

A Teacher's Guide to

The Keeping Quilt

by Patricia Polacco

Choose the questions and activities that work best with the age and interests of the child or class you are sharing this book with.

Discussion Questions

This is a story about what it means to come to a new country and of the customs families bring with them, as well as the new ones they create. Above all, this is a story about love, faith, and the traditions that bind families together over generations and through good times and difficult times.

1. When Great-Gramma Anna came to America, she couldn't speak English. Imagine you moved to a place where you didn't understand the language. What do you think that would feel like?
2. How many different languages are represented in your class? Try to learn a few words or phrases in another language. Practice with a friend.
3. Why do you think Anna's mother made the quilt? How many reasons can you think of?
4. If you were making a family quilt or a classroom quilt, what would you want to put in it and why?
5. Name the many things the family used the quilt for. Can you think of anything else you might use the quilt for?
6. The quilt became a family heirloom, to be passed down to the next generation. Define a family heirloom. What makes a family heirloom so precious? Do you have any family heirlooms? What is the oldest thing in your home that has been handed down? What is the story behind it?
7. The book takes place over many years. How do the pictures reflect the passage of time?
8. When Anna became engaged to Great-Grandpa Sasha, he gave her a gold coin for wealth, a dried flower for love, and a piece of rock salt so their lives would have flavor. When Gramma

Carle was born, she was wrapped in the quilt and given gold, a flower, salt, plus bread so she would never know hunger. Do you have any special traditions in your family or culture?

9. Does the title, *The Keeping Quilt*, have any special meaning?

10. The heart of the quilt is the love with which it was made and the stories it holds. How many stories and how many people are “kept” by this quilt? Can you name some?

11. Why do you think the author gave the quilt to the museum?

12. *The Keeping Quilt* is celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary. What do you think is so special about this book that makes it so loved?

Activities & Projects

1. The pictures in this book are very beautiful and expressive. Try reading the book again just looking at the pictures. Do you notice anything new in pictures or the story that you didn't see before? How do the pictures help to tell the story? What do you think about the artist's use of color?

2. Anna's family heritage is Russian and Jewish. Using the Internet or resources in your school library, research some of their customs and how they celebrate the Sabbath and weddings. Research some of their special foods like Challah and Kulich.

3. What is the cultural heritage of your class? Find the places on the map where everyone came from. Learn about all the different customs and traditions. Have a class party with foods from each country or special recipes from different families.

4. Interview a parent or grandparent and ask them to tell you some family stories. Write or illustrate one of their stories. Write or draw a story about you and your family to pass down to your children.

5. Make a family tree of Anna's family. Make a family tree for your own family. You can find a template by searching the Internet for “family tree for kids.”

To learn more about genealogy:

Climbing My Family Tree <http://www.climbingmyfamilytree.com/genealogy-for-kids/>

Helping Kids with Their Family Tree Project <http://voices.yahoo.com/helping-kids-their-family-tree-project-12016826.html?cat=25>

6. Design and make your own quilt or make a class quilt. Students can make self-portraits or use an animal or flower they like for their squares. Quilts can be made of material and drawn on with fabric crayons. Pieces of clothing or memorabilia could be incorporated. Quilts can also be made of paper, and students can draw or make collage squares.

The Internet has many resources. Here are just a few:

Crayola <http://www.crayola.com/ece-lesson-plans/pattern-paper-quilts-lesson-plan/>

Teacher Vision—Paper Quilts <http://www.teachervision.fen.com/childrens-art-activities/lesson-plan/5102.html>

The Craft Studio—Quilting with Children <http://thecraftstudio.com/qwc/>

The important thing to remember is the many stories will be shared both in the making and in the passing on of these quilts.

7. Although written after *The Keeping Quilt*, *The Blessing Cup* is a companion book, which tells Great-Gramma Anna's story before she came to America. Read it to find out what happened before, and why the family had to flee Russia to come to America. Decide for yourself if drinking from the blessing cup did bring the family riches and blessings.

8. Find out more about the author, Patricia Polacco, and read other books she has written and illustrated. You can begin here: <http://www.patriciapolacco.com/>

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