

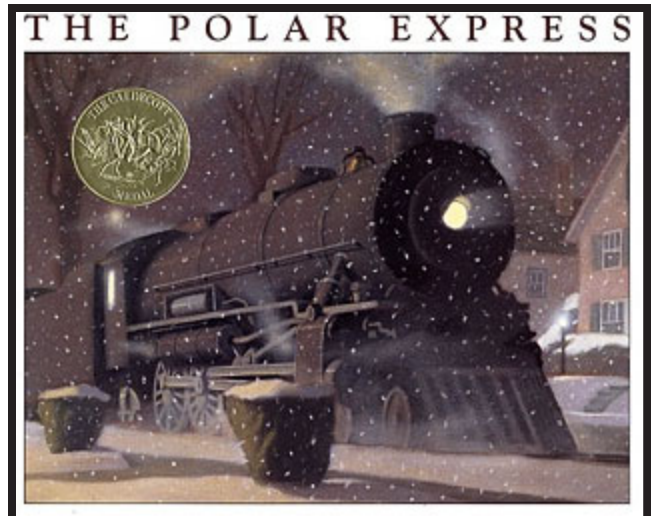
STORYLINE ONLINE PRESENTS:

"THE POLAR EXPRESS"

By *Chris Van Allsburg*

Watch online video of actor *Lou Diamond Phillips* reading this story at <http://www.storylineonline.net>

Late one Christmas Eve, a boy boards a mysterious train that waits for him: the Polar Express bound for the North Pole. When he arrives, Santa offers the boy any gift he desires. The boy modestly asks for one bell from the harness of the reindeer. The gift is granted. On the way home the bell is lost. On Christmas morning, the boy finds the bell under the tree. The mother of the boy admires the bell, but laments that it is broken – for you see, only believers can hear the sound of the bell.



RELATED ACTIVITIES

- Recall from the story the events of the boy's journey. Tell this to a partner.
- Discuss and then write about what you enjoyed most about this book.
- Retell the story in your own words.
- Write about what the illustrations tell about the story.
- Explain orally or in writing why this book is called The Polar Express.
- Make a display of photographs or illustrations that show Christmas or other Holiday celebrations.
- Make a list of Christmas Carols you like to sing.
- Why was it called "the first gift of Christmas?"
- Explain how you would have felt to be chosen by Santa to choose the first gift of Christmas?
- Tell or write about losing something valuable. Did you find what you lost? How?
- When the boy realized that he had lost the sleigh bell the children on the train were very supportive. Describe orally or in writing what the children wanted to do to help the boy. What would you have done to help him?
- Tell or write why only the boy and his sister could hear the beautiful sound of the sleigh bell.
- Tell or write why the sister eventually lost the sound of the sleigh bell.
- Research the name Santa Claus. Make a list of all the names you can find that people around the world call Santa Claus.
- Have you ever taken a trip by train? If you have, describe your trip to someone.
- Write about your train trip and make an illustration to go with your writing.
- Plan a train trip to somewhere you have never been. Research what you would like to see there. Write a detailed itinerary for your trip.

MORE ACTIVITIES

• Find your favorite part. Write it on a piece of paper and discuss it with someone.

• On the train trip aboard the "Polar Express" the children had cocoa and cookies. Plan your own "Cocoa and Cookies Party."

1. Write invitations to three people to come to your party.
2. Find and write out the recipe for your cocoa.
3. Find and write out the recipe for your cookies.
4. Make a list of the ingredients you will need to collect.
5. Check your pantry and refrigerator to see what you already have.
6. Have an adult take you to the market to buy the ingredients that you do not have at your house.
7. Plan to make your cocoa and cookies in time for your party.
8. Enjoy your party with your guests.

• After you have had your party, write about what happened. Include what you enjoyed most and what you would change if you had another "Cocoa and Cookies Party."

• Recall from the story what the conductor, the elves and Santa Claus were like. Now, describe in words (orally or in writing) what each of these characters look like. Make illustrations to go with your descriptions. Discuss your ideas and illustrations with a partner.

• What gift would you have asked Santa Claus for if you had been the child chosen to sit on Santa's sleigh? Tell or write why you chose that gift.

• The plot in this book is very developed.

1. There is a beginning, middle and end of this story.
2. There is an INTRODUCTION of the Who? Where? and What? Describe the Who? Where? And What? of this story.
3. There is a PROBLEM. Tell about the PROBLEM in this story.
4. There is a RESOLUTION. Tell about the RESOLUTION in this story.

Read the book again and fill-in the chart on the next page as you identify the elements of the story.

