



# Thank You, Mr. Falker

by Patricia Polacco

## Teacher's Guide

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## Synopsis

This autobiographical picture book tells the story of the author's own childhood struggle with a learning disability. Five-year-old Trisha is a bright little girl eager to start school so she can learn to read. Her family reveals its high regard for knowledge when, at a pre-school ceremony at home, her grandfather drizzles honey onto a book, symbolizing the sweetness of finding knowledge in the pages of books. Family members have always read to Trisha, and now she can't wait to begin reading on her own.

Trisha is somewhat disappointed when she doesn't begin reading in kindergarten. Still, she loves being at school because she can draw; her classmates love to watch her "do her magic with the crayons." In first grade, the beginning reader stumps Trisha; the words look like "wiggling shapes" to her. As classmates move on to more advanced readers, Trisha stays stuck with the first one. She begins to feel dumb.

As words get harder, Trisha spends more and more time drawing and daydreaming. That summer, Trisha's grandmother reassures the little girl that she is special, smart, and different, just as every person and every living creature is different from all others. But Trisha's grandmother and grandfather both die soon after that summer and school seems even harder now. Reading seems like torture, and numbers are the hardest of all to decipher.

Then Trisha's mother gets a job in California, and Trisha, her mother, and her brother drive from Michigan to their new home in the West. Trisha hopes everything will be different in the new school, but things are heart-

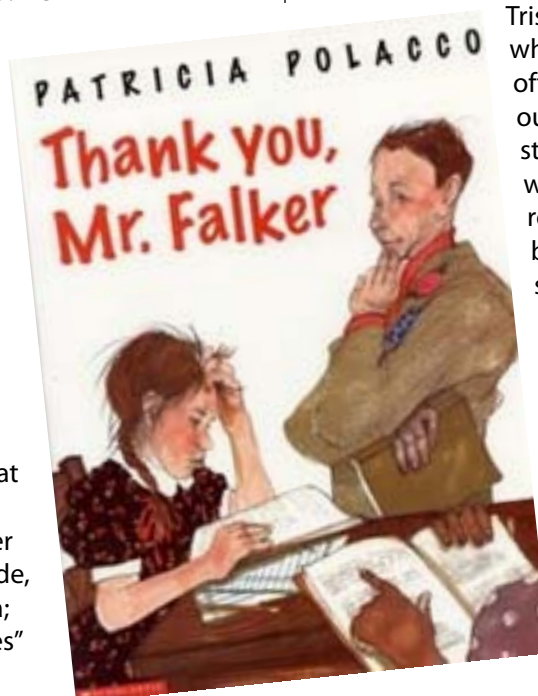
breakingly the same. When she has to read aloud, she stumbles over every word, "reading like a baby in the third grade." Classmates taunt her, with cries of "Dummy!" Trisha starts skipping school as often as possible.

Fifth grade brings a new teacher, Mr. Falker, a tall, young, snappy dresser. Trisha notices he doesn't favor the kids who are best at anything. Mr. Falker often praises Trisha's artwork, pointing out her talent to her classmates. He stops the other students from laughing when Trisha stumbles through her oral reading. He even lets Trisha clean the blackboards, a job for only the best students.

But Trisha's classmate Eric makes school an agony for the girl. Wherever Trisha turns, Eric jumps out at her, leans into her face and calls her "toad," "dummy," "ugly," and other hateful names. He gets the other kids to do the same. Trisha begins to believe them, and she feels very lonely and afraid at school. She takes to hiding under the stairwell during recess, but

Eric finds her even there. When he drags her out and dances around her chanting, "Dumbbell," Mr. Falker rushes to intervene. He marches Eric off to the office; his teasing will end.

One day a bit later, Mr. Falker has Trisha stay after school. He plays a "game" in which Trisha writes letters and numbers on the blackboard with a wet sponge. The results show Mr. Falker that Trisha is dyslexic. He reassures the sobbing girl that she isn't dumb, she just doesn't see letters or numbers the way other people do. He also says she has been very cunning, smart, and brave to fight her way through school all this time without tipping off her teachers. Mr. Falker promises Trisha that she will learn to read. He and Miss Plessy, a reading teacher, meet with Trisha almost every day after school, doing many letter-forming and word-forming drills.



