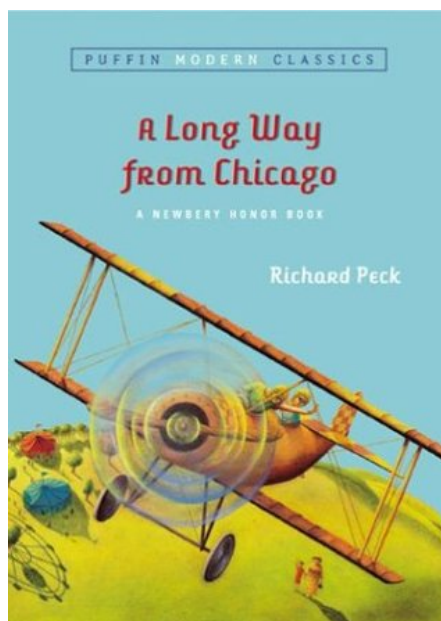




A Long Way from Chicago

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Join Joey and his sister Mary Alice as they spend nine unforgettable summers with the worst influence imaginable--their grandmother!

A Long Way from Chicago Details

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From Reader Review A Long Way from Chicago for online ebook

Seema Rao says

Depression-era Illinois is full of adventure for a little boy and his sister. Full of low-key, atmospheric 30's Americana.

Westminster Library says

Don't let the juvenile designation fool you, this is a book anyone can enjoy. Granny Mazur's grandkids soon learn that there is a lot more to her than her grouchy exterior. She doesn't suffer fools or snobs lightly and has a great many tricks up her sleeves. She outwits both the rowdy neighborhood kids and condescending adults and you will enjoy every minute. My husband and I both laughed our way through this book and its sequel: A Year Down Yonder.

Find A Long Way From Chicago at the Westminster Public Library!
Find A Year Down Yonder at the Westminster Public Library!

Emma Jane says

I basically just LOVE Richard Peck.

george says

Joey and Mary Alice's Grandma ain't your sweet little granny. She's a tough old woman who makes her own soap, not afraid to use a shotgun, illegally traps fish and steals boats. She's outrageous and moody; gruff and caring. Joey and Mary Alice visit her for a week each summer in the country--a far cry from their regular life in Chicago. At first the siblings drag their feet to Grandma's, but after a few summers they can't wait to go and see what antics Grandma will get in to next.

Loved this! Grandma's sttitude reminds me a little of my own grandmother's and the country setting is just like where I grew up (and still live). Grandma is hilarious and I found myself laughing out loud on more than one chapter. Fun, fun book.

Aj Sterkel says

This was a forced read for me. I needed a middlegrade book with an unusual narrative structure for a lecture I'm working on, and my mentor suggested this one. I had never heard of it before. Honestly, I groaned when I looked it up online because I have a love/hate relationship with middlegrade fiction. Some of it is brilliant, but a lot of it is too silly for my adult brain. The cover of this book looks juvenile. The synopsis sounds extremely juvenile. I braced myself to grit my teeth and plow through it . . .

I've never been so surprised by a book.

A Long Way from Chicago is a composite novel. Each of the nine chapters is a linked short story about Joey, Mary Alice, and their eccentric grandmother. The book starts in 1929, when Joey is nine years old, and ends in 1942, when he's eighteen. Each story is about an adventure he has when he leaves Chicago to spend a week in a rural town with Grandma.

"Adventure" again makes this book sound juvenile, but that's the best word for it. The adventures are not unrealistic. Joey talks about the first time he sees a dead body, the first time he flies in a plane, and his desperate attempt to raise \$2 for driving lessons. His grandmother helps him achieve his goals and learn important lessons—in her own bizarre way.

"'Never trust an ugly woman. She's got a grudge against the world,' said Grandma, who was no oil painting herself." – *A Long Way from Chicago*

The narrator's voice is what makes this book readable for adults. Joey is an old man looking back at his childhood, so the voice in all of the stories is mature. The author never talks down to the reader. Also, the stories have a very historical feel to them. Small-town 1930s life is captured in a vivid, believable way. The town is struggling with Depression-era poverty/alcoholism/trust issues, but the problems aren't shoehorned into the stories for educational purposes. The setting feels very natural. I've been reading a ton of historical fiction lately, and this little book is one of the better middlegrade historical novels I've read.

