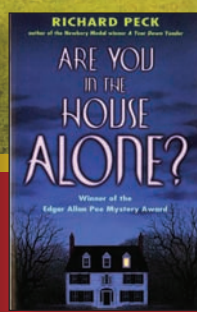
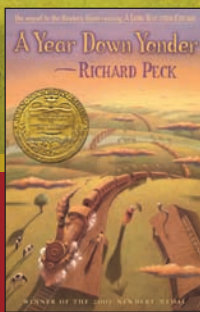
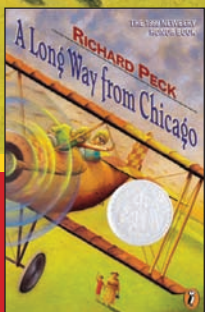
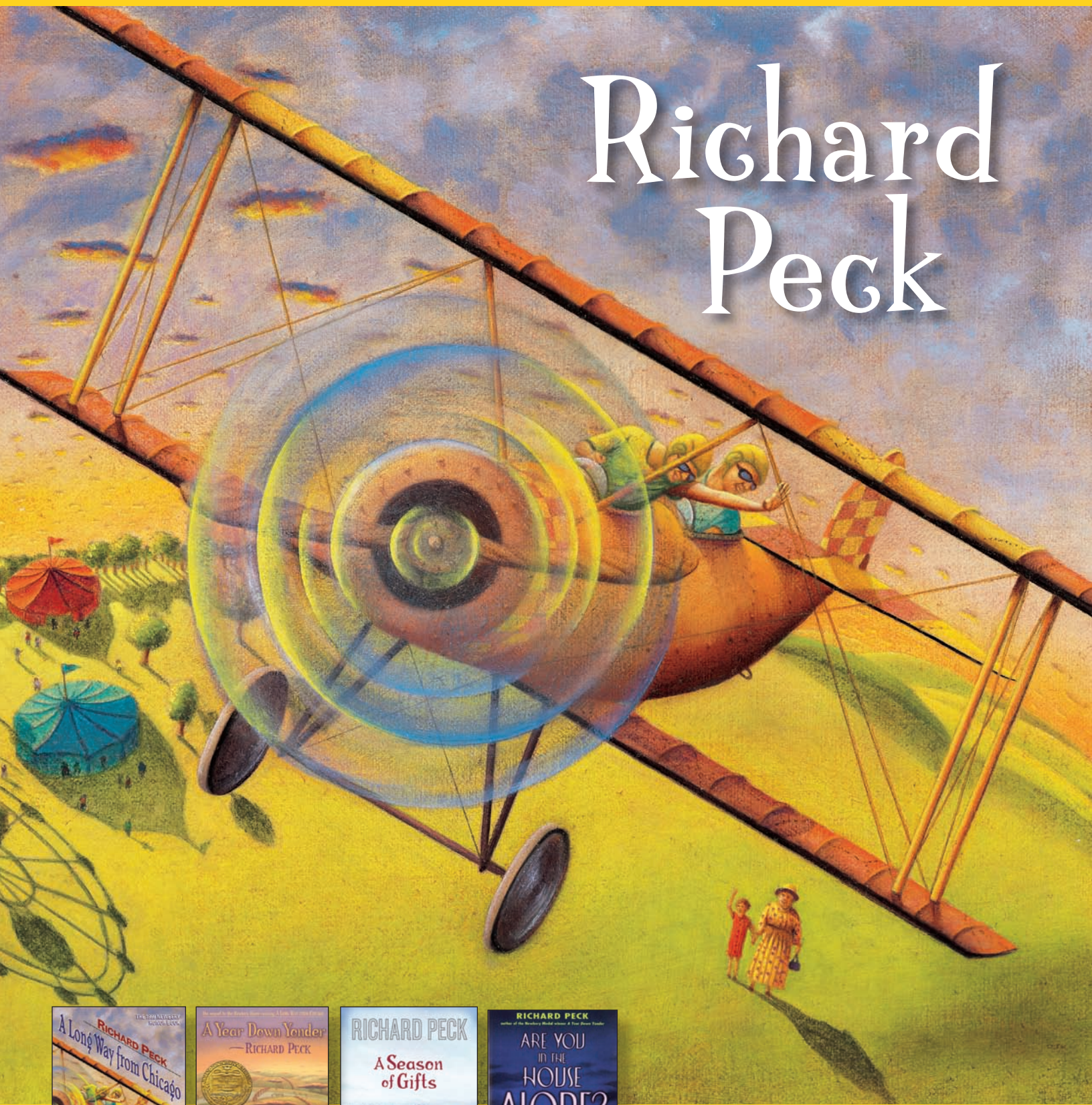


A Curriculum Guide to the Books of Award-Winning Author

Richard Peck



Dial Books for Young Readers • Puffin Books
Divisions of Penguin Young Readers Group
www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians

Praise for Richard Peck

A Season of Gifts

- ★ “Pitch-perfect prose, laced with humor and poignancy . . . ”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

Fair Weather

- ★ “Peck’s unforgettable characters, cunning dialogue and fast-paced action will keep readers of all ages in stitches.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

The River Between Us

- ★ “A rich tale full of magic, mystery, and surprise.” —*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

Ghosts I Have Been

- ★ “First-class . . . an outrageous sequence of events charmed together with skillful wordwork.” —*Booklist*, starred review

Here Lies the Librarian

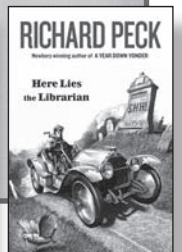
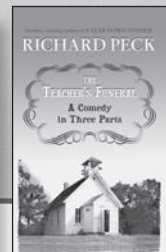
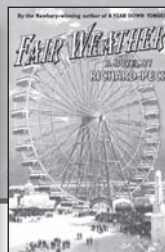
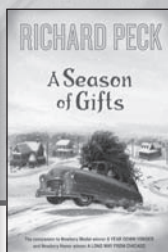
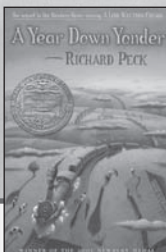
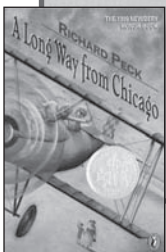
- ★ “Another gem from Peck, with his signature combination of quirky characters, poignancy, and outrageous farce.”

—*School Library Journal*, starred review

A Year Down Yonder

- ★ “Again, Peck has created a delightful, insightful tale that resounds with a storyteller’s wit, humor, and vivid description.”

—*School Library Journal*,
starred review



Inside the Books of Richard Peck

Discussion Questions, Activities, and Thematic Connections

Meet Richard Peck

Read a note from the author, find out more about his life, and read the special Q&A.

Meet the Characters

Find out more about the characters in Richard Peck's novels using these great activities.

Partnering with Peck to Create Readers: Reading Aloud

Learn about the benefits of reading aloud to a group and learn some strategies to take advantage of reading the full book aloud or selecting excerpts.

Partnering with Peck to Create Readers: Literature Circles/Book Clubs & Thematic Connections

Use these prompts and questions to start a discussion on some of Richard Peck's books and take it to the next level with the response projects.

