



Train to Somewhere

Eve Bunting , Ronald Himler (Illustrator)

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Marianne, heading west with fourteen other children on an Orphan Train, is sure her mother will show up at one of the stations along the way. When her mother left Marianne at the orphanage, hadn't she promised she'd come for her after making a new life in the West? Stop after stop goes by, and there's no sign of her mother in the crowds that come to look over the children. No one shows any interest in adopting shy, plain Marianne, either. But that's all right: She has to be free for her mother to claim her. Then the train pulls into its final stop, a town called Somewhere . . .

Train to Somewhere Details

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Eduardo says

Train to Somewhere, by Eve Bunting, takes the reader on a train ride journey with fourteen orphans as they travel from town to town hoping to find a new family by being adopted. Two of the orphans, Nora and Marianne are close friends and hope not to be separated and are longing to be adopted together. But what Marianne wants more than anything is to find her real mother waiting for her at one of the train stops. As the train rolls into each stop, the orphans are quickly being adopted, until Marianne is the only one left. Will she find her mother waiting for her and her biggest wish come true, or will she discover that life sometimes brings better things our way that we never anticipated?

The author's setting of the 19th century time period is easily depicted in the illustrations as the characters are dressed in the dresses and headpieces from that era. The plot of the story takes the reader sequentially from train stop to train stop as the historical events of children being adopted to work on Midwest farms is introduced, and the reader feels the conflict Marianne has each time she doesn't see her mother and then, is still not chosen for adoption. Young readers will experience the theme of what children during this time period endured in losing their original family and being placed at each train stop to be selected by a new family. The historical perspective is evident as the audience gets to experience the viewpoint of Ms. Randolph as their chaperon, and the feelings of the children being lined up for selection, some happy, some sad, some scared and some disappointed. Readers will be able to empathize with the children and develop an understanding of what it would have been like to be orphaned during this time period.

Danette says

A heart breaking story with a sweet ending.
1/15/18 Read with Naomi and Julia.

Emily says

I have no idea HOW I keep coming across all of these books that are just turning on the ol' waterworks full force, but I am! Maybe I'm just emotional lately? Don't know.

A teacher turned this one in, and it reminded me of one that I'd read in a basal reader as a child. Sure enough, it was the one! Just as beautiful and thought-provoking as I remember. This was the story that started my long-held obsession with the Orphan Train, which then fueled my boarding school phase. Ah, memories!!

(NS) Becca says

With beautifully painted realistic pictures this book tells the sad story of 14 orphan children hoping for a better life during the 1920's. As I read the book the beginning scene where the children are led into city hall, I felt myself thinking about slavery as the adults checked out the kids. They pointed out things like that one looks "good for harvest." It really upset me to read this and imagine how the children must have felt. The children are so hopeful for a good life and so sad to leave the comfort of one another. I could feel the pain of

the main character as she dreamt of meeting up with her mother again. Even though I have never been an orphan, the author did a good job of making the pain something I could relate to. Most children reading this book have parents, or guardians, looking after them, and every child just wants someone to love and protect them (like the orphans want!). I love the ending to this story as Marianne finds solace in her decision to accept her new family.

I think this is a startlingly shocking story that surprised me and opened me to a new perspective on the history of our country. I have never been aware of the epidemic of orphans during the 1920's and I learned so much from reading this. Though the story was not a first hand story or based on family told stories, it seems to be an authentic representation of history.

Grades 3-5

L13_Meghan says

This picture book is recommended for grades 3 and up, however it can definitely be used in older grades (5 and up) to explore larger social concepts of the time. This book tells the story of a girl who is put on a train with the expectations that her mother will be coming back for her and picking her up at one of the stops off of the train. Throughout the story, we see the intense emotions these orphans feel, with the main character longing for her mother, and the others longing to have a family. The illustrations are especially interesting, as some show specific orphans with faces blurred out, while the main character becomes the focus. I found the book to be well done and would be comfortable using it in middle school to explore social and political issues of the time as they relate to concepts we explore in class. I would definitely recommend this book as part of a classroom historical-fiction picture book collection.

Julie Suzanne says

I LOVE Eve Bunting. I just want to say. Clearing out my "To Read" list starting with the easier picture books that were placed on it 8 years ago or so, I was delighted to see that there are more Eve Bunting picture books I haven't read yet. I read this beautifully illustrated piece about the "orphan trains" heading out from NYC to the midwest through burning blurry eyes and with a constricted throat. And then I just balled. She does this to me all the time.

Upper elementary to middle school teachers: I'm thinking about the new(er) Social Studies Framework inquiry-based approach here and all of the possibilities. This story is a fascinating little piece of fiction that would ignite inquiry about our history, I think. Were there really orphan trains? Are there still? Why not? There is evidence in the narrative that some of the "adoptive parents" were looking for workers rather than children--it felt like the slave auctions, except that these workers (children) were free to take with the signing of a paper. How did it turn out for these kids? Was there oversight and home visits? What may happen to the hundreds of children separated from their families who have been deported right now in our time? How has adoption policies and child protection changed over time? If a mom wants to leave her daughter to "go start a life out west," can she just leave her at an orphanage? What programs and institutions exist now to help children who don't have parents? Oh the research possibilities!

