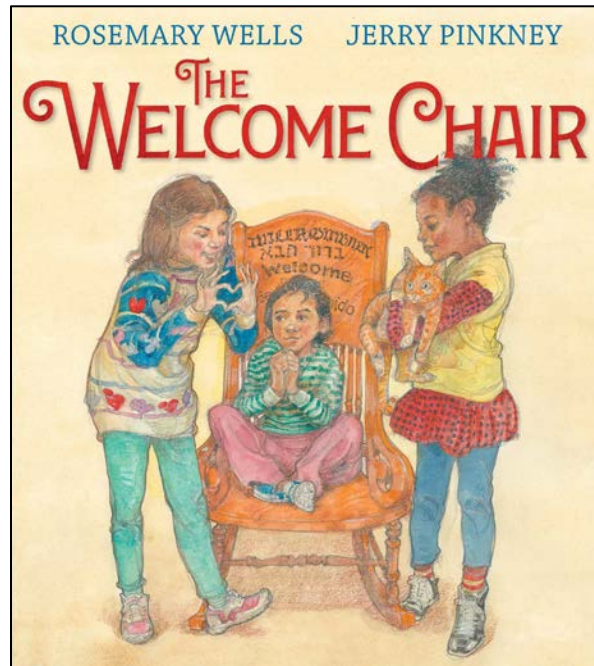


# A Common Core Curriculum Guide to *The Welcome Chair*

By Rosemary Wells, Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney



HC: 9781534429772 • EB: 9781534429789 • Ages 4–8  
Paula Wiseman Books

## **Background/Summary**

Using a diary written by her great-great-grandmother and family legends told to her by her grandmother, author Rosemary Wells tells a story of welcoming people to America. *The Welcome Chair* begins with her great-great-grandfather Sam Seigbert's arrival in New York City; he came from Bavaria in 1807 seeking religious freedom and the opportunity to pursue his own goals. It was Sam, a talented wood-carver, who crafted the welcome chair that greeted many new arrivals: a child born to his first employers, a German couple; his own son, Henry; and the children of the Irish seamstress who worked for his daughter Helen. As each was welcomed, a new word was added to the chair in the newcomer's language. The diary ends with Sam's daughter's Irish seamstress, but the story is continued by the author to include more present-day welcome scenes: two nuns fleeing the Dominican Republic ruled by a dictator, a baby who survived an earthquake in Haiti, and a family who escaped from war-torn Syria. In each case, the welcome chair is there to welcome them to America.

In both the preface and author's note, Rosemary Wells tells us that she disagrees with leaders who want to stop welcoming people who are escaping terrible conditions. In her words, she is against "closing the door." Her book is a powerful description of what a welcome means. Illustrations by Jerry Pinkney help us understand the author's message by depicting welcoming scenes from Sam Seigbert's time to the present. After reading this book, readers can consider whether our country should continue to welcome people like Rosemary Wells's great-great-grandfather, who came seeking freedom, opportunity, and safety in the United States.

## Discussion Questions/Activities

### Key Ideas and Details

The discussion questions and activities below draw on Common Core State Standards for reading informational text (RI) that ask children to ask and answer questions about key details in a text **(RI.K.1-RI.3.1)**, identify the main topic and key details that support it **(RI.K.2-RI.3.2)**, and describe the relationship between a series of events, concepts, or ideas **(RI.K.3-RI.3.3)**.

1. Who was Sam Seigbert, and how is he related to the author? Why did he leave Bavaria and travel to New York?
2. Why did Sam travel out west with the Hinzlers?
3. Describe the welcome chair Sam created for Klara Hinzler to hold her new son, Magnus.
4. Discuss how the welcome chair changed over time in response to these events:
  - The birth of Sam's son Henry
  - Henry's hoped-for return from the Civil War
  - Lucy Kennedy's marriage and the birth of her children
  - Sister Emmanuel's birthday gift for Sister Carlotta
  - Jean-Marie's surviving an earthquake in Haiti
  - Amira and her family's escape from a war
5. Imagine you could interview Sam Seigbert. With a partner, make up questions you could ask. Then take turns being the interviewer who asks the questions or being Sam who answers them. Here are some topics you could ask about and discuss:
  - Why Sam left Bavaria
  - How he traveled to New York City
  - What he saw on his arrival
  - How he met and fell in love with his future wife, Ruth
  - What happened to Sam's son Henry
  - What happened to the welcome chair
6. What do these new arrivals have in common?
  - Sam's son Henry and Lucy Kennedy's children
  - Sister Carlotta, Sister Emmanuel, and Amira
  - Jean-Marie and Amira
7. If you could create something to welcome newcomers to your school or neighborhood, what would it be? Share your ideas.
8. What do you think the author wants you to know about welcoming people to our country? How do you know?

