**Title:** The Polar Express by Chris Van Allsburg

Transported by a magical train to the North Pole, a boy is chosen by Santa to receive the first gift of Christmas. He chooses a silver bell from a reindeer’s harness. Once home again, the boy learns that the ringing of the treasured bell can only be heard by those who truly believe.

**Objective:** Reading Comprehension

- Compare and contrast real vs. fantasy
- Sequencing the events
- Create a new fantasy world

**Materials:** Copy of the textbook

- Copy of the CD-Rom (if available)
- Copies of activity worksheets

**Procedure:** Ask the children if they have ever wanted to go to an imaginary place. Tell them that they are going to read a story about a boy who goes to an imaginary place. Show the students the cover of the book and read the title. Give the children a piece of paper and ask them to draw one thing they think they will see in the story. Read the story or show the CD-Rom. Encourage the students to note when and how the book’s setting changes from the real world to the fantasy world. After reading the book, ask the children if they think what happened was real? Or, was it all in the boy’s dreams? Discuss some of the elements common to fantasy worlds (magical transportation, an unworldly place...
etc.) After reading the book have them draw on the back side of their paper one thing they saw in the story. Compare the two pictures. On the second day, have them begin to complete the activities on the following pages: real and fantasy, story sequencing and recall, and application—your choice. As a follow-up activity have the students think about a fantasy world they would like to visit. Have them write about this fantasy world. Have them use some of the guidelines on a following page.

Reflective Journal

The procedure for reflective journaling can be found at the end of the unit.

Assessment: The students should be able to retell 3 important events in the story: one at the beginning, one in the middle, and one at the end. They should be able to give and example of something that was real in the story and something that was fantasy.
Title: Song— There Are Times to Celebrate

Objective: To learn a new song about celebrating holidays around the world, sung to the tune of "It's a Small World".

To add a new stanza to the song for the country they are currently studying.

Materials: Copy of song to be taught
Tape of tune "It's a Small World"

Procedure: The teacher will present the song to the students, discussing the vocabulary in the song. Rhyming words in the song will be discussed. The students will practice singing the song as a group. Small groups (boys only) can sing the chorus and alternate with the chorus sung by girls only etc. At the conclusion of each country studied, the students will create their own variation of the first stanza adapting it to the holiday customs of that country. This can be completed as a whole group or small group activity.

Reflective Journal:
The procedure for reflective journaling can be found at the end of the unit.
**Assessment:** The students will be able to sing the song with its variations to the tune of “It’s a Small World.”

There are Times To Celebrate

There are times to celebrate,
Times to cheer.
There are times to mark
Special times of the year.
We’re so happy to say,
On these wonderful days,
That we celebrate with love.

(chorus)
These are times to celebrate.
These are times to celebrate.
These are times to celebrate—
Celebrate with love.
The Polar Express—Activity 1—Recall

1. What kind of transportation is the Polar Express?

2. Where does it go?

3. When does it go there?

4. Why does it go there?

5. Who rides the Polar Express?

6. Are the riders happy on the way there?

7. Is the ride one-way or round-trip?

Activity 2—Sequence of Events

Here are 8 events that happen in the story. Rewrite them on another piece of paper in the order that they happen.

1. A bell is lost.
2. The elves and children await the arrival of Santa Claus.
3. The Polar Express winds its way north through the snowy woods.
4. A sleigh bell is found inside an unexpected package.
5. The boy chooses a reindeer sleigh bell for the first gift of Christmas.
6. Santa finds the lost bell and it is wrapped.
7. An amazed boy sees a train come to a stop in front of his house.
8. A sad boy returns home on the Polar Express.
Activity 3—Your Choice

If you were on the Polar Express and was chosen to receive the first gift of Christmas, what would you choose?

Why would you choose this gift?

Would Santa be pleased with your selection? Explain your answer.

Activity 4—Your Fantasy World

Think about a fantasy world you would like to visit. To help organize your thoughts you may want to use the following questions to write your story.

