

# THE POLAR EXPRESS

CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG

KS1 & KS2  
FREE CLASSROOM RESOURCES

Meets criteria  
for Literacy, and  
provides cross-curricular  
objectives in PSHE,  
Geography, and Science.  
Includes suggestions  
for differentiation.





# THE POLAR EXPRESS

CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG

DEAR TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS

**All aboard the Polar Express to the North Pole!**

This resource pack uses the beloved Christmas tale by Chris Van Allsburg, **The Polar Express**, to inspire lessons in Literacy, PSHE, Geography and Science, while also bringing this magical story to life.

**The Polar Express** is an undisputed Christmas classic, and the film based on the book, starring Tom Hanks has become a festive favourite around the world.

Alongside the lessons in the pack we hope that sharing **The Polar Express** story will be a starting point for festive fun, whether you are transforming the classroom for the imaginary train ride, dressing up as the conductor or treating everyone to a cup of hot chocolate!

We can't wait to hear about your experiences of using this wonderful book in the classroom.

Share your work with us on social media: [@AndersenPress](#) [#ThePolarExpress](#)

Andersen Press

# THE POLAR EXPRESS

CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG

## THE AIM

This resource pack can be used with all children at KS1 and KS2, recommended ages 5+. It meets criteria for Literacy and also provides cross-curricular objectives in PSHE, Geography, and Science – from the importance of believing in things, to the animals and landscape of the polar region. Suggestions for differentiation are included throughout this pack but ultimately left to the teacher's discretion.

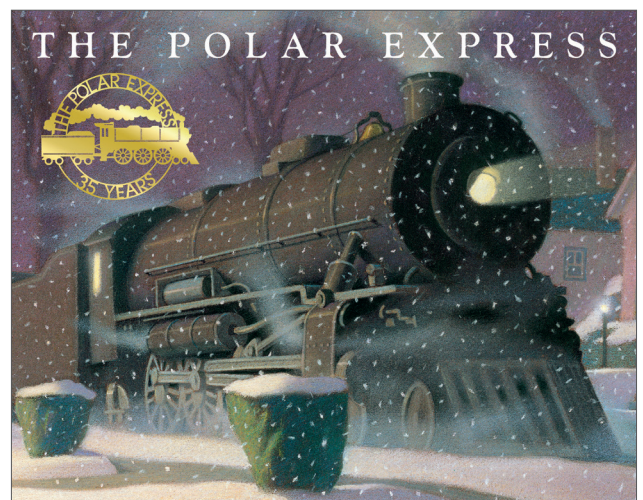
The lessons included here aim to improve reading comprehension and develop creative writing skills, through a magical classroom journey on the Polar Express!

## ABOUT THE BOOK

*Late on Christmas Eve, after the town has gone to sleep, a boy boards a mysterious train that waits for him: the Polar Express bound for the North Pole.*

*When he arrives there, Santa offers him any gift he desires. The boy modestly asks for one bell from the reindeer's harness.*

*It turns out to be a very special gift, for only believers in Santa can hear it ring.*





## **CONTENT LIST - OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES**

This Resource Pack provides material for four, hour-long lessons that can take place during classes, during circle time, or as extra-curricular activities.

### **LESSON 1: READING THE STORY TOGETHER**

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

- To participate in an imaginary train ride on the Polar Express
- To encourage students to summarise the story

**OUTCOMES:** A ticket to ride the Polar Express; a class reading and summary of the story; a scrapbook recording the journey.

### **LESSON 2: TRAVEL TO THE POLAR REGION**

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

- To understand the climate and landscape of the North Pole
- To correctly identify animals found in the polar region

**OUTCOMES:** A labelled map of the polar region; a table of polar animals explaining how they survive in their environment.

### **LESSON 3: CREATIVE WRITING ON THE POLAR EXPRESS**

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

- To pick out interesting words and phrases in the story
- To create descriptive phrases inspired by **The Polar Express**

**OUTCOMES:** 'Word Snowflakes'; a sketch of favourite words and phrases from the text; descriptive phrases inspired by the text.

### **LESSON 4: MAKING A CHRISTMAS WISH**

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

- To consider the importance of believing in things
- To explore deeper meanings behind the story and its ending

**OUTCOMES:** Three wishes; a set of silver bells listing things and people you believe in; a letter to Santa Claus.



# THE POLAR EXPRESS

CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG

## LESSON ONE: READING THE STORY TOGETHER

### LEAD-IN QUESTIONS:

- Why is Christmas Eve a special night?
- How many days is it until Christmas Eve?
- What do you think the Polar Express might be?

### TASK 1:

**“All aboard,” the conductor cried out.’**

Well, what are you waiting for? It’s time to hop aboard the Polar Express!

Set the scene by transforming your classroom into a carriage of the Polar Express. Do this by creating rows of chairs with a central aisle. Using the templates on the next page, cut out your ticket and hand in your ticket to the conductor!

