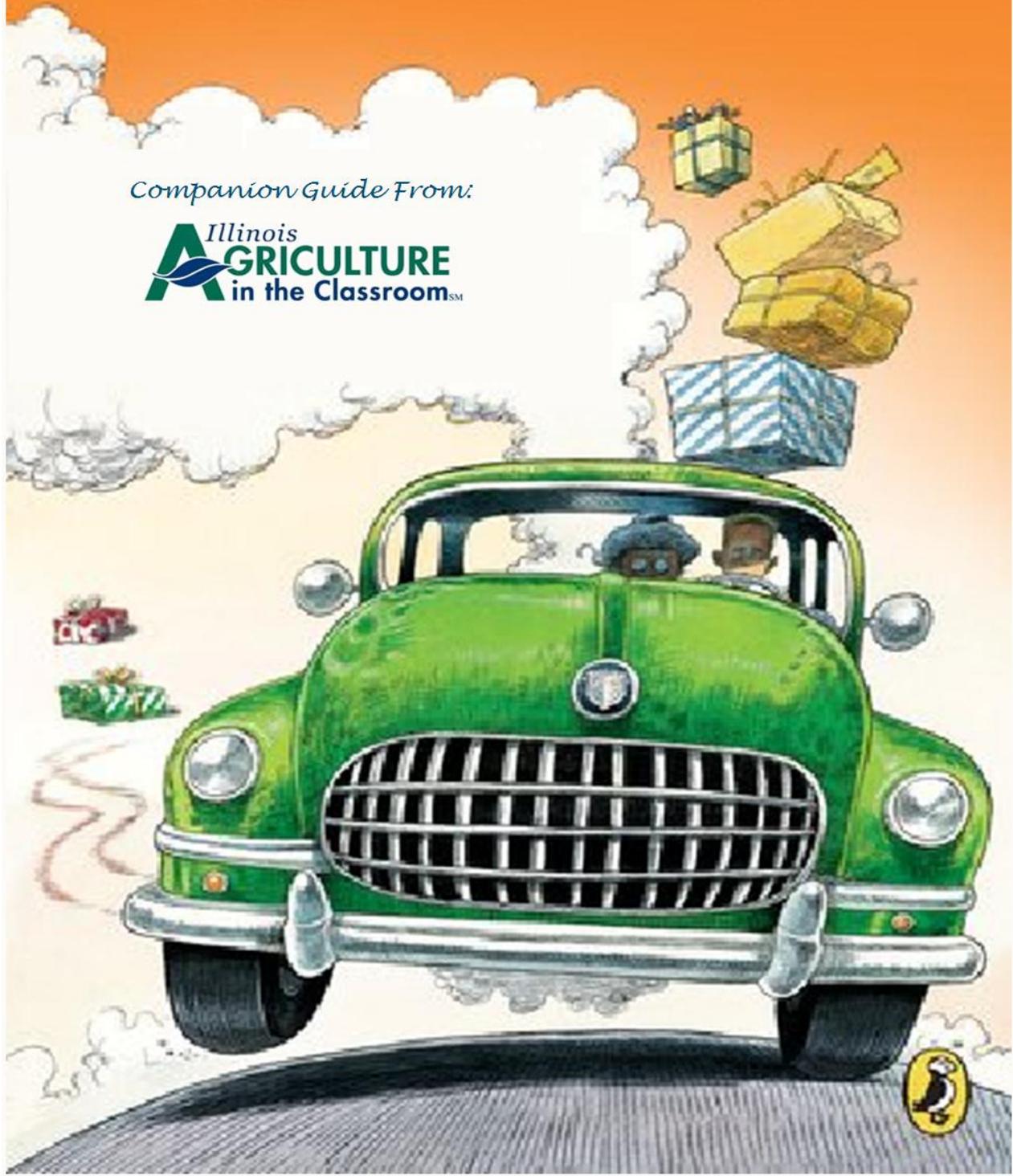


A Season of Gifts

Richard Peck

Companion Guide From:

Illinois
AGRICULTURE
in the ClassroomSM



Introduction

A Season of Gifts is a story about the Barnhart family and their move to a small town in Illinois. The kids aren't exactly thrilled...yet. They have no idea what they are truly in for when they move next door to hearty, brittle, Mrs. Dowdel. She is a sight to see and more frightening than ghosts, but as you read further into *A Season of Gifts*, the Barnharts realize what a treasure they have found in this small town.

