

## **Railroader–Synopsis**

### **Chapter 1–The Moonlighter**

Twelve-year old Skip Skinner lives beside the railroad tracks in Toronto. As he lies in bed at night he listens to the train as it roars by his house, and fantasizes about working on the railroad when he is older.

### **Chapter 2–Late Again**

Skip is late for school and is ridiculed by his teacher. He is kept in, but heads straight for the railway crossing where Charlie, the watchman, has a shanty. He watches as Charlie turns the big wheel that lets the crossing gates down so that cars will stop. Charlie must strain to handle the wheel, but he refuses Skip's offer of help and chases him home.

### **Chapter 3–A Loose Board**

Skip has a secret short-cut to get to the railway crossing. He has loosened a board in his backyard fence. At supper, his parents discuss buying a new washing machine and the prospect of moving within two years. Skip hopes they won't move so he can stay close to the tracks and learn more about the railroad.

### **Chapter 4–Calamity**

On the last day of school Skip and his friend Tom see a train stopped at the crossing near Skip's house. They rush over and join the crowd in time to see that a small boy has been hit by the train.

### **Chapter 5–A Time to Think**

Skip goes to his grandparent's cottage and takes pictures of the wildlife there as he paddles a canoe on the quiet lake. His grandparents, who are constantly sparring, play cribbage with him, swim, and provide him with warmth and security.

### **Chapter 6–Making Friends**

Skip and Tom build a sailboat and make stilts to fill the summer hours. Skip visits Charlie and finds that the old watchman is glad to see him. He learns that Charlie has been afraid to encourage him to hang around the shanty because his own son was killed on the tracks many years before. A friendship has begun.

### **Chapter 7–Lesson Number One**

Skip's friendship with Charlie deepens, and he begins to spend all his spare time at the shanty. He learns railroad terminology, and most important, the lantern signals used for trains.

### **Chapter 8–Beautiful Miss Thomas**

Skip starts Grade 7 and finds his new teacher is young and beautiful. His initial joy fades, however, when he learns she is as strict and demanding as his other teachers have been.

**Chapter 1—The Moonlighter**

A. Skip hoped to be a railroader, and he knew he had to be 14 years old and a Grade 8 graduate. What do you think the minimum qualifications would be to get work on the railroad today?

B. These railroad jobs are described in Chapter 1. Fill in the chart below.

Job	Description	Advantages/Disadvantages
Call Boy		
Engineer		
Fireman		
Conductor		

C. When you finish school, you will be looking for a job. Look in the classified ads in the newspapers to find ideas and information and fill in the chart below.

Job you would like	
Education required	
Equipment/Clothing needed	
Pay received	
Most interesting or best aspect of this job	

**Chapter 2—Late Again**

C. Re-read page 12 carefully and illustrate the interior of Charlie's shack as Skip had seen it through the window.

D. Write 10 verbs you find in this chapter and add interesting adverbs for each. eg. verb adverb  
*peered balefully*

verb	adverb	verb	adverb
1.		6.	
2.		7.	
3.		8.	
4.		9.	
5.		10.	

**Chapter 3—A Loose Board**

B. This story takes place in 1947. Interview a friend or relative who lived through these years and try to find answers to these questions.

1. What is an "icebox"? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Where did the ice come from? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. What things do we consider necessary in our homes that didn't exist in 1947?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. See if your interview subject can help you fill in the blanks for these "old wives' tales".

If you handle a \_\_\_\_\_ you will get warts.

If you \_\_\_\_\_ you can get rid of warts.

If you eat your \_\_\_\_\_ you will get curly hair.

Ask your interview subject if they know any more "old wives' tales" from their childhood.

Compare your answers in class.

**Chapter 6—Making Friends**

A. Re-read pages 37 to 41 carefully. Choose a partner and write a script to dramatize these pages.

Plan your props and costumes, then practise your play and present it to your class.

B. Check the Guinness Book of Records for any records made at stilt-walking.

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

C. Write an entry in Skip's diary to describe the events in this chapter.

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