Three or four months later, Mr. Falker hands Trisha a new book, points to a paragraph—and “almost as if it were magic, or as if light poured into her brain, the words and sentences started to take shape on the page as they never had before.” Trisha reads the whole paragraph and understands it all. She is a reader! That night at home, Trisha re-creates her grandfather’s ceremony, drizzling honey on the same book, tasting the sweetness of knowledge, and crying with happiness.

In an afterward, the author reveals that the story of Trisha is the story of her own struggle with school and of the real-life teacher who changed her life.

## Timeline

<b>kindergarten</b>	Trisha turns five, starts going to school.
<b>first grade</b>	Trisha makes little progress in reading.
<b>that summer</b>	Trisha spends time with her grandmother, who dies soon after.
<b>second grade</b>	Reading becomes torture for Trisha, especially reading numbers.
<b>third grade</b>	Trisha starts at a new school in California, but she still reads “like a baby.”
<b>fourth grade</b>	Trisha skips school as often as possible.
<b>fifth grade</b>	Mr. Falker becomes Trisha’s teacher, discovers Trisha’s problem, and gets her help so she finally learns to read well.

## Author Sketch

Patricia Polacco is a popular and prolific author-illustrator who often draws on childhood memories and her family history and richly mixed cultural heritage in creating her children’s books. She was born Patricia Barber in Lansing, Michigan, in 1944. Her father, a salesman turned talk-show host, was of Irish descent.



Her mother, a teacher, was of Russian Ukrainian descent. The family was part Christian and part Jewish, and Polacco later described both sets of grandparents as “captivating storytellers.” Her parents divorced when Patricia was three, and she lived on her grandparents’ farm in Union City, Michigan, with her mother and brother until she was six. Then her mother and the children moved to Coral Gables, Florida, and three years later to Oakland, California, where they lived in a racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood that was also

Polacco’s home as an adult for many years before she returned to Union City. As children, Patricia and her brother returned to Michigan to live with their father every summer.

Polacco struggled in school with undiagnosed dyslexia; she felt smart inside, but at school she felt stupid and slow. To escape her classmates’ teasing, she often retreated into her imagination and her artwork. A teacher named Mr. Falker finally discovered Polacco’s dyslexia and got her help, a life-changing event that the grateful author celebrates in *Thank You, Mr. Falker*. She received a scholarship to go to college, but married at 18, went to work, and had two children instead of continuing in school. She later went back, earning her B.A. from Monash University in 1974. She then went to Australia, where she received an M.A. and a Ph.D. in art history from the University of Melbourne and worked as a consultant to museums on Russian and Greek icons. She also met her second husband there, chef Enzo Polacco, whom she married in 1979.

Polacco had often made little books as gifts, and at the suggestion of a friend, she joined the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators. This inspired her to assemble a portfolio of her work, which in 1987 she showed to sixteen publishers in one whirlwind week in New York. She sold her first book, *Meteor!* to Dodd, Mead and has enjoyed publishing success ever since. Drawn by her Russian heritage, Polacco has traveled widely in the former Soviet Union. She often speaks at libraries, schools, and bookstores. Of her work, Polacco says, “My heart sings whenever I am drawing.” She is dedicated to bringing to children the messages of understanding among people of all types, of recognizing people’s common humanity, and of taking charge of their own futures.

## Critic’s Corner

Critics admire Polacco’s storytelling talent and the skillful way in which she creates original and emotionally engaging books that draw young readers into the concepts of social, racial, and religious tolerance; the rewards of intergenerational ties; and the value of family traditions and storytelling. Her artwork is praised for its vitality, with bright colors and expressive lines imparting energy, humor, and emotion to her text. Of *Thank You, Mr. Falker*, *Publishers Weekly* said, “Young readers struggling with learning difficulties will identify with Trisha’s situation and find reassurance in her suc-

cess. Polacco's gouache-and-pencil compositions deftly capture the emotional stages—frustration, pain, elation—of Trisha's journey." *School Library Journal* commented, "Youngsters, as well as adults, may find themselves choked up at the emotions so eloquently described in words and pictures. . . . Readers will be grateful for the chance to recognize, appreciate, and share in Polacco's talent and creativity."

