

THE NIGHT TRAIN TO ANYWHERE · BOOK 16

The Robot Post Office

A story where YOU choose the way



STORYBRANCH

Books that branch. Minds that grow.

Meet Your Fellow Travelers

Every journey on the Night Train is better with friends. Here's who is riding with you tonight — and how each one sounds when you read them aloud:

Rowan — The hero of every journey — curious, brave, and wearing the orange coat. Rowan's choices belong to YOU.

The Conductor — Keeper of the timetable and the wisdom. Read him slow as syrup, in your deepest, sleepiest rumble.

Tick the Ticket Mouse — Punches the tickets, panics the loudest. Read him fast-fast-FAST, squeaky and tremendously official — and tonight, believing every single letter.

Postmaster Cog — The brass mail robot who has delivered for sixty years and never once asked a letter a question. Read him flat, polite, and clanky, with a little pause before every 'Rule two.'

Scribble — The small raccoon with the purple crayon who only ever meant to be funny. Read him quick and sheepish, mumbling into his enormous cap — until he finds out he's good at something.





The Night Train came on a night full of BELLS. Not one bell—dozens, all over a little town, all ringing at once, ding-ding-DING-ding, as if every door in it had been knocked on by mistake.

Rowan opened the window. The train stood beside a town square with a post office in it—brass dome, big red mailbox—and across the square zoomed a tall brass robot with a mail sack, delivering letters at a tremendous rate. Behind him ran a fire brigade of ducks with a ladder, going, as far as Rowan could tell, the wrong way!

“Alllll aboard,” said the Conductor. “No hurry. But that’s Tumbledown, and that’s Postmaster Cog, who has sorted letters for sixty years and never delivered a wrong one. Only tonight, I’m told, somebody has posted a whole sack of prank letters—and Cog can’t tell a joke from a fact.”

A robot who believes EVERYTHING? Rowan grabbed the orange coat. This one was going to need looking at up close.

The train is waiting. Turn the page.



The post office was warm and wooden and full of letters. Postmaster Cog rolled up on three small wheels—squeak, squeak, squeak—tall, brass, dented, with a pipe mustache and a little lantern on his head, glowing green.

“My Truth-Lamp,” he said, tapping it. Tink. “Green means the letter is true. Tonight it is green for every letter. So every letter is true. So I deliver.” He held up an envelope.

“This one says the bakery is on fire. This one says everyone must wear hats on their feet, by order of the Mayor. This one says—”

Tick had already taken his ticket off and put it on his foot.

Rowan looked through the window. The bakery was NOT on fire! It was full of candles and singing. “Cog,” said Rowan slowly, “what if the lamp isn't broken? What if it just... believes everything?”

★ A sack of letters and a lamp that says yes to all of them! Where does Rowan start?

- **Stay and check the letters before any more go out:** *If you choose to check, no more pranks leave the building — but forty are already out there, and the ducks have a ladder. → turn to page 5*
- **Chase Cog's round and catch the letters already delivered:** *If you choose the chase, you can stop the worst ones before they land — but Cog is fast, and a letter that's been read is hard to un-read. → turn to page 19*
- **Find out who's writing them:** *If you choose the writer, stop the source and the sack stops filling — though a town full of pranks is full of clues that could be pranks too. → turn to page 33*



The letter on top of the sack was the loudest. It was addressed to the Fire Brigade. It said, in big purple letters, URGENT, and then FIRE AT THE BAKERY, and then SEND EVERYONE.

“Urgent means first,” said Cog. “Rule two.” His green lamp glowed.

“It says urgent!” said Tick, hopping up and down. “And fire! Fire IS urgent! Deliver it! Now!”

It did say urgent. It said it three times, with lines under. Through the window, the bakery glowed—candles, lots of them, and something that might have been a cake or might, Rowan supposed, have been a very small fire.

The ducks were waiting by the door with the ladder. “QUACK,” said the biggest one, which meant: well?

