



**BABUSHKA BABA YAGA  
BOAT RIDE WITH LILLIAN TWO BLOSSOM  
PINK & SAY  
CHICKEN SUNDAY  
by Patricia Polacco  
Teacher's guide by the author**

**INTRODUCTION**

"We collect things and memories and store them lovingly in the recesses of our souls ... only to be brought out into the sunlight by telling about them over and over again." - Patricia Polacco

This guide is designed to assist teachers, librarians, and parents in promoting educational fun among primary readers. The suggestions offered in this guide will not only help children enjoy reading, they will also help them retain new information related to each of the stories.

The books included in this guide were chosen because of their positive themes and their ability to engage the child's imagination and natural curiosity. Each book is listed separately with suggested vocabulary, topics, themes, and activities.

## About Patricia Polacco

Born Patricia Ann Barber in Lansing, Michigan, to parents of Russian and Ukrainian descent on one side and Irish on the other, Patricia Polacco grew up in both California and Michigan. Her school year was spent in Oakland, California, and summers in her beloved Michigan. She describes her family members as marvelous storytellers. "My fondest memories are of sitting around a stove or an open fire, eating apples and popping corn while listening to the old ones tell glorious stories about their homeland and the past. We are tenacious traditionalists and sentimentalist... With each retelling our stories gain a little more Umph!"

Studying in the United States and Australia, Polacco earned an M.F.A. and a Ph.D. in art history, specializing in Russian and Greek painting, and iconographic history. She is a museum consultant on the restoration of icons. As a participant in many citizen exchange programs for writers and illustrators, Polacco has traveled extensively in Russia as well as other former Soviet republics. She continues to support programs that encourage Russo-American friendships and understanding. She is also deeply involved in inner-city projects here in the U.S. that promote the peaceful resolution of conflict and encourage art and literacy programs.

## THEMES

### Babushka Baba Yaga

#### Synopsis

The villagers are afraid of Baba Yaga, so the legendary creature disguises herself as an old woman in order to know the joys of being a grandmother.

#### Topics

Endangered species

Grandparents

Disguises

Folklore

Prejudice

## **Pink & Say**

### **Synopsis**

Say Curtis describes his relationship with Pinkus Aylee, a black soldier, during the Civil War, and their capture by Southern troops.

### **Topics**

Friendship

The Civil War

Family relationships

Slavery

Literacy

Government

U.S. history

Geography

## **Boat Ride with Lillian Two Blossom**

### **Synopsis**

A mysterious Indian woman takes William and Mabel on a strange boat ride and answers their questions about the wind, the rain, and the changing sky.

### **Topics**

Native Americans

Weather

Nature

Myths and legends

## **Chicken Sunday**

### **Synopsis**

To thank Miss Eula for her wonderful Sunday chicken dinners, the children sell decorated eggs to make money to buy her a beautiful Easter hat.

### **Topics**

Holidays

Traditions

Saving money

Honesty

Cooking

## ACTIVITIES

### **Babushka Baba Yaga art activity**

Baba Yaga disguises herself to look like a babushka. Make masks so you can look like a baba yaga.

#### Materials You Will Need:

Paper plates

Hole punch

Yarn

Crayons or markers

Construction paper

Scissors

Glue

Cotton or batting

#### Instructions:

1. Punch out two holes on either side of a paper plate. Attach yarn ties through these holes.
2. Punch holes where eyes should be so the child can see when he or she wears the mask.
3. With crayons or markers, have the child decorate his or her mask to look like Baba Yaga's face.
4. Use construction paper to make pointy ears and glue them on the sides of the plate. It might also be fun to use batting or cotton as hair.

After the children have finished making their masks, have them act out the story in front of the class or hang the masks up around the classroom for display.

