

ENGLISH · GRADES 5–6

Reading Comprehension

A Child's Journey

Read the passage

On the platform of the central station, the air smelled of soot and damp wool. Margaret tightened her grip on the brown paper parcel her mother had pressed into her hands that morning. Inside were a clean nightdress, an apple and a letter she had been told not to read until she arrived. A label dangled from her coat, scratching her chin whenever she moved.

She was nine years old, and she had never been further than the corner store on her own.

The teachers shouted instructions, but their voices were swallowed by the great hiss of steam from the engine. A whistle blew. Children pressed forward, some chattering, some crying, most just silent — pale faces in a sea of grey coats. Margaret found a window seat and watched the city's chimneys shrink and disappear, replaced by green fields she had only seen on biscuit tins.

Hours later, the train slowed into a small village. Local families waited on the platform, peering at the children as if at puppies in a pet shop. A round woman with kind eyes stepped forward and rested a warm hand on Margaret's shoulder. 'You'll do,' she said softly. 'You'll do just fine.'

Margaret followed her down a lane, past a stone chapel and a duck pond, to a low cottage with a wisp of smoke rising from its chimney. That evening, she ate stew she had never tasted before, slept in a room where the only sound was an owl, and clutched her mother's unread letter against her chest.

Retrieval

1. How old was Margaret?
2. What three things were inside her brown paper parcel?
3. Where did the train arrive at the end of her journey?



Inference

1. What does the phrase 'pale faces in a sea of grey coats' suggest about the children?
2. How do you think Margaret felt about being on the platform? Use evidence from the text.
3. Why might Margaret have been told not to read her mother's letter until she arrived?

Language

1. Find and copy a simile from the fourth paragraph.
2. What does the word 'swallowed' tell you about the noise of the steam?
3. Why has the author chosen to end the passage with the unread letter?

