

**AGES 9–11**

# NOTES & ACTIVITIES

for Teachers & Librarians

**READ FOR THEMES:**

- American Geography & Culture
- The Environment
- Modes of Transport
- Magic Tricks & Spy Skills!

**SUBJECT CHECKLIST:**

- Literacy
- History
- Geography
- Maths
- Art, Design & Technology

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...

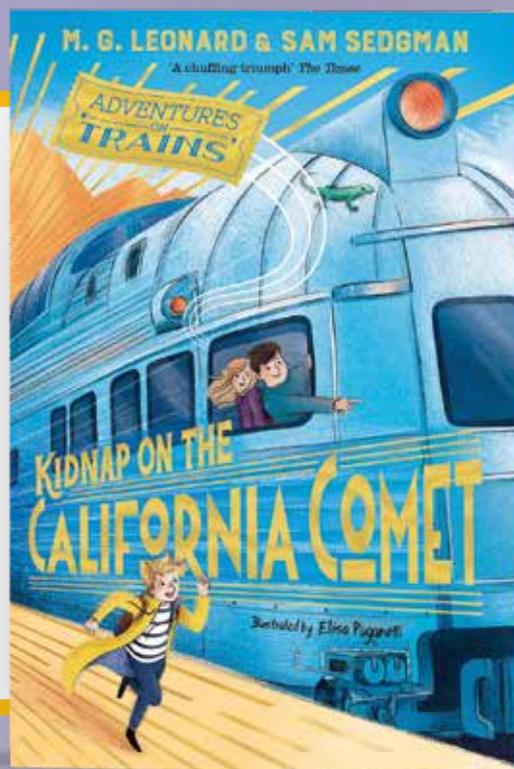
# ADVENTURES ON TRAINS

## JUMP ON BOARD

After the excitement of his adventures aboard the Highland Falcon Thief, Harrison Beck can't wait for the opportunity to go on another amazing train journey. So when his Uncle Nat invites him aboard the California Comet, the iconic three-day train journey from Chicago to San Francisco, he leaps at the chance to travel. But when the daughter of billionaire entrepreneur August Reza goes missing en route, Hal finds himself with another mystery to solve. Can he uncover the kidnapper before the journey's end?

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

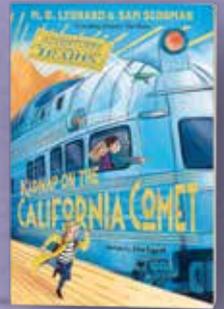
- How does the illustrator Elisa Paganelli create a sense of the speed of the train on the cover?
- Where do you think the story is set? What can you tell about the climate and landscape of the setting?
- How many characters can you see on the cover? What are they doing? What do you think their relationship might be?



### DID YOU KNOW?

Trains were the dominant mode of travel in America, where the book is set, until the mid-twentieth century, but this is no longer the case. Can you guess which modes of transport are more popular now?

