

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Pollyanna (Unabridged) by Eleanor H. Porter

## Book Information

Eleanor H. Porter, Pollyanna (Unabridged)  
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Book Level: 5.2  
Interest Level: MG

An orphan girl transforms a town with her love.

**Topics:** Classics, Classics (All); Emotions,  
Misc./Other; Family Life, Aunts; Family Life,  
Moving to a New Area

## Main Characters

Dr. Chilton the man who was Polly's lover long ago; they have not spoken in many years  
Jennie Pollyanna's deceased mother; Polly's sister  
Jimmy Bean a ten-year-old orphan boy searching for a new home  
John Pendleton a man who once loved Jennie; he and Polly do not get along  
Mrs. Benton and Mrs. Tarbell two women pleased by Pollyanna's visits  
Mrs. Snow an invalid woman whom Pollyanna frequently visits  
Nancy and Old Tom two servants in the Harrington house  
Polly Harrington the forty-year-old aunt of Pollyanna, who accepts her niece into the house as part of her duty  
Pollyanna Whittier an orphaned eleven-year-old who is sent to live with her mother's sister; she is known for finding the good in any situation  
Reverend Paul Ford a minister who is helped by Pollyanna's story of her father's days as a minister

## Vocabulary

**cantankerous** quarrelsome and disagreeable  
**consumption** an old word for tuberculosis  
**gingham** a light cotton cloth woven in checks or stripes

**heathen** a person who is a member of a people, nation, etc., that does not acknowledge the God of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam

**impertinent** rude

**prisms** transparent material used to refract light or break it into a spectrum

**remonstrances** strong protests or objections

## Synopsis

Polly Harrington, a severe, stern-faced woman, is one of the wealthiest residents in Beldingsville, Vermont. She considers it her unpleasant duty to take in Pollyanna Whittier, her deceased sister's daughter, when the death of Pollyanna's father leaves the little eleven-year-old girl an orphan. For many years Polly has held bitter feelings toward Pollyanna's father, a poor minister, because he took her sister from her family's wealth and social position to a life of hardship in a small Western town.

The day of Pollyanna's arrival, Aunt Polly sends Nancy, her servant, to meet the child at the train station. Pollyanna is an enthusiastic, cheerful girl who finds the good in every situation. Pollyanna even finds something to be glad about after Aunt Polly gives her a small, plain, stiflingly hot attic bedroom to sleep in rather than one of the better bedrooms. She had learned to play the "just being glad" game from her father and teaches the game to others. However, she does not tell Aunt Polly about the game because she has been warned never to mention her father to her aunt.

A pattern develops over the summer days; Pollyanna has lessons most mornings and time to play and visit others in the afternoons. She befriends many people, charming them with her talk of "gladness." Mrs. Snow, a poor, bed-ridden church member becomes a good friend after Pollyanna visits her several times. Along her daily route, Pollyanna encounters John Pendleton, a reclusive, bitter man, who, unknown to Pollyanna, was once in love with her mother. After John breaks his leg in a fall, Pollyanna spends time with him in his home, where he begins to care for the young girl. He tries

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to persuade her to live with him, since she has done so much to brighten his life. Pollyanna, however, mistakenly believes he is in love with Aunt Polly and suggests that both she and her aunt live with him. The next day, he clears up the misunderstanding, stating that it was Pollyanna's mother, Jennie, who he had fallen in love with many years before. Later that day, when Pollyanna discovers that her aunt really does want her, she determines to remain loyal to her rather than going to live with John.

Meanwhile, Pollyanna's attempts to find a new home for orphan Jimmy Bean are unsuccessful. The church's Ladies' Aid society will not help, so Pollyanna suggests that John may want to consider taking Jimmy in, but John declines. Along with helping Jimmy, Pollyanna tells a despondent Reverend Ford how her father used "rejoicing texts" to encourage himself. He realizes that is the best way to address a sermon to his church members, who have grown increasingly negative in attitude.

