

AGES 9–11

NOTES & ACTIVITIES

for Teachers & Librarians

READ FOR THEMES:

- ✓ Mystery
- ✓ Travel
- ✓ German Locations, Railways, Language & Folklore
- ✓ European History

SUBJECT CHECKLIST:

- ✓ Literacy
- ✓ PSHE
- ✓ History
- ✓ Geography
- ✓ Art, Design & Technology
- ✓ MFL

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...

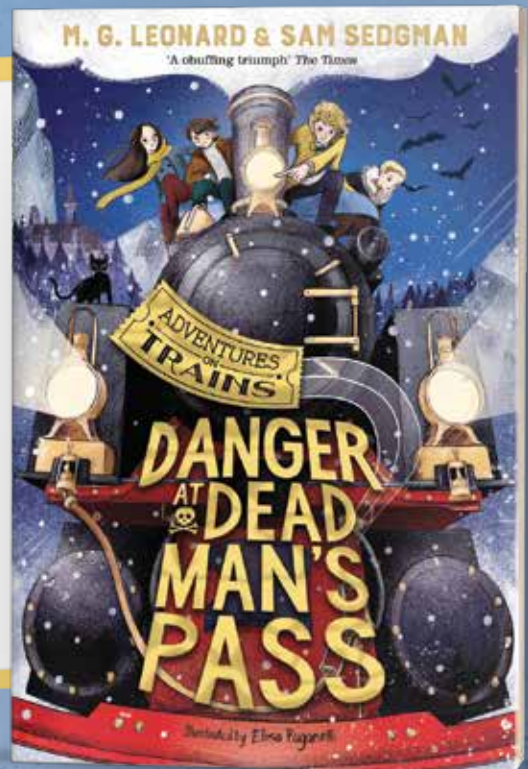
ADVENTURES ON TRAINS

JUMP ON BOARD

A mysterious letter from an old friend asks Hal and Uncle Nat to help investigate a spooky supernatural mystery. Legend has it the Kratzensteins, a family of rich and powerful railway tycoons, are cursed, but there is no such thing as a curse, is there . . .? Hal and Nat take the night train to Berlin and go undercover. From a creaking old house at the foot of the Harz mountains, they take the Kratzenstein family's funeral train to the peak of the Brocken Mountain. Can Hal uncover the secrets of the Brocken railway and the family curse before disaster strikes?

Before reading, take a few moments to look over the cover of *Danger at Dead Man's Pass*, illustrated by Elisa Paganelli. Make some predictions:

- What does the title make you think about?
What sort of story do you predict this will be?
- What can you see on the cover?
What do the different images suggest about the story's setting?
- What is the **mood** or **atmosphere** of the setting?