### Craft and Structure

To learn about craft and structure, the CCSS asks us to help students learn and understand vocabulary words and phrases (**RI.K.4-RI.3.4**), think about the features of nonfiction text (**RI.K.5-RI.3.5**), and assess the author’s point of view (**RI.K.6-RI.3.6**). The questions and activities below emphasize these understandings.

1. **Looking Closely at Interesting Sentences.** What makes readers enjoy an author’s writing? Examine each of the sentences below from *The Welcome Chair* and write down what you notice. What makes the sentence interesting to read? Pay attention to the underlined words and phrases.

- “In the year 1807, Sam Seigbert is born in the Kingdom of Bavaria. He is my great-great-grandfather but will never know it.”

What I notice:

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- “Please, God, may I see my beautiful boy again, whisper the fingertips that touch his face.”

What I notice:

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- “There is a lighthouse at Sandy Hook, but Lady Liberty is not going to appear for another sixty-two years.”

What I notice:

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- “Sam shakes hands with the captain and then darts away across the Brooklyn docks into the screeching, shrieking, filthy, clanking, terrifying, ugly, and beautiful young city of New York.”

What I notice:

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- “Sam, strong and able, goes to work as a carpenter in a joinery.”

What I notice:

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- “The chair goes up to the sewing room and is draped with chintz and bombazine.”

What I notice:

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2. **Looking at Front Matter.** Front matter includes all the pages that come before the main part of the book. In *The Welcome Chair*, this includes the following:
- (1) the illustration that begins the book
  - (2) the title page
  - (3) the preface

Use the table below to take notes on the information given in the front matter. Follow the directions that suggest what to look for.

**Looking at the Front Matter**

<b>Front Matter &amp; What to Look For</b>	<b>My Notes</b>
<p><u>Front Illustration</u>: Examine the illustration at the beginning of the book. What do you see? What clues does it give you for what the book will be about?</p>	
<p><u>Title Page</u>: Identify the book’s title, author, illustrator, and publisher. Look at the illustration. What do you see? What do you think it’s telling you about the story?</p>	<p><u>Title</u>:</p> <p><u>Author</u>:</p> <p><u>Illustrator</u>:</p> <p><u>Publisher</u>:</p> <p><u>Illustration</u>:</p>

<p><u>Preface</u>: This is the author’s introduction to the book. It often explains where the idea for the book comes from.</p>	<p>Use the preface to answer these questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What did the author’s father tell her about how America welcomed people?</li> <li>2. Why do you think the author decided to write this book now?</li> <li>3. Where did the information for this book come from?</li> </ol>
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**After completing the chart above**, discuss this question: How does the front matter prepare you to read the book?

3. **Looking at back matter**. Back matter includes all the pages that come after the main part of the book. In *The Welcome Chair*, this includes the following:
  - (1) the author’ note
  - (2) the illustrator’s note
  - (3) the final illustration
  - (4) the dedication
  - (5) the acknowledgement

Use the chart below to take notes on the information given in the back matter.

**Looking at the Back Matter**

<b>Back Matter &amp; What to Look For</b>	<b>My Notes: What I Noticed</b>
<p><u>Author’s Note</u>: The author explains how she was able to find more material for the story and why she wanted to write the story now.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How was the author able to continue the story beyond what was described in her great-great-grandmother’s diary?</li> <li>2. Why did the author think it was important to write the story now?</li> </ol>
<p><u>Illustrator’s Note</u>: The illustrator explains the challenges he faced illustrating the book.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What challenges did the illustrator face while illustrating the book?</li> <li>2. How did he get past these challenges?</li> </ol>

