

Author Study of Patricia Polacco's Family Stories

Summary

Patricia Polacco's family stories provide an interesting and neutral way to begin discussions about families. Students can make connections from their own family experiences to some of her family experiences.

Main Core Tie

Social Studies - Kindergarten

[Standard 1 Objective 2](#)

Additional Core Ties

English Language Arts Kindergarten

[Reading: Literature Standard 1](#)

English Language Arts Kindergarten

[Reading: Literature Standard 3](#)

Materials

One per class:

- *The Keeping Quilt*
- *The Bee Tree*
- *Thunder Cake*
- *When Lightning Comes In a Jar*
- *My Ol' Man*
- *My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother*
- *Some Birthday!*
- [Story Structure Chart](#) (pdf)
2 7/8 in. x 2 7/8 in. Post-It® notes
- Markers or crayons

One per student:

- [Family Traditions Survey](#) (pdf)
- *My Family Traditions*
book
- Pencil
- Crayons

Additional Resources

Books

- *The Keeping Quilt*
, by Patricia Polacco; ISBN 0689844476
- *The Bee Tree*
, by Patricia Polacco; ISBN 0698116968
- *Thunder Cake*
, by Patricia Polacco; ISBN 0698115813
- *When Lightning Comes In a Jar*
, by Patricia Polacco; ISBN 0399231641

- *My Ol' Man*
, by Patricia Polacco; ISBN 039928225
- *My Rotten Readheaded Older Brother*
, by Patricia Polacco; ISBN 0689820364
- *Some Birthday!*
, by Patricia Polacco; ISBN 0671871706
- *Chrysanthemum*
, by Kevin Henkes; ISBN 0440848121
- *Owen*
, by Kevin Henkes; ISBN 0688114490
- *Julius: The Baby Of The World*
, by Kevin Henkes; ISBN 0440844436
- *A Weekend With Wendell*
, by Kevin Henkes; ISBN 06880635X
- *Wemberly Worried*
, by Kevin Henkes; ISBN 0688170277
- *Just Me And My Mom*
, by Mercer Mayer; ISBN 030712584X
- *Just Me And My Dad*
, by Mercer Mayer; ISBN 0307118398
- *The New Baby*
, by Mercer Mayer; ISBN 0307119424
- *Just Grandma and Me*
, by Mercer Mayer; ISBN 0307118932

Note: Other options for an author study may include Kevin Henke or Mercer Mayer. Both have written and illustrated a number of books about family relationships.

Background for Teachers

The enduring understanding for Standard II is for students to be able to discuss, "What is the relationship?" The focus for this lesson is to discuss the relationship between family members. Emphasis should be placed on the contributions of family members and the traditions established to strengthen family relations. Therefore, the important concept is how people in a family help to care for one another. Each child should feel like their family is special and unique. Sensitivity should be shown during class discussions concerning the dynamics of individual families.

Author Patricia Polacco has written many books about her childhood and the family members who influenced her. Ms. Polacco shares family traditions from her Russian and Irish heritage. She talks about the relationships she had with her grandparents, parents, brother, aunts, uncles, and cousins as she was growing up, and explains important concepts she learned from these people. In every case she shares how the care and love she received from her family strengthened their relationships with each other. Ms. Polacco's stories provide an interesting and neutral way to begin discussions about families. Students can make connections from their own family experiences to some of her family experiences.

Intended Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate a positive learning attitude.
2. Develop social skills and ethical responsibility.
3. Demonstrate responsible emotional and cognitive behaviors.
5. Understand and use basic concepts and skills.

6. Communicate clearly in oral, artistic, written, and nonverbal form.

Instructional Procedures

Invitation to Learn

Ask the class, "What are some things your family does to help you?" and "What are some things you can do to help your family?" Tell the students that during the next week we will be reading stories about families and talking about our own families. We want to think of many different ways that families help each other.

Instructional Procedures

Share Patricia Polacco family stories during read aloud time. Throughout the week, during read aloud time, share one of the Patricia Polacco stories with your class.

After reading a story, have the entire class discuss and respond to the following questions about the story.

Who are the characters?

What is the setting?

What is the problem?

What attempts were made to resolve the problem?

