



Christmas Tapestry

Patricia Polacco

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When a bad leak ruins the sacristy wall in his father's church, Jonathan Jefferson Weeks thinks his family's first Christmas Eve service in Detroit will be ruined, too. But then he and his father find a beautiful tapestry for sale in a secondhand shop. Just the thing to cover the damaged wall and give the church a festive look! But then, amazingly, an old Jewish woman who is visiting the church recognizes the beautiful cloth. It is her discovery that leads to a real miracle on Christmas Eve.

This timely tale of love and generosity between people of different religious faiths is a wonderful showcase for Polacco's art. It features snowy holiday scenes and a colorful tapestry that is almost a character in itself.

Christmas Tapestry Details

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From Reader Review Christmas Tapestry for online ebook

Audrey says

Jonathon didn't understand why his father accepted a position as a pastor in a church in Detroit. The church was run down and badly in need of repair. Nor did he see the point in buying Christmas decorations for it when the wall was badly damaged. However, he and his father set off to shopping one cold winter morning. The car wouldn't start so they took the bus. While they were downtown they noticed a lovely hand embroidered cloth in an antique store which they purchased. It would be perfect for covering the hole in the church wall. While waiting for the bus they met an elderly woman and suggested that she come off at their stop because by then their car would be charged and they could take her home. They stopped at the church to hang up the cloth and the woman was shocked to discover that she had made it sixty years ago as a young bride. Unfortunately the Nazis came and the Jews were sent to concentration camps and she and her husband were separated. Several days later a man came to repair the wall and he also was shocked to see the tapestry as his bride had made one identical to it years ago. The pastor and his family hurriedly reunited the elderly couple with much rejoicing. This was a remarkable story about how God weaves the tapestry of our lives and sometimes the parts that don't make sense are all part of His beautiful handiwork.

Hilary says

3.5 rounded up to 4 stars. A pastor's family moves to a new area and sets about improving their church. A tapestry bought to cover damage on the church wall and a chance meeting provide an interesting twist to the story. The note at the end of the book suggests it could have been based on a true story which makes that part all the more lovely and moving.

The illustrations for us did spoil the story. They are an odd mix of loose and comical and in places quite detailed which I don't think works. We really didn't like the colours used particularly on faces and although we both agreed hands are really hard to draw, we kept noticing how awful they looked especially on the children. My daughter said they actually look quite scary.

An interesting read though.

Gale says

“Historical Memories Stitched with Love”

Combining elements of sacred Christmas themes with Jewish religious celebration and history this picture book presents a rewarding story of which examines the possibility that random negative acts and events may still result in positive results. A “PK” Jonathan Weeks is bummed that his preacher father has been relocated from sunny Tennessee, where they enjoyed a thriving congregation in a nice church to rural Michigan. He and his sister are disappointed by the decrepit old church building and its dwindling congregation.

Resentful of the seemingly random turns of his wheel of fate the boy experiences gradual satisfaction with their steady progress, until a blizzard causes serious ice and water damage to the church-- resulting in an exposed hole in the sanctuary wall. What a disaster just in time to ruin their first Christmas in their new

church! With a dead car battery and limited funds for decorations father and son take a bus to the city, where they notice an antique tapestry of European origin.

Thanks to mutual human kindness they befriend an elderly Jewish lady at the bus stop—from which springs quite a story of love and survival in the Nazi death camps. Narrated in non-frightening manner n way the story reveals how a piece of handmade fabric, stitched with love and devotion to God and one special man, helped reunite lost loves and share the bonds of the miracle of two faiths. Based on Jewish New World legends, this charming book demonstrates how one piece of cloth covered a hole and bound two hearts together.

December 16, 2013

Judy says

A well-done telling of a supposedly true Christmas event. I say 'supposedly' because there are way too many 'coincidences' to make this believable. But that's not a problem, after all this is a Christmas tale. (And I'd like to think it's true.)

Religion is a little heavy-handed, but that too is to be expected. I did like Judaism and Christianity appearing in the same tale.