## Selected Other Works by Patricia Polacco

### Books

*Applemando's Dreams* (1991)  
*Aunt Chip and the Great Triple Creek Dam Affair* (1996)  
*Babushka's Doll* (1990)  
*Babushka's Mother Goose* (1995)  
*The Bee Tree* (1993)  
*Bubushka Baba Yaga* (1993)  
*The Butterfly* (2000)  
*Chicken Sunday* (1992)  
*Christmas Tapestry* (2002)  
*In Enzo's Splendid Gardens* (1997)  
*The Keeping Quilt* (1988)  
*Meteor!* (1987)  
*Mr. Lincoln's Way* (2001)  
*Mrs. Katz and Tush* (1992)  
*Mrs. Mack* (1998)  
*My Rotten Readheaded Older Brother* (1994)  
*Pink and Say* (1994)  
*Rechenka's Eggs* (1988)  
*Thank You, Mr. Falker* (1998)  
*Thunder Cake* (1990)  
*Tikvah Means Hope* (1994)  
*The Trees of the Dancing Goat* (1996)  
*Uncle Vova's Tree* (1989)  
*Welcome Comfort* (1999)  
*When Lightning Comes in a Jar* (2002)

### Audio

*Thank You, Mr. Falker* (Spoken Arts)

## Bibliography

Berger, Laura, ed. *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*, 4th ed. Detroit: St. James Press, 1995.  
*Children's Literature Review*, Vol. 40. Detroit: Gale Research, 1996.

*Contemporary Authors*, Vol. 185; *New Revision Series*, Vol. 101. Detroit: Gale, 2000, 2002.  
 Eliot, Ian, "Patricia Polacco: Master Storyteller," *Teaching PreK-8*, 1996, p. 42.  
 Holtze, Sally Holmes, ed. *Seventh Book of Junior Authors & Illustrators*. NY: H.W. Wilson, 1996.  
 Lewis, Valerie, "Meet the Author: Patricia Polacco," *Instructor* April 1993, pp. 57-62.  
 Maughan, Shannon, "PW Interviews Patricia Polacco," *Publishers Weekly*, Feb. 15, 1993, pp. 179ff.  
 Polacco, Patricia. *Firetalking*. Katonah, NY: Richard Owen Publishers, 1994.  
*Something About the Author*, Vols. 74, 123. Detroit: Gale, 1993, 2001.  
 "Patricia Polacco Official Website," <<http://www.patriciapolacco.com/>>

## General Objectives

1. To use discussion questions to recall details, interpret characters and events, read or listen critically, and respond creatively to the story and its illustrations.
2. To expand vocabulary through context clues and word study.
3. To expand responses to the book by completing a variety of related activities, some in other areas of the curriculum.
4. To exercise artistic, craft, and dramatic skills to help interpret reading.
5. To develop an understanding of various types of learning disabilities, and the effects these may have on children's feelings of self-esteem and their peers' impressions of these children.
6. To examine and discuss the issue of teasing and meanness at school.

## Specific Objectives

1. To trace the changes in Trisha's feelings about school, from the time she looks forward to attending kindergarten to the time she begins fifth grade until the time after Mr. Falker has helped her overcome her problems.
2. To identify various feelings revealed by the facial expressions and body language of the story's characters.
3. To become aware of the ways in which the relationship with her grandmother helps Trisha.
4. To examine the ways in which classmates hurt Trisha with their teasing, and the ways in which their words are not true.
5. To understand how Trisha uses her talent for drawing to help herself.
6. To note the ways in which Eric makes Trisha feel espe-

cially bad.

7. To identify the ways in which Trisha reacts to Mr. Falker and the various ways in which Mr. Falker helps Trisha through the school year.

## The Importance of Setting

The most prominent settings are Trisha's schools: her kindergarten classroom where she is happy, her first- and second-grade classrooms where she becomes very frustrated with her inability to read well, the playground at her new third-grade school where she is teased to despair, and her fifth-grade school, where Mr. Falker supports and helps her in the classroom and Eric taunts and torments her outside the classroom until Mr. Falker intervenes.

Home scenes show her grandpa celebrating the upcoming first day of school with Trisha, gentle summer scenes on the farm with Trisha and her grandma, a cross-country in-the-car scene with Trisha and her mother and her brother, and a poignant ending scene with Trisha looking wonderingly out the window at the starry night sky as she clutches to her the signs that she has finally broken through her disability to become a real reader.

