. On the way Jay Berry thinks about how Rowdy always chases coons but never comes off victorious; he also drives the wagon across a river. Neither has ever been in a library before and Grandpa talks too loud while Rowdy howls at the door. Eventually the librarian finds a book entitled *Trapping Monkeys in the Jungles of Borneo*. Grandpa reads about how to make a pen trap and bait it with coconuts. In Chapter 12, on the way home they stop at the big store in town and buy a bunch of coconuts. Jay Berry buys a few things as presents from a flirty shop girl, and they set off for home. On the way home they stop in the river bottoms to drink from a cool spring. When they return to the wagon the coconuts and gifts are gone—in their place are Jay Berry's stolen britches and a gunny sack of old traps. The monkeys have exchanged goods. Grandpa is furious and Jay Berry wonders how he will ever catch the monkeys. Every attempt he has made at catching them has failed miserably.



Chapters 9-12 Analysis

Chapters 9 and 10 form a basic unit of the narrative. Jay Berry tries to befriend Jimbo but instead winds up drunk and without his pants. Rowdy also gets drunk and slinks home unsteadily. This section of the novel finds Jay Berry accomplishing what he wanted to do—befriend the monkeys—but not in the way he had envisioned it. Daisy gets a chance to nurse Jay Berry. This time her flagrant display of castor oil is enough to get Jay Berry to vomit up his stomach full of sour mash. His hangover lasts for a full day after which he is thirsty and hungry.

Chapters 11 and 12 form another basic unit of the narrative. In this segment Jay Berry's failed attempts are reinforced by Grandpa who begins to take matters into his own hands. They travel to a Carnegie Library in a nearby town and research monkey-trapping methods. The book states that monkeys' favorite foods are bananas and coconuts—at that time period, bananas were a rare novelty. Coconuts have always been easy to transport and store, however, and they are available even in Oklahoma. The coconut purchasing scene is fairly comedic. Grandpa and the store owner are at odds, and a shop girl flirts openly with Jay Berry who is too embarrassed to respond. The final failure of their plan recuperates Jay Berry's many troubles in monkey catching. No matter what he does, the monkeys always seem one step ahead of him. This attempt marks the final attempt to capture the monkeys through guile or force. Grandpa's assertion that any animal can be trapped appears to be invalidated by these monkeys.

The period of Jay Berry's introspection about Rowdy's fascination with treeing coons and his inability to do it parallels his own fascination and inability with catching monkeys. The scene as Rowley chases off after raccoons and as predicted, comes back with his nose torn up is a miniature metaphor for Jay Berry's monkey-catching career.



Chapters 13 - 15

Chapters 13 - 15 Summary

That night, a huge thunderstorm rolls through the area with high winds, continual lightning crashes, and a deluge of rain. Jay Berry cannot recall ever having seen such a powerful storm. Daisy, afraid of the thunder, hides in Jay Berry's room and tells him about Thor, the Thunder God, and also tells him again about The Old Man of the Mountains. Jay Berry isn't sure if Daisy is telling tall tales or really believes she occasionally sees The Old Man of the Mountains. She claims to see him outside the window, but Jay Berry does not see him. Daisy claims The Old Man of the Mountains is granting them good luck. In Chapter 14, in the morning, Daisy goes to her dollhouse and discovers a fairy ring - a perfect circle of equidistant mushrooms. Daisy gathers the Lee family to see the ring. Mama tells a story about Johnnie George Garland and his fiancé Luann. Johnnie went away to war and never came home, being listed as missing in action. After a long time of sadness, Luann found a fairy ring and wished he would come back. A few days later Johnnie came back and the two were married. Mama says she knows the story is true and even says she knows the Garland family. She sings a song and then all of the Lees then step into the fairy ring, kneel down, and make a wish.

In Chapter 15, Jay Berry and Rowdy go into the river bottoms to see if they can find the monkeys after the big storm. The entire area is devastated and for a long time Jay Berry believes the monkeys must have died. Then he finds them, freezing cold, hiding in a tiny hole along the river bank. He pulls the nearly-frozen animals out one at a time and carries them into the sun. He then dries them off and cares for them until they warm up. At this point Jimbo holds his hand and Jay Berry simply walks back to the family corn crib, surrounded by monkeys. The monkeys walk into the warm corn crib, feast on raw corn, and settle down into the hay. Jay Berry has caught the monkeys. In Chapter 16, the family cares for the monkeys while Jay Berry goes to Grandpa's store. There he meets the mailman who offers to send a telegram to the circus which currently is in Tulsa, about 75 miles away. Grandpa is so happy that Jay Berry has caught the monkeys he gives him a huge bag of candy. Then Grandpa asks about what Jay Berry wished for in the fairy ring and learns that it was not catching the monkeys. Grandpa says he will go meet Indian Tom, a local horse trader and secure some ponies from which Jay Berry will be able to take his pick once he gets the reward money. Jay Berry returns home happy and dreaming of his pony and rifle.