### TASK 2:

**‘The lights of towns and villages flickered in the distance as  
the Polar Express raced northward.’**

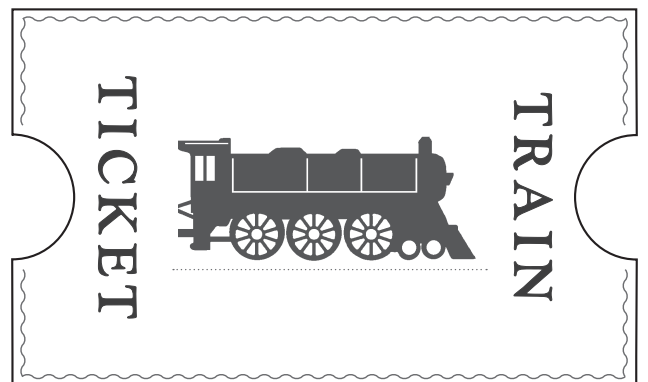
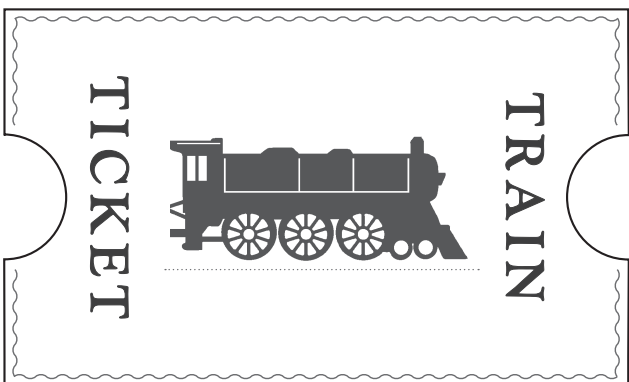
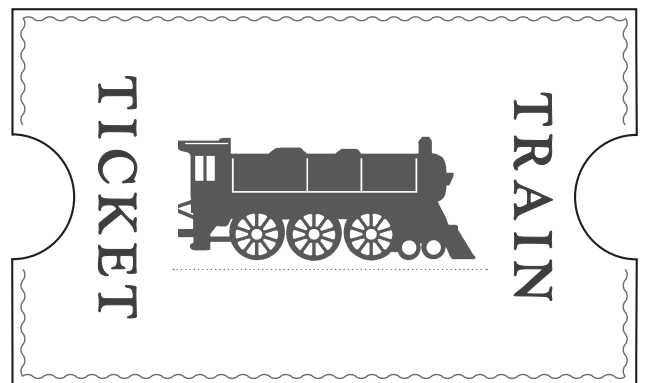
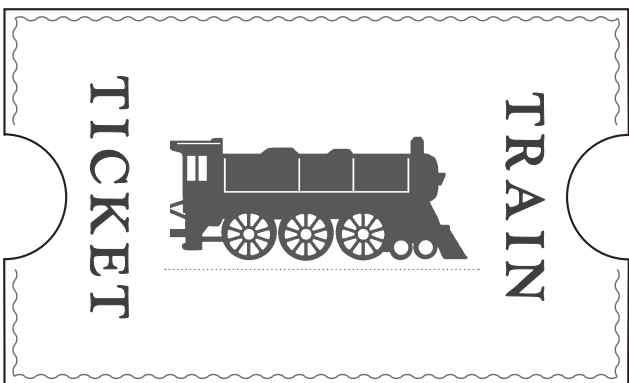
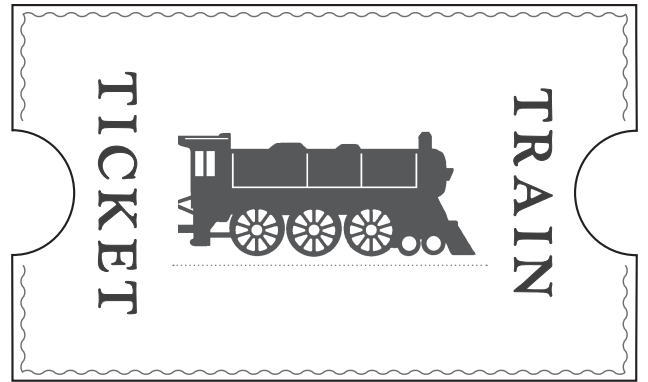
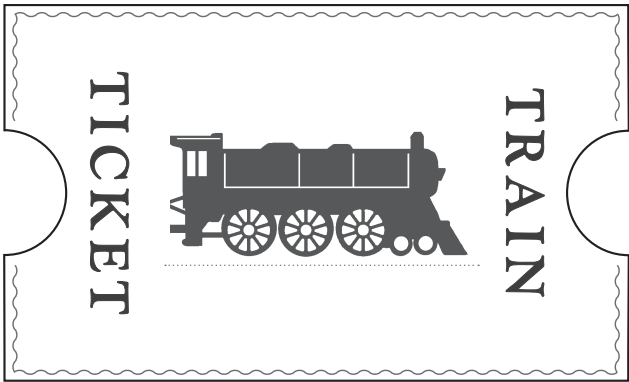
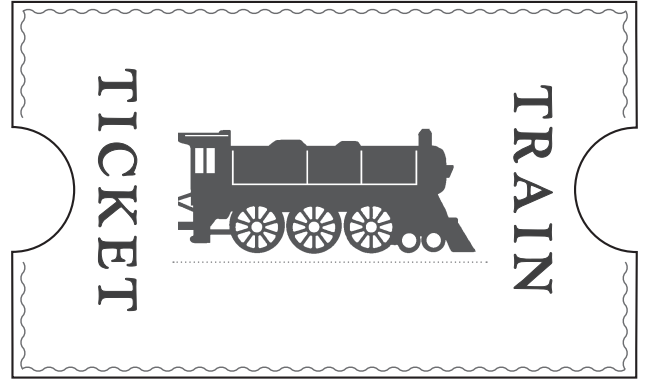
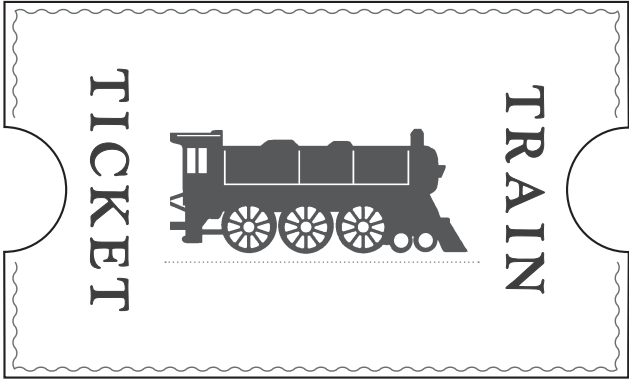
Read the book aloud together imagining that you are riding along in your carriage. In your Polar Express Scrapbook, note down what you see and hear on your journey! Use the template on page 6.

Have a chat together about your favourite sight. What words would you use to describe your journey?



