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When young Trisha finds out her class at the new school is known as The Junkyard, she is devastated. She moved from her old town so she wouldn't be in a special class anymore! But then she meets her teacher, the quirky and invincible Mrs. Peterson, and her classmates, an oddly brilliant group of students each with his or her own unique talent. And it is here in The Junkyard that Trisha learns the true meaning of genius, and that this group of misfits are, in fact, wonders, all of them. Based on a real-life event in Patricia Polacco's childhood, this ode to teachers will inspire all readers to find their inner genius.

The Junkyard Wonders Details

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Author : Patricia Polacco

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From Reader Review The Junkyard Wonders for online ebook

Treasa says

Trisha is thrilled when she is allowed to stay with her father in Michigan to go to school this year - here nobody knows that she only just started reading or that she used to be in a classes for "special" children. But her excitement is dulled when she learns that she has been placed in Mrs. Peterson's class, a class that is known as the Junkyard. Yet while others may think the students in Mrs. Peterson's class are all weird or stupid, those lucky enough to be a part of the Junkyard know otherwise: they are all unique and special and extremely bright. Thanks to the guidance and love of Mrs. Peterson, these children blossom while forming friendships that will last a lifetime. And when they lose one of their fellow Junkyard Wonders, the class comes together to create a tribute to him that they will never forget.

What a beautiful book! The story is touching and told in a very effective and simple way. In just a few words and deceptively simple illustrations, the bonds between the characters and their emotions and thoughts come through as clearly as if I had been there myself. The characters in the book are amazing, especially the exceptional Mrs. Peterson, who is the sort of inspiring teacher that every child should have. And the narrator's voice is a strong one, which is not surprising given that the story is one taken directly from Patricia Polacco's own life. It is a wonderful book about the struggles a child goes through when he is considered "different" and, most importantly, it is a book about friendship.

Dolly says

We really loved this book. Patricia Polacco has done it again, with another thoughtful, tear-jerking story that reveals a little more about her childhood. The way that one teacher can really make a group of children shine is so inspiring - I hope that one day I can make a child feel as special, as creative, as part of something as she did.

I love how the teacher embraced the moniker of "The Junkyard" and showed the children how wonderful a junkyard can be. I love that she turned the "rejects" into wonders and proved that children who learn differently or who have medical problems aren't simply deficient or worthless. This is such a heartfelt and true story and we really, really enjoyed reading it together.

This book was featured as one of the selections for the June 2011: Persons Facing Physical Challenges discussion and the September 2010: Back-to-School reads at the Picture-Book Club in the Children's Books group here at Goodreads. I'm so glad that we had the opportunity to read this book!

Shelli says

Patricia Polacco books are perfect for intermediate/junior high age teachers to share with their students. These books are not a quick five minute read, and not baby books as picture books are sometimes described by the misinformed. Such magical discussions and learning can take place after sharing one of these reads.

This story could be a sequel or a companion book to Thank You, Mr. Falker, although it's not necessary to

have read to understand and enjoy this mini biography from Patricia Polacco's own struggles during childhood.

Having not learned to read until much later in her school career than is normal, Patricia is placed in "special" classes. She had hoped that by living with her father in Michigan her reputation as being a dunce would not follow her from California. It's true that one can't run from their troubles and she was placed in Mrs. Peterson's class of different children, lovingly referred to as the Junkyard Kids.

This is an extremely touching story about never allowing other's opinions of you to shape who you are and what your potential may be.

Lisa Vegan says

Patricia Polacco is a wonder; she's just wonderful. She contributes so much for children who are struggling, and for all readers, with the majority of her books; this is one of those books. It reminded me very much of two other of my favorite Polacco books: *Thank You, Mr. Falker* and *Mr. Lincoln's Way*. I love marvelous teacher stories and these three books tell about remarkable teachers.

Last autumn into early this year, 2010, I read my way through all of Polacco's 51 books (this is the 52nd) starting with *Mrs. Katz and Tush* (I think) in early November and ending with *Mr. Lincoln's Way* in early January. Many have brought me to tears, and this book did that.

This is another autobiographical picture book for children. Polacco had difficulty learning to read (and learning other subjects too) when she was young and was put in special classes.

This story is about how for one year she went to live with her father and attended school for one year there, thinking that the other kids wouldn't know about her past difficulties. Things don't work out exactly as she'd planned.

This is an inspiring true story about Polacco, her wonderful classmates, and her very special teacher. What a wonder she was! Teachers can make all the difference!

