



The Polar Express

by Chris Van Allsburg

An older man takes us back into his childhood to the most memorable of his Christmas experiences: meeting Santa Claus and receiving the first gift of Christmas! The boy is asked by Santa to choose his gift. He asks for a silver bell from the reindeers' harness. The boy wants this bell as proof to hold on to that there really is a Santa.

For over twenty years this bestseller has been a Christmas classic. Search this title and see popular book review sites where hundreds of reviews have been written giving Mr. Van Allsburg's book the highest praise. Many of the reviewers talk about sharing this story with their children year after year and then, passing it on to the next generation in their family. The beautiful illustrations won the prestigious Caldecott Medal (1986) given annually to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children. Mr. Van Allsburg's art won other notable awards, such as a New York Times Best Illustrated Children's Book citation in 1985 and The Parent's Choice Award for Illustrations in the same year.

In 2004, The Polar Express was made into a movie. The film is listed in the 2006 Guinness World Book of Records as the first all-digital capture film. (The live actions of the actors are captured in computer animation.) Many of the book's illustrations are recreated on the screen. However, there are many differences between the book and the movie. The tone of the book is calm and relaxing. The conductor speaks to the boy, but he is never shown in the illustrations. In the movie, the conductor (played by Tom Hanks) is a major character. Mishaps happen to the boy and some of the other children on the train that are not in the book.

Due to the popularity of this classic, Polar Express experiences are being created around the country as real trains take nighttime journeys filled with children in their pajamas.

A Reading Comprehension Best Practice that you will notice in the multiple readings is the formation of Predictions that are based on evidence in the illustrations and the text.

A quote from the movie captures the essence of the story's theme:

"Seeing is believing, but sometimes the most real things in the world are the things we can't see."