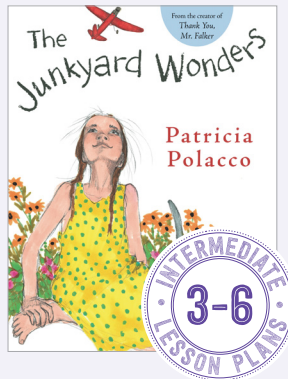


# The Junkyard Wonders

by Patricia Polacco

## Themes

Never Give Up  
Determination  
Perseverance  
Overcoming Obstacles  
Problem Solving  
Acceptance  
Empathy/Compassion



Patricia Polacco shares the marvelous story of a group of children, often made fun of because of their difficulties in school. This group of underdogs perseveres through a series of challenging events – Never Giving Up – to create the ultimate science fair project. This beautiful book deals with difficult, but relatable topics including bullying and death. It is based on a true story!

### Key Vocabulary

**Katydid:** a large grasshopper that makes a buzzing sound by rubbing its wings together  
**Summoned:** a call to come or meet  
**Stout:** blocky, thick-bodied  
**Brusque:** impolitely abrupt in speech or action,  
**Podium:** raised platform for a speaker  
**Junkyard:** a lot or yard in which junk is collected, stored and sold  
**Tourettes:** childhood disorder – characteristics include sudden, repetitive movements (tics) such as twitching, eye blinking, or unusual sounds  
**Diabetes:** a disease affecting the body's use of sugar  
**Nifty:** attractive, stylish, cleverly contrived  
**Wistfully:** thoughtful with sadness  
**Snarled:** to speak sharply with anger or meanness  
**Lever, fulcrum and counterweights:** basic tools – bar for pivoting, the point of support on which a level turns, a weight that balances another weight  
**Perpetual motion:** once put in motion, keeps going without stopping  
**Destined:** to send to a particular place  
**Propulsion:** the drive to move forward  
**Unanimous:** complete agreement by all  
**Sputter:** a fast exclamation  
**Sneered:** facial look – showing lack of respect

### Tricky Phrasing

**My heart sang:** happy, joyous  
**Snapped to attention:** quick movement to stand tall  
**No-nonsense voice:** very serious voice – not joking around  
**Primed the pump:** to prepare for use – to get it started (pushing gasoline through the engine)

## Discussion Starters

1. Why was Trisha excited about the first day at her new school? She was excited to have a new start where no one would think she was dumb, tease her or know she had attended special classes at her old school. She was excited because she already had a friend from the neighborhood – Kay.
2. Describe Trisha's first day at school. How do you think she felt? All the neighborhood kids ran off. When Trisha waved to Kay – she didn't wave back. She felt lost and didn't know where to go. When she asked for directions to her room the two girls made funny looks when they saw what class she was assigned to. **Have you ever felt like Trisha felt?** Allow discussion time to talk about similar events at school and how they could have been avoided. **How can we prevent that at our school?**

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*We might want to invite someone to sit with us if they are alone.*

3. How did Trisha's dad encourage her after the first day of school? He told her to stick it out for a month. He said she was not a quitter. What does it mean to not be a quitter? Don't give up when it's hard. Do your best to stay with it.
4. Mrs. Peterson wanted her students to memorize the "Definition of Genius." Review the poem line by line and have students give examples of what each line means. NOTE: Copy the printable of the definition for each child. Why do you think she wanted the kids to look at this poem every day? She believed it described each of them and would encourage them.
5. The mean kids made fun of the special children and called the class the "Junkyard." Why did Mrs. Peterson, their loving teacher, call the kids "Junkyard Wonders"? Things found at junk yards are usually old, broken and not very useful items that have been thrown away. Mrs. Peterson saw her students as Junkyard WONDERS – kids that could be made into something wonderful. She did not see them as junk.
6. How did the kids in Trisha's class become friends? What kind of things did they do together? Worked together, laughed together, recognized each other's strength. They did almost everything together. Discuss acceptance of others – how differences make great friendships.
7. How did Mrs. Peterson help the kids to not give up? She told them they were wrong to think of themselves as junk. She challenged, believed in and helped them to see their unique strengths. She "showed them how to shine." Note: Have students find textual evidence to support answers.

