

The Teacher's Funeral: A Comedy in Three Parts by Richard Peck

Subjects: Education—Juvenile fiction; Teachers—Juvenile fiction; Country life—Indiana—Juvenile fiction; Humorous stories—Juvenile fiction; Indiana—History—20th century—Juvenile fiction

Awards: Best Books for Young Adults, The Christopher Award

Book Lists: Gifted, Middle School, North America

Props: Farmer's hat



(*Put hat on*) Now before I tell you this story, I want to warn you that schools, school houses, teachers, anything having to do with learning is criticized in this book. They are downright vilified. In fact schools and teachers are the butt of many a joke in this here book. But I want you to know—it's OK. Your teacher won't mind. After all, everyone needs to be able to laugh at oneself.

The story's name is *The Teacher's Funeral*, so you know there's gonna be a dead teacher. But it's a comedy in three parts. So that means they're gonna be making fun of that dead teacher. Right? OK. The story begins in late summer of 1904 with a 15-years-old boy named Russell Culver. Ewweeee, it sure was hot that summer. They don't make Augusts like that no more. But Russell and his kid brother Lloyd were used to it. They didn't mind. In fact August was a sacred part of the year to them boys. They would pick one night and go to the crick and camp out. It was how they kissed the summer good-bye. They knew that the darkness of learning would soon fall about them. It was the time of year when they wanted to live everyday twice over because they knew that before the end of that month, they would be back in the jailhouse of school.

Hominy Ridge School. That's where they would attend. It was a one room country school house in the backwoodsier corner of Indiana. It had one teacher, Miss Myrt Arbuckle, and space for about a dozen students. Well, it did have Miss Myrt Arbuckle as a teacher, until she hauled off and died. Ahh, our dead teacher. Now, no disrespect to Miss Arbuckle, but you couldn't deny that she was past her prime. She must have been at least forty. She was hard of hearing in one ear, no doubt deafened by her own screaming. And she couldn't whup them kids like she wanted to. Now, I know whupping is frowned on now-a-days, but back then, it was the only way to get them restless boys to

pay attention. Well, Miss Arbuckle was a southpaw for whupping, and she had arthritis in that elbow, so while she still could whup, it didn't leave much of an impression. The way the boys looked at it, when you get right down to it, if you can't hear and you can't whup, you're better off dead than teaching. Guess they was right. Now, there's no mystery to her death. She just up and died. It was just her time, you have to consider her age.

Well, as sad as her parting was, it was a miracle to them boys. When Lloyd and Russell heard the news, you should have seen their faces. It looked like they was hearing the music of the spheres. You see, they figured if a teacher has to die, August wasn't such a bad time of year for it. Them boys figured it surely was too late to find another teacher who'd teach in an out-of-date, unimproved school like Hominy Ridge. The school board would just have to close the school down. A darn shame. Maybe get a new teacher for next year. Or at least, that's what the boys hoped. But that's not what the good Lord had in store for them boys.

They were about to be ruled by a new teacher who's them boys worst nightmare. Now, they'll fight back, course they will. But despite stolen supplies, rustic vandalism, a fire in the boys privy (that's another word for toilet), and more snakes than you can shake a stick at, that new teacher will do her best to keep that school afloat.

Ahh, yes this is a good tale. A tale of a simpler day, a time of folksy, one-of-a-kind characters, a time before the flicker of the motion pictures and the yammer of the radio, the time of Russell Culver, his family, friends, and a little school called Hominy Ridge. Read (*Hold up book*) *The Teacher's Funeral: A Comedy in Three Parts* by Richard Peck.