



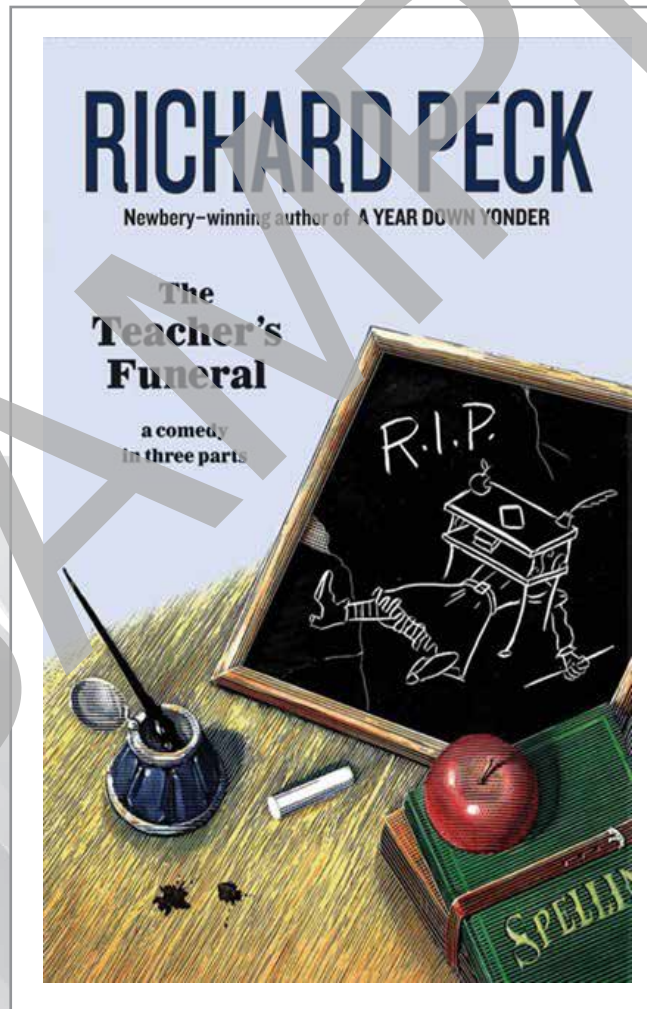
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Teacher's Funeral

Richard Peck



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Teacher's Funeral

Richard Peck

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

novelunits.com

Table of Contents

Summary	3
About the Author	3
Background Information	4
Characters	4
Initiating Activities.....	5
Vocabulary Activities.....	6
Six Sections	7
Each section contains: Summary, Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Supplementary Activities	
Post-reading Discussion Questions	17
Post-reading Extension Activities.....	18
Assessment.....	19
Scoring Rubric.....	26

Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, research, critical thinking, decision making, creative thinking, compare/contrast, pros/cons

Comprehension

Predicting, cause/effect, evaluating decisions

Writing

Poetry, essay, report, journal, description, review, letter, story

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation, acting/drama, interviewing

Vocabulary

Definitions, parts of speech

Literary Elements

Conflict, characterization, figurative language, theme, point of view, irony, climax, genre

Across the Curriculum

History—inventions, Indiana in 1904, school, women's rights, technology, 1904 presidential election, Theodore Roosevelt; Art—collage, sketch, sculpture, cartoons, music; Health/Science—fire safety, herpetology; Math—conversions; Social Studies—Indiana geography, social culture; Grammar—dangling participles

Genre: young-adult fiction

Setting: rural Indiana farm community, 1904

Point of View: first person

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. self, person vs. society, person vs. nature

Themes: family, education, courage, change, hope, industrialization

Tone: relaxed, straightforward, humorous

Date of First Publication: 2004

Summary

When his teacher dies, 15-year-old Russell Culver has high hopes of escaping his Indiana farm town to live out his dreams of working in the Dakotas—that is, until his older sister Tansy becomes the new teacher. Tansy works to educate both of her younger brothers as well as the other children despite a blazing privy, hard-nosed students, more snakes than necessary, chilling confrontations with menacing folks in the community, a nerve-racking evaluation, and several young men striving to win Tansy's affections. All the while, the community struggles to maintain its identity in the midst of a changing world where technology, particularly in the way of automobiles and telephones, begins to alter the way people live, work, and view the world.