This is a good book for children who have anything different about them, who have any kind of difficulties. It's a story for teachers to show them how to do it. It's a story for all kids, and it is a book that would be helpful for the bullied and those who bully other children.

I cried most of the way through it, a typical reaction of mine to Polacco's books. Her books are so heartfelt.

Make sure to read the last page! Polacco tells what happened to all the members of her tribe, a small group within her class that she belonged to, the vanilla group, which was another great idea of her teacher's. I loved hearing what happened with everyone when they grew up; including that information added immeasurably to this story.

The junkyard wonders in this book, both children and items, make the title for this book so perfect.

Polacco always had her art, even when other subjects were a challenge. I always enjoy her illustrations. I love the expressions on the faces of all the people on every page. Her illustrations perfectly fit the story.

I eagerly awaited many months for this book to be published and I was rewarded by one of Polacco's very best books. Now, I can't wait for the next book. In the past she has often had a new book published every spring and every fall; I fervently hope that there will be a second book in 2010!

Edited to add (since I had to go back and correct a typo anyway): I very much admire Patricia Polacco for turning her personal pain into books, books that will help others and bring enjoyment to readers.

Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says

This story picks up some time after *Thank You, Mr. Falker*. After Mr. Falker helps her learn to read, the young girl in the story chooses to live with her father and go to a different school, hoping to be put in a regular class. Instead, she finds herself in a special ed class again, but, luckily, with a very special teacher, Mrs. Peterson. Mrs. Peterson teaches the class how to see themselves as just as smart as the other children, as able to accomplish great things just like anyone else. I wish she had made some kind of protest about people referring to her class as "the junkyard," but, given the times, I guess that just wasn't done. The ending is bittersweet, but also filled with the hope that the entire school would learn something from the accomplishments of "the junkyard wonders." Recommended!

Christine says

Suggested Grade Levels: 4th-8th grade

Genre: Contemporary Realistic Fiction

Themes: Self-Discovery, Growing-Up, Understanding Death, Understanding Disabilities

Awards: Triple Crown Award Nominee and Rhode Island--Children's Book Award Nominee

The beloved Patricia Polacco has done it again; changed readers' perspectives through a picture book. The "Junkyard Wonders" is a story about a young girl who decides to live with her dad in Michigan rather than her mother so she can start in a new school where no one will know her as a "special" student. Her bubble dream to fit in and be "normal" bursts when she learns she is in "The Junkyard" classroom at her new school, the classroom that all the "different" kids attend who are "junk." Things begin to change when she meets her teacher, Mrs. Peterson. By the end of the day Mrs. Peterson has the students memorizing the definition of genius because that is what Mrs. Peterson tells them they all are. Friendships blossom and the classroom turns into a family. The reality of their classmate's illness shocks them all when he passes away. The Junkyard family comes together to find a special way to remember their dear friend. This book has so many lessons wrapped into one story. It will take several reads to find comfort in understanding the lessons to be learned.

The illustrations are embedded with emotion. As a reader you will find yourself feeling joy, frustration and sorrow right along with the characters through the intricate illustrations. The students in this book are dealing with many different emotions from growing up, acceptance, death and friendships. The reader sees each individual's emotions through detailed facial expressions, but what is more impressive are the details in the background. For example, on one page where Junkyard Wonders are being taunted because of their special badges, the reader can see the crowds of children in the background yelling and laughing, giving the feeling of how widely unaccepted the Junkyard Wonders were at their school. The reader can't leave the page without feeling a level of discomfort with the teasing and taunting.

This book would be an excellent book to use with intermediate students to give perspectives on acceptance. The children in the book are teased and bullied because they are in a special education classroom. The illustrations and vivid word choice truly give the reader the taste of how it feels to be in the children's shoes. Teachers could use this book to open the classroom up to conversations about bullies and bystanders. Also the teacher, Mrs. Peterson, plays a vital role in the children's perceptions of themselves. Students could study Mrs. Peterson and do a character analysis of her and explain the intents of her various actions in the story. Be sure to read the author's note at the end of the book to find out just how precious the "Junkyard" students turned out to be. This book is a must read for any intermediate classroom.

Kathryn says

I absolutely loved this book! It touched me deeply. I will be back to write a more detailed review when I feel more coherent.

Lindsey says

Wow. I will read more of Patricia Polacco's books. My family loved this book together, it made us cry with empathy and hope for all young minds. This was a beautifully written memoir type picture book, but for older kids. The illustrations are fantastic and the story lends itself well to open discussions with our 7 year old about how to treat people, how to see the beauty of differences within people, and the joy of learning.