## Cross-Curricular Resources

### Fiction—School Stories

Maryann Cocca-Leffler, *Mr. Tanen 's Ties*  
Patricia Reilly Giff, *Today Was a Terrible Day*  
Jon Scieszka, *Math Curse*  
Karen L. Williams, *One Thing I'm Good At*  
Fiction—Personal Problems  
Nina Alexander, *Allison Rides the Rapids*  
Alden R. Carter, *Seeing Things My Way*  
Elizabeth Crary, *I'm Frustrated*  
Jeanne Gebret, *The Don't-Give-Up-Kid* and *Learning Differences*  
Dakari Hru, *Joshua's Masai Mask*  
Francisco Jimenez, *La Mariposa*

### Nonfiction

Lisa K. Adams, *Dealing with Teasing*  
Kathleen M. Dwyer, *What Do You Mean I Have a Learning Disability?*  
Alice K. Flanagan, *Learning Is Fun with Mrs. Perez*  
Melanie Apel Gordon, *Let's Talk About Dyslexia*  
Susan Kent, *Let's Talk About Needing Extra Help at School*  
Barbara K. Polland, *We Can Work It Out: Conflict Resolution for Children*

Virginia Schomp, *If You Were a Teacher*

### CD-ROMs

*Blue's Reading Time Activities* and *Blue Treasure Hunt* (Humongus Entertainment)  
*Jumpstart Artist* (Knowledge Adventure)  
*Reading Blaster: Ages 4-6* and *Reading Blaster: Ages 5-7* (Knowledge Adventure)

### Internet

"Patricia Polacco Author Study," <  
<http://www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/S00001466.shtml> >  
"A Beacon in the Night":  
"Dyslexia Information," <<http://www.dyslexia-information.com>>  
"Welcome to Patricia Polacco.com":  
<[www.patriciapolacco.com/](http://www.patriciapolacco.com/)>  
"www.bullying.org—Where You Are NOT Alone!":  
<[www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org)>

### Video/DVD

*Bullies and How to Help Them* (Ragamuffin Movies/United Learning)  
*Patricia Polacco: Dream Keeper* (Philomel)  
*Real Kids: What We Learned About Bullying* (Sunburst)  
*Student Workshop: Problems at School* (Sunburst)  
*Thank You, Mr. Falker* (Spoken Arts)  
*What It's Like to Be Different* (Sunburst)

## Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in *Thank You, Mr. Falker* should include these aspects.

### THEMES

- learning disabilities
- learning to read
- self-esteem and self-image
- supportive teachers
- easing and meanness at school
- developing talent
- frustration, fear, loneliness

### MOTIFS

- grandparent-grandchild relations
- fireflies
- stars and shooting stars

- artistic talent
- honey-knowledge-books
- 1950s details
- family farm

## Meaning Study

Discuss with students the meaning of the boldfaced words from the story in the following sentences.

1. **Great Expectations** (on the cover of the book pictured on the dedication page)  
*(The title of Dickens's novel refers to great hopes or anticipation for the future. In this case, young Trisha and her family have great expectations for her success at school, especially in learning to read, which will unlock all knowledge available in books for her. As Trisha moves through elementary school, those expectations are terribly crushed.)*
2. When Trisha turned five, she went to kindergarten.  
*(Kindergarten is a school or class for children from four to six years old, the year before first grade. Most states have kindergarten classes in their elementary schools. By the end of kindergarten, children know their ABCs and probably recognize some words as well. Trisha is happy in kindergarten because she can draw and is not yet expected to learn how to read.)*
3. When Trisha looked at a page, all she saw were wiggling shapes.  
*(This is the first sign of Trisha's dyslexia. She doesn't see printed letters and words and numbers the same way other kids do, and she can't make much sense out of a bunch of wiggling shapes.)*
4. Trisha and her grandmother were walking together. It was twilight. Fireflies were just coming up out of the grass.  
*(Twilight is the light from the sky between sunset and full night [or between full night and sunrise]. It creates a peaceful, subdued, reassuring atmosphere, the same feeling Trisha gets from being with her grandmother. Fireflies are soft-bodied beetles about one inch long with glowing glands on the rear underside. They fly about on late spring and summer nights blinking light signals on and off to attract mates. Grandmother points out that it's just fine to be different, everyone and every creature is different, even each firefly.)*
5. Trisha, and her mother, and her brother moved across the country in a two-tone 1949 Plymouth.  
*(This sets the novel in its timeframe of the early 1950s. The family's car is a few years old, and like many cars of the time, it sports two different colors.)*
6. All the usual teacher's pets gathered around Mr.

