

SATs... But Make it Trains 2

A SATs-style reading booklet on the theme of trains.



Text 1: A day in the life of a train driver



Text 2: Interview with Charlotte Murray



Text 3: Snake Pass



Text 4: Extract from The Railway Children

Text 1: A day in the life of a train driver



Jane Smith, Driver at London Paddington Station

I usually arrive at work half an hour before I am due to book on. This could be any time from 4:30 in the morning! I have to ring control, tell them I'm ready with all the right uniform and equipment; and confirm that I'm fit for duty (not under the influence of drink or drugs).

Next, I read all the notices. They tell me about any last-minute changes which may affect my train or my routes for the day. Then I check my diagram (my job sheet for the day) and head out for my first train.

Today, I'm working a High-Speed Train (HST) from Paddington to Oxford. I meet the train as it arrives from its previous journey so the driver can tell me anything I need to know about the train. When the Train Manager signals that it's time to leave, I pull the train out of the station, moving up through the speed restrictions until we reach top line-speed of 125mph. While I'm driving, I need to keep alert for the signals and be aware of workers on the track. I also look at trains that pass to make sure they're OK and to give the passing drivers a wave.

I stop at the first station on the journey. There's a lot of skill involved in knowing where to start braking and how much brake to use to stop in the right place on the platform. It takes 2km for a train to come to a stop from top speed, roughly the length of 20 full-sized football pitches! Luckily, you get plenty of training to be able to do this, so it becomes routine. There's an added challenge in Autumn when braking can be tricky due to slippery rails but today it is lovely and dry. Most days are uneventful, and it could become monotonous, but drivers must stay focused and vigilant. There's plenty of unexpected issues to liven things up: train failures, signal or track failures – even reports of livestock on the line! Today is routine though.

The London to Reading section of the track is very busy but once we leave Reading, it becomes less urban, as we move into beautiful countryside. At Oxford, there's time for a quick cuppa and a chat with the Train Manager before taking the train back up to London.

When I arrive it's time for a 40-minute meal break. Mealtimes can be quite erratic – you have to seize the opportunities when they come! After lunch, I drive an empty train down to the depot to be refuelled, cleaned and fixed. At the depot, I wait in the mess room for three hours in case any shunting is needed. Some days, there are a lot of trains to move but today, there's only one.

Waiting for something to happen can be quite tedious unless there's other staff to keep you company although they're talking about football today, so I read my book.

At the end of the day, a taxi takes me back to Paddington. From there, I make my way home by tube. I'm not back to work until next week because I work part-time. It leaves room for my other job – being a mum!



Text 2: Interview with Charlotte Murray

Emergency Planning Officer, Great Western Railway



Interviewer: What brought you to the railway industry?

Charlotte: I joined the railway in 1997 as a stop gap before going to university. I started as a Senior Stewardess (providing catering in the buffet and First Class) but within three years I had moved into the offices. A year later, I was promoted to a manager's role. I originally only intended to stay for six months but the sense of family within the company, and the pay and conditions were so good, I decided to make a career out of it. I can honestly say, I have never looked back.

Interviewer: What does your role consist of?

Charlotte: There is no typical day in this role. Every day is different and whatever plan you make for the day can change in the blink of any eye depending on what has happened. I have three main responsibilities:

- Emergency planning (working closely with blue light services to oversee plans for all conceivable emergencies on the railway).
- Overseeing the Fire Risk Assessments for each of our properties.
- Managing the Care Team volunteers who provide practical assistance and emotional support to customers and colleagues after a significant traumatic event on the railway.

Interviewer: What is it about the industry that you love?

Charlotte: I love everything about my job: the work, the people and the never-ending challenges. I meet different people every day and I learn from each of them regardless of whether they are railway or external personnel. The railway is a family and even when we face tough times, we all pull together and work as one.

Interviewer: What is your biggest achievement?

Charlotte: I have been so lucky in my career, but probably being given the opportunity to work in my current role is my proudest achievement. Emergency planning has traditionally been a male dominated environment and I never thought I would have the chance to apply for the job, let alone to be offered it. The railway is becoming less male dominated, but it takes time and patience to break down those barriers.

Interviewer: Has anyone inspired you during your career?

Charlotte: I have had some wonderful role models in my life. My mother taught me how to prove myself and my abilities without standing on the backs of others, and to be humble and thankful. The Head of Security at Great Western Railway has given me amazing support and guidance. She has taught me how to be strong but approachable and is always there should I need her help and advice.

Interviewed October 2016

Text 3: Snake Pass



Hear her shrill shriek
Squeal and
Pierce the night.
Pierce the night
See her eyes shine,
Steadfast,
Track her prey.
Track her prey.

Hear her slither
To the beat
Devour the vale
Devour the vale.
See the ridges -
Coy giants
Shy away.
Shy away.

See her squirm
Under bridges
Lightning speed
Lightning speed
She eludes
Grasping arms
No time to play.
No time to play.