## Writing Prompt

Write about a time when you were *not* a quitter even though it was hard and you wanted to quit. Be sure to use words that describe how you felt and things that you did to help yourself. How did others encourage you to Never Give Up?

## Activities

### The Definition of Genius

Add the "Definition of Genius" to student poetry journals. Have students memorize and recite it using their best intonation and meaningful fluency. Note: Consider posting the definition in the classroom and refer to it when you need to remind your students to NEVER GIVE UP!

### Character Chart

Using the printable provided, identify why members of Trisha's Tribe were at the junk yard, what others said about them, what made them special and what they did as adults. After completing the chart, reflect on how they overcame meanness and what helped them to NEVER GIVE UP.

### Brain Break: "Wondrous Possibilities"

Gather several dozen simple, everyday items - paper clips, buttons - and create your own classroom junk yard center. Each day, pick an item and ask the students to come up with **alternative uses** or **unique possibilities** of what it could be/become! Help students develop a 'think outside the box' attitude as they spontaneously create something new.

PRINTABLE:

The Defn. of Genius

PRINTABLE:

Character Chart

### "WONDROUS POSSIBILITIES" EXAMPLE:

It looks like a drinking straw but it could be...

...a water pipe for a mouse house

...a crutch for doll.

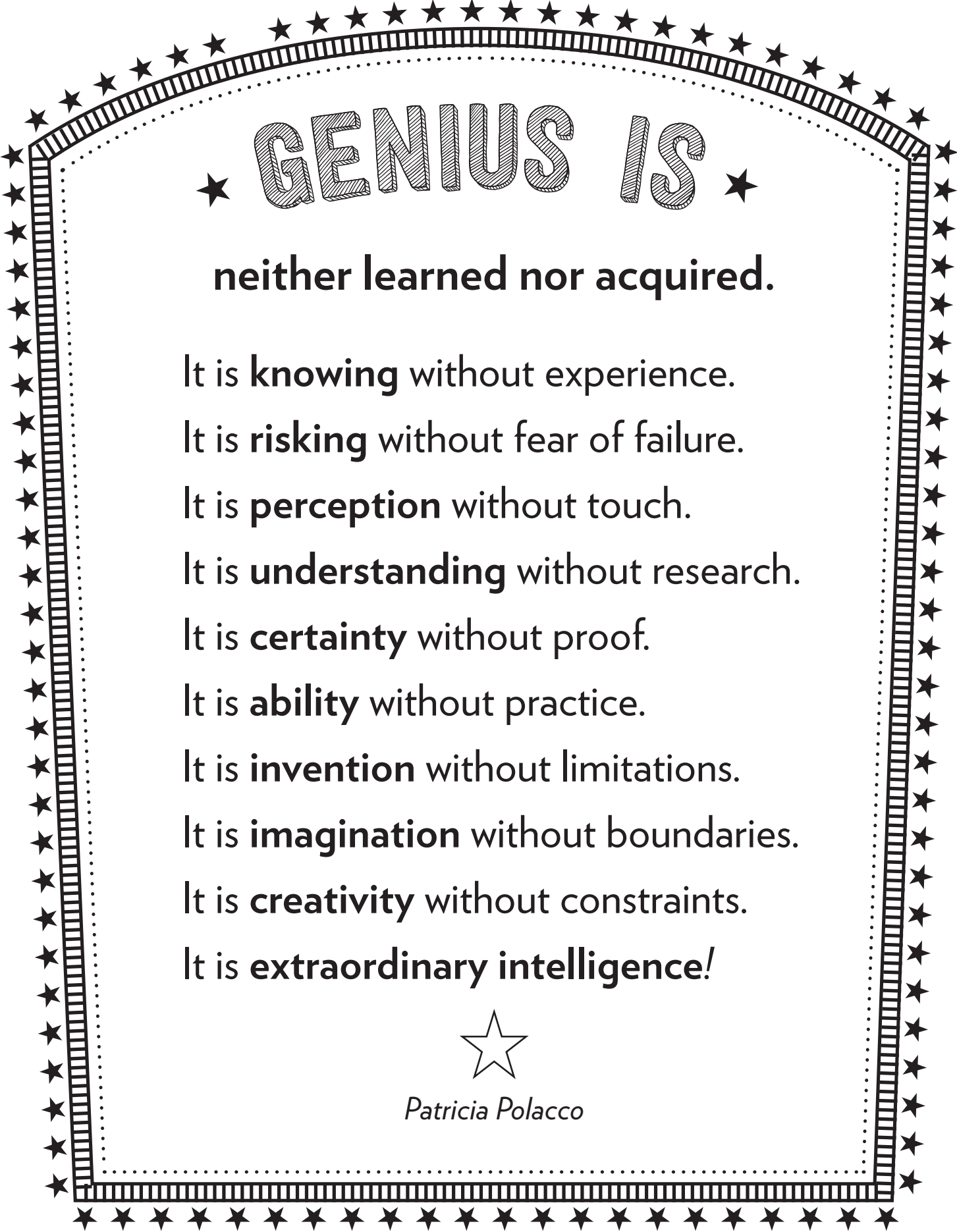
...a watermelon seed plucker.