Falker.

*(A teacher's pet is a student favored by a particular teacher usually because the child performs or behaves well and, sometimes, curries the teacher's favor. Trisha has hope for her fifth-grade year at first, because Mr. Falker doesn't seem to care about teacher's pets or favor any students over any others.)*

7. "You've gotten through school all this time, and fooled many, many good teachers! That took cunning, and smartness, and such, such bravery."  
*(Mr. Falker praises Trisha for coping her way through school in spite of her learning disability. He boosts her self-esteem by telling her how cunning [extremely clever], and smart [not dumb, as she thinks of herself], and brave [showing courage, not the fear she usually feels when the teasers confront her] she really is.)*
8. The rest of the year became an odyssey of discovery and adventure for the little girl.  
*(An odyssey is an intellectual or spiritual wandering or quest. Up to now, Trisha has been blocked from the delight of discovery and adventure that unfold in the pursuit of knowledge. Now that she can read, she plunges happily in to that pursuit.)*

## Comprehension Study

Discuss the following questions with your students. You could ask students in higher grades to write their answers to the questions in their own words.

1. Look at the pictures in the book, without reading the story. Write or tell a few sentences about one or more of the pictures. Describe 1) what the people in the picture are feeling or doing at that moment and 2) what is happening in the picture. In particular, can you guess from the cover picture what this book is going to be about? As you read or listen to the story, see if what you wrote or told about the picture(s) was accurate.
2. How does Trisha feel about starting to attend school? How does she feel about school by the third grade?  
*(Trisha is very excited about starting to go to school. She has grown up loving books, with everyone in her family reading to her from them. She can't wait to learn to read when she gets to school, and while she's waiting for that to happen, she is delighted to be able to draw a lot. But in first grade and second grade, Trisha discovers that while she struggles to read, the other students move ahead easily. She begins to feel dumb, and reading feels like pure tor-*

ture to her. By the time she attends third grade at the new school in California, Trisha is desperately unhappy at school, teased by the other kids for being "dumb" and longing to return to her grandparents' farm in Michigan.)

3. What do the other kids in kindergarten think of Trisha, based on their expressions in the illustration? (They appear awestruck by Trisha's talent at creating crayon artworks. This makes Trisha happy, boosting her self-esteem.)
4. How do Trisha's expressions in the artwork show her feelings about school and reading? (In kindergarten, Trisha is very happy using her talent to create wonderful drawings. In first grade and second grade, Trisha is frustrated and mad at her inability to read much. In third grade, Trisha is crushed and miserable about being teased so meanly. In fifth grade, she feels hopeful with Mr. Falker but then unhappy and even traumatized by Eric's never-ending taunting. By the end of the book, Trisha has a look of amazed happiness as she has her first success at reading in a book.)
5. What feelings do the picture scenes with Trisha and her grandmother express? How does the grandmother reassure Trisha? (The scenes show the soft, gentle light of twilight and the comforting starlit darkness. The softness and gentleness of twilight surround Trisha and her grandmother just as the grandmother surrounds Trisha physically and emotionally with her warmth and love. The grandmother also offers a warm, loving presence for Trisha as they lie in the grass beneath the stars. Trisha's grandma also reassures the girl that she is smart, quick, and dear and different just as everyone in the world is different from one another. The grandma also reassures Trisha that when she is gone, she will be on the other side, where the light of heaven shines back through from the stars.)
6. What hurtful words do her classmates use to tease Trisha? How do these words make Trisha feel? (Her classmates call Trisha "dummy," "dumb," "toad," "stupid," "ugly," "no hoper" and "maggoty old dumb-bell," and add comments, "You don't count," "You don't belong," and "Not one of us." Trisha is crushed; she is afraid, lonely, anxious, and desperately unhappy.)
7. In what ways are the teasing words directed at Trisha not true? (Trisha is not dumb; she simply has a learning disability that interferes with her ability to read and deal with numbers. Having a learning disability does

not make her ugly, a toad, a child with no future, or a child who doesn't count or can't belong.)