Chapters 13 - 15 Analysis

These chapters present the conclusion to the major conundrum of the narrative—Jay Berry catches the monkeys, though not in the way he envisioned. Several events occur that foreshadow his success. First, the storm appears to be almost supernatural in intensity and Daisy claims The Old Man of the Mountain appears and grants the house good luck. Later, Daisy finds a fairy ring and the superstitious family all seem to herald it



as a supernatural token of luck. This is an interesting fusion of the obviously Christian beliefs of the family with traditional superstitions of the area. The family's kneeling wishes inside the fairy ring are a pagan act akin to Christian prayer. In Chapter 14 as Jay Berry makes his wish, he wishes not for a pony and a rifle, but that his little sister's leg can become healed. Daisy wishes that Jay Berry could get a pony and a rifle. Rowdy apparently wishes that Rowdy can get a big bone—all three wishes come true. Mama and Papa also wish that Daisy's leg can be healed. This is the crisis resolution for Jay Berry. Not particularly introspective, he still wants his sister's health over his own desires. He does not yet realize that his reward money will empower him to help her get an operation, but this too will come in latter chapters.

These chapters are also rich with detail of the natural world. Jay Berry's sense of wonder and awe is easily communicated to the reader through the long descriptions of the river bottoms after the storm, the beginning of life returning to normal, the flipping catfish, and the swimming ducklings. Jay Berry's simply but effective first aid to the freezing monkeys earns their complete trust. The domesticated monkeys obviously have grown tired of living the wild life and seem more than eager to return to shelter and ready food. The entire Lee family then assists in caring for the monkeys, including even Mama who remains afraid of Jimbo because of his large size.



Chapters 16 and 17

Chapters 16 and 17 Summary

The family spends the evening reading the Bible. Early in the morning after the telegram, the Lee family is surprised to see a truck drive up to their farm. Automobiles of any kind are exceptionally rare, but they have never seen a big truck like this before. Daisy states she recognizes it from picture books. It is a circus truck. The two men who step out of the truck are the Johnson brothers, the proprietors of the circus. They are overjoyed to see the monkeys, and Jimbo is obviously quite pleased to see them. They load the monkeys into the truck, give Jay Berry \$156.00 in reward money, give Papa four lifetime passes to their circus, and then drive away with the monkeys. Jay Berry is ecstatic and marvels at the vast amount of money he has. He pays Daisy six dollars for helping him tend to the monkeys and then heads to Grandpa's store to see about a pony.

In Chapter 17, Jay Berry visits Grandpa's store and sees two fine ponies. Grandpa has selected these two ponies from about sixty available at Indian Tom's place. The pony that Jay Berry wants is a white and black paint mare; she is perfect but Jay Berry is dismayed to see that she has a wounded leg that is not healed. Grandpa assures him that in four or five weeks the mare will be in perfect condition but Jay Berry is not enthusiastic about waiting so long to ride—he asks his grandfather why he would have selected a crippled pony out of the herd. Grandpa urges Jay Berry to take his time about spending his money—to no avail. Jay Berry turns his money over to his grandfather and takes the mare along home. As he arrives at home he can hear Daisy singing in the distance. He suddenly sees the mare's crippled leg and realizes what his grandfather has been trying to tell him about spending his money. Instead of buying a pony, he will use it to help pay for Daisy's operation. He returns the mare to Grandpa. Grandma then gives him another bag of money—all the money Grandpa and Grandma have saved to help pay for the operation and tells him to bring the family to the store in the morning so Papa and Jay Berry can watch the store while the rest of the family goes to town and puts Mama and Daisy on a train for the hospital. Jay Berry returns home and gives all the money to Mama. Mama and Daisy add their own savings into a considerable pile of cash.

Chapters 16 and 17 Analysis

Chapter 16 is a transitional chapter and moves the narrative from the monkey-catching misadventures of Jay Berry to his maturing phase. As promised, the monkeys bring a big reward. Jay Berry dreams of his pony, rifle, saddle, and other fine things that will set him on the road to adventure and fun. Chapter 17 provides the central crisis and the resolution of the novel. Grandpa lectures Jay Berry on spending money and making decisions but does not tell him straight out what he ought to do. Jay Berry is too caught up in the exciting moment to understand Grandpa's subtle lesson, but he figures it out



on the walk home. Grandpa has carefully selected a crippled mare—one with a leg wound that can heal under the right care—one that he knows will appeal to Jay Berry. This crippled mare is obviously a symbol, or metaphor, for Daisy and her own crippled leg. If Jay Berry uses his money to care for his sister, her leg can heal. Being the conscientious and loving brother that he is, he makes the right moral choice and sacrifices his own wants for his sister's needs. The novel does not state how much money is involved, nor how much the operation costs, but obviously Jay Berry's reward money is substantial and makes the difference in the family's savings. Grandpa and Papa both find Jay Berry to be a deserving and gracious young man. The decision links back to Jay Berry's fairy ring wish and his father's lectures about how a man can make his wish come true by working for it with persistence. Mama and Daisy are very excited about going to the hospital. Daisy lacks any apparent fear or worry about the procedure.