Partnering with Peck to Create Writers: Inspiring Writers through Reading

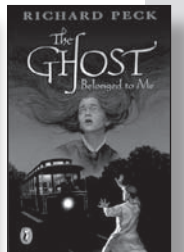
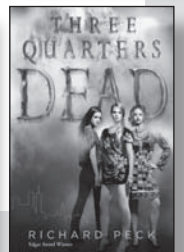
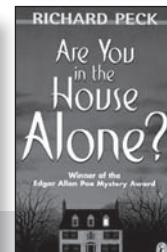
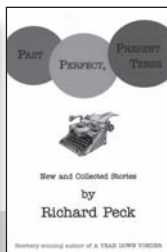
Explore Richard Peck's dynamic use of language and help emerging writers discover their own creativity.

Partnering with Peck to Create Learners: Connecting Readers to History through Literature

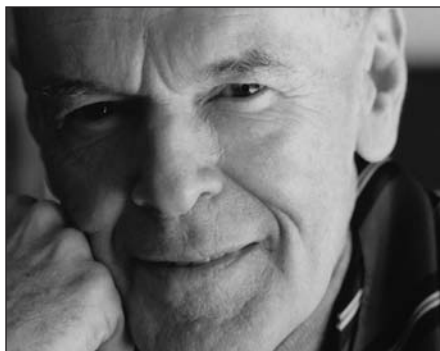
Discover a new side of history through these novels and get readers curious and excited to learn more.

Meet the Books

Learn more about these titles by Richard Peck.



A Note from Richard Peck



- The new minister and his family—preacher's kids—find themselves moving in next door to the biggest, scariest old lady in town.
- Two girls on the last riverboat out of Civil War New Orleans flee north, taking with them an explosive secret.
- A boy gets the shock of his life when the new teacher in his one-room schoolhouse turns out to be . . . his sister.
- An Illinois farm family, who have never seen a lightbulb, set off for the greatest fair of all times, the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893.
- On December 7th, a boy finds himself suspended between two wars: his dad's World War One and his big brother's frightening future.
- A girl waiting to see her grief counselor receives a phone call . . . from the other side of the grave.

Who are all these people?

They're characters from some of my books. Are they real people? They are to me. But I put them together from all kinds of people I've known and read about and imagined. And did all of their adventures happen to me? Yes, in a way—right there at my writing desk, because a story must be real to the writer before it can ever be real to readers.

It was teaching that made a writer out of me. I found my readers in my rollbook; they were my students. I was soon to learn that at the ages of twelve and fourteen and sixteen, they were already facing problems I'd never had. As a teacher I'd noticed that the world of the young was a far more dangerous place than it had been for me back in the 1950's, when we were never more than five minutes from the nearest adult.

That awareness led me to writing novels on serious issues. *Strays Like Us* about that girl who has to make a foster home a real home. *Father Figure* about a boy who has to grow up without a father. And *Are You in the House Alone?* about the teenaged victim of our least-reported crime, rape. The story is meant to show that life is not a television show in which the criminals are always caught just before the final commercial. It's about how victims have to serve a kind of sentence in a society filling up with young victims.

But a novel must entertain first before it can do anything else. Nothing entertains me more than comedy—reading it and writing it. Even *The Ghost Belonged to Me* is more funny than eerie. Joey and Mary Alice in *A Long Way from Chicago* and *A Year Down Yonder* have many a comic adventure down at Grandma's in a world of Christmas pageants gone awry and rigged pie contests at the county fair.

The revolutions of the 1960's and '70's gave us the Young Adult novel. Now in a new century going viral, a technological revolution is giving fiction new questions to ask—about a world of messages texted from the back of the classroom and of Facebook glowing hot into the night long after parents are fast asleep.

A novel of mine, *Three Quarters Dead*, asks its questions of a generation with a cellphone in one hand and the steering wheel in the other. Because a novel, whatever its era or its issues, is never an answer, always a question. A novel for the 21st century young asks the questions teachers and parents are no longer empowered to ask.

Meet Richard Peck

Richard Peck has written more than thirty novels, and in the process has become one of America's most highly respected writers for the young. A versatile author, he is beloved by middle-graders as well as young adults for his comedies and coming-of-age novels. He lives in New York City, and spends a great deal of time traveling around the country to speaking engagements at conferences, schools, and libraries.

Mr. Peck is the first children's book author to have received a National Humanities Medal. In addition, he has won a number of other major awards for the body of his work, including the Margaret A. Edwards Award, the ALAN Award, and the Medallion from the University of Southern Mississippi. Virtually every publication and association in the field of children's literature has recommended his books, including Mystery Writers of America, which twice gave him their Edgar Award. Many of his books have received commendations, including *A Year Down Yonder*, which won the 2001 Newbery Medal, while its prequel, *A Long Way from Chicago*, was a National Book Award finalist and a Newbery Honor Book.

A Q & A with Richard Peck

Q: Where do you get the ideas for your books?

A: My ideas often come from other people's memories. Two of my most popular books, *A Long Way From Chicago* and *A Year Down Yonder*, are set in my dad's hometown. *Fair Weather* really began when I was a kid and old men hanging out at my dad's filling station recalled riding the great wheel at the fair of 1893. I wished then that I was old and could remember it. Now I'm old and think I do.

My novels are all about journeys. My characters have to go out in the world to learn something they couldn't have learned at home. That's a function of the book: to give readers the permission to look beyond the self and the safe. And so I don't start a novel until I know the journey. Then I decide on the characters who would learn the most that journey.

Q: Fiction writers are not often considered researchers. In addition to relying on family stories for your fiction, what other types of research do you conduct?

A: I do endless research. For *A Year Down Yonder*, I wanted Mary Alice to be 15 and I had already established that she was born in 1922, so that put us in 1937. Since this was her story, I had to remove her brother, but where did boys go in 1937? They went to the Civilian Conservation Corps. I read every issue of *Time* magazine in 1937 beginning with January 1. I made a timeline for the entire year because I had to know what happened even though it would not arise in the book. It's set in a town that wouldn't be interested in politics or the world, but I had to know. For example, the most famous woman in America vanished without a trace that summer, and kids do know her. So without distracting, I had to say something about it. It's in half a line, but it's there because that happened in 1937. Then I went through all the catalogues, the Lane Bryant catalogue of course, and what we used to call the Monkey Ward catalogue. These were very helpful because they tell you what things cost. You need so much information that isn't in the history books because people do not live in history books. Instead, they live in catalogues and magazines, newspapers and radio, which was popular at that time, more so than now.

Q: You often credit your teaching years and your former students as the inspiration for your writing. Please explain.

A: I write for kids who don't have to write thank-you notes for gifts from grandparents and for kids who live in communities that practice age segregation. They are growing up in suburbs, where they never see their generation as anything but an absolute majority. This is the gift I have for them. The old people in my novels represent the truth on which all fiction turns: in the long run, you will be held responsible for the consequences of your actions. They're living out all their consequences in a very positive way. There is just so much you can do with fiction, but that's what I do. In every one of my novels there's an old person. Today's young readers need the wisdom, and the wit, of elders.

In a way, writing is an extension of teaching. Everything is. Teaching is a job you never quit, you just go on and on trying to turn a life into lesson plans. Every word I read and every word I write causes me to ask: How would I present that in class? Would they accept this? How would they see this? I write for mythical students, and when I go into classrooms, I get wonderful information, especially from the teachers and the librarians who are there on the firing line every day, and can tell me things that nobody else knows and that the kids dare not say. I'm also under the influence of letters because sometimes it's the lonely who write. They want to talk to somebody and you're it. They usually want to talk to you because something has happened in the book that makes them think that you are near enough to hear them but far enough away to be safe. And that's important.

