



The Mermaid's Purse

Patricia Polacco

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Based on the life of beloved author-illustrator Patricia Polacco's own amazing grandmother, this wonderful celebration of reading and community is as exhilarating as it is heartwarming.

Young Stella loves books so much, her books begin to take over the farmhouse. "Why, Stell, you need your own library to hold those books," her pa tells her, so he and the neighbors build her one! She calls it "the Mermaid's Purse," since the midwife said Stella was born in one. Stella opens the Purse to her neighbors and travels around the countryside, sharing her books door-to-door. Not everyone gives them a chance at first, like grouchy Pig Ears Lonsberry. But farmer Dunkle sure changes his mind when information in a book saves his sick sheep. Eventually, everybody comes to love the Mermaid's Purse—so when a tornado destroys it, scattering Stella's precious books far and wide, the whole community rallies to help.

The Mermaid's Purse Details

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From Reader Review The Mermaid's Purse for online ebook

Becky B says

Polacco relates a story of a girl born during a storm who developed a love for books, created her own library, and from a young age devoted herself to sharing books with her community. When disaster strikes, the community she blessed with books and knowledge returns the favor.

A touching story that Polacco relates in a note in the back of the book is based on her grandmother's life. Her grandmother really did have a library she called the Mermaid's Purse, she really taught people in her community to read and love books, and she went on to be a teacher and librarian. An inspiring story about a girl who blessed her community and was in turn blessed by them. There's a lot of words in this picture book (as is common for Polacco) so this might be better for lower elementary grades than preschool or kindergarten. It would also make a good inspirational read aloud for middle grades before they brainstorm ways to help their own community or how to help those who need disaster relief aid.

KimBear says

"Young Stella loves books so much, her books begin to take over the farmhouse. "Why, Stell, you need your own library to hold those books," her pa tells her, so he and the neighbors build her one! She calls it "the Mermaid's Purse," since the midwife said Stella was born in one. Stella opens the Purse to her neighbors and travels around the countryside, sharing her books door-to-door. Not everyone gives them a chance at first, like grouchy Pig Ears Lonsberry. But farmer Dunkle sure changes his mind when information in a book saves his sick sheep. Eventually, everybody comes to love the Mermaid's Purse—so when a tornado destroys it, scattering Stella's precious books far and wide, the whole community rallies to help."

What a wonderful story!! I think this may be my favorite Polacco book ever! I also love the fact that it's about her grandmother. And, once again, I learned something by reading a book...I had never heard of a "mermaid's purse" before. Don't miss out on this one.

Lynn Davidson says

This is a true story about the author's grandmother, Estelle, whom everyone called Stella.

Stella was born during a storm and strangely, all her life, she sensed oncoming storms before there was any visible sign of them.

Stella loved books and reading so much from the time she was a baby. She had so many books that her father built her her very own little library to keep them all in. She named it the Mermaid's Purse. The farmers around didn't see much use for books, but over time Stella convinced them to read. Then tragedy struck.

This is a very interesting and wonderfully told story.

Gretchen says

This will be a book I use toward the beginning of the year to talk about the love of reading. This book shares that books can be a way to connect, to learn, to share, and to entertain. Of course I need no convincing that books are the greatest gifts and simply magical to read and own, but there are students I have encountered who don't have the same feelings as I do. For those students, and to continue the excitement and love of reading in those like me, this book is one of the first of the year that I will share to help them see my perspective about reading and love.

Beckie says

I grew up on Patricia Polacco so whenever I can get my hands on one of her books, I jump at it. This book came across our libraries on order list so I reserved it to make sure we got it as soon as it came out. As usual, Polacco doesn't disappoint. This beautiful story is about one of her relatives and her love of books. Reading this book took me back to my childhood and my mom reading *Thunder Cake* to me. Highly recommended, heartwarming story for all ages.

