

Edith Nesbit

The Railway Children

Three children go to live in the country. Their house is near a train station. They go there with their mother, but their father isn't there. The train station is an exciting place. Bobbie, Peter and Phyllis are always there and they do a lot of exciting things. But there's one thing that they really want to know. Where's their father?

In this reader you will find:

- Information about Edith Nesbit
- A section focusing on background and context
- A glossary of difficult words
- Comprehension and grammar activities including AI Movers style exercises and 21st century skills activities
- Final test

Tags

Family | Friends | Food | Trains | Nature

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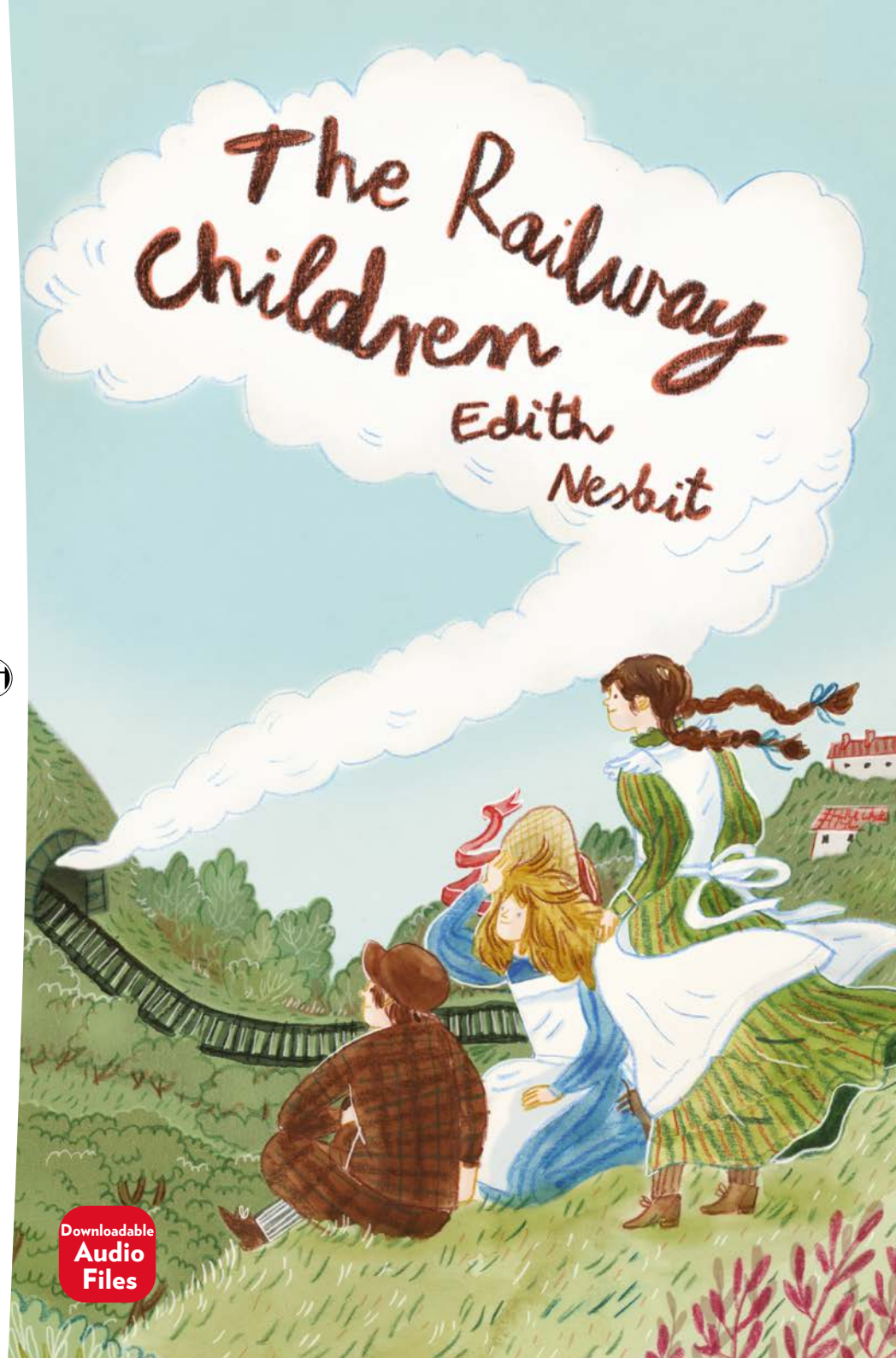
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Stage 1 A1

