



## Sounder

*William H. Armstrong , James Barkley (Illustrations)*

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**Sounder** William H. Armstrong , James Barkley (Illustrations)

Set in the Deep South, this Newbery Medal-winning novel tells the story of the great coon dog, Sounder, and the poor sharecroppers who own him.

During the difficult years of the nineteenth century South, an African-American boy and his poor family rarely have enough to eat. Each night, the boy's father takes their dog, Sounder, out to look for food and the man grows more desperate by the day.

When food suddenly appears on the table one morning, it seems like a blessing. But the sheriff and his deputies are not far behind. The ever-loyal Sounder remains determined to help the family he loves as hard times bear down on them.

This classic novel shows the courage, love, and faith that bind an African-American family together despite the racism and inhumanity they face. Readers who enjoy timeless dog stories such as *Old Yeller* and *Where the Red Fern Grows* will find much to love in *Sounder*.

Supports the Common Core State Standards

## Sounder Details

Date : Published December 24th 2002 by HarperCollins (first published January 1st 1969)

ISBN : 9780064400206

Author : William H. Armstrong , James Barkley (Illustrations)

Format : Paperback 128 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Young Adult, Classics, Childrens, Animals

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## From Reader Review Sounder for online ebook

### **Rachel M. says**

\*Note: This book really has a 1.5 star rating!!!

I've got to be honest...I know this book is a classic, but it did absolutely nothing for me. I have read so many other books that do a much better job of evoking sympathy over the racism that African-Americans faced in the Post-Bellum South. Although this novel presents literacy in a positive light and claims that an education is the key to securing a better future, this novel just does not have enough stuff going for it. The diction is neither beautiful nor inventive, the plot is unoriginal and dull, and the characters have no personality. While I know that this story is intended for children and that it is a retelling of someone else's tale of woe, I still do not like this story and cannot value it as a "classic."

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### **Annalisa says**

This was required reading for me in 6th grade. I remember it opening my eyes to racism and I was appalled that anyone would be treated differently because of the color of their skin. Just after I'd finished the book, I walked into the bathroom in the Miami airport and saw two black women standing against the wall. To prove I wasn't racist, I stood between them until one leaned over and mentioned that it was a line. Sometimes it's better to be blind.

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### **Ryan Miller says**

I know that Armstrong wrote this as a parallel to the story of Ulysses' dog, and that he intentionally left details ambiguous so that all readers could identify with the characters and setting, but I spent the entire book bothered by the way a white author portrayed an African-American family--none of whom were named. Identity is important, and when a book is written so intimately but without names, it devalues (for me) the importance of the characters themselves. I know Armstrong said he wrote the book to be universal, but it's not universal. It's the story of a family discriminated against because of their race; a family already devalued by their societal status, now further devalued by remaining nameless. I also wonder how Armstrong, as a white author, can hope to accurately describe the thoughts of a boy who experiences racism. He writes of hatred, but I was distracted by wondering how these descriptions could be accurate. My peripheral (central?) questions pulled me too far out of the story to enjoy even the rich descriptions and emotions.

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### **Rosa says**

I read this on a plane and I read it fast so that I wouldn't cry. Oh, it's so good. I don't know why I never read it in elementary school. I secretly have a tendency to avoid books that involve animals because I ALWAYS bawl. This was no exception. I LOVED the analogies between Sounder and the boy's father. I highly recommend this book.

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### **Christopher says**

5th grade - 8th grade

This book is short yet advanced. *Sounder* is 80 pages in length with 33 lines of 12 point text. There are no pictures. The story has many complex sentences. Armstrong's *Sounder* is a Newbery Award winner and an excellent book. Despite that though, I might think twice about bringing this book into the classroom. The story is very, very sad and sort of a hard knock life tale. If I decided to choose this book to lead a unit, I would focus on the emotional aspects of the boy, his growth and the morality of the book.