"The years went by, and Mary Alice and I grew up, slower than we wanted to, faster than we realized." – *A Long Way from Chicago*

Grandma is eccentric, but never in a childlike, unrealistic way. She's actually one of the most complex adult characters I've come across in children's fiction. I totally believe a woman like Grandma could exist. She values her privacy and hates small-town gossip, but she's not afraid to step in when something goes wrong. She's a strong woman who has a unique way of solving problems. Basically, she's an elderly, cantankerous, Depression-era Robin Hood.

I enjoyed every story in this book (which I don't say often about short story collections), but these are the standouts:

In "Shotgun Cheatham's Last Night Above Ground," Grandma invents an impressive history for a man who died in poverty.

"The Day of Judgment" starts with Grandma reluctantly agreeing to enter a pie-making contest and ends with Grandma scamming her way onto an airplane.

In "A One-Woman Crime Wave," Grandma commits a series of small crimes in order to prepare a feast for the homeless drifters who wander through town.

"I don't think Grandma's a very good influence on us." – *A Long Way from Chicago*

I'm struggling to come up with something I didn't like. I guess, for adult readers, the stories are a bit predictable and repetitive. They all follow the same basic outline: kids go to Grandma's house; Grandma does something potentially deadly; the reader finds out that Grandma has a good reason for what she does. The repetition isn't a criticism, though, because this is a children's book, and I don't think I would have noticed it as a child.

A Long Way from Chicago is a quick, entertaining read. I guess the lesson here is "Don't judge a book by its cover . . . or its synopsis."

Alm Melson says

A great book! Very funny. People who live in or grew up in small towns will recognize something of their lives in Grandma's small Illinois town where everyone knows everyone's business--"sometimes before it happens." Grandma herself is an unforgettable character. Crotchety and aloof from the rest of the town, shunned by most of her neighbors (until they need her help), Grandma gets the best of snobby society women, out-of-town interlopers, Halloween pranksters & thieves, and school bullies by skillfully setting up situations where their own vices and vanities trip them up and get them in trouble. Underneath her hard exterior, Grandma of course has a heart of gold (but don't mention it to her; she'd only get mad) and she routinely cares for the people in her town who the more affluent and influential townfolk would ignore. You'll wish she were your grandma!

My favorite part is the ending. (Spoilers ahead.)

When the children leave after their week with Grandma in each of the seven chapters of the book, they wave from the train even though Grandma never waves back. In an epilogue set seven years after that last summer visit, the narrator Joey is 17 and on a troop train headed to basic training and, eventually, World War II. He has sent a telegram to Grandma to tell her that the troop train will pass through her town, though without stopping, sometime in the middle of the night. The train is two hours behind schedule when it finally does pass through Grandma's town in the hour before dawn. As it approaches Grandma's house, the last house in town, Joey sees that every light in the house is on, though Grandma always turned out a light when she left a room, and there's Grandma on the porch, "watching through the watches of the night . . . waving--waving big at all the cars, hoping [Joey'd] see." I cried.

Melissa McShane says

This is just a really good MG book that I think all ages will enjoy. My adult daughter saw it on the table next to my writing space and said, "That is worth re-reading often." That's totally true. I love Grandma Dowdel and the complexity of her character, and I love seeing the two kids grow up over the years and be shaped by what they learn a long way from Chicago.

Susan Katz says

The hero of this book remarks of his grandmother early on: "What little we knew about grown-ups didn't seem to cover Grandma." I'm not sure what anybody knows about anybody would cover Grandma Dowdle. "Larger than life" isn't big enough to describe her. Unpredictable, cantankerous, sly, (and secretly, begrudgingly tender-hearted), she's an entertaining person to spend a summer vacation (or a book) with. And when, as often happens in these stories, "all the laws of civilization has broke down," she's a woman you want on your side. Each chapter presents a different summer visit to Grandma and a different episode of Grandma's outrageous but not exactly uncalled-for behavior. She's a person I'd like to introduce to our congressional leaders. What she'd do would be bound to surprise me, but I'd surely end up wishing I'd thought of it myself.