Teen
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Book brief

- 1 *The Railway Children* is E. Nesbit's most famous book for children.
- 2 The novel shows that Nesbit was 'the first modern writer for children' as her stories are about children who have their own adventures in the real world, unlike other books of that period.
- 3 *The Railway Children* was immediately popular with children because they liked the exciting adventures of the three children and the railway.
- 4 When Edith Nesbit wrote about Bobbie, the eldest child in the family, she often thought about her friend, Berta Ruck.
- 5 *The Railway Children* is still popular today as people see it as a very modern children's story, which teaches us many things about life in the early 1900s and the railway in those days.

Edith Nesbit

The Railway Children

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Main Characters



Father

He does an important job for his country but he also takes time to play with his children.



Bobbie

She's 14 years old and has to grow up quickly after her father goes away.



Phyllis

8 years old, she wants to know about everything and always asks a lot of questions.



Mother

She's always there for her children and tries to make them happy even in difficult times.



Peter

10 years old, he loves trains and wants to be a train driver when he's older.



The old gentleman

He waves at the children from the train and soon he becomes their friend.

Grammar

- 1 Read this part of an email. Complete the email with the verbs below.

are changes enjoy ~~have~~ is leave live

I'm reading *The Railway Children* at school. Edith Nesbit wrote this book in 1906. Do you have to read this book at your school? It's about three children. Their names are Bobbie, Peter and Phyllis. They (1) _____ in London with their mother and father. But one day, everything (2) _____. They (3) _____ London with their mother. At first, the children are sad to leave their home. They don't know that their new house (4) _____ near a railway station. In 1905, trains (5) _____ exciting and railway stations are interesting places. 100 years ago, children didn't travel on trains very often. The children in the story (6) _____ themselves. This is why they become the Railway Children.

Speaking and Writing

21st
Century
Skills

- 2 The children in this story have to go and live in a house near a railway station. Discuss these questions with a partner and write your answers.

1 Where do you live? In a town, a city or in the countryside?

2 Do you like where you live? Why / Why not?

3 What's your house like? How many rooms are there?

4 Who do you live with?

5 What can be difficult about going to live in a new place you don't know?

Reading and Writing **MOVERS**

- 3** These words are all in Chapter 1. Look at the pictures and choose the correct word for each definition.



railway station



fire



kitchen



hill



bedroom



dining room



~~candle~~



toy train

You use this to see when it's dark candle

- 1** You catch a train here _____
- 2** A room is warm if it has one of these _____
- 3** Some people eat their dinner here _____
- 4** This is where you cook _____
- 5** This is where you sleep _____

Listening

- 2** **4** Listen to the start of Chapter 1 and circle the words you hear.

They wasn't / weren't always the Railway Children. At first they were just Bobbie, Peter and Phyllis; three children who lived in a big house **(1)** at / in London. They didn't get the train very often. They **(2)** didn't / doesn't know much about the railway then. Bobbie was 14 years old. She was a kind girl, and she always tried to help **(3)** people / persons. Then there was Peter. One day, he wanted **(4)** being / to be a train driver. Phyllis **(5)** was / were 8 years old, and very curious.

Chapter 1

A New Home

- ▶ 2 They weren't always the Railway Children. At first they were just Bobbie, Peter and Phyllis; three children who lived in a big house in London. They didn't get the train very often. They didn't know much about the railway¹ then. Bobbie was 14 years old. She was a kind² girl, and she always tried to help people. Then there was Peter. One day, he wanted to be a train driver. And Phyllis was 8 years old, and very curious³.

The children's mother is always there for them. She helps them with their school work and reads them stories. Their father works hard, but always has time to play with the children.

The children lived in a beautiful house, with their mother and father. Mother was always there. She helped them with their school work. And she read them stories. Father did an important job for his country. He had a lot to do. But after work, he always had time to play with the children.

Bobbie, Peter and Phyllis were very happy. So, how did these children become the Railway Children?

