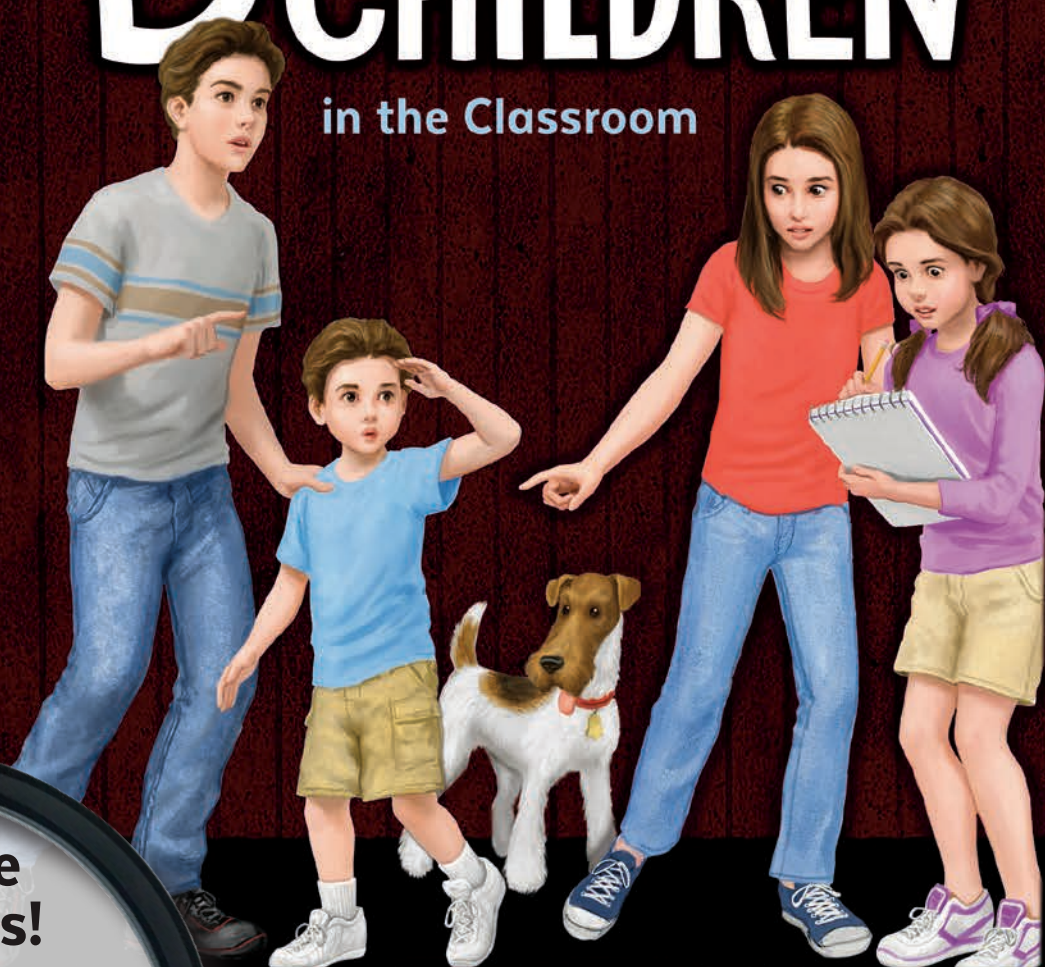
An Educators' Guide to Using the

THE BOXCAR® CHILDREN

in the Classroom



This guide includes:

- A letter to educators
- A letter to caregivers
- Teaching tips for how to use the Boxcar Children® in the classroom
- Activity worksheets
- Book recommendations

Grades 2–6

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ABOUT THE SERIES

Originally published in 1924, *The Boxcar Children* tells the story of four orphaned siblings, Henry, Jessie, Violet, and Benny. They create a home for themselves in an abandoned railroad car in the forest. Thanks to their hard work and resourceful nature, the children are able to thrive in their new home in the woods. They eventually meet their grandfather, who is a kind and wealthy man (although the children had believed him to be cruel). The children decide to live with their grandfather, who moves the beloved boxcar to his backyard so the children can use it as a playhouse.

Today, the series includes more than 200 titles, with adventures sure to entertain young readers in second to sixth grade.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gertrude Chandler Warner was born in Putnam, Connecticut, on April 16, 1890. From the age of five, she dreamed of becoming an author. She wrote stories for her grandfather, and each Christmas she gave him one of these stories as a gift. Today, Ms. Warner is best remembered as the author of the Boxcar Children® Mysteries.



