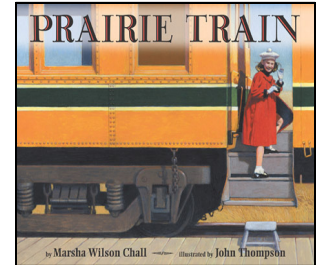


**Minnesota Storytime
Reading Guide**

Title: *Prairie Train*
Author: Marsha Wilson Chall
Illustrator: John Thompson
**Publisher and
Copyright Date:** HarperCollins, 2003



**Connection to
Minnesota:** Minnesota author, Minnesota setting

Summary: This is the story of a young girl in the 1930s who takes her first train trip all alone, from somewhere out west across the prairie to St. Paul, Minnesota, to visit her grandmother. Her experiences, the people she meets, and especially the blizzard that stops the train offer a good look at this magnificent mode of transportation that played a prominent part in Minnesota's history.

Suggested ages: 4-6, 7-10

Tips for Reading:

- Use your voice to emphasize the sounds of the words, such as “woooOOOO,” “Shooh, Shooh,” and “clickety click click click.”
- When the girl drops the five sugar cubes into her coin purse, let your face and voice show that she is getting away with something.
- Let your voice grow quiet as you lead up to the scene where the train stops abruptly and the girl flies off the seat. Then read with more energy to underline the drama of this surprise.

**Questions
before reading:**

- How many of you have seen a train? Have you ever ridden on a train? Have you ever taken a long trip on a train?
- What is a prairie?
- Have you ever traveled all by yourself? What did your parents tell you before you left? How did you feel when you were by yourself?

**To Introduce
this story say:** The little girl in this story is traveling all by herself for the very first time. She's riding on a train in the 1930s, when trains were the most common way to get from one city to another. As you listen to the story, imagine the sounds of the train. And look for the different things the illustrator does with the pictures.

**Questions
After Reading:**

- What kinds of sounds did you hear in this story?
- How does the little girl feel when the train makes the sudden stop? Why do you think she feels comfortable talking to the knitting lady?
- Have you ever been in a bad snowstorm? A blizzard?
- If you could travel by yourself, where would you go? How would you get there? Who would you visit?

RELATED ACTIVITIES

Art:

- Point out the different “perspectives” the illustrator uses. The opening illustration is drawn from above. The scenes with the farm and the train rolling through towns are “panoramic” views, meaning that we see everything that we can see within our vision. The paintings with the sugar cubes and the girl buttoning up her coat are “close-ups,” so we can see the girl’s expression, look into her eyes.
- Have the children draw a panoramic view and a closeup. In the closeup, part of the picture may be off of the page, so we get a feeling of being very near the subject.

Language:

- Have the children discuss “onomatopoeia” in which words are spelled to sound like the noise made by objects or people. Have the children name examples from the story as well as others.

Music:

- Play and/or sing the train songs mentioned in the story, such as “Oh, Susanna,” “The Ballad of Casey Jones,” and “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad.”

**Suggestions for
English Language
Learners:**

- Before reading the book, make a list with the children about what they know about trains. After reading the book, look through the text to see if together you can find any of the words or descriptions from your list.
- After reading the story, look through the book again focusing on the pictures. Ask the children to retell the story in their own words.

Related Books:

- ***Prairie Train*** by Antoine O’Flatharta, illustrated by Eric Rohmann (Crown, 1999)
- ***I Dream of Trains*** by Angela Johnson, illustrated by Loren Long (Simon & Schuster, 2003)
- ***The Train They Call the City of New Orleans***, by Steve Goodman, illustrated by Michael McCurdy (Putnam, 2003)

