

The Last Train

by Gordon Titcomb

A sentimental tribute to a time long gone, but not forgotten, based on a song by Gordon Titcomb and magnificently illustrated by Wendell Minor, about a boy's memories of his family and their years working for the railroad.



Read

Before:

Introduce the book and tell the children a little bit about it. Follow that with a comment or question that is related to the story such as, *What job would you love to do on a train?* Encourage a discussion so the children can comment, ask questions, and express their feelings. Set the stage for listening by asking an "I wonder" statement based on the cover illustration.

- I wonder why he is pulling on that rope?

During:

Encourage the children to comment on the illustrations, ask questions, and predict what will happen next in the story. Children gain confidence and a sense of achievement through being able to correctly predict how a story will end. Point out "rare words" (e.g., those words that are not commonly used in every day conversation) and help the children relate the meaning in a way that makes sense to them.

Rare Words in *The Last Train*

- iron: a heavy, magnetic, metallic element
- station: a place along a train route where passengers are picked up and dropped off
- freight train: a railroad train that carries only freight
- souvenirs: something bought or kept as a reminder of a place or occasion
- brakeman: railroad worker who operates brakes
- porter: a waiter or butler usually found on passenger trains
- anthracite: hard black coal
- diesel: a vehicle, a car or train that is powered by diesel fuel
- contrails: a vapor trail
- mournful: expressing or feeling deep sadness
- refrains: to avoid doing something or hold yourself back

After:

Discuss the story. Ask questions...

- Why was the station boarded up?
- What did the boy's father and grandfather do with the trains?
- What was in the cigar box?
- What happened to the pennies that were left on the railroad tracks?
- What souvenirs did the boy keep?
- What replaced the older trains?
- What happened to the old coal trains?

Do

La! La! La!

After reading the story, sing several train songs and train poems. Below is an example of one song you can sing and a poem you can act out with the children.

She'll Be Coming Around the Mountain

She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes, (when she comes).

She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes, (when she comes).

She'll be coming 'round the mountain, she'll be coming 'round the mountain,

She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes, (when she comes).

The same structure is repeated with the following verses:

She'll be drivin' three white horses when she comes, etc.

Oh we'll all come out to meet her when she comes, etc.

She'll be wearing red pajamas when she comes, etc.

We will kill the old red rooster when she comes, etc.

We'll be havin' chicken and dumplings when she comes, etc.

She will have to sleep with Grandma when she comes, etc.

We'll all be shoutin' "Halleluja" when she comes, etc.

She'll be comin' down a road that's five miles long, etc.

Down by the Station

Down by the station

Early in the morning

See the little puffer bellies

All in a row

See the station master

Turn the little handle

Puff, puff, toot, toot

Off we go!

Extra Activity

If desired, ask a train conductor or a person that works for a railroad company to come and visit the classroom. They can bring memorabilia, items used on railroads or pictures to share with the children.