

Gr. 4-6

# Christmas Tapestry

Based on the Book by Patricia Polacco

Frontloading  
Activities

Writing

Math

Comprehension

Art

Drama



# Frontloading Activities

## Frontloading Activities

Here are three wonderful frontloading activities you can use before beginning to read this book in order to get students prepared to understand the deeper context.

1. **Take a Stand:** Discuss the meanings of the words "fate" and "coincidence" with students. You may want to offer an example of a time when coincidence seem to have had a major effect on the direction of your life. Students will likely offer examples from their own experiences. Then ask students to reflect on the questions:

- Does everything really happen for a reason, as though our lives were preplanned by someone else?
- Or is life is life just full of unexplainable coincidences that randomly determine the the big events in each of our lives?

Put the word "FATE" on one wall, and the word "COINCIDENCE" on the other wall. Ask students to stand somewhere between the two walls to how they feel about this concept. They will repeat this activity after listening to or reading *Christmas Tapestry*, to see if their views have changed.

2. **Pictures:** I have provided five public domain pictures which represent items or events from the book. As this story involves references to World War II, concentration camps, and the Jewish faith, the pictures reflect these ideas. Have students work in pairs or small groups to discuss the pictures, as they predict what these pictures might have to do with Christmas. You might need to fill in the gaps, so that students are better able to understand what two of the characters, Mr. & Mrs. Zukor, experienced in the 1940's.

3. **Vocabulary Match:** I have provided cards with vocabulary from the story, from the story, as well as definitions. Distribute one card to each student and allow them to circulate to find their "partners". By the end of the activity, students should be standing in pairs, with one student holding the vocabulary word and other the definition. Have each pair read their cards, and have the class decide if the cards match up, discussing their reasoning. Then have students share their ideas about what kind of story they think will involve this vocabulary.



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## Match Page 1

cloth woven by hand

ste put on walls and  
gs before they are  
ed

re as a reminder of a  
l person or event

se that a church  
their minister and his or  
y to live in

objects

it is held over two  
o are getting  
ne Jewish faith

w back street

ne at the same  
than one person



chuppah



tapestry

Prison  
(concentration  
camp)



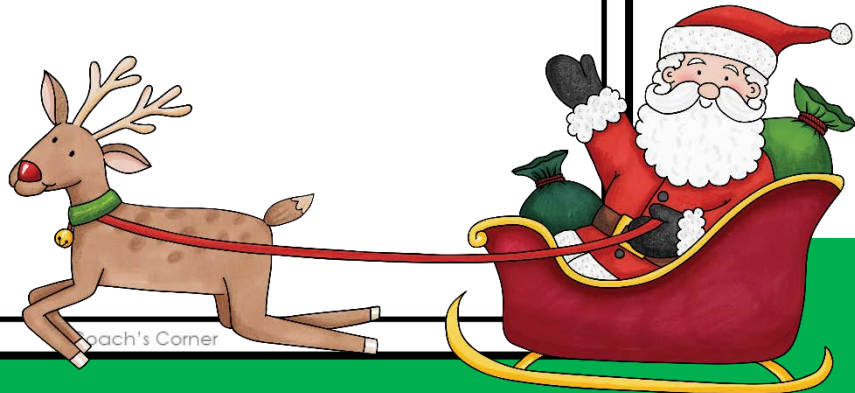
# Activating Prior Knowledge

# Overview

## Unit Components

This literature unit, based on the work of my favorite children's author Patricia Polacco, covers a variety of curriculum areas.

- **Frontloading:** As some of the ideas in this book may be new to students, I have provided three different activities to help build the background knowledge they may need:
  - Take A Stand
  - Pictures
  - Vocabulary Match
- **Drama:** In my classroom I like to use the ideas of Jeffrey Wilhelm ([Action Strategies for Deepening Comprehension](#)) to allow my students to experience the feelings and decisions of the characters in any book we are reading. I have provided 5 role play ideas for ready use in the classroom.
- **Writing:** There are many opportunities in [Christmas Tapestry](#) for students to immerse themselves in writing in the role of a character. I have provided 5 different writing activities to help children think very deeply about the themes of this book.
- **Art:** I have provided examples of various tapestries for you to explore this art form with your students, as well as directions for students to create their own tapestries.
- **Math:** The cloth that Mrs. Zukor made is a central part of this story, and I have created a measurement sheet in which students are asked to estimate the dimensions and cost of this cloth.
- **Comprehension:** While almost all of the above activities lead students into a deeper understanding of the themes of the story, I have included comprehension questions that allow you to analyze how well your class has truly understood the concepts of fate versus coincidence.



