

AGES 9-11

NOTES & ACTIVITIES

for Teachers & Librarians

READ FOR THEMES:

- Travel
- Adventure
- The Arctic Circle
- Northern Lights
- The Stockholm Metro

SUBJECT CHECKLIST:

- Literacy
- History
- Geography
- Science
- Art, Design & Technology
- Drama

These activities have been created to prompt discussions around the themes in the *Adventures on Trains* series by M.G. Leonard and Sam Sedgman – encouraging students to develop their reading comprehension, inference and creative writing skills, all while embarking on a mysterious and thrilling adventure...

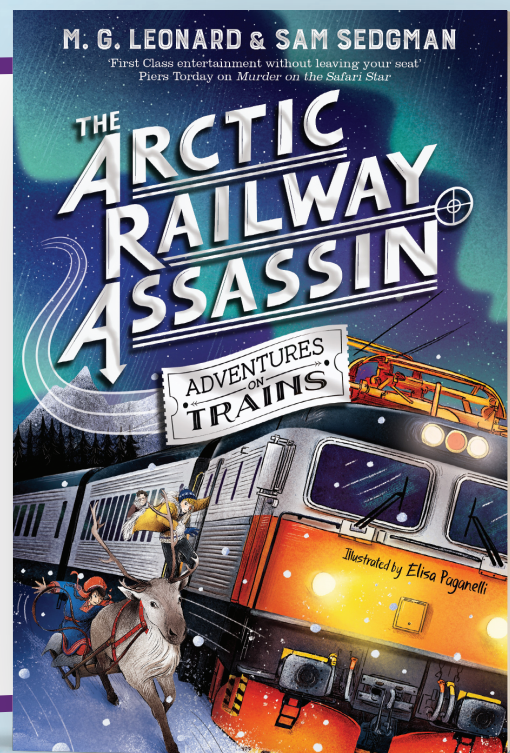
ADVENTURES ON TRAINS

JUMP ON BOARD

The bestselling, prize-winning Adventures on Trains series embarks on a thrilling sixth adventure as Harrison Beck and Uncle Nat climb aboard the night train to Narvik, travelling to the Arctic Circle to see the northern lights for Christmas. But as their train leaves Stockholm, Hal and Uncle Nat realize they're being followed by a sinister figure, and Hal's powers of observation are tested when Uncle Nat's past comes back to haunt him. Journeying into the never ending night of the Arctic winter, our railway detectives must outsmart an assassin in their most chilling adventure yet, in which nothing is as it seems.

Before reading, take a few moments to look over the cover of *The Arctic Railway Assassin*, illustrated by Elisa Paganelli. Make some predictions:

- Where is the Arctic Circle? What do you expect the climate and conditions to be like en route to the Arctic Circle?
- Can you think of any animals that live in the Arctic Circle?
- What challenges might Hal and Uncle Nat encounter on their journey?
- Who do you think the 'assassin' of the title could be? What do you guess is their mission?

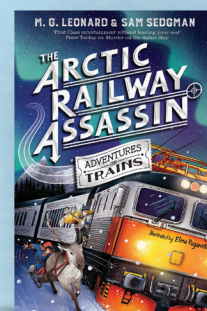


DID YOU KNOW?

You can follow Hal and Uncle Nat's journey to the Arctic! The sleeper train to Narvik, calling at Kiruna, leaves Stockholm Central Station all year round. Research the sleeper train and

its route in more detail. What is special about it? Who and what might you see at Christmas time? List the **top 3 things** that excite you most about this stretch of railway!

ADVENTURES ON TRAINS



TRAIN WINDOW CHALLENGE

LITERACY, HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY, ART & DESIGN

The snow mist, which hung low, reduced visibility, and gave an air of claustrophobia to the landscape. The world outside the window was monochrome, a flat picture made of greys, blacks and whites. So many different whites. Colour is light, Hal thought, but here, there is no direct light, as the sun doesn't rise above the horizon. Snow has the power to suck all the colour from the world. The train passed a slate-grey lake.

The mist looked like it had been exhaled by the water. Despite the temperature outside being minus eleven, the lake was only frozen around the edges. The unfrozen water was the colour and texture of a seal's skin, all oily grey-greens with dark spots and streaks of silver. Hal thought how he would use his watercolours to add layers of darkness to his drawing.

– Pages 96–97

QUESTION:

How does Hal describe the landscape as **beautiful**, but also **striking** and **unusual**? Pick examples.

