

Telling Stories: Richard Peck

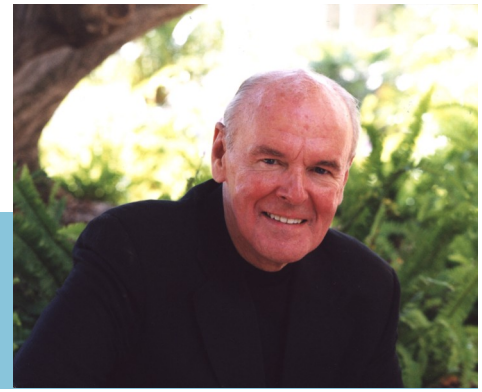
Friday, October 15

Grades 7-12

11 a.m.-12 p.m.

Curriculum Connections: Language Arts

Language Arts Standards sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 11 & 12



About the Program

Creative writing students Justin Allen and Brianna Cole from Woodbridge Senior High School in Prince William County, Virginia will join moderator Maria Salvadore as they explore with Richard Peck several of his recent books, influences on his work, and the craft of writing, as well as solicit Peck's advice for aspiring writers.

Who is Richard Peck?

Richard Peck, a Newbery Medal–winning writer, is a master wordsmith, humorist, and historian. He was born at the end of the Great Depression in Decatur, Illinois and grew up in a family in which words, language, and story were all important.

After serving in the US Army, Peck received a graduate degree in English and taught in middle and high schools for many years. It was while teaching in New York City that Peck realized that adolescents deal with special, often difficult, issues. He decided to leave teaching to write about the issues and problems his students confronted, introducing them to fictional

characters who are moving toward maturity. His first book, *Don't Look and It Won't Hurt* (1972), began his exploration of these themes with appealing and credible characters.

Since then, Richard Peck has published more than 30 books for children, young adults, and adults, received numerous awards and accolades, and remains a popular and widely read novelist.

In addition to the Newbery Medal and a Newbery Honor, Peck has received the Margaret Edwards Award for lifetime achievement, the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction, and the Edgar Allen Poe Award from the Mystery Writers of America. Additionally, Richard Peck is the first author of books for young people to have received the National Humanities Medal.

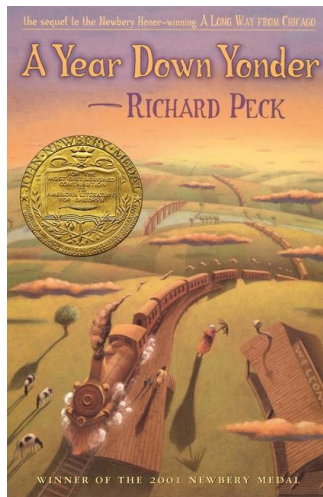
Peck continues to write about timely yet timeless topics influenced by his early years growing up in a small town, his family, the time Peck served in the army, as well as his myriad interests in the past and earlier attitudes and values. His books also demonstrate a well-honed sense of humor and themes that remain universal—each with unforgettable characters.

Peck's More Recent Books

One of Peck's most memorable characters refuses to be permanently shelved. She is larger than life, approaching everything in a unique and memorable way. This character is known as Grandma Dowdel.

She was first introduced in *A Long Way from Chicago*. In this award-winning novel, Joey recalls the summers he and his sister Mary Alice annually visited their colorful grandmother. Their unique summer adventures were always exciting, occurring during lively times made even more remarkable by their one-of-a-kind grandmother.

Peck's More Recent Books, cont.

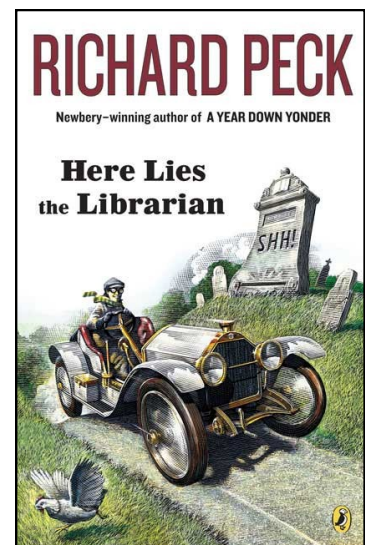


In *A Year Down Yonder*, Mary Alice is now 15 years old and Joey has joined the Civilian Conservation Corps. For the first time, Mary Alice visits her grandmother alone. During the year with Grandma Dowdel, Mary Alice comes to appreciate her grandmother, particularly her wisdom and her unique approach to life and its problems. Readers will recognize Mary Alice's gradually maturing voice.