In this companion guide, you will find “Power Words.” These are words found within each chapter that may be unfamiliar to students. This section contains a match-the-definition segment. Students can also go further by using the words in sentences. In the guide, you will also find “Questions” to use as discussion starters or to check in on readings. Some questions are directly from the book, whereas others are critical thinking questions for which students should put more thought into their responses. Additionally, the guide contains an “Ag-tivity” segment. In this section, there are activities that link the lessons to agriculture and require materials to participate.

Chapter 1 - 2 Locked and Loaded & Revival Dust

Power Words

Privy -	A toilet located in a small shed outside a house or other building; outhouse.
Tetchy -	Bad tempered and irritable.
Mince -	Cut up or grind food into very small pieces.
Revival -	Improvement in condition or strength of something.

Questions

1. What did Ruth Ann suspect about the house next door?
2. Who lives in the house next door to Bob?
3. How did the Barnharts feel about Mrs. Dowdel as a neighbor? What did the townspeople think of her?
4. Mrs. Dowdel is a unique citizen of her community. Tell about the most unusual person you've ever lived near. What made the person unique or unusual?

AG-tivity

This chapter introduces the setting of a rural town. Mrs. Dowdel takes care of the garden in her yard. When planting a garden, it is important to know how and what helps plants, like Mrs. Dowdel's tomatoes, to grow. The activity can be done by each person, or together as a class.

Garden in a Glove

Materials Needed:

Clear Plastic Glove	5 Types of Seeds	Water
Cotton Balls	Pencil	Marker

- A) Write your name on a clear plastic glove.
- B) Wet five cotton balls and wring them out.
- C) Place 3-4 of each same type seed on each cotton ball.
- D) Put a cotton ball with the seed on it into each finger of the glove. Use a pencil to push towards the bottom.
- E) Blow up the glove and close with a twist tie.
- F) Tape the glove to a window, chalkboard, or wall.
- G) The seeds will germinate in 3-5 days. Keep a plant diary and look at the seeds under a microscope.
- H) Transplant the seeds about 1.5-2 weeks later by cutting the tips of the fingers off the glove. Transplant the cotton ball and plants into soil.
- I) After growing to full size, plants can be made into a salad.

Chapter 3 – 4 The Boy Next Door & The Figure at the Window

Power Words

Inventoried -	To make a list or scan through something.
Galoot -	A clumsy or lousy person.
Trickled -	Flowing like a liquid.
Quivered -	To tremble or shake with a slight rapid motion.

Questions

1. We do not know the story's location. List some clues that identify the story takes place in a small town in Illinois.
2. How did Bob end up in Mrs. Dowdel's privy? What was her reaction to finding him?
3. Where did Bob suspect Ruth Ann's doll ended up?
4. Have you ever been the "new kid" in town? How did this make you feel? If you haven't, have you seen a new kid treated? Did this change how you felt about your old hometown? If so, how?

AG-tivity

The story continually mentions corn in several different ways. We are very reliant on corn for many different purposes. Corn is used in ethanol, feed for animals and various other foods that we eat every day! These foods include: soda pop, ketchup, mustard, bubble gum, ice cream, cookies, potato chips, candy bars and many more. There are more than 4,200 uses for corn with more found every day.

Take Home Corn

Materials Needed:

Yellow Construction Paper
Scissors

Lego Board
Glue

Crayons
Dried Corn Husks

- A) Cut a piece of yellow construction paper into the shape of a corn cob.
- B) Place the paper over the Lego board and shade with a crayon (suggested colors are red, orange and brown).
- C) Glue corn husks alongside the corn.
- D) Write on the back of their corn what they want their corn to be used for (example ethanol, soda, animal feed).
- E) Discuss the importance of corn. Check out <http://www.agintheclassroom.org/TeacherResources/AgMags.shtml> for the interactive Ag Mag to further discuss the many important uses of corn today.
<http://littlewondersdays.blogspot.com/2011/09/corn-activities.html>

Chapter 5 – 6 The Afternoon of the Turtle & The Haunted Melon Patch

Power Words

Cinder Blocks -	A hollow rectangular block made with concrete and coal cylinders.
Initiated -	To admit someone into a secret society or group.
Lolled -	Hanging or drooping in a lazy, relaxed way.
Dank -	Unpleasantly moist or humid.
Heathens -	A person who does not belong to a widely held religion.