Melki says

"I don't think Grandma's a very good influence on us," Mary Alice said.

Every August, Joey Dowdel and his kid sister Mary Alice spend a week at their Granny's house.

She was so big and the town was so small. She was old too, or so we thought -- old as the hills. And tough! She was tough as an old boot, or so we thought. As the years went by though, Mary Alice and I grew up, and though Grandma never changed, we'd seem to see a different woman every summer.

Over the years, Grandma Dowdel gets the kids involved in all sorts of hilarious adventures - catching criminals, helping some star-crossed lovers elope, and showing up the snooty banker's wife. Grandma is not above stretching the truth or ~~stealing~~ borrowing someone's boat to achieve her goals. The sheriff even calls her a "one-woman crime wave." She may indeed *seem* to be as tough as a boot - after the first summer, Grandma doesn't even meet the kids at the train station; she figures that they can find their own way to her house, but Joey, Mary Alice, and the reader soon come to realize that she's something of an old softy inside. And she's also one of the most delightful literary characters I've ever encountered.

This book has already made the jump onto my favorites list; it's one of those feel-good stories I look forward to reading again and again.

Abby says

I liked this little book. It was funny. It's about two kids from Chicago who go and visit their Grandma in the country every summer, and how she is exactly like my funny Grandma (aka "Granny") in North Carolina.

My sister recommended this book to me after she read it in her book club. I am a book club virgin. (Meaning, I have never actually belonged to a book club, or attended a live meeting, but I DO love talking about books on this website - oh my gosh, is that like the dorky guys who never actually talk to girls in real life, but chat with girls online all the time and think that counts???)

I forgot what I was saying.

Oh yeah. So anyways, I have never been in a real live book club, but I don't know what you would actually

discuss about this book. Unless, of course, you have a southern grandma like me and my sister do. I don't think most people do.

Here is a story about my Granny and my one and only cousin Daniel. This is exactly what the Grandma in this book was like, except it's a real story about my real Granny.

Daniel was a little kid, and he found fire crackers in one of her closets. He asked if he could set them off in her back yard and she said "Sure!". So he set them off. Unfortunately, they were illegal, and someone called the police. The cops showed up at her door, and Daniel hid in the closet, terrified. Granny knew how to handle the situation. The officers said, "Ma'am, we've had some reports of illegal fire crackers being set off at your house. Could we please have a look around?"

My Granny said, "What? You boys want some crackers? Don't bother me! I'm not feeding you!" And she slammed the door. And my cousin did not end up in the slammer. Slam dunk, Granny!

I think that tale gets taller each time my sister and I re-tell it. But hey, it's our heritage. Some people came from pioneer stock, but we came from a real "mountain woman". (Her words.) She sleeps with an ice pick under her pillow. Although she acknowledges that by the time a burglar (or one of the "dope dealers" she says hang out in the abandoned house across the street) gets close enough to her bed for her to stab him with it, it'll be too late, she says, "But at least he'll get a real good surprise from this little old lady first!"

Sandy says

Laugh-out-loud hilarious! Good for what ails you! Onward to the second in the series . . .

Cosette says

I'm really loving this author. Yes, I'm picking up books from the children's section and reading them to myself. But these books are so much easier to enjoy than the junk written for adult readers!! Characters that you either want to meet or could swear you have already. Circumstances that feel familiar and comfortable - like an old worn cotton shirt, the smell of breakfast coming up the stairs to wake you with the pleasant reminder that you are visiting grandma and they don't serve cold cereal here... nice, friendly, pleasant. Maybe I should pick up flowers for algernon next so I can relate to the main character as his brain cells similarly disappear..!

Brooke H says

Joe and Mary Alice leave Chicago every summer to visit their grandma in her little Illinois town. Whenever they visit their grandmother, she made it a fun time. Joe and Mary Alice didn't really notice that after they had their summer visit, they learned good traits as a person and the reader would learn more of how family is important and being a great person to family and other people. If looking for a book to have laugh or learn about family and good traits to have as a person, I would pick up the book, A Long Way from Chicago by Richard Peck.

