



# THE POLAR EXPRESS

AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR: CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG

**\*\* REMEMBER: HAVE FUN AND THE KIDS WILL TOO! \*\***

## OVERVIEW

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Late on Christmas Eve, after the town has gone to sleep, a boy boards a mysterious train that waits for him: The Polar Express bound for the North Pole. When he arrives there, Santa offers him any gift he desires. The boy modestly asks for one bell from the reindeer's harness. It turns out to be a very special gift, for only believers in Santa can hear it ring. *Amazon*

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR

Chris Van Allsburg is the winner of two Caldecott Medals, for *Jumanji* and *The Polar Express*, as well as the recipient of a Caldecott Honor Book for *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*. The author and illustrator of numerous picture books for children, he has also been awarded the Regina Medal for lifetime achievement in children's literature. In 1982, *Jumanji* won the National Book Award and in 1996, it was made into a popular feature film. Chris Van Allsburg was formerly an instructor at the Rhode Island School of Design. He lives in Rhode Island with his wife and two children. *Amazon*

## THE READ ALOUD

### BEFORE READING

*Use these before reading the story to help students activate background knowledge and make predictions:*

- Does anybody recognize this book?
- Have you ever seen a train like this?
- I wonder where it's heading?
- What do you think the medal on the front is for?
- Explain that these books are extra special and should be treasured always, as they are personally signed by the author!

### DURING THE STORY

*Use these while reading the story to help students interpret the action and content.*

- p.2 What do you know about the North Pole? What can the little boy expect to find there?
- P. 5 Hands up if you enjoy a mug of rich cocoa?
- P.10 What does the word barren mean do you think?
- P.16 What do you imagine the boy might ask for from Santa?

## THE POLAR EXPRESS

TOPICS & THEMES:  
Adventure

Magic

Wishes

*Tips for every  
book!*

POWER PHRASES:

*I WONDER...*

*I NOTICE...*

*TELL ME MORE...*

DIGGING DEEPER:

*"Tell me more, why  
do you think that?"*

*"How do you know  
that?"*

*"Why do you think  
they feel like that?"*

*"Interesting, did you  
notice anything else?"*

- P.20 How do you think the boy is feeling about all of this? It's quite a magical night after all!
- P.21 But what's happened here?
- P.25 I wonder why the parents can't hear the bell ring?

## AFTER READING

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*Use these after reading the story to help students understand what they just read.*

- I would leave an air of mystery around the book if possible, the days for believing in magic might be numbered for many of these children. However, if someone does express to the class that Santa is not real, let's give everyone the choice of what they want to believe by reading out the inside of the jacket at the back of the book.

## BRINGING THE BOOK TO LIFE!

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- If you could go on a train journey anywhere, where would it be and why?

## COOPERATIVE LEARNING

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- Close your eyes and imagine you met Santa Claus, what would you wish for? Make a wish for the holidays. It might not come true, but if you wish hard enough, maybe, one day, it will.