# THE POLAR EXPRESS

CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG

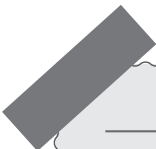
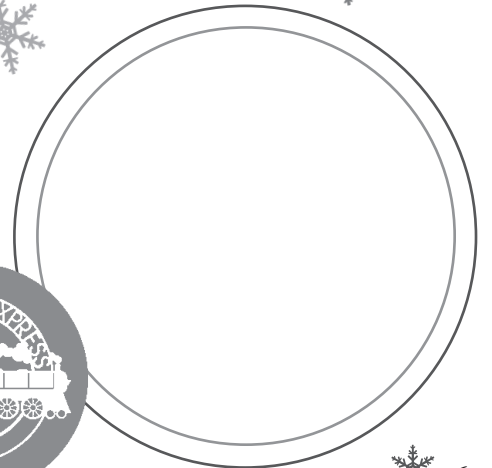
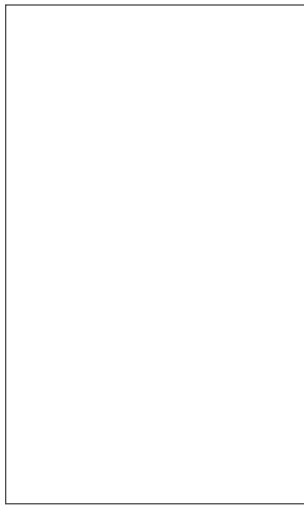
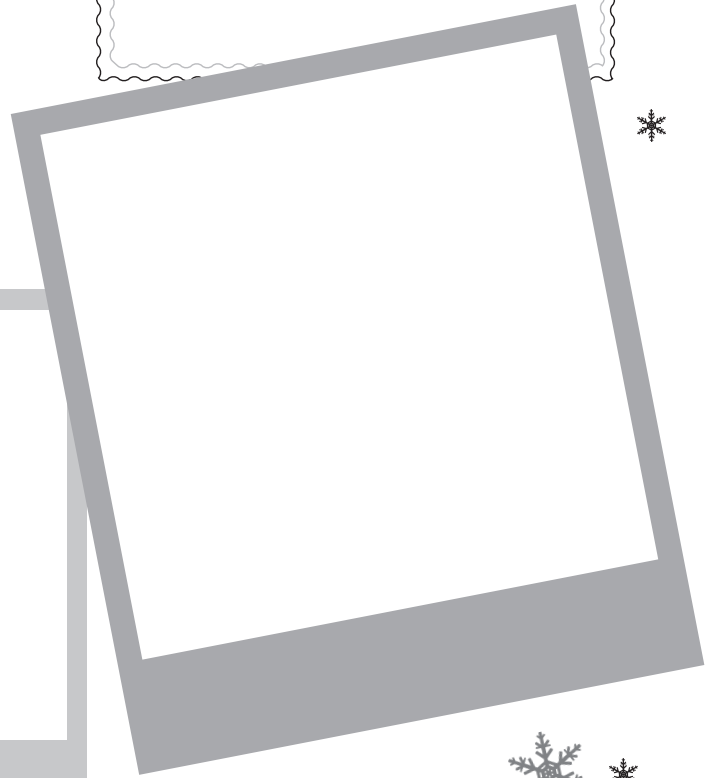
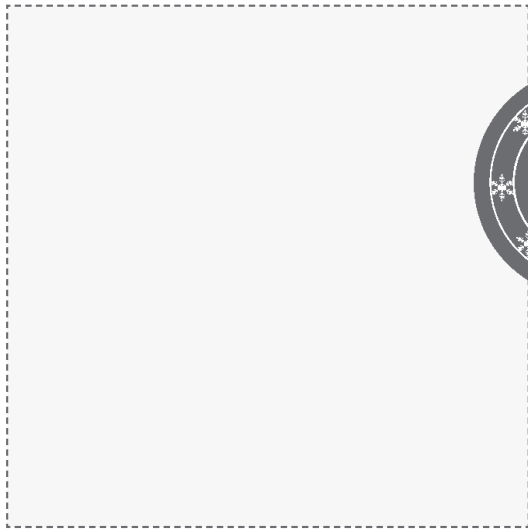
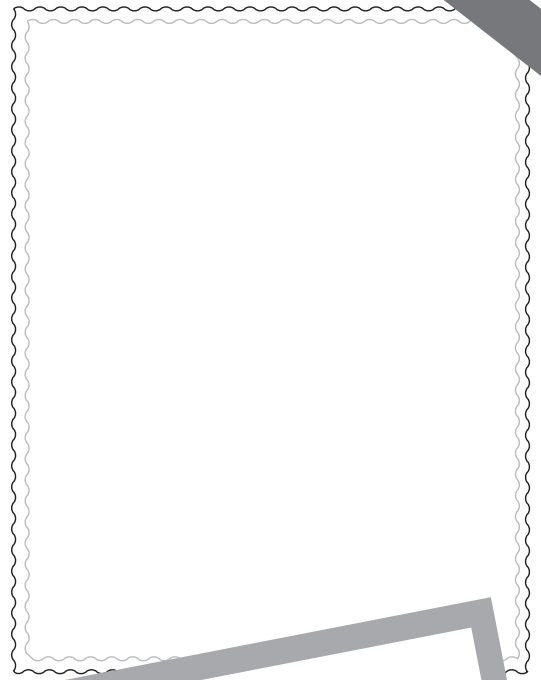




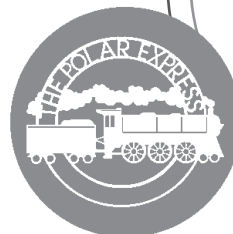
# MY POLAR EXPRESS SCRAPBOOK



A rectangular box with four horizontal dotted lines for writing.



A rectangular box with a scalloped border and five horizontal solid lines for writing.





# THE POLAR EXPRESS

CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG



## LESSON ONE: READING THE STORY TOGETHER

### TASK 3:

Now that you've read the story together, summarise it by cutting out the 'sentence trains' below and putting them into the right order!

Sarah found one last small box behind the tree. It had my name on it. Inside was the silver bell!

I sat on Santa's knee and he asked, "Now, what would you like for Christmas?"

Though I've grown old, the bell still rings for me as it does for all who truly believe.

On Christmas Eve, many years ago, I lay quietly in my bed.

The North Pole. It was a huge city standing alone at the top of the world ...

I reached into my pocket, but the only thing I felt was a hole.

The train was filled with other children, all in their pyjamas and nightgowns.

I tiptoed downstairs and out the door. "All aboard," the conductor cried out.

When the train reached my house, I sadly left the other children.

Santa stood, holding the bell high above him, and called out, "The first gift of Christmas!"

### Differentiate for younger children:

Children can be given the first, fifth, eighth, and last of the sentence strips to narrow down the amount left to order.

### EXTENSION TASK:

Ask children to sketch one of their favourite sentences or scenes from the book.