Guide Writer: Greg Shafer has twenty-seven years of experience teaching in Florida middle schools and holds three degrees from the University of Florida: a bachelor of arts in English, a bachelor of science in journalism, and a master's degree in English education. As a National Board Certified Teacher, Mr. Shafer has taught middle school drama and language arts and served as a peer evaluator as part of a $100 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to Hillsborough County Public Schools. In addition, Mr. Shafer has served as team leader for seventh and eighth grades for the majority of his teaching career and holds his professional certification to teach middle grades, gifted, English 6–12, and ESOL.

LETTER TO EDUCATORS

Dear Educator,

As teachers, we know that getting children hooked on books leads to lifelong learning and success, both in school and in the community.

More than 100 years ago, when educator Gertrude Chandler Warner looked out at her first-grade classroom, she saw students from many backgrounds. Inspired by her students, Ms. Warner created a universal yet personal story for kids of all ages that is both accessible and entertaining.

Some important messages and themes in the Boxcar Children® series:

- **Processing and Hypothesizing**
  Each book centers around a mystery that challenges the children to work together to process information in the form of clues, which builds processing and hypothesizing skills.
- **Problem-Solving Confidence**
  Each book mirrors the reality of young people having to solve problems on their own, which encourages readers to imagine how they might confront similar real-life situations head-on.
- **Family, Found Family, and Community**
  Each book depicts strong family and community values, with characters celebrating differences while engaging in a growth mindset to learn about one another and the world around them.
- **A Foundation of Kindness**
  Each book reinforces universal, timeless values that young children foundationally need: acceptance, kindness, and the importance of family.

The messages and themes found within the Boxcar Children® series transcend the time in which the stories first came to be. Young readers of today will connect with this series, becoming instant friends with Henry, Jessie, Violet, and Benny.

As an educator, I have found this to be a trusted series that kids love to read. If you choose to include the Boxcar Children® series in your classroom library or in your lessons, I won't be surprised if you discover the same.

Greg Shafer
Wilson Middle School
Tampa, Florida

LETTER TO CAREGIVERS

Dear Caregiver,

You know it. I know it. And they know it. Children *love* stories.

But getting kids of all ages excited to read is getting harder and harder because of the myriad options that surround them and vie for their time.

Kids want to be magically transported to different times, to see and hear from different perspectives, and to be introduced to problems that they and the characters must solve.

Originally published in 1924, the Boxcar Children® series has resonated so deeply with generations of children partly due to its ability to change over time while keeping its core characters and values intact.

By choosing the Boxcar Children® series, you will rest assured that beneath the tantalizing titles like *The Deserted Library Mystery*, *The Mystery of the Mummy's Curse*, and *The Mystery of the Missing Pop Idol* lies a world of adventure, cooperation, and acceptance.

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- **Problem-Solving Confidence**
  Each book mirrors the reality of young people having to solve problems on their own, which encourages readers to imagine how they might confront similar real-life situations head-on.
- **Family, Found Family, and Community**
  Each book depicts strong family and community values, with characters celebrating differences while engaging in a growth mindset to learn about one another and the world around them.
- **A Foundation of Kindness**
  Each book reinforces universal, timeless values that young children foundationally need: acceptance, kindness, sharing, the importance of family, and many more.

The messages and themes found within the Boxcar Children® series transcend the time in which the stories first came to be. Young readers of today will connect with this series, becoming instant friends with Henry, Jessie, Violet, and Benny.

As an educator, I confidently recommend this series to caregivers searching for books to give their eager young readers. This series is perfect for anyone looking for intriguing mysteries and thrilling adventure stories. And the best part is there are more than 200 books in the series!

Happy reading!

Greg Shafer
Wilson Middle School
Tampa, Florida

IDEAS FOR USING THE BOXCAR CHILDREN® IN THE CLASSROOM

You can use these activity ideas and discussion questions to talk about any of the books in the Boxcar Children® series.

Family, Found Family, and Community Discussion Questions

Students can answer the questions individually or in small groups. The aim is to foster critical-thinking skills and encourage thoughtful conversations about the books.

- What three words or short phrases best describe what *family* means in the Boxcar Children® series?
- How does the bond between Henry, Jessie, Violet, and Benny contribute to their survival and well-being throughout the series?
- Discuss the role of family in the lives of the Boxcar Children. How does their sense of family evolve and change over time?
- Explore the theme of independence versus interdependence within the family. How do the children balance their individuality with their responsibilities toward one another?
- Discuss the impact of the Boxcar Children's experiences on their understanding of family values and the importance of a supportive family unit.
- Define and explore the theme of family in the series. How does it relate to your own experiences and understanding of family?
- In today's world, we tend to rely on screens of all kinds, sometimes in place of human interaction. How do you think screens would impact family relationships for the Boxcar Children?



