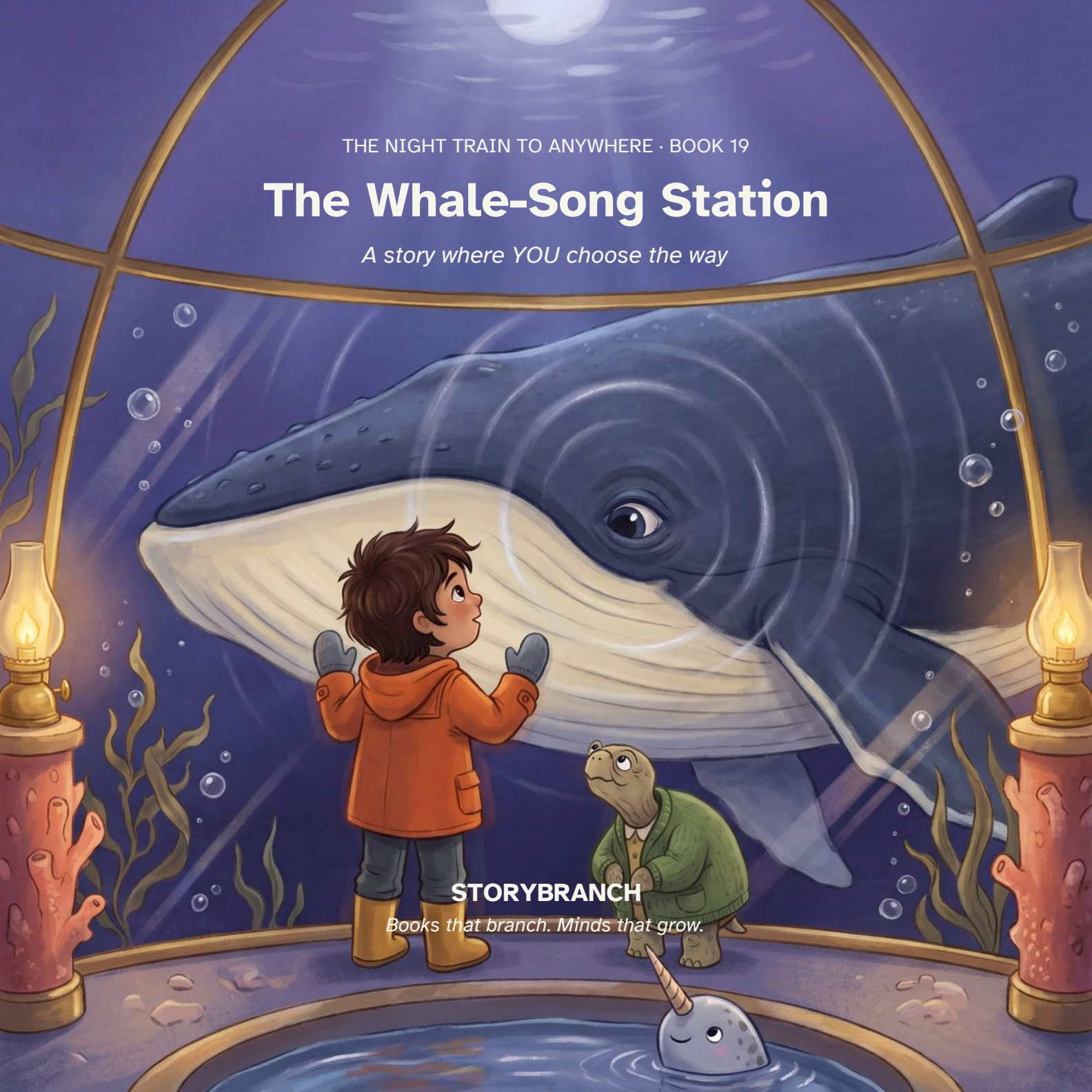


THE NIGHT TRAIN TO ANYWHERE · BOOK 19

The Whale-Song Station

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, sleepest rumble.

Tick the Ticket Mouse — Punches the tickets, panics the loudest. Read him fast-fast-FAST, squeaky and tremendously official — and tonight, absolutely not going in the water.