Chapters 18 and 19

Chapters 18 and 19 Summary

The next day Papa and Jay Berry watch Grandpa's store. Grandpa and Grandma take Mama and Daisy into town and load them onto the train to Oklahoma City. They are gone for six weeks. During that time Jay Berry realizes how much he misses his mother and sister. He also realizes how much work his mother does around the house. He becomes melancholy as the summer turns into fall, dreaming about his pony. His father becomes melancholy as well, and spends many long evenings rocking on the porch smoking his pipe. In town, Grandpa becomes very grouchy, too. The mail comes once a week and Mama always writes a letter. She tells how Daisy's operation is a success, how Daisy's cast comes off, and how Daisy is learning to walk again. Finally the letter says they are coming home. Papa and Jay Berry go to town to welcome them. Jay Berry sees his first train and his first black man. Then he sees Daisy; she walks down the stairs and across the depot without a limp. Her leg is fully healed. The family has a joyful reunion.

In Chapter 19 the family travels home where they are greeted by Grandpa. Daisy then gives him a gift from Oklahoma City. It is a Single-shot .22 Hamilton rifle. Grandpa then reveals he has purchased the paint pony mare that is now fully healed and he gives it to Jay Berry. Daisy and Jay Berry then meet the pony and decide to name her Dolly. Then Daisy says she has watched Jay Berry run through the fields his entire life and has always been jealous. At her request, they run through the fields together. The narrator, as an older man, then reflects that he has always looked for another fairy ring—but has never found one.

Chapters 18 and 19 Analysis

In standard dramatic structure, these chapters form the *dénouement*. With Grandpa's rather heavy-handed but indirect prodding, Jay Berry has made the moral decision, thus concluding the dramatic conflict of the novel. Subsequently, the narrative details Daisy's operation and recovery. During the prolonged absence of Mama and Daisy, Jay Berry comes to realize how much he depends on his family for both temporal support and emotional fulfillment. He also yearns for the pony and rifle he gave up, but knows he made the right decision. As one would expect in a novel of this type, Daisy's operation is fully successful and she gains the ability to walk and run without a limp. In fact, Jay Berry has trouble telling which leg was operated on. In the closing scene, Daisy gives Jay Berry a gift of a rifle and Grandpa gives him another gift, the pony. The logical problem with this narrative conclusion stems from the apparent fact that only Jay Berry's financial sacrifice could enable Daisy's operation. Yet merely six weeks later the family somehow has found enough money to replace Jay Berry's financial commitment. This makes for a happy ending but doesn't make much logical sense. In any event, Daisy

doesn't much care about temporal things and instead want to experience what Jay Berry has experienced his whole life.



Characters

Jay Berry Lee

Jay Berry Lee is the narrator and one of the two principle protagonists in the novel. He is a fourteen-year-old boy, born in the late 1800s, who lives with his parents, Bob and Sara, and his twin sister, Daisy, who is the other principle protagonist. Daisy was born with a crippled leg. Jay Berry spends his time doing chores and playing in the wild overgrown area on the family farm in Oklahoma near the Illinois River—called the river bottoms. Jay Berry's best friend and constant companion is a bluetick hound named Rowdy. Jay Berry and Rowdy enjoy hunting, exploring, and being outdoors. In most respects Jay Berry appears to be a normal boy. His favorite Bible stories center on action and adventure; he doesn't like to read anything except hunting short stories—and not too many of those. He does his chores quickly so he will have time to have fun. He loves his family but doesn't spend too much time thinking about it. In fact, he doesn't spend too much time thinking at all. He'd much prefer to be outside doing something. Jay Berry says he goes to school but this does not occur during the novel. He dreams about owning a pony and a rifle but doesn't see how he will ever have enough money to buy them. During the novel, Jay Berry discovers a bunch of domesticated circus monkeys that have escaped from the circus and taken up residence in the river bottoms. He spends most of the novel trying to catch the monkeys but doesn't manage to outsmart them. Then he befriends the monkeys and rescues them after a huge storm leaves them nearly frozen to death. When Jay Berry receives the reward money he must decide whether to buy a pony and a rifle or give it to his mother to help pay for an operation on Daisy's leg.

