



# The Yearling

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings



## Summary

*The Yearling* is the story of twelve-year-old Jody Baxter and his fawn, set in the late 1800s. Jody is a happy but lonely boy. He wants to have a pet, but his mother says they don't have enough food. The family lives in the scrub in northern Florida, in the United States. Their neighbors are the Forresters. Sometimes the Forresters are friends and help the Baxters; sometimes they are enemies and fight with them. Yet Jody's best friend is Fodder-wing Forrester.

One day a rattlesnake bites Jody's father, Penny. So Penny shoots a doe nearby and tells Jody to cut out its liver. Penny puts the liver on the bite to slow the swelling and to make the poison come out. Although his condition is grave, Penny survives and Jody asks him if he can keep the fawn of the doe he had to shoot, since it has no mother now. His father agrees, but tells Jody that one day the fawn will become a yearling and must be let go. Jody and the fawn become great friends, and spend a lot of time together. But the deer grows bigger and causes trouble. It eats the family's corn crop and spoils their tobacco plants. Jody's mother shoots the yearling. It isn't dead, so Jody has to kill it. He is very sad and runs away from home for three days. When Jody returns, his father tells him that he has learned the lesson that every man is alone in life and has to get up again when he is knocked down.

**Chapters 1–2:** Jody stops working in the family cornfield and goes to his secret place by the river. He sees the tracks of a doe and he wonders if it has a fawn inside. Jody is sad because he wants to have a pet but his parents won't let him have one. His father reminds Jody that they should go hunting for Old Slewfoot, a bear whose meat they will soon taste. So they follow the tracks of the bear as far as the swamp. But Old Slewfoot is not easy to catch. It kills the family's hog, injures one of the dogs, and runs away.

**Chapters 3–4:** Penny the Forresters to exchange one of his hunting dogs for a gun. Jody goes with him to visit Fodder-wing. The friends play with Fodder-wing's pets and Jody is invited to have supper and stay the night. Jody insists on having a pet but his mother refuses to allow him. Jody and Penny go hunting, kill a buck, and go to Volusia to sell its meat. They visit Grandma Hutto. They learn that Oliver, Grandma Hutto's son, is in love with the same girl as Lem Forrester, Twink Weatherby. This may cause some conflict between the families.

**Chapters 5–6:** Oliver, a sailor, comes home and Jody tells him that Lem is interested in his girlfriend. Oliver looks for Lem to fight him, but is attacked by all the Forresters. Penny and Jody try to help him. At first Jody refuses to fight because he doesn't want to be enemies with the Forresters, particularly with Fodder-wing. But when he realizes that Oliver is in real danger he tries to help him and ends up being knocked out. The next day Penny is bitten by a rattlesnake. He kills it and kills a doe so as to draw the venom out by putting the doe's liver and heart on the bite. Jody is sad to see that the doe's fawn has been left motherless, but he has to rush to ask for help from the Forresters. He finds out that Fodder-wing is seriously ill. The Forresters help Penny and he is taken home and seen by Doctor Wilson.

**Chapters 7–8:** Penny recovers slowly and the doctor tells him that he must rest. Buck Forrester offers to help the Baxters with the farm. Jody persuades Penny to let him have the fawn and he and Mill-wheel Forrester search for it in the woods. Ory isn't happy, as the fawn is another mouth to feed. However, Penny welcomes it, so Jody makes a bed for his new pet in the barn. Jody sleeps by the fawn and for the first time he feels that he will never be lonely again.

**Chapters 9–11:** Buck and Jody go hunting for some foxes that have been eating the Baxters' corn. They soon realize that a bear is near the house and Buck kills it. Penny tells Jody that the bear must have smelled the fawn in the barn so Jody decides to let it sleep in his bed. As Jody's fawn grows bigger, it starts eating the family's food and destroying their fields. Jody visits Fodder-wing with his fawn only to find that his friend has died. Jody enters Fodder-wing's room and sees him lying on his bed. Mrs. Forrester tells Jody that Fodder-wing liked the name "Flag" for a fawn so Jody decides to give that name to his pet. Buck visits the Baxters and warns them about the bear, Old Slewfoot, who has been killing their animals. Penny decides to kill the animal at any cost.