# THE POLAR EXPRESS

CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG

## LESSON TWO: TRAVEL TO THE POLAR REGION

### LEAD-IN QUESTIONS:

- What do you learn about the North Pole from the book?
- Who and what might you find there?

### TASK 1:

Read over the extract about the North Pole, then answer the questions below:

‘The mountains turned into hills, the hills to snow-covered plains. We crossed a barren desert of ice – the Great Polar Ice Cap. Lights appeared in the distance. They looked like the lights of a strange ocean liner sailing on a frozen sea.’

1. What is the weather like?
2. What about the landscape?
3. What are the lights in the distance?



# THE POLAR EXPRESS

CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG

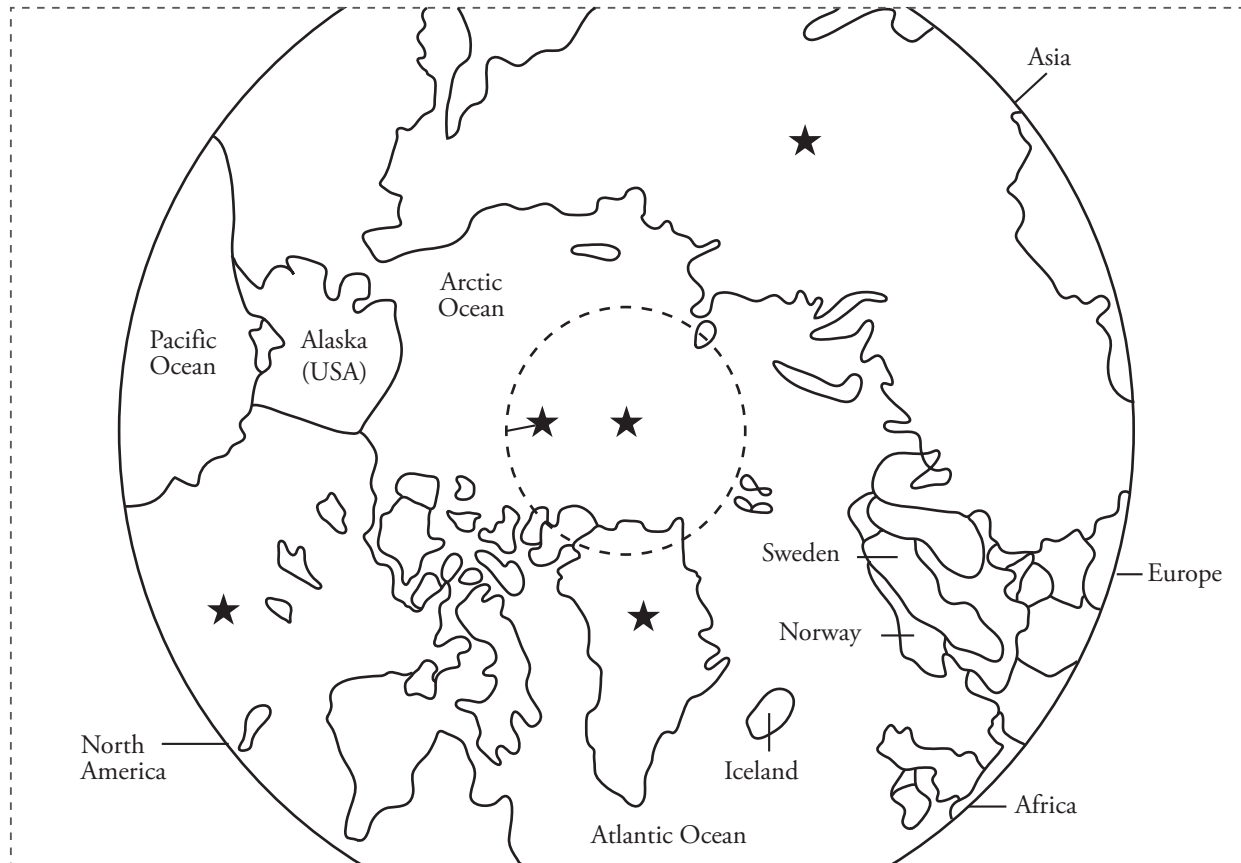


## LESSON TWO: TRAVEL TO THE POLAR REGION

### TASK 2:

Look over the map below. Work together to label it using the word bank.

Note: It's almost impossible to pinpoint exactly where the North Pole is; discuss why.



### WORD BANK:

**RUSSIA | GREENLAND | CANADA | NORTH POLE | ARCTIC CIRCLE**

### Differentiate for younger children:

It's extremely cold at the North Pole! Ask children to write a list of what they would need to pack in their bag if they were to visit.

### EXTENSION TASK:

Ask children to find out where the South Pole is on a map or globe. What do they think the weather and landscape is like there?



## LESSON TWO TRAVEL TO THE POLAR REGION

### TASK 3:

Which different types of polar animal might you see on your trip to the polar region? Circle the five correct animals below:

WORD BANK:

TIGER    NARWHAL    HORSE    LIZARD    POLAR BEAR    REINDEER  
GIRAFFE    WALRUS    ELEPHANT    SEAL

See if you can point out where each animal may live on your map and label it.

### TASK 4:

Conditions in the polar region can be very harsh! Note down one idea about how each animal survives in this environment. Fill in the template on the next page with your ideas.

Here are some starter questions that might help you:

- How does it blend in with its surroundings? Is it easy to hide?
- What does it eat? This must be nearby.
- How does it move and hunt? Perhaps it can swim or has sharp teeth or claws?
- How does it survive the cold? Think about its skin or fur.

### Differentiate for younger children:

Instead of writing, children could draw one of these polar animals and describe what makes them unique.

### EXTENSION TASK:

Ask children what threats from human activity are facing the polar region and the amazing animals that live there. What do they think can be done to protect them?



# THE POLAR EXPRESS

CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG



POLAR ANIMAL	HOW DOES IT SURVIVE?



