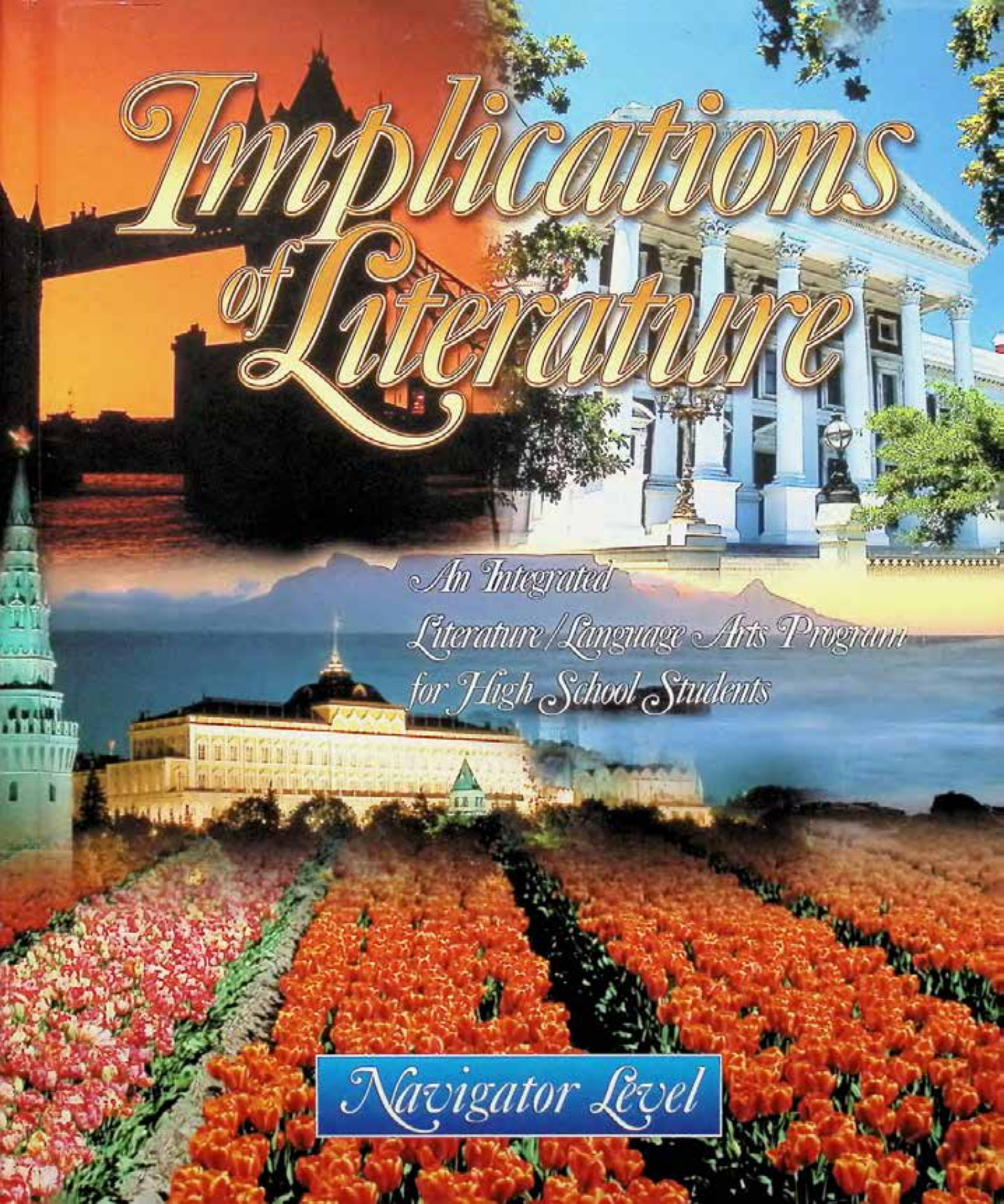




Implications of Literature

*An Integrated
Literature / Language Arts Program
for High School Students*

Navigator Level

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FOCUS ON *Reading*

EVALUATING NARRATIVE WRITING

Studying the major elements of narrative can enrich your appreciation of short stories. Below are some criteria you can use to evaluate the merits of stories you are about to read.

