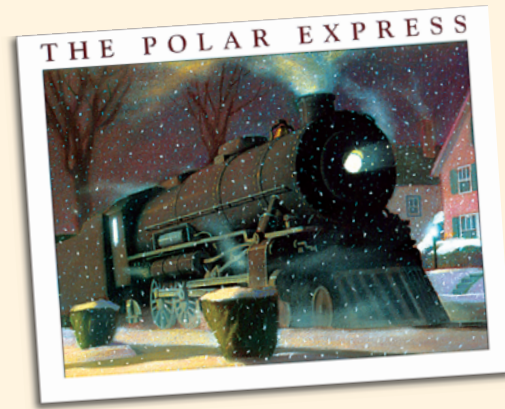


Christmas

The Polar Express

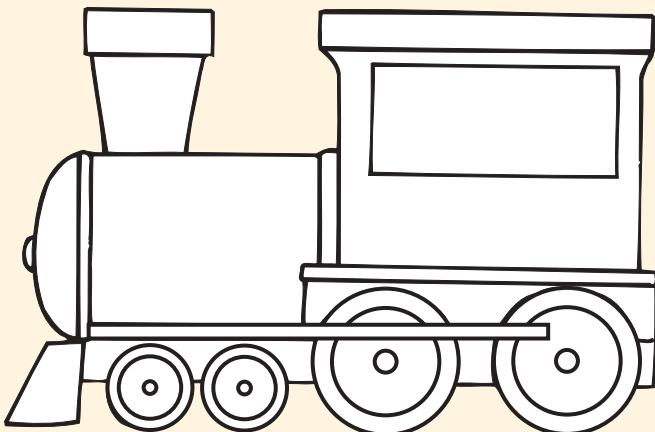
By Chris Van Allsburg
Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985 • Grades ps-3 • 32 pages
ISBN 0-395-38949-6

Transported by a magical train ride to the North Pole, a boy is chosen by Santa to receive the gift his heart desires. He chooses a silver bell from a reindeer's harness. Once home again, the boy learns that the ringing of the treasured bell can only be heard by those who truly believe.



Setting the Scene

The precise language used in Chris Van Allsburg's writing helps build vivid pictures of the setting in the reader's mind. Lead students to examine how these word pictures are constructed when you read *The Polar Express*. While reading the book, have students listen carefully to descriptions of the setting. (Do not share illustrations as you read.) If desired, allow students to take notes. Upon completion of the tale, give students drawing paper and colored pencils. Direct each child to draw a map that includes locations described in the setting, a compass rose, and a map key. Then allow time for each student to share his drawing. Follow up the activity with a second reading of the story. During this reading, point out how this author and illustrator also uses Caldecott award-winning illustrations to bring the setting to life. **EXPLORING SETTING, LISTENING COMPREHENSION, MAP SKILLS**



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The Writing Express

In *The Polar Express* a man shares the story of how he obtained a magic bell on a fantastic journey to the North Pole taken during his childhood. Guide students to explore the organization of the story before writing imaginative journeys of their own. Lead students to summarize the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Next, have them identify important components the author includes in each section. For example, the characters and setting are introduced in the beginning, the action is developed in the middle, and the conclusion is revealed at the story's end.

Next, ask the class, "If you could go on a magical train ride, where would you go?" Instruct students to brainstorm ideas for each section of their stories. After each student has developed each section of her tale, give her three small index cards and an enlarged copy of the train engine on this page to publish her final version on a strip of construction paper as shown. **WRITING IMAGINATIVE NARRATIVES, TRAITS OF GOOD WRITING—ORGANIZATION**