• Write a Cinquain about your favorite holiday. A Cinquain is a form of poetry with five lines, written using a recipe. The words you choose and the form they take on paper are an important part of the writing.

Here's the recipe:

- Line 1: one word to name the subject
- Line 2: two words to describe the subject
- Line 3: three action words about the subject
- Line 4: a four or five word phrase describing the subject (a thought, not a complete sentence)
- Line 5: one word that means the same thing as the first word, or a word that sums it all up

Here's an example:

Elf
Small, playful
Jumping, smiling, helping
A bundle of energy
Pixie

Super Challenge Activity: Research and make a chart of Holiday Celebrations Around the World.

• Chart of Holiday Celebrations Around the World •

Holiday	Season	Decorations	Foods
-----	-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----	-----

STORY ELEMENTS WORKSHEET

Read the book and fill-in this chart as you identify the elements of the story.

Describe the beginning, middle and end of the story:

Beginning: - - - - -

Middle: - - - - -

End: - - - - -

INTRODUCTION:

Who? - - - - -

Where? - - - - -

What? - - - - -

PROBLEM: - - - - -

- - - - -

COMPLICATION: - - - - -

- - - - -

CLIMAX: - - - - -

- - - - -

RESOLUTION: - - - - -

- - - - -

Themes addressed in this book:

Trust
Believing
Seasons
Holidays
Fantasy
Imagination

Additional books on these themes:

Kindness

"Pink and Say" by Patricia Polacco
"Chester's Way" by Kevin Henkes
"Horton Hatches The Egg" by Dr. Seuss
"Miss Spider's Tea Party" by David Kirk

Sharing

"A Chair for My Mother" by Vera Williams
"The Rainbow Fish" by Marcus Pfister
"Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters" by John Steptoe

Other books you might enjoy if you liked *The Polar Express*:

The Twelve Days of Christmas
Elijah's Angel
Little Porcupine's Christmas
A Wish for Wings That Work
The Nightmare Before Christmas
Santa Calls
Christmas in July

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

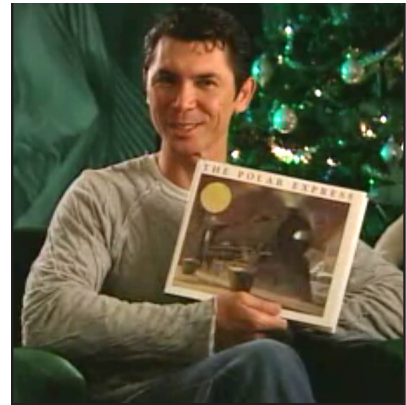
Chris Van Allsburg spent his childhood in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He loved drawing as a child, but remembers "certain peer pressures encouraged little fingers to learn how to hold a football instead of a crayon." During a college freshman course in drawing he re-discovered his love of art. After graduation from the University of Michigan, he earned an advanced degree in sculpture from the Rhode Island School of Design. Though Van Allsburg began his artistic life as a sculptor, even his early pieces show his emergence as a storyteller. Van Allsburg has won two Caldecott Medals and has achieved status as one of the greatest children's book illustrators of our time.

Other books by *Chris Van Allsburg*:

Mysteries of Harris Burdick
The Widows Broom
The Wretched Stone
Just a Dream
Two Bad Ants
The Z Was Zapped
The Stranger
The Wreck of the Zephyr
Ben's Dream
Jumanji
The Garden of Abdul Gasasi

ABOUT THE READER

Lou Diamond Phillips first came to the public's attention when he starred as Ritchie Valens in *La Bamba*. The following year he garnered critical acclaim



for his performance in *Stand and Deliver* by winning the Independent Spirit Award for Best Supporting Actor. Phillips' talents also include live theater, where he starred as the King in the Broadway musical, *The King and I* and earned a Tony nomination for Best Actor. Prolific behind the camera as well, Phillips directed the feature film, *Sioux City* and served as associate producer on *Ambition*. The father of three girls, Phillips reinforces the importance of reading via first hand experience. Phillips recently joined the Screen Actors Guild Foundation in a National Literacy Campaign as Spokesperson for BookPALS, (Performing Artists for Literacy in Schools.)

"The Polar Express" published by Houghton Mifflin Company. Content developed by JAN POWELL, Library Consultant at CityLife Downtown Charter School, Seeds Elementary School, and ELLEN NATHAN, BookPALS National Program Director. Storyline is brought to you by the Screen Actors Guild Foundation and made possible by a generous grant from Verizon. Learn more about the Storyline Online program at <http://www.storylineonline.net>