Daisy Lee

Daisy Lee is one of the two principle protagonists in the novel. She is a fourteen-year-old girl, born in the late 1800s, who lives with her parents—Bob and Sara—and her twin brother, Jay Berry, who is the other principle protagonist. Daisy was born with a crippled leg—Jay Berry describes it as "all twisted up" (p. 2). This causes her to use a crutch to move around. Notwithstanding being crippled, Daisy is a very happy girl. She is quite religiously minded and believes in Christ but also believes in a person called The Old Man of the Mountains, a sort of nature spirit. Daisy's father surmises that The Old Man of the Mountains is Christ. Daisy also believes in various superstitions, such as making wishes inside of fairy rings. She spends her time helping her mother with housework and playing in a large playhouse that her father has built her. Inside the playhouse she builds a religious altar with a tinfoil-wrapped cross and a clay likeness of Jesus' face. She fosters great trust in animals and squirrels, chipmunks, and birds are not afraid of her—and in fact visit her daily. Daisy loves to read and spends much time reading all sorts of fiction and non-fiction. On several occasions she teaches Jay Berry about subjects that he should already know about. Daisy is very selfless and spends much of her time trying to make sure other people are happy and have their needs met. During



the novel Daisy receives an operation, partially paid for by her brother, that repairs her leg and allows her to walk and run without a limp. Daisy subsequently admits that her longest dream has been to run through the fields like her brother.

Papa Bob and Mama Sara Lee

Bob and Sara Lee, referred to as Papa and Mama, respectively, throughout the narrative, are former sharecroppers from Missouri. In Missouri, they were unhappy and poor, working to survive from day-to-day. When their twins were born Sara's father obtained sixty acres of land near his home in northeastern Oklahoma. He gave this land to his daughter and son-in-law. The novel is set on the land in Oklahoma. Papa is characterized by hard work, an unbreakable spirit, and a great desire to provide for his family. He is described as physically typical of a hardworking farmer of strong build and average height. He is religious, smokes a pipe, and has very little free time. Mama is described as tiny, weighing only about 100 pounds. She is often excitable, always fears the worst, and is very worried. Mama is quite prone to believing in folk tales and superstitions, but she is also very religious and reads the Bible to her family for an hour every other day.

Grandpa and Grandma

Grandpa and Grandma are Sara Lee's parents—their names are not given in the novel. Grandpa is described as physically short but fat, with a balding head and a thick wiry beard of white hair. He is uneducated but very intelligent and runs a small store in a rural center near the Lee farm. Grandpa makes some money but does most of his business in trade. Grandpa is said to be a very good grandpa for boys, and he certainly is interested in being a superb grandfather to Jay Berry. Grandpa spends most of his free time rocking on his porch chewing Star tobacco. During the novel, he demonstrates great intuition in devising several methods to catch monkeys. Later in the novel, he demonstrates a keen insight into the human mind by deliberately selecting a lamed mare to present to Jay Berry—to remind him of his crippled sister. Grandpa appears in many scenes of the novel and Jay Berry obviously relies on him a great deal. Grandma appears far less frequently in the novel. She is particularly close to her daughter Sara. Grandma often inspects Jay Berry and pronounces him too skinny and too dirty. However, she also has great faith in her grandson and knows he will always make the moral decision.

Rowdy

Rowdy is a bluetick hound and is described by Jay Berry as a "darn good dog" (p. 6). Rowdy appears in nearly every scene in the novel (he even accompanies Jay Berry to town every time he goes) and is Jay Berry's inseparable companion. Rowdy enjoys the things one would expect a hound dog to enjoy. He likes to chase small animals and he likes to try to tree coons. He is pretty much fearless until he meets the monkeys and



they attack him as a pack. Thereafter he avoids the monkeys. Rowdy appears to be quite in tune with both Jay Berry and Grandpa, who always gives him a meat rind as a treat. Much of the comic action of the novel focuses on Rowdy's various antics. Jay Berry derives much pleasure and emotional support from his dog. He does notice that as the season advances Rowdy seems to slow down; perhaps he is growing old. Daisy has a cat named Cindy that Rowdy does not particularly like.

Jimbo

Jimbo, known through most of the novel as the \$100 monkey, is a highly trained and very intelligent chimpanzee. Jimbo is owned by a traveling circus and escaped during a train accident when the car he was riding in was thrown off the tracks and burst open. Jimbo was accompanied by twenty-eight small new-world monkeys of unspecified species. He becomes the de facto leader of them all. Jimbo takes the monkeys into the river bottoms of Jay Berry's family's farm, an overgrown and wild area. There the monkeys live for several weeks, but they are always on the verge of starving. Jay Berry feeds them apples and coconuts while trying to catch them. Jimbo is always one step ahead of Jay Berry. For example, he uses a stick to trip small animal jaw traps, steals a net and other things from Jay Berry, and then steals coconuts from Jay Berry and his Grandpa. Eventually, however, Jimbo becomes tired of living in the wilderness and yearns to return to a domestic shelter where he can be warm, well-fed, and cared for. After one particularly violent storm Jimbo and the other monkeys are suffering from hypothermia. They are rescued by Jay Berry who takes them home and cares for them until the circus men arrive to take the monkeys back to the circus.

