



# The Wolfling: A Documentary Novel of the Eighteen-Seventies

*Sterling North*

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## **The Wolfling: A Documentary Novel of the Eighteen-Seventies** Sterling North

The Newbery Honor-winning author of Rascal presents a classic story about a boy's best friend--who's half dog, half wolf, and all heart. With ingenuity and hard work, Robbie Trent manages to convince his parents and his wolf-hating neighbors that Wolf is as hard-working as any dog. Illustrator John Schoenherr won a Caldecott Medal for his artwork on Owl Moon.

## **The Wolfling: A Documentary Novel of the Eighteen-Seventies Details**

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Author : Sterling North

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**Sterling North**

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## From Reader Review The Wolfling: A Documentary Novel of the Eighteen-Seventies for online ebook

### **Kate Ramos says**

"The Wolfling" got my attention right away from the first chapter. Robbie's relationship with Wolf was very heartwarming, they learn so much from each other. Sterling North definitely triggered and fiddled with my emotions, which I find very amusing and interesting. I found his style of writing old fashioned, but also refreshing. The novel just made me think about the old times when technology didn't take over our lives.

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### **Tania says**

The Wolfling tells the story of boy and wolf (half-wolf) who grow up together in the unforgiving Wisconsin countryside of the 1800's. Set after the Civil War and at the start of the Panic of 1873, this novel is based on the reality of Sterling North's father's childhood. Young Robbie Trent is an intelligent and hard working young boy who dreams of having his very own canine companion. After his neighbor's dog mates with a female wolf living in the area, Robbie sets his mind to finding and taming one of her pups. The relationship between the boy and his wolf pup sets the stage for a larger story, which is that of a farming community that bands together in the face of hardship. Just as boy and wolf are loyal to one another, so neighbor helps neighbor, son helps father, and husband and wife work side by side to eke out a living and find happiness.

Filled with tidbits of the nature (flora and fauna) of the time and place, a sense of the community that was common in this era, and an inside look at life on the frontier, the Wolfling packs an emotional punch. The reader will root for Ezra and Ellen to strengthen a faltering marriage. They will hope for the recovered health of Professor Kumlien's wife Margretta. The author even means to show both sides of the coin when examining the big heart and cunning entrepreneurship that coexist within Mr. Henderson, the wealthy merchant who has profited from his position on the backs of the poorer farmers. It is a historical novel written for the younger set, and is a great coming of age story and effective look at a time period much removed from the one we are living in.

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### **Ladory says**

This was a very charming book. I think I read Sterling North's book, Rascal, as a kid. I knew it would be good. I read this because my book club chose "animals" as our topic for the month. It turned out that the book is more about the life and times of the main character, Robbie Trent, who was a 12- to 13-year-old boy and his family than about the half dog/half wolf. The setting was Wisconsin in the 1870s. The story included several historical facts such as that Thomas Nast was the one who created the elephant and donkey for our political parties in the magazine, Harper's Weekly. He was a great cartoonist and the other members of my book club remembered the cartoons, as they are all older than I am.

This book was a quick and easy read and I greatly enjoyed it.

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## Jessica Flora says

I think that this is a very well written book about nature, and a wolf. A wolf can be tamed, but cannot be truly "trained", they will always have the same instincts and if not trained right, hurt someone.

At first I thought at the beginning when Robbie goes into the wolf den that old three-toes would end up fighting, but I was thankful it did not.

I like that Sterling North described the landscape. It made it really easy to be able to imagine being there:

"The glacial moraine which formed this green circle was a veritable botanical garden. Sphagnum moss grew to the water's edge. A little farther up the slope was to be found the only trailing arbutus in this area, its evergreen leaves making a perfect background for the fragrant clusters of pink, five-petaled flowers. Other delights were more varieties of wild orchids than in any other part of the southern Wisconsin."

The Wolfling pg. 49-50

There is actually a quote that describes me when fishing very well. I only did it once and as soon as I saw the fish on the hook, I definitely wanted to say this:

"Oh, Robbie, see how he gasps. The poor thing fought so hard for life and now he's dying. Shall we put him back?"

"He won't die if I put him in the sack in the water."

"Well, put him in quick. I don't want to see him die."

The Wolfling pg. 103

Yep. Just like me. Robbie then says to someone else that girls shouldn't fish. In my account, I agree with him. And that is with a fish. I would not be a good hunter. I would be the one that would end up being shot with a gun because I blocked the person from shooting the animal.