If you would like to energize and inspire your group through literature, find out how you can invite Mr. Peck to address your organization by contacting the Penguin Speakers Bureau at speakersbureau@us.penguinroup.com

Meet the Characters

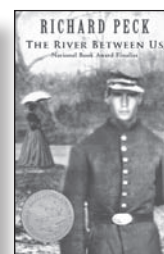
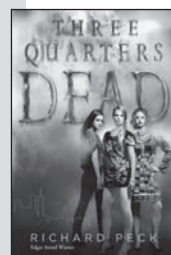
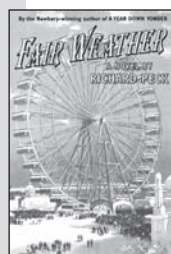
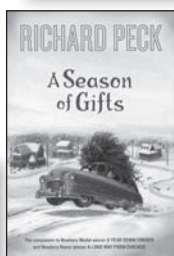
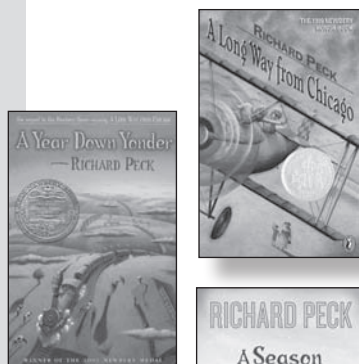
Richard Peck's trademark quality as a novelist is his uncanny ability to season his stories with unforgettable characters. From clearly identifiable narrators whose lives grow and change throughout the course of the novel to larger-than-life relatives who create havoc and shape memories, Peck creates characters that appeal to readers' senses and make strong impressions as storytellers and story-makers.

One way to examine Peck's characters *before reading* is to take a category such as "Larger-Than-Life Characters" and discuss people students know in their lives who might fit into this category. What qualities or personality traits do they exhibit? What makes them memorable? Then invite students to keep their eyes open as they meet some Larger-than-Life Characters in Richard Peck's novels, exploring the character's traits, behaviors, and personalities to discern what makes them unique. How does Peck create strong first impressions for his characters? How does he build on and sustain the character's unique traits? Begin with an examination of the five characters listed in the web below, and add other characters as students meet them in their reading.

A similar exploration comparing fictional characters and people from real life can occur for other categories (see webs below). In addition, students could create their own category webs for Peck's characters (i.e., Characters to be Feared, Characters with Best-Friend Qualities).

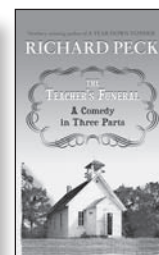
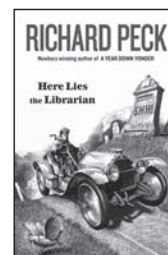
Larger-than-Life Characters

Grandma Dowdel — *A Long Way From Chicago*,
A Year Down Yonder, *A Season of Gifts*
 Granddad Fuller — *Fair Weather*
 Uncle Miles — *The Ghost Belonged to Me*
 Delphine — *The River Between Us*
 Miss Amanda — *Amanda Miranda*



Love 'Em, Hate 'Em, Can't Live Without 'Em: Friends & Relatives

Miss Eulalia Titus — *On the Wings of Heroes*
 Effie Wilcox — *A Long Way From Chicago*,
A Year Down Yonder, *A Season of Gifts*
 Tanya, Natalie, Makenzie — *Three Quarters Dead*
 Alexander Armsworth — *The Ghost Belonged to Me*
 Aunt Euterpe — *Fair Weather*



People Who Make the Impossible Possible

Blossom Culp — *The Ghost Belonged to Me*, *Ghosts I Have Been*
 Tansy Culver — *The Teacher's Funeral: A Comedy in Three Parts*
 Irene Ridpath — *Here Lies the Librarian*
 Aunt Fay Moberly — *Strays Like Us*
 Grandma Dowdel — *A Season of Gifts*



“We writers don’t take real people, change their names, and put them in our stories. That doesn’t give us enough credit for creativity. We create characters from what we’ve observed of all the people we ever met, or read about.” —Richard Peck, “A Conversation with Richard Peck,” *Fair Weather*

Response Project – Facebook Page

Create a Facebook account for a character that intrigues you. Use poster board or butcher paper to design the layout of two screen shots—one features the character’s wall in the center and the other features the character’s info in the center. Include a three-column layout with a photo in the upper left corner and advertisements that target your character on the right.

The wall includes:

Two posts from your character’s point of view and
three responses to each post from your character’s friends.

The info page includes:

Birthday
Hometown
Relationship Status
Siblings
Likes and Interests
Activities
Favorites (Music, Books, Movies, Quotations, etc.)

Display your character’s Facebook account on the classroom wall and invite other readers (or characters!) to become friends by adding their name on the left column under the Friends heading.

Since the characters in Peck’s novels are fully-developed, students may enjoy spending time re-visiting their selected book and discovering more about a specific character, listing character traits, motivations, and behaviors. The following response projects encourage readers to discover, synthesize, represent, create, and display the identity of one character from their selected novel (or chapter) and represent that character’s identity in images as well as words. Some character traits may be found directly within the text, but others may be inferred from what s/he says and thinks, how s/he acts, and what others say about him or her.

“An elderly character has appeared in each of my novels since [*The Ghost Belonged to Me*] . . . now they’re staples. . . I need them. Young readers need them more. The old folks are there in the novels as counterbalances. They provide wisdom and seasoning won only through long lifetimes, and compassion unavailable from the peer group.” —Richard Peck, *Invitations to the World*

Meet the Characters

Response Project – Poetry

All of Richard Peck's novels introduce readers to multi-dimensional fictional people. Capturing their unique qualities in the form of a poem can be a fun challenge. One of the easier forms of poetry to write is the cinquain ("sin-kain") which is a five-line form that usually follows this organization:

- Line 1 – one word that tells who/what the poem is about
- Line 2 – two adjectives
- Line 3 – three words ending in -ing that describe something the subject does
- Line 4 – four to six word phrase that describes the subject further
- Line 5 – a few words or a phrase that renames what/who the poem is about

Here is an example from a larger-than-life character (inspired by *A Season of Gifts*):

Grandma Dowdel
Eccentric, big-hearted
Conniving, aggravating, giving
"Busier than a one-armed paperhanger"
Ruth Ann's shadow

And another from a supporting character (inspired by *Ghosts I Have Been*):

Letty Shambaugh
Dimpled, devious
Mocking, preening, bossing,
Gold ringlets, round pink face
Queen of the small town girls.

Response Project – Character Trading Cards

Show students a sample trading card (there are numerous examples for male and female athletes in each edition of *Sports Illustrated for Kids*). Examine both sides of the card and make a list of the categories of information included on each side. Use this template to design an oversized trading card for a selected character. Side one includes a portrait of the character.

Side two includes a selection from the following categories.

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| • Character nickname | • Birthdate |
| • Family members | • Character traits |
| • Hobbies/Interests | • Best friends or worst enemies |
| • Most admired person | • Adventures or experiences |
| • Future plans | • Best/worst day of their life |
| • Memories | • Unique verbal expressions |
| • Distinguishing Features | • What's on their iPod? |
| • Favorite _____ (author, musician, song, book, athlete, teacher, school subject, food, etc.) | |

Partnering with Peck to Create Readers: Reading Aloud

Peck's Ten Questions to Ask About a Novel

1. What would this story be like if the main character were of the opposite sex?
2. Why is the story set where it is (not what is the setting)?
3. If you were to film this story, what characters would you eliminate if you couldn't use them all?
4. Would you film this story in black and white or in color? Explain.
5. How is the main character different from you?
6. Why would or wouldn't this story make a good TV series?
7. What's one thing in this story that has happened to you?
8. Reread the first paragraph of Chapter 1. What's in it that makes you read on?
9. If you designed a new cover for this book, what would it look like?
10. What does the title tell you about the book? Does it tell the truth?

