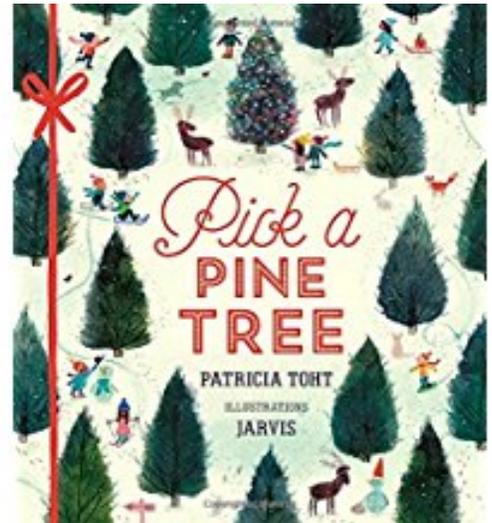


Pick a Pine Tree

by **PATRICA TOHT**
illustrated by **JARVIS**

ABOUT THE BOOK

Part of the magic of the Christmas season stems from the traditions that families and friends take part in every year: hanging up stockings; putting lights in the windows; and, one of the most important of all, picking out and taking home the Christmas tree. With style and warmth, debut author Patricia Toht and Jarvis, the author-illustrator of *Alan's Big, Scary Teeth*, evoke all the rituals of decorating the tree — digging out boxes jam-packed with ornaments and tree trimmings, stringing tinsel, and, at long last, turning on those twinkling lights. Joyously drawn and rhythmically written, this celebration of family, friends, and the holiday season is as merry as the tradition it depicts. A festive read-aloud brimming with all the joy and excitement of Christmastime — beginning, of course, with picking out a tree!



About the Author:

Patricia Toht once owned a children's bookshop called Never Never Land before turning a love of books into a love of writing. *Pick a Pine Tree* is her debut picture book. Patricia Toht lives in Chicago, Illinois.

About the Illustrator:

Jarvis is an illustrator and animator who has worked as both a record jacket designer and an animation director. He is the author-illustrator of *Alan's Big, Scary Teeth*. Jarvis lives in Manchester, England.

About the Creator of this Guide:

RANDI SONENSHINE is a literacy specialist, instructional coach, and children's author. Her debut picture book will be published by Candlewick Press. Learn more at randisonenshine.com.

About this Guide: This guide was created for grades K-2, but can be easily adapted for older children.

Reading Activities (Common Core: RL.K.1-6, .10; RL1.1-3, .5, .7)



Before Reading

1. Ask the class, “What is a tradition?” (a long-standing belief or practice that continues from one generation to another) Explain that holidays usually have associated traditions. Ask, “What holiday has the tradition of cookouts and fireworks? How about wearing costumes and trick or treating? What are some Thanksgiving traditions?” Explain that many cultural and religious groups celebrate holidays. Brainstorm and share traditions of some of these.

2. Show students the cover of *Pick a Pine Tree* and read the title. Ask, “Based on the title and cover art, which holiday and tradition do you think this book is about?” Ask for specific details that helped students make that inference.

3. Point out and discuss the difference between the author and illustrator. Show students the Jacket flap and read about the author and illustrator. Ask, “What Christmas tree traditions are mentioned by the author and illustrator?” Explain that the book describes one family’s Christmas tree traditions.

During Reading

1. Explain that the text is presented in a how-to structure, like instructions, or a recipe with steps in time order. (For older students, you might introduce the term *chronological* or *sequential*.)

2. Read the story aloud, emphasizing the rhyme and rhythm of the text.

3. Before each page turn, encourage the students to predict what comes next in the process of setting up and decorating the Christmas tree.

After Reading

1. Ask students to recall as many specific details as they can. Use prompting as necessary.

- Where does the family get a Christmas tree?
- How do they get the tree home?
- What things do they do before decorating the tree? During? After?

2. Ask questions that require students to make connections to the text. (examples below)

- If your family has a Christmas tree, where do you get it and how do you get it home?
- Have you decorated or helped someone else decorate a Christmas tree? What was similar in the story to your experience? What was different?
- If your family decorates for any holiday, how do you go about it? Are there specific decorations you use year after year? Do any of these have special meaning?
- If you haven't decorated a tree, what about carving a pumpkin or decorating for Halloween? Is it more fun with friends? Why or why not?