8. How does Trisha use her drawing talent to help herself? (Being able to create amazing artwork keeps Trisha happy in kindergarten, and it allows her to feel good about herself as her inability to read becomes more and more of a self-esteem problem. The worse her problems at school become, the more Trisha draws.)
9. What is your first impression of Mr. Falker, based on the first illustration of him inside the book? (Answers will vary. He looks like a fairly new teacher fresh with enthusiasm, imagination, panache, and kindness, happy to dress in a snappy fashion.)
10. What is Trisha's initial reaction to Mr. Falker? (In the illustration, she seems to be studying him with thoughtful hope. She has noticed, as the text tells us, that Mr. Falker seems not to care about teacher's pets and who is the cutest, smartest, or the best at anything.)
11. In what ways does Eric make Trisha feel especially bad? (Eric singles out Trisha for unending harassment. He sits behind her in class, and wherever Trisha goes outside of class, Eric pops up to torment her. He pulls her hair by the classroom door; he leans in her face on the playground and calls her "Toad"; he gets other kids in school to jump out at Trisha on the playground or in the cafeteria or in the bathroom and call her "Stupid" or "Ugly." He makes Trisha afraid to turn any corner or go anywhere in the school.)
12. How does Mr. Falker help Trisha during the school year? (Mr. Falker openly praises Trisha's outstanding talent for drawing, so other students notice her talent. He stops other students from openly laughing or teasing Trisha in class. He regularly gives her the special job of erasing the blackboards, a privilege for the best students. He pats her on the back when she gets something right, and he looks "hard and mean" at any students who try to tease her. Best of all, he ends Eric's harassment and finally recognizes Trisha has a learning disability and gets her the help she needs so that, after three or four months, she finally is able to read with understanding.)

## Across the Curriculum

Invite students to complete any of these activities that

are suitable for their grade and interest level.

## Art

- 1 . Illustrate a scene from this book using your own choice of medium and artistic style.
2. Create a picture of a twilight scene somewhere near your home.
- 3 . Draw a picture or create a model of your school and its play- ground.

## Language Arts

- 1 . Trisha's first reader is one of the "Dick and Jane" series used in the 1950s. Try to find one or more of these books, and compare them with some of today's beginning readers.
2. Find out about different methods of teaching young children how to read, including phonics and whole-word approaches. Which way did you learn to read?
3. Trisha's fifth-grade class reads *Charlotte's Web*. If you haven't done so yet, read this book and discuss it in class.
4. Read other books by Patricia Polacco and identify common themes and art elements among them.

## Mathematics

- 1 . Calculate the number of miles for a road trip from Michigan to California. How many fewer miles would an airplane trip be?
2. Show a younger child how to line up and add simple numbers.

## Science

- 1 . Create a poster or other type of illustrated report on fireflies.
2. Research and report on dyslexia—its causes, its effects, and ways to deal with it.
3. Find some star constellations in the night sky, and tell the story of one of them.

## Social Studies and Geography

1. Trace Trisha's family's journey from Michigan to California. The trip took five days in the early 1950s. How long would it take today?
2. Research and report on the requirements for being a fifth- grade teacher in your school system.
3. Identify elements of the illustrations in this book that help set this novel in the 1950s.
4. Explain what ethnic background the illustrations suggest for Trisha's grandmother.

## Student Involvement Activities

1. Describe a favorite teacher you have had, and explain what you liked so much about this teacher.
2. Describe your relationship with your grandparents or any other special older people in your life.
3. Talk about a time when you felt different, the way Trisha feels when her classmates are all able to learn to read much more quickly than she is. How did you handle this situation?
4. Talk about teasing that you, a friend, or a sibling have experienced or done. What started the teasing? Why did it go on? How did the person being teased feel? How was the situation handled? What is your school's policy about teasing?
5. Describe any traditions your family has to mark the time when a young family member is about to start going to school.
6. Create a class display of images of cars of the late 1940s and 1950s.
7. With classmates, draw up a list of playground rules, including rules of behavior towards others using the playground.
8. Read a favorite book aloud to a group of younger children.
9. Describe a long road trip with your family.

### **Alternate Assessment**

Depending on student ability level, you could have students write their responses to one of these assessment vehicles or simply discuss their response with you, individually or in a group setting.

