

AGES 9–11

NOTES & ACTIVITIES

for Teachers & Librarians

READ FOR THEMES:

- ☒ Australian Geography
- ☒ The Environment
- ☒ STEM
- ☒ Aboriginal Culture

SUBJECT CHECKLIST:

- ☒ Literacy
- ☒ Geography
- ☒ Science
- ☒ Art, Design & Technology
- ☒ Drama

These activities have been created to prompt discussions around the themes in the *Adventures on Trains* series by M.G. Leonard and Sam Sedgman – encouraging students to develop their reading comprehension, inference and creative writing skills, all while embarking on a mysterious and thrilling adventure...

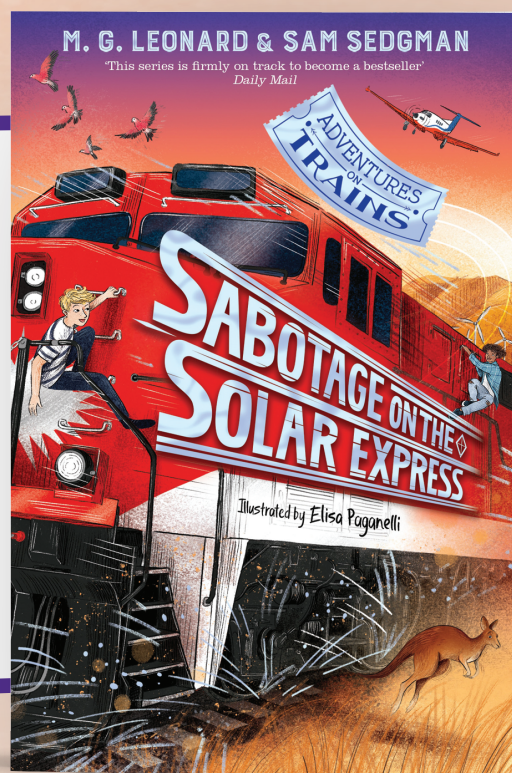


JUMP ON BOARD

Billionaire train enthusiast August Reza has invited Harrison Beck and Uncle Nat on the maiden voyage of the Solar Express – the winning design of his Reza’s Rocket competition. But during the journey, they discover the train has been sabotaged, hurtling passengers into a heart-stopping, action-packed, thrill ride across the Australian Outback. Can Hal find the saboteur and stop the runaway train before disaster strikes?

Before reading, take a few moments to look over the cover of *Sabotage on the Solar Express*, illustrated by Elisa Paganelli. Make some predictions:

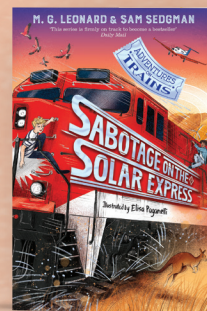
- What does the word ‘sabotage’ mean?
What do you think has happened to the train?
- What can you see on the cover that might be a clue to the setting of the story?
- Look carefully. Is there anything on the cover that suggests danger?



DID YOU KNOW?

The train featured in this story is named ‘The Solar Express’ because of its hydrogen and solar-powered hybrid engine. Power from solar panels sends an electric current through water, which splits it into hydrogen and oxygen.

The hydrogen is then used to fuel the engine. The only exhaust is H₂O – water! Carry out some research into solar power and hydrogen fuel cells. When you have learned more about them, consider why this is a good way to power a train.

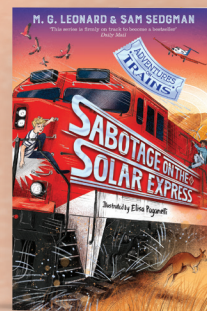


WINDOW CHALLENGE

LITERACY, HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY, ART & DESIGN

When Hal is on the Solar Express, he doesn't have a lot of time to look out the window. However, Marlee takes him on a once in a lifetime flight in her Royal Flying Doctor Service plane. As you read pages 37–38 when Hal soars through the air above Uluru, underline any key words or phrases that stand out to you. Then, take a leaf from Hal's sketchbook and **draw** the scene described in the plane window.