Jessica Schwartz says

I recently read this book and thought it was just fantastic. Patricia Polacco tells the story of a girl who decides to stay in Michigan for the school year with her dad and grandma. She is placed into a special class called the "Junkyard." She struggles at first to deal with the fact that she is in yet another "different" class. However, the friendships she made and her teacher, Mrs. Peterson make this experience one of the most incredible.

This complex picture book can be implemented in the classroom in so many ways. One of the themes is the power of friendship. Her friends Jodi, Thom, Gibbie and Ravenne are placed in a tribe and work together on projects. They form such a bond that shows students how important it is to have the type of friends who will always look out for you. Each of her friends has something that makes them different. These differences is also what makes them so special. Gibbie's love of building helps the group find a beautiful model airplane to re-create. Jodi's disease helps protect the group from bullies at recess. It is important that students see that everyone is different in one way or another, and we need to embrace this.

The definition of a "Junkyard" is also extremely significant. Mrs. Peterson explains it a place full of wondrous possibilities. Where one persons trash is another's treasure. She asks the class to find objects and look at them for not what they are, but for what they can be. When reading this book with students, I feel it is essential to truly think about this and relate it to personal experiences.

This book also sends the message to never give up. Though the airplane needed a lot of work, the group's

determination to make it fly and "go to the moon" made everything work.

Overall, this is an amazing book that sends so many wonderful messages to students. I would definitely recommend it to anyone!

Manybooks says

This autobiographical wonder (written and illustrated by the incomparable Patricia Polacco) has it all so to speak; it is evocative, heartwarming, emotionally wrenching. When Tricia decides that she wants to live with her father for a while, she is dismayed when she is, yet again, put into a special education class, *the junkyard*. However, Mrs. Peterson's class has incredible, wonderful classmates (friends) for Tricia, and an extraordinary teacher, who inspires her students to be creative, imaginative, to believe in themselves, who shows them that they are truly "special" in the best, most positive sense of the word.

I find myself both inspired and enveloped by the many emotions, the many themes, messages flowing into and out of this absolute gem of a story (and a true story at that, based on Patricia Polacco's own childhood experiences); a rich and varied tapestry of happiness, sadness, anger, fear and frustration has been allowed to enter my soul, my very being. And then there is Mrs. Peterson, a truly one-of-a-kind teacher. She makes Tricia and her classmates believe in themselves. She encourages their creativity, their dreams and ideas, at a time when most of the other teachers and students only see that the students in Mrs. Peterson's *junkyard* are somehow "different" that they are "weird" that they are "challenged." While Mrs. Peterson might not actually be able to stop the bullying, the negativity that is often directed at her students, she makes her students realise that they "can" that life is full of wonder and endless possibility.

I would recommend this to older children, above the age of seven or eight. Although there is quite a lot of descriptive text, it is not primarily that which makes me hesitate to recommend this amazing and heartfelt narrative to very young children, but the fact that the story does cover some rather heavy themes, such as bullying and the unexpected death of a classmate (I cried while reading, and I was also fuming with indignation at the bullying and the fact that the principal chose to listen to the tales told by the school bully).

Like other reviewers have also mentioned, I don't think that Patricia Polacco's bold and colourful illustrations would be all that appealing to me on their own. However, in combination with the text, they work amazingly well. A fitting complement to the story, the illustrations mirror and expand on the joy, the heartbreak, the love, the hope, all of the emotions portrayed and described in and by the narrative. Very highly recommended.

Sarah Hamrick says

Patricia Polacco, author of The Junkyard Wonders, writes about a young girl named Trisha who is ashamed of her special education class. She begs her parents to let her move schools for a fresh start at a new school where no one knows "she used to be dumb," but much to her dismay, she is placed in another special class, referred to as the "Junkyard," in her new school. The class got its name because all the students are "odd, like stuff in a junkyard." However, Trisha comes to appreciate her class as she finds out how special her classmates really are. They all have unique talents and abilities that their teacher Mrs. Peterson encourages them to see for themselves. Mrs. Peterson shows them how wonderful they truly are even when bullies bring

them down. The class grows together, and even through trials and losses never ceases to be anything less than Junkyard Wonders, students who forgot what they weren't, and imagined what they could be. Mrs. Peterson taught them to believe in themselves when no one else would. Because of her support, these students were able to overcome their hardships and recognize their inner genius.