Grandmother Barnacle — Stationmaster of the Whale-Song Station — an old sea turtle in a green cardigan who has listened to whales for sixty years and knows exactly which questions they can answer. Read her slow, dry and kind, with a little pause before she says something that turns out to matter.

Nib — A small young narwhal with a cork on her tusk, who is sure the song is a happy one and has a guess for everything. Read her fast, bubbly and certain — “Obviously!” — and let her go quiet, and thoughtful, when she finally asks instead of guessing.





The Night Train came on a night that HUMMED. Rowan felt it before hearing it—a long, low, wobbling note that came up through the floor and into the bed and into Rowan's teeth. Mmmmmmmmmmm. It wasn't the train. The train had never hummed like that.

Rowan opened the window. Beyond the train, the sea began—calm and silver under the moon—and the railway line ran straight INTO it, down a curving tunnel of glass, past kelp and bubbles, to a glowing dome far below on the seabed!

“Alllll aboard,” said the Conductor. “No hurry. That's the Whale-Song Station, and the hum is a whale. Old Fathom. She's been singing the same song since sundown—same notes, same order, over and over. Whales don't do that for fun. She's saying something. Nobody down there can work out what.”

A train that goes UNDER THE SEA? Rowan pressed one hand flat on the humming floor, then grabbed the orange coat and ran.

The train is waiting. Turn the page.



The station was a hall of coral under a glass dome, and the sea pressed all round it, dark and silver. Beyond the glass hung the whale—enormous, gentle, and singing. The glass shivered with it.

“Grandmother Barnacle,” said an old sea turtle in a green cardigan, spectacles on a chain. “Stationmaster. That’s Old Fathom out there. She’s my oldest friend and I can’t understand a word, because whales don’t have words. Only notes.”

A small narwhal with a cork on her tusk popped up in the platform pool. SPLOSH! “It’s a HAPPY song,” she said. “I’m Nib. She’s just singing. Whales sing! Let’s sing back!”

Grandmother Barnacle looked at Rowan over her spectacles. “Three long notes. Two short. One long. Since sundown. You tell me if that’s happy.” Tick, who did not like the look of all that water, tucked himself deeper into the hood.

★ **A whale with something to say and no words to say it! What does Rowan do?**

- **Stay at the glass and ask Old Fathom questions she can answer:** *If you choose to ask, a whale can’t talk — but she can answer, if the question is the right shape. → turn to page 5*
- **Borrow a diving helmet and follow the song out into the sea:** *If you choose to swim, a song comes from somewhere — and wrong directions teach you the right one. → turn to page 19*
- **Ask around the station — someone must know what it means:** *If you choose the station, it’s full of creatures who’ve heard whales all their lives — and one knows more than the rest. → turn to page 33*



Rowan pressed both mittens to the glass. On the other side, Old Fathom's eye was as big as a dinner plate, and it was looking straight back.

Three long notes. Two short. One long. The glass hummed.

“See?” said Nib, doing a loop. “Happy! DANCE!” Tick, who liked a dance, was already tapping a foot. It did sound rather like music. And whales did sing. Everybody knew that!

But Rowan looked at the eye, and the eye did not look like dancing.

★ **Is it just a song — or is it a message?**

- **It's a song — join in and dance:** *If you choose to dance, it's the most fun thing on the platform — and the quickest way to stop listening. → turn to page 7*
- **Ask her something:** *If you choose to ask, you'll have to find a question a whale can answer — which is harder, and more interesting, than it sounds. → turn to page 9*



— Just Singing —

They danced! Nib looped, Tick tapped, Rowan swung both arms, and the barnacle choir on the pillar joined in with a wobbly harmony. Ooooo-eeeeee-ooooo. It was a very good dance.

And the song got slower. Three long notes, longer. Two short, sadder. One long, so low the floor shook. Old Fathom's eye had closed.

Rowan stopped. “She's not singing WITH us.” “She's tired,” said Nib. “Of what?” said Rowan, and nobody knew, because nobody had asked.

Grandmother Barnacle hadn't danced. “I've heard Fathom sing for fun,” she said. “It goes UP at the end. This goes down. When you decide what a thing means before you check, dear, you stop being able to hear it.”

Rowan looked at the closed eye, and went back to the glass to try again.