ACTIVITY IDEAS:

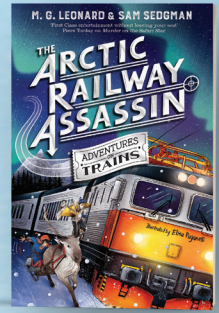
- On pages 192–193 and 218, Hal witnesses the Northern Lights. Research 5 key facts about the Aurora Borealis – another name for the Northern Lights. Sketch what you might see if you're lucky!
- On his adventure (pages 168–169), Hal befriends Katarina – an indigenous person of northern Norway, known as the Sámi. Research the history of the Sámi and how they have adapted to life in the Arctic.
- In the story, it's a race against time to find and destroy the Kill Code. Create a key and your own code using letters, numbers, or even musical notes. See if your partner can crack the code in time to save the world!

DID YOU KNOW:

The further north Hal travels, he finds that daylight hours reduce until it is dark throughout the whole day. Find out why this is. What impact does this have upon plants and animals?

VOCAB CHECK:

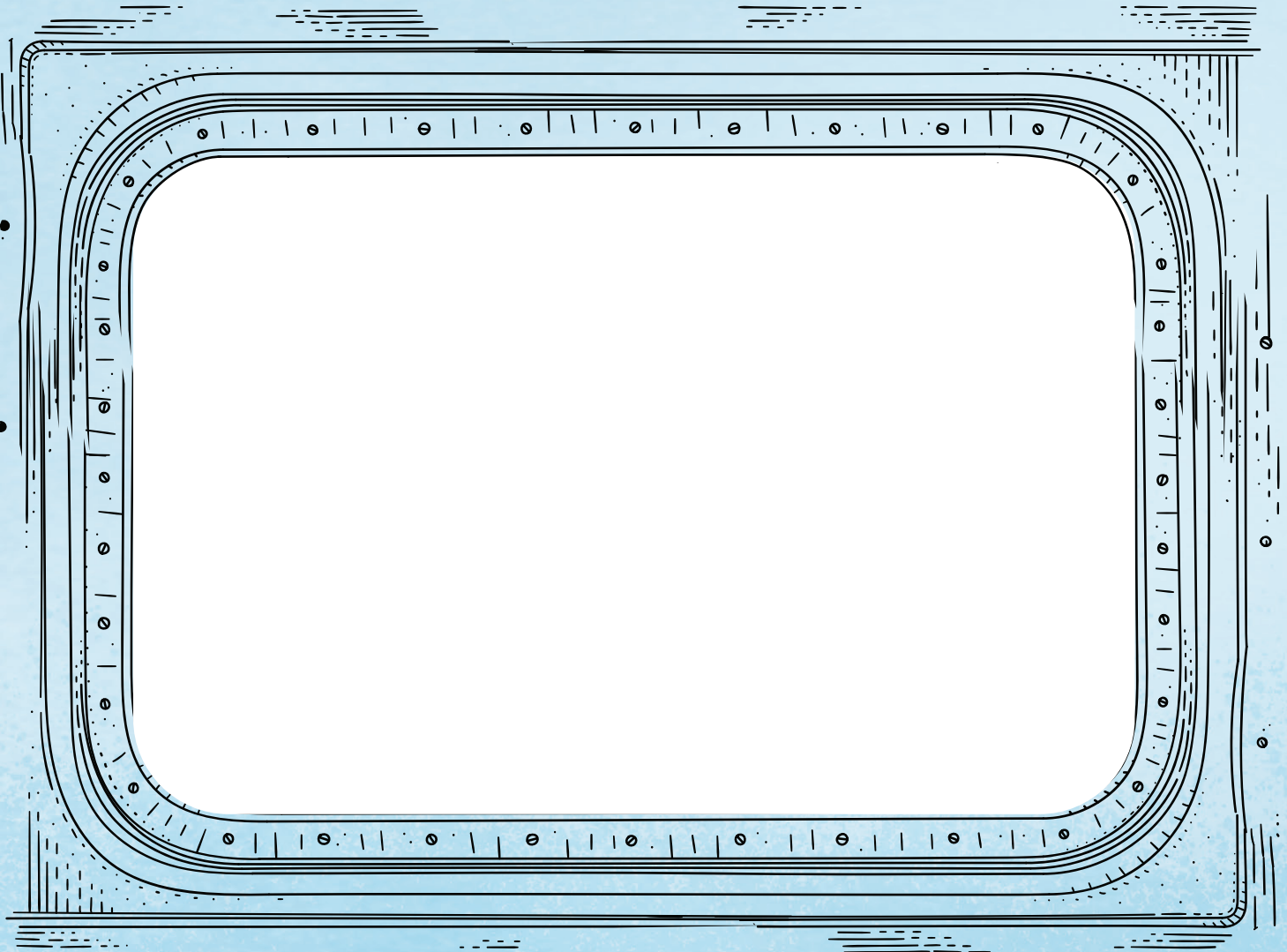
Define 'mist', 'visibility', 'claustrophobia', 'monochrome', 'horizon', and 'watercolours'.



