

# The Last Train

by Gordon Titcomb

A sentimental tribute to a time long gone, but not forgotten, based on a song by Gordon Titcomb and magnificently illustrated by Wendell Minor, about a boy's memories of his family and their years working for the railroad.



## Read

### Before:

Introduce the book and tell the children a little bit about it. Follow that with a comment or question that is related to the story such as, *What job would you love to do on a train?* Encourage a discussion so the children can comment, ask questions, and express their feelings. Set the stage for listening by asking an "I wonder" statement based on the cover illustration.

- I wonder why he is pulling on that rope?

### During:

Encourage the children to comment on the illustrations, ask questions, and predict what will happen next in the story. Children gain confidence and a sense of achievement through being able to correctly predict how a story will end. Point out "rare words" (e.g., those words that are not commonly used in every day conversation) and help the children relate the meaning in a way that makes sense to them.

### Rare Words in *The Last Train*

- iron: a heavy, magnetic, metallic element
- station: a place along a train route where passengers are picked up and dropped off
- freight train: a railroad train that carries only freight
- souvenirs: something bought or kept as a reminder of a place or occasion
- brakeman: railroad worker who operates brakes
- porter: a waiter or butler usually found on passenger trains
- anthracite: hard black coal
- diesel: a vehicle, a car or train that is powered by diesel fuel
- contrails: a vapor trail
- mournful: expressing or feeling deep sadness
- refrains: to avoid doing something or hold yourself back

### After:

Discuss the story. Ask questions...

- Why was the station boarded up?
- What did the boy's father and grandfather do with the trains?
- What was in the cigar box?
- What happened to the pennies that were left on the railroad tracks?
- What souvenirs did the boy keep?
- What replaced the older trains?
- What happened to the old coal trains?

# Do

## La! La! La!

After reading the story, sing several train songs and train poems. Below is an example of one song you can sing and a poem you can act out with the children.

### **She'll Be Coming Around the Mountain**

*She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes, (when she comes).*

*She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes, (when she comes).*

*She'll be coming 'round the mountain, she'll be coming 'round the mountain,*

*She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes, (when she comes).*

The same structure is repeated with the following verses:

*She'll be drivin' three white horses when she comes, etc.*

*Oh we'll all come out to meet her when she comes, etc.*

*She'll be wearing red pajamas when she comes, etc.*

*We will kill the old red rooster when she comes, etc.*

*We'll be havin' chicken and dumplings when she comes, etc.*

*She will have to sleep with Grandma when she comes, etc.*

*We'll all be shoutin' "Halleluja" when she comes, etc.*

*She'll be comin' down a road that's five miles long, etc.*

### **Down by the Station**

Down by the station

Early in the morning

See the little puffer bellies

All in a row

See the station master

Turn the little handle

Puff, puff, toot, toot

Off we go!

### **Extra Activity**

If desired, ask a train conductor or a person that works for a railroad company to come and visit the classroom. They can bring memorabilia, items used on railroads or pictures to share with the children.