Why we read aloud Reading aloud may be our most valuable tool for teaching reading and creating readers. While the sole purpose of the read aloud isn't to teach reading, we can't deny the opportunity it offers students to experience the pleasures of reading and to develop the art of listening from a capable and skilled reader. Not only do books become accessible to all readers, regardless of ability or interest, read alouds can ignite independent reading, stretch attention spans, stimulate the imagination, foster critical and creative thinking, invite a reading-writing connection, and develop a community of readers in the classroom. With Richard Peck's books, listeners will experience a range of responses, from deep chuckles to thought-provoking silence.

Reading aloud—entire novel While it requires a commitment of time, the benefits from reading aloud a novel present rewards that few other teaching methods can offer. A novel such as *The Teacher's Funeral: A Comedy in Three Parts*, introduces a class to a unique school story, a motley bunch of students, comical and surprising events, and a time period when modern technology came in the form of the internal combustion machine. It's easy to build community and generate discussion around this book's theme of seeking one's dreams despite obstacles.

Or, read aloud one of Peck's extensively researched historical novels to align with a curricular study. This will spark curiosity about time periods, events, and people from the past that propel students to conduct their own inquiry. For example, *Fair Weather* could lead to research on the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and the appearance of twentieth-century technology (i.e., moving pictures, long-distance telephone), or famous historical figures such as Buffalo Bill Cody and Lillian Russell, or an examination of why world's fairs have been overtaken by theme parks.

Reading aloud—selected excerpts There are numerous reasons for reading aloud a selected passage from a novel, rather than the entire book. This strategy can serve the same purpose as a book talk, giving readers just enough so they'll hunger to pick up the book and read it on their own. Reading a selected passage can also serve to introduce characters, reveal a time and place, even to build suspense or tickle the funny bone. On the following spread there are selected passages from Peck's novels with captivating episodes that can be read in one brief sitting.

Read Aloud Excerpts . . .

. . . to Invite Independent Reading



From *A Long Way From Chicago*:

In 1930 Joey Dowdel and his younger sister Mary Alice are sent to Grandma Dowdel's for their second summer visit. One evening, Mary Alice's pastime of rope jumping (alone) and Joey's construction of a giant jigsaw puzzle (also alone), is interrupted by the sound of a horse clopping by . . . then silence . . . and then an explosion that springs Grandma Dowdel right from her chair.

- Read aloud the first four pages in "The Mouse in the Milk" (ending at ". . . I wondered who'd dare do this to Grandma.") to set the stage Grandma's outlandish scheme to take matters into her own hands.

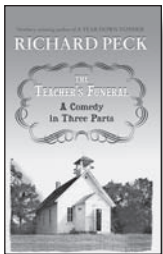


From *Ghosts I Have Been*:

It's 1914 and Blossom is one resourceful young woman — she has to be. Her mother's fortune telling doesn't bring in much money. Some folk in Bluff City think Blossom "doesn't know her place." Be that as it may, Blossom is about to make sure that a passel of Halloween pranksters know *their* place.

- Read aloud Chapter One to discover how outhouses can be frightening places.

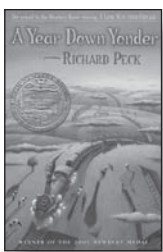
. . . to Meet Colorful Characters



From *Here Lies the Librarian*:

A tornado in 1914 brings four young tourists to a rural town in Indiana. Their timing is perfect. The townspeople are searching for a new librarian and these young women are in search of life experience, and a job. What begins as a clash with the penny-pinchers of the town, ends with an opportunity for everyone. The town will never be same again.

- Read aloud Chapter Five "The Bargain of the Century" to meet an entire cast of quirky characters.

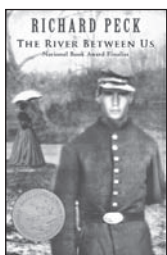


From *A Year Down Yonder*:

One hot summer day while Mary Alice lives with Grandma Dowdel to escape her family's Great Depression woes, a stranger walks into the side yard, seeking a room to rent. And after some negotiation, Grandma agrees to board the lodger, Arnold Green, a New York City artist sent from the WPA to paint a mural in the small town post office.

- Read aloud the middle section from the chapter "A Dangerous Man" (beginning with "That Saturday was summer-warm . . ." to "And she was thirty-six, so I probably thought that was way too old to be thinking about romance.") to meet the new guy in town.

. . . to Reveal Time and Place

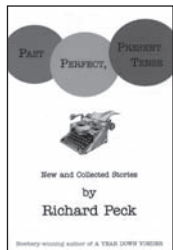


From *The River Between Us*:

During the early days of the Civil War, the Pruitt family takes in two mysterious young women who have journeyed to Illinois from New Orleans. As summer arrives, the riverboats still arrived, laden with cotton from the South. But that didn't quell rumors that the Pruitts were harboring an escaped slave.

- Read aloud the first four pages of Chapter Six (ending at "It's up there in the death drawer yet.") to set the scene as one family struggles to make ends meet as Civil War is imminent.

Read Aloud Excerpts . . .



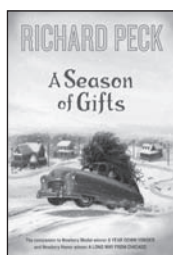
. . . to Reveal Time and Place (continued)

From *Past Perfect, Present Tense: New and Collected Stories*

In this short story that inspired Peck to write the novel *Fair Weather*, a farm girl who's never been anywhere, experiences the opportunity of a lifetime when she and her mother journey to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in the summer of 1904.

- Read aloud the second half of "The Electric Summer" (beginning with "That's how Mama and I went to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis . . .") to experience how the world unfolds and the future is found as one century leads to another.

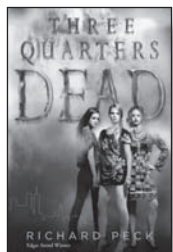
. . . to Build Suspense and Evoke the Spirits



From *A Season of Gifts*:

Twelve-year-old Bob Barnhart and his family have recently moved to a small town in southern Illinois. Who's their next-door neighbor? The fearless and crafty Grandma Dowdel. Apparently a local tradition during the fall of each year brings trouble to Mrs. Dowdel's pumpkin patch. This year is no exception.

- Read aloud the first three pages of Chapter Six "The Haunted Melon Patch" (ending at "The next ghost you see could be you.") to establish how Grandma Dowdel strikes fear into the heart of her newest neighbors.



From *Three Quarters Dead*:

Kerry is texting and clubbing with her recently dead friends. Just as in life, her friends are powerful, alluring, and undoubtedly dangerous. Join Kerry in a New York City apartment where she meets these apparitions—an apartment full of the dark dread that shows what will come.

- Read aloud from the middle of Chapter 7 "Makenzie's Kilt" (beginning with "Somebody was right there . . .") to the end of the chapter to discern whether Kerry will escape from what haunts her.