WINDOW CHALLENGE

LITERACY, HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY, ART & DESIGN

Hal felt the plane tilt. The right wing dipped, bringing the ground into view and, rising from the earth, he saw an enormous rock the size of a town.

'Look!' Marianne grabbed Hal's leg. 'Uluru.'

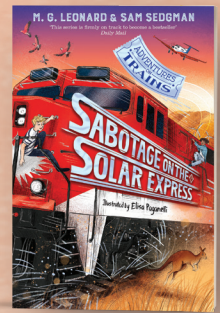
'Beautiful,' Uncle Nat said under his breath. As the plane flew in a wide circle, the mammoth rock turned slowly beneath

them. Hal attempted to capture an image of Uluru from above. Shadows danced across the ancient orange stone, mocking his pen's attempt to trap them on paper. He realized it would be difficult to capture a perfect image of Uluru. It was as changeable as a living thing.

'It's glowing,' Marianne said with awe, 'like a colossal ruby on the sand.'

– Page 37-38





WINDOW CHALLENGE

LITERACY, HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY, ART & DESIGN

ACTIVITY IDEAS:

- The Solar Express was the winner of the Reza's Rocket competition for trains of the future. Read about some of the other entries on page 13 and then design your own entry for the competition. Think about what would make your train unique, environmentally friendly and fast!
- When Hal first met Marianne in Kidnap on the California Comet, she inspired him to draw comics. Choose a section of this story and retell it in a comic book style. Look at pages 4, 8 & 25 for ideas about how to set out your boxes.
- Tom and Kira are journalists reporting on the story of the Solar Express. Tom really hopes this will be his big break and make him famous! Work with some friends to create a video news report about the runaway train. Take turns to be the reporter, be interviewed in role and do the filming.
- Draw a map of Hal and Uncle Nat's journey on a blank outline of Australia. Plot the major cities and towns, draw the train lines they traveled on and be sure to include important landmarks. You could even colour the background red to represent the dusty, red deserts of the 'Red Centre'.

DID YOU KNOW:

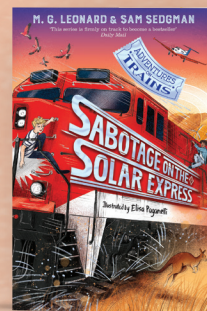
Uluru is a giant sandstone rock measuring 348m high with a total perimeter of 9.4km. The Anangu people in Australia believe it was created by ancestral spirits. Find out more about the Aboriginal people, their culture, beliefs and legends. Think about the saying, 'We don't own the land, the land owns us.' What does this mean and how does it impact how people live their lives?

VOCAB CHECK:

Define 'mammoth', 'ancient', 'mocking', 'capture', 'changeable' and 'colossal'.

QUESTION:

What evidence is there that Uluru is a significant Australian landmark?



DETECTIVE WORK!

LITERACY, ART & DESIGN, SCIENCE, DRAMA

Read pages 172–175, when Hal is examining the fox figure he has found inside the Rocket model and trying to work out who could have sabotaged the train.

Putting his hand in his pocket, Hal took out the golden fox. He stared at its face. What did it mean? Foxes were known for their cunning, their cleverness. He turned the fox over in his hands, scanning every millimetre of it, and then he noticed something. There was a tiny stamp on the underside of each of its paws. At first he thought it was a hallmark, but then saw that three of the feet had a tiny H preceded by numbers, while the fourth paw had a tiny GV engraved on it. He frowned.

‘Boaz, do you recognize these symbols?’

Boaz looked up from his paper, where he’d drawn a series of diagrams with boxes, arrows, pluses and minus. He squinted at the fox. ‘Those look like . . . tiny nuclear symbols for the isotopes of hydrogen.’ He frowned. ‘But I don’t know what the GV is. What are they doing on the feet of a fox?’

