

The Stories of Patricia Polacco

Introduction

Why Do an Author Study?

Author studies help to develop a community of readers and writers in a classroom. Reading books by the same author provides students with common discussion topics and encourages them to develop and give reasons for personal reading preferences. Students who explore an author in depth come to view the author as a real person and recognize the possibility that they too can become authors.

Author studies can take place anywhere, individually, in small groups or as a whole class. They are a wonderful opportunity for a teacher to individualize his/her reading program. The important thing about doing an author study is to ensure that students make a connection with the author and his/her writings. The primary purpose of an author study is to learn about the craft of writing and to identify and categorize a variety of elements of style (imagery, simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole) provided that the study of these elements does not lessen the enjoyment of reading.

Teachers assess the students' comprehension during an author study. Students are encouraged to make connections, ask questions, infer meaning, determine theme and main idea, create visual or sensory pictures and synthesize to draw conclusions or make predictions.

Why Patricia Polacco?

Patricia Polacco is an excellent choice for an author study with students of any grade level. She writes stories about her own life which encourages students to find things in their own lives to write about. Too often children think the ordinary events of their own lives are too dull to write about. Her experiences with learning to read should be emphasized to help students who are experiencing difficulty with reading and writing and as encouragement for them that they are not "stupid". The examples she uses in her books about overcoming fears, making friends, her family and memorable events help students to realize that they can make their own dreams come true.

Story Mapping

What is Story Mapping?

Story mapping is another term for identifying the four major parts of a story - characters, setting, problem and solution. These are often called story elements. Story mapping is an essential skill for reading students to master as it helps them bring meaning to the stories they read. Students who use story mapping can easily understand what they read. It also helps the students to become better writers because they can use the skill in mapping out their own stories.

The four main parts of any story are its characters, the setting, the problem and the solution. Characters are who or what the story is about. They can be animals or people and there are usually one or two main characters. The setting describes where and when the story takes place. The problem is the main action of the story or the difficulty encountered by the main character. The solution of the story is usually the ending which tells how the problem was solved.

For each of the books in this unit a story map is provided for the teacher's reference. Themes, subjects and summaries are also provided as well as blank story maps and exercises you may wish to do with your students.

Here are several examples of story maps which can be used with students.

Story Map Chart

| | |
|------------|--|
| Characters | |
| Setting | |
| Problem | |
| Solution | |

Thunder Cake

Themes

- ◆ conquering fears
- ◆ helping others

Summary

Patricia has a fear of storms. When a thunderstorm threatens, her grandmother teaches her to overcome her fear by telling her they must bake a thunder cake. The ingredients for the cake are all outdoors and they must gather them all up before the storm hits. She also teaches Patricia how to tell how far away the storm is by counting the seconds between the lightning and the thunder claps. Patricia does not even realize that she has been outdoors during the storm until her grandmother points it out to her.

Story Map

| | |
|------------|--|
| Characters | Patricia, her grandmother |
| Setting | her grandmother's farm in Michigan |
| Problem | a thunderstorm is coming and Patricia is really afraid of thunderstorms |
| Solution | her grandmother takes her mind off the storm by getting her to help gather the ingredients to make a Thunder Cake. |

Thunder Cake

Before Reading the Book

Suggested introductory activities:

- ◆ Tell the students they are going to hear (read) a story about a girl who was afraid of thunderstorms. Ask the children how many of them are afraid of thunderstorms. Why are they afraid?
- ◆ Ask the students if there was anything they used to be afraid of, but are not afraid of it anymore. What happened to help them overcome their fear?
- ◆ Ask if they have read any books about people being afraid of things. How did these people overcome their fears?
- ◆ Ask them if they know how thunder and lightning happen. This is a wonderful opportunity to integrate Language Arts and Science to explain the phenomenon of storms or to introduce the topic of weather.
- ◆ Why are people afraid of weather? Why are there warnings given out when severe weather is expected?
- ◆ What should people do if they are really afraid of thunderstorms?

Some New and Interesting Words from the Story

| | | | |
|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| babushka | shudder | overcome | horizon |
| stammered | surveyed | strode | fingered |
| penned | scurried | samovar | squinted |
| trellis | luscious | churned | frosted |