The Gravely Brothers

The Gravely brothers are neighbors to the Lee family. Mama Lee considers them a bad lot because they have several bootlegging fermenters and distilleries hidden around the area. Jay Berry comes across one of the Gravely brothers fermenting operations in the river bottoms and becomes drunk with the monkeys when they all sample the sour mash.

Patricia

Patricia or Patty is a shop girl at Wiley's Mercantile in Tahlequah. She appears to be the owner's daughter. She is quite forward with Jay Berry and openly flirts with him upon their first meeting, telling him to hold her hand, batting her eyes, and even insinuating that he might like to give her a kiss. She is presented as strong and intelligent, and Jay Berry doesn't know how to respond to this 'city slicker' type of girl.



The Old Man of the Mountains

Several times in the novel, Daisy Lee speaks of seeing The Old Man of the Mountains, apparently a spirit or vision. On one occasion she sees the spirit but Jay Berry does not. Daisy believes The Old Man of the Mountains takes care of the natural areas around the Lee home and protects the small animals from harm. She believes he can grant good luck or bad luck by pointing a stick and smiling or frowning, respectively; he does not speak or make any sound and is described as an old man with long white hair. Papa tells Jay Berry that he believes The Old Man of the Mountains really is the spirit of Jesus Christ being vouchsafed to Daisy as a special mercy. At the end of the novel Jay Berry prays to The Old Man of the Mountains and his prayers are answered that day.

Johnnie George and Luann Garland

In Chapter 14, Mama tells a fairly lengthy story about Johnnie George and Luann Garland, a married couple she knows that live in the nearby area of Pea Vine Hollow. Johnnie George and Luann were engaged to be married but then Johnnie had to go off to war with Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders. After some time, word came that Johnnie was missing in action. Luann was so grief-stricken that she quit speaking and for many weeks cried every day. Then Luann found a fairy ring or a ring of toadstools in a perfect circle. The fairy ring was magic and Luann stood in it and made a wish that Johnnie would come home. A few days later Luann spoke for the first time in months, telling her mother that Johnnie was on the way home. Shortly thereafter, Johnnie did indeed arrive having been wounded in the war. Completely recovered, Johnnie married Luann and they had a family.



Objects/Places

Gandy

Gandy is the name of the family male goose that Jay Berry captures in the butterfly net when he is learning how to use it. Gandy is quite mean, as are many geese, and Jay Berry generally steers clear of him. Once, Gandy had eaten a fishing worm off a fishing pole and the hooked worm had snagged about half-way down his throat. After several unpleasant days Gandy finally managed to get the hook through his system.

Modified Monkey Traps

Grandpa takes small-animal jaw traps and wraps the jaws in padding so they will hold but not damage when the trap is sprung. Grandpa tests the traps out on his own hand and finds that they are unpleasant but functional. Afterwards, Jay Berry attempts to use the traps to catch monkeys but the monkeys are too smart to step into the traps and instead spring them with sticks before pilfering the bait.

The Butterfly Net

Jay Berry obtains a large and complex butterfly net from his Grandpa's store. The net is quite large and has a very long handle. The net is controlled by two lines that run the length of the handle—one of the lines opens the net and the other line closes the net. When Jay Berry uses the net he does catch two monkeys in it at one time, but Jimbo chases Jay Berry away and figures out how to release the captive monkeys.

Sally Gooden and Sloppy Ann

Sally Gooden is the Lee family's milk cow. Jay Berry thinks she's crazy and devious. Sally Gooden has a phenomenal jumping ability and loves to escape into the river bottoms. Although she wears a cowbell, she knows how to stand still so that it doesn't ring when people come looking for her. Sloppy Ann is the family hog.

Hydrophobia

After Jay Berry is bitten and scratched by the monkeys (Chapter 7) he sister and mother fear he might have contracted hydrophobia, more commonly known as Rabies today. The disease is viral, fatal, and there is no cure. It commonly is contracted from wild animal bites. Jay Berry spends a few days wondering if he is about to go crazy and start biting people/ Daisy favors chaining him to a fencepost, but Mama Lee vetoes that plan. The Lee family misunderstands the onset of rabies, however, because its incubation period usually is a few months in humans.