Questions

1. What was the name of the ghost allegedly seen on Mrs. Dowdel's property?
2. Mrs. Dowdel protected her melon patch each fall. How did she keep warm and what weaponry did she carry?
3. Explain what wakes the town in the middle of the night.
4. Describe Barbara Jean Jeeter's initiation into the Iota Nu Beta sorority. Where were the other sorority sisters when she screamed for help?
5. After moving, Phyllis starts getting in trouble. When did you first notice she was acting in ways she shouldn't?

AG-tivity

Scarecrows are used to frighten birds, such as crows, away from farm crops and garden foods. Mrs. Dowdel protected her melon patch in the same way that a scarecrow does. Complete the activity below to create your own scarecrow. Feel free to decorate at the end to look like Mrs. Dowdel!

Scarecrow

Materials Needed:

Brown Paper Bag	Markers or Crayons	Old Newspaper or Magazines
Glue	Coffee Filter	
Construction Paper	Scissors	

- A) Fill your paper bag with crumpled up old newspaper or magazines. Fold over and tape shut.
- B) Using construction paper cut out thin strips of yellow (or any fall color) for your scarecrow's hair. Cut additional pieces for some eyes and a nose. Cut any extra items such as a flower to paste on top.
- C) Tape or glue the strips of paper around the top of your bag. Once you are finished, secure your Scarecrow's eyes and nose and draw on a mouth. Glue on your coffee filter hat. Decorate as you like.

Chapter 7 – 8 Fuss and Feathers & Indian Summer

Power Words

Bronchitis -	The swelling of airways leading to the lungs.
Rickrack -	Braided trimming in a zigzag pattern.
Intoned -	To speak with little rise and fall of the pitch of voice.
Calabashes -	American tree that bears fruit in the form of large wood-like gourds.

Questions

1. Explain two rumors regarding the location of Mrs. Dowdel's money.
2. Name three items that Mrs. Dowdel sold on the roadside of her property.
3. Mrs. Dowdel told the Barnharts, "You can't get a church up and goin' without a good funeral first." How did this advice prove to be true?
4. What was inside the box that Mrs. Dowdel and Mrs. Wilcox brought to the Barnharts?