Christine Turner says

"Young Stella loves books so much, her books begin to take over the farmhouse. oWhy, Stell, you need your own library to hold those books,o her pa tells her, so he and the neighbors build her one! She calls it othe Mermaid's Purse,o since the midwife said Stella was born in one. Stella opens the Purse to her neighbors and travels around the countryside, sharing her books door-to-door. Not everyone gives them a chance at first, like grouchy Pig Ears Lonsberry. But farmer Dunkle sure changes his mind when information in a book saves his sick sheep. Eventually, everybody comes to love the Mermaid's Purse-so when a tornado destroys it, scattering Stella's precious books far and wide, the whole community rallies to help."

Alice Ball says

I love this historical fiction (based on a real person) story about a young girl who loves books and spreads that love throughout her community in spite of resistance. Great story for teaching resilience in the face of setbacks. Beautiful work.

Lisa Vegan says

4 1/2 stars

I wasn't familiar with the term mermaid's purse and was afraid this would be one of Polacco's folk tale books for young children, and I tend not to like them as much as her emotionally moving picture books for older children. This turned out to be one of the latter. Recommended for 8 and up, and for some ages 5-7 for read aloud.

It's a story about books and I always appreciate those, and a story based on her own grandmother's experience and I love reading Polacco's stories about her own life and her family members' lives. She has such history in Michigan and I can understand what she's made it her home.

The illustrations are great. I love most of them. I'm particularly fond of the cover illustration, a picture that also appears inside the book as part of the story. Some of the other pictures are even more creative though, and in a style almost like Chagall for a few. Wonderful detail to the illustrations! Also, the last page has 3 photos of her grandmother and others in different settings.

I love how she dedicated this book (the 66th by her that I've read) to her editor of 30 years.

This is a real celebration of books, reading, community, and giving and sharing. Very uplifting! Polacco is lucky to have such a strong sense of family and of place. I so admire how she turns challenges into triumphs.

Highly recommended. Ditto for most Patricia Polacco books. I feel so grateful to have found her and her books. I've been happily reading them for the last 7 years. I hope there will be many more. I'll definitely keep an eye out for any future books.

A note: I think that I'm caught up and that I've read every Patricia Polacco book published so far.

A note about my star ratings: I quickly started comparing Patricia Polacco with Patricia Polacco, and that's not fair. Many of my ratings would likely be one star or two higher if I'd been comparing her books with all other books I've read. In particular, some of those 4 star books I should have rated 5 stars. As I made this list I kept wondering what I was thinking, underrating, something I don't normally do.

in the order I've read them, from November 2009 to November 2016 (I hope I haven't left out any):

1. Mrs. Katz and Tush – 4 stars,
2. Babushka's Doll – 3 stars,
3. The Keeping Quilt – 5 stars,
4. Thank you Mr. Falker – 5 stars,
5. Picnic at Mudsock Meadow – 2 stars,
6. Ginger and Petunia – 3 stars,
7. For the Love of Autumn – 4 stars,
8. The Trees of the Dancing Goats – 5 stars,
9. The Lemonade Club – 5 stars,
10. My Ol' man – 3 stars,
11. Oh, Look! – 3 stars,
12. The Graves Family – 4 stars,
13. Emma Kate – 5 stars,
14. G is for Goat – 4 stars,
15. Welcome Comfort – 3 stars,
16. The Bee Tree – 4 stars,
17. Thunder Cake – 4 stars,
18. Pink and Say – 4 stars,
19. Just Plain Fancy – 4 stars,
20. January's Sparrow – 5 stars,
21. Betty Doll – 5 stars,