Soon afterward Robbie asks his teacher if he can bring wolf into school and hesitantly she allows him. This is one of my most favorite chapters in the book. Wolf licks one of the students that helped raise the wolfling.

There were a few "Oooohs" and Aaaahs from the girls.

"He won't hurt me," Inga said. "That's a wolf kiss. It means I'm a member of his pack."

"Who's afraid of that big faker," Bubs said. He reached from his side of the aisle to tweak one of Wolf's alert ears painfully.

There was a yelp, then a deep-throated growl. Wolf lifted his upper lip in a snarl that showed his two-inch fangs.

"Pull him off, Robbie! Pull him off! He's going to grab me," Bubs whined.

Robbie let Wolf come within six inches of the throat of the cringing boy before speaking sharply and pulling the wolf-dog away to the front of the room.

"Sit," Robbie said, and Wolf sat.

"Play dead." No response.

"Shake hands." Wolf lifted a paw.

"You see," Robbie explained, "you can tame a wolf. But it is very hard to completely train one. That is why you never see a wolf act in a circus."

The Wolfling pg. 121

Bubs of course is a bully that had always treated Robbie terribly. After this he learns his lesson about Wolf. There is much more about this book that I just love. The few illustrations are amazing and realistic.

But as with any book there is always something that could be improved. I wish that the race with Robbie vs. Bubs was longer and more descriptive, and some of the rest of the book was slow. Other than that, it was a fantastic book that I think many others will love as much as I do.

## Cristalia says

Robbie Trent lives on the skirts of the wild, his neighbor is a naturalist who teaches Robbie all he knows about wildlife. At one point Robbie goes on a wolf hunt, the rest of the town is introduced as they get involved in finding the wolf and her pups. Robbie however never planned on actually killing the wolves.

I delighted in the detail given for every chapter, though i might remark that there was too much detail and not enough characterization of the more interesting characters such as the traveling veteran, or the Swiss naturalist, and could have involved wolf more as an intelligent animal, thus making it easier to comprehend the relationship he had with people, and how he responded to certain circumstances.

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## 82heureux says

The Wolfling is a novel by Sterling North. this book is about a boy named robbie, who is interested in animals, desire for a pet wolf. his family is a farming family so they dont like the idea of their son having a pet wolf since wolfs are known for killing livestock(chickens, goats,Etc.).Eventually they let robbie keep a baby wolf which robbie got by himself by going to the mother wolfs current den and just getting the wolf. as the wolf grows up he is growing fond of robbie and his family but there is a little conflict between robbie and a boy called Bubs Mooney. Bubs is jealous of robbie for having a pet wolf so he steals robbie's traps for catching small animals like squirrels and he gets in fights with his dog against robbie's wolf.

I really enjoyed the book. What i do not like about the book is how it ends abruptly. Robbie wins a horse race and thats the end. other than that i think this was a pretty okay book. I could really picture the authors description of the woods and the races and all of the main events in the story. This is what kept me wanting to read the rest of the book.

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## Gina says

I found this book to be confused and poorly marketed. By the latter, I mean that the summary on the back in no way captures what the book is actually about. By the former, I mean that it can't seem to decide what it wants to be.

Is it a book about a boy raising a wolf dog, proving to his family and society that he is just as tame, gentle, and hardworking as any pure dog? Is it about a boy choosing between a promising academic future, the hard life of a farmer, or a life in the constant pursuit of money in order to flee the farm work? Is it about a father struggling between the idea that the hard life he's built should be good enough for his son and winning that son's affection? Is it about a boy's first love? Is it about a boy's first rivalry? Is it about a mother accepting the loss of many children and opening herself up to the idea of trying to get pregnant again (by the way, parents, good luck explaining that plot to your wolf-loving kid who innocently picked this one up)? Is it a snapshot of 1873/74 in Wisconsin?

