



# TeachersFirst READING TREKS

## *A Long Way from Chicago*

### Teacher Guide

### Grade Level & Content Areas

Access Reading  
Trek Map

**Ages:** 9–13

**Grades:** 4–5 (read-aloud), 6–8  
(independent reading)

**Reading Level:** 5th grade

**Lexile Measure:** 750L

**Guided Reading Level:** V

**Developmental Reading**

**Assessment (DRA):** 50

**Content Areas:** English/language arts, social studies, and social development.

## Synopsis of Book

Drawing the setting from his own family's hometown and farmhouse, author Richard Peck transports the reader back through America's history of prosperity, the Great Depression, and into World War II. Each summer over several years, Joey and his younger sister, Mary Alice, travel by train from Chicago to a small town in Illinois to spend a week with the feisty Grandma Dowdel. Told from Joey's perspective and beginning when he is nine years old, a series of short stories and vignettes tell of Grandma Dowdel's antics and adventures—including feeding the drifters, gooseberry pie making competition, aiding a young couple's escape, and a small-town centennial celebration. What may seem to some as a boring week away from the big city turns out to be anything but. This delightful tale provides humor for ages ten and older, including adults.

## Standards

### Common Core State Standards for K–5

#### Reading: Literature

- Key Ideas and Details
- Craft and Structure
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

#### Writing

- Text Types and Purposes
- Research to Build and Present Knowledge

# Common Core State Standards for 6–12

## Reading: Literature

- Key Ideas and Details
- Craft and Structure
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

## Writing

- Text Types and Purposes
- Research to Build and Present Knowledge

## National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

- Theme 1: CULTURE
- Theme 2: TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE
- Theme 3: PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS
- Theme 7: PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, AND CONSUMPTION

## National Core Arts Standards for Visual Arts

- CREATING

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## Using a TeachersFirst® Reading Trek to Explore This Book

TeachersFirst Reading Treks create a virtual field trip of resources about a piece of literature or a text using the My Maps feature of Google Maps. To motivate and enrich student reading, teachers and students can reference this visual collection of web resources and images as they relate to the contents of a book.

TeachersFirst has done the hard work for you! Use the activities in this teacher guide and the accompanying [Reading Trek map](#) as you and your students explore this book. And, if you feel inspired, you (or your students) can create your own Reading Trek about this or another book!

## Using This Reading Trek in Class

Below is a list of ideas for how to use this Reading Trek in your educational setting.

### Working with the Map:

1. Introduce the book to the whole class on an interactive whiteboard using the [Reading Trek map](#), highlighting Grandma Dowdel's layer. Mr. Peck did not specifically identify Cerro Gordo as the small town in the text, but rather in an interview, as he wanted readers to connect with their own ideas of small towns.  
Identify and discuss each of these from the vignettes in the text. Using TUZZit ([TeachersFirst review](#)) to create a graphic organizer for each theme across the chapters and record the settings, acts of kindness, characters involved, outcomes, and personal reflections.
2. Several themes and topics underlie the chapters, such as poverty, perseverance, honesty, community, friendship, and family.
3. Discuss the difference between the economic boom enjoyed in 1929 as depicted from clues in Chapter 1 and the ensuing Great

Depression. Using the activity Where Did All the Money Go? ([TeachersFirst review](#)), parts 1 and 2, students can discover clues to what caused the Great Depression.

4. Discuss inflation over time. Compare the young waitress's wages or cost of a soda with current prices. Using The Inflation Calculator

([TeachersFirst review](#)), calculate the menu prices today from the [1937 Granville cafe](#), [1938 Key West restaurant](#), or a [1939 Baltimore restaurant](#).

5. Create a virtual timeline of the yearly summer visits using Sutori ([TeachersFirst review](#)).

## Extension Activities:

1. Use the Reading Trek to stimulate discussion, ask questions, or to inspire writing prompts about living in a small town during these times. Students can draw pictures of their favorite scenes from the text, including an image of Grandma Dowdel.
2. Students can listen to "[A Year Down Yonder](#)" and "[A Season of Gifts](#)," the second and third stories in the novel, on YouTube.
3. Students can create their own Google My Maps ([TeachersFirst review](#)) depicting their home and the locations of trips they have taken or would like to take in the future, highlighting stops along the way.
4. Students can race to find the words in the virtual Word Search for "A Year Down Yonder" offered by Reading is Fundamental ([TeachersFirst review](#)), and available in [easy](#), [medium](#), and [hard](#) difficulties.
5. To check comprehension or just for fun, try some of the activities at [this study guide](#) from Shmoop ([TeachersFirst review](#)).
6. Students can research the types of items people would enter into a competition at a local county fair—livestock, produce, baked and canned goods, crafts, etc. As a class, decide on two or three categories and have students make mock entries or create a picture of their entry to be judged.

## Helpful Resources

### From TeachersFirst:

- [TeachersFirst CurriConnects Book List - Maps](#)
- [TeachersFirst Review of Google My Maps](#)
- [OK2Ask: Engage & Inspire with Reading Treks](#)

### Other Resources:

- [The Bement Story](#), the history of a neighboring town in Piatt County.
- [A collection of resources about author Richard Peck](#) on Pete's PowerPoint Station.
- Book trailer examples can be found at [Kid Lit TV's Book Trailer Archives](#) or [Slime Kids](#).