Who lives in my world?
1. What do they look like?
2. How do they talk?
3. What are their special powers?
4. What do they do all day?
5. What are they called?

What is my Fantasy World Like?
1. What is it called?
2. What does it look like?
3. Where do the inhabitants live?
4. What kind of magical places/objects are there?

How Can I Get to My Fantasy World?
   1. By Magical vehicles?
   2. By making a wish?
   3. By a secret passageway?
Title: Too Many Tamales by Gary Soto & illustrated by Ed Martinez

Maria feels like a grown-up because she is allowed to help her mother make the Christmas tamales. But her feelings of pride turn to despair when she fears that she has dropped her mother’s diamond ring into the sticky dough. With the help of her hungry cousins, and a stroke of luck, the ring is recovered and the holiday is once again a joyous occasion.

Objective: The students will show an appreciation for a piece of literature about a traditional Mexican food.

The students will demonstrate division readiness.

The students will be able to create a story map.

Materials: Copy of text

Copy of story map

24 hot tamale candies

Paper towel

Recipe for making Tamales

Procedure: Have the students look at the pictures at the beginning of the story. Ask: What do you think the story is about? Read the story with the students, stopping to discuss key points. Have them predict what is going to happen. Discuss the story’s ending. Was their prediction correct? Were you happy the way the story turned out? Complete the story map with the students.

Math Activity:
This story is a springboard for a division lesson. Remind the students that the 4 cousins ate the first batch of 24 tamales. Give each pair of students a paper towel and 24 Hot Tamales candies. Have the student pairs arrange the candies in four equal piles on the paper towel to show how many tamales each cousin would have eaten if each one ate the same amount. Have a student volunteer from each pair write the resulting equation (24÷4 = 6). Continue in this manner, using a different factor of 24 each time. For example, instruct the pair to imagine that 8 cousins had shared the tamales. After completing a desired number of division problems, give each student some candy tamales to sample. Que bueno!

Sample some tamales that the teacher has prepared. (Recipe on another page.) The teacher can demonstrate how to make a tamale.

Reflective Journal:
The procedure for reflective journaling can be found at the end of the unit.

Assessment: The students should be able to recall the main parts of the story. The students should be able to demonstrate division readiness using manipulatives. The students should be able to tell if they like Tamales or not.
Sweet Tamales

3 ½ dozen large dry corn husks
1 cup lard (or ½ cup lard and ½ cup butter)
4 cups dehydrated masa flour
1 cup sugar
1 teaspoon salt
2 1/2 to 3 cups warm water or fruit juice

Date-Pecan Filling

(Makes 3 ½ dozen tamales)
1. Wash corn husks in warm water. Place in pan and cover with boiling water. Let soak at least 30 minutes before using.
2. Beat lard until light and fluffy, using spoon or electric mixer.
3. Combine masa flour, sugar, and salt. Gradually beat this mixture and water into lard until dough sticks together and has a paste-like consistency.
4. Shake excess water from each softened corn husk and pat dry on paper towels. Spread about 2 tablespoons tamale dough on center portion of husk, leaving at least a 2-inch margin at both ends and about ½ margin at right side. Spoon about 1 ½ tablespoons filling onto dough. Wrap tamale, overlapping left side first, then right side slightly over left. Fold bottom up and down.
5. Lay tamales in top of a steamer with open flaps on bottom. Tamales should be placed so there are spaces between them for circulation of steam.
6. Steam over simmering water about 1 hour, or until corn husks can be peeled from dough easily.
7. Date-Pecan filling: Blend 1 cup brown sugar, ¼ cup butter or margarine, and ½ teaspoon cinnamon until smooth. Add 1 cup chopped pitted dates and 1 cup chopped pecans; toss until evenly mixed.
Title: Let’s Play Passport

Objective: The children will learn the names and location of the seven continents.

Materials: Let’s Play Passport game directions and pieces.

Procedure: The teacher will make the game according to the directions. The children will play the game in groups of 2-4.