About the Author

Richard Peck was born on April 5, 1934, in Decatur, Illinois. His father was a merchant, and his mother was a dietician. Peck attended the University of Exeter from 1955–1956, and graduated from DePauw University with a B.A. in English in 1956. He earned his M.A. from Southern Illinois University in 1959, and compiled additional graduate work at Washington University from 1960–1961. From 1956–1958, Peck served in Germany as a soldier in the U.S. Army.

A high-school and college English teacher, Peck left the teaching profession to pursue a writing career. He believes that his students taught him to write, as he learned from them that before anything else, a novel must entertain. In 1990, Peck won the Margaret A. Edwards Award and the National Council of Teachers of English/ALAN Award. He is also the recipient of the Mystery Writers of America Edgar Allen Poe Award. In 2001, Peck was awarded the Newbery Medal for *A Year Down Yonder*. Peck's books deal with hard realities young adults must face, and he says he tries to "give readers leading characters they can look up to and reasons to believe that problems can be solved."

The Teacher's Funeral was listed on New York Public Library's 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing and was selected as an ALA Best Book for Young Adults in 2005 and an ALA Notable Book in 2005. His other works include *A Long Way from Chicago*, *Are You in the House Alone?*, *Don't Look and It Won't Hurt*, and *Close Enough to Touch*. In a speech he once gave, Peck commented, "After twelve novels, I find I have only one theme...It is simply that you will never grow up until you begin to think and act independently of your peers."

Background Information

Several people in history developed self-powered road vehicles, such as Nicolas Joseph Cugnot of France, who built the first steam engine-powered vehicle in 1769. However, the automobile as we know it today was invented by German engineer Karl Benz, who built the first internal combustion engine in 1885 and received the first patent for a gas-fueled car in 1886. In 1887, Gottlieb Daimler developed a prototype of the modern gas engine with a vertical cylinder, which he called a Reitwagon (Riding Carriage), as it originally had only two wheels.

The Standard Wheel Company, mentioned in the novel, actually did exist and originally produced bicycles. It was founded in 1903 in Terre Haute, Indiana, and later expanded to include the Overland Automobile Company that would manufacture motor vehicles. (Note: In the book, Eugene Hammond is employed by the Overland Automobile Company.) The company produced its first vehicle, named the “Runabout,” in 1903. In 1905, the company relocated to Indianapolis. By 1910, Overland produced the second-highest number of automobiles in the United States. The company struggled and changed names over the years, but survived. In the 1940s, Willys-Overland Motors, Inc., produced the first “Jeep.” In the 1960s, the company held a government contract to produce vehicles for the United States Post Office, and in 1963 became the Kaiser Jeep Corporation. In 1970, American Motors Corporation purchased the company and incorporated it with AM General in 1971. In 1979, AM General began work on a High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicle, known today as the Humvee®, for the United States Army. Today, the company has modified production to make the vehicle available to the civilian population as well.

Characters

Russell Culver: 15-year-old boy who is ready to move away from his small Indiana home to work in the Dakotas; generally does not enjoy school

Lloyd Culver: Russell’s younger brother

Tansy Culver: Russell’s 17-year-old sister who becomes the new teacher after Miss Arbuckle dies

Charlie Parr: Russell’s slightly-older best friend who chooses not to go with Russell to the Dakotas to try to win Tansy’s affections

O. C. Culver: Tansy, Russell, and Lloyd’s wise father; widower; hard worker who wants his children to get an education and learn to make good decisions on their own

Aunt Maud Singleterry: O. C.’s sister-in-law who has never married; helps take care of the Culver family after her sister (O. C.’s wife) passes away; awful cook; revealed to be the Sweet Singer of Sycamore Township

Floyd “Flopears” Lumley: friends with Lloyd and Lester; eager yet slow learner; later discovered to be an exceptional artist

Beulah “Little Britches” Bradley: the youngest and one of the brightest students at Hominy Ridge School

Lester Kriegbaum: Lloyd’s friend; avid reader

Pearl Nearing: stubborn student who often resists Tansy’s teaching

Glenn Tarbox: one of the elder Tarbox children who starts attending school after Tansy becomes the teacher; fancies Tansy

