

Extract from: *The Railway Children* by E. Nesbitt

Because their father has been taken away under mysterious circumstances, three children – Roberta, Peter and Phyllis – have had to leave their home in London and travel to a new house in the country with their mother.

“Wake up, dears. We’re there.”

They woke up, cold and melancholy, and stood shivering on the draughty 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 tail-lights of the guard’s van disappear into the darkness.

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 centre of their new life, nor what wonders and changes it would bring to them. They only shivered and sneezed and hoped the walk to the new house would not be long. Peter’s nose was colder than he ever remembered it to have been before. Roberta’s hat was crooked, and the elastic seemed tighter than usual. Phyllis’s shoe-laces had come undone.



“Come,” said Mother, “we’ve got to walk. There aren’t any cabs here.”

The walk was dark and muddy. The children stumbled a little on the rough road, and once Phyllis absently fell into a puddle, and was picked up damp and unhappy. There were no gas-lamps on the road, and the road was uphill. The cart went at a foot’s pace, and they followed the gritty crunch of its wheels. As their eyes got used to the darkness, they could see the mound of boxes swaying dimly in front of them.

A long gate had to be opened for the cart to pass through, and after that the road seemed to go across fields—and now it went down hill. Presently a great dark lumpish thing showed over to the right.

“There’s the house,” said Mother. “I wonder why she’s shut the shutters.”

“Who’s *she*?” asked Roberta.

“The woman I engaged to clean the place, and put the furniture straight and get supper.”

There was a low wall, and trees inside.

“That’s the garden,” said Mother.

“It looks more like a dripping-pan full of black cabbages,” said Peter.

The cart went on along by the garden wall, and round to the back of the house, and here it clattered into a cobble-stoned yard and stopped at the back door.

There was no light in any of the windows.

Everyone hammered at the door, but no one came.

The man who drove the cart said he expected Mrs. Viney had gone home.

“You see your train was that late,” said he.

“But she’s got the key,” said Mother. “What are we to do?”

“Oh, she’ll have left that under the doorstep,” said the cart man; “folks do hereabouts.” He took the lantern off his cart and stooped.

“Ay, here it is, right enough,” he said.

He unlocked the door and went in and set his lantern on the table.

“Got e’er a candle?” said he.

“I don’t know where anything is.” Mother spoke rather less cheerfully than usual.

He struck a match. There was a candle on the table, and he lighted it. By its thin little glimmer the children saw a large bare kitchen with a stone floor. There were no curtains, no hearth-rug. The kitchen table from home stood in the middle of the room. The chairs were in one corner, and the pots, pans, brooms, and crockery in another. There was no fire, and the black grate showed cold, dead ashes.

As the cart man turned to go out after he had brought in the boxes, there was a rustling, scampering sound that seemed to come from inside the walls of the house.

“Oh, what’s that?” cried the girls.

“It’s only the rats,” said the cart man. And he went away and shut the door, and the sudden draught of it blew out the candle.

“Oh, dear,” said Phyllis, “I wish we hadn’t come!” and she knocked a chair over.

“*Only* the rats!” said Peter, in the dark.

Questions 1 – 14 are about *The Railway Children* by E. Nesbitt (pages 3 – 4)

1. *Roberta's hat was crooked, and the elastic seemed tighter than usual.*

Which word is closest in meaning to **crooked**?

Tick **one**.

upside-down

☐

lopsided

☐

ragged

☐

soaked

☐

1 mark

2. Look at page 3. Why does Mother tell the children that they have to walk?

.....

1 mark

3. Look at the paragraph that begins: *This was the first train...*

In what ways can you tell that the children felt uncomfortable? Name **two**.

1.

2.

2 marks

4. Look at the paragraph that begins: *The walk was damp and muddy.*

Name three things that make the family's walk more difficult.

1.

2.

3.

2 marks

5. *The cart went at a foot's pace.*

What does this mean? Tick **one**.

The cart only travelled a short distance.

☐

The cart was travelling too fast for the children to keep up with it.

☐

The cart travelled at walking speed.

☐

The cart was pulled by a horse.

☐

1 mark

6. *Presently a great dark lumpish thing showed over to the right.*

What does *a great dark lumpish thing* tell you about how the family feel about the first sight of their new home?

