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**Reading extract and questions:**

**Year 5-6**

**The Railway Children by E. Nesbit (Chapter 1)**

 **Set A/B**

They were not railway children to begin with. I don't suppose they had ever thought about railways except as a means of getting to Maskelyne and Cook's, the Pantomime, Zoological Gardens, and Madame Tussaud's. They were just ordinary suburban children, and they lived with their Father and Mother in an ordinary red-brick-fronted villa, with coloured glass in the front door, a tiled passage that was called a hall, a bath-room with hot and cold water, electric bells, French windows, and a good deal of white paint, and 'every modern convenience', as the house-agents say.

There were three of them. Roberta was the eldest. Of course, Mothers never have favourites, but if their Mother HAD had a favourite, it might have been Roberta. Next came Peter, who wished to be an Engineer when he grew up; and the youngest was Phyllis, who meant extremely well.

Mother did not spend all her time in paying dull calls to dull ladies, and sitting dully at home waiting for dull ladies to pay calls to her. She was almost always there, ready to play with the children, and read to them, and help them to do their home-lessons. Besides this she used to write stories for them while they were at school, and read them aloud after tea, and she always made up funny pieces of poetry for their birthdays and for other great occasions, such as the christening of the new kittens, or the refurnishing of the doll's house, or the time when they were getting over the mumps.

These three lucky children always had everything they needed: pretty clothes, good fires, a lovely nursery with heaps of toys, and a Mother Goose wallpaper. They had a kind and merry nursemaid, and a dog who was called James, and who was their very own. 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.

You will think that they ought to have been very happy. And so they were, but they did not know HOW happy till the pretty life in the Red Villa was over and done with, and they had to live a very different life indeed.

The dreadful change came quite suddenly.

Peter had a birthday—his tenth. Among his other presents was a model engine more perfect than you could ever have dreamed of. The other presents were full of charm, but the Engine was fuller of charm than any of the others were.

Its charm lasted in its full perfection for exactly three days. Then, owing either to Peter's inexperience or Phyllis's good intentions, which had been rather pressing, or to some other cause, the Engine suddenly went off with a bang. James was so frightened that he went out and did not come back all day. All the Noah's Ark people who were in the tender were broken to bits, but nothing else was hurt except the poor little engine and the feelings of Peter. The others said he cried over it—but of course boys of ten do not cry, however terrible the tragedies may be which darken their lot. He said that his eyes were red because he had a cold. This turned out to be true, though Peter did not know it was when he said it, the next day he had to go to bed and stay there. Mother began to be afraid that he might be sickening for measles, when suddenly he sat up in bed and said:

“I hate gruel—I hate barley water—I hate bread and milk. I want to get up and have something REAL to eat.”

**Questions for *The Railway Children***

**Set A**

**Vocabulary:**

**1.** …*They were just ordinary suburban children…* Which of the below is closest in meaning to *suburban?* Tick **one.**

live on the edge of a large town/city live in the countryside

live in central London live in a village

**2.** In the first paragraph,it says their house had *‘every modern convenience…’* What does *convenience* mean in this sentence? Circle **one**.

comfort hardship electricity furniture

**3.** *They also had a Father who was just perfect – never cross, never unjust…* What does *never unjust* mean?

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**Retrieval:**

**4.** What did the children currently use the railways for?

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**5.**  What did their father do if he was not ready to play games with the children?

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**6.** What happened to upset Peter shortly after his birthday?

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**Inference:**

**7.** How do you know something is going to happen to the family later in the story?

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**8.** What evidence is there in the text that their mother cared for them a great deal? Give **two** examples.

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2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**9.** How do we know that Peter is feeling better at the end of the extract?

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**Summarise:**

**10.** Here are some summaries of different paragraphs. Number them from 1 to 5 to show the order in which they appear in the text.

The children are only aware of the railways as a way of getting around.

They children had everything they needed at home.

Peter is affected by the loss of his new engine.

Their mother writes things for them for different reasons.

The three children were called Roberta, Peter and Phyllis.

**Compare:**

**11.** How is their mother different to other ladies of that time?

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**Questions for *The Railway Children***

**Set B**

**Vocabulary:**

**1.** Look at the paragraph beginning “*These three lucky children…*” **Find** and **copy** a word that means*someone who looks after children.*

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**2.** In the paragraph beginning: *Mother did not spend…* what does *the refurnishing of the doll’s house…* mean?