I would use this book as a read aloud to my fourth or fifth graders to teach about the inner genius in all of my students. Not only does this book expose students to challenges some of their classmates may face, but it demonstrates what a gift these students are and all the wonderful things they bring to the classroom and to their fellow students. I would love to include a discussion about how the author wrote this book based on events from her own life and experience, and how she overcame adversity. I hope this would inspire my students to be loving and accepting, while understanding that everyone has unique gifts and an inner genius that others can learn from. Overall I LOVED this book and its powerful message.

Crystal Marcos says

I love this book! I enjoy reading uplifting stories based on true events. I like Polacco's use of light humor in a serious topic. Being different doesn't have to be a bad thing. It can be quite a wonderful thing. Bravo to Mrs. Peterson for helping the children to see their full potential! I can only hope that my child has an experience with at least one teacher like this. This book made me remember my absolute favorite teacher Mrs. Nimitz. She was my 7th and 8th grade teacher. I was behind in reading and US history when I moved from Hawaii to Illinois. I finished as Salutatorian my 8th grade year. Thank you Mrs. Nimitz! I found myself with tears in my eyes as I read where the children from The Junkyard were today. Awesome! I can see reading this book with my daughter someday and having great discussions about it. I believe it is a wonderful learning tool for children.

Donalyn says

As readers, we are blessed that Patricia Polacco continues to find stories to tell us. In this touching book, Polacco shares a pivotal year in her life with the magical Mrs. Peterson and her schoolmates, the Junkyard Wonders. Every teacher and librarian who reads this book will remember the power we have to change children's lives.

Eva Leger says

After reading this book and a few of the reviews that are here on GR I'm definitely going to look into some more of *Patricia Polacco's* book.

When Julia and I started this I had no idea where it was going. Although I found out fairly quickly I was still surprised at her execution. Julia, at 5, "got" a lot more than I thought she would.

I like how this deals with so many things within something bigger. The main character, Trisha, starts school only to find out the few friends she had weren't speaking to her any longer. Then she finds that she's in advanced classes. With a bunch of kids that the others definitely do not consider normal. (Sound realistic anyone?) While I was never in any advanced classes (although Julia may be if she stays on the same track she's on) it's still highly relatable.

The definition of the word genius was a bit much for Julia so I shortened it so she could grasp it. I also like that (and this is something I noticed quietly but Julia pointed out to me) that Trisha lives with her Father and Grandmother (another very relatable aspect for many, many children today - including Julia). Mrs. Peterson's way of teaching is beautiful and this is a great way to show kids that they'll (hopefully) meet some wonderful teachers along their way through school.

The confrontation with Barton? Awesome - something everyone can relate to, even the Barton's of the world. There was just so, so much included. Jody's character and what happened to him is something I faltered with for a few minutes. I was scared Julia wouldn't really know how to handle it since she's has minimal experience with death as of yet. I had nothing to worry about - she asked some questions and we talked. I was a little surprised I guess, I wasn't aware something of that magnitude would happen in the story. What happens with the principal at the end of the book is another aspect I liked - everyone deals with disappointment - even teachers. And they try to find a way through the problem - like the characters here did. Probably my favorite thing about the book is that the end wasn't mushy with the Barton-like kids finally seeing the light and accepting the smarties. That's not the way it works in real life and it would have hurt the story immensely for me.

Randie D. Camp, M.S. says

At her old school, Trisha was known for her struggles with reading, so she is disappointed to learn that she has been placed in the "junkyard" class at her new school. Trisha's disappointment lessens as she begins to make friends with the unique students in her class. Fortunately, for Trisha, Mrs. Peterson is an incredible teacher who shows her students that they are not "junk" but brilliant wonders.

Several events take place in this book to offer hope, inspiration, and encouragement to students who are special.

April Storm says

'The Junkyard Wonders' by Patricia Polacco is a book based on an event that happened in Polacco's childhood. The story is about a girl named Tricia who moves to a new school, hoping to be seen as 'normal'. However, she is put in the special class again- called 'The Junkyard'. The story follows Tricia and her class as they each use their unique talents to help each other. Their motivating teacher, Mrs. Peterson, inspires them to be themselves. The colorful pictures combined with the well-written words bring this book to life.

I would use this book in my classroom to teach my students about acceptance and bullying. It would be a great read for students who may have a learning disability, since the main character of the book has dyslexia. I also think it would be beneficial for your whole class to hear- those that may be bullied or those that may bully other students. I think this book would be helpful in cultivating a friendly and family-like classroom community. I would read this to students in upper-elementary school, because it deals with some heavier topics like the death of a classmate.