22. Chicken Sunday – 5 stars,
23. Some Birthday! – 3 stars,
24. Meteor! – 3 stars,
25. In Our Mothers' House – 5 stars,
26. Tikvah Means Hope – 5 stars,
27. The Butterfly – 5 stars,
28. Rechenka's Eggs – 4 stars,
29. Aunt Chip and the Great Triple Creek Dam Affair – 5 stars,
30. When Lightning Comes in a Jar – 3 stars,
31. Mrs. Mack – 5 stars,
32. Luba and the Wren – 3 stars,
33. Someone for Mr. Sussman – 4 stars,
34. Appelemando's Dream – 3 stars,
35. Something About Hensley's – 4 stars,
36. Firetalking – 4 stars,
37. The Grave's Family Goes Camping – 4 stars,
38. Boat Ride with Lillian Two Blossom – 3 stars,
39. My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother – 3 stars,
40. Uncle Vova's Tree – 4 stars,
41. Babushka's Mother Goose – 3 stars,
42. Rotten Richie and the Ultimate Dare – 3 stars,
43. An Orange for Frankie – 5 stars,
44. In Enzo's Splendid Gardens – 5 stars,
45. I Can Hear the Sun – 5 stars,
46. John Phillip Duck – 4 stars,
47. Babushka Baba Yaga – 3 stars,
48. Christmas Tapestry – 4 stars,
49. Mr. Lincoln's Way – 5 stars,
50. Mommies Say Shhh! – 3 stars,
51. The Junkyard Wodners – 5 stars,
52. Just in Time, Abraham Lincoln – 5 stars,
53. Bun Bun Button – 4 stars,
54. The Art of Miss Chew – 5 stars,
55. Bully – 4 stars,
56. The Blessing Cup – 5 stars,
57. Gifts of the Heart – 4 stars,
58. Clara and Davie – 5 stars,
59. Fiona's Lace – 5 stars,
60. Mr. Wayne's Masterpiece – 4 stars,
61. An A From Miss Keller – 5 stars,
62. Tucky Jo and Little Heart – 4 stars,
63. Because of Thursday – 4 stars,
64. Still Firetalking – 4 stars,
- * and this book: 65. The Mermaid's Purse – 5 stars

I also read, around the time I read Pink and Say, a book she only illustrated:

66. Casey at the Bat: A Ballad of the Republic Sung in the Year 1888

So 66 books now. A wonderful collection!

Lynn says

How is that Polacco's stories all have happy endings? Is it her talent for crafting narratives for events in her life? Do we all have such events in our life worth writing about? Or was she blessed with a lifetime of interesting events as well as a talent for writing?

Carol Royce Owen says

Patricia Polacco never ceases to amaze me. Every story she writes has such intriguing characters, so many based on her own relatives and friends. This newest book, *The Mermaid's Purse* is based on the life of her grandmother, Estella Barber. Stella became known throughout the county of Locke Center as the girl who loved books. After her father built her a building to house her hundreds of books, which she named *The Mermaid's Purse*, Stella set out to not only share those books with other children, but also with the farmers throughout the area who scorned her love of reading. Eventually the farmers and others in the town grew to love Stella as they saw the importance of reading, and all there is to learn from books. But when a tornado destroys her beloved *Mermaid's Purse*, Stella is overcome with sorrow, and is left speechless, until the entire community helps to replace all that was lost.

Sara Grochowski says

A girl determined to share her love of books in a small Michigan town. Is it any surprise that I adore this book?

Martha says

Patricia Polacco's story about her grandmother Estella Barber's love of books from a tender age AND her adventure with her yet-to-be husband, is just plain heartwarming. Beginning with resuscitating Fred back to life after he nearly drowning as a youngster, years later led to a happy lifelong marriage to this friend from her childhood, "Moon-eyes Fred." As a young girl, she started a library with the help of her father, who built her the structure to house her books. Sometime thereafter Estella predicted a storm in the air, she was right, a ferocious storm collapsed her wondrous library called the *Mermaid's Purse*. The loving resurrection of the "Mermaid's Purse" occurred because of the support of her neighbors, who returned the many books she had loaned them, enough to continue her lending library. This is a wondrous story that rings true to the spirit of librarians who all know the worth of a library to its community! A must buy!

Nick says

There have been many picture books about books and libraries, but this one is something special. The author's own grandmother is the main character in this story, based on real events from the late 19th century.

Stella loved books so much that her family and friends built her a little library to hold them, and she shared her books and the skill of reading with the local population. Of course, something awful could go wrong, and did, but the story comes together with a very loving resolution.

This is not a great story for very young children, but for older ones this would be good. Like many of her books, this could be a picture book for older readers, or a good read-to-me book for kids just at the age to start appreciating books and reading.

Yapha says

Patricia Polacco never disappoints! It made me cry, of course...

Jessie says

A beautiful story about community and the power books have to bring people together.