Content Area: Language Arts/Social Studies

Lesson Plan: I would use this book as a way to discuss fairness in reality and to show and discuss morality.

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### **Ensiform says**

Winner of the 1970 Newbery. Set probably some time in the '30s, this book centers on an unnamed black boy who must grow up fast after his poor, sharecropper father is arrested for stealing a ham for his hungry family. The titular dog, a hound/bulldog mix who loves to hunt with the father, is hit with a shotgun during the arrest, and never hunts again. It's a bleak tale; the boy's silent rage, in which he visualizes brutal violence befalling the unjust, cruel white men who oppress him and his father, is mitigated only by a persistent desire to educate himself, which blooms when he meets a kindly widowed teacher.

This gift of literacy, which literally opens up new worlds to the boy (there is a distinct albeit unsaid implication that he will eventually move beyond the narrow world of shacks in which he grew up), in some small way helps the boy from being crushed by the destruction of the spirits and bodies of both father and dog. In the end, after the miserable dog finally dies under the house, the boy is glad: "Only the unwise think that what has changed is dead," he consoles himself. Is this really a book for children? I suppose so, despite the bleakness and injustice that saturates the story. I read this book as a child, and though much of his poetic prose and historical import must have gone over my head, I remember being very moved by the cruelties the boy and dog endured. However, this is definitely also a story that adults not only can be edified by, they ought to.

[read twice]

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### **Hali Armour says**

I enjoyed reading this book however it is definitely not one of my favorites. The tone of this book was very emotional throughout the whole thing. It was obviously took place awhile back when there was racism and hard times. The little boy told his story throughout the whole book. The boys' family and education were both very important to him. He helped support his family with his father and dog (*Sounder*). Until something went wrong and his father and dog were no longer around for a while. *Sounder* soon comes back but is very hurt. Then the boy eventually meets a teacher from a school in a far away town and is given the opportunity

to learn to read. His father later on eventually comes back home but soon the family is yet again broken up. This story touched my heart because I recently got a dog of my own who I dearly adore and I could not imagine going through the heartache this family would have gone through with theirs.

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### **Duffy Pratt says**

I've read several of these Newberry honored books now, and they make me wonder about the committee. The picture I get of the voters are of a bunch of middle aged white folk who think of books as a kind of castor oil. Not good tasting, but it's medicine and it's good for you whether you like it or not.

This one checks off all the boxes. The writing is graceful and beautiful, but stilted. There are a couple of events, but no story here. Story is something kids might like, so we can't have any of that. There are some pointless literary quirks that would be good to point out in a classroom setting, but are basically annoyances. Here, the main one is the lack of names for the characters. That would be OK, except the main character has younger brothers and sisters, and the writer lacks the skill to give any of the siblings a recognizable identity. And then there's the ever present nod to important, edifying issues: here it's the mistreatment of poor blacks in the deep south in the post Plessy v Ferguson era. (That's the 1899 case that said that separate but equal was OK, and was finally overruled by Brown v Board of Education in 1955.)

It's a miracle to me that The Graveyard Book won the Newberry award. I guess it means that the voters are not perfect in choosing books that will bore young readers and put them off of reading. But they are definitely close to perfect in that regard. And it's true, much of the stuff that kids want to read on their own is drek. But there are also many good books out there that are also enjoyable, and if kids find good books that they like to read, who knows, maybe they would read more. But my guess is that that won't happen so long as everyone seems to agree that these Newberry books are what kids "should" be reading.

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### **Kristen says**

Newbery Medal Winner--1970

I read this book when I was little, but I didn't remember much about it other than that the characters didn't have names (except Sounder, of course), and that I didn't enjoy it that much. I have a little more appreciation for the subtle narration and the tough subject matter as an adult, but I still didn't love it. Reading the descriptions of Sounder after he is shot is tough, and after the horror in the beginning of the story, things are pretty slow-moving and uninteresting.

