

A Long Way From Chicago



By

Richard Peck

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

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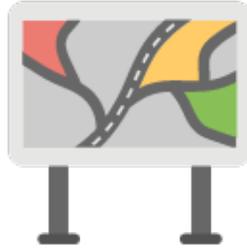


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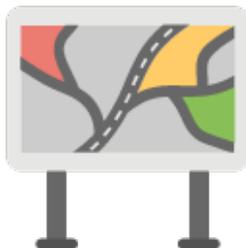
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About the author: Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit novelstudies.org.

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Suggestions and Expectations

This 65 page curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of this novel study guide focuses on one chapter of *A Long Way From Chicago* and is comprised of four activities:

- Before You Read
- Vocabulary Building
- Comprehension Questions
- Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

Every activity need not be completed by all students.

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

Some of the themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include coming of age, the Great Depression (during the 1930's), small town life and *community* in rural America, family relations, truth, justice and ethics.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *personification*.
7. Rewrite colloquial expressions
8. Use of singular/plural nouns
9. Listing compound words
10. Identifying parts of speech
11. Determining alphabetical order
12. Identification of root words
13. Identify/create *similes*

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *sequence chart*
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Complete a *5 W's Chart*.

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Compare 2 characters
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Casting the characters

Creative and Critical Thinking

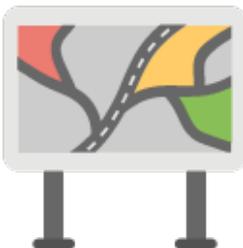
1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Write a letter to a friend
4. Create a magazine ad
5. Create an advertising jingle
6. Conduct an interview
7. Write about personal feelings
8. Write a book review
9. Complete an Observation Sheet
10. Identify a rhyming scheme

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Create an information card

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Synopsis

During the Great Depression, Joey and his sister, Mary Alice - two city slickers from Chicago - make their annual summer visit to Grandma Dowdel's sleepy Illinois town. Soon enough they find that it's far from sleepy . . . and Grandma is far from typical. From seeing their first corpse (and he isn't resting easy) to helping Grandma trespass, pinch property, catch the sheriff in his underwear, and feed the hungry - all in one day - Joey and Mary Alice have seven summers they'll never forget. [The Publisher]

Author Biography

Richard Peck

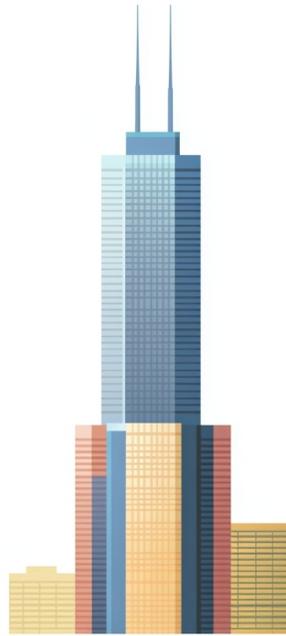
Richard Peck was born and brought up in Decatur, Illinois, about a three-hour car ride from Chicago. His first writing job was in the United States army in Germany where he was assigned the job of ghost-writing sermons for chaplains.

His four most recent novels are set in the part of the world that the author most likes to celebrate. In Mr. Peck's own words: "Strays Like Us is a story about a girl being fostered in one of those small, old-fashioned towns where it's hard to be a stranger. *A Long Way From Chicago* and *A Year Down Yonder*, two books that have changed my life, are set in the farm town where my father grew up. Grandma Dowdel's house is the house where my grandmother lived: a tall jigsaw gothic with lightning rods. My newest novel is *Fair Weather* in which three farm kids see the future unfolding before them at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893."



Richard Peck passed away in 2018.

A Long Way From Chicago



By Richard Peck

Name:

A Long Way From Chicago

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Chapter 1

Shotgun Cheatham's Last Night Above Ground



Before you read the chapter:

Grandma Dowdel, the main character of the novel, is also one of the most memorable people you will probably ever read about. What specific characteristics do you think a character in a novel should possess in order to make him/her really memorable?