See her tunnel
Into darkness
Then emerge
Then emerge
Triumphant,
Seizing moonbeams
In her way
In her way

See her slink
Past sleeping hamlets.
See her sashay
On through towns
Hear the roar
Feel the whoosh
Come what may
Come what may

Hear her breathing start to slow.
Hear her screech!
Hear her sigh
As
Her
Slim
Body
Slides
Smoothly
Into
The
Station
And
Stops.

Shhhhhh!

Text 4: Extract from The Railway Children

By E Nesbitt



Three children, Roberta (Bobbie), Peter and Phyllis have moved with their mother to a small cottage in the countryside, after their father is called away 'on business'. They leave behind a life of privilege in London for a humble cottage which overlooks the railway track. Their consolation for the upheaval is the excitement that the railway and its steam trains bring.

It was one morning as they sat on the fence waiting for the Green Dragon, which was three and a quarter minutes late by Peter's Waterbury watch that he had had given him on his last birthday.

"The Green Dragon's going where Father is," said Phyllis; "if it were a really real dragon, we could stop it and ask it to take our love to Father."

"Dragons don't carry people's love," said Peter; "they'd be above it."

"Yes, they do, if you tame them thoroughly first. They fetch and carry like pet spaniels," said Phyllis, "and feed out of your hand. I wonder why Father never writes to us."

"Mother says he's been too busy," said Bobbie; "but he'll write soon, she says."

"I say," Phyllis suggested, "let's all wave to the Green Dragon as it goes by. If it's a magic dragon, it'll understand and take our loves to Father. And if it isn't, three waves aren't much. We shall never miss them."

So, when the Green Dragon tore shrieking out of the mouth of its dark lair, which was the tunnel, all three children stood on the railing and waved their pocket-handkerchiefs without stopping to think whether they were clean handkerchiefs or the reverse. And out of a first-class carriage a hand waved back. A quite clean hand. It held a newspaper. It was the old gentleman's hand.

After this it became the custom for waves to be exchanged between the children and the 9.15. And the children, especially the girls, liked to think that perhaps the old gentleman knew Father, and would meet him 'in business,' wherever that shady retreat might be, and tell him how his three children stood on a rail far away in the green country and waved their love to him every morning, wet or fine. For they were now able to go out in all sorts of weather such as they would never have been allowed to go out in when they lived in their villa house. This was Aunt Emma's doing, and the children felt more and more that they had not been quite fair to this unattractive aunt, when they found how useful were the long gaiters and waterproof coats that they had laughed at her for buying for them.

Mother, all this time, was very busy with her writing. She used to send off a good many long blue envelopes with stories in them — and large envelopes of different sizes and colours used to come to her. Sometimes she would sigh when she opened them and say:

"Another story come home to roost. Oh, dear, Oh, dear!" and then the children would be very sorry.

But sometimes she would wave the envelope in the air and say — "Hooray, hooray. Here's a sensible Editor. He's taken my story and this is the proof of it."

At first the children thought 'the proof' meant the letter the sensible Editor had written, but they presently got to know that the proof was long slips of paper with the story printed on them. Whenever an Editor was sensible there were buns for tea.

One day Peter was going down to the village to get buns to celebrate the sensibleness of the Editor of the Children's Globe, when he met the Station Master.

Peter felt very uncomfortable, for he had now had time to think over the affair of the coal-mine. He did not like to say "Good morning" to the Station Master, as you usually do to anyone you meet on a lonely road, because he had a hot feeling, which spread even to his ears, that the Station Master might not care to speak to a person who had stolen coals. 'Stolen' is a nasty word, but Peter felt it was the right one. So, he looked down, and said nothing.

It was the Station Master who said "Good morning" as he passed by. And Peter answered, "Good morning." Then he thought: "Perhaps he doesn't know who I am by daylight, or he wouldn't be so polite." And he did not like the feeling which thinking this gave him. And then before he knew what he was going to do he ran after the Station Master, who stopped when he heard Peter's hasty boots crunching the road and coming up with him very breathless and with his ears now quite magenta-coloured, he said: "I don't want you to be polite to me if you don't know me when you see me."

"Eh?" said the Station Master.

"I thought perhaps you didn't know it was me that took the coals," Peter went on, "when you said 'Good morning.' But it was, and I'm sorry. There."

"Why," said the Station Master, "I wasn't thinking anything at all about the precious coals. Let bygones be bygones. And where were you off to in such a hurry?"

"I'm going to buy buns for tea," said Peter.

"I thought you were all so poor," said the Station Master.

"So we are," said Peter, confidentially, "but we always have three pennyworth of halfpennies for tea whenever Mother sells a story or a poem or anything."

"Oh," said the Station Master, "so your Mother writes stories, does she?"

"The beautifulest you ever read," said Peter.

"You ought to be very proud to have such a clever Mother."

"Yes," said Peter, "but she used to play with us more before she had to be so clever."

"Well," said the Station Master, "I must be getting along. You give us a look in at the Station whenever you feel so inclined. And as to coals, it's a word that — well — oh, no, we never mention it, eh?"

"Thank you," said Peter. "I'm very glad it's all straightened out between us." And he went on across the canal bridge to the village to get the buns, feeling more comfortable in his mind than he had felt since the hand of the Station Master had fastened on his collar that night among the coals.