. . . to Tickle the Funny Bone



From *On the Wings of Heroes*:

WWII has invaded Davy Bowman's childhood, with his older brother sent to the army and his mother off to work. It is a time of sacrifice and making do, a time to collect rubber and hunt for milkweed fluff, all for the war effort. Davy and his buddy Scooter's search for scrap metal leads them to Old Man Stonecypher's cobwebby attic—and the unexpected.

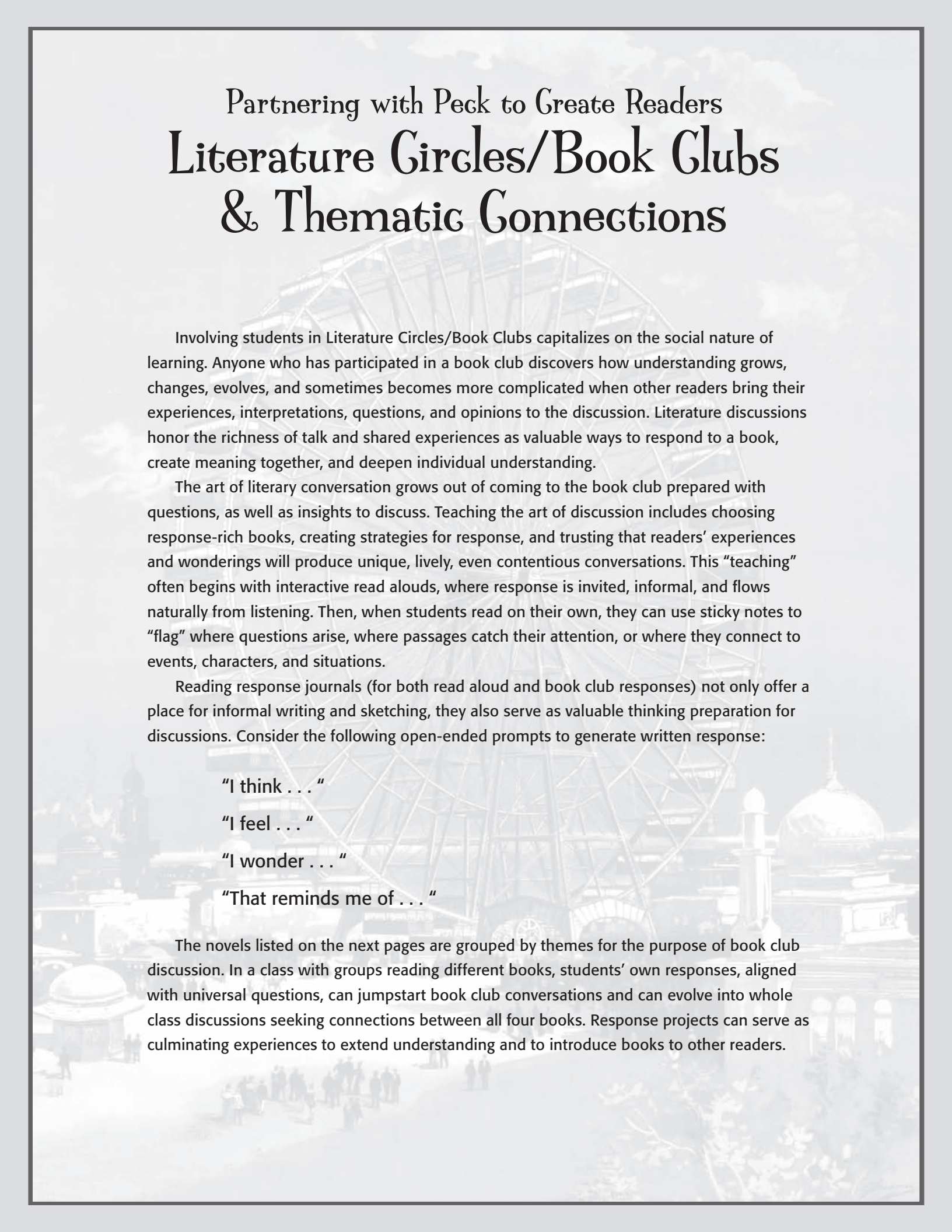
- Read aloud the chapter "Scooter Put a Pin in Midway Island . . ." to discover the fun (and funny) that comes from doing good deeds.



From *The Ghost Belonged to Me*:

In 1913 and Alexander Armsworth has some biggest concerns: a girl named Blossom may be pulling a trick on him, his older sister, Lucille is in love and his mother is desperate for her family to appear proper and grand. He walks Uncle Miles, to give Mrs. Armsworth a hard time . . . and everyone else a laugh.

- Read aloud from the middle of Chapter Four (beginning with "Then Uncle Miles was standing in the doorway . . .") to the end of the chapter to meet this unforgettable character.

The background of the page features a faded, grayscale image of a Ferris wheel, likely the London Eye, with a city skyline visible in the distance. The Ferris wheel's structure is prominent, with its spokes and passenger capsules clearly visible. The city skyline includes various buildings and structures, some with domes, suggesting a historical or European setting. The overall tone is light and artistic, providing a subtle backdrop for the text.

Partnering with Peck to Create Readers Literature Circles/Book Clubs & Thematic Connections

Involving students in Literature Circles/Book Clubs capitalizes on the social nature of learning. Anyone who has participated in a book club discovers how understanding grows, changes, evolves, and sometimes becomes more complicated when other readers bring their experiences, interpretations, questions, and opinions to the discussion. Literature discussions honor the richness of talk and shared experiences as valuable ways to respond to a book, create meaning together, and deepen individual understanding.

The art of literary conversation grows out of coming to the book club prepared with questions, as well as insights to discuss. Teaching the art of discussion includes choosing response-rich books, creating strategies for response, and trusting that readers' experiences and wonderings will produce unique, lively, even contentious conversations. This "teaching" often begins with interactive read alouds, where response is invited, informal, and flows naturally from listening. Then, when students read on their own, they can use sticky notes to "flag" where questions arise, where passages catch their attention, or where they connect to events, characters, and situations.

Reading response journals (for both read aloud and book club responses) not only offer a place for informal writing and sketching, they also serve as valuable thinking preparation for discussions. Consider the following open-ended prompts to generate written response:

"I think . . . "

"I feel . . . "

"I wonder . . . "

"That reminds me of . . . "

The novels listed on the next pages are grouped by themes for the purpose of book club discussion. In a class with groups reading different books, students' own responses, aligned with universal questions, can jumpstart book club conversations and can evolve into whole class discussions seeking connections between all four books. Response projects can serve as culminating experiences to extend understanding and to introduce books to other readers.

Book Club Themes

Rascals, Oddballs, Outlandish, and Quirky Characters

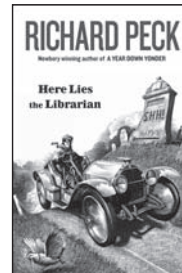
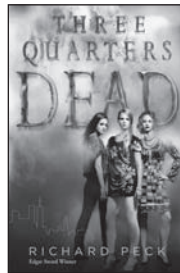


People who are larger than life can inspire, surprise, embarrass, and change us. *Fair Weather* introduces Granddad Fuller, an old geezer with “more toes than teeth,” and *A Long Way from Chicago* sends the Dowdel siblings to spend seven summers with a grandma whose shenanigans are both irreverent and legendary. In *Ghosts I Have Been*, Blossom Culp is ready to take on the world, this world *and* the next one, and Miss Eulalia Titus in *On the Wings of Heroes* seems “too old to live.”