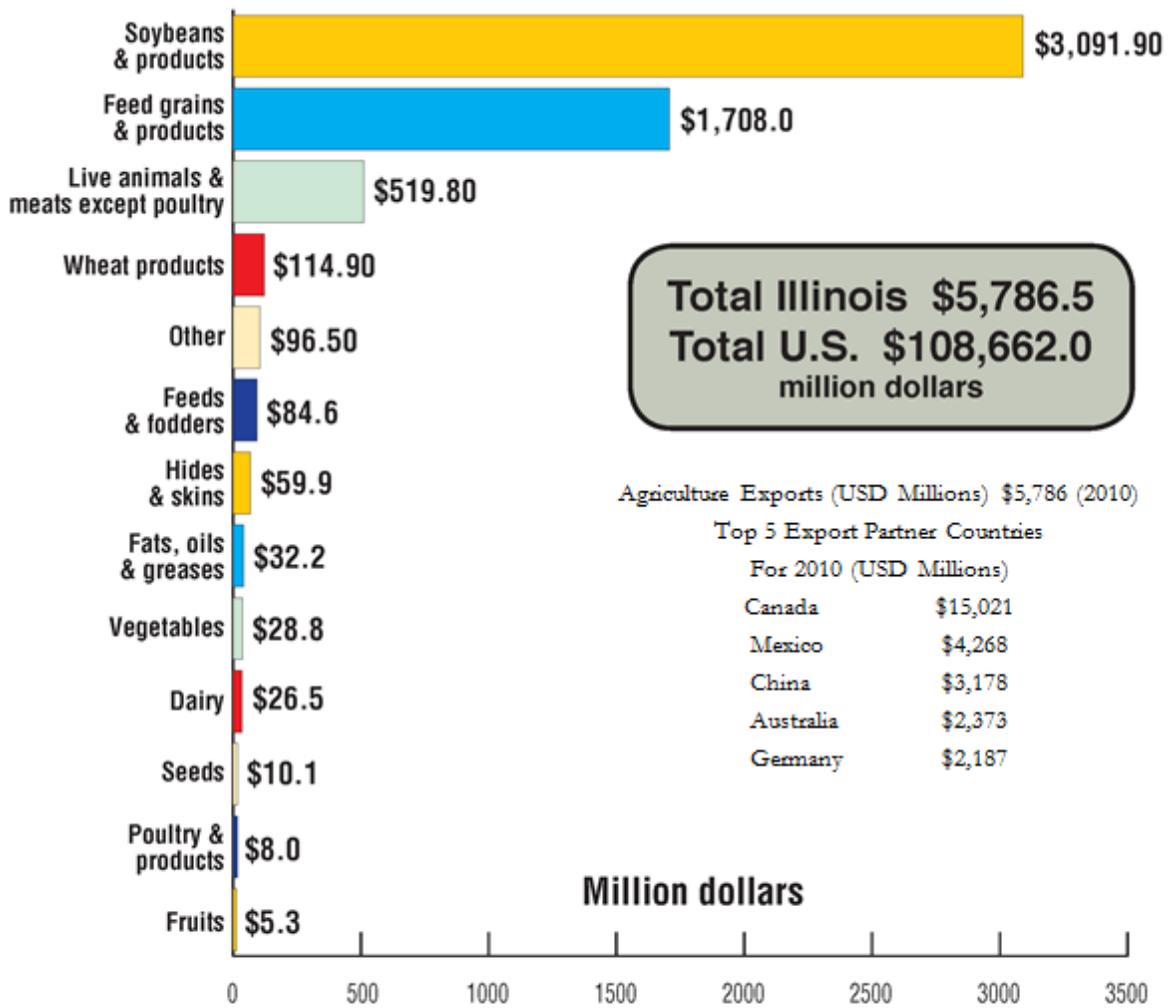
AG-tivity

Mrs. Dowdel sells the produce grown in her garden. Similarly, states and countries as a whole export their goods to others who cannot or do not grow. The chart on the next page shows the exports from Illinois. It also shows the top five countries to which Illinois exports goods. Use the chart on the next page to answer the following questions.

1. What percentage of the total, rounded to the nearest whole number, are feed grains and products?
2. Which product represents roughly 9% of the total Illinois agriculture exports?
 - a) Wheat Products
 - b) Vegetables
 - c) Live Animals & Meat (Not Poultry)
 - d) Poultry & Products
3. Soybeans & products are less than half of the total Illinois agriculture exports.

True or False
4. Which country is Illinois' largest partner in receiving exports?
5. The feed grains and products category is how many times larger than the poultry and products category?

Try using the information from the chart below to draw your own chart.



*Goods leaving the State of Illinois

Source: ERS/USDA State Export Data – www.ers.usda.gov/data/stateexports/

Chapter 11 – 12 Blazing Pumpkin & Come, Ye Thankful People, Come

Power Words

Lubricate -	Apply oil or grease to allow smooth movement.
Temptation -	A desire to do something.
Reformatory -	An institution where youthful offenders are sent instead of prison.
Suet -	A type of fat on animal kidneys used in foods like pudding and pastries.

Questions

1. Who did Ruth Ann want to dress up as for Halloween? Who did she actually dress up as?
2. Who did Mrs. Dowdel catch trying to steal from her on Halloween night?
3. What happened to Newt Fluke? How did this impact Elmo Leaper, Jr.?
4. What happened to the Barharts' vehicle (the Pickle)?

AG-tivity

It's Thanksgiving time in the story. Mrs. Dowdel baked at least 20 pumpkin pies. Did you know that Illinois is #1 in pumpkin growing? See if you can research where the Pumpkin Capital of the World is. Follow the recipe below for a classroom of pumpkin pie! Make sure to have plenty of helpers for measuring, preparing and passing out.