Reflective Journal: The procedure for reflective journaling can be found at the end of the unit.

Assessment: The assessment for this game will be observing cooperation and oral communication between the game players.
Title: Nine Days To Christmas: A Story of Mexico
by Marie Hall Ets & Aurora Labastida

This year, for the first time, Ceci is old enough to have a posada of her own—one of the special Mexican parties given on the nine nights before Christmas. All of the people in the village will be there, and there will be delicious things to eat. Best of all, Ceci will be able to choose the special piñata for her posada. She can hardly wait!

Objective: To help children see the importance of traditions in their own families.
- To see differences and similarities in customs between the United States and Mexico.
- To focus on four aspects of a story: Character, New words, Favorite part, and Summary.
- To learn a Piñata song
- To be able to make a pinata

Materials: Copy of textbook
- Copy of Pinata song
- Copy of Quartering the story worksheet
- Copy of directions on how to make a pinata

Procedure: Have the students look at the pictures at the beginning of the story. Ask: What do you think the story is about? Read the story with the students, stopping to discuss key points. Have them predict what is going to happen. Discuss the story’s ending. Was their prediction
correct? Ask: How does this tradition compare to one that your family has? Compare traditions of the students. Complete the activity worksheet, “Quartering the Story,” individually. On the second day, teach the students the Pinata Song in English. Hispanic students can sing it in Spanish. Begin making their own piñata. This will take several days to complete. Have students bring to school a bag of their favorite candy to put in the piñatas when complete.

**Reflective Journal:**

The procedure for reflective journaling can be found at the end of the unit.

**Assessment:** The students should be able to retell the four parts of the story that they wrote about in Quartering the Story. They should be able to sing the Pinata Song as a group in English.
Title: All Aboard the Holiday Express

Objective: The students will create a passport, an itinerary, and a map for their journey on the Holiday Express. The students will also create a suitcase to keep their passport, travel map, and other items that will be made throughout the duration of the unit.

Materials: Copies of the passport application worksheet, passport booklet worksheet, the world map, and a file folder to create the suitcase. A bulletin board consisting of the world map with an airplane and six suitcases labeled to represent the countries traveled to during the unit. As each country is visited the suitcase will be pinned there.

Procedure: The teacher will introduce the Holiday Express unit by giving each student a copy of the world map. Students can discuss the countries that they are from individually, and then the teacher will talk about the countries the unit will be covering. The teacher will ask the students what they already know about each country, making a list on a chart. Next, the teacher will list some things the students would like to know about each country. As each country is introduced, the students should color that stop on their map and their map key. The students will be journaling daily where they can write about the new things they have learned. The teacher will then distribute the passport applications. The students will learn that travel from one country to
another requires a passport. The students will learn that specific and personal information is included in the application, and once approved, a passport is issued. Finally, the students will create their own personal suitcase out of their manila folder to hold their map, passport and treasures collected along the way.

**Reflective Journal:**

The procedure for reflective journaling can be found at the end of the unit.

**Assessment:** The assessment will be the successful completion of all the passport activities and the suitcase as well as participation in the group discussion about the map.
**Title:** The Wild Christmas Reindeer by Jan Brett

This is a story of a stubborn reindeer and a little girl named Teeka. Her job is to prepare the reindeer for their big night pulling Santa’s sleigh.

**Objective:** To compare another Christmas story with The Polar Express.

To make a reindeer art project.

**Materials:** Copy of text

Copy of Rudolph Art Project

Copy of Venn Diagram

Tape of song Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer

**Procedure:** Read the story to your students. Tell them that they are going to read a story about a girl who Santa has asked to get his reindeer ready to fly on Christmas Eve. Discuss the following: Teeka’s plan, Teeka’s problem, Teeka’s decision, and Teeka’s discovery. You can also discuss how each reindeer got its name. They can give each reindeer a new name, based on their behavior. Discuss the traditional names of Santa’s reindeer. After reading the story give each student a copy of the Venn Diagram. As a group complete the Venn Diagram, comparing the two stories. On the second day make the reindeer art project. You may want to play the song Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer while the students are making their reindeer art project.
Reflective Journal:

The procedure for reflective journaling can be found at the end of the unit.