Universal Questions: Who do you know who stands out from the crowd? What are the rewards and what are the costs when someone does? What price do we pay, and what freedom do we gain when we are different from our friends and family? What does it mean to be an individual? Can larger-than-life characters change? Why would they? Are larger-than-life characters always positive? How do you judge people who are different? Is this judgment fair?

Response Project: “Bigger-than-Life Characters” —As a team, create a life-sized full body image of a selected rascal, oddball, outlandish or quirky character from your novel. Trace someone’s body onto construction paper in the position that expresses your character’s personality. Paint on the physical characteristics and then add an oversized-dialogue bubble with an excerpt from the book that best describes him or her.

Things Aren’t Quite What They Seem



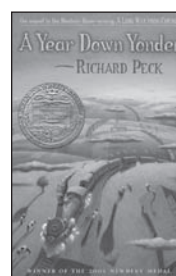
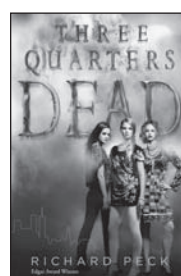
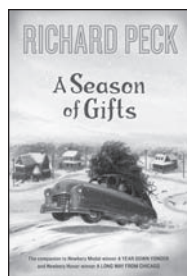
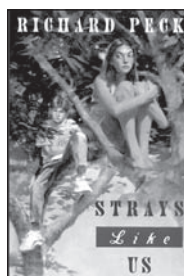
What appears on the surface may not always be the truth. In *Amanda Miranda*, how much do the maid and the lady of the house really have in common? Rumors fly in *The River Between Us* when two strangers from the south bring mysterious identities to Civil War north. Kerry’s friends in *Three Quarters Dead* aren’t admitting the real reasons they hand out punishments and prizes to their peers. Peewee dresses like a boy and fixes cars, while Eleanor is the young woman pouring tea at the library reception in *Here Lies the Librarian*. Can they really be the same person?

Universal Questions: How do we know whom to trust? Are there times when surface appearances fail you—when you’re too quick to judge? How much can you tell about someone you have just met? Are there times when telling lies is necessary? At what cost? How do you get at the truth when you hear different, sometimes conflicting, stories about someone?

Response Project: “Diary Entries” —Imagine a character in your novel keeps a diary to capture honest thoughts, concerns, and maybe even secrets too painful (or frightening) to divulge. Select three places in your book where it’s likely your character turned to their diary to speak the truth. Write these diary entries in the voice of your character.

Book Club Themes

Finding a Place to Belong

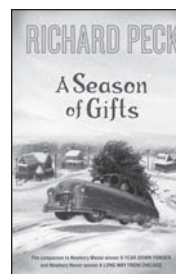
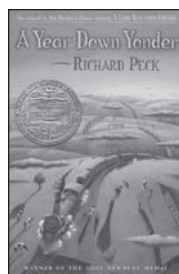


We all want to find a place to belong. Sometimes the search for that place brings us right where we are supposed to be. Other times it leads us down a path of destruction. In *Strays Like Us* Molly waits daily to be reunited with a mother who may never appear. The town seems full of bullies in *A Season of Gifts*, making life mighty lonely for Bob Barnhart and his family. In *Three Quarters Dead*, Kerry thinks she has found the friends she has been hoping for. The recession of 1937 brings hard times to Mary Alice Dowdel's family in *A Year Down Yonder*. But what can be worse than having to live with old Grandma Dowdel in a hick town with no big brother, no friends, and an outdoor privy for necessary business?

Universal Questions: What makes a home more than a place to sleep at night? Can home be a person rather than a place? How long or what does it take for where we live to become home? What changes are you willing to make to belong to a group of friends? Are there changes you would never make in the name of conformity?

Response Project: "Theme Quilt" —Create a quilt square to represent the theme "Finding a Place to Belong" for the character(s) in each of your books. Use colors and symbols in the border to represent feelings associated with belonging. Design a central visual of an event, character, or situation from the book that served as a turning point for the protagonist, and then add a "golden line" from the book, either a phrase or a sentence that best captures this theme. Connect all quilt squares to create a theme quilt representing all four books.

Journeys: From Known to New



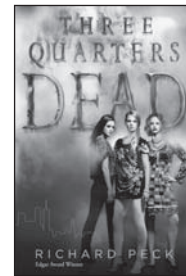
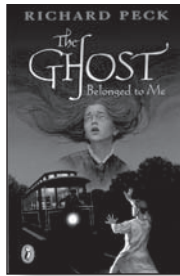
We never know exactly what will occur by the end of a journey . . . sometimes we travel accompanied by fear, or excitement, or just plain resignation. But rarely are we unchanged. Blossom Culp takes two ocean journeys in *Ghosts I Have Been*, and one of them is aboard the Titanic, while Mary Alice leaves the comforts of home in the primitive and dramatic *A Year Down Yonder*. A summer of marvels and wide-eyed wonder awaits Rosie Beckett as she strays from the family farm and travels to the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago in *Fair Weather*. Who could imagine there'd be adventures galore for a preacher's kid sitting through four seasons in a small Illinois town in 1958. But *A Season of Gifts* reveals journeys of the heart, if not of travel.

Universal Questions: How are characters in these stories different before and after their journeys? How have journeys changed them? How have they changed you? Would you like to journey to one of the places (or with one of the characters) you read about? Explain. Are there places you have been that you would choose to bring one of these characters? Where would you go? What character would you bring and why?

Response Project: "Postcards From My Life" —Choose 3-5 places in your novel when your character would have sent a postcard to someone to share what is happening to them at that time and how they're feeling about it. On one side, design an image of the place or scene that marks the event, and on the other side, write a brief but focused message in the voice of your character. Your postcards should reveal how your character grows or changes over time.

Book Club Themes

Skeletons in the Closet

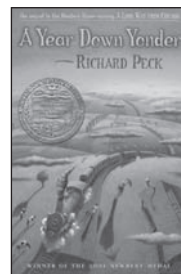
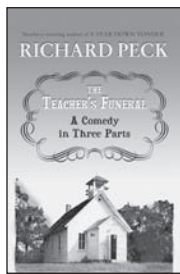


In stories, dark secrets will out! In *Ghosts I Have Been*, Alexander must discover why a girl cannot rest easy in her grave. Blossom Culp in *The Ghost Belonged to Me* must tell the story of a young boy who met his watery demise with a terrible secret. Cass is haunted by visions in *The River Between Us*, compounded by the upsurge of the Civil War, the arrival of mysterious visitors, and the shocking delivery of a coffin to the Pruitt home. Tanya is a paranormal character of great power with a hidden agenda. Can Kerry stop her in *Three Quarters Dead*? Does she want to?

Universal Questions: What happens when people keep secrets? At what point can fear help us? Is a secret a lie? Are there times when lying is the best option? What can you do when you discover a secret that should be divulged? When is it better to leave skeletons in the closet?

Response Project: "Gallery of Ghosts" -- The supernatural figures in these novels are fully fleshed out despite being dead. Draw one of the ghosts from your novel. Under the portrait, note where the ghost has been seen, why they can't rest, what gifts they have, and if they make their presence known by sight, sound or smell. You may have to do some inferring to complete your ghostly portrait. Create a "Gallery of Ghosts" by hanging everyone's ghost portrait on the classroom wall.

