

## LONG WAY HOME FROM CHICAGO

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Joey and Mary Alice's relationship with Grandma Dowdel. Discuss why their parents thought it so important that they get to know their Grandma. What kind of mother do you think Grandma Dowdel was to Joey and Mary Alice's father? Joey says that Grandma frightens his mother-Grandma's daughter-in-law. What characteristics of Grandma make her so frightening?
2. Joe Dowdel is an adult sharing his memories of Grandma Dowdel. He says, "*Are all my memories true? Every word, and growing truer with the years.*" (p. 1) What does Joe mean when he says, "growing truer with years?" What kind of relationship do you think Joe Dowdel has with his grandchildren? Discuss whether the summers spent with Grandma Dowdel might have shaped the kind of grandfather he became.
3. Why does Mary Alice say, "*I don't think Grandma's a very good influence on us*"? (p. 61) How is she a good influence on her grandchildren? Ask the students to debate whether Grandma is a "bad influence" or a "good role model."
4. Grandma Dowdel never seems to show affection. How do you know that she loves her grandchildren?
5. Why does Grandma Dowdel display the body of Shotgun Cheatham in her parlor? Discuss what Grandma means when she says, "*A rumor is sometimes truth on the trail.*" (p. 115)
6. During their visit in 1931, Joey and Mary Alice realize that Grandma Dowdel runs illegal fish traps. Why is it important to have hunting and fishing laws? What department in state government is responsible for monitoring such laws? They vow never to tell their dad about this. Discuss what other things Joey and Mary Alice

discover about Grandma that they are likely to keep to themselves. Why does Sheriff Dickerson call Grandma a "*one-woman crime-wave*"? (p. 57)

7. One of Grandma's weapons is blackmail. Discuss the numerous times in the novel that she uses blackmail to help people. What does the phrase "larger than life" mean? How does this fit Grandma?
8. During which summer do you think Joey and Mary Alice learn the true character of Grandma?
9. Joey says, "*As the years went by, we'd seem to see a different woman every summer.*" (p.1) Discuss whether it's Grandma that changes, or Joey and Mary Alice.

## Lesson Plans

### Curriculum Connections

#### Language Arts

- In the summer of 1930, Mary Alice brings her jump rope to Grandma's house and occupies herself by jumping rope to rhymes. Ask students to use books in the library or the Internet to locate popular jump rope rhymes. Then have them create a jump rope rhyme about Grandma.
- The reader sees Grandma Dowdel through Joey Dowdel's eyes. Discuss how a reader's impression of a character is shaped by point-of-view. Ask students to select another character in the novel (i.e. Effie Wilcox, Mr. Cowgill, Sheriff Dickerson, Vandalia Eubanks, or Junior Stubbs) and write a description of Grandma through that person's eyes.
- A reporter from the "big city" of Peoria comes to Grandma Dowdel's house to cover the death of Shotgun Cheatham. He streaks out of the house when Grandma fires a shotgun at the coffin. Write a newspaper story that describes this entire incident. Give the story an appropriate headline.