...a toothpick for a giant.

Info

Accelerated Reading Quiz: 140945

Author website: [www.patriciapolacco.com](http://www.patriciapolacco.com)



# ★ GENIUS IS ★

**neither learned nor acquired.**

It is **knowing** without experience.

It is **risking** without fear of failure.

It is **perception** without touch.

It is **understanding** without research.

It is **certainty** without proof.

It is **ability** without practice.

It is **invention** without limitations.

It is **imagination** without boundaries.

It is **creativity** without constraints.

It is **extraordinary intelligence!**



*Patricia Polacco*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Junkyard Wonders

Create a character chart for the members of Trisha's Tribe.

CHARACTER	Why were they at the Junkyard / What did others say about them?	What made them special & wonderful?	What did they eventually do as adults?
Ravanne			
Gibbie			
Jody			
Thom			
Trisha			

How did they overcome meanness? What helped them to NEVER GIVE UP?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



# The Junkyard Wonders

Create a character chart for the members of Trisha's Tribe.

CHARACTER	Why were they at the Junkyard / What did others say about them?	What made them special & wonderful?	What did they eventually do as adults?
Ravanne	<i>Never talked Shy</i>	<i>Whiz at math Painted beautiful designs on silk</i>	<i>Textile Designer Fashion Designer</i>
Gibbie	<i>Had Tourettes Had tics and shouted for no reason</i>	<i>Loved to build things Mechanically smart</i>	<i>Aeronautical Engineer for NASA</i>
Jody	<i>Disease-grow too fast Super tall Body Guard</i>	<i>Loved reading Protective of friends Loyal to friends</i>	<i>Passed Away at young age from his disease</i>
Thom	<i>Called a sissy boy/ "twinkle toes" Glasses that made his eyes look big Trouble seeing</i>	<i>Loved to Dance Made everyone laugh Very clever</i>	<i>Artistic Director of American Ballet Company</i>
Trisha	<i>Couldn't read well Called dumb "Weirdos, retard"</i>	<i>Loved to draw</i>	<i>Author of Children's Books</i>

How did they overcome meanness? What helped them to NEVER GIVE UP?

*Answers will vary: Believed in themselves, didn't listen to mean kids, encouraged each other, proud of who they were, did their very best, listened to the encouragement of their teachers and family, and NEVER GAVE UP.*