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



“Old Fathom,” said Rowan, into the glass. “What's wrong?”

The whale sang. Three long, two short, one long. Exactly the same.

“That's what she says to everything,” said Grandmother Barnacle. “I've asked her what's wrong forty times tonight. A question that big, she can't fit in a song. But watch—” She held up one flipper. “Fathom. Are you cold?” A bubble rose past the glass. Blup. One. “Are you hungry?” Blup-blup. Two bubbles. “One for yes,” said the turtle. “Two for no. She can't tell you a story. But she can tell you yes or no—if you ask her something small enough to be one!”

Rowan's mind lit up like a lantern.

Turn the page.



Small enough to be one. Rowan thought, and then asked.

“Are you hurt?” Two bubbles. No. “Is somebody ELSE hurt?” One bubble. Yes! Nib stopped looping. “Somebody big?” Two. “Somebody small?” One. “Are they near?” One. “Near the ship?” One—and the song, for the first time all night, CHANGED: three long notes, faster, almost eager.

“You're getting closer,” said Grandmother Barnacle quietly. “Listen to her—she speeds up when you're warm.”

Rowan had four yeses and the sea was very big. Every question so far had been Rowan's. Nib was watching with her mouth open. “Oh,” she said. “OH. That's what asking is.”

Turn the page.



END OF YOUR FREE SAMPLE

What is the whale trying to say?

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

Chose "Borrow a diving helmet and follow the song out into the sea" or "Ask around the station — someone must know what it means" 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)
Or get just Book 19 for \$59. Pause or cancel anytime.

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Next in this file: The Grown-Up's Ticket, your parent guide to Book 19.

Books that branch. Minds that grow.

At the undersea station, a whale sings the same strange song over and over — and it's a message, if Rowan asks the right things! ★

Tonight, every choice belongs to YOU. Decide it's a happy song and dance along? Swim straight for the cave? Shout your question to forty creatures at once? A whale can only answer yes or no — and somebody very small is waiting on the right question.

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 19 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 Ask Sharp Questions — small enough to fit the answer — and Learn From Every Outcome: every wrong turn is a clue.

Storybranch

Books that branch. Minds that grow.



★ ADMIT ONE GROWN-UP ★

The Grown-Up's Ticket

Your guide to reading *The Whale-Song Station* together

Tonight the Night Train runs down a glass tunnel to a domed station on the seabed, where Old Fathom — an enormous, gentle humpback — has been singing the same song since sundown. Three long notes, two short, one long. Whales don't have words, only notes, and Grandmother Barnacle, the turtle stationmaster, has asked her 'what's wrong?' forty times and got the same song back. Nib, a small narwhal with a cork on her tusk, is sure it's a happy song. Your child — as Rowan — is about to learn that a whale can only answer yes or no, that a question has to be the right shape to fit, and that somebody very small is waiting on the right one.

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

Ask sharp questions

Shaping an ask to fit what the other creature can actually answer — "*are you hurt?*", "*is it somebody small?*", "*is it near the ship?*" — instead of the big mushy one that gets the same song forty times. The quality of every answer your child will ever get depends on the shape of the ask.

✦ SECONDARY SKILL

Learn from every outcome

Treating every result — especially the misses — as information. The cave was empty, but the song got quieter there, and that's not nothing; five wrong turns, put together, make a map.

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

Ask sharp questions

The habit: make it small enough to answer — and aim it at the one who'd know.

A whale has something to say and no words to say it. Watch what changes the shape of the ask does: 'What's wrong?' gets the whole song again; 'Are you hurt?' gets two bubbles for no, and 'Is somebody ELSE hurt?' gets one for yes, and eleven of those find a seahorse the size of a thumb in one link of an anchor chain. Every winning path makes the question smaller until it fits — or aims it at the one creature who'd actually know, instead of forty who'll all answer at once. Every dead end decides what the song means before asking, or asks the same guess twice. Notice Nib's ending: the sharpest question all night is hers, because she knew one thing nobody else did and finally asked it. At ages 3–8 this looks wonderfully simple: *"can she answer that with a yes or a no? What's a smaller one?"*

PARENT MOVE №1

The "Vague vs. Specific" Upgrade

When the story offers to ask a creature something, **pause before the asking**. Try: *"Wait — if we ask Fathom 'what's wrong?', she'll just sing again. What's one SMALL thing she could answer with a bubble?"* Then upgrade the ask together: an are-you, an is-it, a which-one. Read what the sharper version earns — one bubble or two — and count the yeses on your fingers as they stack into a place. (Use it at least once a night.)