## LESSON THREE: CREATIVE WRITING ON THE POLAR EXPRESS

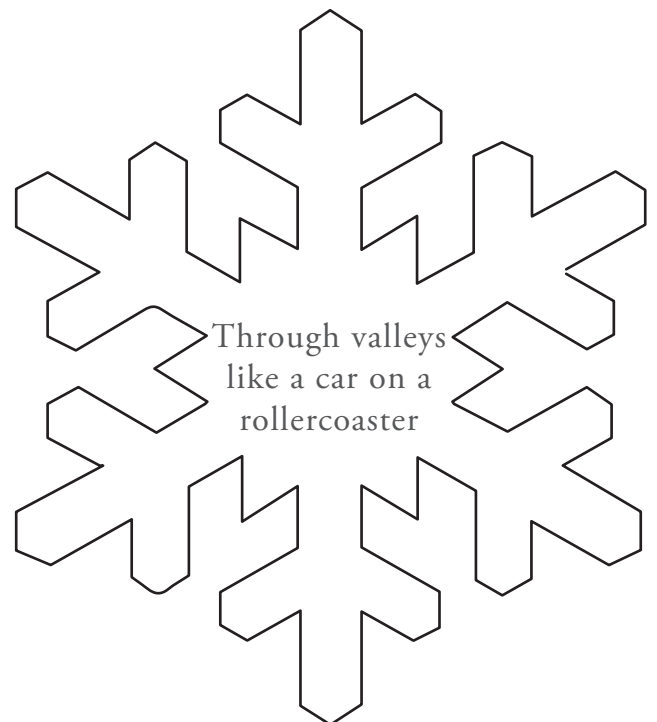
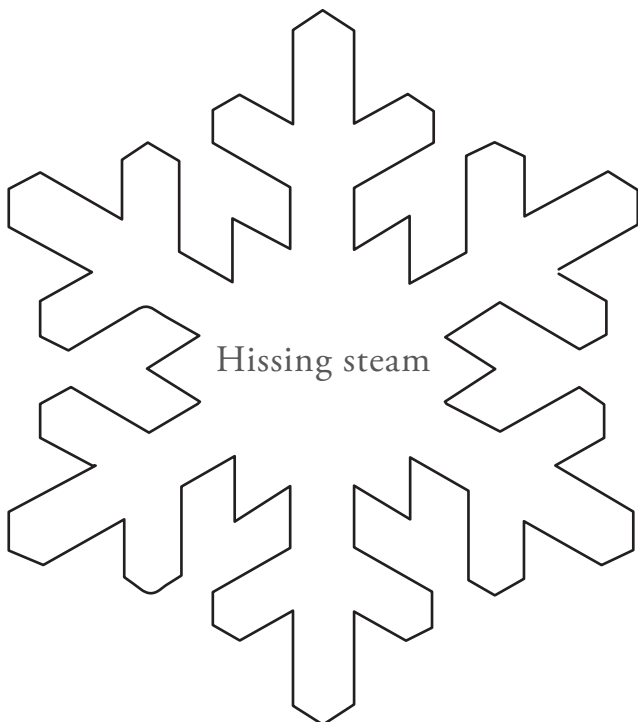
### LEAD-IN QUESTIONS:

- What is magical about the Polar Express?
- Have you read any other stories about Christmas time?

### TASK 1:

There are lots of interesting words and phrases used in the story.

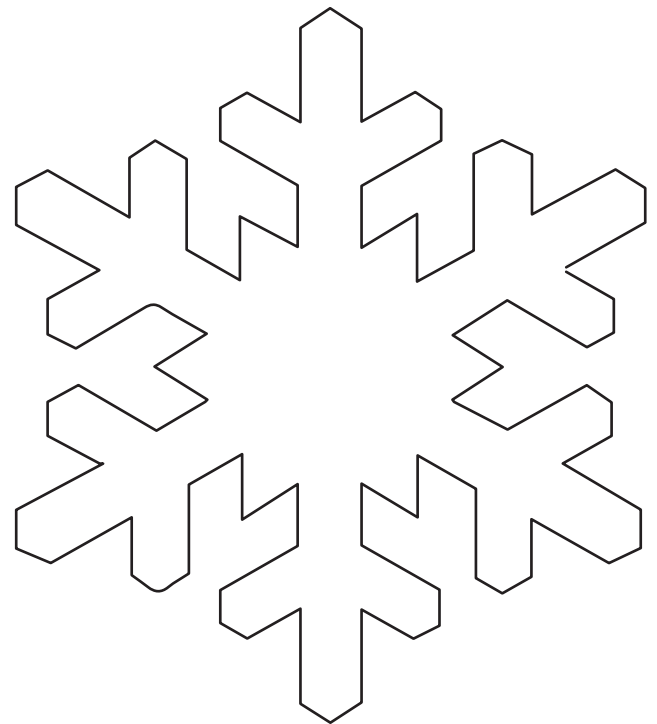
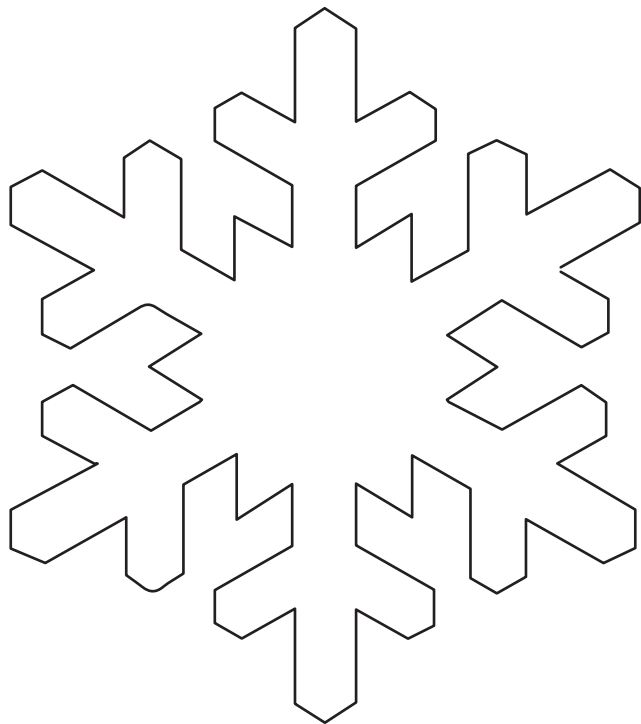
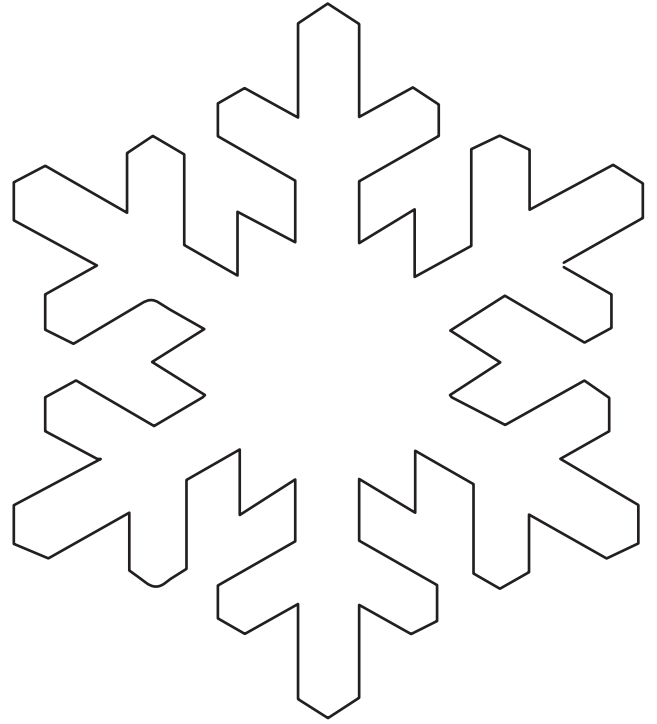
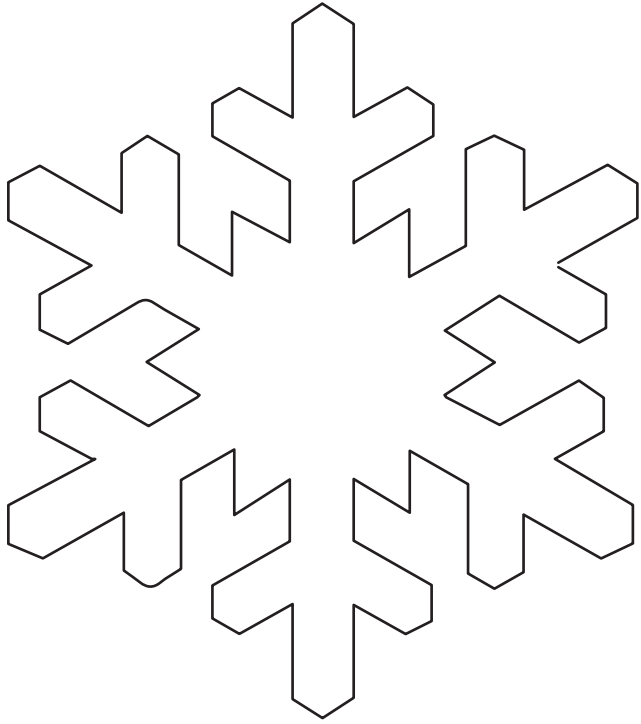
Have a look over the two examples in the Word Snowflakes below. What do you like about them? What do you picture in your mind? Choose some of your own favourite words and phrases from the story. Fill in your own Word Snowflakes on the next page.





