

A whimsical night garden scene. In the center, a young boy with dark hair, wearing an orange hooded jacket and yellow boots, is kneeling and holding a small, white, egg-shaped creature with closed eyes. To his right, a large green frog wearing a purple and yellow striped beanie with a pom-pom is holding a silver watering can. To the left, a small brown squirrel sits on a stone ledge, holding a small shovel. The garden is filled with stone-edged flower beds containing small green plants and several white egg-shaped creatures. In the background, there are trees with orange fruit, a stone wall, and a small stone building with a domed roof and a lit lantern. The sky is dark blue with a full moon and many stars. Numerous small, glowing green fireflies are scattered throughout the scene.

THE NIGHT TRAIN TO ANYWHERE · BOOK 21

The Garden of Sleeping Seeds

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, very fond of the little seeds with faces.

Great-Aunt Thimble — Keeper of the Garden of Sleeping Seeds — a plump old toad in a knitted tea-cosy hat, with a tin watering can and eighty years of honest mistakes. Read her slow, croaky and warm, like someone who has never once been in a hurry, with a little pause before 'dear.'

Fizz — The young chipmunk with the tiny trowel who has never grown anything — because none of it counted. Read him quick, bouncy and a bit too loud — “that was PRACTICE!” — and let him go small and wobbly the first time he tells a seed the truth.





The Night Train came on a night that smelled of turned earth and rain. Rowan noticed the smell before the train—wet soil, cut grass, something green and growing—the way a garden smells the morning after a storm. Mmmmm.

Rowan opened the window. Beyond the train stood a high old brick wall with a round wooden door in it, and over the wall rose fruit trees, and a little stone hut with a domed roof, and hundreds of soft green sparks drifting up into the dark like slow, sleepy fireworks!

“Alllll aboard,” said the Conductor. “No hurry. But that’s the Garden of Sleeping Seeds, and its seeds don’t sprout for just anyone. They sprout for gardeners who have failed at least once—and can say what they learned. The Moonflower seed has to bloom tonight, and I’m told nobody in there has managed it yet.”

Seeds that only wake up when you tell them the truth? Rowan had never heard of such a thing. Coat on, boots on, and out into the smell of rain.

The train is waiting. Turn the page.



Inside the wall, the garden was all raised beds and winding paths, and on the path stood a plump old toad in a knitted tea-cosy hat, holding a tin watering can. “Great-Aunt Thimble,” she said. “I keep the garden. Or it keeps me. Hard to say, after eighty years.”

A small chipmunk with a tiny trowel bounced up onto a stone. BOING! “Fizz!” he said. “Head gardener! Well—assistant. Well—I’ve never actually grown anything. But that’s because none of them COUNTED.”

Great-Aunt Thimble held out a pearl-white seed the size of a walnut. “The Moonflower,” she said. “Blooms once a year, tonight, and its light feeds the glow-bees all winter. Every seed here sleeps until a gardener plants it, fails, and tells it honestly what went wrong. Most gardeners can’t. They’d rather say it didn’t count.”

Fizz looked at his feet. The seed, in Rowan’s mittens, snored softly. Zzzzzz. Tick leaned in close to listen, and it snored right in his ear.

★ **A seed that only wakes for honest gardeners! Where does Rowan begin?**

- **Plant the Moonflower seed straight away and see what happens:** *If you choose to plant, the first try will go wrong — it always does — and what you say afterward is the whole game.* → **turn to page 5**
- **Ask Great-Aunt Thimble how she woke her very first seed:** *If you choose the story, eighty years of gardening started with one failure — and one honest sentence.* → **turn to page 19**
- **Try the little practice seeds before risking the Moonflower:** *If you choose to practice, small seeds fail faster — and Fizz will want to skip straight to the big one.* → **turn to page 33**



Rowan chose the nearest bed, dug a hole with Fizz's trowel, dropped the seed in, patted the earth—pat, pat, pat—and stepped back. Nothing happened. Then nothing happened some more.

“It's fine,” said Fizz quickly. “That was just PRACTICE. Practice doesn't count! Dig it up, plant it again, and THAT one's the real one.”

Tick, from Rowan's shoulder, said that sounded very sensible.

Rowan looked at the bare soil. Something had gone wrong—the hole, maybe, or the pat, or the bed. Rowan didn't know what yet. But Great-Aunt Thimble had said the seed wanted to be TOLD, and “it didn't count” didn't sound like telling it anything.

★ **It didn't sprout. Was that practice — or a real try?**

- **Call it practice, dig it up, and plant it again fresh:** *If you choose practice, you get a clean start — and a seed that has heard exactly nothing. → turn to page 7*
- **Sit down and tell the seed what went wrong:** *If you choose to tell it, you'll have to work out what did go wrong — which is harder than digging. → turn to page 9*



— It Didn't Count —

They dug it up. They planted it again—a better hole, a firmer pat, Fizz supervising.