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**Chapters 12–14:** Ory goes to Volusia for Christmas Eve and Penny and Jody go hunting for Old Slewfoot and kill him. Buck and Mill-wheel help them carry the dead bear to town. Penny and Jody go to Volusia with the Forresters and they all enjoy their Christmas party. Their celebration is spoiled by the news that Grandma Hutto's house is burning down. Everybody suspects that the Forresters have done it but Grandma Hutto says that it was an accident and that she wants to move to Boston. Oliver returns and tells everybody that he has married Twink Weatherby. Flag becomes a yearling and starts destroying the tobacco, potato, and corn fields. This angers Ory, who ends up shooting the Flag but not killing him. Jody has to kill his fawn. He feels very sad but has learned the lesson that a man has to do what a man has to do.

## About the author

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings was born on August 8, 1896, in Washington DC, United States. As a child, she spent weekends at the family farm in Maryland and developed a great love for the land and nature. Writing about the land became a focus in her life. Rawlings majored in English at the University of Wisconsin and graduated in 1918. The next year she married Charles A. Rawlings, a newspaperman, and worked for periods as a reporter and feature writer for the *Louisville Courier-Journal* and the *Rochester Journal* while trying to become a writer of fiction. In 1928, tired of city living, Rawlings and her husband bought an orange grove in Cross Creek in northern Florida. The move gave Rawlings new inspiration. She began writing about the hard, simple life of her neighbors and the harmony in which they lived in their wild surroundings. For the next 25 years she wrote novels based on her experiences in Florida. Her first book, *South Moon Under*, was published in 1933 (she divorced her husband that same year) and was followed by *Golden Apples* (1935) and by *The Yearling* (1938), which won a Pulitzer Prize. *The Yearling* was made into a movie and has become a family classic.

## Background and themes

**Setting:** *The Yearling* takes place in the Big Scrub, between the Oklawaha and St. Johns rivers in northern Florida. The Scrub today falls within the Ocala National Forest. The land is dry and sandy, but around rivers and lakes there are areas of swamp and rich, dark soil where cypress, oak, and magnolia trees grow. Wildlife includes deer,

foxes, alligators, and herons. In the 1800s, many white pioneers moved into the Florida area. They settled where no one had ever settled before. They built log cabins, farmed the land, and hunted to feed themselves and earn a living. Life was hard and families were usually poor.

**Coming of age and self-discovery:** The story explores the growth and change of a pre-adolescent boy and his own discovery of the hardships of life and acceptance of the inevitable death of loved ones.

**Struggling for a better life:** A strong message is that even though every person wants a happy life, leading a good life isn't easy. However, people should persevere and strive for what they want, despite the setbacks.

**Developing a father-son relationship:** Family bonds are explored, and how a father can help his son learn the most important lessons in life.

**Facing the death of loved ones:** The story explores how a boy fears the death of his sick father and how he has to confront the deaths of his best friend and his pet.

## Discussion activities

### Before reading

- Discuss:** Have students talk about pets. Ask students the following questions: *Do you have a pet? What is it like? What do you like about it?* Students who don't have a pet can talk about a pet they have had or a pet they would like to have.
- Discuss:** Tell students to look at the animals on page 2. Elicit their names and write them on the board.
- Pair work:** Ask students to decide which animals could be pets and which are wild animals, and to fill in the following chart. Write their answers on the board.

Pets	Wild animals

- Write:** Have students write about having a wild animal for a pet. Ask students to imagine they are parents and write answers to the following questions. *How would you feel if your child wanted to have a wild animal for a pet? What would you say and do? Why?* Students read their answers out loud.
- Write:** Students write about chapters they will read.
  - Form groups. Students read the back cover of the book and look at the chapter titles on the Contents page. Each group writes one or two sentences about what each chapter could be about.