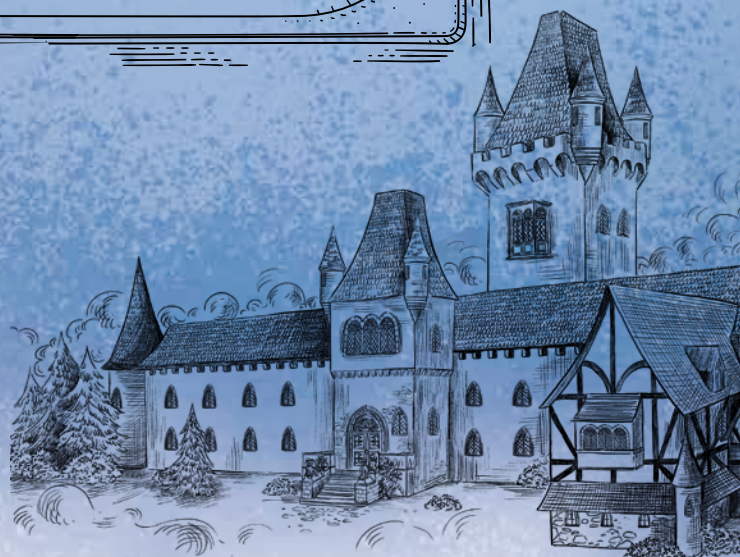
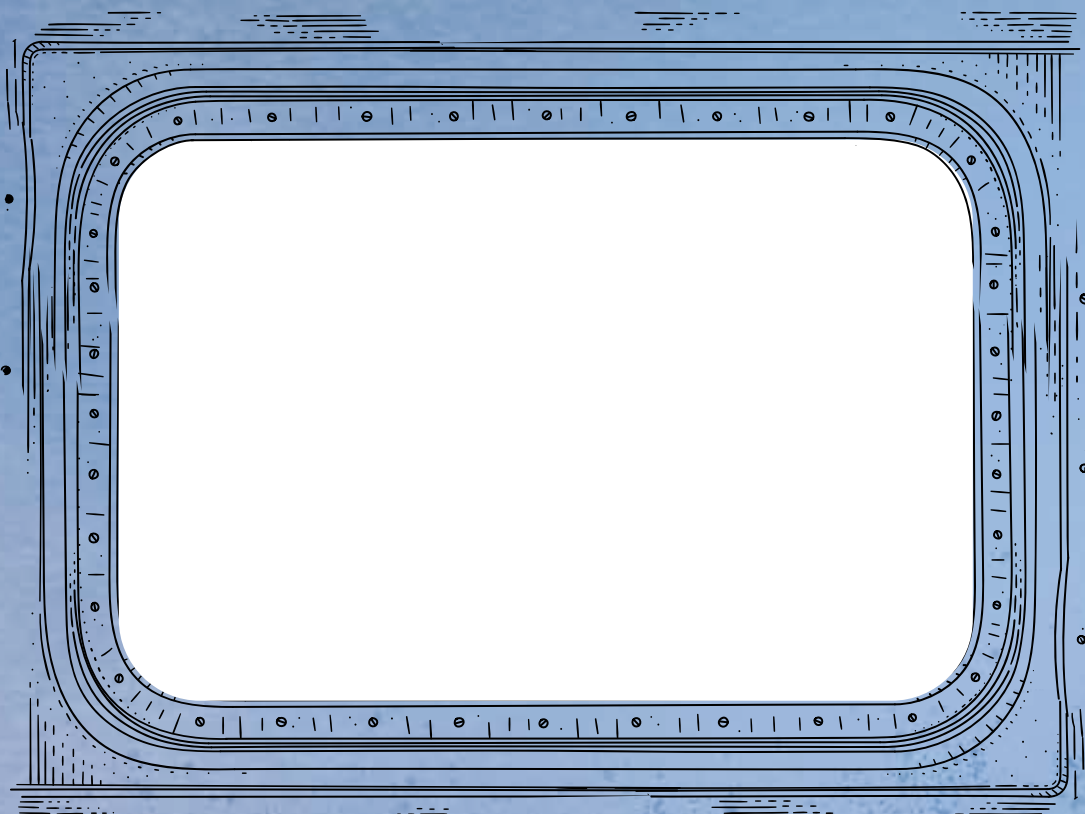
Consider the thoughts and feelings of the four characters pictured on the cover. In four speech bubble templates, write what you think the **interior monologues** of each character might be. This means, write down what you think the characters might be **thinking** and **feeling** here. Are they excited or frightened? Who is taking charge?



TRAIN WINDOW CHALLENGE

LITERACY, GEOGRAPHY, ART, MFL

As you read page 95 when Hal travels towards Schloss Kratzenstein, underline any key words or phrases that stand out to you. Then, take a leaf from Hal's notebook and draw the scene described in the train window.