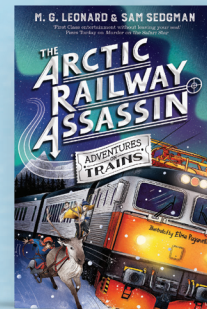
TRAIN WINDOW CHALLENGE

LITERACY, GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY, ART & DESIGN

As you read pages 96–97 when Hal travels across the Arctic landscape, underline any key words or phrases that stand out to you. Then, take a leaf from Hal's notebook and **draw** the scene described in the train window.



ADVENTURES ON TRAINS



A CAVE OF WONDERS

LITERACY, HISTORY, SCIENCE, ART & DESIGN, DRAMA

Read pages 38–39, when Hal and Uncle Nat visit Kungsträdgården – home to colourful paintings, hidden relics, and a self-sustaining ecosystem. Hal conveys his wonder at this incredible station on the Stockholm metro ...

‘Kungsträdgården is the deepest metro station in Stockholm.’ Uncle Nat said, stepping off and turning to see Hal’s reaction to the incredible cavern painted with patchwork patterns of red, green and white.

‘It’s like a prehistoric cave!’ Hal exclaimed.

‘When they dug out the stations, they sprayed the rock face with concrete, instead of cladding it. That’s what makes it feel like a cave.’

Hal rushed over to a barrier and looked down into an illuminated granite pit containing bits of columns and ornate stone cornices from buildings. ‘What’s this?’ There were plants and moss growing between them, and to the side an iron lamp post. ‘It looks like an archaeological dig.’

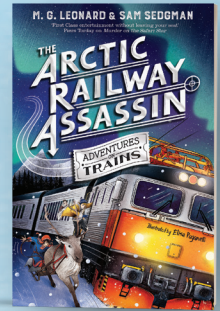
‘These are relics collected when Stockholm was redeveloped,’ Uncle Nat replied, coming to stand beside him. ‘But the most interesting thing about this station is that scientists recently discovered it has a unique ecosystem.’

‘Ecosystem?’ Hal looked around.

‘Yes. Living down here are crane flies, fungus, unusual types of moss and a rare cave dwarf spider that shouldn’t be found in this part of the world. I read that the ecosystem thrives on the chalk that drips from the ceiling, the artificial light and the human detritus that we shed as we pass through it.’ – Pages 38–39



ADVENTURES ON TRAINS



CAVE OF WONDERS

LITERACY, HISTORY, SCIENCE, ART & DESIGN, DRAMA

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Which key fact do you learn about Kungsträdgården at the beginning of the extract?
- Define 'ornate'. What does this description suggest about the station?
- How does Hal react to what he sees? What does he compare Kungsträdgården to?
- What does Uncle Nat think is 'most interesting' and why?
- How does Kungsträdgården compare to stations you have visited? What is special about it?

ACTIVITY IDEA:

Using the illustration on page 40 for inspiration, draw what Hal sees at Kungsträdgården.

DESIGN CHALLENGE:

