



TeachersFirst READING TREKS

A Year Down Yonder

Teacher Guide

Grade Level & Content Areas

Access Reading
Trek Map

Ages: 10–13

Grades: 3–5 (read-aloud), 4–8
(independent)

Reading Level: 4th Grade

Lexile Measure: 670L

Guided Reading Level: N

Developmental Reading

Assessment (DRA): 30

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

Synopsis of Book

Richard Peck, drawing the setting from his family's hometown and farmhouse, transports readers back in time to the Great Depression. In his earlier book, [A Long Way from Chicago](#), Mary Alice and her brother Joey travel by train to the south where they spend a week with their feisty Grandma Dowdel each summer over several years. It's now 1937—the family has lost their apartment in Chicago, Joey has joined the Civil Conservation Corps, and Mary Alice journeys back to her grandmother's small town to live with her during the school year while her parents weather the financial turmoil. Over the ten months that follow, a deep bond forms between the two, and Mary Alice discovers that smalltown life can be quite exciting and entertaining.

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 4: INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY

National Core Arts Standards for Visual Arts

- CREATING

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. Highlight Grandma Dowdel's layer. Note that author Richard Peck did not specifically identify Cerro Gordo in the text, but rather in an interview, as he wanted readers to connect with their own ideas of small towns.
2. Identify and discuss the acts of philanthropy in each vignette in the text. Create a multi-circle Venn diagram with Canva ([TeachersFirst review](#)) using a circle for each chapter to record the setting, the act of kindness, the characters involved, the outcome, and personal reflections. Make notes as to how Mary Alice's opinion of her grandmother changes.
3. Discuss the difference between an economic depression and recession in terms of job availability, personal income, and family impact.



4. Contact the local American Legion Post to arrange for a guest speaker to discuss projects the class can do to help veterans in the area.
5. [A reader's guide](#), provided by Penguin Random House Books, offers discussion questions and curriculum connections in math, science, social studies, and art. Teacher Vision provides [discussion questions](#), while Quizlet ([TeachersFirst review](#)) offers [Make Everything Disappear](#), a game where students match questions and answers.
6. Use the Inflation Calculator ([TeachersFirst review](#)) to discuss how inflation has changed the value of certain coins and dollar amounts over time.
7. During the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) celebration of Washington's birthday, the true identities of two guests are revealed. Discuss how Grandma Dowdel manipulated the guest list and atmosphere in her home as a catalyst for this discovery.

Extension Activities:

1. Use the Reading Trek to stimulate discussion, ask questions, or inspire writing prompts about living in a small town during a time of want. Compare students' ideas and suggestions to how Grandma Dowdel dealt with her situation.
2. Students can listen to *A Long Way from Chicago* and *A Season of Gifts*; the first and third in this series of stories are available on YouTube.
3. Students can create their own My Map ([TeachersFirst review](#)) depicting their home, school, and other places they visit regularly.
4. Students race to find words in this virtual word search offered by Reading is Fundamental ([TeachersFirst review](#)), available in [easy](#), [medium](#), and [hard](#).
5. To check comprehension or just for fun, try these [questions](#) and [quizzes](#) from [Shmoop](#) ([TeachersFirst review](#)).
6. Using [The Bement Story](#) as a guide, create a booklet about your local community with Printing Press ([TeachersFirst review](#)). Students can conduct research through local historical societies to create advertisements about past and present businesses and short stories about families, schools, and community events, highlighting local heroes.
7. Make fork cookies as a class and discuss how available each item was in a Depression-era kitchen. Combine $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup granulated sugar, and 1 cup self-rising flour. Shape into 1-inch balls and place them on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Dip a fork in water and press the tines across each dough ball once, dipping the fork in the water between cookies. Bake for 15 minutes at 350°. (Note: this recipe contains dairy and gluten.)

Helpful Resources

From TeachersFirst:

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

Other Resources:

- Book Trailer Examples found at [Kid Lit TV's Book Trailer Archives](#)