Daisy's Nursing Uniform

Daisy Lee wants to be a nurse. She has made her own nurse's uniform, patterning it after pictures from catalogs. She also has a few medical books that she studies from time to time. Whenever Jay Berry gets sick, Daisy dresses in her nurse's uniform and administers to him - a process that he hates. Whenever Daisy puts her uniform on, Jay Berry knows he's in for a rough patch.

Carnegie Library

The library that Grandpa and Jay Berry visit in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, is a Carnegie Library - a library built with money donated by Andrew Carnegie, a Scottish-American businessman and philanthropist. About 2,000 Carnegie Libraries were built across the world, mostly in America in the late 1800s through 1929.

Fairy Ring

A fairy ring is a ring of toadstools that form almost an exact circle with toadstools appearing at equal distances around the perimeter. Daisy finds a perfect fairy circle near her dollhouse after a storm. The family believes the fairy circle to be an exceptionally rare natural occurrence that foretells great good fortune. The family, one by one, enters the fairy circle, kneels down, and makes a secret wish. As far as can be discerned by the narrative, all of the wishes do come true.

The River Bottoms

The Lee family farm encompasses sixty acres, several of which are in an area called the river bottoms. In this area, the land has not been cleared and vegetation is very dense. Sycamore, maple, and oak trees appear to dominate the area. The area is very wet and muddy, and often in deep shade. The area is crisscrossed by small game trails. The area is particularly beloved by Jay Berry and his hound dog Rowdy who spend as much time there as they can.

Cherokee Country

The major setting of the novel is an area of Oklahoma known during the time of the novel as Cherokee Country because it was inside of the Cherokee Indian lands. At the time of the novel, these lands were bought and sold like any other, but the area was predominantly settled by Cherokees. The Lee family moves to the land from Missouri. The closest town is Tahlequah, Oklahoma. The land is characterized by lush greenery and rich soil.



Themes

Catching Monkeys

The dominant narrative theme is the most obvious part of the novel - the constant attempts by Jay Berry to catch some monkeys that have escaped from a circus. The monkeys are led by a highly trained and very intelligent chimpanzee named Jimbo. Were it not for Jimbo, Jay Berry probably could catch the other monkeys fairly quickly. But Jimbo is too smart and is always one step ahead of Jay Berry. Jimbo uses a stick to set off small animal traps before robbing the bait; later he drives the other monkeys into a massed attack to distract Jay Berry while he frees some captive monkeys from a net; still later he gets Jay Berry drunk. Finally, he steals food and supplies from the wagon of Jay Berry and his Grandpa. Throughout the novel, the primary focus is on catching these monkeys but the Lee family never manages to actually capture the monkeys. Jay Berry gradually comes to see the monkeys as more than simply reward money. In a way he grows fond of them and becomes concerned for their health. After a terrible storm, he goes to the river bottoms to make sure the monkeys are alright. He finds them shivering from hypothermia. He revives them and then leads them home. Now knowing that they can trust him, the monkeys follow him back to the family corn crib where they remain, feasting on corn and sleeping in warm hay, until the circus men come to retrieve them.

Although monkey catching is the dominant narrative theme, it informs little of the novel's real meaning. Within the narrative, the monkeys form a sort of antagonist situation that Jay Berry overcomes. But the real moral theme of the novel focuses on the reward money and how it is used.

He Really Wants a Pony and Rifle

Throughout most of the novel, Jay Berry dreams about owning his own pony and rifle. He wants a paint pony and a .22 caliber rifle (during the time of the novel, repeating rifles were fairly uncommon - thus Jay Berry's single-shot rifle is appropriate). On several occasions within the narrative he uses exposition to explain to the reader that all boys of that era and locale wanted a pony and a rifle, perhaps analogous to a car and a computer today. Unfortunately for Jay Berry, a good pony costs about \$100 and a good rifle costs about \$35 dollars. And he has only a few coins. His family is poor and beyond that has a great need for money to pay for an operation on Daisy's crippled leg. Thus, when Jay Berry captures the monkeys and earns a \$156.00 reward, he realizes that all of his dreams can now come true. In fact, he has even selected his rifle from a catalog and selects his pony from a pair behind his Grandpa's store. This is the central moral crisis of the novel. Will Jay Berry use his money to purchase things to satisfy his own desires? Will he give his money to his family to help pay for Daisy's operation? In the narrative, Jay Berry demonstrates moral courage by making the right choice and Daisy's leg is repaired by the operation. The novel then concludes with a fairy tale sort of ending



and Jay Berry gets his pony and rifle anyway. However, his decision of personal sacrifice forms the major narrative development of the novel.