Not long after Pollyanna begins school in the fall, tragedy strikes when an automobile hits Pollyanna. Nancy notices Aunt Polly no longer has a sense of duty about her when it comes to her niece; she now genuinely cares for Pollyanna. At first, Pollyanna believes she has broken her legs and still finds something to be glad about when Aunt Polly calls her "dear." It is when Pollyanna overhears the comment that she will never walk again that she, for the first time, cannot find anything to be glad about. Neighbors and friends rally around the girl, coming to visit and sharing with Aunt Polly their stories about Pollyanna and her "just being glad" game. Aunt Polly asks Nancy why she was not aware of this game and is determined to play it with Pollyanna. Aunt Polly will do anything for Pollyanna except call Dr. Chilton to come look at the girl. The doctor and Aunt Polly once had a relationship that ended badly, and both have too much pride to seek the other. However, Jimmy overhears that Dr. Chilton knows someone who might be able to cure Pollyanna, and when Jimmy reveals this, Aunt Polly allows Dr. Chilton to be summoned. Dr. Chilton's visit prompts a reunion and eventual marriage between the old lovers and brings help to Pollyanna, who slowly begins walking again.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

How do Aunt Polly's feelings about Pollyanna change over the course of the story? Why do you think her feelings changed?

*In the beginning, Aunt Polly is not very happy to be taking Pollyanna into her home. She does it only out of a sense of duty and responsibility. Nancy is the first to notice Aunt Polly's feelings have changed when Aunt Polly becomes worried because her niece is late coming home one night. Nancy also notices Aunt Polly no longer feels taking care of Pollyanna is just a duty. She is genuinely concerned when Pollyanna is injured and vows to do almost anything to help her. Aunt Polly's feelings change as she comes to know Pollyanna better. Pollyanna loves her aunt unconditionally and is very vocal about how good and kind Aunt Polly is to her. Aunt Polly marvels that Pollyanna has found something to be glad about in every difficulty, and this is a strong rebuke to her own bitterness. She eventually sees the futility of her self-centeredness and decides to change.*

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## Literary Analysis

Describe the relationship between Aunt Polly and Dr. Chilton during most of the book. What do you think their relationship was like before they had their falling out and split up? What do you think their relationship will be like in the future?

*The relationship between Aunt Polly and Dr. Chilton is non-existent during most the story. The reader becomes aware they once had a relationship, even though neither character speaks of the other. They do appear to be curious about each other if one's name is mentioned by someone else. When talking with John Pendleton, Dr. Chilton says he knows he cannot go into her home uninvited, as it would signal all was well between them. Both people have a bit too much pride and that keeps them distant. Students' thoughts on what the relationship was like and what it will be like will vary. They should use knowledge of the characters' personalities to make inferences.*

## Inferential Comprehension

Compare Pollyanna and Aunt Polly. What do they have in common? What are their differences?

*Pollyanna was named after her two aunts, Polly and Anna, thus they share similar names. Both have a sense of duty and responsibility to the family -- Aunt Polly when she accepts her niece into her house, and Pollyanna when she declines John Pendleton's offer to live with him. They are different in that Pollyanna is optimistic, outgoing, happy, and enjoys having fun, while Aunt Polly tends to be pessimistic, withdrawn, and unfriendly to most people. Pollyanna loves Aunt Polly without really knowing her, while Aunt Polly shows reserve and restraint with her affection towards her niece.*

## Constructing Meaning

What is your favorite part of *Pollyanna*? Why?

*Responses will vary, but students should explain why they made their choices.*

## Making Predictions

The story ends with Pollyanna learning to walk again. She has taken six steps. The reunion of Aunt Polly and Dr. Chilton results in their marriage. Have students predict some of the possible events that might occur in a sequel to *Pollyanna*. Be sure they include the other characters they read about: John Pendleton, Jimmy Bean, Mrs. Snow, Nancy, etc.

**Understanding Characterization** Pollyanna gets to know many different people throughout the story. Have students list them and describe several characteristics about each, both before and after they get to know Pollyanna. Once a list is compiled, have students create a "photo album" of Pollyanna's friends. They should draw what they believe the character looks like and write a brief description beneath the picture.

**Recognizing Plot** Pollyanna is a very enthusiastic child who finds the good in every situation. Aunt Polly, however, is a stern woman who is less than excited to have the orphan in her home. Have students brainstorm how the story would change if their personalities were reversed. How would Pollyanna react to living with her aunt? How would Aunt Polly react to having her niece in her home? What else would change throughout the story if Aunt Polly had Pollyanna's positive attitude and vice versa?

**Understanding the Main Idea** Pollyanna learns the "just being glad" game from her father. Have students review how the game is played and then create small groups to play the game. Give them difficult situations in which they are to find something to be "glad" about. They might also come up with situations themselves to use within their group.

## Teachable Skills