

**THE RIVER BETWEEN US
BY RICHARD PECK**

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2006
Grades 6-8**

Submitted by Dorothy L. Grimsley, Instructor
Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education
University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Title: The River Between Us
Author: Richard Peck
Publisher: Dial Books, 2003
Pages: 176

Summary

The story begins with a 100-mile car trip in 1916. Dr. Hutchings takes his fifteen-year-old son, Howard, and his five-year-old twin sons to Grand Tower, Illinois on the banks of the Mississippi River to visit Grandma Tilly and her husband, Great-uncle Noah and Great-aunt Delphine. Then the timeframe changes with Tilly narrating the events that occurred during the Civil War when Grand Tower was a little one-horse town located on the border between the warring North and South. Tilly's 16-year-old brother is anxious to join the Union Army and go to war. Both Tilly and the mother are distraught about Noah going to war because Cass, the younger sister, who has visions, sees men, lots of men, dying. The family's life changes when two mysterious young ladies arrive on the steamboat from New Orleans. One is the fair and beautiful Delphine Duval, who has fancy dresses and high-society ways. The other young lady is Calinda, who is darker-skinned. Since the women can't get to St. Louis, Mama Pruitt offers them room and board. Noah, who is quite taken with Delphine, leaves home to join the Union troops. When Tilly and Delphine travel to Cairo to bring him home from the war, they find him in a deplorable army tent hospital where he has just had his arm amputated. During their travels Tilly learns that Delphine is a quadroon. The story ends with a return to 1916 and the surprise revelation in which Howard learns the identities of his father's actual parents.

Awards and "Best Book" Lists

National Book Award: Finalist 2003
Scott O'Dell Historical Fiction Award 2004
ALA Notable Children's Book 2004
ALA Best Best Books for Young Adults 2004
Book Links Best of List, Lasting Connections 2004
Booklist Best of List, Editor's Choices 2004

IRA Teachers' Choices List, Advanced 2004
Kirkus Best of the Year List 2003
NYPL's 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing
Parent's Choice Gold Award 2003
Riverbank Review Children's Books of Distinction 2003

Author's Biography

Richard Peck was born in Decatur, Illinois and lived on Dennis Avenue until he reached the age of eighteen. His mother was a dietitian; his father ran a gas station and often rode his Harley Davidson to work. He spent his early years listening to stories told by the adults in his life. When he was a young child, his mother read to him and introduced him to the world of literature. His father told him tales about his own boyhood activities. When the truckers and farmers who hung around his father's gas station swapped stories, he listened. He spent time at his grandparent's farm and listened to stories told by his grandmother and her four sisters. His Uncle Miles was another source of stories. Growing up amid interesting adults and listening to stories inspired many of his books. He is the winner of numerous awards. He is the first children's writer ever to have been awarded a National Humanities Medal, which he received in 2001. He is also the winner of the 1990 Margaret A. Edwards Award, a prestigious award sponsored by the Young Adult Library Services Association of the American Library Association; the 1990 National Council of Teachers of English/ALAN Award for outstanding contributions to young adult literature; and the Mystery Writers of America Edgar Allan Poe Award.

Peck went to college in Exeter, England and served a stint in the army. Then he taught school for 20 years before he quit to become an author. His first novel was *Don't Look and It Won't Hurt*. He has written more than 30 novels for young adults, as well as an autobiography, poetry and works of adult fiction. *A Year Down Yonder* won the Newbery Medal in 2002 and *A Long Way From Chicago* was named a Newbery Honor Book in 2001. Recently, Peck was selected to receive the Ludington Award by the Educational Paperback Association. He donated the \$2,500 gift to the LSU School of Library and Information Science to add to the Richard Peck Scholarship fund. Peck lives in New York City and makes frequent visits to England and to Louisiana.

Most Recent Books by Richard Peck

A Long Way From Chicago. Newbery Honor
A Year Down Yonder. Newbery Medal
Fair Weather
The Teacher's Funeral: A Comedy in Three Parts

Related Titles (Civil War)

Across Five Aprils by Irene Hunt
Becca's Story by James D. Forman
The Blue and the Gray by Eve Bunting
Brady by Jean Fritz
Bull Run by Paul Fleischman
Clara Barton: Civil War Nurse by Nancy Whitelaw
Diary of a Drummer Boy by Marlene Targ Brill
An Island Far From Home by John Donahue
Lincoln: A Photobiography by Russell Freedman
Moon Over Tennessee by Craig Crist-Evans
Mountain Valor by Gloria Houston
Pink and Say by Patricia Polacco
Retreat from Gettysburg by Kathleen Ernst
Scholastic Encyclopedia of the Civil War by Catherine Clinton
Soldier's Heart by Gary Paulsen

Mixed Race

The Land by Mildred Taylor.
What Are You?: Voices of Mixed-Race Young People by Pearl Fuyo Gaskins.