This was a WOW book for me because of how it uplifts children who are different. Even though the class is called the 'Junkyard' the students learn how their differences make them special and unique. I think the book

does a great job of recognizing differences and gives students a window into how students in special education classes may feel. I would highly recommend this book!

M.M. Hudson says

The Junkyard Wonders is a sweet tale about a group of kids who are tossed aside by society. They are nicknamed "The Junkyard Kids". They are bullied by the "normal" kids and seen as less.

Written in first person, each character is described in detail, first beginning with what makes them "special" but then what makes them superb! Together, along with an amazing teacher, who sees their potential, they rise together to become and do something great. Written within the pages is great parental support.

The characters come alive with colorful illustrations and show their mannerisms in a fun, pleasant way. I loved these kids and the talents that each had. There is a bit of sadness that happens about the middle of the book but that sadness fuels the children to continue on.

My favorite part of this book is the very last page. It tells what happens to each of these kids and what they go on to do. Oh, didn't I tell you? This book is based on a real live event that the author experienced. Yes, she was one of the kids!

This is well worth reading and should be on book shelves everywhere.

5 stars.

Disclosure: I obtained a copy of this book from my local library. The views here are 100% my own and may differ from yours. ~M.M. aka Naila Moon

Lilly Smithdeal says

The Junkyard Wonders was a great realistic fiction book that I would love to read with students in grades 3-5. The story talks about a group of students whose classroom is referred to as "the junkyard." The students realize they are all very different from one another and all have special characteristics of their own. The students use these differences in a positive way in their class and begin to realize that the differences are positive. This would be a great book to read with students in order to help them learn about appreciating difference among people and having compassion towards others who are different than yourself. This book could be a read aloud before students interview one another and find differences among themselves and their classmates. The students could then write about what a day in the life of a peer that they interviewed would look like. This would help students show compassion towards one another's differences. This book was a WOW book for me because of the emotional story that is told. It was so encouraging to read about the students recognizing their differences and then all using their special talents to create something important and meaningful to their entire class.

Ronyell says

As a young girl, author Patricia Polacco was diagnosed as dyslexic and she was put into special classes, however in this book, “The Junkyard Wonders,” young Patricia Polacco has discovered a very special teacher named Mrs. Peterson who teaches her and other students like her that they are special no matter what anyone says about them! “The Junkyard Wonders” is truly one of Patricia Polacco’s best works ever created for children!

Beautiful, simply beautiful! I have read many books that depicts Patricia Polacco’s troublesome childhood when she was coping with dyslexia, but never have I read a book that truly showed the power of true friendship in such a hopeful light! Patricia Polacco has done a magnificent job at both writing and illustrating this book about a group of kids who each have a disability and how they learned to believe in themselves through an inspiring teacher. Patricia Polacco’s writing is dramatic and heartwarming at the same and I truly felt sad for Trisha and her friends as they were teased at school because of their disabilities, but I loved the way that Trisha and her new friends stick together through all the hard times they had at school and I also loved the way that Trisha and her new friends spend so much time with each other after they met which proves how close they are to each other. What I truly loved about this book was the teacher, Mrs. Peterson and it was so inspiring about how she helped the children with disabilities believe in themselves and see that they are special in a good way. I also loved her definition of a genius as it defined that everyone in that classroom are all geniuses and it does not single anyone out. I also loved the fact about how Mrs. Peterson showed the class about making new objects out of something old in the junkyard and it was truly special in how they built an airplane together since it showed how everyone came together to make something that represented the whole class. Patricia Polacco’s illustrations are truly beautiful and heartwarming at the same time and I loved the illustrations of Patricia Polacco as a child as she always wears pigtails and a dress and has a hopeful expression on her face. My favorite image was of Mrs. Peterson coming into her class and you can see all the children including Trisha staring up at Mrs. Peterson thinking that she was intimidating, however I really loved the appearance of Mrs. Peterson as she does have an appearance of a strict teacher as she wears a gray dress, wears glasses and has her hair in a bun, but she has such a kind face and wisdom beyond her years that I immediately fell in love with her!

All in all, “The Junkyard Wonders” is a truly memorable book for children who have disabilities and want to believe in themselves. It makes me really want the teachers that Patricia Polacco had when she was small because they were all truly inspiring teachers! I would recommend this book to children ages five and up due to length of the book being a bit too long for children.

Karol says

Oh, I really loved this one! A story about kids with the stigma of special needs, and how the teacher believed in them and inspired them to be all that they could be. The story was both compelling and uplifting.