# Measurement

## Measurement in Christmas Tapestry

Tapestries can be made in many sizes, depending upon what they will be used for. A tapestry company, Heirloom European Tapestries, says on its website that good quality tapestries sell for about \$150 for a small 2ft by 2ft tapestry.

1. Look at the cloth hanging on the wall in the book. About how long do you think the cloth is? About how wide do you think it is? (Hint: Look at Mr. Weeks standing by the tapestry!)

I think Mrs. Zukor's cloth is about \_\_\_\_\_ long and \_\_\_\_\_ wide because \_\_\_\_\_

2. Based on your estimates of the length & width of the cloth in the story, what would the area and perimeter be?

I think the area of the cloth would be \_\_\_\_\_ and the perimeter would be \_\_\_\_\_ because: \_\_\_\_\_

3. If a 2ft by 2ft tapestry would cost about \$150.00, about how much would a cloth like Mrs. Zukor's cost these days?

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## Christmas Tapestry: Answers

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e wall in the book. About how long do you think the cloth is? About how wide do you think it is? (Hint: Look at Mr. Weeks standing by the tapestry!)

**6 feet** \_\_\_\_\_ long and **4 feet** \_\_\_\_\_ wide

as Mr. Zukor, and men are generally around 6 feet tall, so I think it is about 4 feet wide.

length & width of the cloth in the story, what would the area and perimeter be?

It would be **24 square feet** and the perimeter would be **20 feet** because: \_\_\_\_\_

**multiply length by width.  $6 \times 4 = 24$ , so the area is 24 square feet. To get the perimeter I add all four sides.  $6 + 6 + 4 + 4 = 20$ . So the perimeter is 20 feet.**

cost about \$150.00, about how much would a cloth like Mrs. Zukor's cost these days?

**When a 1" by 1" square would cost about \$75.00. If Mrs. Zukor's cloth is 6 feet by 4 feet, then I multiply  $75 \times 24$ , which is 1800. The cloth was sold as a tapestry these days.**

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# Answer Key



# Art

## Tapestry Art Lesson

In this lesson, students will learn about the shuppa that ultimately reunites Mr. and Mrs. Zukor. They will also learn about tapestries, which are pieces of fabric which have been woven and can tell the viewer a story, particularly if there are several tapestries, such as the Bayeux Tapestry, which tells the story of the Battle of Hastings.

Your students will learn about how tapestries are traditionally made, and then trying to create their own tapestry.

### Materials:

- Video: [Tapestry](#)
- Video: [Paper Weaving with Watercolors](#) (don't worry that it's 1st grade, the steps would do fine with these explicit step-by-step instructions)
- Watercolor paper (2 sheets per student)
- Paper towel
- Paintbrushes
- Containers of water
- Watercolor paint
- Pencils
- Rulers
- Scissors
- Glue



### Instructions:

1. If possible, show students [The Art of Making a Tapestry](#), for them to get an idea of the complexity of weaving.
2. Distribute materials to students.
3. Play the [Paperweaving with Watercolors](#) videos, allowing students to work through the process step-by-step.

**Variation:** Instead of having students paint watercolors before weaving, you can simply give them seasonal colors (ie. red and green) to do the weaving.

**Alternative:** Have students choose one of the 4 designs on the following pages, using seasonal colors.



# Weaving/Coloring

# Drama

## Christmas Tapestry: Drama Activities

If you are using Christmas Tapestry as a read-aloud, you can stop at key moments in the book to involve your students in drama activities. These activities generally allow students to act out scenes from the book, exploring the feelings and perspectives of those involved.

In Christmas Tapestry, the main character, young Jonathan, moved with his family to Detroit where his father will be a minister in the church. Jonathan is upset, and is questioning what purpose his move will have. Students need to spend some time exploring the "what's the point?" view is one of the central themes of the book.