Understanding Time Order: Which Came First? (Common Core: RL.2, RL.7)

1. Write the following steps from the story on sentence strips and arrange them in random order in a pocket chart or on a magnetic board.

- Pick out a tree and bring it home.
- Put the tree in a stand and water it.
- Invite friends over.
- Decorate the tree.
- Add a tree skirt and plug in the lights.
- Gather around the tree and sing.

2. Read aloud the events and guide students through arranging them in the correct time order. Refer back to the text and illustrations in the book as needed.

*Differentiation:

- For students needing more support, simplify the language and use a smaller number of events.
- For more independent students, or for a center activity, prepare multiple sets of events on card stock and give each group a set. Have groups arrange the cards in order.
- To include movement, give sentence strips to children and allow them to form a human time line.

Super Sense Detectors (Common core: RL 1.4- preview for K)

1. Explain that authors use words that appeal to our senses in order for the reader to imagine and make connections to what the characters are seeing, feeling, hearing, etc. This also helps the reader to understand the story better.
2. Introduce/review the five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, using picture cards or an anchor chart.
3. Create a chart on the board or an easel pad with a column for each of the five senses. Tell students that they are going to be Super Sense Detectors; as you read the story again, they will be watching and listening for words that describe something you can see, hear, smell, taste, or touch. Record these words and phrases in the appropriate chart column.

Differentiation/Variation:

- For a more interactive activity, have students cut out symbols from a prepared handout (a hand, eye, nose, mouth, and ear) and glue these on popsicle sticks, or have laminated versions ready. When you come to a sensory word or phrase in the story, instruct students to hold up the appropriate prop. Some examples: spiky needle clumps, scaly bark, sappy bumps, piney scent, bulging boxes, rusty tins, twinkling lights, fat, round bulbs, jingle bells, lacy snowflakes, voices ring. When you are finished, ask students which senses were represented the most? Which was not included? (taste) Ask students to come up with “taste” words and phrases that would fit the story.



Writing Activities

A “Sense” of Tradition (Common Core Connections: W.K.2, W.1.2)

1. Tell students that they will use pictures and sensory words to describe a favorite family tradition. Explain that it doesn't need to be tied to a holiday; it can be a yearly summer beach trip, Sunday dinners, movie or game nights, baking cookies with grandma, etc. – anything that is a fairly regular occurrence.

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2. Model the process with students first, using a shared class tradition, such as recess, lunch time, or library visits. Brainstorm words and phrases for each of the five senses, listing these on chart paper or the board. Write a description using these and pictures. Have students read the finished work aloud in a choral (students read together with the teacher) or an echo read (students repeat each line or sentence after teacher).
3. Have students repeat the process for their own family traditions. Allow them to share their work with the whole class from an "Author's Chair" or in small groups.

HOW-TO (Common Core Connections: W.K.3, W.1.3, W.1.7)

1. Point out that *Pick a Pine Tree* reads like a how-to book for choosing and decorating a Christmas tree. Explain that it is very important for how-to books to present instructions in the correct time order. (Recall the time order activity above.)
2. Re-read the story, calling attention to the "time" words Patricia Toht uses in the story: NOW, THEN, NEXT, AT LAST. Also point out that each step begins with a "verb," a word that tells the reader what action to perform: PICK, LIFT, MOVE, TRIM, and so on.
3. Have students write a how-to for a familiar task that requires three or more steps. Give some examples like getting ready for school, cleaning your room, or playing a particular game. Model the process first.

*Differentiation: Allow students to use a combination of drawings, dictation, and words to compose their how-to pieces.



Math Activities (common core connection: GA.1, GA.2)

Simon Says, "Shape Up!"