★ **The letter says URGENT. Deliver it now — or look first?**

- **Deliver it — urgent is urgent:** *If you choose to deliver, the brigade is there in a minute — and a letter that shouts 'urgent' three times gets exactly what it asked for. → turn to page 7*
- **Look out the window and check the letter against what you can see:** *If you choose to look, it costs ten seconds — and ten seconds is a long time if the bakery really is burning. → turn to page 9*



— The Birthday Fire —

The ducks were MAGNIFICENT. Ladder up, hose out, pump going, Chief Puddle shouting “WATER!”—and thirty gallons went through the bakery window in a single glorious arc. SPLOOOOSH!

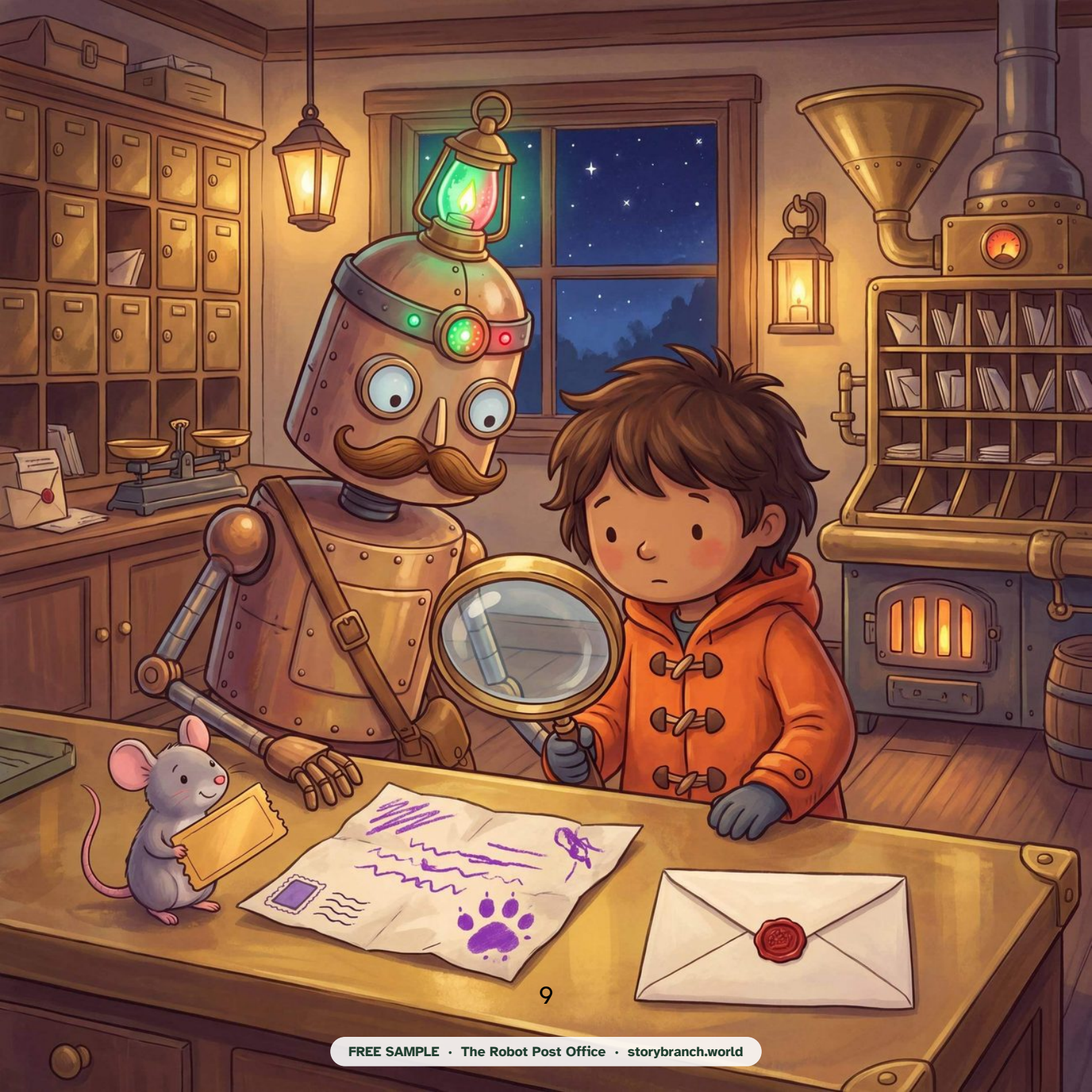
Onto a birthday party. Mrs. Pebble the baker was thirty-two today, and had thirty-two candles, and now had a cake floating gently across the floor with a paper hat on it.