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

privy	obituary	prohibit	reprobate	apt
obliged	philanthropist	forage	disperse	reputation

1. He didn't appreciate it when Grandma called him an old _____.
2. I'd be very much _____ if you would come when you're called.
3. I read about his death in the _____ column of the local newspaper.
4. On my way out to the _____, I almost stepped on a garter snake.
5. The crowd began to _____ when the rain started.
6. I received a bursary for my studies from a local _____.
7. If the rains don't come soon we are going to have to _____ for our food.
8. Be careful not to startle the mare as she is _____ to kick you.
9. Her _____ includes being rather tight with her money.
10. The police _____ anyone from carrying a concealed weapon on their person.

Questions



1. The first sentence in Chapter One is certainly an attention-grabber, isn't it? What was your own personal reaction to this unusual introduction?

2. Describe the **setting** of the story in Chapter One.

3. What were two things about staying at Grandma Dowdel's which annoyed Mary Alice?

1	
2	

4. What was there about the death of Shotgun Cheatham which attracted the attention of some of the larger newspapers?

5. What were two reasons offered by Grandma as to why Shotgun probably never rode with Jesse and Frank James?

6. What was **ironic** about Grandma's statement, "Never trust an ugly woman. She's got a grudge against the world."?

7. Describe how Shotgun really got his name (according to Grandma).

b. How did this story differ from the one she told the reporter about Shotgun?

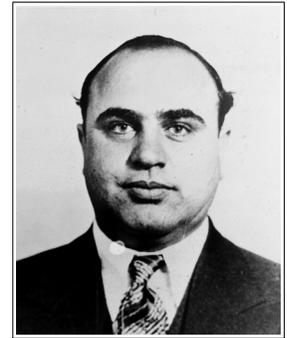
8. Why do you think Grandma went to all the trouble for Shotgun's wake and funeral?

9. Describe what caused so much of a commotion at Shotgun's wake.

Language Activities



A. As Joey points out in this chapter, Chicago during the 1920's was quite famous for its notorious gangsters. In addition to **Al Capone** and **Bugs Moran**, men such as **Sam Giancana**, **Albert Anselmi**, **Tony Accardo** ruled the underworld of America's second largest city. Your task is to investigate a mobster from the 1920's and write a brief report on him/her. This report should contain at least four interesting facts. As a twist to this assignment, you can; do a law enforcement official of this era instead (i.e. **Eliot Ness**).



1	
2	
3	
4	

B. A **simile** is a comparison using the words “like” or “as”. An example from Chapter One is “he smelled like a polecat.”

What two things are being compared in this example?

Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your imagination:

a) the delighted squeal of a child

b) an explosion

D. Copy out any three sentences from this chapter and underline the **nouns**.

E. The word “**rock**” can be used as a **noun** or a **verb**, depending on the sentence. Using your imagination, write sentences to illustrate how this word can be used as both a noun and a verb.



ROCK

Noun	
Verb	

F. Reword the following expressions from Chapter One in more traditional English.

a) ... talk the hind leg off a mule	
b) ... Grandma, who was no oil painting herself.	
c) ... which was uphill work	
d) ... he wants to get the horselaugh on us	

G. A Quatrain Poem About Grandmas.

The **quatrain** is a popular form of rhymed verse. It is a poem of four lines, is usually light and can be humorous. The following quatrain was written by the famous poet, Atrocious Halitosis. It is the first verse of a poem called, **My Granny**.

*My Granny is a swell old gal,
She lives in Newfoundland,
She visits every chance she gets,
'Cause she knows I am so grand.*



Various rhyming schemes make up a quatrain poem. As you can see, the above four lines have a rhyming scheme of **A - B - C - B**. Other rhyming schemes include: ABAB, AABB, AABA, ABBA, ABBA, and AAAB.

Your task is to write your own quatrain poem. You may choose a rhyming scheme that fits with your own personal creation. The theme should have something to do with the themes established in the first three chapters of our novel.

The Quatrain Poem

Now create your own Quatrain Poem. Your poem must follow the format of a quatrain poem described above (and must rhyme).

Title: _____

Extension Activity



Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A storyboard can tell the story of only one scene – or the entire novel.



Complete the storyboard below illustrating the events described in the first chapter of *A Long Way From Chicago*. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper before attempting a final copy.

1	2
3	4
5	6