The story starts on a very important day.

It was Peter's birthday. He was ten years old.

¹ **railway** where you can find trains and stations

² **kind** nice, good

³ **curious** when you ask a lot of questions

The Railway Children

He had a very nice party. There was a lot of good food, and nice games to play, but what Peter really wanted was a toy¹ train for his birthday and that's what he got. It was a beautiful train. He played with it all day. In the evening, Bobbie went into Peter's bedroom. She wanted to say happy birthday again.

'Are you playing with your train?' she asked.

'No, look! It's broken².' Peter tried not to cry³. *I'm a big boy now and big boys don't cry,*' he thought.

'Don't worry,' said Bobbie. 'Father is coming home now for dinner. He can help you.'

At dinner, Peter waited. *I can't ask my father now,* he thought. *I must wait, and ask him when he finishes his dinner. But please finish dinner soon!* When the family finished eating, Peter couldn't wait another minute. 'Father, look at my train! What can I do?'

'Don't worry Peter', said Father. 'Let's look at it together.'

'Together!' said Peter.

'Yes, me, you, Bobbie and Phyllis,' said Father.

Bobbie, Peter and Phyllis live with their mother and father in London and they're very happy. Peter gets a toy train for his birthday but he breaks it and he's sad.

¹ **toy** something that children play with

² **broken** look at what Peter has in his hand in the picture on page 13. It's broken

³ **to cry** you do this when you're very sad

Edith Nesbit

‘But they’re girls!’ said Peter.

‘Girls are clever too, you know,’ said Father.

At that moment, there was a knock¹ at the door.

‘Who can that be?’ said Father. ‘It’s very late. Stay in the dining room, children.’ Mother and Father went to open the door. The children waited in the dining room. They were very curious.

‘Who is it?’ asked Bobbie. ‘It’s strange². People don’t usually come to visit in the evening.’

‘I want to listen,’ said Phyllis.

So, Phyllis went near the door and tried to listen. She couldn’t hear everything.

‘There are two men with Father. They’re in the kitchen. Father is talking,’ said Phyllis. ‘He’s not happy. I can hear more now...They’re going outside. Yes, that’s it, now the men are leaving. I don’t know if Father is with them. Yes, they’re leaving.’

Phyllis went back to the table, but only Mother came back into the dining room.

‘Go to bed now children,’ said Mother. ‘It’s late.’

‘But what about my train?’ said Peter.

Peter’s father says they can all help Peter with the broken train, but then two men come to the door and their father has to go away with them.



Peter can’t wait for dinner to finish so that his father can help him with his broken train.

¹ **to knock** (at the door) you do this when you want someone to open the door for you

² **strange** something that you don’t often see or hear is strange



‘Father isn’t here,’ said Mother. ‘He had to go to work.’

‘That’s strange,’ said Bobbie. ‘Why does Father have to go to work now? It’s late’.

The children said goodnight to their mother, and they went to bed.

The next morning, the children were ready for their breakfast, but they didn’t have breakfast with Mother or Father. They weren’t there, but their Aunt Emma was in the kitchen.

First, Father isn’t here. And now Mother. What’s happening? thought Phyllis. *Aunt Emma is here. She doesn’t tell us stories. She doesn’t help us with our school work. She’s got no time for children.*

Mother didn’t come home all day. The children went to school. When they came back, there was only Aunt Emma. In the evening, Mother came home. She sat down, and then she said:

‘Now my dear children, I want to tell you something. It’s bad news¹. Father can’t come back home for a long time. I’m very worried about this, so, you must help me. You must be good. Please don’t ask me any questions. Don’t worry. Everything will be fine in the end.’

Next morning, their mother isn’t there. She comes home in the evening and tells them that their father can’t come back home for a long time. She doesn’t say why and she doesn’t want the children to ask any questions.

¹ news new information

The Railway Children

In their bedroom, the children couldn't sleep.

'What's happening? Bobbie, can you speak to Mother?' asked Peter.

'No! We mustn't ask questions. Mother must have a good reason¹ for not telling us. We promised² to be good, remember? It's something about father's job. We have to wait. We can't do anything now.'

After that, Mother often went out and Aunt Emma stayed with the children. One evening, Mother came home late. She was very tired.

