

Soup

Recommended for Grades 4-6

Book Summary: Soup

It is the 1930s in Vermont. Rob Peck and Soup are best friends who get into all sorts of trouble. Soup is constantly encouraging Rob to do things like fling apples at the church, leading to a broken church window. He convinces him to make a pipe and try smoking, leading to Rob throwing up. Soup tells him it is okay to cheat a man because he is a Jew, leading to both of them feeling terrible. Finally, he talks Rob into rolling down a huge hill in a barrow. Rob ends up crashing through a chicken coup.

[SPOILER] Just when you are thinking that Soup is really a terrible friend because he is always getting Rob in trouble. We see a different side to Soup at the end of the story. Rob ends up getting really upset when Soup gets beautiful new shoes & his old, too small shoes rip. Rob is crying in the road about how unfair it is and how he hates Soup for getting new shoes. He can't go to school in his old, torn shoes. Soup takes his new shoes off & puts them on Rob's feet. He lets Rob wear the new shoes and he wears Rob's broken old shoes.

Author Biography: Robert Newton Peck

Robert Peck was born on February 17, 1928 and grew up on a rural farm in Vermont in the 1930s. His family was a family of hardworking Shaker farmers. During the Depression, Robert's father would slaughter hogs. His childhood on the farm strongly influenced him, and this is seen throughout his writings. Robert was the first in his family to read and write.

When Robert Peck was young, he had many different jobs. Some of the things he did were butcher hogs, be a lumberjack, and to work at a papermill. Eventually, he joined the Army and served in the infantry in World War II for two years. After that, he earned his bachelor's degree at Rollins College, and then he went to Cornell University to study law. After that, he got a job writing jingles for television commercials. But he quit his job as an advertising executive once his first novel, *A Day No Pigs Would Die*, was published in 1972.

Since then, Robert Newton Peck has published over sixty stories, most of which are aimed at fourth to twelfth graders. Many of his stories are somewhat autobiographical and feature characters from his childhood, such as his best friend Soup and his teacher, Miss Kelly.



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Discussion Questions: Soup

1. The story starts off with Rob in trouble for having been rude to a teacher. Do you think he should have gotten in trouble for what he said? Or was the teacher at fault for asking such a rude question to start?
2. Every time Rob does something bad, his Aunt Carrie recommends that his mother thrash him. What does this mean? Do you think it is an appropriate punishment? Why or why not?
3. When Soup throws the apple that hits the church, he leaves Rob to take the blame. Does this make him a bad friend? Why or why not? Is it fair that he is punished for breaking a window that he didn't really break? Why or why not?
4. Soup and Rob make a pipe using an acorn and a daisy stem. Why do you think they wanted to try smoking so badly? Why do people still smoke today when we now know how harmful it is?
5. In chapter five, Soup and Rob put a stone in the tin foil they are recycling to try to get more money. Soup says it isn't bad because the man they are cheating is a Jew and someone told him that there is no such thing as a good Jew. Do these sort of racial prejudices still exist today? Can you give an example?
6. Soup convinces Rob to roll down a hill inside a barrel. Rob doesn't find the ride down the hill, through a fence, and into a chicken coop fun at all. But on the walk home, he is happier than can be. Have you ever done something that you hated at the time, but were really glad you did later? What was it?
7. In this story, Soup curses occasionally. Why do you think the author has him do this?
8. Rob's response to a bully is to punch him in the face in front of his mother, so the bully can't retaliate. Is this a good solution to bullying? What would you do if you were being bullied?
9. At the end of the story, Rob is upset that Soup got new shoes. Soup wears Rob's old ones and lets him wear his new shoes to school. Does this change your opinion on what kind of friend Soup is? Does it change your opinion of Soup?
10. The main character's name is the same as the author's name. Do you think these things are based on the author's childhood? Why is it a fiction book and not a autobiography?



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