

Stone Fox

Recommended for Grades 3-7

Book Summary: Stone Fox

Little Willy lives with his grandfather on a farm in Wyoming. We are not given a specific year, but it would have taken place in the early 1900s. One day, Little Willy gets up to discover that his grandfather hasn't gotten out of bed. When he goes to check on him, his grandfather is alive, but won't move or talk. Little Willy gets a doctor, who tells him that there is nothing physically wrong with his grandfather. There must be some reason he doesn't want to live anymore. Little Willy discovers that his grandfather owes \$500 in taxes, and they are about to lose their farm. Little Willy is determined to find a way to stop that from happening. He discovers that the prize for the local dog sled race is \$500 and decides to use his college money to enter.

[SPOILER] Little Willy believes he is going to win, even when Stone Fox, a Native American who has won the last 10 years, enters the contest, too. Little Willy's dog, Searchlight, runs her heart out. They are in the lead for almost the entire race. As they approach the finish line, Stone Fox catches up. With only ten feet to go, Searchlight's heart explodes and she dies. Little Willy is devastated. Stone Fox stops his sled short of the finish line, too. Little Willy just cradles his dog. As the other racers approach, Stone Fox pulls out his gun and says he will shoot anyone who crosses the line before Little Willy. Little Willy then carries the body of his dog Searchlight across the finish line.

Author Biography: John Reynolds Gardiner

John Reynolds Gardiner was born on December 6, 1944 in Los Angeles, California. As a child, he was a poor reader and poor speller. His teachers told him he wouldn't be able to pass college English. He didn't read his first novel until he was nineteen. He didn't try writing until he was twenty-seven. He had to take a remedial English class in college. He earned his master's degree from UCLA, and he worked as an engineer specializing in thermodynamics before writing his first children's book. Gardiner also edited children's stories for television. He married and had three daughters. His most famous book was "Stone Fox", which was published in 1980. Over the course of his life, he lived in England, Italy, West Germany and Central America, and taught writing workshops around the world. John Reynolds Gardiner died on March 4, 2006 of complications from pancreatitis at a hospital in Anaheim, California.



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Discussion Questions

1. What do you think about Little Willy's grandfather not getting out of bed and leaving Little Willy to handle their money problems? Do you think grandfather is really ill?
2. Little Willy and his dog Searchlight manage to harvest all the potatoes on the farm. Is this realistic? Do you think a dog could do the work of a horse? Why or why not?
3. At ten years old, do you think you would have been able to take care of a farm, take care of a sick relative, and still attend school? Do you think it is realistic that Little Willy could do all of that? Why or why not?
4. Little Willy thinks the dog sled race is the answer to his prayers. If he wins, he will get the \$500. But he has to risk his \$50 of college money in order to enter. All the adults tell him he is being foolish. Do you think he makes the right choice? Why or why not? Would you do the same thing in his place?
5. When Little Willy goes into the barn to touch Stone Fox's dogs, Stone Fox punches him in the eye. Do you think Stone Fox meant to hit him? Why or why not?
6. Little Willy tells Stone Fox that his grandfather always says 'that those that want to bad enough, will.' Do you think that is true? When people lose a game or don't succeed at something, is it because they didn't want to bad enough? Can you give an example to support your opinion?
7. When Little Willy is racing and they go past his grandfather's farm, he sees his grandfather sitting up in bed. Why do you think he recovered enough to sit up when days earlier he couldn't move his hand? If Little Willy loses, do you think he will relapse?
8. Do you think it is fair to race one dog against five dogs? Why or why not?
9. Searchlight runs so hard that her heart bursts. Is this Little Willy's fault? Why or why not? What did you think when that happened?
10. Stone Fox pulls out a gun to stop anyone other than Little Willy from winning. Was this the right thing for him to do? Do you think Little Willy and Searchlight should win the money? Why or why not?
11. Do you think this book portrays Native Americans in a good or bad way? Why?



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