### **Babushka Baba Yaga reading questions**

1. Why would Baba Yaga want to be a babushka?
2. What kinds of things did Baba Yaga do in the village? With Victor?
3. Why did Baba Yaga leave her new home?
4. How did the town discover the truth about Babushka Baba Yaga?
5. Why did Baba Yaga hide her identity?
6. Did the villagers realize how they misjudged Baba Yaga?

### **Babushka Baba Yaga math activity**

Help teach pattern recognition by creating handouts picturing sequences of babushkas (kerchiefs) in varying patterns. Ask the children to complete the next set in the sequence.

### **Babushka Baba Yaga social studies activities**

1. There are people from many different cultures living in this country. Most people moved to America from other countries.

Make up a questionnaire to send home with children so they can talk to their parents or other family members about where their families originated. You might want to ask some questions such as: What country are they from? What language do they speak? What kind of clothes do they wear? What kind of food do they eat?

When the children return with the questionnaires have them present their results to the class along with some pictures of their families and have them place their names on a map of the world to point out where their families are from (save this information to go along with the social studies activity for **Chicken Sunday**).

Or, talk about the different people that make up a family (grandparents, cousins, parents, siblings, etc). Show an example of a family tree and have the children draw their own family trees showing their family's line of relatives. The children should add family pictures or draw their relatives' faces on their tree. The trees can be displayed on the wall.

2. Have each child research a historical figure who played a part in the Civil War, finding information about that person's life and his or her role in the war.

The children should present their reports to the group. It might be fun if the children write their reports in first person and dress up to look like their subjects (President Lincoln or Harriet Tubman, for example).

## **Babushka Baba Yaga writing activities**

1. Many men and women involved in the Civil War wrote letters home and/or kept a journal of their experiences. These letters and journals have provided scholars with a great deal of information about the war and about the lives of those involved, both on the battlefields and on the home front.

In a group discussion, relate the causes and events of the Civil War and talk about the key figures involved.

After the children have had background information about the war, have them choose a figure, fictional or real, and step into his or her experience by writing letters or journal entries as that person.

2. Review with the class the relationship Babushka Baba Yaga had with her grandson, Victor, and all of the fun things they shared together.

Have the children write about their grandparent(s) and what kinds of fun things they like to do with them.

## **Babushka Baba Yaga science activity**

During the Civil War, many soldiers were wounded in battle. Say was wounded after being separated from his troop. Luckily, Pink found him and brought him to his home, where Pink's mother, Moe Moe Bay, was able to dress Say's wound and nurse him back to health.

Do the children in your group know what to do if they or someone else gets hurt? Talk with them about calling an adult for help, cleaning a small cut or wound, what to do if someone else is hurt, and calling 911 if there aren't adults nearby.

### **Pink & Say art activity**

Pink and Say value their friendship a great deal, and in a pivotal moment in the book, grasp hands to express the strong bond that exists between them.

This activity will enable a child to illustrate the important bond that he or she feels with a special person.

#### **Materials You Will Need:**

Medium-size sheets of white paper

Crayons or magic markers

#### **Instructions:**

1. Have each child trace his or her hand on a medium-size piece of paper.
2. On the same piece of paper, have each child draw a picture of someone important whose hand they've touched, whether it be a teacher, family member, or friend. Instruct the children to draw their important person over their outlined hand.

Have each child discuss why this person is important to him or her.

### **Pink & Say reading questions**

1. How did Pink and Say meet? Where?
2. How was Say hurt?
3. What did Pink do for him?
4. Where did the two boys go?
5. Who cared for Say?
6. What does Moe Moe Bay mean by saying Pink knows how paper talks?
7. How did Pink learn to read?
8. Why is his being taught to read so unusual?
9. Where was the boys' hiding place?
10. Who caught the two boys? Why?

### **Boat Ride with Lillian Two Blossom art activity**

Making a dream catcher. The dream catcher is a traditional Native American craft. This craft is intended to capture all your bad dreams, while the hole in the center lets the good dreams through.