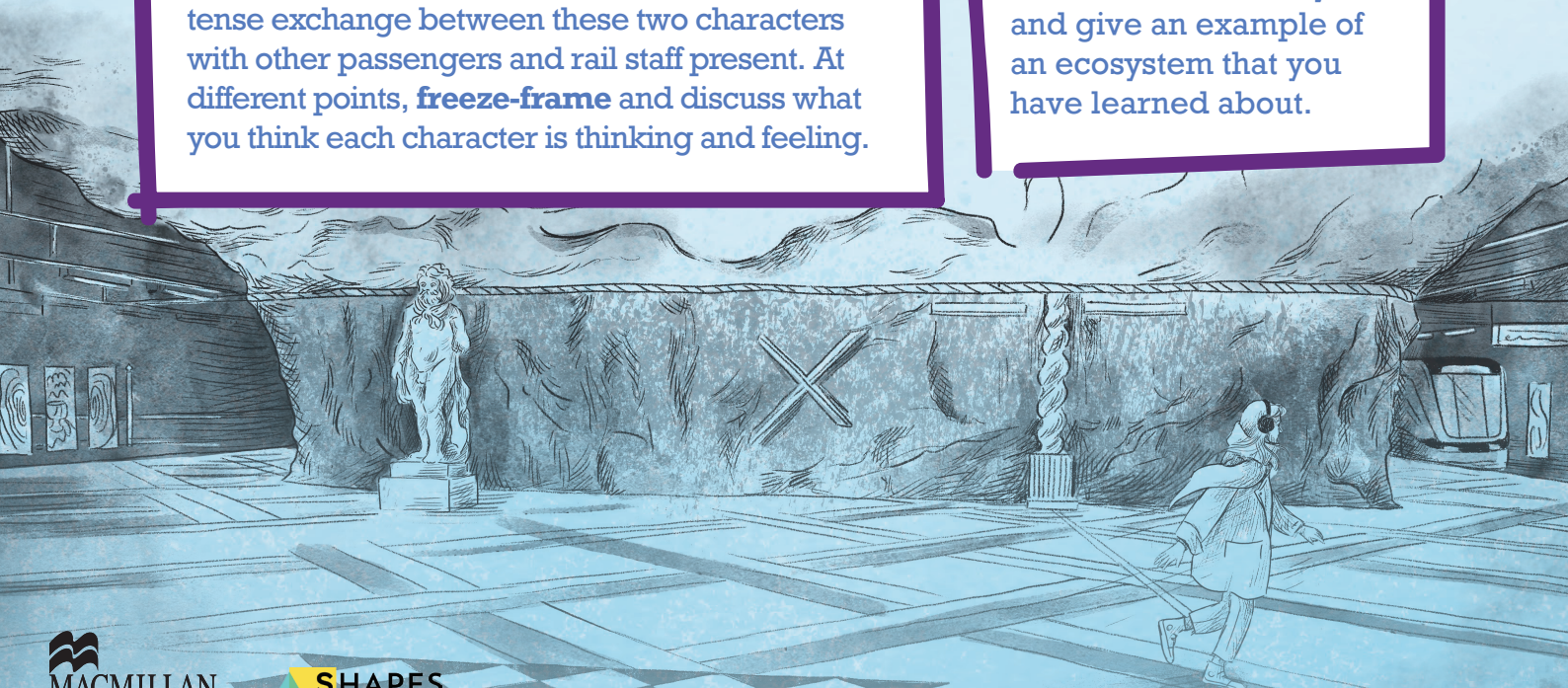
Design a detailed plan for a new train station. Present your design to the class, describing what makes it unique and why it will attract visitors.

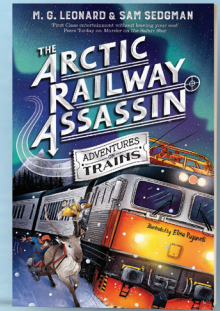
DRAMA IDEA:

On pages 103–105, Uncle Nat comes face-to-face with the Shadow – a former assassin, thought to be dead. In small groups, recreate the tense exchange between these two characters with other passengers and rail staff present. At different points, **freeze-frame** and discuss what you think each character is thinking and feeling.

ACTIVITY IDEA:

Define the term 'ecosystem' and give an example of an ecosystem that you have learned about.





HAL'S POCKETBOOK CHALLENGE!

On pages 170–171, Katarina and Hal discuss the elusive assassin – the Chameleon – and how to recognise her. Design a ‘Most Wanted’ poster in Hal’s pocketbook to help the authorities track her down! Include a sketch, descriptions of her, and other key information such as where and when she has been spotted.

‘We don’t know how this woman will disguise herself, but by my reckoning, she’s about five foot seven. She has three piercing holes in each of her ear lobes, a strong jaw with a pointy chin, and small sticky-out ears. Everything else – her hair, the colour of her eyes, her body proportions – she can change.’ He looked at Katarina. ‘It doesn’t matter how brilliant she is at disguise, though, you can’t easily hide a leg injury.’