Brittaney Reed says

Polacco, P. (2002). Christmas tapestry. New York: Philomel Books.

"Christmas Tapestry" by Patricia Polacco is such a heart warming book. It follows a young boy and his minister father , and family as they move to a new state to start a new Church. Jonathan Jefferson Weeks, thinks it is bad luck that he and his family had to move and fix up this run down church. He didn't want to move. After all the work his father put into the other Church, Jonathan soon realizes that his father can do the same to this one. As the days go by the whole family and community bring the Church back to life, just in time for a painter to come in and paint a lovely mural on the church wall for Christams. But, one night a winter storm blows through and damages the Church wall. Now the mural can't be painted. Jonathan is devastated. Mean while his father and Jonathan must go into to town but due to the weather they must take the bus. As they look around town Jonathan sees a store with a beautiful tapestry that would go perfect in the Church and cover the damaged wall. As they are waiting for the bus, tapestry in hand, they meet an old lady. The lady is invited to the families home for dinner and the father offers here a ride home. The old lady sees the tapestry and exclaims she made that very tapestry for her husband many years ago. Well, as the story moves along the Church finds a man who can come and fix the wall in the Church even on Christmas eve! After all, the man explains he is Jewish but just then he sees the hanging tapestry and immediately recognizes it. Turns out this man is a Holocaust survivor and that his wife made that very tapestry hanging there. The truth is then revealed about the tapestry and Jonathan soon learns not everything is bad luck and sometimes things happen for a reason.

I loved this story and I really enjoyed every minute of it! I think it is a great holiday themed book that can also explore the Jewish culture as well as facts about the Holocaust. I would definitely recommend this book.

I love how the story unfolded, how all the characters were related and I even loved the element of romance and love Polacco throws in there. I don't know if it would be appropriate for school just because of the element of religion but it could be a good book to ask about reading or even reading to your own children. Such a good story.

Paige Cuthbertson says

Super sweet story! I just wish the author hadn't made the Christians in the book shy away from referring to things as God's plan. I think there were two or three references to the "Universe unfolding" and only one made to God having a plan. Other than that, it's a very sweet, touching story for children.

Tanya W says

Liked the story, but it was hard to suspend belief. I want stories with all these miraculous twists to be true instead of made up.

Spoiler alert...

Where is the story of an unlikely meeting years later between a husband and wife separated in the Holocaust, who thought each other dead, that serves to reunite them? That is the story that should be made into a children's book. But maybe there isn't a real story like that out there... so this is the next best thing.

Randie D. Camp, M.S. says

Polacco is most certainly one of the best, if not the best, storytellers of all time. Her illustrations compliment her beautifully crafted story.

This is not your average Christmas story. Jonathan Jefferson Weeks did not believe that everything happens for a reason, he thought it was bad luck that his family had to move from beautiful Memphis to dreary Detroit. His father is a pastor and accepted a position in Detroit because he knew he could bring the Church to life...and they did. But a winter storm threatens the success of the Christmas service because now the mural cannot be painted due to a hole in the wall. More "bad luck" unfolds and Jonathan and his father must ride the bus into town; however, this leads them to a beautiful tapestry the perfect size for the damaged Church wall. They meet a lonely old woman. A friend of the Church knows a lonely old man who can fix the hole in the wall and when he sees the tapestry the story unfolds and Jonathan learns that everything does indeed happen for a reason, God plans every detail and nothing is without purpose.

*Spoiler: It turns out the lonely old woman and man were actually husband and wife who were separated during the Holocaust. Their reunion is touching, magical, romantic, emotional...everything a Christmas story should be.

Lisa Vegan says

I love this author/illustrator but was not in the mood for a Christmas book at all. Throughout much of it was a bit too Christian religious for me, but hey, it's a Christmas book. Even by the end it was a tad too much "everything happens for a reason" for me.

However, I loved this story, and the winter themed illustrations are lovely. I loved that Polacco found a way to include Judaism in her book and halfway through when we meet the elderly Jewish woman, my "Patricia Polacco tears" (as I now call them) started in earnest. When I then met another character and I knew where the story was headed, I fell in love with another Polacco book. Note to parents: There are (rather innocuous) references made to Nazis and concentration camps.

