

# A Year Down Yonder

Recommended for Grades 5-8

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## **Book Summary: A Year Down Yonder**

1937. Mary Alice is sent south to live with her grandma for a year while her parents save money to earn back their home. She is dismayed about having to live in the country without modern conveniences and with her unwelcoming grandma who sends her to school as soon as she arrives and banishes Mary Alice's cat outside. At first, Mary Alice is considered a rich city girl by her classmates but in time she comes to make friends. Grandma is brash and intimidating to everyone who knows her, but she continually outsmarts them and teaches Mary Alice a thing or two.

## **[SPOILER]**

Grandma saves money to buy a train ticket for Mary Alice's brother to come visit and she begins to change her mind about who Grandma really is. When the end of the year is up and her parents write that she can come back, she asks Grandma if she can stay longer. Grandma refuses but she tells Mary Alice that her door will always be open for her. Years later, Mary Alice is married in Grandma's house.

## **Author Biography: Richard Peck**

Richard Peck was born April 10, 1934 in Decatur, Illinois. He earned his Bachelor's in English from DePauw University and a Master's degree from Southern Illinois University. After college, he was drafted into the army as a Chaplain's Assistant and served in Germany. When he returned, he became a middle and high school teacher until 1971 when he began to write. Since his first book in 1972, he has written a book nearly every year. He has won several awards for his books including the Newbery Medal, the Edgar Allen Poe Award and the Scott O'Dell Award. He currently lives in New York and continues to write, travel and work as an adjunct professor at Louisiana State University.



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## Discussion Questions: A Year Down Yonder

1. Mary Alice has to go live with her grandma until her parents can afford to live in their apartment again. How would you feel if you had to move away for an entire year? Is there anything else her parents could have done instead of sending her away?
2. Why do people find Mary Alice's grandma intimidating? How does Grandma help to maintain this perception? Do you know anyone like Grandma?
3. Mary Alice gets off on the wrong foot with Mildred who thinks she's a rich city girl. How would you deal with a bully like Mildred? Should Mary Alice have given Mildred a dollar? Why or why not?
4. Grandma tricks Mildred by pretending to get the jam but really setting Mildred's horse free and tying her boots around its neck so the girl has to walk home barefoot. How was this a clever trick? What kind of example is Grandma setting for Mary Alice? What else could Grandma have done?
5. Grandma is told she can have any pecans on the ground from Old Man Nyquist's tree. When she realizes he's tricked her, she drives his tractor into the tree to make the pecans fall. What do you think about Grandma's methods of getting what she wants?
6. Why do you think Armistice Day is taken so seriously? Which national holidays are more important here? Why?
7. Mary Alice finds out that Grandma used the fox money to buy a train ticket for her brother. How has Mary Alice's perception of Grandma changed? How has the reader's perception of her changed?
8. Mary Alice and Ina Rae trick Carleen into thinking that the new boy likes Ina Rae. Was this a well-deserved prank? Why or why not?
9. How did Mary Alice's cat Bootsie change since moving south?
10. Why did Grandma pay the stranger to not paint a mural in the post office? Was this a good plan? Why or why not?
11. Why did Mary Alice want to stay with Grandma when the year was over? What do you think would have happened if she had stayed?



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