

# All Aboard the Imagination Train: Crafts and Symbolism of The Polar Express

## Materials List

- Access to view clips or the full movie, \*The Polar Express\* (optional, but highly recommended).
- Paper (heavy cardstock or construction paper), ruler, pencil, scissors.
- Art supplies: Markers, colored pencils, glitter, stickers, hole punch.
- Optional Craft Materials: Small decorative box (or materials to build one), small bell or item to represent the bell (e.g., small marble, large bead, or foil crumpled into a ball).
- Hot Chocolate Ingredients: Mix, milk/water, various toppings (whipped cream, mini marshmallows, cinnamon, sprinkles).
- Journal or designated writing space.

## Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, Madisyn will be able to:

1. Analyze and explain the symbolic meaning of three key elements from \*The Polar Express\* (the Ticket, the Hot Chocolate, and the Bell).
2. Design and execute a creative, themed craft project that visually represents the concept of "belief."
3. Reflect on the movie's central theme and articulate how maintaining belief applies to her own life and interests.

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## Part 1: Introduction (Tell Them What You'll Teach)

### Hook: The Sound of Belief

Have you ever heard a sound so soft, you doubted it was even real? The kind of sound only you can hear? That's what this movie, \*The Polar Express\*, is all about—hearing something that requires you to choose to believe it's true. Even though you might be 13 and feeling too cool for Santa, the core message of this story is about the power of imagination and conviction.

### Today's Mission

We are going beyond just watching a holiday movie. Today, we're becoming Myth Busters and Designers! We will analyze the core symbols of the film and then use that understanding to create three fun, tangible projects: the Golden Ticket, the Ultimate Hot Chocolate experience, and the "Believe Bell Box."

### Success Criteria

You know you've succeeded when:

- You can clearly explain what the Ticket and the Bell represent.
- You have creatively customized and completed the "Believe Bell Box" craft.

- You have written a reflection connecting the theme of "belief" to a goal or interest of your own.

## Part 2: The Core Symbols and Application (Teach It)

### I DO: Symbolism Deep Dive (Analysis and Modeling)

**Educator Talk:** In movies and books, objects aren't just objects; they carry deeper meaning. This is called symbolism. We're going to quickly analyze the top three symbols from our story.

#### Symbolic Analysis Table

Symbol	What It Is Literally	What It Represents (Symbolism)
The Ticket	A piece of paper allowing you to board the train.	Fate, Opportunity, the Journey of Life, or a willingness to take a leap of faith.
The Hot Chocolate	A warm, sweet drink served on the train.	Comfort, Magic, Community, Childhood Innocence, and Adventure.
The Bell	A small bell from Santa's sleigh.	Belief, Faith, and the Magic of childhood; if you stop believing, you stop hearing it.

#### Modeling Activity: The Golden Ticket

The ticket is our first project. It is perfectly rectangular and has clear writing. I will show you how to measure an index card (or a piece of paper cut to 3x5 inches) and use a ruler to create a precise rectangle. The color is key—it should look gold or a very pale yellow. I will model using ALL CAPS to write the destination: "**POLAR EXPRESS**" and punching a clean, centered hole in the center, just like the Conductor does.

### WE DO: The Hot Chocolate Experience (Guided Practice & Sensory Activity)

This phase links the symbol of comfort and community to a fun, practical activity. It's hands-on and requires creativity.

#### Activity: Designing the Ultimate Drink

We are going to create the legendary hot chocolate. However, the task isn't just making it; it's making it *epic*.

1. **Preparation (The Science):** Mix the hot chocolate according to the package directions (focusing on the proper ratios for the creamiest result).
2. **Design Challenge (The Art):** You must now become the hot chocolate designer. Using the available toppings, create a presentation that best represents the warmth and magic of the train ride. This is not just throwing marshmallows in—it's arranging them perfectly, dusting them strategically, and making it look like a piece of edible art.
3. **Reflection Check-in:** As you sip, discuss: How does the act of preparing and enjoying this drink link to the feeling of comfort and security the kids found on the train? (*Formative Assessment Check:* Ask Madisyn to describe her design choices and their thematic connection.)

## YOU DO: The Believe Bell Box (Independent Application)

Now, we tackle the most important symbol: The Bell. This activity requires creativity, fine motor skills (crafting), and deep reflection (writing).

### The Project: The Believe Bell Box

Since the bell's power is tied to belief, you need a safe place for your own belief to live. You will design a decorative box (or container) to hold your "bell" and, more importantly, your personal statement of belief.

#### 1. Construction (30 minutes):

- Either decorate a small existing box or fold/construct a small container from heavy cardstock.
- Decorate the outside using gold, silver, or blue themes. Focus on the word "BELIEVE."
- Prepare your bell (or bell substitute) and set it aside.

#### 2. Reflection (Writing):

In your journal or on a small piece of paper that will fit inside the box, write a short paragraph answering this prompt:

**Prompt:** The bell represents the ability to believe in the unbelievable. What is one goal, dream, or value you hold right now that requires you to 'believe' in yourself or the future, even when others might doubt it? How do you keep the sound of that belief ringing?

#### 3. Assembly:

Place the written statement of belief and the "bell" inside the decorated box. Seal or close it. This box is a reminder of the goals you are committed to.

## Part 3: Conclusion (Tell Them What You Taught)

### Recap and Review

Today, we didn't just enjoy a movie theme; we broke down the core literary devices and applied them creatively. Review the Symbolism Table and have Madisyn recap:

- What key word is written on the Polar Express Ticket? (POLAR)
- What does the Bell symbolize? (Belief/Faith)
- Why was the Hot Chocolate so important to the journey? (Comfort/Community/Magic)

### Summative Assessment: Peer Review and Presentation

Present the finished "Believe Bell Box" to the educator/group.

#### Success Check:

1. Did the decoration reflect the theme?
2. Read the reflection statement aloud (or summarize the key points). Does the written reflection successfully connect the theme of belief to a personal goal?
3. Did the overall process demonstrate analysis of the movie's symbolism?

## Differentiation and Extension

### Scaffolding (If Madisyn needs more guidance):

- Provide pre-printed templates for the Golden Ticket and the Bell Box outline, removing the measurement component.
- If writing the reflection is difficult, use sentence starters: "I need to believe in myself most when I am trying to \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_."

### Extension (For Advanced/Deeper Engagement):

- **Creative Writing Challenge:** Adopt the persona of the Conductor. Write a short journal entry describing what he thinks is the most valuable passenger possession (not the ticket or the bell, but something else—e.g., courage, curiosity) and why he is committed to the journey.
- **Design Pitch:** Create a full marketing poster or a short commercial script for the Polar Express, focusing only on one of the three core symbols analyzed today.