This would make for a good story at Christmas, at Chanukkah, and it will especially be appreciated by children who have a parent who's a preacher, rabbi, cantor, or has any other such profession. It's a wonderful and uplifting holiday story.

In an author's note at the back, it's revealed that she got the idea for this by hearing two supposedly true versions of this story, and she adapted it, including changing the location to her home state of Michigan.

I've now read 49 Patricia Polacco books and I have two on reserve at the library, and I'm expecting those to be ready for borrowing relatively soon. I fervently hope that she writes/illustrates many more books.

Heather says

I wasn't feeling the drawings from the get-go.

It was weird how it said they moved from Memphis, Tennessee to Detroit, and didn't say where Detroit was until the next page.

The characters have these weird pink patches on their pages, that goes across their noses.

The cat is cute hanging off the dinner table.

I know they're probably really busy and preoccupied, but to be so busy they didn't miss their friends is a little unrealistic to me.

"It won't bother us, will it!" There should have been a question mark there.

I've never heard the word sacristy before, so Idt kids would know it.

I was surprised to hear there was a caretaker there.

This boy looked like he was in middle school, by the size of him. Then all of a sudden he's crying in his dad's arms and saying "I miss home!"

"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.

They said the car battery was dead, then "it's all right, Jonathan. We can take the bus." And it didn't say who said it.

'Jonathan's face fell. The slow old bus all the way downtown and back?' Sounded a little complain-y and I didn't know why. The bus would be handy if your car wasn't working.

"Why do we need decorations--the church is ruined. Everybody will just sit and look at a hole in the wall,"

Jonathan said as they boarded the bus.' Reminds me of me!

The dad is always talking in exclamations!

"Look, Jonathan, hand-stitched embroidery!" Sounded funny.

-"how much is this?"He asked timidly. Idt the father would be speaking timidly and that isn't the right word to use. Hesitantly would make more sense.

-it's very convenient that the dad only had \$15 and some change, and the shopkeeper says he'll sell it to him for \$15.

I expected the tapestry to look more Christmas-y.

The pics of town with the snow and dif colored outfits are pretty.

It didn't really make sense that the father said the way would be shorter from his house, and 'by now the better is charged.' I didn't know they could fix the car by simply charging the battery. Or that he'd know for sure it was charged. It seems very dangerous to offer to take someone home in your car in that kind of weather. The bus seems much safer.

-I didn't think this story would happen in this way. I thought she'd come to church service and then see it. Not happen to call out to them at the bus stop, the dad offer a ride in their car, even though the bus was running, and then the boy just happens to ask to hang it up and that's how she sees it.

I wonder how in the world her tapestry got there from Germany! It's cool she made it herself when she was about to become a bride.

The boy is standing with his hands up, and mouth open, most likely because he's shocked it's her tapestry, but it looks comical. There's these weird scratchy lines beside his mouth and on his nose that looks like hair. The woman had dark smudges on her face.

The blanket was used as a Chuppah, a canopy over her and her husband. 'If there had been children, they would have all been wrapped in this to be named.'

I like the drawing at the top of the page, of her on her wedding day, with the groom standing under the tapestry. I wish I was in color.

OMG this story turned tragic! The Nazis came and the SS got them and their neighbors.

'All the women and children were thrown into one railroad car...the men and boys into another.'

You said all the children were with the women, then the boys were with the men.

"I shall never forget his sweet eyes, the way he looked at me. I never saw him again. We were all sent to concentration camps." She shows the faded blue numbers on her arm.

The dad talks weird, not really like people do. "I'm speechless. No words can describe!"

'Jonathan beamed as he looked into his father's face. Then he hugged the old woman.' What was he smiling about?

That's sweet that she never married again.

When he says his name is Joachim Zukor, I thought it sounded Jewish and wondered if this might be her husband, but thought that was way too fantastical. So when he sees it and says his bride made it, I rolled my eyes. There's no way! What are the chances of them both having survived and moved to America and were living in the same town.