TRAIN WINDOW CHALLENGE

LITERACY, GEOGRAPHY, ART, MFL

As the train climbed, winding through the foothills of the Brocken, the dense clouds hiding the sky seemed to grow heavier and sink lower. The front of the forbidding manor was a crenellated stone wall with arched windows. In the middle protruded a stubby square porch. Hal guessed this was the main

entrance. To the right, a building like the town houses, with criss-cross beams, sprouted forward, as if added as an afterthought. Behind this stern aspect was an enormous tower, a turret on each of its four corners, each with two vertical windows, like vacant black eyes, topped by a conical roof. – Page 95

QUESTION:

How is Schloss Kratzenstein presented as a 'spooky' or mysterious place in the story?

VOCAB CHECK:

Define 'dense', 'forbidding', 'crenellated', 'protruded', 'stem', 'turret' and 'vacant'.

DID YOU KNOW:

Anyone can complete Hal and Uncle Nat's journey from Crewe to Wernigerode. Carry out some research to find out how – which trains would you need to take, and what you need on your journey?

ACTIVITY IDEAS:

- Schloss Kratzenstein is based on Castle Wernigerode and the historic architecture of Wernigerode itself. Create a modern-day travel brochure for Wernigerode, encouraging people to visit the area.
- As you read *Danger at Dead Man's Pass*, pick out the German phrases that the characters say and translate them. Use them to create a handy Vocabulary List or Glossary of German words and phrases that you might need if you visit Wernigerode.



A JOURNEY THROUGH HISTORY

LITERACY, HISTORY

Wenigerode is known as the gateway to the Brocken, the highest mountain in the Harz region. Everything that Oliver Essenbach tells Hal about the history of the Brocken is true! Read pages 186–187.

'Its history is one of the reasons this place is so popular with tourists – and the ancient forest and wildlife,' Oliver conceded. 'The Brocken is the highest mountain of the Harz. In the Second World War, its television made it a target for Allied bombing.'

'It was bombed?'

'Yes. Then after the War the Russians came, and the Brocken became a security zone – a military fortress – because it was part of the border between East and West Germany. A concrete wall was built around the top of the mountain. No one was allowed up it. Border guards were stationed there. The Stasi – the East German secret police – turned the summit into a listening post, and the Soviet Red Army . . .' – Pages 186–187

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What does the phrase 'Allied bombing' mean? Who were the Allies?
- What was the Cold War? Why did the Brocken become 'a security zone' during this period?
- What was Arnold's role in the Cold War? How is this connected the Kratzenstein curse?
- Why are the themes of spies and spying important in the story? Who is revealed to be a spy?
- What is a 'dead drop'? What other codes, signals and secret messages feature in the book?

ACTIVITY IDEA:

Create a timeline of the Brocken from World War II to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

SPY CHALLENGE:

Create your own undercover spy name and a secret coded message for someone to crack!