# THE POLAR EXPRESS

CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG





# THE POLAR EXPRESS

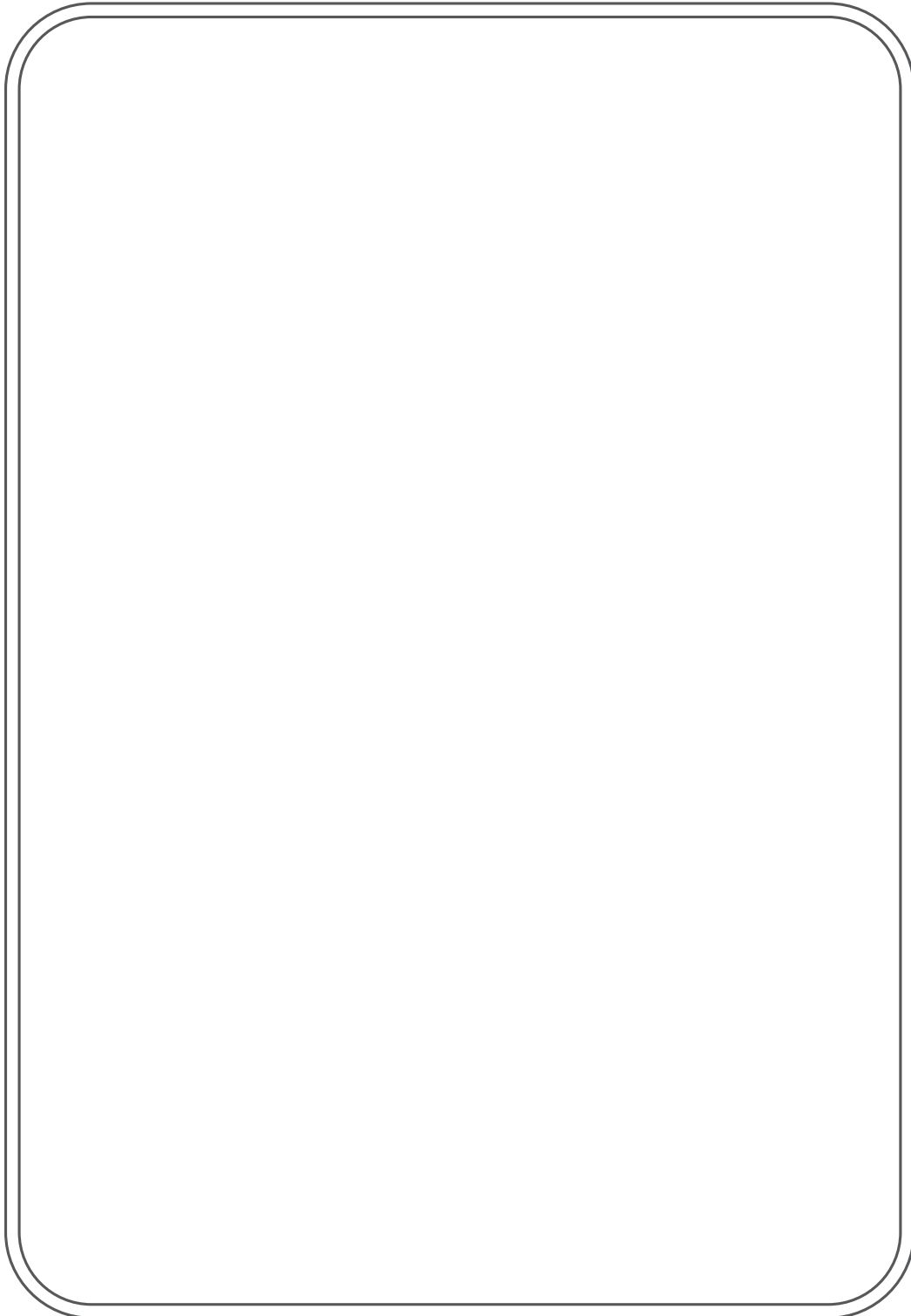
CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG



