

The Mermaid's Purse

We have read several books by Patricia Polacco. Many of Patricia Polacco's books are stories from her family. Her mother's side of the family immigrated from Russia. Her father's side of the family immigrated from Ireland.

After reading *Fiona's Lace*, several of you wanted to know what happened to the author's Irish ancestors after they survived the big fire in Chicago. In *Fiona's Lace*, the author's great-great-great-grandfather hoped to move to Michigan and own a farm. This book is about the author's grandmother, who was born on a farm in Michigan.

The title of the book is *The Mermaid's Purse*. This is an old term used to describe a baby born with the amniotic sac, or membrane still surrounding the baby. This is very rare - only about 1 in 80,000 babies are born en caul - the more correct term. Because this is so rare, a baby born in this way was often thought to be a sign of good luck or that the baby would have special qualities. One common belief was that the person born this way could never drown.

We will read half of the book today and finish it next Monday.

Introduce yourself and tell your group if this story reminds you of anything in your life.

Discussion questions.

Teachers: You can save these until the end of the story, or answer the questions as you read.

(page 2)

What made Estella's birth unusual? How did she get her name?

Were you, or anyone in your family, given a name because of an event or unusual happening?

What does it mean that Estella was drawn to storms and storms to her?

(pages 3-4)

What were some blessings and gifts that came to Estella?

There is an unusual description of how big Stella was when she started school. What is it?

Are you a person who always has your nose in a book?

When you were a child, did you ever get in trouble for reading when or where your parent thought you should not?

(pages 5-6)

What did Stella's father mean when he said that Fred was making moon eyes at her?

Pig Ears is an unusual nick name! Why do you think he might have that name?

What does Pig Ears Lonsberry think about Stella's books?

How is something or someone usually christened? How is Stella's library christened?

(page 7)

Whit - the smallest amount; an iota.

Scoff - to laugh at and talk about someone or something in a way that shows disapproval and a lack of respect

Why did Stella's father think the men weren't interested in books?

Do you know someone who doesn't care a whit about books? What is something you don't care a whit about?

Have you been scoffed at for something you believe or think is important?

(pages 8-9)

buckboard - a four-wheeled wagon of simple construction meant to be pulled by a horse or other large animal.

timothy - a kind of grass grown for hay

haunches - the upper part of an animal's rear leg

What was wrong with Mr. Dunkle's sheep?

(pages 10-11)

How did Stella save Fred's life?

(pages 12-13)

"Now everyone in the county knew and loved Stella and the Mermaid's Purse and its wonderful books." How had Stella changed their minds?

There are still people in the world and in this country who cannot read. Do you know someone who is or was illiterate? If they learned to read late in life, who helped them?

Do you have a favorite illustration?

Do you have any predictions about what will happen next in the story?