‘I found the fox inside the model of the Rocket.’

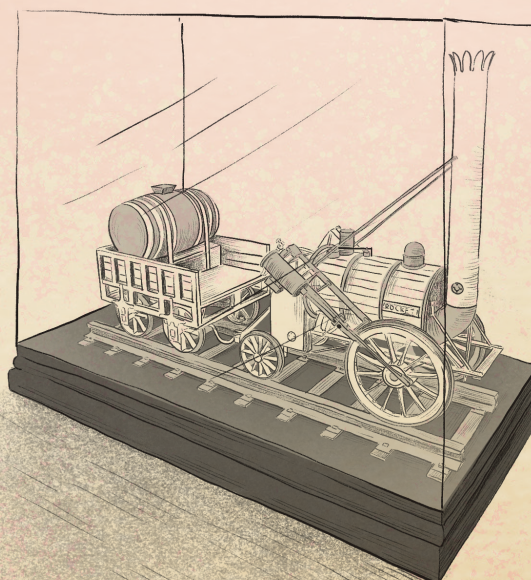
‘That thing was dangerous,’ Boaz said, returning to his workings out.

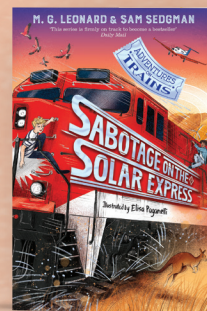
‘You said sabotaging the train felt personal, like it’s an attack on you and August. I think you’re right.’

‘Yeah?’

‘What if the saboteur is someone who didn’t win the Reza’s Rocket competition? Someone who thinks they’re clever, that their idea is better than the Solar Express? Someone who is furious that they didn’t win, that they lost to a child, and wants revenge?’

– Pages 172–173





DETECTIVE WORK!

LITERACY, ART & DESIGN, SCIENCE, DRAMA

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What does the symbol of a fox tell us about the person who created the Rocket model (and who also probably sabotaged the train)?
- Why might there be nuclear symbols on the paws of the fox?
- What could the GV represent on the fourth paw?
- Why might someone want to make a personal attack on Boaz and August?
- Using these clues, who do you suspect of sabotaging the Solar Express?

ACTIVITY IDEA:

Make a model of an animal that represents your personality. Think about how they look or behave in a way that's similar to you.

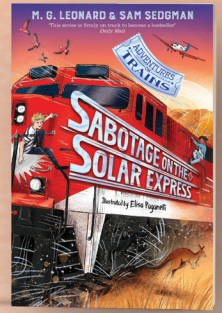
SPY CHALLENGE:

Create your own code using letters and numbers that represent important things. Leave a secret message for a friend and see if they can work it out.

DRAMA IDEA:

Imagine the saboteur sneaking on-board the Solar Express. Try pretending to be this person and move across the room without anyone seeing or hearing you.





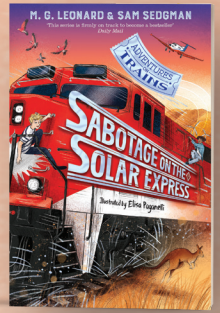
HAL'S POCKETBOOK CHALLENGE!

During his journey on the Solar Express, Hal makes careful sketches of everyone involved. Drawing makes him feel calm and flicking through his sketchbook helps him think. Create your own sketchbook. Include a sketch of every suspect and make note of who they are and what their motive might be for sabotaging the Solar Express. Is there anyone else who should be included?

Hal recognized the look of concern on his uncle's face and his pulse quickened. He put his hand to his pocket, feeling the reassuring rectangular shape of his sketchbook. If someone was planning to mess with August Reza, then he was going to make sure they didn't get away with it. – Page 70



HAL'S POCKETBOOK CHALLENGE!



Create an advertisement for the the launch of the rebranded Safari Star!

A large white rectangular area with a purple border, intended for creating an advertisement.