Luisa Knight says

A sweet and heartwarming story about a girl on an orphan train in the late 1800's.

Ages: 5 - 9

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Valerie says

Summary:

This story, appropriate for third grade readers and older, tells of a young orphan girl, Marianne, and her journey on an American orphan train headed West. Trains like these ran from the mid-1800's to 1920, carrying homeless children across the country to find families and home where they were needed. At each stop men and women inspect the children for health and a suitable purpose, taking boys for heavy labor and farm hands and pretty girls for housework and childcare. Sadly, at each stop, more and more children are taken, but Marianne is left behind each time. In the beginning Marianne does not seem to care, as she is searching for her own mother, who left her years before "to [go:] West to make a new life for us." She had promised to come back for Marianne, but so many years passed, Marianne now has a chance to go West, too, hoping her mother is waiting at one of the train stops for her. As each stop passes without a sign of her mother, Marianne must deal with the true feeling of being alone and unwanted, both by her real mother and the other men and women who look over her each time. Will she find her mother? Will she find a family where she is wanted? Or will she be taken back to New York to join the next group of children on the next train to Somewhere?

Nicole Gray says

The book is about 14 orphans that go on a train ride to find a family. The main little girl Marianne is hoping to not get picked because she is sure her mom will be at one of the stops to get her. After being the last one left after all the stops she seems to find more than she was expecting. The story was cute and touching.

Sheri says

This historically based, fictional tale provides a poignant look at a transformative period of time in American history. The Orphan Train riders rode the train to the New West in hopes of a new family and a better life. Bunting's effectual story emphasizes the orphans' perspectives and states of mind as they begin the journey westward and come to terms with the new lives awaiting them.

Linda Lipko says

There was a plethora of children who were orphans or homeless in America during the years of 1850's through the 1920's. There simply were not enough orphanages to accommodate all those in need. The solution was to place children on trains heading for the mid west where at specific stops, adults would look the children over, and then decide which one to take.

Some children landed in good homes and were loved. Yet, others were used as unpaid help on farms or as house keepers. Naturally, those who wanted a child to love, picked the youngest ones first, leaving older ones to be chosen as workers.

Based on this historical event, the author tells the story of Marianne, who with fourteen other children took the train to locations throughout the midwest in the hope they would first and foremost be wanted and loved. Sadly, Marianne was not a beautiful little child. She was heading toward teen age years, hoping against any probability that at one of the stops her biological mother would be there to claim and love her.

Left at the orphanage, she was promised by her mother that she would come and get her when it was financially possible to raise her. With soft illustrations, Ronald Himler's art and Eve Bunting's ability to tell a poignant story, capture the readers emotions as they route for Marianne to be loved.

Her one little friend Nora is easily taken on one of the first stops. Lying and telling the couple that Marianne is her sister, does not entice the couple to take two children.

Alas, as the train approaches the very last stop, in a small town named "Somewhere," Marianne is the only child left. As tears softly fall on her face, she notices that there is one elder couple on the platform. They long for a child and as they tell her they wanted a boy, they readily accept that she is she is the one for them.

Samantha says

Train To Somewhere is an elementary age book about the orphan trains from around the beginning of the 20th century. There are many children on the train that will travel west. Marianne is an older child who knows she is not as young and cute as she would need to be in order to be picked first. She is okay with this since she is hoping to find her mother who went west years earlier. As the train travels, she is separated from her friends and it starts to bother her that no one wants her. At the final stop there is one older couple waiting. She wasn't what they expected and they aren't what she hoped for, but they see how they can care for each other.

I can see this story being used for a read aloud, but I don't think I would be able to keep it together at the end. This story was so sad, but very good. I felt so bad for the girl when she was holding out hope for her mom, when she was the last one, and when she decided to give up hope for her mom. The story was of very high quality, just kind of sad. I think the end is very hopeful once you get over the initial sad parts.

Garett Johnson says

Train to Somewhere is an emotional historical fiction picture book written by Eve Bunting and illustrated by Ronald Himler. It is the story of a young child named Marianne, who is riding the orphan train. She is riding in hopes that her mother will pick her up at one of the stops after she starts a new life out West. As the story and plot chug along (see what I did there), your heart is tugged as you hope that she spots her mother. As unfortunate as this tale is, the feeling of hope remains throughout the story for the reader.

The painted illustrations are very realistic and beautiful. They support the chilling tale of orphan trains during the early 1900's. The pictures allow the reader to feel what it must have felt like riding these sad trains during this time in America's history. The blurred faces of the fellow train riders is interesting and the main character is the only one brought into focus. The mood and tone of the story are well conveyed through each artistic opportunity. The drawings are realistic, which allows children as well as adults to relate to them through the images.

This story would be a great addition to the historical fiction classroom library. Children who may not have heard of this period in our country's history can empathize with the story of our young protagonist, Marianne. As sad as the story can become, it leaves the reader with a feeling of hope. The theme of adoption can be a struggle to discuss for children and this story may help youngsters understand better what it might be like.

Stephanie Weatherly says

Use this book to teach historical fiction. Paired with primary and secondary sources it does a great job of telling a story about orphan trains.

NP says

This book was incredible with the mood. Although it was kind of depressing it had a great theme. When I first read it I had expected a different ending than what actually happened. I recommend this book to you!