“It said fire,” said Cog, green lamp glowing, as Mrs. Pebble stood in the doorway dripping. “The letter said.”

“The letter said,” Rowan agreed, watching the cake go by. “And the window was right there, and I didn't look through it.” Chief Puddle wrung out his helmet. “It said urgent,” he offered. “Three times.”

“Saying something is urgent,” said Rowan, “doesn't make it true. It just makes it LOUD.” Mrs. Pebble, fishing her cake out of the puddle, said that was the wisest thing anyone had said all night, and could someone please hand her a towel.

🔄 **Go back to page 6 and choose again.**



Rowan looked through the window properly. Candles: thirty-two. Cake: one. Otters in paper hats: many. Fire: none!

Then Rowan looked at the letter properly, with Cog's magnifying glass. Purple crayon. FIRE spelled with two I's. A sticky purple paw print in the corner. And at the bottom, where a real letter has a name, nothing at all.

“Cog,” said Rowan. “Who wrote this?” “It does not say.” “Does it match what's out the window?” Cog looked. “It does not.” “Would the Fire Brigade write to THEMSELVES to tell themselves about a fire?” A long pause. “They would not.” The green lamp on Cog's head flickered. Just once. Just a little. Tick saw it and gasped.

Turn the page.



“Three questions,” Rowan said, and climbed on a stool to be nearer Cog's lamp. “Before you deliver anything. Who wrote it? Does it match what you can see? Would that person REALLY say that?”

Cog tried it on the next letter. EVERYONE MUST WEAR HATS ON THEIR FEET, BY ORDER OF THE MAYOR. “Who wrote it? It says the Mayor. But the Mayor signs with a carrot seal, and this is a purple paw. Does it match? I have never seen a hat on a foot. Would the Mayor say it?”

The lamp went RED. Bright red, for the first time in sixty years! Cog stared up at his own head in astonishment.

“It isn't broken,” said Rowan. “It never was. It just needed you to ask.” Tick, quietly, took his ticket off his foot and put it back on his head where it belonged.

Turn the page.



END OF YOUR FREE SAMPLE

Who is writing the prank letters?

You've reached the end of the free pages, and the biggest choice of the night is waiting on the very next page.

Chose "Chase Cog's round and catch the letters already delivered" or "Find out who's writing them" on page 4? Those paths are in the full book too: 9 choices, 3 friendly dead ends and 7 different endings, so it's a new adventure every time you read it.

Start the series — \$49/month

A new adventure every month · parent guide included · shipping included (US & Canada)

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Next in this file: The Grown-Up's Ticket, your parent guide to Book 16.

Books that branch. Minds that grow.

A mixed-up mail robot is delivering prank letters as if they were real — and the whole town is in a tangle!

Tonight, every choice belongs to YOU. Deliver the letter that says URGENT three times? Trust the one that says 'this letter is true' at the bottom? Believe the note that names the prankster? The fire brigade has a ladder, the Mayor is in his nightcap, and Postmaster Cog's Truth-Lamp says yes to everything.

Storybranch books are parent-guided choose-your-own-adventure-style stories for kids 3–8, made to be read together. You read, they choose — and every fork in the story builds the core skills of smart thinkers for the next AI revolution.