## LESSON THREE: CREATIVE WRITING ON THE POLAR EXPRESS

### TASK 2:

Sketch your favourite words and phrases from your snowflakes in the train carriage window. What details will you include? Which colours? See if you can bring the words and phrases to life!





# THE POLAR EXPRESS

CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG

## LESSON THREE: CREATIVE WRITING ON THE POLAR EXPRESS

### TASK 3:

Create some descriptive phrases of your own. You could describe: your journey on the Polar Express; the weather or landscape of the North Pole; polar animals; the elves or Santa Claus.

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....

### EXTENSION TASK:

Come up with a title for your own magical Christmas story.





# THE POLAR EXPRESS

CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG

## LESSON FOUR: MAKING A CHRISTMAS WISH

### LEAD-IN QUESTIONS:

- What Christmas wish is made in the story?
- Why do you think it is granted?

### TASK 1:

Imagine that you have been granted three wishes. What would you wish for and why?

Note: You are not allowed to wish for more wishes!

1. I wish .....
2. I wish .....
3. I wish .....

Have a chat about your wishes together. How many of you wished for: a toy or gadget; something expensive; something that can't be bought?

### Differentiate for younger children:

Ask children to choose just one wish. They can write this down or sketch it.

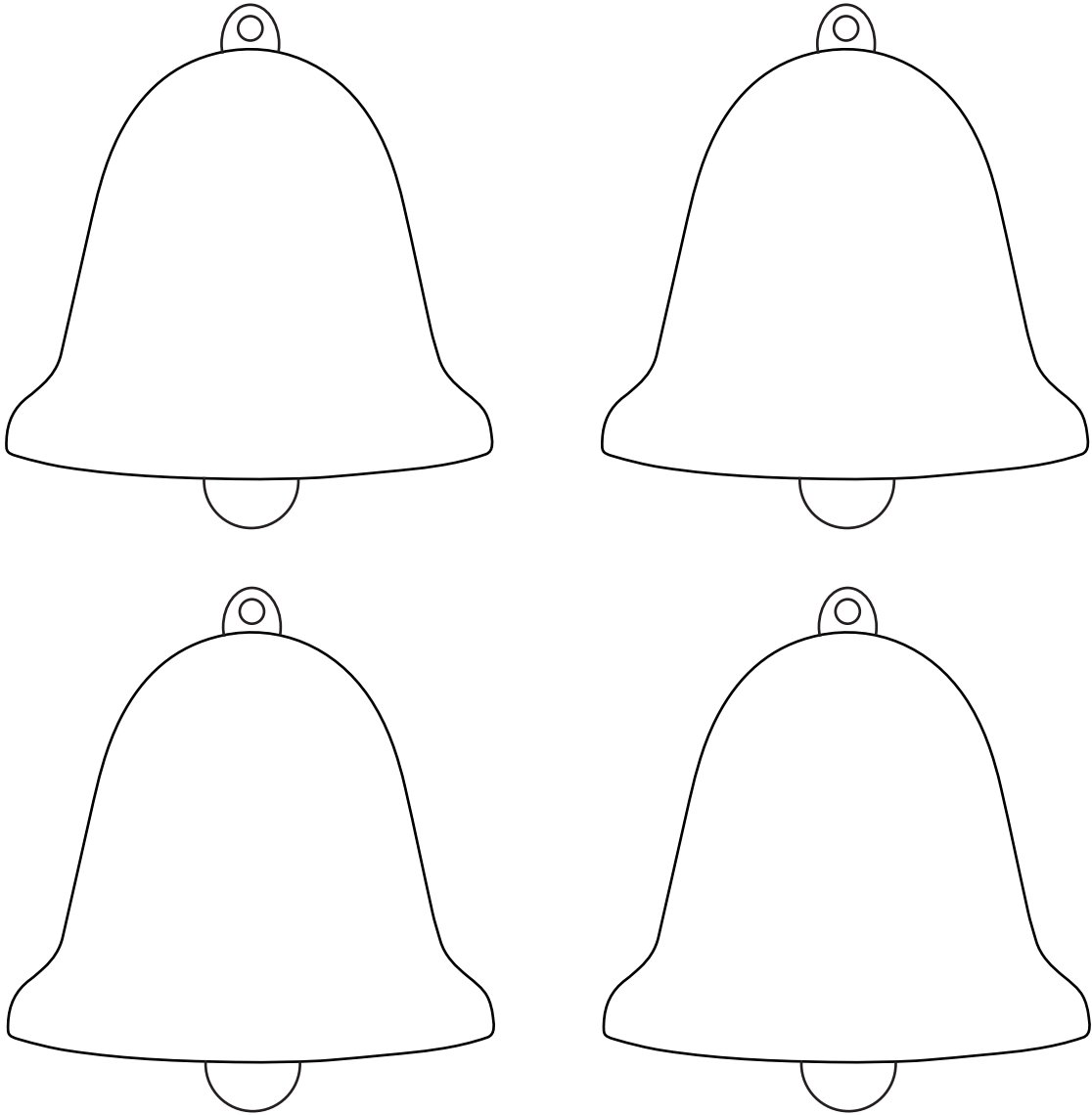


## LESSON FOUR: MAKING A CHRISTMAS WISH

### TASK 2:

Read through the final page of *The Polar Express* again. What messages are you left with? Has it made you think about Christmas differently? What about the importance of believing in things?