Growing Up, Moving On



Often before we think we are ready, or able, we need to shoulder increased responsibility as we grow older. Eleanor (Peewee) in *Here Lies the Librarian* absolutely refuses to go to high school. What could possibly interest her there? In *The Teacher's Funeral*, Russell's dreams of quitting school to join a wheat-threshing crew are disrupted when his sister becomes the teacher in his one-room schoolhouse—a teacher with big plans for her brother. It's hard to imagine that Mary Alice will learn much about life in a sleepy Illinois town, but *A Year Down Yonder* with Grandma Dowdel forces her to grow up. In the place of absent parents, Molly and Will in *Strays Like Us* must find other adults they can trust.

Universal Questions: Is growing ever easy? Can someone decide not to grow up? What are some good and bad things about taking on a task that may lead to failure? How does it feel when someone depends on you? Is there an adult that you aspire to be like when you grow up? Why? What character from your book would you choose as a mentor? What do you imagine happens to the characters in your book ten years later?

Response Project: "Life Lessons" -- Create a list of ten of your selected character's Life Lessons learned over the course of the events in the novel. Some might be serious, while others could be humorous. Come prepared to explain your choices from the perspective of your character.

“My advice for children who want to write is, you can start right now. . . . Nobody but a reader ever became a writer. . . . Becoming a writer involves extended study and more practice than the piano or football . . .”

— Richard Peck, *Invitations to the World*

Partnering with Peck to create writers: Inspiring Writers through Reading

Imagine how hard it would be to play music well and to know how it should sound if you never listened to it. While musicians practice, they also learn from the mastery of gifted musicians. The same is true for visual artists and for writers. By paying attention to the craft of writing—opening lines and similes, sensory description and metaphor, and language choices— young writers develop an ear for the voice of a text, for the rhythm of dialogue, and the feeling of a “just right” phrase. Richard Peck’s writing offers lessons for students willing to slow down, pay attention, and read with a writer’s eyes.

One way to develop the ability to read like a writer is to make note of words and phrases that stand out and capture the reader’s attention. Encourage students to keep a writer’s notebook and keep pages dedicated to recording well-crafted language, whether it’s particularly resonant metaphors and similes, descriptions of people, places, and situations that tap into smell, sound, sight—all the senses that take readers inside the writing.

Look at some of the excerpts on these pages for examples of descriptive writing. Read these out orally or write them down on the board or butcher block paper. Have your students identify additional passages from Richard Peck’s books and copy them into their writer’s journals.

Use the identified passages as inspiration and write a short piece introducing a character of your own or write a setting with descriptive language to evoke a specific mood or feeling.

Some sample writer’s notebook pages:

Well-crafted language

- “The penthouse seemed to be hanging in space—somewhere between the moon and New York City.” (p. 132 in *Three Quarters Dead*)
- “White electricity had lit the world and erased the stars.” (p. 62 in *Fair Weather*)
- “Lottie had my hand in a grip of steel. We hadn’t bargained on anything like this. We were scared, of course, but I longed to be a poet, to pin this vision to a page. It had a beauty beyond your wildest dreams, and so big, it made us mice.” (p. 62 in *Fair Weather*)

Leads and Opening Sentences

- “If your teacher has to die, August isn’t a bad time of the year for it.” From *The Teacher’s Funeral: A Comedy in Three Parts*
- “You wouldn’t think we’d have to leave Chicago to see a dead body.” From *A Long Way from Chicago*
- “It was the last day of our old lives, and we didn’t even know it.” From *Fair Weather*
- “My best friend used to be Aaron Zimmer.” From *The Great Interactive Dream Machine*

Description using metaphor

- “The dust around here is thicker than fur on a squirrel.” (p. 131 in *On the Wings of Heroes*)
- “You could see from here the house was haunted. Its crooked old lightning rods pointed boney fingers at the sky.” (p. 5 in *A Season of Gifts*)
- “The ice on the woven fences was a latticework of diamonds.” (p. 61 in *A Year Down Yonder*)

Description using simile

- “I’d snubbed death, like you snub a teacher.” (p. 171 in *Three Quarters Dead*)
- “My teeth is chattering like a woodpecker with palsy.” (p. 58 in *A Year Down Yonder*)
- “I loved my mother, and she loved me. She loved me like a ragdoll you drag around and then leave out in the rain.” (p. 154 in *Strays Like Us*)
- “It took us a while to adjust to her. We weren’t used to a teacher who looked like a walnut with a mustache.” (p. 83, *On the Wings of Heroes*)

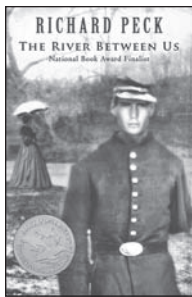
Sensory Description

- “Then in swept Carleen Lovejoy. Her shimmering gown, cut on the bias, was meant to outdo the other angels. Her halo hovered high over her head, supported from behind. She was made up for the New York stage. She’d shaved off her eyebrows and drawn on new ones. Her cheeks were pinker than nature. Her lips were a deep red Cupid’s bow, with fingernails to match. She was a natural blonde, and that was the only thing natural about her.” (p. 69 in *A Year Down Yonder*)
- “The filth of the place was beyond anything you ever seen. Along all the mud streets stood in the ditches, abuzz with bluebottles and mosquitoes, as there hadn’t been a frost yet this far south. The whole town was a dump. The swollen carcasses of dogs lay about, and even a dead horse half in a cut of water red with its blood. I clutched the hamper to me and tried to cover my nose. It was a terrible place, this Cairo, right down there at the end of Illinois, at the end of the world.” (p. 109 in *The River Between Us*)

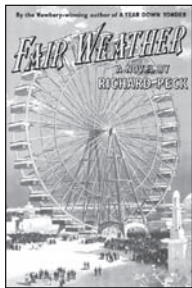
Partnering with Peck to create learners: Connecting Readers to History through Literature

History is as much about people as it is about the events that are in textbooks. Many of Richard Peck's novels bring alive the mundane and the extraordinary, the events that shaped the times, places, and people whose lives intersected with the events. What well-crafted historical fiction does best is ignite curiosity. What really happened? Did people really do that, say that, live like that? What caused the events that changed lives forever? What in the story is real and what is fictional?

These three novels link naturally to a social studies curriculum that focuses on United States history. Reading one of these stories while studying about the related time period creates interest as students research topics, people, events, attitudes, and issues of the time.



The River Between Us The heart of this novel is set in the Civil War, but centers around the 15-year old narrator, who travels to Grand Tower, Illinois fifty years after the story takes place. The central story occurs in 1861 and features Tilly and her twin brother Noah's family soon after their mother takes in two girls from New Orleans—flashy, stylish Delphine and mysterious dark-skinned Calinda. When Noah runs away to war, Tilly and Delphine go after him, finding him badly injured in the horror of a tent hospital. They bring him home, only to discover their world is changed forever, in part due to the town's rumors about Delphine and Calinda (Are they spies? Is Calinda a slave? A servant?) and to the secrets that reveal the novel's mystery. This is a riveting story of racism and young people facing war, unsure what side to support or why, and offers a powerful depiction of life during the American Civil War.