1. Tell or write a brief summary of each year of Trisha's school life, from kindergarten through fifth grade.
2. Explain how the illustrations help to tell the story and express Trisha's emotions.
3. What does this story show and tell about the effects of teasing and bullying on the victim?



## Vocabulary Test

(20 points)

Read each sentence. Below the sentence, find the answer that could be used in place of the word in boldface (dark) type. Write the letter of the answer in the blank in front of the sentence.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. The grandpa dipped a ladle into the jar of honey.

- (a) sharp knife
- (b) spoon with a deep bowl
- (c) identification tag

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. "Stand up, little one," the grandpa cooed.

- (a) talked fondly
- (b) whistled
- (c) cried

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. The little girl knew that the promise to read was at last hers.

- (a) untrue statement
- (b) prayer
- (c) pledge that something will happen

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Trisha began to feel "different." She began to feel dumb.

- (a) smart
- (b) stupid
- (c) unfeeling

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Reading was just plain torture.

- (a) agony
- (b) pleasure
- (c) confusing

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. Mr. Falker was tall and elegant.

- (a) refined and graceful
- (b) loose and casual
- (c) strict and uncaring

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. "This drawing is brilliant . . . absolutely brilliant."

- (a) shiny and hard
- (b) dull and cloudy
- (c) striking and dazzling

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. "Do you know how talented you are?"

- (a) tall and athletic
- (b) gifted
- (c) slow at learning

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. Mr. Falker looked hard and mean at any kid who teased Trisha.

- (a) acted friendly toward
- (b) tormented
- (c) knocked down

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. "Stop! Are all of you so perfect that you can look at another person and find fault with her?"

- (a) weakness and failing
- (b) special gift
- (c) understanding

## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Matching (10 points)

Read each description. Find the name on the right that matches the description. Write the letter of the name in the space in front of the description. Use each name only one time.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Drizzles honey on a book when Trisha is five. a. Mr. Falker
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Teacher who wears colorful ties. b. Gramma
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Fifth-grader who is especially mean to Trisha. c. Grandpa
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Young girl who thinks she is dumb. d. Trisha
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Tells Trisha the stars are holes in the sky. e. Eric

### Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write the letter of the ending you chose in the space in front of each sentence.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The author of this book is  
(a) Eric Carle. (b) Patricia Polacco. (c) Cynthia Rylant.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Trisha finally learns to read when she is in this grade:  
(a) third. (b) fourth. (c) fifth.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Trisha's grandparents live in/on the family  
(a) farm. (b) beach house. (c) apartment building.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The kindergarten students' first reader is  
(a) *Harry Potter* (b) *Mother Goose*. (c) *Our Neighborhood*.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Trisha's grandmother thinks Trisha is  
(a) smart. (b) dumb. (c) naughty.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Trisha, her mother, and her brother move from Michigan to  
(a) New York. (b) Florida. (c) California.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Mr. Falker stops the other kids from doing this to Trisha:  
(a) kicking. (b) teasing. (c) playing with her.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Trisha spends recess under the  
(a) stairwell. (b) trampoline. (c) cafeteria table.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Mr. Falker has Trisha write letters and numbers on the chalkboard with a  
(a) crayon. (b) piece of chalk. (c) sponge.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. At the very end of this book, Trisha cries with  
(a) anger. (b) happiness. (c) frustration.

### Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark each sentence with a T if it is true or an F if any part of it is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Trisha is an only child.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Trisha's grandparents move across the country with Trisha, her mother, and her brother.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Trisha loves to draw at school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. In first grade, Trisha reads as well as her classmates.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Things are very different for Trisha as soon as she starts attending the new school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Trisha starts making up excuses to skip school.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Mr. Falker is just like all of Trisha's other teachers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Trisha's grandmother says everyone is different, even each firefly.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Mr. Falker teaches Trisha to read in just two weeks.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. This book is a true story about the author when she was a young girl.

### Part IV: Essay (Extra Credit)

Write or tell your answer to one of these questions to get extra points on your test.

- 1. What is Trisha's main problem at school? Why does she have this problem?
- 2. How do Trisha's feelings about herself change during the course of this book? Why?