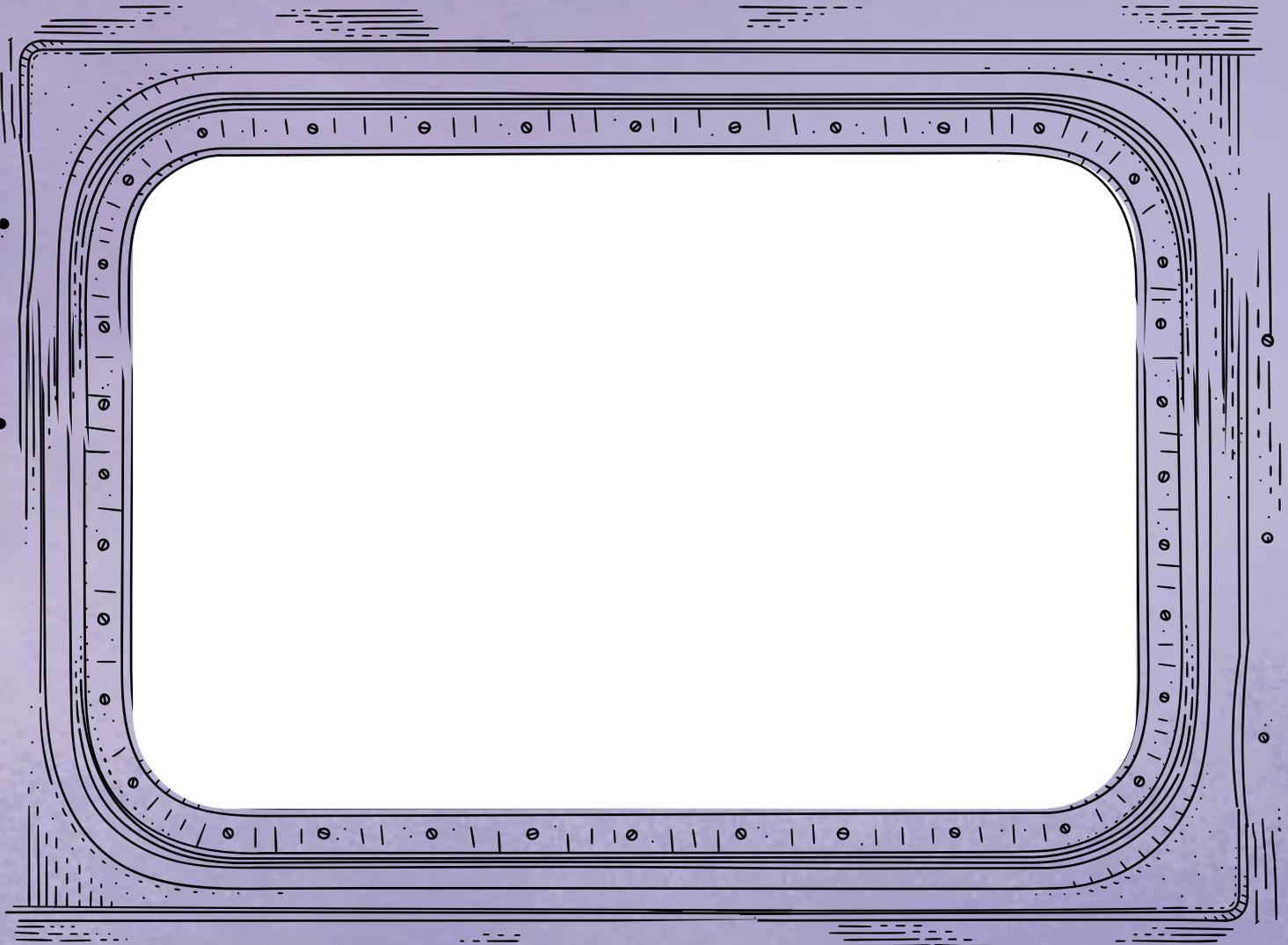
Write a list of all the modes of transport you can think of in America and rank them in order of popularity (and top speeds)! Do you know which is the fastest train in America? See if you can find out!



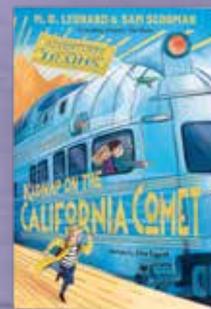
# TRAIN WINDOW CHALLENGE

LITERACY, GEOGRAPHY

Hal and Uncle Nat are fascinated by the incredible scenery on route from Union Station in Chicago to Emeryville, just outside San Francisco. Which section of the train line would you most like to see?



# ADVENTURES ON TRAINS



## TRAIN WINDOW CHALLENGE

LITERACY, GEOGRAPHY

*Uncle Nat sat down beside Hal. 'Through that window you'll see the wonders of America. It's an incredible place.'*

*'I thought it would be like England, but it isn't, is it? Everything is extra here. The roads are wider; the cars are bigger; even the food portions are huge.' Hal paused, momentarily*

*overcome by the scale of America. 'It makes me feel small.'*

*'You'll get used to it. And then when you go home, you'll think everything in Crewe is tiny.' Uncle Nat looked at him over his glasses. 'Travelling changes you. Marvelling at new places is an important part of that. It makes you think about different ways of living.'* – Page 19

### SOME MATHS:

If the real California Zephyr covers 2,481 miles and the journey takes three days and two nights, what approximate speed does the train travel at in miles per hour (mph)?