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### **Becky says**

I remember reading this when I was maybe 8 or 9, and of being completely inconsolable afterwards. I have an overactive empathy gene, I think, so certain books affect me far more than I would like to be affected. Thankfully, this time around, I was able to read through this without going through a box of Kleenex during and a period of depression afterwards.

*Sounder* is a story that deals with loyalty and loss, as well as courage and perseverance in the face of racism and hatred and meanness. So many difficult issues packed into such a small package, and yet Armstrong pulls it off without being overbearing or preachy.

I love this book, and I am glad that I was able to experience it again as an adult. I love the message conveyed at the end (and I'm paraphrasing here): Even though what we've loved is gone, it still lives on in our memory, so it is eternal and cannot be destroyed.

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### **Christie Williams says**

Certainly, I value the storyline of poor black sharecroppers--it is an important narrative to tell. I did not, however, enjoy the ways in which Armstrong told this narrative.

Except for the ending, I was bored by his stilted prose. That is my primary issue with the story. In addition, I was annoyed by the nameless characters in this story. I do not buy the suggestion that their namelessness suggests that they represent many poor and rural African Americans during this time. For me, their namelessness suggests that the author may not have really understood the subjects about which he wrote.

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### **Yolanda says**

My heart always hurts when I read about days long ago and how the world treated people of a different skin color. I'm not sure it isn't so much different today in some parts of our world. It saddens me.....

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### **Dawn says**

Another re-read of a childhood favorite. I was immediately struck by the excellent writing. And then I was amazed at how differently it reads now. As a child, it was a story about a boy and a dog. As an adult, it's about the racist treatment of poor black sharecroppers in the South. Regardless - it was a great read then and it's a great read now.

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### **Julianna says**

Reviewed for THC Reviews

*Sounder* isn't so much a story about a dog as it is the coming of age story of an African American boy in the depression era South. There is a beauty in the simplicity of the author's writing which imparts a great deal of meaning in a minimum of words. William H. Armstrong was definitely an author who understood the meaning of the saying, "Less is more" and put it to good use. I never thought a book in which the characters have no names could be so powerful, yet even though I didn't know what they were called and very little of what they looked like, the author made me really care about them. Though spare and unembellished, his narrative managed to convey the hardships of life for a sharecropping family during that time. Loneliness seems to be a running theme throughout a large part of the book, and I could sense the boy's feelings of isolation very deeply. It is also a story about searching for meaning in life. As the boy travels around the

countryside looking for his father, he discovers his heart's desire. It is also about the unbreakable bond between a man and his dog that often transcends our mortal understanding. The way this connection was depicted near the end of the book was both joyful and heartbreaking at the same time, bringing tears to my eyes.

From a parental standpoint, I think this book has some wonderful messages to convey to kids. All of the main characters, the boy, his mother, his father, and Sounder, all showed a great deal of determination in the face of adversity. The family exhibits a strong religious faith that was rendered in a very gentle way that I enjoyed. There is also the idea that if we search long enough and work hard enough, we can accomplish what we set out to do. Although I didn't feel that there was anything particularly unsuitable for kids in the book, sensitive readers, especially animal lovers, should be aware that there are a couple of descriptive scenes involving cruelty to animals and details of injuries received by both a human character and an animal. The boy also thought about what it might be like to watch two men die, one in the way that he'd seen a bull strangled and the other in the way that he'd seen a scarecrow torn apart by the wind. It was only his thoughts though, and he never outwardly exhibited any violent tendencies. Not to mention, both men had treated him very poorly, so it was rather understandable. Lastly, there is one use of the "n" word as a racial slur, and two characters die, but of course, dying is simply a part of life.

