

Book Reports versus Book Reviews

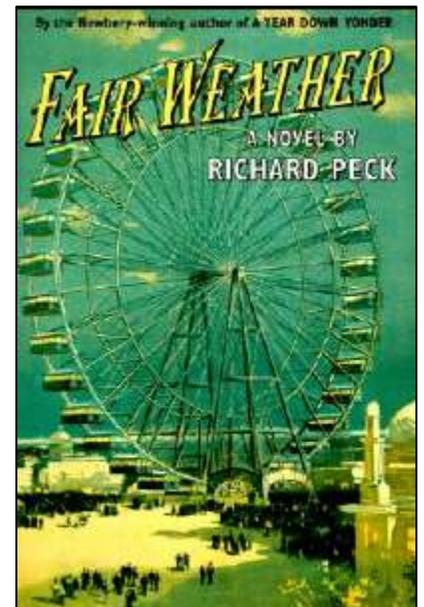
In elementary school, we write **book reports**. These are expository (informative) reports that simply explain a book's story elements; writers of book reports explain what a book is about (plot), where the story takes place (setting), who is in the story (characters), and what the book might mean (theme). The goal of a book report is simply to prove you read the book from start to finish.

In secondary school, we compose **book reviews**. These are voice-filled informative *and* persuasive essays that—instead of simply reporting on the book's basics—focus on the book's most enduring qualities. Certainly *plot, setting, character, and theme* should be a part of a book review, but the goal of a review is to convince another person to read the book, not simply prove you've read it. If you're sharing a bit of your personality and explaining the book's impact on your thinking, then you are writing a book review.

Fair Weather by Richard Peck a book review by Mr. Harrison

Historical fiction plops its readers right into a past era, using historically accurate facts but telling a story with fictional characters. I, who always disliked the dryness of history text books but who loves to learn about history, appreciate a well-written history-inspired novel. However, I really like my historical fiction *vanilla*; allow me to explain what I mean by this.

Politically-inspired historical fiction—like *Pralines and Cream*—is a little too rich for my tastes. War-based historical fiction—like *Jamoca Almond Fudge*—never has been to my liking either. If I'm reading a fictional novel about history, I want to read about ordinary people doing more-or-less ordinary things that are historically accurate and interesting. *Vanilla* doesn't go out of its way to stun you, but it's still delicious. Fair Weather by Richard Peck is a great example of *vanilla* historical fiction.



Here's a very funny story about a fictional family who visits the very first World's Fair in 1893. There's no war here. There's no politics in action. There's just a huge fair in Chicago that Rosie Beckett (13 years old) and her siblings are lucky enough to go see. The Becketts are down-to-earth farm people. When rich Aunt Euterpe—their Chicago relative—sends them four train tickets and an invitation to attend this amazing, once-in-a-lifetime event, they go, but not with their mother. Instead, they arrive in Chicago by train under the tutelage of their eccentric, well-traveled Granddad and his dog, Tip. Rosie, her older sister (Lottie), and her younger brother (Buster) are about to experience an event that will change the way they see the world.

Now if Aunt Euterpe had her way, the family would hardly experience the World’s Fair at all; she believed the midway (with its Ferris wheel and games), the animal exhibits, and the Wild West Show are attractions for the common man, not for rich sophisticates like herself. Right from the start, she realizes that Granddad plans to give these three children a fair experience she did not intend. My favorite relationship is that between Granddad and 7-year-old Buster; while Aunt Euterpe (*Ter-Pee!* as Granddad calls her) would prefer Buster be a proper little boy, the young man clearly wants to live a life as adventurous as his Granddad has.

Author Richard Peck has certainly done his research about 1893. The descriptions of the exhibits, the rides, the games are delightful, and interesting historical facts just keep pouring out of the chapters; did you know, for example, that hamburgers were first invented at this World’s Fair? We learn this as the Beckett family—including a protesting *Ter-Pee*—experience such inventions first-hand.

The best scene has to be the Wild West Show in a chapter called “The Greatest Day in Granddad’s Life.” After an honest-to-goodness appearance by Buffalo Bill Cody and Annie Oakley and a hysterical moment where Tip, their dog, becomes a part of the show, we learn that Granddad has had an exciting, secret past that his grandchildren knew nothing about. I won’t spoil the moment for you, but clearly this book is telling us to live our lives to the fullest because you never know when you’re experiencing a moment in history.

If you like your history vanilla too, then I predict you’ll find this novel a great read.

Apply Mr. Harrison’s [Reading Workshop Rubric](#) to his own review:

A hint before scoring this: Sometimes Mr. Harrison writes an example for you to read and analyze, but he purposely leaves things out so the writing shouldn’t receive a perfect score; sometimes he doesn’t do this, and he goes for the perfect score. Read the rubric and Mr. Harrison’s review carefully.

Out of 10, how did Mr. Harrison do with the rubric row entitled “Persuasive Purpose Achieved”? _____
Why specifically did you award that score to Mr. H.? Where were her persuasive attempts?

Out of 10, how did Mr. Harrison do with the row focused on those specific *five story elements*? _____
Why did you award that score to Mr. H.? Which elements were discussed the best?

Out of 10, how did Mr. Harrison do with the row entitled “Polished Final Product”? _____
Why did you award that score to Mr. H.?