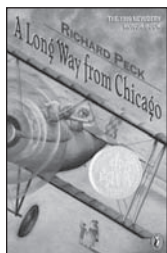
Fair Weather It's 1893, nearly the turn of the century, and thirteen-year-old Rosie Beckett, her sister Lottie, and her younger brother Buster are invited by their Aunt Euterpe to travel from their farm to the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. While Rosie finds her future in the Women's Building at the fair, the Beckett siblings and their flamboyant Granddad Fuller (an old Civil War comrade-in-arms) meet celebrities of their time—Buffalo Bill, Lillian Russell, and Scott Joplin—and stumble into some unfortunate incidents with their widowed aunt. Their trip is an extraordinary adventure of historical fact and fiction offering a glimpse into 19th-century America through the wide-eyed wonder and naïveté of farm kids in the big city. The inclusion of historical photographs, lively dialogue, and well-timed humor round out this portrait-novel of a pivotal moment in American history.



On the Wings of Heroes This novel begins on the eve of WWII during a time in America where neighbors knew one another, where hide-and-seek games and jalopy parades bonded a community, and where the war effort became everybody's business. Davy Bowman's happy, carefree life becomes complicated by the sacrifices of war; his beloved older brother is sent to the army, his boyish father becomes somber, his mother joins the workforce, and his meddlesome grandparents move in with the family. Throughout the novel, Davy's experiences are shaped by his friends, some unique adults, and the daily reminder that his brother is painfully absent. This is a poignant story about wartime heroes, including those on the home front who step up in important ways.

Meet the Books

Connect with these great books by Richard Peck



A Long Way from Chicago

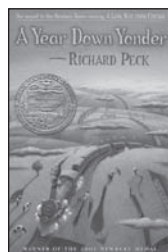
HC: 978-0-8037-2290-3

PB: 978-0-14-130352-9

PB: 978-0-14-240110-1

(Puffin Modern Classic)

- A Newbery Honor Book
- An ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- An ALA Notable Children's Book
- A *Horn Book* Fanfare
- A National Book Award Finalist
- A New York Public Library's 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing
- VOYA Teen's Top Ten Best Books

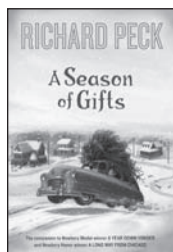


A Year Down Yonder

HC: 978-0-8037-2518-8

PB: 978-0-14-230070-1

- A Newbery Medal Winner
- An ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- An ALA Notable Children's Book
- New York Public Library's 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing
- New York Public Library's Books for the Teen Age
- *Booklist* Best Book of the Year
- *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year



A Season of Gifts

HC: 978-0-8037-3082-3

PB: 978-0-14-241729-4

- An ALA YALSA Best Book for Young Adults Nominee
- A CBC/NCSS Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People
- A *Kirkus Reviews* Best Children's Book of the Year
- A *Booklist* Editors' Choice
- A Kansas State Reading Circle Recommended Reading List Selection
- Great Lakes Books Award Master List
- An *IndieBound* 2010 Indies Choice Honor Award Winner

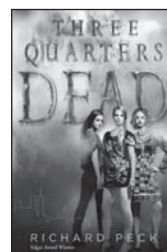


Fair Weather

HC: 978-0-8037-2516-4

PB: 978-0-14-250034-7

- An ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- A *Booklist* Editor's Choice
- A *New York Times* Editor's Choice
- A *Publishers Weekly* Best Children's Book
- A *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year



Three Quarters Dead

HC: 978-0-8037-3454-8

NEW!



The Great Interactive Dream Machine

PB: 978-0-14-038264-8

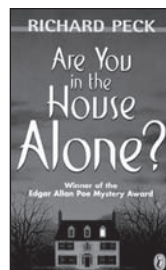
- VOYA Best Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror



Strays Like Us

PB: 978-0-14-130619-3

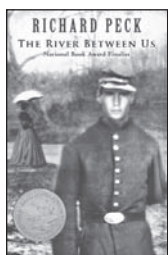
- An ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- A *Bulletin* Top 100 Title



Are You in the House Alone?

PB: 978-0-14-130693-3

- An ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- An Edgar Allan Poe Mystery Award Winner



The River Between Us

HC: 978-0-8037-2735-9

PB: 978-0-14-240310-5

- A Scott O'Dell Award Winner
- A National Book Award Finalist
- An ALA Notable Children's Book
- An ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- New York Public Library's 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing
- A *Booklist* Editor's Choice
- A *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year
- An ALA Notable Children's Book
- An ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- A *Kirkus* Reviews Editor's Choice



The Ghost Belonged to Me

PB: 978-0-14-038671-4

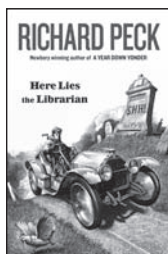
- An ALA Notable Children's Book
- A *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year



Ghosts I Have Been

PB: 978-0-14-131096-1

- An ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- A *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year



Here Lies the Librarian

HC: 978-0-8037-3080-9

PB: 978-0-14-240908-4

- A *Parent's Choice* Gold Award
- *Washington Post* Top Ten of 2006
- New York Public Library's Books for the Teen Age
- Land of Enchantment Master List (New Mexico)
- Charlie May Simon Book Award Master List (Arkansas)
- Georgia Children's Book Award Master List



Lost in Cyberspace

PB: 978-0-14-037856-6



Amanda/Miranda

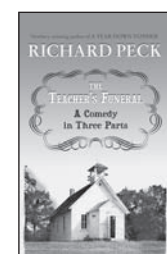
PB: 978-0-14-131217-0



Past Perfect, Present Tense: New and Collected Stories

HC: 978-0-8037-2998-8

PB: 978-0-14-240537-6



The Teacher's Funeral

HC: 978-0-8037-2736-6

PB: 978-0-14-240507-9

- *School Library Journal* Starred Review



On The Wings of Heroes

HC: 978-0-8037-3081-6

PB: 978-0-14-241204-6

- Four State Book Award Master Lists (Maine, North Dakota, New Hampshire, and Utah)
- New York Public Library 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing
- New York Public Library (NYPL) Book for the Teen Age
- Children's Book Council (CBC)/National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People (2008)
- Bank Street Best Books of the Year: Starred Title
- *Publishers Weekly* Starred Review
- *School Library Journal* Starred Review

Advice and Inspiration from Richard Peck

I read because one life isn't enough, and in the page of a book I can be anybody;

I read because the words that build the story become mine, to build my life;

I read not for happy endings but for new beginnings; I'm just
beginning myself, and I wouldn't mind a map;

I read because I have friends who don't, and young though they are,
they're beginning to run out of material;

I read because every journey begins at the library, and it's time for me to start packing;

I read because one of these days I'm going to get out of this town,
and I'm going to go everywhere and meet everybody,
and I want to be ready.

For Young Writers

1. Learn five new words a day. A story is written one word at a time, and you need a larger supply than you have.
2. Read the kind of books that you want to write. Read to see how the author put the story together, and how the author phrased it. Nobody but a reader ever became a writer. You have to read a thousand books before you can write one.
3. Find your way to the library and mine its riches. All fiction is based on research. Befriend librarians; they can unlock the world. Find that part of the library you belong in, and take up residence, because every book begins in the library in the hope it will end there.

Read to your children
Twenty minutes a day;
You have the time,
And so do they.

**Read while the laundry is in the machine;
Read while the dinner cooks;
Tuck a child in the crook of your arm
And reach for the library books.**

**Hide the remote,
Let the computer games cool,
For one day your children will be off to school;
Remedial? Gifted? You have the choice;
Let them hear their first tales
In the sound of your voice.**

**Read in the morning;
Read over noon;
Read by the light of
Goodnight Moon.
Turn the pages together,
Sitting close as you'll fit,
Till a small voice beside you says,
"Hey, don't quit."**