1. Turn to the spread that begins, "Jolly Santas," which shows a close up of the ornaments on the tree. Have students identify the shapes that make up the various ornaments.
2. Give students each a set of two-dimensional (flat) shapes made from construction paper or laminated die cuts. Include one small and one large of each of the following: square, rectangle, triangle, and circle. Play Shape Simon Says: Give students instructions for arranging the shapes, using size and directional words (*above*, *below*, *beside*, and *next to*). For example: *Simon says place the small triangle above the large square, or Simon Says place the large circle below the small rectangle.*

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Measure, Measure (Common Core Connections: 1.MD.A.1, 1.MD.A.2)

1. Cut five lengths of tinsel or ribbon in the following measurements: one 4' piece, one 3' piece, two 2' pieces, and one 1' piece. (This can be done in smaller units if space is an issue.) Make enough sets for small groups of students.
2. Discuss the meaning of *measure* and the concepts of *length* and equal measure. Have students do the following:
 1. Find the two pieces that are equal in length (2' pieces).
 2. Put aside one of the equal length pieces and arrange the remaining pieces of tinsel in size order from shortest to longest.
 3. Find two pieces that together equal the length of the longest piece (two 2' pieces), by placing them end to end and comparing them to the longest piece.
 4. Find two *different* pieces that together equal the length of the longest piece (1', and 3' pieces), by placing them end to end and comparing them to the longest piece.



Science Activity (Next Generation Science Standard/ STEM connection: Analyzing and Interpreting Data; making observations and looking for patterns)

Tree Scientists

1. Tell students that pine trees are *evergreens*, and ask them to infer the meaning of the word. Explain that most, but not all evergreens are conifers, or trees that have needles instead of leaves and produce pinecones. Show pictures of some common conifers, such as pines, firs, and spruces. Ask students to note differences, as well as similarities among the trees.
2. Explain that one important job of a scientist is to make observations and look for patterns. Tell students that they are going to be tree scientists, and they will need to use all their powers of observation. Recall the five senses from the Super Sense Detectors activity above, and ask students which of the five senses will be most useful in observing conifer needles. (Make clear that they are not to taste any of the needles.)

3. If possible, take a field trip to a place that has a variety of evergreens, such as a park, home improvement or landscaping store, or a tree lot. Have students study the needles of different tree species and draw these in a journal or on a prepared activity sheet. Next, have students describe the needles using their senses. Encourage them to note differences in color, texture, shape, size, and smell. When students return to the classroom, have them use their observation notes to identify the species using an evergreen identification chart (easily found on the internet). This part of the activity requires looking for patterns.

*If a field trip is not possible, collect the various needles ahead of time and have students conduct the observation activity in the classroom.

** For very young children, conduct the activity as a class, passing around each specimen, and recording notes on chart paper while children dictate their observations.

Social Studies Connection: (NCSS C3 Framework: D2.Geo.2.K-2.)



Christmas Decorations Around the World

1. Ask students to share any knowledge they have of different Christmas decorating traditions around the world. Explain that you will be investigating some of these unique traditions and locating the country on a world map.

2. Display a photo of a Christmas tree from a country other than yours. Prompt students to make inferences about the location based on the decorations and environment, pointing out specific features and using guided questioning. (It may help to display a second photo showing geographical or cultural features of the country to further support this critical thinking skill.)

3. Locate the country on a world map. To add a fun element, use prepared symbols related to each country's decorating traditions and pin these on the map.

Sample countries and traditions to investigate:

- In Australia, shell ornaments are often used for decorating Christmas trees, since Christmas falls during Australia's summer months. Connect this to the beaches around Australia.
- A tradition in the Ukraine and Poland is to decorate Christmas trees with a spider web.
- Gold paper fans, origami cranes, and paper lanterns are popular Christmas tree decorations in Japan.

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- In Sweden, traditional Christmas tree decorations are Swedish flags and ornaments made of straw.
- In Greece, it is a tradition to decorate a “Christmas Boat” made of paper or wood, which is placed by the outer door or fireplace.



Art Activity (National Core Arts Standards, Anchor Standard 1)

Pine Cone Christmas Tree

Materials Needed:

- craft pine cones (If using “found” pine cones, be sure to file sharp edges.)
- green, blue, and white paint and paint brushes
- white or red modeling clay
- assortment of decorative supplies, such as glitter, mini pom-poms, pipe cleaners, beads, string, etc. (The greater the variety, the better; children should have freedom to create their own unique product.)
- glue

Instructions:

1. Let students paint pine cones as desired. Allow to dry.
2. Have students choose a color of modeling clay and anchor their pine cone “trees” on a mound of the clay.
3. Have students decorate using the provided supplies. Encourage them to be creative.
4. Display the finished pieces and have students to a gallery walk.

