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.

**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**
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

Understanding Hist/Cultural Factors

Comparing and Contrasting

Understanding the Author's Craft

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