

Activity Guide

Winter Lights: A Season in Poems & Quilts

Written and illustrated by Anna Grossnickle Hines

Dear Reader,

Winter is the perfect time to snuggle up with a good book. Anna Grossnickle Hines's *Winter Lights: A Season in Poems & Quilts* makes a cozy companion. Read it at school, in the library, or at home. Take comfort in the words and in the rich illustrations. And, with this guide, have fun! In the guide, we've included engaging discussion topics and activities to enhance your experience. Enjoy!

Getting Started

Look at the book's cover. Point out the title (*Winter Lights*) and the subtitle (*A Season in Poems & Quilts*). Ask young readers: What is a quilt? How do you make one? What do you need to make a quilt? Why do you think the author chose to illustrate the book with quilts? Was it a good choice? Why?

Shaping Up

Carefully examine each quilt as you read. Look for shapes. Different ones were used. Start with a quilt you especially like. Ask: What shapes do you see? Then look at other quilts. Which quilts are made with triangles? Which use squares and rectangles?

See the Light

Where does light come from? Find examples in the book (sun, moon, stars, flashlight, electric light, candle flame, fire). Which gives the most light? Which gives the least light? Which are natural and which man-made?

Color Me Blue

What colors do you imagine when you think of winter? Which of those colors do you see in *Winter Lights*? Anna Grossnickle Hines selected the fabric colors carefully, to reflect the subject of her poems. Which colors make you feel warm? Which colors make you feel cool? Which colors do you think you would see in a book of spring or summertime poems?

Celebrate! It's the Season

Several of the poems in *Winter Lights* are about holidays. Which are mentioned? Which holidays, if any, do you celebrate? How does the celebration incorporate light? Do the lights have any special meaning or significance? If so, what?

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Write On

After reading *Winter Lights*, have children write their own winter poems. Jump-start creativity with this opening line from "Holiday Magic": "My street is dull/and plain by day,/but magic comes at night." Have kids complete the poem by imagining a magical night in their neighborhood. Children may also want to try a shape poem inspired by "Tree," which is shaped like its subject.

The Poet's Way

Metaphor is a tool writers use to bring words to life. Look at the poem "Artist" for an example. Hines describes the moon as "bright as a lightbulb" and "round as pie." By comparing the moon to something as recognizable as a lightbulb or a pie, the writer instantly gives the reader the picture she is trying to paint. Use metaphors to describe other sources of light, such as the sun or a candle flame.

Pick a Poem

Children enjoy a special sense of accomplishment when they memorize and recite poetry. Have children memorize and recite a favorite poem from *Winter Lights*. Choral reading works best with young children (teachers and librarians may wish to copy poems onto chart paper so kids can read together). Older children may be able to work independently or with a partner.

Lighten Up

Days get shorter in the winter. Throughout the season, keep track of when the sun rises and sets (a week-long tracking period is best for younger kids; older children can sustain the activity for two weeks or more). Local newspapers and Web sites often post data. Record the data, and observe the pattern that develops.

Count on It

Thousands of pieces of fabric were used in the making of *Winter Lights*. Challenge kids to figure out the number of triangles used to make just one quilt: "Star Catcher." Together, come up with a strategy for counting the triangles. (For the record: "Star Catcher" has a total of 8,450 triangles. The quilt is made up of 650 large triangles, each of which holds 13 smaller triangles.)

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Putting It Together

Discover how geometric shapes fit together. Use tangrams or geometric-shaped wooden blocks to create different-sized squares. Start by making the smallest possible square, then put shapes together into increasingly larger squares.

Quilt It

Groups of kids can make a winter quilt. Each child will need an 8 x 8-inch square of white fabric and fabric markers. Have kids draw winter-themed pictures on their squares (to minimize mistakes, kids can do a pencil sketch on paper and then trace the sketch onto the fabric). Have the kids or adult volunteers stitch the squares together, then display the finished quilt. As an alternative, kids can create a quilt square based on the Log Cabin design described in the back of the book. Needle and thread are required, so adult supervision is too. Enlist experienced quilters to help kids create other designs.

Party On!

Host a winter poetry festival. Have kids read poems from *Winter Lights*, and recite those they've memorized or written themselves. Decorate with winter-themed colors, lights and homemade paper, and fabric quilts. Enjoy seasonal food and drink.

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Ages: 5 up Grades: K up

- ★ "The selections, which highlight holidays such as Santa Lucia, Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and Chinese New Year, as well as events like the winter solstice and the aurora borealis, appeal to a wide variety of ages. This is a distinguished collection that the whole family can enjoy together." *School Library Journal* (starred review)
- ★ "Winter is the time of lights, and Hines celebrates the season in thoughtful poems and pictures of gorgeous quilts full of bright, beautiful colors. . . . A lovely follow-up to Hines's *Pieces: A Year in Poems & Quilts* (2001)."—*ALA Booklist* (starred review)
- ★ "If ever there were a perfect book to curl up with on a cold night, this is it. With both humor and poignancy, Hines (*Pieces: A Year in Poems & Quilts*) again puts on display an astounding amount of effort and craftsmanship in a collection of child friendly poems and custom-made quilts that feature striking images of winter light as it's experienced around the world."—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

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