



# Activity One

## Pecans and Pumpkins

The second chapter of A **Year Down Yonder** features Grandma and Mary Alice raiding the neighbors' pecan tree and pumpkin patch. Grandma justifies her actions by putting the delicious pecan and pumpkin pies she makes to good use in the community.

A **pecan**, like the fruit of all other members of the hickory family, is not truly a **nut**, but a **drupe**, a fruit with a single stone or pit surrounded by a husk. The nuts of the pecan are edible, with a rich, buttery flavor and can be eaten fresh or used in cooking, particularly in desserts and other tasty dishes.



**Pecan** is from an Algonquian word, meaning a nut requiring a stone to crack.

The **pumpkin**, on the other hand, is a gourd-like squash. It is grown on every continent except Antarctica. Pumpkins are a hardy, warm-weather crop usually planted in July in soil that holds its water well. Most parts of the pumpkin are edible, including the fleshy shell, the seeds, the leaves, and even the flowers. In North America, the pumpkin is a very popular Halloween and Thanksgiving staple.

As demonstrated by Grandma Dowdel, pies are a popular way to put both the pecan and the pumpkin to use. However, there are a myriad of other fascinating ways both of these items can be utilized. Your task is to research an especially intriguing recipe that relies on either the pecan or pumpkin as a principal ingredient. This research can use either the Internet or a cookbook. Copy out this recipe so it is available to your classmates and others. As a bonus activity (with parental permission and appropriate supervision), take to the kitchen and put this recipe to the test. When you have tried the recipe and tasted the result, write a brief synopsis of your experience, including an objective appraisal of how good (or bad) the recipe turned out to be.



# Activity Two

## The Golden Age of Radio

In the chapter, ***A Minute in the Morning***, the author makes reference to a number of radio programs enjoyed by Mary Alice: *Baby Snooks*, *Fibber McGee and Molly*, *The A&P Gypsies*, *Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy*, and *Whispering Jack Smith*.

A number of other popular radio programs also dominated the airwaves in the late 1930's. These included such shows as *Professor Quiz*, *Grand Ole Opry*, *The Jack Benny Program*, and *Terry and the Pirates*, as well as a multitude of others.

Using the Internet or resources in your school library, choose one of these radio programs and do an investigation of it.

Your research might include the origins of the program; the stars; some of the typical plot lines; its development and history; why it was so popular.

Your report should be about a half-page in length.



**That was the big thing when I was growing up, singing on the radio. The extent of my dream was to sing on the radio station in Memphis. Even when I got out of the Air Force in 1954, I came right back to Memphis and started knocking on doors at the radio station.**

**— Johnny Cash**



# Activity Three

## President Roosevelt and the Great Depression

The **Great Depression** was a severe worldwide economic depression that began with the stock market crash in 1929 and lasted until about 1940. It was the longest, most widespread, and deepest depression of the 20th century. In the United States, unemployment reached a high of 25% in 1933.

Many economists believe that President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies helped the United States to recover from this terrible depression.

It was a decade that had devastating effects on millions of people all over the world. Crop prices fell, wages dropped, jobs disappeared. People went hungry and many were forced to go on government assistance (where they could). People even starved to death!



*President Franklin Roosevelt*

Complete one of the tasks below:

- a) Write a brief biography of **President Franklin Roosevelt**. Be sure to tell something of his early life, his career in politics and his major accomplishments. Your report should total approximately one-half of a page.
- b) Write a brief synopsis of the **Great Depression**, especially as to how it affected the country in which you live. What particular hardships did many people have to bear? What were some examples of their resourcefulness? Your report should concentrate on the effects of the Great Depression on the *ordinary* people who lived during this time. You may even wish to interview a family member or family friend who lived during the Great Depression. Your report should total at least one-half page in length.

**Note:** You may wish to include an interesting picture with your report.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_



# Activity Four

## The Flying Fortress

In the last chapter, Mary Alice mentions that her brother, Joey, flew B-17 Fortress missions during World War II.

Crews of the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress flew thousands of missions over Europe during the Second World War. The B-17 was what was known as a heavy bomber used by the American Air Force beginning in August, 1942. Although the B-17 was armed with a number of machine guns for defense, the Germans soon learned they could attack it from the front where it was vulnerable. This was corrected as the war progressed and the bomber's defenses were improved. In all, 12,000 B-17s were built during the war and more than 250,000 Americans had a hand in flying them — of these, 46,500 were either killed or wounded. The B-17 dropped a total of 500,000 tons of bombs on Germany.



Although flying for the American Air Force must have been seen as a rather glamorous occupation by many, statistics tell us what a terribly dangerous job it was. No doubt recruiting new pilots to replace those killed or wounded must have been a concern to those in charge.

In this regard, your task is to create a **recruitment poster** for the United States Air Force (or the air force of another country of your choice). This poster should be done to attract men and women to join the air force and help defend their country. The poster should include a large colorful picture and a short effective message that will catch the imagination of those who see it so that they might seriously consider joining the Air Force.



# Activity Five

## Casting Director

- **This activity can be done with students working in small groups.**

Imagine you are the casting director for a movie company planning to do a film version of this novel. You are to cast all of the major roles for the movie and must choose one of the following two scenarios.

- a)** For the list of characters in the box below, choose an appropriate Hollywood actor to fill each role and write a brief explanation as to why you chose this particular actor.

**OR**

- b)** For the list of characters below, choose an appropriate person from your own school to fill each role and write a brief explanation as to why you chose this particular person. For this assignment, you might choose fellow students (including yourself), teachers, principal, custodian, etc.

### Roles

- **Mary Alice**
- **Grandma Dowdel**
- **Royce**
- **Carleen Lovejoy**
- **Ina-Rae**
- **Miss Butler**
- **Old Man Nyquist**
- **Mrs. Weidenbach**
- **Principal Fluke**
- **Maxine Patch**
- **Arnold Green**
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



# Activity Six

## An Alternate Ending

- **This activity can be done individually or in small groups.**

The conclusion of ***A Year Down Yonder*** is very memorable. Not only does it tie-up a few loose ends (i.e. Mary Alice becomes a reporter and marries Royce), but it is very moving and dramatic as well. The conclusion also leaves the reader wondering about other issues (i.e. will Mary Alice's relationship with her grandmother continue to grow? Will she move back to her grandma's home town? Will Joey survive the war? Will Royce have to go and fight?)

What, though, if Richard Peck had woken up on the wrong side of the bed on the day he wrote the novel's concluding chapters? What if it didn't end the way it is described in these pages, but had taken another *turn in the road*? *What if Grandma Dowdel had agreed to let Mary Alice continue to live with her? What if Royce had fallen for Carleen Lovejoy instead of Mary Alice? What if Joey had come to live with Grandma too? What if...? What if...?*

Although we will never know the answers to these questions, you will be given the opportunity of putting your imagination to work in coming up with what might have happened if the author's imagination had worked its way in an entirely different direction.

If you work with a group, brainstorm possible alternative endings to the novel. Remember to consider all of the principal characters. From your list of ideas choose one ending to present to the class. Write a detailed synopsis of your alternate conclusion presenting as much detail as possible. After presenting it to the class, you may wish to get their input as to additional changes that might be made to further improve your alternative ending.

**Have fun!**