

## Interdisciplinary Ideas

### LANGUAGE ARTS

1. Write a story about a teacher who changed your life by teaching you something new, helping with a problem, or inspiring you. Write your story as realistic fiction and dedicate it to this teacher. If possible, share with the teacher.
2. Read *Crow Boy* by Taro Yashimo and create a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the two stories.
3. Research biographical information about Patricia Polacco. (Keyword: Patricia Polacco) Find out how her life experiences growing up influenced her writing.\* Report to the class.

4. Explain what you think this quote from the story means. "The honey is sweet, and so is knowledge, but knowledge is like the bee who made the honey, it has to be chased through the pages of the book!"

### SOCIAL STUDIES

1. Research reading problems and resources for solving them. Report your findings in class. (Keywords: reading problems, dyslexia)\*
2. Read about famous people who helped students with disabilities (e.g., Anne Sullivan or Alexander Graham Bell).

### ART

1. Make a list of feelings shown in the illustrations. Share with the class.
2. Make no-teasing posters for your classroom. Display.

- \* Visit [www.heartwoodethics.org](http://www.heartwoodethics.org) and choose Teaching Heartwood, Culture Keys, for more on the history, culture, and geography of this book.

## Thank You, Mr. Falker

Patricia Polacco  
1998  
New York: Philomel Books

### Respect

USA  
Realistic Fiction  
Reading Time: 12 minutes

### CONCEPTS

Respect  
Loyalty  
Courage

### SUMMARY

Patricia Polacco's autobiographical tale centers around young Trisha's struggles with learning to read. Her problems are compounded by teasing at school until a special teacher "unlocks the door and pulls her into the light." The story honors the patience and skill of such teachers everywhere. Each expressive watercolor illustration expands the meaning of the text.

### OBJECTIVES

The student will be able to define and discuss respect, loyalty, and courage as they apply to this story and to dedicated, caring teachers.

# After the Story

## Thank You, Mr. Falker

### DISCUSSION

1. What were Trisha's hopes before she entered school? Who gave her support when she was very young? How? Who gives you support?
2. What is Trisha's dilemma at school? Why does she feel different and dumb? What does Trisha see when she looks at a page of text? What changes make her life even more difficult? Do you think she is brave? Explain.
3. Why do other children tease Trisha? How does Mr. Falker show loyalty to Trisha? Have you ever stopped someone from teasing? Explain.
4. Tell about ways Mr. Falker helps Trisha. How does she help herself? What qualities do you think she respects in Mr. Falker? In herself? How did the author honor Mr. Falker by writing this book? (Explain that this is a true story about the author's childhood.)

### ACTIVITIES

1. Locate Michigan and California on the world map. Connect the two states with a string.
2. Arrange peer tutoring sessions with younger students in your school. Read Heartwood books to them. Practice reading the book first.
3. Research strategies for coping with teasing. (Keywords: bullies, teasing) Role-play three strategies Trisha might have used to respond to classmates' teasing.
4. In groups of three or four, discuss this passage from the author's biographical information: "This book was written to honor Mr. Falker, but also to warn young people that mean words have a terrible power...and that they should do all they can to see that teasing stops at their school." Discuss whether your class needs a no-teasing plan and if so, draft one.

### JOURNAL

1. Write a thank-you letter to a special teacher and mail it. Use Heartwood words and examples in your letter.
2. Write about a struggle you had in learning something new and a person who helped you through this difficult time.
3. Find examples of at least five Heartwood attributes in the story and write about them.

### HOME CONNECTION

Ask family members to talk about favorite teachers. Discuss attributes those teachers possessed. With permission, share their stories with the class.

### VOCABULARY

**slick**  
**elegant**  
**bounded**

**odyssey**  
**cunning**