

THE TEACHER'S FUNERAL: A COMEDY IN THREE PARTS

Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2007 Grades 6-8

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The Teacher's Funeral: A Comedy in Three Parts by Richard Peck. Penguin Group (USA) (Dial), 2004. 190 p.

Summary

Near the end of the nineteenth century, Russell, Lloyd and their older sister, Tansy, live on a small farm in Indiana with their father. Life as they know it is changing dramatically. Modern farm machinery is becoming available to make farm work easier. Russell, who is 15 years old and in the eighth grade, is not interested in school. He dreams about leaving Indiana to join a wheat threshing crew in the Dakotas. When the schoolteacher mean, old Miss Myrt Arbuckle "hauls off and dies" in August, the boys hope that school will be cancelled, but no such luck. In fact, things are looking even worse when Russell's domineering older sister Tansy is hired to be the new teacher in the run-down one-room schoolhouse. But to the boys' surprise, Tansy is a good teacher, who manages to get Russell and Lloyd through their eighth grades exams, despite their bad attitude toward school. The boys get themselves into some fixes concerning privy fires, snakes and speeding automobiles. The slapstick humor is delivered with Peck's signature dry wit that has made his historical (and hysterical) books such favorites.

Awards

ALA Notable Book 2005
ALA Best Book for Young Adults 2005
Christopher Awards Winner, 2005
Disney Adventures Magazine Best Historical Novel 2004
New York Public Library's 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing

Author's Biography

Richard Peck was born in Decatur, Illinois in 1934. He received a B.A. degree (1956) and an honorary doctor of letters degree (1999) from DePauw University in Indiana. Peck taught in a junior high school in Illinois and then in New York. Inspired by his students, Peck became a professional writer in 1971. His first novel was *Don't Look and It Won't Hurt*. Since then he has written numerous contemporary and historical novels about adolescents. He has won numerous awards, including the Newbery Award for *A Year Down Under*. <http://www.carolhurst.com/authors/rpeck.html>

Other Titles by Richard Peck

A Year Down Yonder (Newbery Medal)
A Long Way from Chicago (Newbery Honor)
The Dreadful Future of Blossom Culp
Fair Weather
The Great Interactive Dream Machine
The River Between Us (LYRC 2006 Gr. 6-8 Ballot)
Here Lies the Librarian (available in early 2006)

Related Titles

Caddie Woodlawn by Carol Brink.

One Room School by Raymond Bial.

The Secret School by Avi.

Those Happy Golden Years by Laura Ingalls Wilder.

Worth by A. LaFaye. (LYRC 2007 Grades 3-5 Ballot)

Journal Resource for One-Room School Books

Book Links, March, 2005 has a bibliography of children's picture books, fiction and non-fiction about one-room schools.

Classroom Connections

Language Arts

- Complete a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the past in the novel to the present.
- Have the students write a letter to the author or one of the characters and tell them how they felt about the story.

History

- Have a discussion comparing how things are now and how they were at the end of the 19th century and early part of the 20th century. Discuss topics such as transportation, education, work, living conditions and food.
- At http://pbsvideodb.pbs.org/programs/all_chapters.asp?item_id=5220, a video and information about the beginning of the 20th century is provided. Students could watch the video and answer questions provided by the teacher.
- Discuss how the educational system was then and how it is now. Compare and contrast how students were taught, the number of students in a classroom and the methodology used during those early years with the procedures used today.
- An excellent lesson plan about this era can be found at http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=319
There are links that provide information about one-room schoolhouses, photos of one-room schoolhouses and types of transportation that students used.
- Read aloud excerpts from *Those Happy Golden Years*, which tells about Laura's experience teaching in a one-room school when she was only 15 years old. Compare Laura's teaching experience with that of Tansy.
- Have students research automobiles and clothing fashions of the early 20th century and make a collage using pictures that they find online. Have the students write a short paragraph about the clothing fashions and automobiles of the early 20th century.

Connections by Elizabeth Dumas, Good Hope Middle School, West Monroe

Grade 6

ELA Unit 3: Historical Fiction This title can be utilized in the following activities by student historical research groups interested in life at the turn-of-the-20th century -1904.

Activity 3: Resources for Exploration: Fiction and Nonfiction Bibliographies

Activity 4: Determine Influence of Setting on Characters. Excerpts from this story can be used to "review and model the use of first person pronouns in telling a story from a particular character's point of view."

Grade 8

ELA Unit 2: Laughing Out Loud-Humorous Fiction/Essays (If a class set of this book is available, this book would be a good choice for an English or Language Arts class to read during this unit.)

Activity 3: Elements and Techniques of Humor. The first chapter of this book would be an excellent excerpt from a humorous story that could be used for this activity.

Activity 2: Vocabulary-Puns and Connotative/Denotative Words. This book is a good source of connotative/denotative word examples. Ex.-"Then our teacher, Miss Myrt Arbuckle, hauled off and died."

Web Links

Carol Hurst's Children's Literature Site

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

This site has a biography of Richard Peck.

DePauw University

<http://www.depauw.edu/news/index.asp?id=15842>

Article about *The Teacher's Funeral* winning an award and about Richard Peck.

Educational Paperback Association

<http://www.edupaperback.org/showauth.cfm?authid=68>

This article about Richard Peck includes an autobiographical statement by Peck, a biography, and a list of his works. He is featured as one of EPA's top 100 authors.

Kidspoint: Richard Peck

http://www.kidspoint.org/columns2.asp?column_id=1172&column_type=author

This site includes a biography, books with summaries and related sites

Nancy Keane's Booktalks

http://www.nancykeane.com/booktalks/peck_teacher's.htm

Three different booktalks on *A Teacher's Funeral*.

Penguin Group (USA)

http://us.penguingroup.com/nf/Book/BookDisplay/0..0_0803727364.00.html

Publisher site includes a brief summary, links to author information and an excerpt of Chapters 1 and 2 from the book.

Richard Peck

<http://www.richardpeck.smartwriters.com/>

This site includes a list of Peck's published works, awards, links to related sites about Richard Peck, and his contact information.

Scholastic.com – Arrow Author Book Report

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/clubs/pdfs/peck.pdf>

A PDF outlining how to do a book report for *A Teacher's Funeral*.

History

Answers.com

<http://www.answers.com/topic/one-room-school>

This article looks at one-room schoolhouses from a historical perspective. It mentions the typical structure and locations of famous schoolhouses.

EDSITEment

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=319

Excellent lesson plan for a unit on one-room schoolhouses.

Emints: Schools in the Nineteenth Century

<http://www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/S00001565.shtml>

Excellent links to information about schools.

Kingwood College Library: American Cultural History

<http://kclibrary.nhmccd.edu/decade00.html>

Interesting facts about the way of life in the very early 20th century.