- ★ Read together · ages 3–8
- ★ 9 choices · 7 endings · a new adventure every night
- ★ Book 16 of 30 in The Night Train to Anywhere series

THE SKILLS IN THIS BOOK

Every Storybranch adventure practices two of the seven skills of smart thinkers. This book builds Spot What's Not True — loud isn't the same as right — and Ask Sharp Questions, of the one who'd actually know.

Storybranch

Books that branch. Minds that grow.

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★ ADMIT ONE GROWN-UP ★

The Grown-Up's Ticket

Your guide to reading *The Robot Post Office* together

Tonight the Night Train stops at Tumbledown, where Postmaster Cog — a brass mail robot who has delivered for sixty years and never once asked a letter a question — is rolling round the square with a sack of prank letters, and his Truth-Lamp glows green for every one. The fire brigade is heading for a birthday party. The Mayor has apparently ordered hats on feet. Your child — as Rowan — is about to learn that a letter isn't true because it says URGENT, or because it's signed, or because it says 'this letter is true' at the bottom; it's true when it matches what you can check.

And here's the fun part: **your job isn't to teach.** You're the Conductor — you set the pace, do the voices, and ask one good question at the forks. Your child drives. This guide gives you everything you need: the two skills hiding inside the story, two signature "parent moves," a few tricks for making every choice feel like an event, a tracker for the nights ahead, and an observation log for noticing how the thinking grows.

★ PRIMARY SKILL

Spot what's not true

Noticing when a claim is dressed up as a fact — loud, signed, sealed, convenient — and checking it against something real before acting on it. In a world of confident sources, the skill that keeps your child the one doing the believing.

✦ SECONDARY SKILL

Ask sharp questions

Rowan's three questions — *who wrote it? does it match what we can see? would they really say that?* — small enough for a robot to answer, and aimed at the one creature who couldn't be fooled.

9

CHOICES TO MAKE

7

DIFFERENT ENDINGS

3

FRIENDLY DEAD ENDS

∞

WAYS TO READ IT AGAIN



The one golden rule: never pick for them. Ask, then wait — even when the silence stretches, even when they're clearly about to pick the "wrong" one. The pause is where the thinking happens, and the wrong turns are where the learning happens. Everything in this book is safe to get wrong.



PRIMARY

Spot what's not true

The habit: saying it doesn't make it so — check it against the window.

Every prank in this town is the same trick in a different coat. A letter that shouts URGENT three times. A letter with 'THIS LETTER IS TRUE' at the bottom. A neat, signed letter about a bridge. A letter that helpfully names a villain. Cog's lamp says yes to all of them, and so — for a page — does your child, because that's what confident sources do to all of us. Every winning path checks the claim against something real: the bakery window (candles, not fire), the Mayor's own carrot seal, the bridge itself, the goose's green ink. Every dead end believes a source because it was loud, or sealed, or pointed at someone. At ages 3–8 this looks wonderfully simple: *"it says fire — can we see any?"*

PARENT MOVE №1

The Unreliable Source Audit

When a character (or a letter!) states something as fact, **put a finger on it and ask three quick questions out loud:**

"Who's saying this? How would THEY know? What would we see if it were true — and can we see it?" Then look at the picture together and check. Make it a game: the more confident the claim sounds, the more fun it is to audit. Kids who audit letters at bedtime audit everything else too. (Use it at least once a night.)

✓ TRY SAYING	✗ INSTEAD OF
"It says fire. Can we see any fire out the window?"	"It says URGENT — quick, deliver it!" (three underlines and a hose through a birthday party)
"Who wrote this — and how would they know?"	"It's signed, so it must be true." (anyone can write 'this is true' at the bottom)
"Who could we ask that couldn't be fooled about this?"	"A letter says it was Granny Marrow — let's go!" (a letter about the letters, in a town where letters are the problem)

SECONDARY

Ask sharp questions

The habit: ask small, and ask the one who's standing in the thing.