PLOT

1. Is the main conflict developed well? Do the episodes grow logically out of the conflict? Is the resolution acceptable or is it improbable? Are the elements of suspense and foreshadowing handled skillfully? Is your interest sustained?? How does the story "How Potts Saved the Night Express" (page 3) show skillful use of all these plot elements?

CHARACTER

2. Are the characters credible and consistent? Are their actions well motivated? Are they revealed through their actions, thoughts, and words rather than merely through direct comment? Are they individualized or are they stereotyped? How do these criteria apply to the characters in "His Excellency" (page 109)?

SETTING

3. What function does setting have? Does it have important links to the plot? Does the setting help to create atmosphere or delineate character? Apply the two criteria above to "Koyo, the Singer" (page 119) and "Quintus Getting Well" (page 51).

POINT OF VIEW

4. What point of view is used and what is its purpose? How does the point of view control your reaction to characters and events? How does the first-person point of view affect the impact of characters and events in "The Half-Brothers" (page 173)?

IRONY AND SYMBOL

5. What is the significance of ironic and symbolic elements? What kinds of irony are used and how does irony affect the tone of the story? Do symbols add meaning to the story? How does the author use irony in "The Lie" (page 71)? What symbolic meaning might the spectacles have in "The Wonderful New Machine" (page 97)?

THEME

6. Does the story offer some insight into man's experience? Does the story have a theme, or does it exist chiefly for entertainment? Is the theme expressed directly or indirectly? What is the theme of "The Beggar" (page 149)? Test your statement by seeing if it includes all the important aspects of the story.

Use the questions listed above to evaluate the short story by Saki found in **Close Reading of a Short Story** on page 740.



Before You Read...

How Potts Saved the Night Express

by Ray Stannard Baker (1870–1946)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ray Stannard Baker was born in Lansing, Michigan. He graduated from Michigan Agricultural College and later attended the University of Michigan Law School. He pursued a career as a journalist and worked for the *Chicago News-Record*, before joining the staff of *McClure's Magazine*. While at *McClure's*, he wrote a number of famous "muckraking" articles, hard-hitting pieces of journalism that exposed corruption within industrial, social, and political circles. Together with a number of colleagues he purchased *The American Magazine* in 1906, and served as one of its editors. Baker was a versatile writer, publishing a number of stories for *Youth's Companion*, a magazine for young people, as well as writing a series of rural sketches under the pen name "David Grayson." These appear in several volumes, including *Adventures in Contentment*, *Great Possessions*, and *The Countryman's Year*.

Baker was the first prominent journalist to focus on the issue of racism in the United States. He was a strong supporter of Woodrow Wilson, who chose Baker to serve as a special agent to study the war situation in Europe (1918). Baker also served as director of the press bureau of the American Peace Commission at the Peace Conference in Versailles. He eventually published fifteen books on Wilson and internationalism, including his authoritative, eight-volume biography of Woodrow Wilson. The last two volumes of this work earned Baker a Pulitzer Prize for biography in 1940.

ABOUT THE SELECTION

This story dates back to a time when train travel represented the most efficient and pleasant means of transportation. A trip across the country took several days and was considered something of a luxury. Trains were equipped with special cars for passengers, including dining cars and sleeping cars, as well as freight cars that carried cargo of all sorts.

Passengers aboard these trains were unaware of the tremendous amount of coordination, quick thinking, and courage needed to successfully complete a journey. The engineers and their assistants had a difficult job and were called upon to make crucial decisions in the blink of an eye. Ray Stannard Baker writes about an engineer named Potts, the hero of the Chicago Night Express.

The passage of time plays a significant role in this story. The actual time that elapses is no more than a few minutes and the main action involves no more than a few critical seconds. From the perspective of the protagonist, however, this short period of time constitutes an eternity.

How Potts Saved the Night Express

Ray Stannard Baker

FOCUS: PLOT; SUSPENSE

What is the reader's first impression of Potts?

The beauty and serenity of the night lull both the engineer and the reader into a false sense of security.

What is the exception to Potts' rule?

Potts, engineer, says that a railroad man always must expect the unexpected. If he's looking for a landslide, he is sure to pitch through a broken *culvert*; and if he expects an open switch or a loose rail, the side bar of his engine may snap and thresh* the cab into scrap iron and kindling* wood. It is this uncertainty, which lies always in the darkness just beyond the point where the headlight gleams on the rails, that *furrows* lines about the engineer's mouth and brings the worn look to his eyes. There is one exception to this general rule. If you meet a train of tanks, says Potts, expect trouble and don't stop expecting it until you clear it by a mile. And when Potts gives this advice he speaks from dear experience.

