

Reading *Jingle the Brass*

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For parents and children to explore together.

SUMMARY

During this activity, you and your child will actively read *Jingle the Brass*, using the suggested reading questions.

WHY

Through this activity, your child will have fun while learning about railroad systems. In the process, your child will build reading skills, including the ability to explore the pictures in the book, and will learn new vocabulary words.

TIME

- 30 minutes

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP

This activity will work best for children in kindergarten through 4th grade.

CHALLENGE WORDS

Jingle the Brass uses many special words to describe people, things, and actions that are a part of life on the railroad. The glossary in the back of the book defines most of these words.

Words not defined in the glossary:

- Ornery: Easily annoyed or angered.
- Temperamental: Unpredictable in behavior or performance.
- Outbound: Traveling away from a place.
- Freight: Goods that are carried by ships, trains, trucks, or airplanes.

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/train/>.

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PARENT PREPARATION

- If you have time, read the story yourself before sharing it with your child. Also read the Step Back in Time sheet and the notes on the last two pages of the book.
- If you have time, preview some of the reading suggestions below. Pick just a few suggestions that look interesting and fun for you.

YOU NEED

- This reading guide
- Step Back in Time sheets (*attached*)
- *Jingle the Brass* book written by Patricia Newman and illustrated by Michael Chesworth

BEFORE YOU READ

- Read the first page together out loud. Highlight or write down the words that have a special meaning in this story. Look up those words in the glossary at the back of the book. Read the first page again and see if it makes better sense now.

Tip

On the first page, you'll read several breakfast terms, including "put on the nosebag" (to eat), "eggs with headlights" (eggs sunny-side up), "wreck on the mainline" (scrambled eggs), and "whitewash" (milk).

DURING READING

- When you come across any words that require an explanation, first use the pictures and other words in the sentence to figure out a possible definition. Then use the glossary to check what the author meant by using the words. Were you right or wrong?

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Tip

Learning how to work with new words is a critical skill for any reader. Some words in this book are specific to life on the railroad, so it is a great book to practice learning new vocabulary through context (the pictures on the page and other words in the sentence).

- Imagine yourself being the little boy in the story. What things would you hear, feel, see, smell, or taste at these points in the story:
 - when meeting your conductor at the diner (page 1)
 - when watching Joe shovel the coal (page 6)
 - when the train first leaves the station (page 12)
 - when Joe reaches for the orders (page 17)

Tip

The little boy helps the author tell the story because he is someone that young readers can identify with. From the first page, when the conductor says “I’ve been waitin’ for you,” readers know that they are represented by the little boy, and everything the conductor says is being said to the readers directly.

- As you read, try to keep count of how many different jobs are mentioned that are connected to the railroads. If this many jobs are connected to just the few trains included in this story, imagine how many people were involved in all of the railroads across the entire country when railroads were even more popular for carrying people and things. Do you know anyone today who works on a train?

Tip

In the late 1920s, there were over 1.7 million rail employees nationwide. Most railroaders worked “behind the scenes,” without the glamour in folklore and culture that the publicly visible locomotive engineers and conductors enjoyed.

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AFTER YOU READ

- Has anyone you know ever traveled on a steam locomotive? Ask your grandparents, older neighbors, or teachers. Ask about the starting and ending points for the trip, any exciting parts about traveling by steam locomotive, or how long ago this trip occurred.
- What other areas of our lives have special words? Talk about examples your child might be familiar with. For example:
 - Computers and texting: mouse (an animal or a computer device), a buddy list (online list of friends), cyberbullying (using technology to intimidate or upset someone)
 - Football: clipping (a small piece of something, such as a newspaper or a type of block that is against the rules), draft (a version of a piece of writing or a process of picking team members), Hail Mary (a kind of Christian prayer or a courageous pass at the end of a game), clothesline (a place to dry clothing or a type of block that is against the rules)
 - Cooking: cup (any container for liquid or a specific unit of measurement), batter (a mix of flour, egg, and milk thin enough to pour or a player in a baseball game)
- The illustrations (pictures) in this book were made using watercolor paints and pencil. Take a close look at the cover. In the cloud of smoke, look at how the blues have soft edges, blend into each other, and fade into white. Also look at the grey pencil lines that form the outside of the smoke. Do you have any other books that use watercolor illustrations? Have you ever used watercolors to make a picture?