Cog's lamp isn't broken. It's never been asked anything. Rowan's repair is three questions a robot can actually answer — who, does-it-match, would-they-really — and the lamp goes red for the first time in sixty years. Notice where the sharpest questions get sent: not to the cleverest creature, but to the one who can't be wrong about it — the baker, the Mayor, the keeper standing on the bridge. Small enough to answer, aimed at the one who'd know: that beats any amount of cleverness.

PARENT MOVE №2

The "Vague vs. Specific" Upgrade

When the story offers to ask someone something, **pause before the asking.** Try: **"If we just ask 'is this letter true?', what could Cog even say? What's one SMALL thing we could ask that he could actually check?"** Then upgrade the ask together: a who, a does-it-match, a would-they-really. Read what the sharper version earns — a red lamp — and marvel at it, loudly.

Showtime: making every choice a moment

THE GROWN-UP'S TICKET

A choice page is a tiny stage play, and you're the stage manager. You don't need all six of these — pick two that fit your kid and make them *yours*. Rituals are the point: by Book 3, your child will be doing them to *you*.

1 The Conductor's Whistle

When a choice is coming, give a long, low, sleepy **"whooooo..."** — the signal that a Big Decision is pulling into the station. Slow everything down. Decisions get drama; page turns don't.

2 The Finger Hover

One finger hovers over each option while you think out loud together — but **no touching until the choice is made**. The hover makes the pause physical (and very hard to rush).

3 The Ticket Punch

Decision made? Your child "punches the ticket": two firm taps on the chosen option and a squeaky **"Tickets, please!"** No punch, no page turn — Tick the Ticket Mouse insists.

4 Freeze the Picture

On each full-page painting, stop before reading on: **"What do you see? What's about to happen?"** Predict, then read, then check. Wrong guesses are cheered — that's a scientist at work.

5 Ask the Cast

Stuck between options? **"What would the Conductor do? What would Tick do?"** (Tonight Tick believes every letter — he has his ticket on his foot by page four. His plan is always *"it says so! deliver it!"*, which is exactly why he's useful. Even a 3-year-old can hear a claim that's only true because it says it is — and feel very clever spotting it before Tick does.)

6 Swap the Chooser

On re-reads, flip the roles: you choose, your child holds **veto power** — but a veto must come with a reason. Or let a stuffed animal choose, and audit its judgment together. (Be a deliciously bad chooser. Getting overruled is the goal.)

THE VOICES — YOUR FIVE-MEMBER CAST

Rowan

Warm and wondering — but mostly, Rowan speaks with your child's voice. When Rowan decides, hand the line over: *"what do we do?"*

The Conductor

Slow as syrup, deep and sleepy, with looong pauses. The easiest voice in children's literature — and the one they'll beg for. *"No hurry... no hurry at all..."*

Tick the Ticket Mouse

Fast-fast-FAST, squeaky, tremendously official. Sit up straight when he speaks. He is very busy and everything is an emergency.

Postmaster Cog

The brass mail robot — tall, dented, with a pipe mustache and a little lantern on his head that glows green for 'true.' Read him flat, polite and clanky, with a small pause before every *"Rule two,"* and let something like wonder creep in the first time his lamp goes red.

Scribble

The small raccoon with the purple crayon and the enormous cap, who only ever meant to be funny. Read him quick and sheepish, mumbling into the cap — and let him sit up straight when he discovers he's the best prank-spotter in town.

Performance note: you need exactly *one* voice you love — the Conductor is the beginner's choice — and the Train needs no voice at all: whistles, hums and rumbles are your child's job. Consistency beats talent. Nobody is grading you, and the reviews in that bedroom are already five stars.

Punch your ticket: the re-read tracker

THE GROWN-UP'S TICKET

One night is one path — but this station holds **seven endings and three secret dead ends**, and no single read finds them all. Keep this page by the bed. After each ride, check off where you landed and give the ending a name of your own invention. Completing the whole card usually takes a week or two of bedtimes ... which is rather the idea.