He says "for me it is the Festival of Lights" and I didn't know what he meant.

I wish they hadn't put a picture of them reuniting before we'd read it. I flipped the page to see them in front of each other and then had to read how the family drove him there and he raced to her apartment door. I wish we could have seen him running up to her house.

Also she recognized him pretty easily, but it had been so long since they'd seen each other.

I like how Jonathan put together why everything happened. Why they moved, why the plaster fell, why the car didn't start, why it was so cold they shared tea with the lady.

'It was all so seamless, woven so perfectly.' Good line.

It said 'woven as beautifully and surely as Jonathan's radiant cloth that hung at the front of his church.' But it wasn't his tapestry or his church.

'It was all, truly, a Christmas Tapestry.' I like when authors include the title of the book in the story but it didn't really make sense.

I think The last page was trying to say this was a true story but it wasn't really succeeding. It left me confused.

'Both presentations were told as a true stories involving young ministers, one from Canada, the other New York.' She changed the story to her home state, Michigan.

The church on the last page was pretty, and I love those colors together, the blues and white and fellows. But it looked unlike the rest of the illustrations.

Lauren says

The sketching of the illustrations is very relaxed in this book--with the rough, penciled outlines still very much visible. An extremely heart-warming tale to share with children around the holidays.

Jaclyn Giordano says

Christmas Tapestry by Patricia Polacco is a picture book intended for readers in grades three through six. I gave it four stars. Jonathan Jefferson Weeks, a young boy, and his family have moved from Tennessee to Detroit so that his father could work at and fix up a church. Jonathan is frustrated by the move, but with hard work and determination, the church is made beautiful again. However, just before Christmas mass, a snowstorm causes a large gaping hole in the wall of the sacristy. Through Jonathan's perseverance, however, the hole is covered by a colorful Christmas tapestry, not only saving Christmas, but also bringing together an old couple separated by World War II and many years. Jonathan's faith is restored as this tale of love, determination, faith, and worship brings the old and the new together to celebrate the joy of the season. I listened to this story on audio disc, with the narration of Patricia Polacco, the author. Her tender and gentle voice added to this warm and loving story. The frustration, strength, joy, and love are clearly articulated with her change in tone and mood. I would have like to have also heard a male voice narrating Jonathan's part, as his boyish spirit and will are an important part of this story. However, Polacco stays true to herself as she delicately handles this beautiful story.

The colorful illustrations have a rustic and homely feel to them, which will help the reader feel the warmth, simplicity, and tenderness of this story that brings the old and the new back together again. Although this story does talk about religion, it does so without choosing favorites, as two religions are seen as a completion and joining of all of the characters. Readers will come to understand the pain of lost love and lost dreams and the elation and joy that comes with finding true love and a true home.

Abigail says

Jonathan Jefferson Weeks was one unhappy boy: uprooted from his home in Memphis, he had moved, together with his Baptist minister father, and the rest of the family, to Detroit. His father's new church was old and dilapidated, with few people attending services, and the parsonage was right next door, allowing everyone in the neighborhood to identify Jonathan as a PK (preacher's kid). Why, he wondered, had they come here? What purpose could it serve, and what meaning did it have? Pitching in, despite his questions, Jonathan helped in the family and community effort to restore the church, looking forward to the day of the Christmas pageant. But when a blizzard left the church's sacristy wall, where a beautiful wall painting had been commissioned, terribly damaged, all of Jonathan's doubts came flooding back. If God truly did have a purpose, in bringing the Weeks to Detroit, why had he sent the blizzard? The answer to that question, for Jonathan, came in a most unexpected way, with the beautifully embroidered cloth he and his father bought, to cover the damaged wall, and the miraculous reunion it brought about, between two people cruelly parted, years before...

As is so often the case with Patricia Polacco's books, I found myself weeping, while reading Christmas Tapestry, which so perfectly captured so many ideas and feelings that were central to my own childhood.