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- b** Have each group add 7 of the following words to the sentences written in **a**. Tell them to look them up in the footnotes, if necessary.
- bark barn corn fawn fence hoe hunt scrub swamp venom track yearling candle*
- c** Some groups read their sentences out loud. Students to keep their stories for an after-reading activity.

### Chapters 1–2

#### After reading

- 6 Write:** In pairs, tell them to imagine they are Jody. *You fall asleep by the stream. What do you dream of? Your future pet? Your perfect life? Write it down.*
- 7 Artwork, role play:** Tell students to form groups and draw the face of Old Slewfoot. The drawings should be big enough to make masks with them. Get the same groups to prepare to act out the moment in which Jody and Penny go hunting. Those playing Old Slewfoot should wear the masks.

### Chapters 3–4

#### After reading

- 8 Discuss:** Get students to work in groups. Each student chooses to be one of the characters in Chapters 3–4 (Jody, Penny, Ma Baxter, Ma Forrester, Fodder-wing, any of the Forresters, Mr. Boyles, Eulalie, or others). They take it in turns to describe themselves and what they do and the others guess who they are.
- Choose one student from each group. The student comes to the front and says who he/she is. Ask the rest of the class to ask them questions.

### Chapters 5–6

#### After reading

- 9 Discuss:** Talk about the following with the students.
- a** *Should boys fight for a girl? Have the boys in the class ever fought for a girl?*
- b** *Do you think that Oliver and Lem did right? What would you have done? How do you think Twink feels? What about the other people around them?*
- 10 Write:** Tell students to imagine they are Jody walking back home to Baxter's Island.
- You are alone and it is very dark at night. You don't know how your father is. What are you thinking of? How do you feel? Write out your thoughts.*

### Chapters 7–8

#### After reading

- 11 Check:** Tell students to work with their partners and answer the questions in Activity 13 after having read Chapters 7–8. Then tell them to compare with what they answered in Activity 16 above.

- 12 Role play:** Tell students to work in pairs. Ask them to write and act out the conversation the Baxters had.
- Student A: You are Jody's mother. You don't want any pets at home. Say why.*
- Student B: You are Penny. You think your son should have a pet. Say why. Make sure you convince Ory.*

### Chapters 9–11

#### After reading

- 13 Write:** Tell students to imagine they are Jody after visiting the Forresters.
- You are Jody. You have seen your best friend, who has died. Write down how you feel.*
- 14 Pair work:** Put students in pairs. Tell them to imagine they are Penny and Jody.
- You have to kill Old Slewfoot. What do you plan to do? How are you going to do it? Act out the conversation between father and son.*

### Chapters 12–14

#### After reading

- 15 Discuss:** Put students into groups and tell them to discuss these questions.
- Why did the house burn down? Did the Forresters have anything to do with it? Do you believe what Grandma Hutto said? Why (not)?*
- 16 Discuss:** Teach the phrase: "the moral of the story" (what can be learned from the story).
- a** In small groups, students write down what they think is "the moral of the story." For example: "Life isn't easy, and when people are knocked down they have to get up again." They should write one to four sentences.
- b** Each group then reads out their sentences, and the class votes for the best "moral."
- 17 Movie:** "Bambi"
- a** Ask students if they have seen the movie "Bambi." Form groups mixing students who have seen it with those who haven't. Tell those who have seen it to retell the most important scenes.
- b** Have each group draw the most powerful scene in the movie or the one they like most.
- c** You can look at the scenes in class.
- 18 Watch and compare:** "Bambi" and "The Yearling"
- a** Watch the scene in which Bambi's mother is killed and compare it to the story.
- How is the mother of the fawn killed in the movie and in the story? What are the reasons for killing each? What happens to the fawns?*
- b** After reading *The Yearling* watch "Bambi," and have students compare and contrast the setting, characters, plot, and morals in the book and the movie.

### Vocabulary activities

For the Word list and vocabulary activities, go to [www.penguinreaders.com](http://www.penguinreaders.com).