### ACTIVITY IDEAS:

- Pick one of the scenic sections of the train line and draw what you think you might see: you might choose the Rockies, the arid country of Utah and Nevada, or the snow-capped Sierra Nevada in California to the Bay Area.
- Write a postcard from Hal to his family when he reaches San Francisco. What sights does he see there with the Morettis? How does he feel about his recent journey on the California Comet?
- Enter August Reza's competition (p80); design a new mode of transport to reduce carbon emissions.

### DID YOU KNOW:

The California Comet is based on a real railway journey you can take across America, called the California Zephyr. On a map of America, see if you can trace the route (use page 11 of the book to help you!).

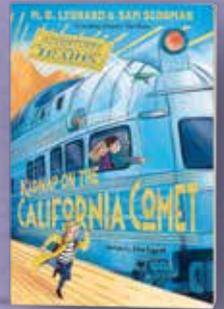
### VOCAB CHECK:

Define 'momentarily', 'overcome', 'scale' and 'marvelling'.

# ADVENTURES ON TRAINS

## DETECTIVE WORK

LITERACY, ART & DESIGN, DRAMA



Read pages 89–98, when Hal witnesses the kidnap of Marianne Reza and manages to record everything he sees by drawing it at super-fast speed! No wonder Mason nicknames him Sherlock da Vinci!

***‘How did you see all of that?’  
Hadley asked as Uncle Nat guided  
the three children towards the  
squat flat-roofed station.***

***Hal shrugged. ‘I look at the shape,  
size and scale of things when I’m  
drawing. It’s like my brain takes a  
photo of something, and then my***

***hand is the printer. I don’t notice  
details though until I’m drawing  
them. If I talk before I draw, if you  
ask me to describe something with  
words, my memory gets blurred and  
I’m not certain of what I saw.’***

***‘Dude!’ Mason exclaimed. ‘You’re  
like Leonardo da Vinci and Sherlock  
Holmes rolled into one.’***

***‘I’m not,’ Hal replied feelingly.  
‘Sherlock Holmes would’ve worked  
everything out before Marianne was  
kidnapped.’ – Page 93***





# DETECTIVE WORK

LITERACY, ART & DESIGN, DRAMA

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

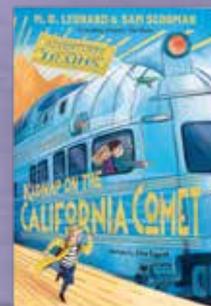
- What three things does Hal look at when he's drawing?
- What happens if Hal talks before he draws? Why?
- How do Hadley and Mason feel about Hal's skills? How do you know?
- Why does Mason compare Hal to Leonardo da Vinci and Sherlock Holmes? What do you know about these two people?
- Why do you think Hal responds 'feelingly' to Mason's exclamation? What is Hal thinking about?

## ACTIVITY IDEA:

The Moretti siblings teach Hal some magic tricks to help him solve the mystery of Marianne's disappearance. Which magic tricks do you learn in the story? What is the '**French Drop**'? What is '**misdirection**'? And who is **Harry Houdini**? Perform your best magic trick to the class!

## SPY CHALLENGE:

Play the MEMORY GAME to get your spy-mind working just like Hal's! In groups, gather 10–15 objects on a tray – E.G. a spoon, a pencil, a rubber etc. Put one classmate in charge of the tray. The rest of the group has ten seconds **ONLY** to look at everything on the tray and try to fix them the objects in their memory. Then, the person in charge should cover the objects. Each classmate should write down a list of as many objects as they can remember. The winner is the one who remembers the most objects!