“THAT was the real one,” he said. Nothing happened.

“Practice,” said Fizz. “Again!” They dug it up. They planted it again. Nothing. Again. Nothing. On the fifth planting the seed gave a small, tired snore, and rolled over in the soil, and went—if anything—more deeply asleep. Zzzzzzzzz.

“Five tries,” said Great-Aunt Thimble, arriving with her can, “and not one of them counted, so the seed has heard nothing at all. It isn't waiting for you to get it RIGHT, dear. It's waiting for you to say what you got wrong.”

Rowan looked at the seed. Five plantings. Same hole, same depth, same dry soil, same everything. Rowan hadn't changed a thing, because nothing had been wrong. Because none of it counted!

“Right,” said Rowan. “It counted. All five. Let me think about what happened.”

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



Rowan sat on the bed's stone edge, put one mitten flat on the soil, and thought back. The hole: shallow. The soil: dry as biscuit. The watering: none, because Rowan had forgotten the can entirely!

“I planted you too shallow,” Rowan said to the earth, feeling a little silly. “And I didn't water you. At all. I was in a hurry to see you sprout, so I skipped the parts that make you sprout.”

Under the soil, something GLOWED. Faintly—a pearl-colored warmth, like a nightlight through a blanket. Fizz stopped bouncing. Great-Aunt Thimble said, very quietly, “There.”

“It heard me,” said Rowan. “It heard you say it OUT LOUD,” said the toad. “That's the part that wakes them.”

Turn the page.



They dug the seed up, gently, and planted it again—deeper this time, in soil Rowan crumbled soft with both mittens, and watered until it shone.

It sprouted before the can was empty! Two round pearl-white leaves, glowing, unfolding like small hands. The glow-bees came from all over the garden to look. Fizz did a lap of the bed.

Then Rowan, who had learned that water mattered, watered it again. And again, to be safe. And once more, because it was so pretty. Glug, glug, glug.

By the time the moon had moved a hand's width, the sprout was lying on its side in a puddle, leaves limp, glow gone thin. Rowan had learned the first lesson SO well that it had turned into a second mistake. “Oh,” said Tick. “Oh no.”

Turn the page.



END OF YOUR FREE SAMPLE

Will the Moonflower wake?

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

Chose "Ask Great-Aunt Thimble how she woke her very first seed" or "Try the little practice seeds before risking the Moonflower" 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

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Or get just Book 21 for \$59. Pause or cancel anytime.

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Next in this file: The Grown-Up's Ticket, your parent guide to Book 21.

Books that branch. Minds that grow.

The garden's magic seeds only sprout for gardeners who have failed at least once — and can say what they learned! ★

Tonight, every choice belongs to YOU. Call the first planting 'practice' and dig it up? Blame Fizz for the footprint? Borrow a sprout from next door and say you grew it? The Moonflower has to bloom before sunrise — and it's listening for one honest sentence.

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 21 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 Learn From Every Outcome — say what went wrong, out loud — and Choose What's Right, even when it costs.

Storybranch

Books that branch. Minds that grow.



★ ADMIT ONE GROWN-UP ★

The Grown-Up's Ticket

Your guide to reading *The Garden of Sleeping Seeds* together

Tonight the Night Train stops at a walled garden where the seeds sleep until a gardener plants them, fails, and says out loud what went wrong. Great-Aunt Thimble, the old toad who keeps it, woke her first seed eighty years ago with one honest sentence. Fizz, a young chipmunk with a tiny trowel, has never grown anything — because none of his tries counted. The Moonflower has to bloom before sunrise, and your child — as Rowan — is about to learn that a mistake you name is a lesson, a mistake you excuse is a snore, and that the honest thing is sometimes the one that costs.

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

Learn from every outcome

Treating every result — especially the misses — as information. A planting that 'didn't count' teaches nothing five times over; a planting named as too shallow and too dry wakes the seed while Rowan is still talking.

✦ SECONDARY SKILL

Choose what's right

Telling the right thing from the easy thing when they sit on opposite sides — blaming Fizz for the footprint, borrowing a sprout that isn't yours — and choosing the honest one even when it costs.

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

Learn from every outcome

The habit: a miss is a lesson only once you've said what it was.

