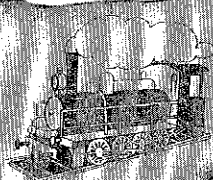


# The Railway Children

Edith Nesbit

1906



## Literal Questions

- Name the three railway children. [Peter, Bobbie, Phyllis]
- What colour and material were the children's flags? [Red, flannel]
- Why were they waving these flags?  
[To warn the approaching train of danger]

## Deductive Questions

- Was the approaching train a modern electric train? [No – 'a puff of white steam' tells us it is an old train and helps set this scene in the past]
- List two things that prove the train is rumbling towards them very fast.  
[The two little flags on the line sway and the heaps of loose stones begin to tumble]
- How do we know Bobbie is not scared at this point?  
['Her hands did not tremble now']

## Inferential Questions

- Was the sound of the train loud or quiet? [loud – Bobbie could no longer hear Peter and Phyllis above the 'mountain of sound']
- Why do you think Bobbie carried on waving her flags after the train had stopped?
- What do you think causes Bobbie to end up lying across the line, still gripping her flags? [She has fainted with fear]

## Evaluative Questions

- Would you call Bobbie brave or foolish for remaining on the track waving her flags? Why?
- How does Edith Nesbit create tension and suspense in this passage? How does this affect the reader?
- Railway lines are highly dangerous. If this event were to happen today, what should the children have done? Why?

## Essential Vocabulary

- Look up the word 'firm' in a dictionary. What does it mean? What do you think Peter means when he tells the girls to 'Stand firm'?
- Look up the word 'harsh' in a dictionary. What does it mean? Why do you think Edith Nesbit describes the train's voice as being 'harsh'?
- Draw a mountain. Highlight this word in the text. Why do you think Nesbit uses this word to describe the sound of the train? [Huge, dominant, imposing]
- How many times does Bobbie tell the train to stop? [3] Why do you think she repeats this word so many times? [For emphasis and dramatic effect]
- Who is she speaking to here? [Although directed at the train, it suggests she is speaking to herself as 'no one heard her']
- Highlight the word 'slackened'. What do you think the train is doing at this point? [Breaking, slowing down]
- Underline the sentence where Bobbie continues to wave her flags 'feebly and jerkily'. Show your teacher how she would have done this. What do you think these two words mean? Check your answers in a dictionary.

# The Railway Children

by Edith Nesbit

It seemed to her that they had been standing there for hours and hours, holding those silly little red flannel flags that no one would ever notice. The train wouldn't care. It would go rushing by them and tear round the corner and go crashing into that awful mound. And everyone would be killed. Her hands grew very cold and trembled so that she could hardly hold the flag. And then came the distant rumble and hum of the metals, and a puff of white steam showed far away along the stretch of line.

'Stand firm,' said Peter, 'and wave like mad! When it gets to that big furze bush step back, but go on waving! Don't stand on the line, Bobbie!'

The train came rattling along very, very fast.

'They don't see us! They won't see us! It's all no good!' cried Bobbie. The two little flags on the line swayed as the nearing train shook and loosened the heaps of loose stones that held them up. One of them slowly leaned over and fell on the line. Bobbie jumped forward and caught it up, and waved it; her hands did not tremble now.

It seemed that the train came on as fast as ever. It was very near now.

'Keep off the line, you silly cuckoo!' said Peter, fiercely.

'It's no good,' Bobbie said again.

'Stand back!' cried Peter, suddenly, and he dragged Phyllis back by the arm. But Bobbie cried, 'Not yet, not yet!' and waved her two flags right over the line. The front of the engine looked black and enormous. Its voice was loud and harsh. 'Oh, stop, stop, stop!' cried Bobbie. No one heard her. At least Peter and Phyllis didn't, for the oncoming rush of the train covered the sound of her voice with a mountain of sound. But afterwards she used to wonder whether the engine itself had not heard her. It seemed almost as though it had – for it slackened swiftly, slackened and stopped, not twenty yards from the place where Bobbie's two flags waved over the line. She saw the great black engine stop dead, but somehow she could not stop waving the flags. And when the driver and the fireman had got off the engine and Peter and Phyllis had gone to meet them and pour out their excited tale of the awful mound just round the corner, Bobbie still waved the flags but more and more feebly and jerkily.

When the others turned towards her she was lying across the line with her hands flung forward and still gripping the sticks of the little red flannel flags.