'Now, my children,' said Mother. 'We're leaving this house. We're going to a new house. It's called "Three Chimneys". You'll love it. I know you'll love it.'

'Everything is changing,' thought Bobbie.

'What next?'

'Can I take my toy train?' asked Peter.

'Yes,' said Mother. 'But we can't take everything with us. "Three Chimneys" is small.'

The children were worried. Where was this new house and how small was it?

A week later, they were on the train to begin their new life. At first, the children enjoyed looking out of the train window but soon they were tired.

Their mother tells the children that they're going to a new house called "Three Chimneys". She says they'll love it. Peter wants to take his toy train. Mother agrees but says the new house is small, so they can't take everything with them.

¹ **reason** why somebody does something

² **to promise** to say that you are going to do something

After many hours, the train arrived¹. They got off the train and looked around². They couldn't see very much. They were cold, tired and hungry and it was very dark.

'We have to walk now,' said Mother. So they walked. They saw a lot of farms and then, they saw a hill.³

'Where's the house?' asked Peter.

'It's up this hill,' said Mother.

And so, they went up the hill, then they saw a house.

'Look! There it is,' said Mother.

They opened the door. It was very dark and cold inside. Mother had a candle⁴, so they began to see more and more.

'I can see some things now,' said Phyllis. 'There's a table ... and I can see some chairs. But there's not much in the room. There's a place for a fire⁵, but there's no coal⁶. That's why it's very cold.'

'What's that noise?' asked Bobbie.

'It's only a rat⁷,' said Mother.

'A rat!' said the children, all together. 

They travel for a long time on the train and when they see they house they don't like it at all. It's cold, dark and there's even a rat!



With the light from the candle in Mother's hand, the children can see that there isn't much in the room and they're not very happy with their new house.

Think

Would you like to go and live in a new house?

¹ **arrive** come to a place

² **to look around** to look everywhere

³ **hill** 

⁴ **candle** look at what Mother has in her hand in the picture on page 17

⁵ **fire**



⁶ **coal**



⁷ **rat**





Speaking

- 1** Talk to a partner about the pictures on pages 13 and 17 and answer these questions.

21st
Century
Skills

- 1 How many people are there in each picture?
- 2 Where do you think their father is now?
- 3 How do you think the children are feeling in each picture?
- 4 Which picture do you prefer? Why?
- 5 Do you think it's right that their mother doesn't want the children to ask any questions? Why / Why not?
- 6 Do you think it's right to talk about problems all together in a family? Why / Why not?

Writing

- 2 A** Put the words in the correct order to make questions.

- a is Father Where? Where _____
- b is Father coming back When? When _____
- c at work Father Why is? Why _____
- d you playing your train with Are? Are _____
- e is house new Where the? Where _____
- f take Can toy train I my? Can _____

- 2 B** Now match the answers with the right questions.

- 1 ☐ It's near a railway station.
- 2 ☐ I don't know.
- 3 ☐ No, it's broken.
- 4 ☐ Yes, but you can't take too many things.
- 5 ☐ He has a lot of things to do.
- 6 ☒ He's at work.

Reading and Writing **MOVERS**

3 Choose the correct word for each sentence.

Her name was Roberta but everyone called her Bobbie.

~~called~~ named told

1 Mother always told the children _____.

goodnight breakfast stories

2 After dinner, some _____ visited Father.

person people man

3 When Father left, the children wanted to _____ Mother some questions.

ask say do

4 Near the railway station there _____ farms.

was had were

5 In the new house, Phyllis could see a table and _____ chairs.

any some no

Grammar

4 Complete the sentences. Put the verbs in brackets in the past tense.

There (be) was a knock at the door. The children (1) (wait) _____ in the dining room. They (2) (be) _____ very curious. Some men (3) (go) _____ into the kitchen. Father (4) (talk) _____ to them. He (5) (not be) _____ very happy. Phyllis (6) (listen) _____ near the door. Then the men (7) (leave) _____ with Father.

Before-reading Activity

Listening

- ▶ 4 5 Listen to track 4 of Chapter 2. What can't the children eat? Then find out why Mother says this.

1 ☐ bread and jam

2 ☐ bread with jam and butter

3 ☐ bread with butter