The garden's rule is the skill in one sentence: seeds wake for gardeners who can say what went wrong. Watch the dead end in Branch A — five plantings, none of them 'counted,' so nothing changed between them and the seed heard nothing. Then watch the fix: 'too shallow, and I forgot the water,' said out loud, and a glow under the soil. Watch, too, the second mistake — Rowan learns 'water it' so well it becomes 'drown it' — because learning doesn't stop at the first correction. The practice seeds in Branch C are the purest version: small, fast, forgiving failures whose whole purpose is to teach the big one. At ages 3–8 this looks wonderfully simple: *"that didn't work — what exactly went wrong? Say it to the seed."*

PARENT MOVE №1

The Dead-End Post-Mortem

When a planting flops or a page snaps shut, **resist flipping back right away**. First: **"Ooh — that one missed! Before we go back ... what did it teach us? What would we tell the seed?"** Ten seconds of detective work, then flip back with full ceremony. Count out loud — **"lesson number two, collected!"** — so misses become clues, not embarrassment. (Use it at least once a night.)

✓ TRY SAYING

"So it didn't sprout. What did WE do — too deep, too dry, too much?"

"You learned 'water it.' Did you learn 'stop'?"

"What's the part of this that's ours to say?"

✗ INSTEAD OF

"That was just practice — it didn't count." (five plantings, and the seed has heard nothing)

"Do the same thing again, harder." (a puddle, and a drooping sprout)

"It was the wind." (the seed can tell the difference)

SECONDARY

Choose what's right

The habit: name the cost out loud, then choose.

Every branch has a fork where the easy thing works and the right thing costs. Blaming Fizz for the footprint is even true — and the seed goes paler, because seeds wake for honest, not for true. Fizz's borrowed sprout might fool the Moonflower — and someone next door wakes to an empty pot. Handing the seed to Fizz means giving away the best moment of the night. Rowan's winning paths all pay the price and say why. Even the last ending is about this: admitting the embarrassing lesson late, when the night would have let it slide.

PARENT MOVE №2

The Compass vs. Clock Test

When a choice is really *easy* versus *right*, **hold up two fists** — one is the clock (quick, close enough, nobody would know), one is the compass (the right thing). Ask: **"Which fist is 'use the borrowed sprout'? Which one is 'put it back'? ... Which one does Rowan want to be holding at sunrise?"** Let them tap the fist. Then read on and see whether the compass cost anything — and whether it was worth it.

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 Fizz do?**" (Fizz's answer at every fork is the one where nothing is his fault — "*That was PRACTICE!*" "*Somebody must have stepped on it.*" "*It's a SHORTCUT!*" — and he's quick and sure, which is exactly why he's useful. Even a 3-year-old can hear a mistake being wriggled out of. And watch him learn: the first true thing he ever tells a seed grows the brightest flower in the book.)

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.

Great-Aunt Thimble

The old garden toad in the knitted tea-cosy hat, with a tin watering can and eighty years of honest mistakes. Read her slow, croaky and warm, like someone who has never once been in a hurry — she never tells Rowan the answer, she waters a different bed and waits.

Fizz

The young chipmunk with the tiny trowel who has never grown anything, because none of it counted. Read him quick, bouncy and a bit too loud — "*that was PRACTICE!*" — and let him go small and wobbly the first time he tells a seed the truth.

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.

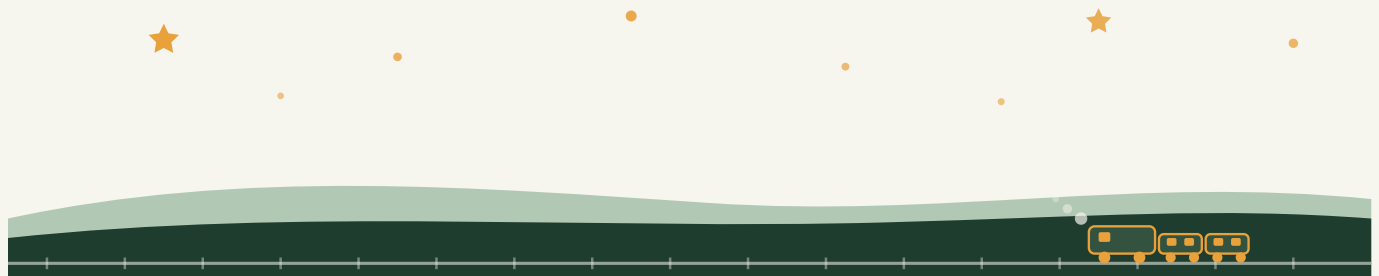
AFTER THE LAST PAGE — THREE LIGHTS-OUT QUESTIONS

1. "Which choice was the hardest tonight — and what made it hard?"
2. "Which try tonight 'didn't count' — and what did Rowan finally say to the seed that woke it up?"
3. "Where was the easy thing different from the right thing tonight? What did the right one cost — and was it worth it?"

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.