Families are Good

The family situation portrayed in the novel is particularly empowering. The Lee family is very loving, close-knit, and supportive. Bob Lee, or Papa, works hard nearly every day to provide his family with the best life possible. Sara Lee, or Mama, also works hard every day to see to the family's needs. Both parents value education and provide educational opportunities to their children. Both parents are religious and raise their children within a Christian faith, though no organized religions exist in the region. Three times a week Mama reads to the family from the Bible for an hour. Beyond the immediate family, Sara's parents—known in the novel only as Grandpa and Grandma—are nearby and wholly supportive. On several occasions the two groups help each other out by offering financial support or emotional support. All of the adults have a single goal, being to save enough money to pay for an operation on Daisy's crippled leg. By the end of the novel, Jay Berry has joined in this desire and the family thus has a single unified goal to which they all work and contribute. Numerous minor details in the novel portray strong family relationship - Jay Berry recognizes the songs his mother sings; he looks to his father for validation; he spends time with his Grandpa learning things; and his Grandma is interested in his physical wellbeing. Daisy, also, is highly esteemed by her parents and grandparents and in turn she openly admires and cares for Jay Berry. The family relationships in the novel form one of its dominant themes.



Style

Point of View

The novel is related from the first-person and limited point of view. The narrator is a fourteen-year-old boy who lives in northeastern Oklahoma during the late 1800s. Although he has a youthful perspective and is not particularly insightful, he is entirely honest and trustworthy. The point of view selected firmly establishes the narrator as the principle protagonist in the novel, and allow the narrator to explain the rationale for his actions. He reveals many interior thoughts and desires, and frequently speculates about the thoughts and desires of other characters. Every major character in the novel (indeed, nearly every character) is a close relative of the narrator. This allows him to be particularly insightful about their feelings and thoughts. All of the characters share a common history and share common goals and values. Due to this, the narrator can speak for his entire family in a manner that is straightforward and believable. The selection of the point of view is appropriate and allows the narrative to be engaging and honest.

Setting

The novel is set on the Lee family farm in northeastern Oklahoma along the Illinois River. The Lee family's grandparents live a few miles away. Late in the novel the narrator reveals that the town of Tahlequah, Oklahoma, is within a few miles of the grandparent's store. This area is exceptionally well described in the novel; indeed, perhaps one quarter of the novel is spent in describing the beautiful scenery; the silvery river; the forests of sycamore, maple, and oak; and the rich, fertile land. The family lives in a good-sized house (each child has their own room) and has a barn and a corn crib. The area under active farming is surrounded by a split-rail fence.

Some of the Lee family's sixty acres of property is not cleared. This segment runs along the river and is referred to as the river bottoms. This area is Jay Berry's favorite place on earth. It is densely wooded and heavily overgrown, with numerous small game trails crisscrossing the underbrush. With his dog Rowdy, Jay Berry spends nearly all of his free time exploring the river bottoms.

Language and Meaning

The well-crafted language of the novel is simple and accessible. The narrative portions of the novel are related in precise and simple prose that is engaging and compelling. Sentence structure is simple and straightforward, and word selection is appropriate. The language of the novel flows well, making the novel enjoyable to read. Dialogue in the novel includes vocabulary and structure appropriate to the period and the speaker. The dialogue in the novel is particularly enjoyable and believable. Characters use a variety of words that are not particularly common today; most characters are very well-spoken.



The novel is historically accurate and yields a vivid portrayal of Oklahoma life during the late 1800s.

Meaning is easily derived from the fairly simple narrative structure. The overt action of the novel all contributes to the somewhat more subtle plot of Jay Berry becoming a man and leaving behind boyhood desires. Symbols are used heavily in the novel where Jay Berry's plight with the monkeys is symbolized by Rowdy's plight with some coons and Daisy's crippled leg is symbolized by Dolly's crippled leg. Foreshadowing is used effectively and extensively.

Structure

The 290-page novel is divided into nineteen enumerated chapters of fairly equal length. The novel exists in numerous editions from several publishers and is also available as an online text. Each chapter focuses on a simple central event or concept and the chapters are arranged in chronological order. The novel's timeline covers a period of about three weeks, with occasional reference to events happening before the novel begins. The novel's internal timeline is easily intelligible and extremely consistent. After the three weeks of monkey-catching action, the novel rapidly proceeds through another six weeks of time as Daisy receives her operation and recovers from it.

The structure of the novel is simple and straightforward and assists the reader to focus on the novel's themes. The novel uses a traditional development style in fiction, providing background information, character development, conflict, and resolution. While fairly simplistic, the narrative structure in the novel is suitable for younger readers. Symbols, metaphors, and foreshadowing are all used effectively.



Quotes

"Aw," Papa said, turning to pour seed corn into the hopper of the planter, "you probably got scared and just thought you heard something. Besides, if there were monkeys all over the country, I couldn't do anything about it. I have to get this corn planted. We can do without monkeys, but we can't do without bread corn." (p. 14).