ADVENTURES ON TRAINS



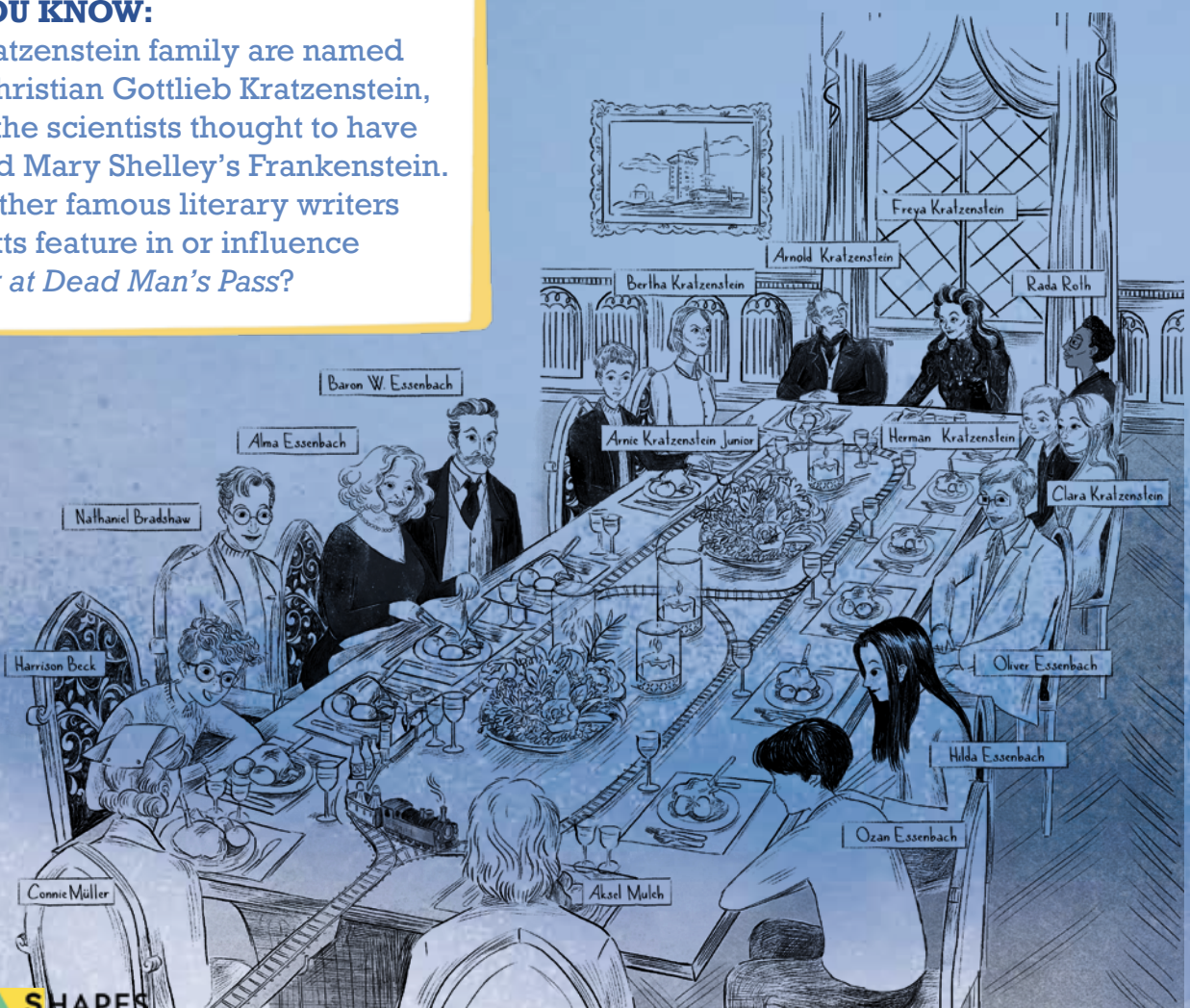
HAL'S POCKETBOOK CHALLENGE

Hal likes to draw everything in his pocketbook because it helps him to make sense of what is going on around him. Read pages 18-19 where he discusses the Kratzenstein family tree with Uncle Nat. Have a go at re-creating the family tree yourself, using railway lines to connect each family member – just like Hal does!

Hal pulled out his notebook and, turning to a double blank page, began to draw a family tree. He needed a way to remember who everyone was, and he knew a picture would work best. He put Arnold at the top. 'Alexander is the one who has died?' – Page 18

DID YOU KNOW:

The Kratzenstein family are named after Christian Gottlieb Kratzenstein, one of the scientists thought to have inspired Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. What other famous literary writers and texts feature in or influence *Danger at Dead Man's Pass*?



SUSPECT CASEBOOK



Create a suspect casebook detailing each member of the Kratzenstein family. As you read, make notes about how each of them might be considered a suspect in the murder of Alexander Kratzenstein. Include photographs of the characters, their connection to the victim, evidence and motivations.

Arnold Kratzenstein	Bertha Kratzenstein	Arnie Kratzenstein Junior
Clara Kratzenstein	Herman Kratzenstein	Freya Kratzenstein
Rada Roth	Connie Müller	Aksel Mulch
Baron Essenbach	Alma & Oliver Essenbach	Hilda & Ozan Essenbach