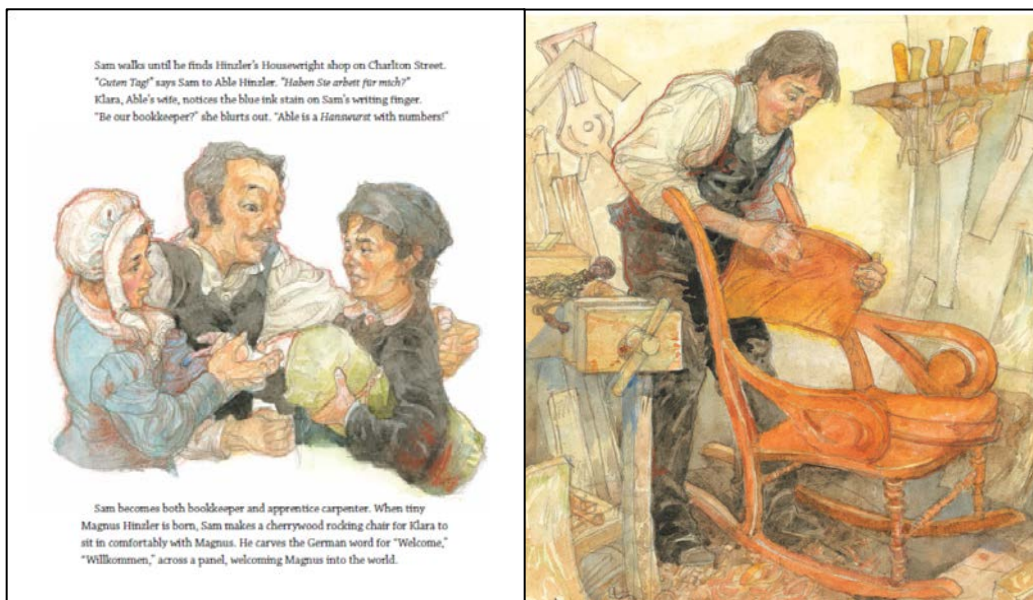
<p><u>Final Illustration</u></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What signs of welcome can you find in this illustration?</li> <li>2. How are the illustrations in the front matter and the back matter different?</li> </ol>
<p><u>Dedication</u></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Who did the author (R. W.) dedicate the book to?</li> <li>2. Who did the illustrator (J. P) dedicate the book to?</li> </ol>
<p><u>Acknowledgment</u></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Who did the author thank for help with the book?</li> </ol>

**After completing the chart above,** discuss this question: How does the back matter help you understand and appreciate what you read?

**Integration of Information**

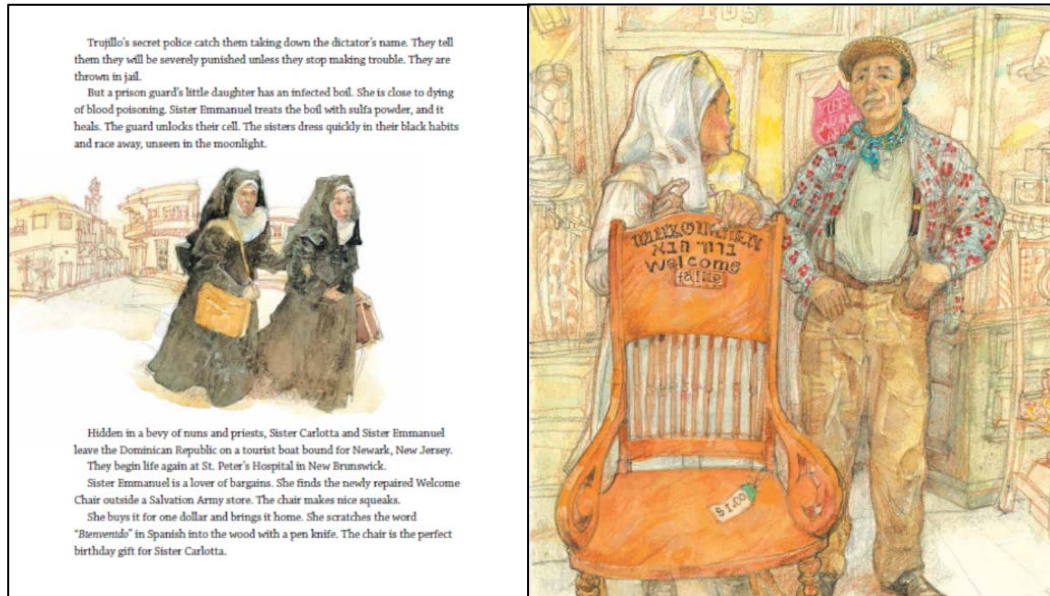
The Common Core State Standards ask students to use both the illustrations and details to describe key ideas and to show how images contribute to and clarify a text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur). **(RI 1.7-RI 4.7).**

1. **Learning from Words and Illustrations.** The words and illustrations work together to explain a key idea and the details that support it. Examine the pages below to see how this is done.



Illustrations © Jerry Pinkney

- **Key Idea:** Sam created the welcome chair.
- **Details:**
  - What details about the welcome chair are provided only by the words?
  - What details about the welcome chair are provided only by the illustrations?
  - How do the words and the illustrations work together?