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**3.** In the sentence:*Then, owing either to Peter's inexperience or Phyllis's good intentions*…

The word *intentions* is closest in meaning to:

Tick **one**.

wishes guidance

arguments support

**Retrieval:**

**4.** In what way were the children privileged? Give **three** examples.

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**5.** What did the dog do when the engine got broken?

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**6.** Why was Peter’s mother concerned about him?

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**Inference:**

**7. *…****and the youngest was Phyllis, who meant extremely well.* What does this tell us about Phyllis’s character?

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**8. *…****boys of ten do not cry, however terrible the tragedies may be which darken their lot.* This means…

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**9.** What evidence is there to suggest that Peter really did cry?

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**Meaning as a whole:**

**10.** Using the whole text, **tick** **one** **box** in **each** **row** to show whether each statement is true or false.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **True** | **False** |
| Their Father treats them all differently and they find this difficult. |  |  |
| They are very content as a family. |  |  |
| The children are not *railway children* at this point in the story. |  |  |
| All of the children were involved in damaging Peter’s birthday present. |  |  |

**Authorial intent:**

**11*. …****but they did not know HOW happy till the pretty life in the Red Villa was over and done with, and they had to live a very different life indeed.*

Why has the author chosen to use these words?

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**Answers for *The Railway Children***

**Set A:**

**Vocabulary:**

**1.** live on the edge of a large town/city

**2.** comfort

**3.** always fair/doesn’t treat them unfairly

**Retrieval:**

**4.** as a means of getting to places - e.g. Maskelyne and Cook's, the Pantomime, Zoological Gardens, and Madame Tussaud's

**5.** he always had an excellent reason for it/explained the reason to the children so interestingly and funnily (that they felt sure he couldn't help himself)

**6.** the Engine suddenly went off with a bang/his engine broke

**Inference:**

**7.** the dreadful change came quite suddenly/they did not know HOW happy till the pretty life in the Red Villa was over and done with, and they had to live a very different life indeed

**8.** Accept any two from:

She was almost always there/ ready to play with the children/read to them/helped them to do their home-lessons/wrote stories for them/ made up funny pieces of poetry for their birthdays and for other great occasions

**9.** He gets his appetite back/he wants to have something REAL to eat (also accept: he suddenly sat up in bed)

**Summarise:**

**10.**

1

The children are only aware of the railways as a way of getting around.

4

They children had everything they needed at home.

5

Peter is affected by the loss of his new engine.

3

Their mother writes things for them for different reasons.

2

The three children were called Roberta, Peter and Phyllis.

**Compare:**

**11.** She isn’t dull/doesn’t sit at home waiting around for dull ladies to pay calls to her/doesn’t spend all her time in paying dull calls to dull ladies

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**Answers for *The Railway Children***

**Set B:**

**Vocabulary:**

**1.** nursemaid

**2.** the doll’s house was given new furnishings - e.g. wallpaper, paint, furniture etc.

**3.** wishes

**Retrieval:**

**4.** Accept any three of the following: pretty clothes/good fires/a lovely nursery with heaps of toys/Mother Goose wallpaper/a kind and merry nursemaid/a dog of their own/perfect father/caring mother/house with all modern conveniences

**5.** was so frightened that he went out and did not come back all day

**6.** she was afraid that he might be sickening for measles

**Inference:**

**7.** it tells us that she has the right intentions/ideas but also gives us a clue that although she means extremely well she probably gets it wrong sometimes

**8.** boys of ten don’t cry no matter how bad something is that happens to them/no matter what happens to make their life worse/to make them sad

**9.** He said that his eyes were red because he had a cold. This turned out to be true, though Peter did not know it was when he said it…

**Meaning as a whole:**

**10.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **True** | **False** |
| Their father treats them all differently and they find this difficult. |  |  |
| They are very content as a family. |  |  |
| The children are not *railway children* at this point in the story. |  |  |
| All of the children were involved in damaging Peter’s birthday present. |  |  |

**Authorial intent:**

**11.** To build suspense/to warn us that change is coming/something is going to happen/to tell us that their happy life doesn’t last

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