What You Need to Have

- Gallon Ziploc freezer bag
- 2 2/3 cups cold milk
- 2 packages (4 serving size) instant vanilla pudding mix
- 1 can (15 ounces) solid-pack pumpkin
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
- Graham cracker crumbs
- 25 small cups
- Scissors
- 1 can whipped topping
- 25 spoons

What You Need to Do

1. Combine the milk and instant pudding in the Ziploc bag.
2. Remove the air and Ziploc it shut.
3. Squeeze and kneed with hands until blended for 1 minute.
4. Add the pumpkin, cinnamon, and ginger.
5. Remove the air and Ziploc it shut.
6. Squeeze and kneed with hands until blended for 2 minutes.
7. Place 1/2 tablespoon of graham cracker crumbs in the bottom of small cups.
8. Cut corner of freezer bag and squeeze pie filling into cups.
9. Garnish with whipped topping.
10. Add a spoon. Eat up!

Chapter 13 – 14 Selective Service & Season of Secrets and Surprises

Power Words

Springerle -	A type of German biscuit with a design pressed in.
Derelect -	Very poor condition due to neglect.
Pfeffernuss -	A small spiced cookie made traditionally for Christmas.
Trussed -	Tied up wings and legs of a bird before cooking.
Nuisance -	A person or thing causing inconvenience or annoyance.

Questions

1. What charges were brought up against Roscoe?
2. Who was the President of the United States of America at the time of the story?
3. What did Ruth Ann reveal to her family at the dinner table?
4. What did Mrs. Dowdel force Bob to do? What were they going to get?

AG-tivity

As Christmas season approaches, Mrs. Dowdel decorates with Christmas trees. In the story, they go out to get an evergreen tree. Seeds are found inside of the cones. When planted, the pine cone seeds turn into seedlings and then into the evergreen tree. Use the activity on the next page to make your very own 3D tree. Cut the figure out, and fold along the dotted lines. Cut the line strip in the cone section to insert the tab to make the 3D tree. Students can decorate their tree. For further study, research what happens at each stage and write descriptions of each.



Evergreen Tree Poem

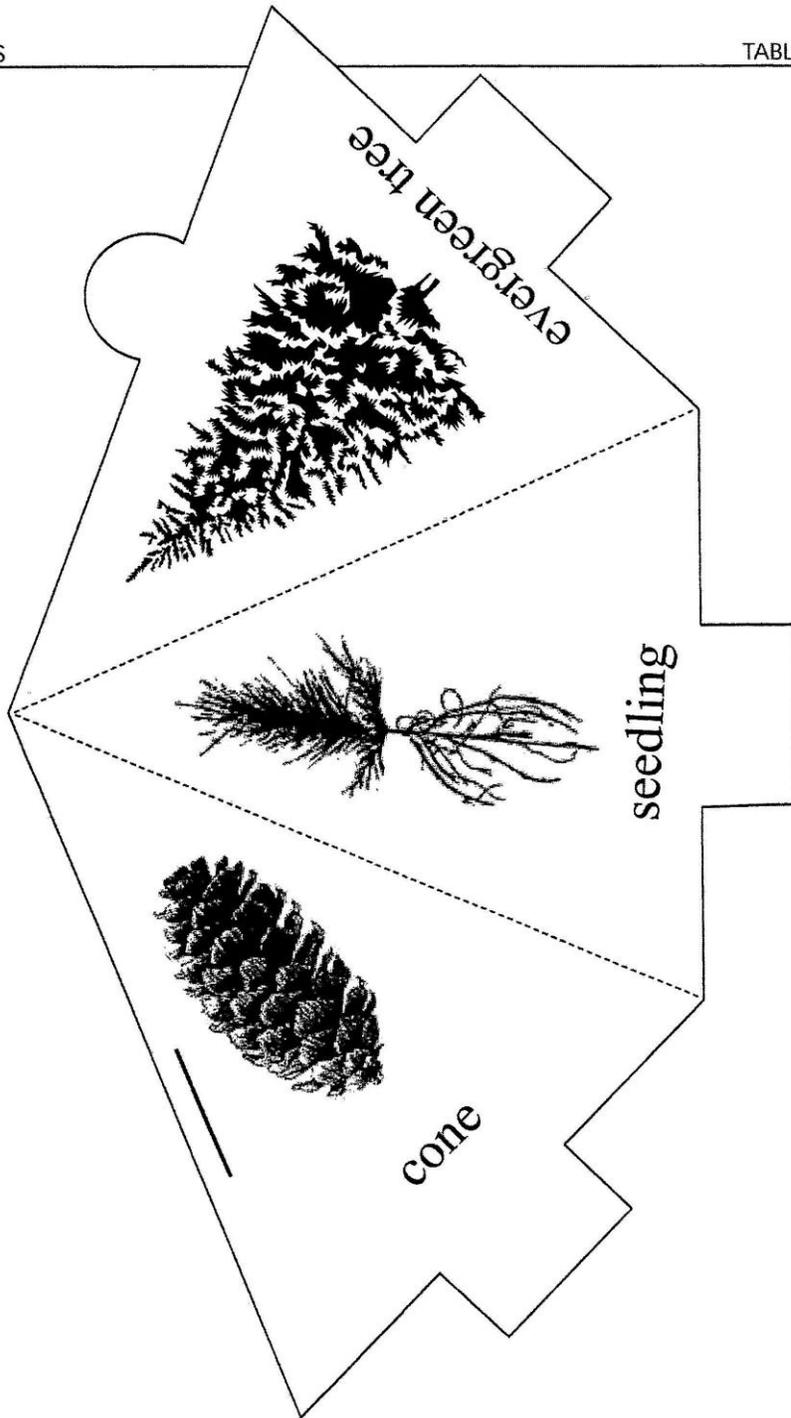
I am a type of tree you know
I start out small and then I grow
My roots spread deep under the ground
To help me so I won't fall down