It was past midnight when Potts came out of Galesburg, pulling the Chicago express from Burlington. There was a full moon, making the whole country almost as bright as day, and the September air was warm and sweet with the smell of the woods. Harrison, the fireman,* was swinging the black mouth of the fire box and shoveling in the coal. Potts, with his left hand resting carelessly on the throttle* lever, leaned out of the cab window and wished that all night runs might be made in nights like this. Under him quivered the great steel being whom he had grown to love as a friend, and behind him trailed the long, dark, voiceless train. There were eleven cars in all, four baggage cars, three day coaches,* three sleepers* and a mail car, the heaviest

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

thresh — here, to beat, as in the threshing process.

kindling — flammable items, such as twigs, used to start a fire.

fireman — the person who stokes a furnace on a steam locomotive.

throttle — here, the control that determines the speed of the train.

day coaches — compartments in which the passengers spend the day, as opposed to sleeper coaches, which contain beds or seats that can be converted into beds.

sleepers — here, sleeper coaches, as above.

train on the road. Packed away inside of them were two hundred and fifty persons or more, bound eastward from Burlington, Omaha, Denver, and the Far West. They dozed or *droned*, secure in their faith that the steady but unknown hand that guided the engine would somehow bring them safe into Chicago.

At the blinking of the Altona semaphore* Potts drew down on the whistle lever, and the engine gave one long cheer for the little town which it intended to pass with no other notice. As the train slowed to schedule speed a few straggling buildings came up suddenly into the moonlight, stood for a moment in plain view and then *darted* backward again into the darkness. Altona was passed with a clear track and a long upgrade* ahead. A mile eastward blinked a semaphore, white and safe, and to its left, close down to the track, there were three other lights, one large one and two smaller ones.

"Tramp freight," said Potts to himself, as he saw the lights of the stranger slowly brighten. There was no need of further reducing speed. It was double track all the way, and the passenger must make time. On such a night as this there could be no possibility of danger — the two trains would slip by each other with the usual shrieks of friendly greeting. So Potts thought, expecting the expected.

An ordinary engineer might have rested on his arm pad and left the throttle wide open; but Potts leaned suddenly farther out, peering with wrinkled face up the track. Behind the headlight of the freight he saw the dark hulks of the box cars half shrouded in smoke from the

engine stack. Behind them a long chain of tank cars filled with gasoline, naphtha, and kerosene were dimly outlined in the moonlit distance. To the engineer they looked as they moved like a continuous black cylinder.

"It's a long train," he muttered.

Then as his quick eye traveled again from the yellow eye of the headlight back to the green lantern on the far-away caboose he saw with a sudden sinking of the heart that the train was much too long. He knew that somewhere in the middle a *coupling* ring had broken and the front end of the train with the engine was roaring down the grade with the rear end resistlessly pursuing it. Sooner or later, unless the freight crew manned the brakes, there must be a terrible collision.

In the face of sudden danger an engineer's first impulse is to stop his train. Potts sprang back to his place. He threw the throttle forward and drew back the quivering reverse lever. Then his hand closed on the brass handle that controlled the air brake. There was a deafening hissing and cracking, and the brake indicator dropped from 70 to 65 to 60 in two seconds. The wheels underneath whipped up a fountain of sparks, and the sleepers in their *berths* turned and grumbled at being disturbed. Most difficult to believe, all these events had taken place within the bounds of a long breath. Now there were three biting shrieks of the whistle — Pott's cry of warning to the freight engineer that his train was broken. Harrison, the fireman, who well knew the meaning of the signal, sprang to his window on the left. His hair blew loose in the back draft.

What is implied about the passengers?

What has Potts realized?

What literary technique is used to describe the freight train?

What is ironic in the response of the passengers?

What is implied by the statement "expecting the expected"?

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

semaphore — a signaling device for sending information over distances using mechanically operated arms or flags mounted on a post, especially on a railroad.

upgrade — uphill track; incline.



What do the three warning whistles indicate?

Why does the engineer ignore the warning whistles?

What dilemma faces Potts?

"The break is among the tanks," he shouted, as he saw the approaching freight.