Tip

If you have watercolors, paper, and pencil available, try to recreate one part of one of the illustrations in the book.

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/train/>.

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For more information, visit the National Museum of American History Web site <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/train/>.

Railroads have moved people and cargo around America for more than 180 years. The first steam-powered locomotives began to appear around 1830, and were very important to land transportation by the 1850s. By 1860, there were roughly 31,000 miles of track in the country, mostly in the Northeast, but also in the South and Midwest.

As the rail system grew, it connected the lives of Americans across the country. By 1893, almost any town could receive food and goods from any section of the country within a week or two. In the 1920s, trains delivered daily mail and express packages and long-distance travel was available to even more people.



The “John Bull” was one of the first successful locomotives in the United States. It ran for the first time in November, 1831.

Facts and Fiction

The words and illustrations in *Jingle the Brass* represent a mix of fantasy and facts about steam locomotives in American history. For example, the illustrations of hobos are comical and in general practice a child would not ride in the cab of a locomotive. For readers interested in “just the facts,” we recommend the nonfiction book *The John Bull: A British Locomotive Comes to America* by David Weitzman.

From the 1830s through the 1950s, people traveled in trains pulled by steam locomotives. Cars in these trains were almost always arranged in a specific order. Coal-burning steam engines sent smoke and cinders into the air, so the most **privileged** passengers sat as far away from the locomotive as possible. The passenger cars—the coaches—were separated from the locomotive by the mail and baggage cars.

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It took many people to make the railroad system work.

- The conductor was the “captain” of the train; he was in charge of the train crew, looked out for the safety of everyone aboard, and made sure that every passenger paid the correct fare.
- Two crew members worked in the engine’s cab: the engineer ran the locomotive, and the fireman managed the boiler and helped watch for signals. Both jobs were highly skilled.
- On trains with luxurious sleeping cars, people called “Pullman Porters” took care of passengers’ needs, like helping with luggage and tidying up the passenger area.
- Other “behind the scenes” railroad workers included the business clerks, track workers, signal tower workers, and express package agents.

The railroads that cross the country, mostly because of the food, coal, cars, and other goods that travel by rail, still have an impact on our lives. Many Americans still travel by rail, on diesel-powered locomotives, streetcars, subways, and commuter trains.

For more information, visit the *America on the Move* online exhibition at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthemove/>.

Locomotive: the vehicle that produces the power that pulls a train.

Cinders: very small pieces of burned material, such as wood or coal.

Privileged: having special rights or advantages that most people do not have, such as money.

Luxurious: very comfortable and expensive.

Diesel: a specific type of oil fuel.

Commuter trains: trains that carry travelers regularly to and from places, especially between their homes and workplaces.

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Read the “Reading Guide” sheets for step-by-step directions.

OBJECTIVES

The students will be better able to:

- Read for understanding.
- Answer questions using written and pictorial resources.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- Discussion exhibits understanding of story and historical details.
- Discussion exhibits understanding of vocabulary in the context of the story.

STANDARDS

NCHS History Standards

K-4 Historical Thinking Standards

- 2H. Draw upon the visual data presented in photographs, paintings, cartoons, and architectural drawings.

K-4 Historical Content Standards

- 8B. The student understands changes in transportation and their effects.

IRA/NCTE Language Arts Standards

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

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21st-Century Skills

Learning and Innovation Skills

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

Information, Media, and Technology Skills

Information Literacy

Media Literacy

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