

READING COMPREHENSION:  
EXCERPT ADAPTED FROM

# The Railway Children

Keep reading! Then answer the questions that follow.

- 30** A whirling week of packing followed. Boxes were filled, and boxes and more boxes; and then late in the afternoon at the end of the week a cab came to take them to the train station.
- 31** At first the children enjoyed looking out of the train window, but when it grew dusk they grew sleepier and sleepier, and no one knew how long they had been in the train when they were roused by Mother's shaking them gently and saying, "Wake up, dears. We're there."
- 32** They woke up, cold and melancholy, and stood shivering on the drafty platform while the baggage was taken out of the train. Then the engine, puffing

and blowing, set to work again, and dragged the train away. The children watched the train's tail-lights disappear into the darkness.



- 33** This was the first train the children saw on that railway which was in time to become so very dear to them. They did not guess then how they would grow to love the railway, and how soon it would become the center of their new life, nor what wonders and changes it would bring to them.

Answer the following questions about Chapter I of *The Railway Children*. **Sample Answers**

1. Reread the first sentence in paragraph 1. What effect does this sentence have as the opening line of the story?
- a.** It draws the reader in by foreshadowing a big change about to happen in the characters' lives.
- b.** It creates imagery that supports the reader's understanding of the setting.
- c.** It invites the reader to meet and become interested in the story's characters.
- d.** It reveals the genre, informing readers that the story is historical fiction.
2. Which theme is reflected in paragraph 4 of the story?
- a.** When unanticipated change happens, unexpected good things may happen.
- b.** Keeping a positive attitude in difficult times will help you find joy in little things.
- c.** It may be hard to appreciate the good things you have until you no longer have them.
- d.** You may be surprised with what you can do when you are forced to face difficulty.

3. **Part A.** What can you infer about the family based on the information in paragraph 3?

**The family is a happy unit, with a father and mother who both dote on their children.**

**Part B.** Cite specific details from the passage to support your response.

**The text says that Mother is always there for them, doing things like writing poems for them and helping them with their homework. It says the children's father is "perfect" — never grumpy or unfair, and always ready to play.**

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4. **Part A.** Read the following sentence from paragraph 5.

*The dreadful change came quite suddenly.*

Which of the sentences below marks the turning point foreshadowed in the sentence above?

- a. Then, the engine suddenly went off with a BANG, nearly breaking poor Peter's heart.
- b. The children could hear the voices of Father and the gentlemen in the library.
- c. Just then there was a knock at the front door.**
- d. "Is there NO hope?" said Peter, in an unsteady voice.

**Part B.** Use details from the text to explain your answer.

**Before the knock on the door and the arrival of the mysterious men, everything is normal and the family is intact. Afterward, Father is gone, Mother is terribly upset, and everything changes.**

5. What does Father's dialogue in paragraph 14 reveal about his attitude about fixing problems?

**Father has a positive, hopeful attitude, but in order to successfully fix problems, he believes that careful effort and the right materials must accompany the positive outlook.**

6. Which details from paragraphs 18 and 19 are examples of sensory imagery that indicate that something is wrong? Choose **two**.

- a. Father did not seem to be able to get rid of the gentleman quickly.
- b. Father's voice sounded louder and different than the voice he generally used.**
- c. Father and the gentlemen were in the library.**
- d. Mother's lips were thin and not their proper shape at all.**
- e. Mother went into the library.

7. How is the toy train like the family? Use details from the story to support your response.

**The toy train, which is described as "more perfect than you could ever have imagined," symbolizes the state of perfection and happiness that the family experiences at the beginning of the story. Its sudden break occurs just like the family's sudden shift into chaos and hard times.**

8. Nesbit keeps the reader—and the children—in the dark about the reasons for Father's departure and the family's sudden change in circumstances. Based on the dialogue in the passage, what do you think may have happened? Use details from the text to support your answer.

**Father may have been arrested and taken to jail by government officials. Mother does not want to tell the children what happened, which shows that it may be something that's considered shameful. Also, she says it is about "business." When Roberta asks if it's something to do with the government and Mother confirms that it is, the text reveals that Father's "business" is working in a government office.**

9. **Part A.** Which pair of words best expresses the tone set for the rest of the story in paragraph 33?

- a. sorrowful and gloomy
- b. optimistic and exciting**
- c. fearful and uneasy
- d. silly and playful

**Part B.** Which details in the paragraph set the tone? Record two examples on the lines below.

1. **Though the children don't know it, the railway would become "dear to them."**
2. **The children "would grow to love" it, and it would bring "wonders and changes" to them.**