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Matching (10 points)

Read each quotation. Find the name on the right of the person who spoke the words. Write the letter of the name in the space in front of the description. Use each name only one time.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. "You are the smartest, quickest, dearest little thing ever." a. Eric  
\_\_\_\_\_ 2. "Dumbbell, dumbbell, maggoty old dumbbell!" b. Grandpa  
\_\_\_\_\_ 3. "You're going to read—I promise you that." c. Trisha  
\_\_\_\_\_ 4. "Do you think . . . I'm different? Do you think I'm smart?" d. Gramma  
\_\_\_\_\_ 5. "I did this for your mother, your uncles, your older brother, and now you!" e. Mr. Falker

### Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write the letter of the ending you chose in the space in front of each sentence.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Mr. Falker is Trisha's teacher for this grade:  
(a) first. (b) third. (c) fifth.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Trisha's grandfather ladles this substance onto a book:  
(a) honey. (b) sugar. (c) yogurt.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Trisha has a special talent for  
(a) music. (b) art. (c) math.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Trisha's problems at school make her feel  
(a) special. (b) dumb. (c) popular.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Trisha's grandmother says that the stars are  
(a) candles. (b) fireflies. (c) holes in the sky.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Trisha, her mother, and her brother travel cross-country by  
(a) car. (b) bus. (c) airplane.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Trisha's grandparents' farm is in the state of  
(a) California. (b) Kansas. (c) Michigan.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Mr. Falker is  
(a) short and round. (b) tall and elegant. (c) bushy-haired and bearded.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Mr. Falker stops this classmate from tormenting Trisha:  
(a) Eric. (b) Alice Marie. (c) Davy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Miss Plessy is a teacher of  
(a) art. (b) speech. (c) reading.

### Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark each sentence with a T if it is true or an F if any part of it is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Trisha is the youngest girl in her family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Mr. Falker gives Trisha the special job of erasing the blackboard.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Before starting school, Trisha had very little contact with books.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Patricia Polacco created both this book's words and its pictures.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Although Trisha has trouble reading, she is gifted in math.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Because Mr. Falker protects Trisha, the other kids stop being mean to her.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Both of Trisha's grandparents die before Trisha moves across country with her mother and brother.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The other kids' meanness does not bother Trisha very much.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The other kids tease Trisha a lot on the playground.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Mr. Falker often praises Trisha for the things she does well.

### Part IV: Essay (Extra Credit)

Write or tell your answer to one of these questions to get extra points on your test.

1. How do the other kids at school treat Trisha? Give some specific examples, and the effect this has on Trisha.
2. In what ways does Mr. Falker help Trisha?

**Answer Key**

**VOCABULARY TEST (20 POINTS)**

- 1. b      6. a
- 2. a      7. c
- 3. c      8. b
- 4. b      9. b
- 5. a      10. a

**COMPREHENSION TEST A**

**Part I: Matching (10 points)**

- 1. c
- 2. a
- 3. e
- 4. d

**Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points)**

- 1. b                  6. c
- 2. c                  7. b
- 3. a                  8. a
- 4. c                  9. c
- 5. a                  10. b

**Part III: True/False (20 points)**

- 1. F                  6. T
- 2. F                  7. F
- 3. T                  8. T
- 4. F                  9. F
- 5. F                  10. T

**PART IV: ESSAY (EXTRA CREDIT)**

Answers will vary.

**COMPREHENSION TEST B**

**Part I: Matching (10 points)**

- 1. d
- 2. a
- 3. e
- 4. c
- 5. b

**Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points)**

- 1. c                  6. a
- 2. a                  7. c
- 3. b                  8. b
- 4. b                  9. a
- 5. c                  10. c

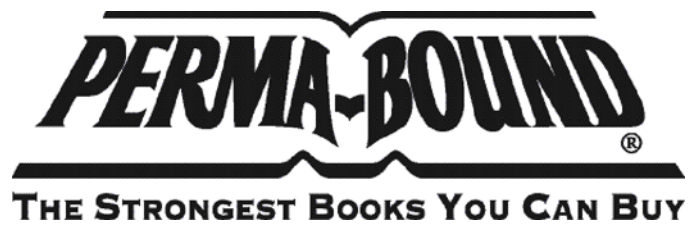
**Part III: True/False (20 points)**

- 1. T                  6. F
- 2. T                  7. F
- 3. F                  8. F
- 4. T                  9. T
- 5. F                  10. T

**Part IV: Essay (Extra Credit)**

Answers will vary.





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