For all the sleep I got that night, I may as well have stayed up with the hoot owls. Every time I closed my eyes, I'd start seeing monkeys. They would come by in a long line, one behind the other, leaping and squealing. Each monkey had a price tag hanging from his neck, telling how much he was worth. (p. 42).

Grandpa laughed and said, "Oh, I don't think the good Lord would do anything like that—not to a boy anyway. He can understand things better than women folks can. I found out a long time ago not to pay too much attention to the women. They don't mean half of what they say anyhow." (p. 79).

By this time, I had the monkey-catching fever so bad, I didn't think I'd get any sleep at all that night. In fact, I couldn't see much use in even going to bed. But I must have been more tired than I thought I was. I fell asleep and didn't even dream about monkeys. (p. 98).

Daisy must have seen Rowdy and me coming up through our fields because she was standing on the porch when we came walking up. With a frown on her face, she peered at us.

Letting out a low whistle, she said, "Holy smokes, Jay Berry, what happened to you and Rowdy? Both of you look like you've been run through a brier patch." (p. 113).

I woke up the next morning with a pounding headache and twice as sick as I had been the day before. My whole body screamed for water and my throat was so dry I had to jiggle my Adam's apple three or four times before I could swallow. I had such a nasty taste in my mouth it reminded me of the time I had eaten some green persimmons. (p. 144).

Grandpa was so startled he dropped his hat on the floor. He stepped back so fast he bumped into me. In a loud voice, he said, "What are you shushing me for?"

The lady didn't say a word. She just pointed to a sign on the counter right in front of Grandpa. In silence we read the sign. It said, "Quiet—Children Studying." (p. 170).

I looked, and sure enough, the monkeys had disappeared. I felt like bawling. "They're gone, all right," I said. "So are our coconuts and my pony and .22. Doggone it - just when it looks like I have a cinch on getting my pony and .22, something like this happens every time. What are we going to do now?" (p. 189).



Papa didn't say anything right away. He just walked along looking down at the ground. Then in a low, deep voice, he said, "Son, if you really want that pony and gun - really want them - I'm pretty sure that someday you'll have them." (p. 206).

We were sitting at the table eating, when Papa looked up at me and said, "If you find the monkeys, are you going to try to catch them?"

"No," I said, "I just want to see if they are all right. Then I'm going to the store and have a talk with Grandpa. I hope he has something figured out." (p. 222)

"I saw a fairy ring this morning," I said.

As if he couldn't believe what he had heard, Grandpa said, in a rather loud voice, "You saw a fairy ring this morning?"

"I sure did, Grandpa," I said. "Daisy found it." (p. 240).

It was so still in our kitchen that you could have heard a dream walking. The only sound I heard was the slow hissing of the tea kettle on the cook stove. (p. 269).

"As we ran, I glanced over at Daisy. She had her head thrown back and her face was flushed with excitement. Her long hair was flying and her eyes were as bright as morning glory blossoms. She was squealing with laughter.

I had never seen my little sister so happy. It made me feel good all over." (p. 290).

Topics for Discussion

The novel never definitively states whether Grandpa and Grandma are Bob Lee's parents or Sara's parents. Yet numerous clues within the novel make it obvious that the grandparents are Jay Berry's maternal grandparents. What are some of the things in the novel that establish this relationship?

During the fall, when Daisy is away getting her operation, Jay Berry notes that Rowdy has slowed down and isn't as active as he was during the summer. Jay Berry assumes this is merely because the seasons are changing. What else might be happening to Rowdy?

After reading about growing up in the 1800s in Oklahoma, would you rather live now or then? Would you rather live in rural Oklahoma, or where you do now? Why? Discuss.

Discuss the historical background of the novel. In what ways does the novel's historical setting of northeast Oklahoma contribute to the success of the narrative?

What historical aspects of the novel are particularly interesting? How was life in the late 1800s different due to the lack of technology?

Explore Jay Berry's changing attitude toward money. What does money mean to Jay Berry at different points in the novel? Do you think he grows to appreciate the 'value of money'? If you had \$156 dollars today, would you be able to buy a pony and a rifle?

The Lee family professes a fairly typical protestant Christianity as their religion. Yet they also participate in superstitious rituals such as making wishes in fairy circles and having visions of The Old Man of the Mountains. Would you consider the Lee family to be Christian? Pagan? Discuss.

In the novel, men and women are presented as doing essentially distinct tasks. Men work in the fields, outdoors, and women work in the house, indoors. Does this same type of division of labor exist in modern families? How do you think this type of division of labor worked in the 1800s? Do you think that Papa wished he could cook more often? Do you think Mama wished she could do the planting?