*Sounder*, like many other children's classics, may be more easily appreciated by adults, but in my opinion, there is much for children to glean from its pages, lessons that kids in our modern world need to learn but often don't. *Sounder* is a beautiful story that has earned a spot on my keeper shelf. I can understand why it won the Newberry Medal. It is a wonderful tale that is truly powerful in its simplicity. Although it isn't really marketed as such, *Sounder* is the first in a trilogy of books followed by *Sour Land* and *The MacLeod Place*. It was also made into a motion picture that received several Academy Award nominations. I'm really looking forward to reading the other books in the series and seeing the movie as well.

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### **Josiah says**

I was very pleasantly surprised by this book (not that the story itself strikes a pleasant tone). In many years I would have quickly agreed that this is the best choice for the Newberry Medal, but for 1970, I would actually give the award to John D. Fitzgerald's "More Adventures of the Great Brain".

William H. Armstrong writes with quiet sincerity, and a truthfulness in detail that cannot be exceeded. What I liked best of all about this book is that young readers are so often told that no matter how they feel at that moment, everything will be okay eventually, and in the long run their hurt and deprivation will not be remembered by them.

William H. Armstrong does not for one second back away from fully presenting in "Sounder" the real horrors that this African-American family living in the mountains must face. He doesn't condescend to put a band-aid on a situation that cannot be fixed, that can never be made right again. In describing with full force the devastating and grotesque injuries suffered by the coon dog Sounder, as well as the unspeakable treatment inflicted upon the boy's father, William H. Armstrong acknowledges not only the unfathomably deep, terribly raw emotions of his characters, but also the similar feelings of his readers that sometimes, things will not be okay; sometimes, irreparably bad things are done that can never be reversed, even if they seem too horrible to bear.

The power of this story is breathtakingly, and the writing of it is starkly real.

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### **E.F.B. says**

I read this book way back in...I can't even remember which grade. Maybe 1st or 2nd grade? My school had a summer program and they'd give us a quiet hour every day to pick a book and read, and for some reason I chose "Sounder" that year. It really surprised my mom and teachers that I chose it, because it was way beyond my reading level at the time, both in length and reading difficulty, but I did, and I read it all the way through. I think I was just at that age where I thought A) if it has a dog on the cover it must be good, and B) if I started a book that meant I had to finish it. \*shrug\*

I've given it 3 stars because I don't remember a lot about it other than it was kind of depressing. Sounder was a good dog and was good friends with the boy who owned him but (view spoiler) Also, if I recall correctly, the story is set during a time period when racism was pretty rampant, and I think I remember some of that racism being aimed at the boy you see on the cover, so that's something to be aware of. Again, my memory of this book is pretty hazy, so I can't give details. I think there was a little violence too (see spoiler), but nothing too graphic that I recall.

I honestly can't say I enjoyed "Sounder", but it was certainly a challenging read for me at that time.

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### **Margie says**

An exquisitely told tale - simple in execution and profound in thought, one that stays in your mind and heart long after you have finished it.

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### **Sue says**

I think this was one of the last books I read aloud to my family. I remember all of us lying on the bed while I read a chapter or two a night. I remember trying to read as I cried.

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### **Paula says**

I was on a Newbery kick and brought Sounder home from the library. My husband saw it and remarked that it would be a great read-aloud and asked if I'd read it before. I said that I couldn't remember if I'd read it (I'm like that sometimes).

Well, as it turns out, Sounder is not the type of book you'd forget that you'd read!

Sounder and his master, the boy's father, suffer similarly disfiguring fates at the hands of the law, and both return home to endure, then die.

I did love how the mom reacted to the boy's news that a schoolteacher had offered him room and board and schooling. Rather than be selfish/cautious/reluctant about the offer and make him stay home to help earn a living in his father's jailed absence, she rejoiced. She believed this boy's life had been touched by God.

The chance we have to obtain a free education is so often a source of grumbling (especially where the words "summer" and "vacation" are concerned). How blessed by God I am to live how and where I do! I am definitely reading this one to the kiddos. Even if it's a sad story, it's good that someone has told it. And it creates a discussion that must be had among those with lives of privilege.

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### **Dee's Books says**

A childhood favorites...

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