.....

1 mark

7. *"That's the garden," said Mother.*

"It looks more like a dripping-pan full of black cabbages," said Peter.

How does this tell you that Peter doesn't like the garden?

.....

1 mark

8. *There was no light in any of the windows.*

Why is Mother surprised by this?

.....

1 mark

9. Why did the cart man think that Mrs Viney had gone home?

Tick **one**.

Because the family's train was so late arriving.

☐

Because she'd already made the dinner.

☐

Because she didn't have the key.

☐

Because she was worried about the rats.

☐

1 mark

10. "*Oh, she'll have left that under the doorstep,*" said the cart man; "*folks do hereabouts.*"

What does the cart man mean by *folks do hereabouts*?

Tick **one**.

You hear about people leaving things under the doorstep.

☐

It is traditional to leave the house unlocked.

☐

People lose keys all the time.

☐

People do that kind of thing around here.

☐

1 mark

11. Look at the paragraph beginning: *He struck a match...*

Name **two** things about the kitchen that the family finds disappointing.

1.

2.

2 marks

12. Look at the paragraph beginning: *He struck a match...*

Find and copy the word that is closest in meaning to 'gleam'.

.....

1 mark

13. *"Only the rats!" said Peter, in the dark.*

What does Peter think about the rats?

Tick **one**.

He thinks that rats aren't anything to worry about.

☐

He thinks that it is normal to have rats in the country.

☐

He thinks there are lots of other animals as well as the rats.

☐

Unlike the cart man, he thinks that the rats are a problem.

☐

1 mark

14. Number the following events 1 – 5 to show the order in which they happened. The first one has been done for you.

Phyllis knocks a chair over.

☐

The family's baggage is taken off the train.

☐

They hear the sound of rats in the walls.

☐

The cart man shows them the key under the doorstep.

☐

The children's mother wakes them up.

☐ 1

1 mark

17 marks total for this section

Answers

Questions 1 – 14 are about *The Railway Children* by E. Nesbitt (pages 3 – 4) (check page numbers)

Question	Answer	Mark
1	lopsided	1
2	Award 1 mark for reference to the following: Because in the countryside there are no cabs to take them home. Do not accept answers which just state that they are in the countryside without reference to cabs.	1
3	Award 1 mark for each of the following points, up to a maximum of 2 marks: - They sneezed - They shivered - They were worried about how long the walk was going to be - Peter's nose felt cold - Roberta's hat elastic seemed tight - Phyllis's shoe-laces had come undone. Do not accept references to the fact that the children are cold without evidence from the text to back this up.	2
4	Award 1 mark for any two and 2 marks for any three of the following: - the road was rough - there were puddles - there were no gas lamps - the road was uphill	2
5	The cart travelled at walking speed	1
6	Award 1 mark for answers which explain that the family think the cottage looks unpleasant, e.g. - They think it looks ugly like a nasty lump. - They think it looks gloomy and unattractive.	1

- 7 **Award 1 mark** for answers which explain that Peter is comparing the garden to things he doesn't like, or that he's saying it doesn't look like a garden should, e.g. 1
- 'He's saying it reminds him of a horrible vegetable.'
 - 'Gardens should be green and colourful but Peter says this one looks black.'
- 8 **Award 1 mark** for answers which make reference to the fact that Mother had arranged for a woman to be there and to make them dinner. 1
- 9 Because the family's train was so late arriving. 1
- 10 People do that kind of thing around here. 1
- 11 **Award 1 mark** for each of the following points, up to a maximum of **2 marks**: 2
- The kitchen was bare.
 - There were no curtains.
 - There was no hearth-rug.
 - The fire wasn't lit.
 - The fire grate was dirty with ashes.
- 12 glimmer 1
- 13 Unlike the cart man, he thinks that the rats are a problem 1
- 14 **Award 1 mark** for all numbers placed correctly as follows:
- 5 Phyllis knocks a chair over.
 - 2 The family's baggage is taken off the train.
 - 4 They hear the sound of rats in the walls. 1
 - 3 The cart man shows them the key under the doorstep.
 - 1 The children's mother wakes them up.