✓ TRY SAYING

"Can she answer that with one bubble? What's a smaller question?"

"Who in this station would actually know? Let's ask just them."

"What did you notice tonight that nobody's asked about yet?"

✗ INSTEAD OF

"Ask her what's wrong!" (the same song, for the forty-first time)

"Everybody — what does it MEAN?" (forty answers, which is the same as none)

"It's a lullaby, obviously." (Nib's guess at sundown, and again at midnight)

SECONDARY

Learn from every outcome

The habit: a miss is a clue about the next try.

Old Fathom plays warmer-and-colder with her whole song — louder and faster when Rowan is close, quieter when not — and Rowan's best moments come from noticing that. The cave is empty, but the song got quieter there, so the cave is crossed off and the sea is smaller. Race to the ship and it's too big to search; keep testing every few strokes and the song steers you past the deck to one rusted link. Even the dead ends teach: the same guess twice is the one outcome that teaches nothing, and Rowan says so.

PARENT MOVE №2

The Dead-End Post-Mortem

When a guess flops or a page snaps shut, **resist flipping back right away**. First: *"Ooh — that one missed! Before we go back ... what did it tell us? Did the song get louder or quieter?"* Ten seconds of detective work, then flip back with full ceremony. Count out loud — *"wrong turn number three, collected!"* — so misses become clues.

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 Nib do?**" (Nib's answer at every fork is a guess, delivered as a fact — "*It's a HAPPY song!*" "*The cave, obviously!*" "*It's a lullaby!*" — and she's quick and sure, which is exactly why she's useful. Even a 3-year-old can hear the difference between a guess and a question. And watch her learn: the night she asks "*is it Pearl?*" instead of guessing is the whole book in one line.)

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.

Grandmother Barnacle

The turtle stationmaster in the seaweed-green cardigan, who has listened to whales for sixty years and has been waiting all night for someone to ask *her* instead of everyone. Read her slow, dry and kind, with a little pause before the thing that turns out to matter — and never once an 'I told you so.'

Nib

The small narwhal with the cork on her tusk, who has a guess for everything. Read her fast, bubbly and certain — "*Obviously!*" — and let her go quiet, and small, when she finally asks the question she'd been sitting on all night.

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.

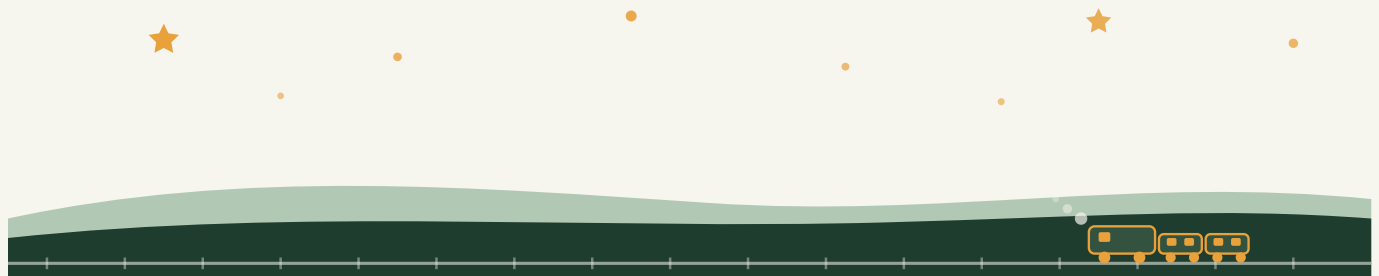
AFTER THE LAST PAGE — THREE LIGHTS-OUT QUESTIONS

1. "Which choice was the hardest tonight — and what made it hard?"
2. "Which question tonight was too big for the whale to answer — and what smaller one worked?"
3. "When Rowan got it wrong, what did the song do? What did that wrong turn teach us about the next one?"

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.

