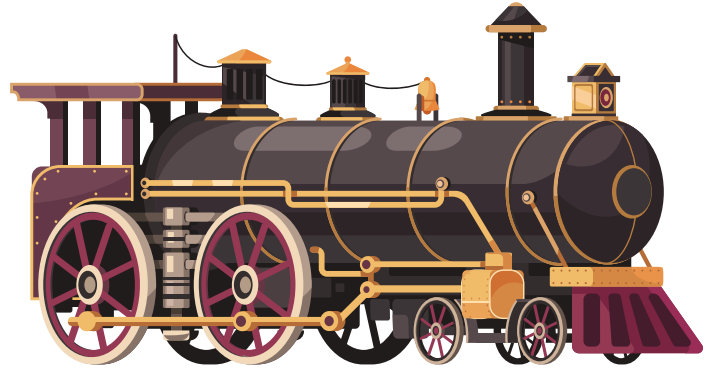


READING COMPREHENSION:
EXCERPT ADAPTED FROM

The Railway Children

Read this adapted excerpt from E. Nesbit's 1906 novel *The Railway Children*, and answer the questions that follow.

- 1 They were not railway children to begin with. I don't suppose they had ever really thought about railways, except as a means of getting to the theater or the zoo or the museum. They were just ordinary suburban children, and they lived with their father and mother in an ordinary red-brick villa, with colored glass in the front door, a tiled passage that was called a hall, a bathroom with hot and cold water, electric bells, French windows, and "every modern convenience," as the house agents say.
- 2 There were three of them. Roberta—also known as Bobbie—was the eldest, and if their mother HAD had a favorite, which she did not, it might have been Roberta. Next came Peter, who wished to be a train engineer when he grew up; and the youngest was Phyllis, who always meant extremely well.
- 3 These three lucky children always had everything they needed: nice clothes, good fires, and a lovely nursery with heaps of toys. They had a lovely mother, who was almost always there for them, ready to play and read to them, and help them do their homework, and write stories and funny poems for them. They also had a father who was just perfect—never cross, never unjust, and always ready for a game—at least, if at any time he was NOT ready, he always had an excellent reason for it, and explained the reason to the children so interestingly and funnily that they felt sure he couldn't help himself.
- 4 You will think that they ought to have been very happy. And so they were, but they did not know HOW happy till their life in the red villa was over, and they had to live a very different life indeed.
- 5 The dreadful change came quite suddenly.
- 6 Peter had just had a birthday—his tenth. Among his other presents was a model locomotive engine more perfect than you could ever have dreamed of. It lasted in its full perfection for exactly three days. Then,



the engine suddenly went off with a BANG, nearly breaking poor Peter's heart.

- 7 Mother made Peter a poem to cheer him up after the disaster. It began by saying what an unfortunate but worthy boy Peter was, and then continued:

*He had an engine that he loved
 With all his heart and soul,
 And if he had a wish on earth
 It was to keep it whole.*

*One day—my friends, prepare your minds;
 I'm coming to the worst—
 Quite suddenly a screw went mad,
 And then the boiler burst!*

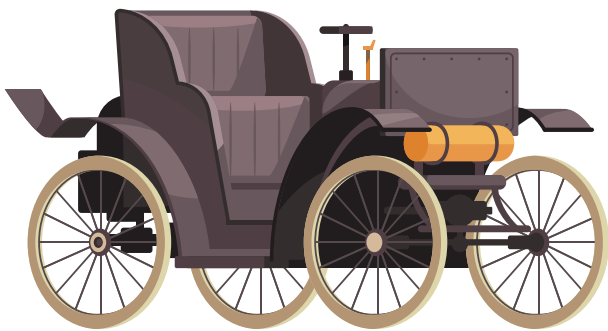
- 8 All Peter's hopes for the curing of his afflicted engine were fixed on Father, who was most wonderfully clever with his fingers. He could mend all sorts of things. But Father had been away in the country for days. When he finally came home, Peter, with heroic unselfishness, did not say anything about his engine till after Father had had his dinner.
- 9 At last Mother said to Father, "Now, dear, if you're quite rested and comfy, we want to tell you about the great railway accident, and ask your advice."
- 10 "All right," said Father, "fire away!"
- 11 So then Peter told the sad tale, and fetched what was left of the engine.

**READING COMPREHENSION:
EXCERPT ADAPTED FROM**

The Railway Children

Keep reading!

- 12** “Hum,” said Father, when he had looked the engine over very carefully. The children held their breaths.
- 13** “Is there NO hope?” said Peter, in an unsteady voice.
- 14** “Hope? Rather! Tons of it,” said Father, cheerfully; “It’ll want something besides hope, though—a bit of brazing and a new valve, perhaps. I think we’ll keep it for Saturday afternoon, and you shall all help me.” The children were relieved and happy to oblige.
- 15** Just then there was a knock at the front door.
- 16** Ruth, the parlor-maid, came in and said that two gentlemen wanted to see Father.
- 17** Mother said, “Do get rid of them quickly, dear. It’s nearly the children’s bedtime.”
- 18** But Father did not seem to be able to get rid of the gentlemen at all quickly. The children could hear the voices of Father and the gentlemen in the library, and Father’s voice sounded louder and different than the voice he generally used.



- 19** Mother went into the library. There was more talking. Then, the children heard boots go out and down the steps. They heard a cab drive away, and the front door shut. Mother came back, her face as white as her lace collar, and her eyes very big and shining. Her mouth looked like just a line of pale red—her lips were thin and not their proper shape at all.
- 20** “It’s bedtime,” she said. “Father’s been called away—on business.”

- 21** “It wasn’t bad news, Mammy, was it? Is anyone dead—or—” asked Roberta.
- 22** “Nobody’s dead,” said Mother, “I can’t tell you anything tonight, my dears. Go, NOW!”
- 23** So Roberta and the children went.



- 24** When they came down to breakfast the next morning, Mother had already gone out—to London, Ruth told them. When the children came home from school, Mother was still not there. And she was not there at tea-time. It was nearly seven before she came in, looking so ill and tired that the children felt they could not ask her any questions. She sank into an armchair.
- 25** After she’d had some tea, Mother said, “Now, my darlings, I want to tell you something. Those men last night did bring very bad news, and Father will be away for some time. I am very worried about it ...”
- 26** “Is it something to do with government?” Roberta asked, for Father worked in a government office.
- 27** “Yes,” said Mother. “Now it’s bedtime. I want you all to help me by not asking any questions about this trouble. It isn’t necessary for you to know, and don’t you worry. It’ll all come right in the end.”



- 28** Everything continued to be perfectly horrid for weeks. Mother was nearly always out. Meals were dull and dirty. Then came the time when Mother came home and went to bed and stayed there two days, and the children crept wretchedly about the house and wondered if the world was coming to an end.
- 29** Mother came down one morning to breakfast, very pale and with lines on her face that used not to be there. She smiled as well as she could, and said, “Now, my pets, everything is settled. We’re going to leave this house, and go live in the country. Such a ducky dear little white house. I know you’ll love it.”

**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*.

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

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

**READING COMPREHENSION:
EXCERPT ADAPTED FROM**

The Railway Children

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

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.

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

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.

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.

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. _____

2. _____