Here are two points at which you could stop and ask students to act out the feelings and experiences of the characters:

1. Phone Call From a Friend: At the beginning of the story, Jonathan and his family are gathered around the dinner table taking about the move. You could stop here and divide the class into groups. Group 1 will take on the role of Jonathan, and Group 2 will take on the role of his best friend from Memphis, who calls at the end of the story. Jonathan likes his new home. Have all the Group 1 students stand up to find a "Group 1" partner. Circulate and listen to the "conversations" when you can see students struggle with the task. This role play could be repeated at the end of the story to explore Jonathan's doubts about why his family moved to Detroit.
2. Diary Entry: Have students write a diary entry after meeting the Weeks family. They can use their background knowledge of the World War II before beginning to share with your students. They can also share the concentration camps.

Allow them 5 to 10 minutes to write their entry, either as a friend or with the class, as you wish.

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3. Tableaux: Choose an important scene from the story (for example, the discovery of the damage of the sacrilege, or the old woman sharing the story of her marriage with the weeks family). Put the students in groups so that each person in the illustration is represented by a student. Give students about 3 minutes to work within their group to:

- choose roles.
- have each group member write one sentence which their character might be thinking to themselves (not saying aloud to another character) during the scene.
- determine the order in which each character will speak.
- physically arrange themselves so that they are in silent, still positions as identical as possible to those in the book's illustration when it is their group's turn.

Signal each group to begin by clapping your hands twice, or some other clear signal. Students will write and recite their lines in their predetermined order. At the end of the tableaux, the teacher claps to release the students from the scene.

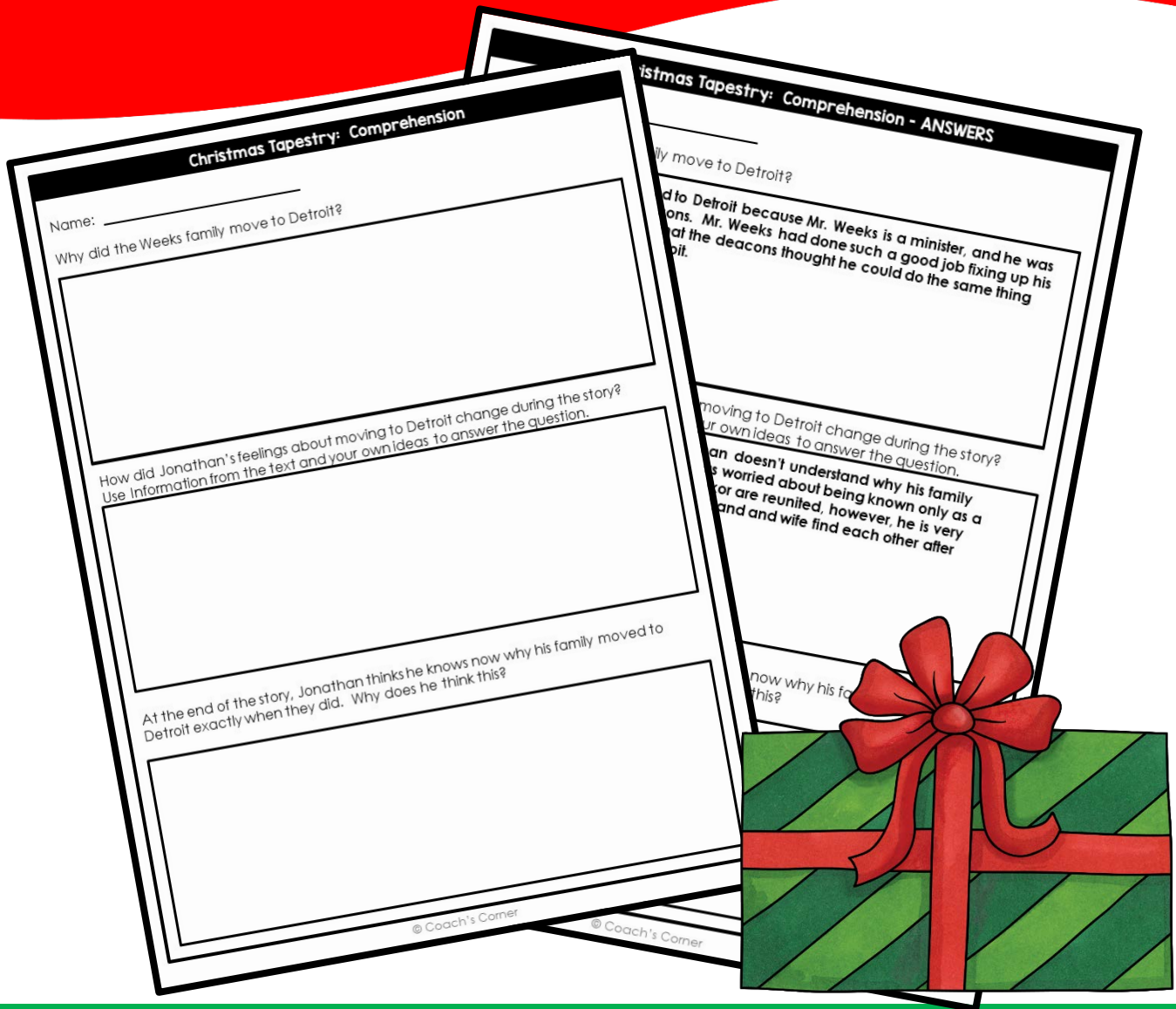
4. Hotseat: This comprehension strategy involves one person (teacher OR student) taking the role of one of the characters. The rest of the participants have the opportunity to ask this "hotseat" character questions to help them learn more about the character's feelings and perspective. If you have never done type of activity before, I suggest you get in the hotseat first, perhaps as Jonathan or the old woman, providing reflective answers that help your students have a better understanding of the character. I have provided "hotseat" cards that you might want to hand out to the students prepare the questions ahead of time. After some practice and understanding of this technique, the questions of students will begin to go beyond the "What's your favorite color?" to deeper questions that will show that they are thinking of the various events and issues that affect the character. For example, "Jonathan, how do you feel about having to make friends in your new home?"