The cab was dark except for the shaded light at the indicator, but Harrison saw the engineer nod grimly, and again the three warning whistles cut the night air. He must do his best to warn the crew of the freight. But the tank train continued to advance. Its engineer either failed to hear the signal or else its fearful significance did not impress him. From *hauling* tanks he had grown *callous* to the *perversities* of tanks. He knew well enough, had he stopped to think, that a collision meant an explosion — and such an explosion as would put to shame a powder mill.*

Suddenly Harrison drew in his head. "She's slowing up to take water,"* he said sharply.

For a moment the engineer was undecided. In a few seconds time he would be opposite the broken freight. The stopping of its detached front end would hasten the collision. His train had only partly slacked its terrific speed, although the air indicator trembled at 55. If he waited to stop and back* and there were a collision, what would become of his train? He already saw in a flash of imagination the fiery burst of the explosion, the heaps of crushed cars, tangled and twisted irons, with burning oil spluttering* over them;

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

powder mill — a gunpowder factory.

take water — fill the tank with water to be used to generate steam

back — shift into reverse.

spluttering — here, spattering.

and he heard the agonized cries of the passengers pinned to their death under the wrecked sleepers.

But the momentary excitement of the discovery passed. Potts stood six feet one, in his stockings, and he weighed 220 pounds. There was nerve* in every inch of him. Besides, he knew the huge, black, breathing being under him, and he had confidence in her. He shut off the air brake.

"Coal her up," he shouted to Harrison.

"But you can't run by — there isn't time —"

"Coal her up," roared the voice again, and the engineer's huge height loomed up in the doorway at the right of the cab. His hair was loose and his face was smutty.* He knew the risk of the attempt to drive his train past the danger point. He knew it might cost him his life, and he had a wife and baby at home in Burlington; but his hand never *wavered*.

Open came the throttle, the whistle screeched, and the engine leaped forward as if it fully appreciated the need of effort. Again the sleepers in the palace cars grumbled at being shaken up. They were fond of their ease, and it was not difficult to find fault.

Harrison, the fireman, bent steadily from tender* to fire pit, and each time he bent the flames glowed more fiercely, while the inspirator* pumped the water steadily into the huge boiler. All this happened within the space of a dozen sec-

onds. At such a time an engineer must act as he thinks. A second lost may cost a hundred lives.

The head of the freight lowered* now alongside. Potts caught a glimpse of its engineer leaning lazily out of his window, unconscious of the *impending* disaster. The detached end of the freight, as Potts saw it now, was well down the grade, rushing straight for the front end with terrific speed. The roar and *jar* of its wheels was faintly audible above the sound of his own train. Fifty thousand gallons of inflammable oil soon to collide with another fifty thousand gallons — and then!

Potts put on sand.* The engine started forward more swiftly, its wheels biting the track with a firmer grip at every second of their progress. The throttle was now wide open. From the stack belched a fierce fountain of sparks and the bell jangled continually.

"She'll do it; she'll do it; she'll do it," says Potts to the beating rhythm of the piston rod.*

The engineer knew the creature he was driving. He heard her pant with the exertion, he saw the flames belching from her nostrils, he heard her clamoring hoofs, he heard the "squeak, squeak" of a spot where the harness was wearing, and he urged her to bear the pain until they were safe again. The first half of the freight had now beaten past; there was the long flash of the open space

The author builds suspense as the reader tries to anticipate how the engineer will avert the crisis.

What danger is involved in passing the freight train?

The passengers' self-centeredness serves as a foil for the engineer's selfless courage.

To what is the engine of the train metaphorically compared?

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

nerve — courage.

smutty — covered with sooty marks of smoke.

tender — a railroad car carrying fuel such as wood or coal, and water, attached to the rear of the engine.

inspirator — a pump.

lowered — here, loomed threateningly.

put on sand — poured sand on the tracks to increase traction.

piston rod — a rod connected to a metal cylinder (piston) that transmits the motion of the piston to the engine.

soon to be filled with the wreck, and then the tank cars again, the tank cars of the flying end of the train, reeling forward faster than one can count. Then a streak of green light, and Potts knew that his engine was clear of the caboose.* But would he pull past far enough to save the last sleeper?

What is Potts' concern at this point?

All this time the passengers slept quietly. The conductor was lounging in the baggage car, and the brakeman was joking with the newsboy. No one knew the danger save the two quiet, stern men in the engine cab. And in the twenty seconds which had elapsed since Potts first scented danger they lived a year.