★ THE SEVEN ENDINGS

☐ Ending 1 _____	☐ Ending 2 _____
☐ Ending 3 _____	☐ Ending 4 _____
☐ Ending 5 _____	☐ Ending 6 _____
☐ Ending 7 _____	

Write the name YOU gave each ending on the line.

• THE THREE DEAD ENDS — A BADGE OF HONOR, NOT A RECORD OF FAILURE

☐ Wrong turn 1 _____	☐ Wrong turn 2 _____
☐ Wrong turn 3 _____	

What did each one teach you? Jot the lesson.

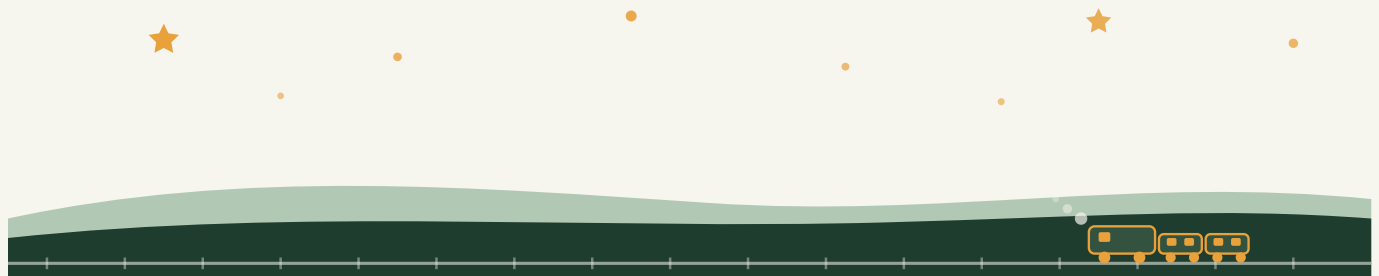
AFTER THE LAST PAGE — THREE LIGHTS-OUT QUESTIONS

1. "Which choice was the hardest tonight — and what made it hard?"
2. "Which letter tonight sounded true but wasn't — and how did we find out?"
3. "Who did we ask that couldn't be fooled? What made them the right one to ask?"

Sixty seconds, lights low, no quiz energy. If you only have time for one, ask the second — it's the whole book in a single question.

Same station, different night.

Every reader who boards makes different choices — which means the book your child read tonight isn't quite the book they'll read tomorrow. When you've collected every ending, leave the card in the book: it's the story of how your child learned to think, one fork at a time. Next month, a new station.



The observation log: what you noticed tonight

THE GROWN-UP'S
TICKET

Page 4 tracks **where the story went**. This page tracks **how your child thought** along the way — the part that carries over to homework, playgrounds and every station still to come. After each read, take a quiet minute to score the six behaviors below. It isn't a test, and "not yet" is honest, useful information: over a few weeks, the *pattern* is what matters.

0 Not yet tonight 1 With a nudge from you 2 On their own *Write the date in the top box of each read.*

WHAT TO WATCH FOR	READ 1	READ 2	READ 3	READ 4	READ 5	READ 6
DATE						
Paused before choosing Waited, thought, or offered an idea before picking an option.						
Went back after a dead end Chose to return to the fork and try a different path.						
Named what went wrong Could say, in their own words, why a wrong turn was wrong.						
Accepted an outcome they didn't want Stayed with the story after a disappointing turn, without a meltdown or a demand to undo it.						
Kept track across pages Remembered something from earlier in the story and used it at a choice.						
Stayed with the story Attention held from the first page to the ending, without needing a break.						
Found choosing stressful tonight Tick if the forks felt like pressure rather than fun. If this gets ticked often, read one path straight through and choose only at the final fork — fewer decisions, same story.						

NOTES — ONE LINE PER NIGHT

READ 1

READ 2

READ 3

READ 4

READ 5

READ 6

Scores aren't grades, and no single night means much. What you're collecting is a picture of a growing mind at work — the same six behaviors, book after book, station after station. Keep the page with the book and compare it to next month's.