It could, of course, legitimately be all of these things, except that none of them come together. By which I mean, Robbie actually faces very little opposition in attaining, training, and gaining his family and neighbors' approval of Wolf; this plot therefore ends before the book does. Robbie's own struggle in deciding what kind of life he wants to live actually only comes in the last quarter of the book, when suddenly the plot veers in an

entirely new direction and becomes about a horse race. Before that, he seems quite certain of his academic desires. Ezra's issues about his son are only touched upon occasionally and seem to come down to: "I don't actually like my own kid, but I want him to like me." The "first love" angle was, as usual when it comes to describing the romantic lives of twelve year olds, uncomfortable and unnecessary. Bubs and Robbie's rivalry seemed as if it was headed toward a confrontation between their dogs, only to, once again, dive into a horse racing competition - which had its own set of issues. For one thing, even in trotting races, your dog is not supposed to join you in the carriage and scare the other horses. This would also be known as "cheating," even if you didn't win.

And as for the snapshot, much is made of the panic of 1873, but nothing actually comes of it. There are a few descriptions and mentions of what issues that arose, but it's not actually shown. Robbie never seems to suffer for it. Wolf certainly doesn't.

In short, the book just seemed directionless, the author uncertain of what he wanted to write about, and it results in this mishmash of ideas and plot lines that never come to fruition, with a slapped-on postscript saying the book was only meant to cover Wolf's birth to adolescence as an excuse for the abrupt end and recommending against trying to tame a wolf or wolf-dog in real life. Maybe don't write a book about a successful taming of a wolf-dog then - or, rather, half a book.

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### **Branden Siewert says**

this book is about a young boy and his life on a farm in the 1870s and a half wolf half dog that he raises from a pup. this book is a very adventurous and filled with loving fun. being based around the time it is and the setting it is, its from a simpler time and something that i cant relate to and wish i could go to. i recommend this book to people looking for an adventure and like outdoorsy type reading.

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### **Elias Domantay says**

The book, "The Wolfling" is a book that catches peoples attention in the beginning. It has to deal with a child named Robbie Trent who desperately wants a wolf pup and has to work to get it. He has a rival named Bubs that wants to always top Robbie in everything that he does just to show that he is better than Robbie. It also has a twisted end but can be predicted.

In the book, it shows Robbie wanting a wolf pup but can only get it if he worked for it. This shows that nothing is free. It symbolizes that the only way to get what you want is to work for it and if you don't then you wont get what you are wanting. The author shows the 'struggles' in life and how people can survive. That is what makes the book interesting. It gives some sort of advice by putting it into a fictional book to get in the readers mind. The book gives the reader information while making it interesting.

In the middle of the story, a character named Bubs joins the action. He gives an even bigger problem to the main character Robbie. He wants to make a horse race against Robbie and wants to show that he is better than him. This shows that the author is giving Robbie a bigger challenge and other complications to overcome. The author shows the pride in Robbie and the competitive trait in Bubs.

At the end of the book, Robbie loses the race sadly. Since he lost the crowd still cheered for him to symbolize the loyalty for Robbie. Bubs still got the win on the race but didn't get what he wanted at the end. The ending was predictable because that ending happened many times in other books and movies. At most

endings of other books, it ends the same way this one did. Other than that it was a very good book that would be hard to put down.

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### **Cooper says**

At first it was just a little bit hard to get into at first but when he named the wolf I was soooooo mad like why but after then it was pretty good. If I saw this book I would be like i don't really want to get this. But why I ending up loving it was because of a very good person on good reads, Erin. ( I suggjust friending her)

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### **Kylia McCoy says**

A single wolf's howl cuts the silence, a sound not many people know anymore. Wolves were nearly gone in Wisconsin, hunted for fun and killed for a nickel. Stearling North's The Wolfling takes the reader through the adventures of a average twelve year old boy. Boys were tough, worked on the farms and did the hard work that needed to be done. Except Robbie, he does his work but loves animals, even willing to go so far as to save a baby wolf-dog. North gives a extremely discriptive explanation while still keeping the reader interested. As Robbie enters the wolf's den, North explains the cave walls, the sound and look of the wolfling as though it is a picture. Not only is the book about the misadventures of a boy and his wolf, it gives brief explanations about the everyday life, politics and economy of the 1870's. Although it effects Robbie very little, his teacher explains the economic crises at hand. Although, the book isn't a fact pace book. Pages go on and on explaining the details of the stuffed birds that Kumlien makes. (a strange, but intelligent neighbor and friend of Robbie's) This book is highly recommended for anyone who enjoys books about animals and wants a quick read rather than a long book.