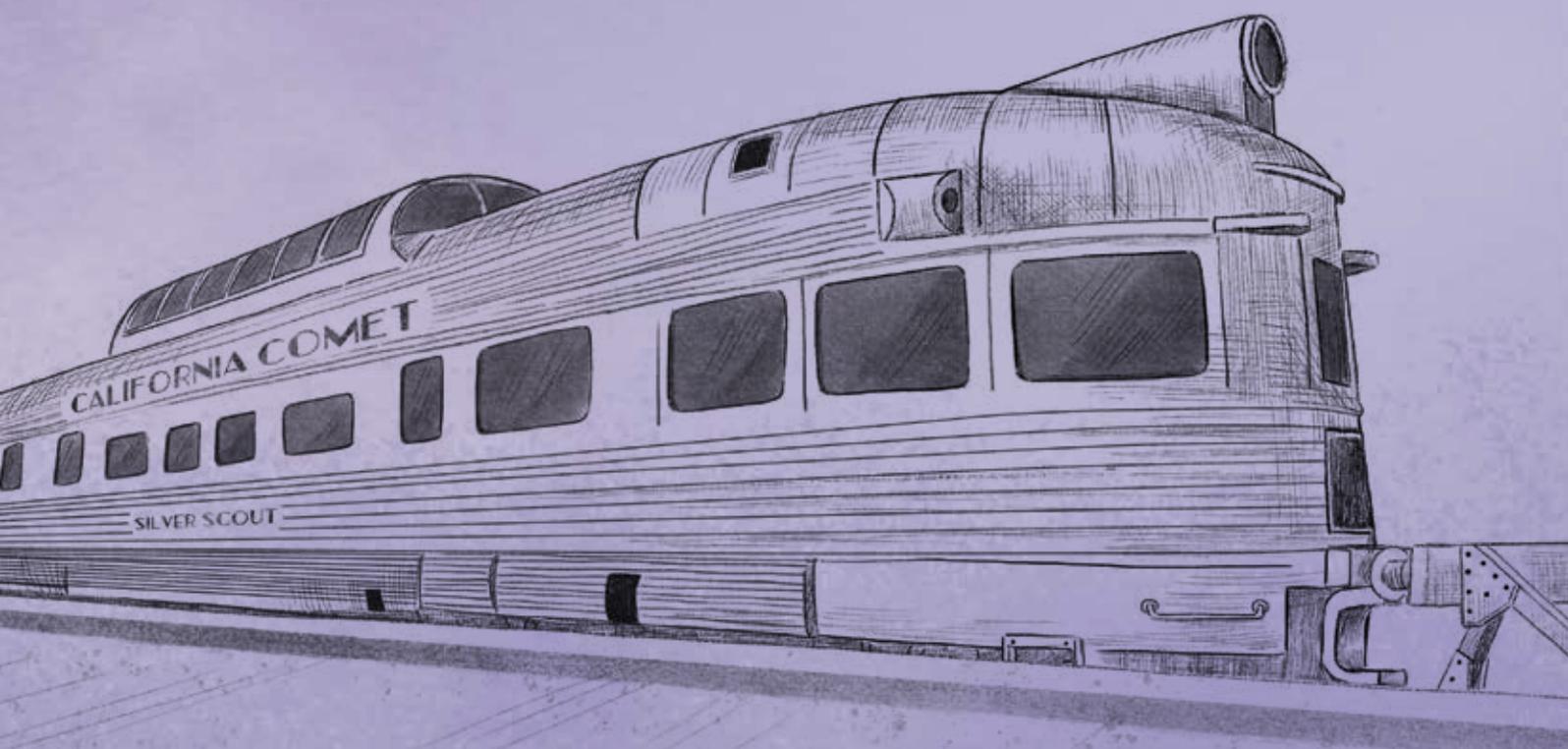
# HAL'S POCKETBOOK CHALLENGE!

On pages 158–162, Hal and his friends decide to search the Silver Scout for clues about Marianne's disappearance. Without reading the text, look at the illustration from Hal's pocketbook on pages 156–157. Become a detective just like Hal: use the drawing to find any useful clues and note down your findings!

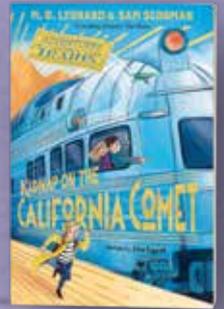
*'Let's ride to Granby in the Silver Scout.'*

*'Hal!' Hadley looked scandalized.*

*'We need to search for clues. Marianne's bedroom has been turned over and I want to draw it.'* – Page 158



# HAL'S POCKETBOOK CHALLENGE!



Look for the clues in Hal's sketch



**1. What can I see?**

**2. List of possible clues about what happened to Marianne:**