In each of the silver bells below, note down things or people that you believe in. Think about why they are important to you.





## LESSON FOUR: MAKING A CHRISTMAS WISH

### TASK 3:

Write a letter to Santa Claus using the template on the next page.

In your letter you might like to:

- Make a wish
- Tell him about things and people you believe in
- Plan a visit to the North Pole
- Ask him questions about life in the North Pole
- Explain what you have learned about Christmas

### EXTENSION TASK:

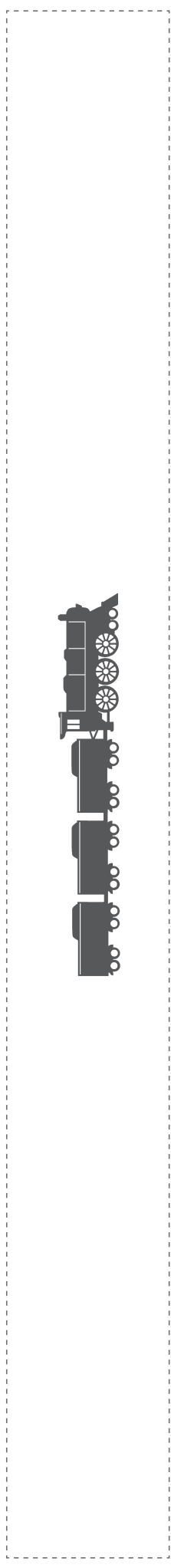
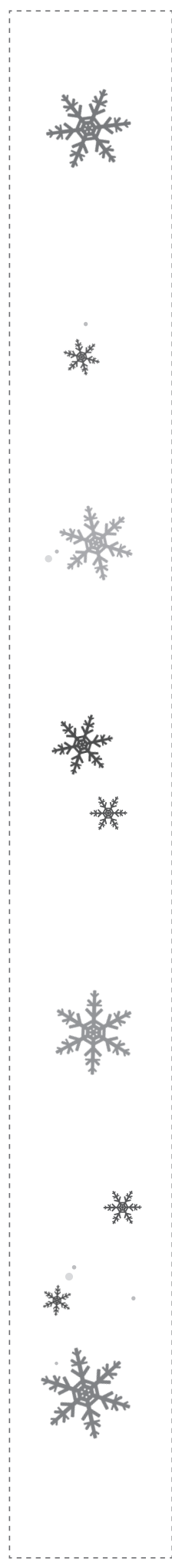
Reply to a friend's letter from the perspective of Santa Claus.





# CREATE A POLAR EXPRESS PAPERCHAIN

Add colour to your paperchain strip, then link everyone's strips together to decorate your classroom!





# THE POLAR EXPRESS

CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG

## THE POLAR EXPRESS WORD SEARCH

CHRISTMAS REINDEER SANTA ELVES SLEIGH

CONDUCTOR TRAIN TICKET STEAM

SNOWFLAKES MOUNTAINS BELL GIFT BELIEVE

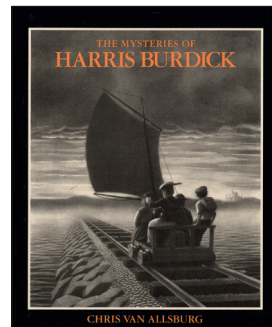
X	S	L	E	I	G	H	S	I	Z	P	S	B	P	Z
V	A	J	C	A	L	X	A	A	S	G	T	U	T	B
S	N	K	D	O	T	R	E	I	N	D	E	E	R	V
J	T	Q	N	G	G	Z	B	L	L	A	A	U	V	O
L	A	Q	S	I	C	Q	E	T	M	M	M	Z	R	O
R	Y	W	N	F	C	G	L	H	R	R	H	K	R	L
A	I	E	O	T	H	H	L	S	F	O	D	Y	M	U
O	F	L	W	F	R	C	O	N	D	U	C	T	O	R
H	T	B	F	K	I	U	G	W	F	D	O	T	U	U
T	Y	E	L	C	S	S	X	D	C	H	Z	F	N	K
I	B	L	A	Y	T	R	A	I	N	Y	F	G	T	C
C	T	I	K	K	M	J	H	P	U	C	Y	R	A	M
K	Z	E	E	Z	A	R	I	K	E	V	X	W	I	L
E	M	V	S	K	S	U	H	N	Z	O	U	Q	N	V
T	S	E	L	V	E	S	Q	Q	K	Y	M	J	S	V

## OTHER BOOKS BY CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG

### THE MYSTERIES OF HARRIS BURDICK

9781849392792

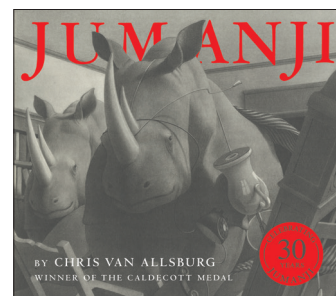
‘The perfect book for stimulating children’s creative writing’ **Anthony Browne**



### JUMANJI

9781783446766

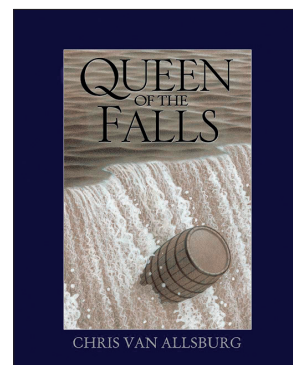
**Winner of the Caldecott Medal**



### THE QUEEN OF THE FALLS

9781849392860

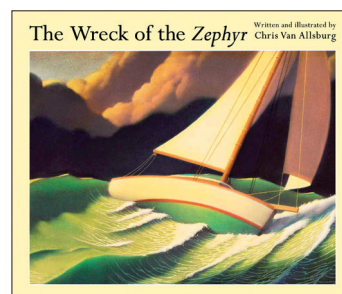
‘Van Allsburg adeptly turns an oddball historical footnote into an accessible adventure story’  
**New York Times**



### THE WRECK OF THE ZEPHYR

9781849395434

‘It would be difficult to imagine a better book of its kind’ **New York Times**



### THE MISADVENTURES OF SWEETIE PIE

9781783442928

‘Stunningly clever illustrations reveal the world from a hamster’s perspective’  
**Early Years Educator**

