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Activity Guide

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Kate Shelley and The Midnight Express

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ABOUT THE STORY

More than one hundred years ago, when railroads were new in America, a terrible storm hit the Iowa town where Kate Shelley lived. Would the bridges be safe for the trains to pass over? Kate decided to find out, braving the terrors of the storm to save the Midnight Express.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Margaret K. Wetterer is a former elementary school teacher who, like Kate Shelley spent part of her childhood in Ireland. Her first book, *The Moons of Jupiter*, was published in 1971. Since then, she has written several children's books, including three fairy tales based on Irish folklore.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Karen Ritz has a degree in children's literature from the University of Minnesota. She lives in St. Paul with her husband and two children, where she combines two of her favorite pastimes, reading and drawing.

INTRODUCING THE STORY

Point out Iowa on a map of the United States and introduce it as the setting of the story. Explain that the story is true. At the time it is set, 1881, the railroad was the major form of long-distance transportation. Describe Moingona, where the story occurred as a farm community through which the railroad passed.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

- "Why did Kate let the animals out of the barn?"
- "How did she know the bridge was broken?"
- "What happened to Kate's lantern?"
- "What did the railroad give Kate for her bravery?"
- "What might have happened if Kate had not reached the telegraph office?"
(Make predictions)
- "How would you describe Kate Shelley's personality?" (Make judgments)

Vocabulary

Write these verbs on the chalkboard. Ask volunteers to define each word. Then have students choose three of the words to use in a short paragraph.

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|--------|-----------|----------|
| fierce | express | brambles |
| shooed | telegraph | handrail |
| agent | medal | platform |

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Health: Storm Safety Rules

Kate Shelley did some dangerous things when she went out into the storm to save the Express. Have children discuss the actions she took that were unsafe. Then work with them to prepare a storm safety poster to hang in the classroom.

Social Studies: Events of 1881

Make available timelines of world and national events for children. Have each child look at a timeline and write down one event that occurred in 1881 and where the event took place. Write the events on the chalkboard to give children a broader sense of the world in 1881.

Science: Thunderstorms

Have children look in books about weather to learn what happens in a thunderstorm. Ask them to create a flow chart showing each step in a storm such as the one Kate Shelley experiences.

Social Studies: History of the Railroad

Explain to children that in the 1880's, railroads were built that linked the eastern United States with the expanding West. Have children work in groups to find out about the earliest railroad to cross the nation. Children can locate the railroad's route and read about how and when it was built. Ask groups to write an explanatory paragraph on the history of the cross-continental railroad.

INTERNET ACTIVITY

Before you send children to do research using any of the keywords listed below, you may wish to try them yourself to be sure the sites are suitable.

More about Kate Shelley

Because Kate Shelley was a real person and a hero, there are many websites about her on the Internet. Children can find out more about her by using her name to search the web. Have them write down any interesting information they learn about Kate Shelley and report on it to the rest of the class.