Have students work in groups to create a prequel to the story. They can write out these scenes, or simply give them to act out during the same class. Hopefully students will be able to see the lines of fate and/or circumstance during these scenes.

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# Weaving/Coloring

# Comprehension



# Answer Keys



# Word Search


## Word Search

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

o	t	e	n	t	s	y	o	m	
y	t	s	i	r	c	a	s	n	
c	e	m	b	r	o	i	d	e	
h	a	c	o	m	m	e	m	o	
a	i	y	s	n	m	e	n	p	
r	s	a	r	i	i	o	l	n	
o	m	o	e	t	s	a	i	s	
n	m	a	c	i	s	f	l	e	
e	n	r	n	t	i	e	p	l	
m	r	u	e	c	o	w	p	r	
s	h	r	e	m	n	m	l	a	
r	o	n	e	s	e	u	q	i	
r	t	w	e	d	d	i	n	g	

sacristy  
antiques  
wedding  
commemorate

commissioned  
tapestry  
chuppah  
commence



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## Word Search


Name: \_\_\_\_\_

o	t	e	n	t	s	y	o	m	q	n	a	e
y	t	s	i	r	c	a	s	n	m	e	s	c
c	e	m	b	r	o	i	d	e	r	g	m	n
h	a	c	o	m	m	e	m	o	r	a	t	e
a	i	y	s	n	m	e	n	p	g	n	e	m
r	s	a	r	i	i	o	l	n	r	o	c	m
o	m	o	e	t	s	a	i	s	r	s	c	o
n	m	a	c	i	s	f	l	e	a	r	h	c
e	n	r	n	t	i	e	p	l	c	a	u	o
m	r	u	e	c	o	w	p	r	e	p	p	a
s	h	r	e	m	n	m	l	a	n	y	p	u
r	o	n	e	s	e	u	q	i	t	n	a	p
r	t	w	e	d	d	i	n	g	i	m	h	e

sacristy  
antiques  
wedding  
commemorate

commissioned  
tapestry  
chuppah  
commence

alley  
menorah  
embroider  
antiques



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# Answer Key