My trunk protects me up and down
And carries all my food around
The inside part of me is dead
The outer layers grow instead

From my trunk grow many branches
This is the part of me that dances
On my branches, green needles you'll see
They use the sun, to make food for me

Do I sound like a tree you've seen?
Have you guessed?
I'm an evergreen!

From Regina Stewart



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Chapter 15 – 17 The Gift & A Christmas Wedding & A Visit from Saint Nick

Power Words

Matrimony -	State or ceremony of being married.
Divinity Fudge -	White creamy chocolate made with egg whites.
Sacrament -	A religious sign regarded as sacred or mysterious significance.
Inflation -	An increase in prices and fall of purchasing value of money.

Questions

1. Who was the visitor from afar that showed up at the Barnharts'?
2. Which unexpected guests showed up at the church?
3. What unplanned event took place at the church that night? Who were the two individuals involved?
4. What present was waiting under the tree for Ruth Ann?
5. At the end of the story, what do we discover happened to Mrs. Dowdel's money?

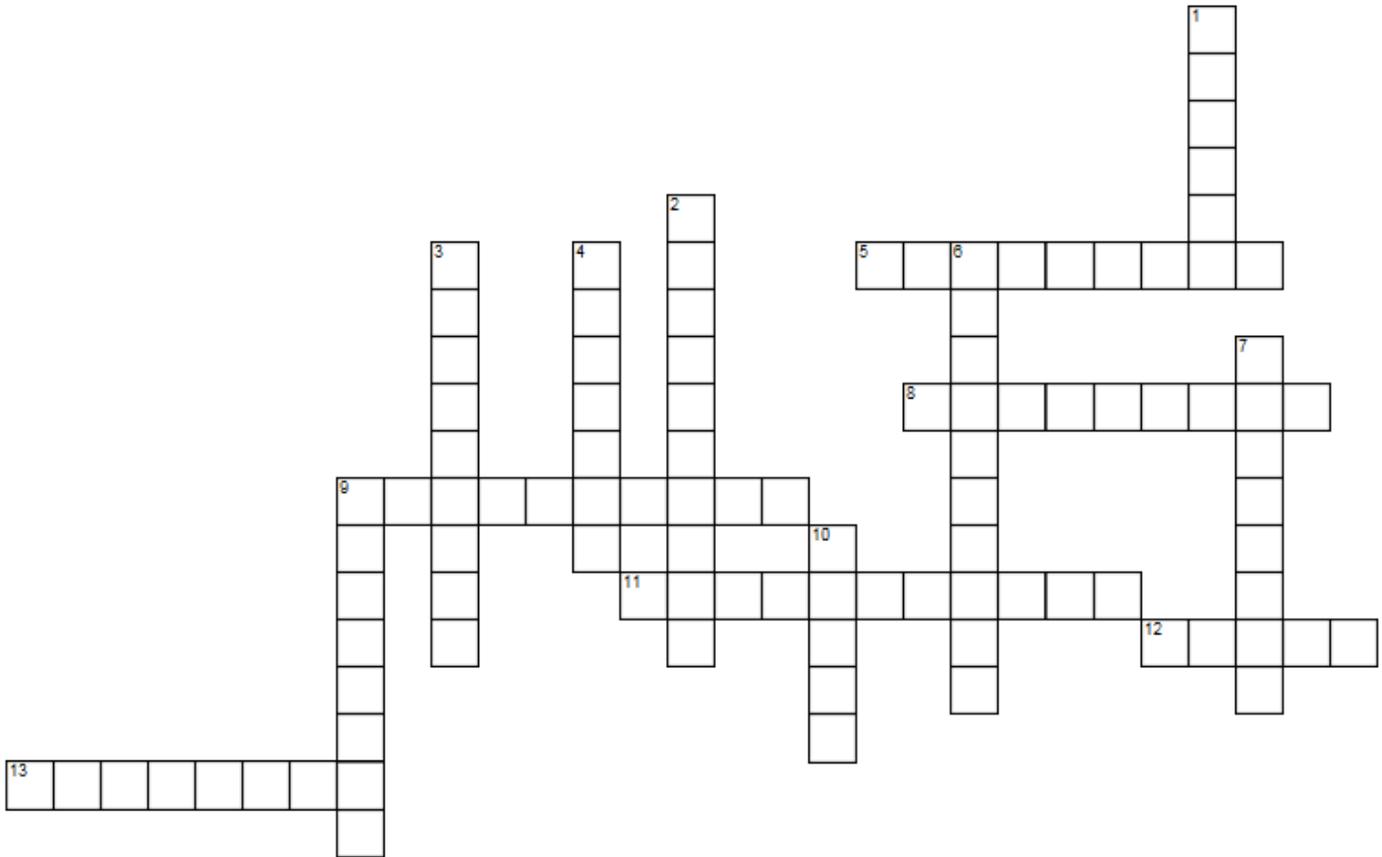
AG-tivity

Mrs. Dowdel had been giving gifts throughout the story. These were not always physical gifts, but sometimes doing good things for others. Work together as a class to make a big tree poster and place it somewhere in the class. Ask each student to choose one person in the community to whom he or she can give something back. The student can choose any person or organization that has done something for them or their family. An example might include a physician who helped them when they were sick. Have the student create a thank you letter and write specific details for which they are grateful. Once the projects are complete, they can summarize their project and write it on the back of the leaf below, write their name, decorate it and hang it on the tree.