Like Jonathan, I too was a "PK," and well do I remember that feeling of being set apart, of feeling peculiarly watched, and judged, by the community. I also remember the earnest questions about the Divine which I directed to my father, who, like Rev. Weeks, did his best to answer and comfort me. Familiar, too, was the involvement here, not just with the church congregation, but the wider community (my father having served on many ecumenical councils).

In short, this was a book that spoke to me on a very personal level. But it was also a book that told a very moving story, in its own right, about two Holocaust survivors who find one another, after many years, through the intervention of the Weeks, and their church. I was reminded of a different reunion - that between Charlie and his long-lost lady love, in Sydney Taylor's All-of-a-Kind Family - and the association was a welcome one. I think that, even for readers who don't believe that there is any such thing as God, or a divine force guiding events, this would be a moving story. After all, we don't need to share the beliefs of others, to be moved by how they give them meaning, strength and joy. And that, in the end, is the special genius of this book: Patricia Polacco has brilliantly captured how faith *does* give joy, and how generosity and community, even with people of different faiths, is particularly appropriate at Christmas. Just a joy to read!

Jessica says

The only bad thing about this book is that I can't read it aloud to my kids. Two pages in and I'm bawling my eyes out, anticipating the ending. There is no more perfect compliment to this tale than Polacco's signature artwork.

Andrea says

The first thing that hit me were the illustrations. I didn't like them at all, because they weren't pleasant to look at and the people were just ugly. They had splotches of pink paint on their faces all the time that looked like they were humiliated. People's faces aren't red all the time, so that was wrong. I didn't like the style of the art, whatever it was; it was loose and messy. Their hands looked grotesque as they were painting outside. The mom's looked like a gargoyle or some other creature. The boy's hand was squared off like real hands aren't. The girl had a really big toe that was standing up in the air away from the others..not pretty.

There was way too much writing, and none of it was interesting. There were so many sentences on the page, and some pages were almost entirely full of writing, and this was a big, tall book. I didn't care about the painting and services and the painting supposed to go on the sacristy wall. It wasn't interesting at all. When she started mentioning the ice on the roof and back water I was just flabbergasted, because what kid would comprehend and/or care about back water and standing water running into the building and down the wall. Then there was a hole in the wall, and the caretaker knew a plasterer. This just wasn't kid-friendly at all. I doubt this would keep a kid's attention, in equal parts because it was too long and because what was written wasn't interesting.

All of a sudden, as months have gone by, the son is crying and whining about why they had to move there and what God's plan is for them, and why after all that hard work He had to send a blizzard. I don't think a stained wall is anything to cry about. I wasn't buying that a kid that looked that old would cry because it snowed and they couldn't have the wall painted by Christmas. That's called life, and he should be used to things not going right by that age. I just doubted he would be so upset after they spent the whole summer and fall happily fixing the church up that with one mishap he'd bemoan the whole move to Detroit.

The boy looked really ugly crying, and his hand looked deformed hugging his dad. The fingers were fat and looked like a monster's massive paw. Then there were gray shadows on their faces, and I have never seen anyone in my life have gray-colored skin, under any circumstances. It looked like they had been dipped in grease or had soot on them. There were also sketch lines on their bodies, lines on their hands and hair and things like that. Illustrations were totally not working. I guess it could be said that his dad taught the lesson that the universe unfolds like it should, and things don't seem as bleak—too big a word to use for kids—the next morning.

And come on, I was rolling my eyes when the author wrote that Johnathan didn't even want to go get Christmas decorations in town because of the church wall. Yeah, right. I'm sure any kid would jump at the chance to go into town to decorate. Him being so bummed out he didn't even want to go was ridiculous.

The pages with the snowy scene and the bus and people in the street were the prettiest so far. Maybe because the falling snow obscured most of the other details.

Jonathan spotted the cloth in the window, and we're supposed to believe he instantly had the brilliant idea to hang it over the hole in the church. His dad worried about the price, only has \$15 and some change for the bus. Wanna guess what the price of the tapestry is? \$15!

Come on. And I don't know if it was supposed to happen or not, but the shopkeeper looked like he was slyly looking at them. That, combined with him naming all of the cash they had, made me wonder if he heard him say he only had \$15. Oh, and I guess kids were supposed to find it highly interesting that it was hand-stitched embroidery...