A long way of Chicago made me laugh and I learned good traits without noticing after I finished reading. I couldn't put this book down. Before I started the book, it was over. A Long Way from Chicago taught me

more about family and how to live life to the fullest and have fun. This book takes place in Illinois during the Depression. So when Joe and Mary went to their grandmas, they would help other people in need of help during this hard period of time. This book reminds me of "Out of My Mind". It reminds me of this because when I was reading "Out of My Mind" I learned that everyone is a human being and everyone is different. The theme of that book was family because Melody's parents were always there for her and taught me as a reader to always be a caring person because you never know when you or they will need you in the end. I recommend "A Long Way from Chicago" to people that are going to visit their grandparents or older relatives. I also would recommend this book to people that like historical fiction genres.

Lesr Kew says

What a delightful read. It took me back to the country and gives you plenty of guffaws! I would love to read this out loud to children any day of the week. Grandma is one tough woman!

Marie says

Richard Peck's, *A Long Way from Chicago* is the first book in the trilogy about larger than life character Grandma Dowdel and her grandchildren, Joey and Mary Alice. (The second is *A Year Down Yonder* and the last is *A Season Of Gifts*.) Joey and Mary Alice are sent from Chicago to spend the summer each year with their Grandma Dowdel in rural Illinois. The book immediately grabs the reader's attention: "You wouldn't think we needed to leave Chicago to see a dead body. We were growing up in there back in the bad old days of Al Capone and Bugs Moran." Grandma Dowdel is not to be outdone by anyone so she offers to hold the viewing of Shotgun Cheatham's dead body in her parlor. Late that night when the body moves on its own Grandma takes out her shotgun and proceeds to shoot! (Little did the other participants know that it was just the cat causing the chaos.) Each chapter describes another year (during the Great Depression from 1929-1942) of antics their Grandmother subjects them to. From ghosts to outdoing the banker's wife the reader is sure to enjoy Grandma's antics.

Peck grew up in Decatur, Illinois and certainly used his experiences to write this historical and hysterical fiction. Written in the point of view of Joey the readers get a glimpse into how Grandma rids the town of bullies and brings down the "society" class a peg or two! This well written book won a Newbery Honor Award. I enjoyed this book but liked *A Season of Gifts* even more! In *A Season of Gifts* Joey and Mary Alice are now adults and don't visit any longer. But when a preacher and his family move next door the antics start all over again. I could relate to the characters more in *A Season for Gifts*.

Novelist Plus suggests ages 8 and up but to get the full depth of life during this time I would suggest grades

4th and higher. Activities for this age group might include learning about Chicago gangsters and what life was like during this era. The website: <http://libraries.risd.org/wallib/alon...> has numerous activities relating to the book, include colloquialisms of the time. One example is “she hightailed it out of there.” Another activity would be a reader’s response journal chapter by chapter to share with peers in discussion groups.

Gloria says

This story’s grandma does not exactly fit the mold of the classic plump, white-haired, cookie-baking character used in other stories or commercial ads. Grandma Dowdel has a rather tough and leather-like persona that fascinates her two grandchildren each summer as they learn more and more about how she thinks.

Through these summer experiences, the reader learns about the Great Depression, small town America, and gets a glimpse of Chicago during its gangster-plagued years. More than history, however, our readers see that classic societal problems as well as classic character traits have always been with us.

Grandma doesn’t lecture these kids. Instead she shows them life’s realities and her special way of dealing with them. The problems include drunkenness and lewd behavior, child abuse, gossip, foreclosures, bullying and more. The positive characteristics include caring for the poor and the elderly, independence, self-reliance, and wisdom. Her sheer ordinary humanity is shown via the use of white lies, wit, patience, and hard work. Grandma seems to intuit the needs of others, but really she simply made a choice to listen and see, and not turn away from hardship.

Amy says

Here’s one from an all-time favorite author of mine. Do you happen to have a hilarious grandma? Or do you even know a really funny old lady? If so, you will adore this book.