What was the resolution?

Draw and write a response to each question on a Post-It® note and place it on the *Story Structure* chart in the corresponding space. Continue this procedure with each story. As you begin to see similarities and differences that arise in each book, discuss them with the class. For example, in *The Keeping Quilt* and *When Lightning Comes In A Jar*, Patricia learns the stories and traditions of her ancestors from the older members of her family, such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Ask the class to begin to identify different ways that Patricia's family members are helpful to one another. Responses may include: "In *Thunder Cake*, Grandma helps Patricia overcome her fear of thunderstorms." "In *The Bee Tree*, Grandpa helps Mary Ellen understand reading is important." Next, ask the class to discuss, "How is your family helpful to one another?"

Note: While working on the *Story Structure* chart, explicitly explain to your class that narrative stories usually follow the pattern they are noticing in each of these family stories. Patterns are often found in words and stories just like patterns are found in math. Ask the class to look for patterns in the words and stories they read at home and at school.

Family Traditions Survey

Explain to the students that Patricia had some family traditions that were important to her. For example, the family reunion she went to each summer. Tell the students that you are going to be sending home a Family Traditions Survey. Ask your students to have their parents help them answer the questions on the paper and return it to school so we can talk about our own family traditions. (You may wish to send the survey page home earlier so you already have the student responses to the questions at this time.) What are some family traditions you have? Why are these traditions important to your family? Allow the students to share their responses with a partner or in small groups so there is opportunity for more students to contribute to the conversation.

My Family Traditions Book

Next, tell the students they are going to make a book and record some of their favorite family traditions in it. It is suggested you make a four-page layered book as shown. Layer one is the cover of the book and should have the name of the book and the author. For example, *My Family Traditions* by Johnny Smith. Layer two may describe a favorite family meal. Layer three may describe a favorite family book or story. Layer four may describe a favorite family vacation. Students may illustrate each page and label the picture, or write a complete sentence to match the picture for each page. The

format is versatile, so students may choose to record different family traditions than those listed above. Remind the students to use the ideas they shared on the Family Traditions survey to help them give responses for each book page. This project may take as long as a week to complete. Allow time for students to read their completed books with each other.

Extensions

The following activities have been included with this lesson plan to help provide students with a variety of ways to practice as they develop their understanding of narrative stories. These activities allow students to respond to books and stories through retellings. Retellings can improve students' comprehension as they engage in remembering the structure and content of the text. As students select information from a text that is worth remembering, retellings help focus selective attention on relevant information. When students make connections to the text from their own lives they are able to generate meaning from the text in a personal way.

These tools can be used with a whole class, small groups, and even in centers as student partners discuss the elements of a given story.

- [Story Structure Cards](#) (pdf)
- [Story Structure Spinner](#) (pdf)
- [Story Structure Cube](#) (pdf)
- [Story Structure Glove](#) (pdf)
- [Story Star](#) (pdf)

Family Connections

A parent, or other family member, and the student may complete the Family Traditions survey at home. It should generate rich conversation of special family memories. The survey should be returned to school to be used with a class writing project.

Give your child the opportunity to create his/her own scrapbook of family memories. Allow him/her to use extra family photographs, magazine cutouts, stickers, stencils, marking pens, colored pencils, colored paper, glue sticks, scissors, etc. Encourage your child to not only put pictures on the pages of his/her book, but also write about what is happening in each picture. Remember the book should represent your child's ideas and work. It should be an ongoing process so your child may enjoy adding further pages to the book after special family events. Your child will also enjoy reading and rereading the book with you often. It should not be a parent project that looks like it was just completed at a professional scrapbook class.

Create a few family mottos. Brainstorm your own, or look for different sayings that encourage family members to develop unity, strength, care, acceptance, and appreciation for one another. Write the sayings on paper and decorate. Tape the mottos on bedroom walls, bathroom mirrors, and the refrigerator so they will be seen and read often and put to memory.

Assessment Plan

The My Family Traditions book may be dated and kept in a student's portfolio. By looking at this work sample the teacher and family can identify what traditions are most meaningful to the child and strengthen family relationships. Also, it is an excellent record of the student's writing ability.

Authors

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