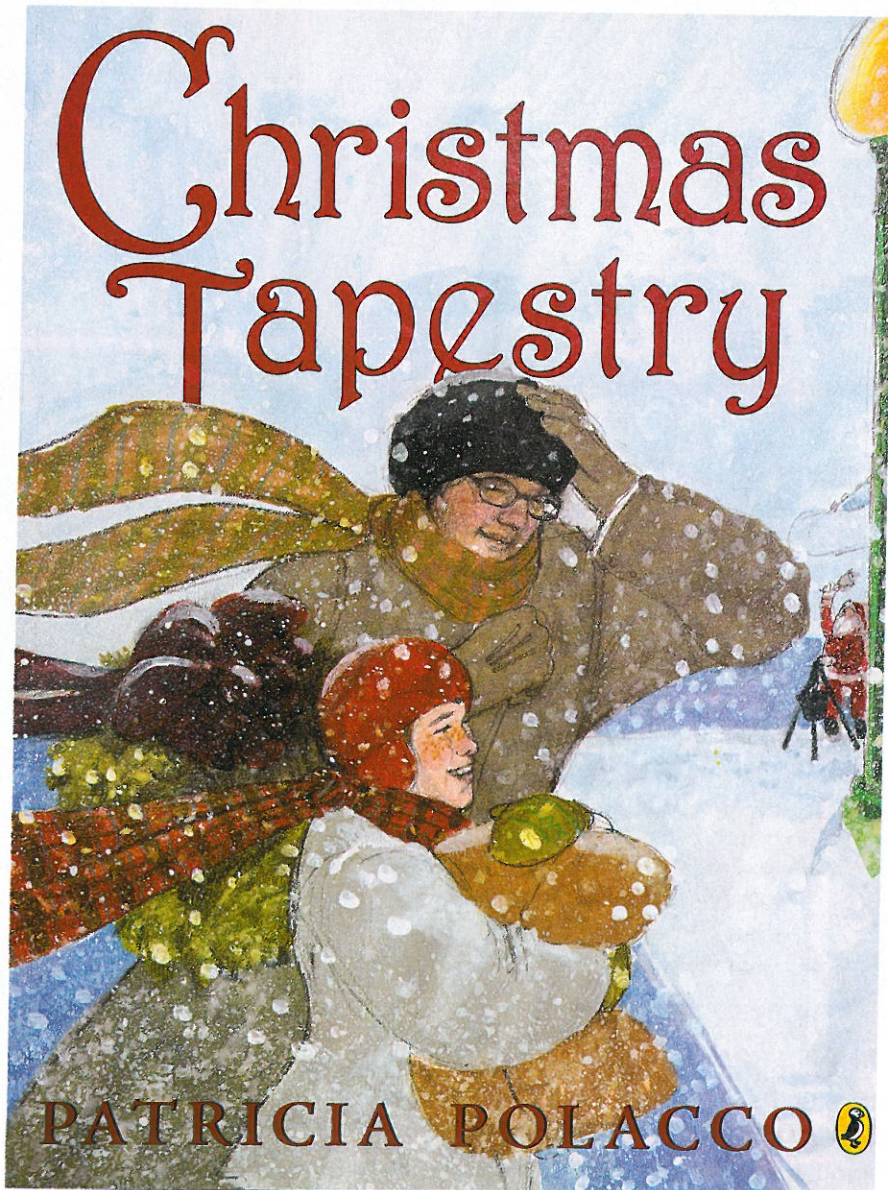


# Christmas Tapestry

## by Patricia Polacco

Seamlessly weaving character, story, and art, *Christmas Tapestry* tells the story of a young boy who experiences an unforgettable Christmas Eve.

By Hayley Penrose



For Jonathon Jefferson Weeks, moving to Detroit seems like the worst thing in the world. His father's new church is in need of repair and everything about his new life screams 'preacher's kid.' When the town comes together to help repair the church, everything starts to look up for Jonathon. That is, until the city is hit by a snowstorm that ruins the sacristy wall at the church, exactly where a painting of the Lord had been commissioned to go! His feeling that the world is once again against him is compounded when their car breaks down on the way to pick up Christmas decorations and they are forced to go by bus in the freezing snow.

Sheltering from the storm in an alley, Jonathon notices a beautiful cloth in a shop window – perfect to hide the damaged wall and bring some festive cheer into the church. Waiting for the bus on their return home, Jonathon and his father befriend an elderly Jewish woman who has her own connections to the tapestry – her discovery leads to a Christmas miracle, and Jonathon understands why events had to happen the way they did.

Author Patricia Polacco adapted this uplifting story from a tale involving young ministers she heard in homilies – once in the 1960s, and again in the 1990s. Both were presented as true stories, although one was based in Canada, the other in New York. Some minor adjustments have been made in this version, with Polacco choosing her home state of Michigan as the setting and making it more suitable for younger readers.

As a quilt and tapestry lover, it is not surprising that Polacco was drawn to this story. For her, these pieces are “emblems of family history, tangible symbols of the traditions and love that are passed down from generation to generation,” which is reflected in *Christmas Tapestry*.

Like the cloth it features, the storylines are woven effortlessly together creating a rich narrative, accompanied by Polacco's pencil and watercolour illustrations to bring the characters to life. Each has been drawn to the tiniest detail from labels on moving boxes to discarded shoes in the background. Having struggled in school due to dyslexia, Patricia Polacco turned to art early in her life spending her time drawing, painting, and sculpting. She did





not learn to read until she was almost 14 when her teacher recognised she had dyslexia and got her the help she needed to succeed at school. It was not until she was 41 years old that she wrote and illustrated her first book, *Meteor*.

Patricia Polacco says that writing the books were quite a surprise, although storytelling has always featured heavily in her life. Both sides of her family have a history of sharing stories through word of mouth and Polacco credits hearing stories, as opposed to seeing them, for making her good at telling her own. Most of the books she has written have a strong foundation in her own experiences. Like many of her books, *Christmas Tapestry*, features interaction between a young person and an elderly person. Growing up, Patricia Polacco had very close relationships with her grandparents and says that knowing both children and elderly people early in her life was one of the most valuable experiences she has had.

While the story of *Christmas Tapestry* is Jonathon's, it is the people in his life who have the greatest impact on the narrative's progression. His father provides guidance and an optimistic attitude that balances out Jonathon's initial pessimism. When upset about moving, his father tells him "although we don't always understand, the universe unfolds as it should... Tomorrow will be another day, and perhaps things won't seem so bleak when you wake up to a new morning."

The Jewish woman and her stories about life in Germany and surviving a concentration camp during the war act as a point of comparison for Jonathon and allow him to get a new perspective on his own life.

It takes a while, but eventually Jonathon sees that, even though it may not seem like it at the time, everything happens for a reason.



*Christmas Tapestry* by Patricia Polacco is published by Puffin Books, 2002, 2008. Look for it at your local book retailer or online.