Classroom Connections

- Have students play songs that were popular with the Southern troops. Compare these with songs the Northern troops played and sang. Some songs are available at http://www.mce.k12tn.net/civil_war/activities_for_lesson_10.htm Other sources are <http://www2.netdoor.com/~newsouth/newsouth.html> and <http://www.civilwarmusic.net/index.php> Have students draw illustrations to go with one of the songs and put the drawings together into a book.
- Have students use the Internet to locate resources related to the Civil War. You could assign relevant topics to assigned pairs or small groups. Provide rubrics to be used to evaluate the web pages.
- Use the book *The Civil War: Strange and Fascinating Facts* also published as *Our Incredible Civil War* by Burke Davis to develop a time line.
- Have students study the leaders of the Civil War: general characteristics such as their "job" in the Civil War, the side they were supporting, the battles they fought, the qualities that made them "leaders," and their specific roles in the war.

- Have students research Civil War Battles – specific information such as the number of casualties, wounded and missing persons, what actually took place at the selected battles and their significance to the outcome of the war.

Web Sites

American Civil War

<http://teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/tlresources/units/byrnes-literature/schaley.html>

Complete lesson plan to use with the book *The Civil War: Strange and Fascinating Facts* by Burke Davis.

Book Page: Lessons Learned

http://www.bookpage.com/0310bp/richard_peck.html

Interview with Richard Peck discussing his book *The River Between Us*.

Carol Hurst: Civil War in Children's Literature

<http://www.carolhurst.com/subjects/ushistory/civilwar.html>

Excellent resource with suggestions for teaching about the Civil War using literature. It includes a bibliography and discussion of children's literature about the Civil War with some recommended literature for teachers. Most of the books are appropriate for the upper elementary level. Web links to further information and Civil War photographs are included.

Carol Hurst: Richard Peck

<http://www.carolhurst.com/authors/rpeck.html>

Includes biographical information about Richard Peck and a bibliography of some of his books for young adults. Includes links to other information about Peck.

The Civil War

http://www.mce.k12tn.net/civil_war/civil_war.htm

Site contains many explanations, online quizzes, reading lessons, and activities for each main topic associated with the Civil War.

Fairrosa Cyber Library of Children's Literature

<http://www.fairrosa.info/archive/ne2004/river.html>

Class discussion of *The River Between Us* posted on a message board in January 2004.

Small Planet Communications: Lesson Plan: The Civil War

<http://www.smplanet.com/civilwar/civilwar.html>

Lesson plan for an upper elementary unit on the Civil War. Also contains links to other Internet sites that can provide cross-curricular materials for both teacher and student.

Richard Peck: A Legend in Children's Literature

<http://richardpeck.smartwriters.com/index.2ts>

A group of students from Skokie created this home page for Richard Peck.

Pennsylvania School Librarians Association

<http://www.psla.org/grantsandawards/script20046-8.php3>

The Pennsylvania Young Readers' Choice Award program includes "scripts" with booktalks and links for the titles on the ballots, including *The River Between Us*.

National Book Foundation

http://www.nationalbook.org/nba2003_rpeck.html

The River Between Us was a finalist for the 2003 National Book Award for Young People's Fiction.

Tallman

<http://www.tallmania.com/peck.html>

Profile of Richard Peck on this literature-related site maintained by a teacher.

French Creoles

www.frenchcreoles.com

Click on Creole culture for information.

<http://www.frenchcreoles.com/CreoleCulture/quadroons/quadroons.htm>

Discusses the placage system that existed in New Orleans 1790-1865 in which a white man would take a free woman of color as his mistress.

"New Orleans Creoles of Color: Shattered Dreams and Broken Promises" by Karen Battle

<http://www.loyno.edu/history/journal/1991-2/battle.htm>

This is an article about the free Black population of New Orleans in the 1800s.