#### **Materials You Will Need:**

Pipe cleaners/chenille stems

Tapestry thread or wool

Different colored feathers

#### **Instructions:**

1. Bend the pipe cleaner to form a circle and twist the ends together.
2. Tie tapestry thread to the pipe cleaner.
3. Wind thread around the pipe cleaner (not too tightly), at regular intervals (spacing is dependent upon the size of the circle) until you return to the start. Do not tie off the thread.
4. Repeat step 3, but instead of winding around the pipe cleaner, weave through the piece of thread you have just wound.
5. Continue this process until there is a small circular opening in the center, then tie off the thread. (Do not tie the thread back off to the pipe cleaner as it ruins the continuity of the net.)
6. Tie some colored pieces of thread, of different lengths, to the pipe cleaner and hang different colored feathers from the ends.

Now you can hang the dream catcher above your bed!

### **Boat Ride with Lillian Two Blossom reading questions**

1. What kinds of questions were William and Mabel asking each other?
2. What was the name of William and Mabel's goat?
3. How did they meet Lillian Two Blossom?
4. Where did they all go together?
5. How did Lillian explain the sounds of the wind?
6. When they were traveling in the boat, was Lillian young or old?

### **Boat Ride with Lillian Two Blossom math activity**

Create word problems using characters or situations from the book. Children will find "story problems" set in a familiar context much less intimidating. For example, "If Lillian Two Blossom, Will, and Mabel began flying in the boat at 2:00 PM and returned at 5:30 PM, calculate in hours, minutes, and seconds how long they were in the boat."

### **Boat Ride with Lillian Two Blossom writing activity**

William and Mabel asked many questions about the world and nature. Have each child re-write Patricia Polacco's story by explaining how certain things in nature happen. Choose a few volunteers to read their version of **Boat Ride with Lillian Two Blossom** to the rest of the group.

### **Boat Ride with Lillian Two Blossom science activity**

To answer Will and Mabel's questions, Lillian relates traditional Native American myths, associating a different North American animal with each natural occurrence (i.e., fish with rain, wolves with wind). Explaining nightfall, Lillian tells the children that it is "brought by the little creatures of the dark."

Illustrate the differences between diurnal animals (those active during the day) and nocturnal ones (those active at night) to the children. Then ask each child to choose a nocturnal animal and to find information about that animal to present to the group. Have the children research the animals' habits and their environments.

### **Chicken Sunday reading questions**

1. What would Miss Eula admire on Sundays?
2. What kinds of food did Miss Eula serve on Sundays?
3. What did the children call these Sundays?
4. Why was Mr. Kodinski so upset at the children?
5. What were the children planning to do for Miss Eula? Why?

### **Chicken Sunday social studies activity**

The characters in this story are all from different cultures. They celebrate different holidays and have different traditions. For example, little Patricia's family and Mr. Kodinski are from Russia. But Mr. Kodinski is Jewish and little Patricia, Stewart, Winston, and Miss Eula all celebrate Easter.

Ask the children to talk with their parents to learn about some of the rituals, holidays, and traditions that are observed by their own native cultures or religions.

Invite the children to present what they've learned and to wear traditional dress during the presentation. They could also bring in traditional food or perhaps a recipe to share with the other children. Another idea is to have each child bring in traditional objects to explain to the group the ways in which holidays are observed by his or her family.

### **Chicken Sunday science activity**

The children used wax to decorate their Ukrainian-style eggs. Investigate where wax comes from and its different uses. Invite a professional beekeeper to come into the classroom or library to talk to the children about his or her job.

### **Chicken Sunday writing activity**

The children did something very special for Miss Eula as a way of thanking her for her kindness and her great food. Ask the children to write a paragraph about what they would like to do for someone special and to explain why that person is special to each of them.

### **Chicken Sunday math activity**

Make matching puzzles using drawings of differently decorated Russian eggs, or make crossword puzzles by creating clues from the story to reinforce analytical skills.

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