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### **Gtsalas says**

This book is about Robbies best friend that is half wolf, half dog and all his heart. Its name is Old Three Toes. He has a litter of puppies. Robbie wants to have them, but Robbie's dad and neighbors rather kill the puppies rather than Robbie keeping them. Robbie is trying to convince his parents to keep them. They go together on many adventures. I like this book because I like adventorous books. I can connect to this book because I have always wanted to convince my parents to adopt another pet (we have a cat).

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### **Daniel says**

It was touching to be a part of the story of a young boy relatable yet different than the boy I was who befriends one of the most wonderful possibilities. To befriend a wolf is certainly a dream to some people. This book doesn't have much conflict though, but it is written smartly and with a freedom akin to the wild wolf. I did learn a bit about the species. A child may find this book fascinating.

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### **MisterFweem says**

Robbie Trent, protagonist in Sterling North's *The Wolfling*, stands on the brink. The brink of manhood, the brink of maturity, as the comely Inga Skavilain courts him, making him jealous first of the portrait painted of her by Frithof Kumlein, then making it a present to him.

But Robbie Trent, and Sterling North's wonderful, yet relatively unknown novel, also live and take place at a brink of American history. The Civil War is ten years old, and its veterans and the nation's people are set to wander into the wilds of the plains and of the Rocky Mountains. The railroads, the political machines, the smoke-filled rooms, have established their dominion. Technology and the wonders it brings, the savings in labor, are emerging, mass-produced for the common man. Country is beginning its fight with City, as farmers unite under the umbrella of the Grange to protest railroad rates and the power the railroad holds over entire industries and state legislatures. Montgomery Ward publishes its first one-page catalog, signaling the beginning of a mass consumer society.

Yet for the people living in rural areas, like that of North's beloved, idealized Lake Koshkonong, are still united with nature. True, the unity is in varying degree, with farmers connected to the cultivated plant, the domesticated animal, and young boys like Robbie and men like naturalist Thure Kumlein, connected with nature in its wild state. But the connection is there, the community is there, as citizens come together to raise a house for the Kumleins.

It's a bittersweet descent, from the closeness of the time to the speed of today. North writes:

And off they went in a beautifully varnished cart behind a fast little Morgan who tossed her head on sheer delight and made her mane fly like a silken shawl in the lake breeze.

"She's a fast horse, Robbie."

"We're going to win that race."

"And then what?"

"I'm going to race her at county fairs."

Inga went silent.

"Well, say something! Don't you want me to win, Inga?"

"I don't want to spoil this beautiful day. Please drive slower, Robbie, we're coming to Lotus Lake and I want to see those big yellow water lillies and that beautiful swan."

The boy gently pulled the reins. Spinney had a sensitive mouth. She slowed to a walk.

"What is the Latin name for these flowers?"

"Nel . . . Nelumbo something," Robbie faltered. He pulled Spinney to a stop.

"You knew it last year."

"Nelumbo Lutea," the boy said triumphantly.

"Oh Robbie," Inga sighed "will there be time in your fast new world for swans and lotus blossoms and wolflings?"

Wolf, who by this time had caught up, acted as though he understood Inga's question. He looked up pleadingly.

"You really don't want me to win, do you, Inga?"

"Not if it means changing your whole life."

"But how will I ever buy my time? I thought, with a few purses . . ."

"How much is the prize ok the Fourth of July?"

"One hundred dollars to win, fifty to place, twenty-five to show."

The trumpeter swan, with neck beautifully arched, kept the other birds from his mate's hidden nest.

"That's a late nesting," Robbie said in the ensuing silence.

"You are even talking a new language: 'win, place, and show!'"

Robbie clucked to the bay mare, who again began to trot. The well-greased wheels spun noiselessly through the dust. The boy and girl were silent for several minutes as they climbed the hill, where on the moment of midnight, they had welcomed the new year.

Literally, Inga Skavilain is asking Robbie Trent to slow down, to consider whether he wants to pursue a life of heightened competition to get what he wants, or a more contemplative life that will help him continue down the same path to what he wants, but without succumbing to expediency.

Metaphorically, North seems to be asking -- this was the country on the brink. Do we continue to seek the expedient path, or do we wait, watchful, for a better path towards progress? Expediency seems to have won out, and at an ever-accelerating pace.

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## **P.S. Winn says**

A half dog, half wolf has a young man, really still a boy, finding himself defending the dog in a heartwarming tale.

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