



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: R

Developmental Reading

Assessment (DRA): 30

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

Synopsis of Book

Drawing inspiration from his family's hometown and farmhouse, Richard Peck takes readers back to the era of the Great Depression and returns to the world of the Dowdel family in this sequel to [A Long Way from Chicago](#). The first book details Mary Alice and her brother Joey's summer visits to their spirited Grandma Dowdel. *A Year Down Yonder* takes place in 1937—the family has lost their Chicago apartment, Joey has joined the Civilian Conservation Corps, and Mary Alice must spend the school year living with her grandmother in a small rural town. Over the next ten months, Mary Alice and Grandma Dowdel form a close bond, and Mary Alice soon learns that small-town life holds more excitement, surprises, and unforgettable moments than she ever expected.

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
- PRESENTING
- RESPONDING
- CONNECTING

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 by displaying the [Reading Trek map](#) on an interactive whiteboard and highlighting 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 the story 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 using Canva ([TeachersFirst review](#)) where each circle represents a chapter. Record the setting, the act of kindness, the characters involved, the outcome, and personal reflections. Make notes about how Mary Alice's opinion of her grandmother changes over time.
3. Discuss the difference between an economic depression and a 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. [This reader's guide](#), provided by Penguin Random House Books offers discussion questions and curriculum connections in math, science, social studies, and art that you can use in your classroom. You can also use these [discussion questions](#) from TeacherVision or have students play [Make Everything Disappear](#), a Quizlet ([TeachersFirst review](#)) 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 George 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.
8. Organize a classroom event where students experience a day during the Great Depression. Students can dress in 1930s-inspired outfits, use "ration cards" for school supplies or snacks, and participate in activities like letter writing, penny auctions, and quilting bees (paper versions).
9. Have students use a digital tool such as Time Graphics Timeline Maker ([TeachersFirst review](#)) to create an interactive timeline of the events in *A Year Down Yonder*. Each entry should include the chapter title, key events, acts of kindness, historical connections (like the DAR celebration), and a visual (photo, drawing, or artifact). Students can even embed short audio clips where they narrate how Mary Alice's relationship with Grandma changes over time.

Extension Activities:

1. Use the [Reading Trek map](#) 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 handled her situation.
2. Students can listen to [A Year Down Yonder](#) on YouTube.
3. Ask students to create their own Google My Maps ([TeachersFirst review](#)) depicting their home, school, and other places they visit regularly.
4. Have students race to find words in this virtual word search from Reading is Fundamental ([TeachersFirst review](#)), available in [easy](#), [medium](#), and [hard](#).
5. Try these [questions](#) and [quizzes](#) from Shmoop ([TeachersFirst review](#)) to check comprehension or just for fun.
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 that highlight local heroes.
7. Make fork cookies as a class and discuss each item's availability 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 lines across each dough ball once, dipping the fork in water between cookies. Bake for 15 minutes at 350°F. (Note: this recipe contains dairy and gluten.)

8. Have students research typical incomes and costs from the 1930s and build a simple

budget using [Google Sheets](#). They must decide how to spend their limited money on necessities like food, housing, and clothing. Afterwards, have them write a reflection about the challenges families faced and how community generosity like Grandma Dowdel's made a difference.

Helpful Resources

From TeachersFirst:

- [TeachersFirst CurriConnects Book List - Maps](#)
- [TeachersFirst Review of Google My Maps](#)
- [OK2Ask: Building Background Knowledge with Reading Treks](#)
- [OK2Ask: No Passport Required: Cross-Curricular Learning Journeys with Google My Maps](#)

Other Resources:

- [Kid Lit TV's Book Trailer Archives](#)
- [Slime Kids Book Trailers](#)
- [Bookrags Study Guide](#)