As they were waiting for the bus, an old lady on the bench—with 4 fingers—called out that it's always late, and offered them tea from her thermos and cookies. Would you really want to drink after a stranger?

They all kept saying "If the bus ever comes!" and it was over the top to me. The dad offered to take her home from the church, because it was shorter than the bus route would get her there. When they got to the church Jonathan wanted to see the tapestry on the wall, and as soon as they got it up the old lady—who didn't have a name—recognized it as one she had made in Germany. Quite the tale. It became more fantastical because she didn't know how it had gotten there from Germany. It would have been better had she taken it with her at some point, rather than the crazy chance that it made it all the way here by some other circumstance. It was cool though that she stitched her initials in it and that it was for her wedding. The picture of them in color, her showing the number tattooed on her arm from the Holocaust, and the black and white picture behind her, of her getting married was cool. The cloth was used as the Chuppah, the canopy over the bride and groom, then as the bedspread on her marriage bed, which was a cool custom. If they had had children before they were taken away by the Secret Service, the children would have been wrapped in it for their naming.

All of the people had red skin on their faces, arms and hands, so it looked like they had all been boiled. Not a good look.

I found it unusual that Jonathan would hug the old woman after her story. Maybe it's because I was really shy as a kid and didn't hug people easily, especially strangers, but I just don't think kids would hug a complete stranger.

The words procession of the Christ Child and the service was to commence promptly were too big for a kid's book. Smaller words should have been used.

The plasterer was called in on Christmas Eve. As soon as he said his name, Joachin Zukor, I knew he was Jewish, but I never expected he would be the long-lost husband of the old woman. Talk about too much. It's

nice to have a happy ending, but come on, how did a separated married couple from Germany end up in the same town that many years later? How did they both go to Detroit? It's a nice thought that two separated people in such terrible circumstances found each other at long last, but it needed an explanation.

They asked him if his wife wrote her initials on the cloth and he asked how they knew that. They showed him and he instantly started crying. RHZ for Rachel Hannah Zukor. Then Jonathan was hugging Mr. Zukor, telling him she's alive and was here 3 days ago. Oh boy. It's just like kids to go around handing out hugs to strangers...

It all came together at the end, with Jonathan realizing why they moved to Detroit when they did, why the plaster fell, and their car didn't start, forcing them to take the bus, and why it was so cold that they had tea with an old lady. Everything fit together and had happened for a reason. That's a nice, hopeful thought to kids to look on the bright side and trust that things are going to turn out okay even if we don't realize it at the time, though I can't say I've had that happen to me too many times..but anyway, there's a good lesson here. The tapestry was a metaphor of life, that everything is woven together and makes a whole.

I didn't really understand the ending, when it was said that the author had heard this story twice, once in the 1960s and then the 1990s in two separate people's works. Both were apparently told as true stories about young ministers, one from Canada and the other from NY, and that the author retold it in her home state of Michigan. So, the people telling the stories were ministers from those places? Or the Jewish couple were ministers? The real stories should have been explained, that a man and woman separated during the Holocaust were reunited in a state, and how they came to be there, because it was one big mystery. The last page with the church at night, with what looked like 4 moons was pretty, though I don't know why each of the 3 trees behind the church were framed in these huge, yellow circular shapes that looked like full moons. They shouldn't have been lit up like that. A white moon was in the sky. The church was pretty with the snow on the roof and the snow-covered bushes surrounding it.

This isn't a kid-friendly book and would be better for older kids, maybe in late elementary or middle school. Despite the pictures, this isn't a standard picture book and the writing is much more mature and there is so much of it, it would require an older kid with a bigger attention span that could sit through this. It just isn't interesting, doesn't read well and would be awful for a read-aloud and took too long to read. I'm not sure what kid would enjoy this or be captured by it, but at 23 I wasn't interested and my attention was wandering. I just wanted to be done with it. Also, I didn't even want to look at the pictures because the people were so disturbing.