Grandma Dowdel is back in Peck's *A Season of Gifts*. Set in 1958, Mrs. Dowdel is older but no less feisty and more than up to the challenges she sees when she gets new neighbors, the Barnhart family. This warm, slightly irreverent, and very funny family saga is told from middle child Bob's perspective. Readers will get to know Grandma Dowdel's small town and meet its extraordinary residents while glimpsing a long-ago time enlivened by rich historical detail.

Here Lies the Librarian, set at the start of World War I, is also filled with historical detail—and lots of laughs for readers. It opens with a tornado overturning tombstones in the town's cemetery, but not daring to unearth the stereotypical librarian buried there. Soon, however, four schooled, automobile-driving, passionate, and definitely atypical librarians arrive in the small town to the delight of Peewee (née Eleanor). Peewee lives with her brother Jake, who is fascinated by these new wonders of modern technology—automobiles. Competition on- and off-track make for a rollicking good story in which Peewee and her world are forever changing.

On the Wings of Heroes is perhaps Peck's most autobiographical novel. Readers view World War II from the perspective of Davy Bowman and the changes it brought to Davy, his family, and their Midwest community. Readers will in turn smile, weep, and then laugh as they share Davy's experiences. Filled with rich detail and historical nuance, this poignant novel also explores what constitutes heroism.



Instructional Activities

Reading/Writing

- ◆ Read a Richard Peck novel. From whose point of view is the story told? Why is this perspective used? Why might the author have used it? What does a first-person narrative achieve? The third-person omniscient?
- ◆ Rewrite a scene but change the point of view. Tell it from the third-person omniscient, sometimes called the omnipotent observer, or from the perspective of another character. What changed? What were you able to describe that was not possible when told from a first-person narration?
- ◆ If his characters could talk to the author, what might they say? Write a letter to Richard Peck from the point of view of one of the characters (Bob Barnhart, Davy Bowman, or Peewee McGrath).
- ◆ Read several poems from Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* (MacMillan, 1916). What do these "epitaphs" share in common? Are they anything like the headstone of Peewee's now-deceased town librarian, Electra Dietz, in *Here Lies the Librarian*?
- ◆ Write several original epitaphs in either prose or poetry. Consider the tone you want to create and how to create it. It can be comic or serious. How might the form you use affect that tone?

Instructional Activities, cont.

Research/History

- ◆ The history of the automobile corresponds to that of the development of the United States. Research the automobile. Why and how did its development have an impact on the United States? Create a timeline of key events in the changes in transportation. Juxtapose it to major historical events in the United States and the world. Where and how do these events seem to relate?
- ◆ During World War II, there were many shortages, detailed in *On the Wings of Heroes*. If those same shortages were to happen again today, what plan would you devise to address them? Write about your plan and compare it to what Davy and his family did in the novel.
- ◆ What sources would you use to verify the accuracies of the description of what actions Davy and his family took in *On the Wings of Heroes*? Journals or diaries and other first-hand accounts—including real people—are considered primary source material. Are there primary sources you could use to verify the accuracy of what went on in the Bowman's community?
- ◆ Grandma Dowdel was a strong influence on her grandchildren. Interview an older person in your life. Find out what their childhood was like, where they lived, what recreational activities were available to them. Write a story about how you would have interacted with them in the time in which they grew up or how they react in your world today or how they have influenced you.



Resources

Internet Resources

For more information, visit:

Richard Peck interview from 2004–2005 season: kennedy-center.org/education/pwttv/

World War I: pbs.org/greatwar/

World War II: loc.gov/rr/program/bib/WW2/WW2bib.html
worldwar-2.net/

Automobiles and their history:

3d.cs.colorado.edu/systems/agentsheets/New-Vista/automobile/history.html
loc.gov/rr/scitech/mysteries/auto.html

Selected Books by Richard Peck:

Books discussed in this program:

Here Lies the Librarian (Dial, 2006)

On the Wings of Heroes (Dial, 2007)

A Season of Gifts (Dial, 2009)

Other books by Richard Peck:

Fair Weather (Dial, 2001)

A Long Way from Chicago: A Novel in Stories – 1999 Newbery Honor (Dial, 1998)

Past Perfect, Present Tense: New & Collected Stories (Dial, 2004)

The River Between Us – Scott O'Dell Award (Dial, 2003)

The Teacher's Funeral: A Comedy in Three Parts (Dial, 2004)

A Year Down Yonder – 2001 Newbery Medal (Dial, 2000)