

The Polar Express

Second Reading: Text & Vocabulary

All aboard The Polar Express! The boy has grown into an adult and narrates his most memorable Christmas experience. He tells it calmly without exclamation marks and bolded letters. What a heartwarming story about the power of believing!

*Always read the pages before the discussion.

Pages 1 - 2:

- **rustle:** make soft, gentle sounds by rubbing against something. What was the boy doing to make sure that he could hear the ringing of Santa's sleigh bells?
- How do you think the train got to his house? (No correct answer. Use the power of your imagination)

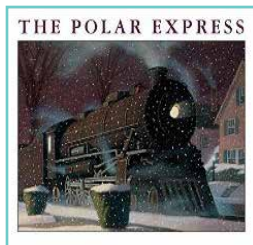
Pages 3 - 6:

Mr. Van Allsburg uses figurative language and great vocabulary that make his text as elegant as his illustrations:

- **an apron of steam:** like an apron wraps around a person, the steam wraps around the train. Discuss whether you see an apron of steam in the illustration.
- Think back to your prediction about the location of the boy's room. (It must be on the side of the street that the conductor faces. Maybe, it's the house that's barely showing on page 3.)
- **Express:** An **express** train has no stops along the way to its destination. It proceeds directly to the destination without other stops. What might the destination of The Polar Express be?
- On page 6, **nougat:** marshmallow-like. Have you eaten anything with a **nougat** center?

Pages 7 - 14:

- On page 7, **thundered:** roared. What does it mean that the train **thundered** through the quiet wilderness? How might the rabbits and the wolves feel about the train **thundering** through the quiet forest?
- On page 9, Mr. Van Allsburg uses more figurative language: "...so high it seemed as if we would scrape the moon" and ".....like a car on a roller coaster..." What do these phrases mean? (The mountains are very, very high. The train is going up and down very, very quickly over the peaks and through the valleys.)



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- On page 11, **barren desert of ice**: Nothing is visible except ice. Why might the Great Polar Ice Cap be a **barren desert of ice**?
- like the lights of a strange ocean liner sailing on a frozen sea: a large boat on a sheet of ice. What might the lights be?
- Who do you think Santa will choose to receive the first gift of Christmas?

Page 17 - 22:

- Why do you think that Santa hugged the boy?
- What day does it become when the clock struck midnight? (Christmas)

Pages 23 - 24:

- How do you think the boy might be feeling? Why?
- **lurch**: sudden tip or roll to one side. Why might the train **lurch**?
- What would you have done if you were the boy discovering that the bell was missing?

Pages 25 - END:

- On page 25, **broke my heart**: very sad. Why did losing the bell **break the boy's heart**?
- When The Polar Express blasted its whistle do you think it woke anyone?
- How did the silver bell end up on the seat of Santa's sleigh? (It fell through the hole in the boy's pocket when he was sitting on Santa's lap.)
- Who is Mr. C.? (Santa Claus)
- Why couldn't his mother and father hear the bell? Why could Sarah hear the bell?
- Why can the boy still hear the bell as an adult? (He still believes.)
- In what does the boy believe?