Season of Gifts

Power Words – Crossword Puzzle



ACROSS

- 5 Apply oil or grease to allow smooth movement.
- 8 To admit someone into a secret society or group.
- 9 A desire to do something.
- 11 An institution where youthful offenders are sent instead of prison.
- 12 Cut up or grind food into very small pieces.
- 13 A person or thing causing inconvenience or annoyance.

DOWN

- 1 A clumsy or lousy person.
- 2 An unfavorable opinion without knowledge or reason.
- 3 State or ceremony of being married.
- 4 Improvement in condition or strength of something.
- 6 Swelling of airways leading to lungs.
- 7 A person who does not belong to a widely held religion.
- 9 Flowing like a liquid.
- 10 A toilet located in a small shed outside a house or building; outhouse.

Afterthoughts

1. What did Bob and Ruth Ann both think of Mrs. Dowdel when they first moved in next door? How do their opinions of her change? Find a quote in the book that explains part of your answer.
2. Why do you think Ruth Ann idolized Mrs. Dowdel? What did she learn from Mrs. Dowdel, and what did Mrs. Dowdel gain from Ruth Ann being around?
3. Phyllis was going through a rough phase and getting into trouble. When did you first notice that she was doing things she should not be doing? Who else notices Phyllis is getting into trouble? Find a quote in the book that explains part of your answer. How does Mrs. Dowdel help her?
4. Explain why you think the name *A Season of Gifts* is a good name for the story.

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