



# TeachersFirst **READING TREKS**

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## A Year Down Yonder

[TeachersFirst Reading Treks Link](#)

### **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 text, *A Long Way from Chicago*, Mary Alice and her brother Joey travel by train to the south. They spend a week with their feisty Grandma Dowdel each summer over several years. However, it's now 1937, the family has lost their apartment in Chicago, and Joey joined the Civil Conservation Corps. Mary Alice journeys back to the small town to live with her grandmother for 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 small town life can be quite exciting and entertaining.

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

TeachersFirst Reading Treks are a way of creating a virtual field trip of resources about a piece of literature or 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 a book.

TeachersFirst has done the hard work for you! Use the activities in this Instructional Guide and the accompanying Reading Trek 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!

### **Grade Level & Content Areas**

Grades 6-8/Middle School/Young Adult, for individual reading or as a read aloud for Grades 4 and 5. Lexile Level: 750L. DRA Level: 50. Guided Reading Level: V. English/language arts, social studies, and social development.

### **Common Core State Standards for Grades 4-8**

#### **Reading**

- **Literature** (key ideas and details; craft and structure; and integration of knowledge and ideas)

## Writing

- **Text Types and Purposes**
- **Research** (to build and present knowledge)

## ISTE: Student Standards

- (1) Empowered Learner: Students leverage technology to take an active role in choosing, achieving, and demonstrating competency in their learning goals, informed by the learning sciences.
- (3) Knowledge Constructor: Students critically curate a variety of resources using digital tools to construct knowledge, produce creative artifacts, and make meaningful learning experiences for themselves and others.
- (6) Creative Communicator: Students communicate clearly and express themselves creatively for a variety of purposes using the platforms, tools, styles, formats, and digital media appropriate to their goals.

## National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

- **Theme: CULTURE**
- **Theme: TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE**
- **Theme: PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS**
- **Theme: INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY**

## National Core Arts Standards for Visual Arts

- **CREATING**

## Using the Reading Trek in Class

This title has connections to people, places, and environment.

1. Introduce the book to the whole class on an interactive whiteboard using the Reading Trek map, and highlighting Grandma Dowdel's layer. Mr. 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 of the vignettes in the text. Create a multi-circle [Venn Diagram](#) using one 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. Some lesson plan information can be located at [Learning to Give](#).



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 for the class 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 also offers [Discussion Questions](#). Quizlet ([TeachersFirst review](#)) offers the game, [Make Everything Disappear](#), matching questions and answers.
6. Discuss how inflation has changed the value of certain coins and dollar amounts over time using [The Inflation Calculator](#) ([TeachersFirst review](#)).
7. During the DAR celebration of Washington's birthday, the true identities of two guests is revealed. Discuss how Grandma Dowdel manipulated the guest list and atmosphere in her home as a catalyst for this.

## Additional Activities

1. Use the Reading Trek for stimulating discussion, asking questions, or for writing prompts about living in a small town during a time of want. Compare student 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 several other places that they visit on a regular basis.
4. Students can race to find the words in the 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 the local community. Students can research through local historical societies and create advertisements about past and present businesses, short stories about families, school, and community events, while highlighting local heroes using [Printing Press](#) ([TeachersFirst review](#)).
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. Place dough balls on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Dip a fork in water and press the tines across each dough ball one time, dipping the fork in the water each time. Bake 15 minutes at 350°. (Note dairy and gluten allergies.)

## Helpful Resources

- Book Trailer Examples found at [Kid Lit TV's Book Trailer Archives](#) ([TeachersFirst review](#)) or [Slime Kids](#) ([TeachersFirst review](#)).
- [TeachersFirst CurriConnects Book List - Maps](#)
- [TeachersFirst Review: Google My Maps](#)
- [OK2Ask: Google MANIA - Google Maps: Make Learning a Journey with Reading Treks](#)