Eugene Hammond: employee of The Overland Automobile Company; has a car and buggy

Supplementary Activities

1. Literary Devices: Continue adding to your list of figurative language. Examples: **Similes**—“watched them like a hawk” (p. 151); “bright as a button” (p. 153); “hanging on around these parts like a summer cold” (p. 155)
2. Music: Eugene Hammond dances with Aunt Maud on the front porch as he tries to win Tansy’s affections. Research music that was popular around 1904. Find and play one song for the class. Identify the musical style, the artist, and what year(s) the song was popular. (Note: Page 160 of the novel mentions John Philip Sousa.) Have students write a short review of the song played.
3. Writing: Pretend that the Tarbox family can read. Write a persuasive letter on Glenn’s behalf explaining why it is important for him to get an education. Consider the arguments the Tarbox clan will have against education, and try to argue against those points in your letter.
4. Art: Sketch a drawing of Glenn and Russell after the soot explodes all over the school and both boys lose their eyebrows.

Part III: Chapters Sixteen–Seventeen

The superintendent and his assistant come to evaluate Tansy’s knowledge and teaching abilities. During the evaluation, they call on Glenn and Flopears, who surprise the class by demonstrating their knowledge of science and art. Tansy earns her teaching license and continues to teach for many years. Both of her brothers go on to universities. Upon Aunt Maud’s death, it is revealed that she was the Sweet Singer of Sycamore Township. In the end, Tansy chooses Glenn, Charlie marries Pearl, and Russell marries Little Britches.

Vocabulary
unfurled
ado
brooch
interjected
domicile
resumed
simmered
detain
mercy

Discussion Questions

1. Does it surprise you that Aunt Fanny Hamline brings a flag to the classroom? Why or why not? What does this gesture do to further describe her character to readers? (*Answers will vary. This gesture shows that Aunt Fanny is not entirely mean and that she has the ability to be generous when she so chooses, even though she likes to appear tough and coldhearted.*)
2. How does the author create tension during the part of the story in which the superintendent and his assistant evaluate Tansy? How does the author resolve this tension? (*The author creates tension by showing Russell’s fear about whether Tansy knows the answers to the questions she is asked. After Tansy passes her part, the author has the superintendent call on two students who seem ill equipped to display educational fortitude—Glenn and Flopears.*
The tension is resolved as Tansy answers her questions correctly and as Glenn and Flopears demonstrate excellence in their preferred topics of interest—science and art.)
3. Whom does Tansy eventually choose to marry? Why do you think she chooses him? (*Glenn; Answers will vary.*)
4. It is revealed that Aunt Maud was the Sweet Singer. How do you think she kept this a secret for so many years? Did you suspect anybody else throughout the course of the novel? Who, and why? (*Answers will vary.*)

5. What challenge does Tansy make to Russell? Why? (*She challenges him to get a good education; Lloyd's fate depends on Russell because Lloyd needs somebody to look up to, and Russell's responsibility to serve as a good role model for his younger brother is overdue.*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Literary Devices: Continue adding to your list of figurative language. Examples:
Metaphors—Lloyd: a dot in the distance (p. 178); Beulah: the brightest button in the box (p. 180); **Similes**—“[school] looked like a coal mine” (p. 171); “busy as bees” (p. 171); “smooth as lard” (p. 172); “quiet as mice” (p. 177); “big as a house” (p. 179); “the boy’s privy blazed like a torch” (p. 184); “head still rang like a belfry” (p. 186); **Personification**—“brooch...winked in the morning” (p. 175)
2. Grammar: One of Tansy’s evaluation questions has to do with the participle. Research participles, and write a sentence that includes a dangling participle. Then write the sentence correctly so that the participle no longer dangles. (Example: “Looking around, the view was majestic” indicates “the view” is looking around. A better way to write the sentence is, “Looking around, we took in the majestic view.” In this case, the subject doing the looking is “we” and not “the view.”)
3. Cartoon: In the novel, Flopears becomes a cartoonist for the *Indianapolis Star* newspaper. Research newspaper cartoonists, and either write a short report on how one becomes a newspaper cartoonist or draw your own single-frame cartoon about your opinion of *The Teacher’s Funeral*.

Decision-making/Problem-solving Alternatives

Directions: List six problems the characters in the novel face. Then complete the rest of the chart. For each problem, circle which solution you think is best—yours or the character's.

Problem	Character's Solution	Your Solution