- **Key Idea:** Sister Emmanuel purchases the welcome chair for Sister Carlotta.
- **Details:**
  - What details about Sister Emmanuel's purchase are provided only by the words?
  - What details about Sister Emmanuel's purchase are provided only by the illustrations?
  - How do the words and the illustrations work together?

### **Writing**

CCSS emphasizes writing informative and explanatory text in the early grades. The writing activities below provide experience writing to give an opinion (**W.K.1-W.3.1**), to inform (**W.K.2-W.3.2**), and to explain a sequence of events (**W.K.3-W.3.3**).

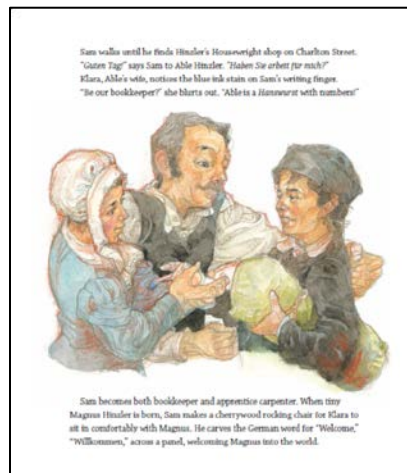
1. **Giving Your Opinion.** The author makes this statement about welcoming people into our country:

"In our current time, there are leaders who would close our doors to the tired and poor who were once welcomed here. Because I disagree with them from the bottom of my heart, I wanted to write about the chair that welcomed members of my family for so long."

What do you think? Do you agree or disagree with the author? Is keeping our doors open to the tired and poor who were once welcomed here important to do? Give your three strongest reasons for your belief.

2. Design and draw your own welcome chair to welcome people to your classroom. First, look at different designs for chairs. Choose one or design your own chair. You can find different designs for chairs at the website for the Metropolitan Museum of Art at <https://www.metmuseum.org/search-results#!/search?q=Chairs>. Then decide what you would like to write on the back panel of your chair. Underneath your picture, explain how your chair welcomes people.
3. Select an illustration in the book and bring it to life by writing the conversation the featured characters might be having. Here are some examples:

- Write the conversation between Sam and the Hinzlers when the Hinzlers offer Sam a job.



- Write the conversation Sam had with his wife, Ruth, when he gave her a lambswool-lined boot with wheels and presented her with the welcome chair with the Hebrew words for "Welcome" carved on it.





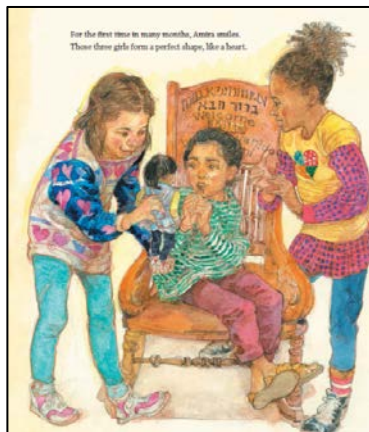
- Write the conversation that Helen Leopold had with her family seamstress, Lucy, when she gave Lucy the welcome chair as a wedding present.



- Write the conversation between Sister Emmanuel and the man outside the Salvation Army store when she spotted the welcome chair and decided to buy it for Sister Carlotta.



- Write the conversation between Pearl, Amanda, and Amira when they presented their gifts to Amira.



## Extending the Experience of Reading the Book

### 1. Learn More about Author Rosemary Wells

- Visit her website at <https://www.rosemarywells.com>
- Watch the video *A Visit with Rosemary Wells* at <https://vimeo.com/2792417>
- Watch the video *An Interview with Rosemary Wells* at <https://vimeo.com/2791998>

### 2. Learn More about Illustrator Jerry Pinkney

- Visit his website at <https://www.jerrypinkneystudio.com>
- Watch a video interview of Jerry Pinkney at <https://www.readingrockets.org/books/interviews/pinkneyj>
- Watch a video of Jerry Pinkney and his work as a picture book illustrator at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9K0sVOShs&t=56s>

### 3. Read Books about Family Heirlooms and Other Treasured Items Like the Welcome Chair That Are Passed Down from Parent to Child

- *The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia Polacco
- *The Blessing Cup* by Patricia Polacco
- *My Mother's Pearls* by Catherine Myler Fruisen
- *The Copper Tin Cup* by Carole Lexa Schaefer

### 4. Read Books about Immigrants Coming to America

- *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales
- *My Diary from Here to There* by Amada Irma Pérez
- *Tani's New Home* by Tanitoluwa Adewumi
- *Islandborn* by Junot Díaz
- *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi

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