Assessment: The students should be able to retell 3 important events in the story: one in the beginning, one in the middle, and one in the end. They should be able to retell 2-3 items that were the same in both stories and 2-3 items that were different.
Title: Christmas in France

Objective: The children will learn about the holiday traditions that are observed in France.

Materials: Babar and Father Christmas by Jean de Brunhoff, 5X7 index cards, 12X5 construction paper, six-inch dowel, Christmas gift wrap, scissors, glue, sequins, rickrack, ribbon and glitter, and Ho Ho cakes.

Procedure: The teacher will introduce the lesson by having the children locate France on their maps. The children should color their map and map key. She will then give the students an opportunity to share what they already know about France. The teacher will then give the students some backround information about the traditions observed in France. Christmas in France is considered a religious holiday with a Nativity scene usually displayed in the home. Although, Christmas trees are not particularly popular, the French version of Santa Claus, Pere Noel, leaves gifts in the shoes of the children. Another tradition includes a feast called a reveillon, following Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. At this feast, a special dessert called buche de Noel, or a Christmas log is served. This is a cake rolled and frosted to resemble a tree trunk. In ancient times, the French thought an unburned Yule log had magical powers. Today, people burn Yule logs in their fireplaces for good luck. The teacher will then read the book Babar and Father Christmas. As a
creative writing assignment, the children will draw a picture of Babar and his dog Duck on one side. On the other side they will write a message telling where Babar is, along with a message, and address the postcard to his family. Christmas stickers may be used for stamps. An alternate activity could be creating a typical French door decoration, used to welcome friends and neighbors. At the conclusion of the lesson the children will share in a snack of Ho Ho’s to signify a buche de Noel.

Reflective Journal:
The procedure for reflective journaling can be found at the end of the unit.

Assessment: The assessment for this lesson will be the class participation after reading the book, and the successful completion of the post cards from Babar.
Title: Christmas in Italy

Objective: The children will learn about the holiday traditions that are observed in Italy.

Materials: Suitcases with student's passport and map. A basket and broom, Tomie De Paola's book, The Legend of Old Befana, chalkboard, worksheet about Old Befana, and a craft broom with things to decorate them with.

Procedure: The lesson will begin with the students locating Italy on their maps. The teacher will ask the children to share any information they might already know about Italy. The teacher will then share some facts about the traditional ways Italians celebrate Christmas. Italians consider Christmas a religious and family holiday. Before December 25, a nativity scene is set up in every church and many homes. Distant family members travel home for the holiday, and Christmas Day, families go to church together. Before Christmas, musicians from the Abruzzi region called zampognari travel from town to town playing hymns on their bagpipes. On Christmas Day children may receive gifts from Babbo Natale, the Italian version of Santa Claus. Traditional gift giving comes on January 6, Epiphany, when families remember the journey of the Three Wise Men to Bethlehem to present gifts to the Bambino Gesu. Legend says the three kings rested on their way at the home of an old woman. When they asked her to come with them, she declined saying
she was too busy sweeping her house. Later she reconsidered and lost her way. To this day she is looking for the Christ Child. The teacher can then ask the students the significance of the basket and the broom and ask how they might relate to each other. She then tells the students that the main character of the book The Legend of Old Befana, is going to go through changes and that they were going to chart them as she reads. The teacher will then make three stars on the chalkboard. After the teacher reads the book, the students will collect their thoughts in the stars, the teacher can prompt the students by asking them what things stayed the same, and what things were different. The children can then fill out their worksheet and decorate their brooms.

**Reflective Journal:**

The procedure for reflective journaling can be found at the end of the unit.

**Assessment:** The assessment will be oral participation in the discussion about the book, and completion of the worksheet.