What is the effect of contrasting the other train employees and the passengers to Potts and Harrison?

Without warning there followed a terrific crash. The freight train came together, and far in the air a great splash of fire glowed bright against the black sky. Halfway down, as the exploded tank car fell, hissing with flame, it met another and another. The explosions shook the earth, blew great holes in the roadbed, tore away the sanded rails over which the passenger had just thundered, hurled the sleepers from their berths, jarred out the

What does Potts' response to the conductor indicate about his personality?

What is ironic in the conclusion of the story?

lights and swayed the fifty-ton Pullmans as if they had been cardboard playhouses.

Potts, dripping with perspiration, sank weakly to his seat. The train had come to a standstill, safe. The engine breathed *intermittently* as if exhausted with its race. The conductor came up on the run white of face, and held up his lantern.

"It was a narrow escape," he said.

And Potts, the engineer, smiled in his face. He laid his hand caressingly on the huge black side of the engine as if he feared it had been strained.

"We're behind two minutes, now," he said calmly, as if being on time was the most important thing in the world.

A mile back the tank train was going up car after car like a bunch of giant firecrackers. The oil was blazing on the houses of the town, and the panic-stricken engineer of the freight was escaping up the track with his detached engine and a few of the box cars. In all, thirteen tanks of oil were exploded, two buildings were burned, and a man was killed. But the Chicago express was saved.

They thanked Potts — that was all.



? CHECKQUIZ

1. When and where does the story take place?
2. What is Harrison's function?
3. What does Potts notice about the other train's cargo? What else does he notice?
4. What conclusion does Potts draw regarding the other train? How does this affect Potts and his passengers?
5. What explanation does the author offer for the other engineer's failure to respond to Potts' signal?

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

caboose — the last car of the train.

6. How does the other engineer further endanger Potts and his passengers?
7. How does Potts respond when he realizes that the other train is slowing down? Why is this a risky response?
8. What happens to the other train?
9. What reward does Potts receive for his bravery and quick thinking?



LITERARY CRITIQUE

1. How does the author set up the story? What does the reader expect? Does this knowledge of what to expect increase or diminish one's enjoyment of the story?
2. What information is the reader given about Potts? What picture may be drawn from this information?
3. What value does Potts hold dear? Which character serves as a foil for Potts? How?
4. How does the author use metaphor and personification to enhance the story?
5. What literary devices does the author use to arouse the reader's excitement?
6. How does the author employ irony in this selection?
7. Do you think that Potts would be pleased with this story?



WRITING WORKSHOP

1. A **foil** is a character whose actions and personality contrast sharply with that of another character, usually in order to emphasize qualities in a protagonist. In a well-organized essay of three to four paragraphs, describe the character or characters in this story who act as foils for Potts. Cite quotations from the text to prove your thesis.
2. The facts of this story would make an excellent basis for a legend or tall tale about an engineer who risked his life for the safety of others. Rewrite the story as a tall tale or ballad. If you write a ballad, use 4-line stanzas with a simple meter and rhyme scheme. If you are writing a tall tale, be sure to use exaggeration and heavy embellishment of facts.



JOURNAL WORKSHOP

Baker makes the point that Potts and the firemen "lived a year" in the twenty seconds that elapse before the trains are clear of one another. Create a journal entry in which you discuss the different perceptions we have of time passing, depending on whether the events experienced are pleasant or unpleasant. In your entry, you may focus on a real or imaginary experience.

VOCABULARY WORKSHOP

*berths callous coupling culvert darted droned furrows hauling impending
intermittently jar perversities wavered*

EXERCISE

MATCHING

Match the word in the left-hand column to the definition in the right-hand column that is closest in meaning. Write the answers in your notebook.

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. berths | a. obstinacies |
| 2. callous | b. transporting |
| 3. perversities | c. beds |
| 4. darted | d. hesitated |
| 5. droned | e. from time to time |
| 6. wavered | f. ridges |
| 7. hauling | g. dashed quickly |
| 8. furrows | h. channel crossing under a road |
| 9. culvert | i. unfeeling |
| 10. intermittently | j. make a low, humming sound |
| 11. coupling | k. sudden movement |
| 12. impending | l. a joining device |
| 13. jar | m. about to happen |