

Literature Circle Questions

Use the questions and activities that follow to get more out of the experience of reading *A Year Down Yonder* by Richard Peck.

1. Why does Mary Alice have to move to Grandma Dowdel's?
2. The privy pirates pay dearly for their Halloween pranks. What plan does Grandma devise to outwit the boys? Who is the major victim of Grandma's prank? What gives him away?
3. The author uses humor and exaggeration to create characters and events that are larger than life. Find a passage or a scene in which the author uses these techniques. Practice reading it out loud, then share it with your group. Discuss what the author does to make the passage work.
4. Describe Mary Alice's Valentine's Day scheme and its effect on Carleen Lovejoy.
5. Throughout the novel Grandma and Mary Alice never state that they love each other. Cite examples from the book that show their feelings.
6. If Grandma came to your town today, what is one thing she might do to start trouble? What might she want to fix?
7. Mary Alice feels like an outsider in Grandma's town. She says, "I was still spending my school days on the sidelines." Describe a situation in which you have felt like an outsider. Then compare your experience to Mary Alice's.
8. Toward the end of the novel the narrator writes, "Sometimes I thought I was turning into [Grandma]. I had to watch out not to talk like her. And I was to cook like her for all the years to come." Compare and contrast Grandma and Mary Alice. In what ways are they similar, and how do they differ?
9. The shadow of war pervades the story. Mary Alice's father participated in the Great War. Her brother Joey flies a B-17 in World War II. Given the author's description of Armistice Day and Mrs. Abernathy's son, what do you think his attitude is toward war?
10. Imagine that you are Grandma. Create mottoes or bumper stickers that reflect your philosophy of life.
11. Grandma is a fur trapper, and you are an animal rights activist. Compose a list of reasons you will use to convince Grandma to stop trapping foxes.
12. The Christmas story, "Away in a Manger" is in the middle of the book. In what way is this story the heart of the book?

13. As Grandma shakes the pecans from Old Man Nyquist's tree and plucks the Pensingers' pumpkins for the Halloween pies, Mary Alice asks, "Grandma, that wasn't stealing, was it?" Evaluate Grandma's actions. Do you think she was stealing? Why or why not?

14. At the DAR "cherry tart" gathering for George Washington's birthday, Mrs. Weidenbach discovers (thanks to Grandma) that she is a Burdick, and Effie Wilcox's sister. In your opinion is Grandma seeking vengeance or justice here? Are her actions justifiable? Why or why not?

15. Assess what you would do if you were Mary Alice. Would you go back to Chicago? Provide reasons to support your decision.

Activities

1. Pretend that you are Mary Alice and write a diary entry that tells how you would have reacted to the news that you, "a city girl" had to attend a "hick-town" school and live below a spooky attic in a house that had no phone, a privy, and a Grandma even your mother fears.

2. With a partner, dramatize one of the scenes in the story or write and perform an advertisement for one of Grandma's products, such as Dowdel's Super Glue.

3. In *A Year Down Yonder*, the author creates larger-than-life characters. Look for their descriptions in the novel. Then choose one of the characters and draw a caricature of him or her based on the description in the book. Beneath your caricature, write the name of the character and the quotation from the novel that inspired the drawing.