Set in the 1930s, *A Long Way from Chicago* recount the summers Joey and Mary Alice spend with Grandma Dowdel. She’s “old as the hills” , “tough as an old boot”, and so large she makes her quirky town look tiny. She’s known for stretching the truth, manipulating sleazy and snobbish people, and pulling all sorts of stunts you can’t believe, all for the “good of the community”—while the grandkids just watch in wonder. Her antics will keep you laughing and turning pages, for sure.

When I was still teaching, my principal came in one day “for a little visit”. I just happened to be reading this book aloud to my class, and I’ll never forget looking up and seeing Mr. Principal sitting at the back of the room laughing his head off. It was the best walk-through I ever had.

I wish I could paint an accurate picture of Grandma Dowdel for you, but there’s just no way. You need to read it! And if you love this book as much as I do, don’t miss the sequel: *A Year Down Yonder*, in which Mary Alice stays with Grandma by herself for a whole year. Also hilarious and awesome—it won the 2001 Newbery Award. (*A Long Way from Chicago* received an honorable mention.)

And then if you still haven’t gotten enough, here are some other Richard Peck titles I really like:

Fair Weather (this one has a hilarious grandpa)

Here Lies the Librarian

The Teacher's Funeral

A Season of Gifts (Grandma Dowdel is back!)

Amy says

Ahhhh! This was so good! I chose it because I wanted something that both Jake and I would enjoy for a quick road trip (Hence, "The Treasure Map of Boys" will have to wait).

It was perfect. Funny at times that we both burst out laughing. Awesome sense of place and time, wonderful characters, entertaining stories. We both so thoroughly enjoyed it. I must admit, I dozed off towards the end of the book. So I asked Jake to tell me the ending. As he explained the scene, I got all teary-eyed right there in the Indian food restaurant.

I really wish there wasn't this stigma against choosing books that aren't marketed for your age group (for lack of a better way to say it). It's like grownups think they are not allowed to read a book that is not "for adults." I know I'm preachin' to the choir here on Goodreads. But I'll bet there are very few people aside from librarians (and maybe teachers?) who would pick out a "children's book" to listen to, even though there are no children involved. And it's truly a bummer because you shouldn't have to have children around to relish the genius of Richard Peck...

Nancy says

Author Richard Peck started this novel as a short story, using his story "Shotgun Cheatham's Last Night Above Ground" as the first chapter when he discovered that his main character Grandma Dowdel couldn't be contained to just one story. The narrative structure is built around grandchildren Joey and Mary Alice visiting their Grandmother in rural Illinois every summer. Growing up in Chicago, the two siblings have a lot to learn about small town living, and their crusty Grandmother's old fashioned ways. Each chapter is written as a stand alone story, and cover the years between 1929-1935. We see the children age into teens, and their relationship with their Grandmother matures. She is truly a force to be reckoned with, and has the proverbial kind heart underneath her gruff exterior. A lovely prologue and epilogue bookend the stories, and Grandma Dowdel is someone you will never ever forget!

Nana S. says

Recently I have read a book titled A Long Way From Chicago by Richard Peck. The book takes place in the 1930's during the time of the great depression when siblings Joey and Mary Alice spend a week at their grandma's house every summer for nine summers. They thought spending a week at their grandma's house in her sleepy town might be boring. But it turns out that grandma's town is a lot less sleepy than Joey and Mary Alice thought. They help their grandma do everything from trespassing, to seeing the sheriff in his underwear, to feeding the hungry. Sometimes all in one day. The author tells the story in the eyes of Joey which I don't think is necessary because the story was mostly focused on grandma. Joey and Mary Alice didn't do much in the story. Throughout the story grandma says she didn't care for her town but she's always

doing her best to help her town. Like keeping away nosy reporters and feeding men who lost their jobs and now have no food to eat. Sort like a tough guy or bully who's afraid to admit his feelings. I can relate to how Joey and Mary Alice feel when they found out something they thought was boring was actually really interesting. One career day when we went to the main event and I saw what it was going to be unlike last years main event. But it was actually really cool. People from an organization that helps take care of birds such as falcons or eagles brought some of the birds and let them fly over our heads. I would recommend this book if you like hostorical fiction books with some humor. I thought this was an okay book. It's just not my kind of book. If it had more action I would have liked it better.
