

Children's Literature Across the Curriculum Ideas

Created by students at the University of North Carolina Charlotte

Title: *The Polar Express*

Author: Chris Van Allsburg

Publisher/Date: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985.

Grade level: Pre-K - 2

Summary: A magical train ride on Christmas Eve takes a boy to the North Pole to receive a special gift from Santa Clause.

Reading/Writing Connections

1. Show the cover of the book. Ask students to brain storm to guess what the book might be about.
2. Show the students a silver bell necklace you made and place it around your neck.
3. Tell the students they will find out how important this one little bell is in the story.
4. Tell them before they begin, we are going to have hot cocoa to drink as we read the story.
5. Fix hot cocoa. (Students will realize they are drinking hot cocoa as the children in the story are.)
6. Begin reading the story. When the young boy is asked what he would like for the first gift of Christmas stop reading. Have the students speculate and guess what they think he may ask to receive. Then finish the book. After you finish, ask students why his friend could not hear the bell? Discuss why it is important for us to believe in others.
7. Ask students why a silver bell might be a jackdaw in this book.
8. Distribute a piece of ribbon (approximately 12-18 inches depending on age), and a silver bell. Show students how to thread it and make a necklace for themselves.
9. Remind them that when they hear the bell ring that they need to continue to believe in themselves.
10. Have the students write about a short story, "If I could receive the first Christmas gift, I would ask for..."
11. Display the stories on a bulletin board or in the hall.

Vocabulary/Spelling

harness	lurch	midnight	nougat
ocean liner	paced	pranced	rustle

Library Connections

1. Share with the students other titles by the author: *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*, *Jumanji*, *The Wreck of the Zephyr*, *Ben's Dream*, and *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*.
2. Help the students in researching the author and teach them how to research any author.
3. Help the students locate other books on Christmas wishes
4. Help students locate books on different types of trains.

Social Studies/Mathematics Connections

1. Make a train for the classroom. Chart or draw the places that they pass on the way to the North Pole.
2. Have the students write a story to tell if they were to take a train ride where would they like to go.
3. Find out information on trains and transportation.

4. Map Study: Find the North Pole on a globe. Estimate the distance from where they live to the North Pole. Plot out a route that would take you to the North Pole. Calculate using the map legend the time it would take to travel.

Language Arts Connections

1. Discuss who has ever lost something and how it makes one feel.
2. Write a story about one thing you lost, how you felt and if you found it how you did so, and how you felt so when you did.

Art Connections

1. Make a book to go with the story about the students train trip. Draw pictures to go with the story.
2. Bring in old toy catalogues or magazines. Have the students make a wish book for their own. They could also cut out a picture of what they would wish for to go with the story they wrote.

Title: *The Polar Express*.

Author: Chris Van Allsburg

Publisher/Date: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985.

Grade level: 2-4

Summary: A magical train ride on Christmas Eve takes a boy to the North Pole to receive a special gift from Santa Claus.

Reading/Writing Connections

2. Preview the book (showing only cover and illustrations) encourage students to predict the events of the story.
3. Show a silver bell to the students. Ask them to explain after reading the importance of the bell in the story.
4. After reading the story, discuss why the author had the boy lose the bell.
5. Talk about why the children hear the bell and their parents do not.
6. Discuss the importance of believing in others.
7. Ask students to guess why the bell is the jackdaw for the story.
8. Give each child a large silver bell and a red pipe cleaner. Show the students how to make the pipe cleaner into a handle. Remind them when they hear the bell ring they need to continue believing in themselves.
9. Write a paragraph describing a magical moment in the story.
10. Write a fantasy story about a time you were aboard a magical train.

Vocabulary/Spelling

carols	Christmas	conductor	elves	express
factory	harness	northward	pocket	polar
presents	reindeer	rustled	sleigh	whistle

Library Connections

1. Share other titles by the author: *Ben's Dream*; *Two Bad Ants*; *The Strangers*; *Just a Dream*; *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*; *Jumanji*; and *The Wretched Stone*.
2. Compare Chris Van Allsburg's art style to that of another illustrator, such as Vera B. Williams or Stephen Gammell. Tell what is distinctive about Van Allsburg's style.

3. Other Books about Christmas

Thomas Yeoman's *For Every Child a Star: A Christmas Story* finds an old man's sleep interrupted by unusual activity outside his window.

Moe Price's *The Reindeer Christmas* describes how an elf helps Santa find a faster way to deliver his gifts.

Jan Brett's *The Wild Christmas Reindeer* tells how an elf gets the reindeer ready for Christmas.

4. Additional Train Books

Bill Peet's *The Caboose Who Got Loose* tells of a caboose wishing for a way to escape the endless track.

David McPhails' *The Train* tells of a boy who takes a ride on his toy train while everyone is asleep.

Social Studies Connections

1. Compare the North Pole in *The Polar Express* to Charlotte. Use the following categories: leader, homes, transportation, animals, citizens, and businesses.
2. Find a route from Charlotte to the North Pole. Discuss transportation used.

Science/Music Connections

1. Show examples of different types of bells. Discuss pitch. In groups, arrange bells from highest to lowest pitch.

Math Connections

1. The first gift of Christmas was given at midnight. Make up plausible times for five other events of the story. Draw a clock showing the time and write the event.

Language Arts Connections

1. Read Jan Brett's *Wild Christmas Reindeer*. Compare and contrast the two books using a Venn diagram.
2. Retell *The Polar Express* in news article form. Answer the 5 W's: who, what, where, when, and why. Also add a headline.