IDEAS FOR USING THE BOXCAR CHILDREN® IN THE CLASSROOM

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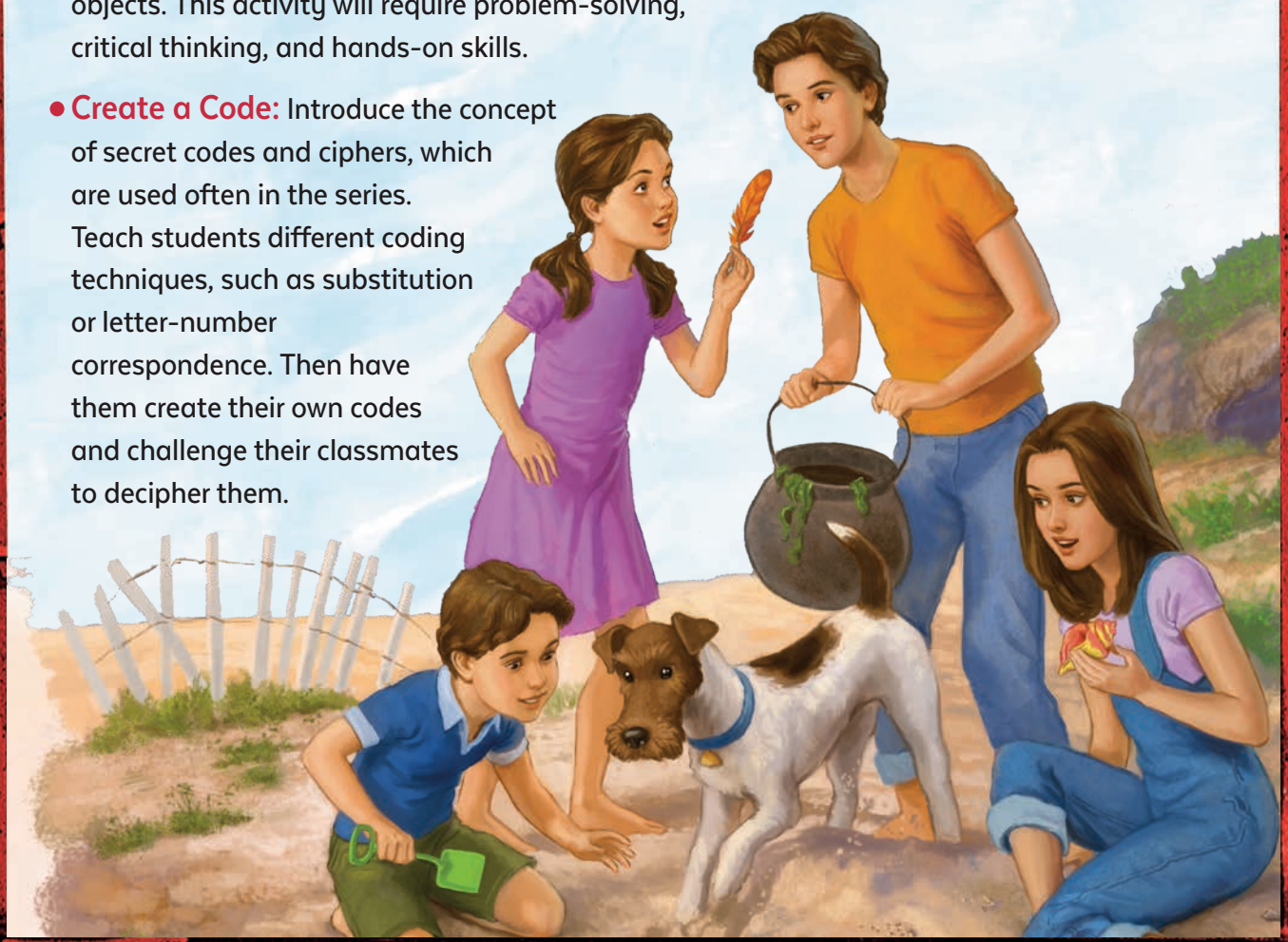
Problem-Solving Activity Ideas

- **Problem-Solving Scenarios:** Present students with different scenarios inspired by the challenges faced by the Boxcar Children. For example, children could be asked to brainstorm solutions for finding food or shelter, or solve a specific problem. Encourage creative thinking and collaboration as the students work together to find innovative solutions.
- **STEM Challenge:** Integrate STEM concepts by assigning students a challenge related to the Aldens' adventures. For example, students could be tasked with building a model of a shelter or designing a pulley system to move heavy objects. This activity will require problem-solving, critical thinking, and hands-on skills.
- **Create a Code:** Introduce the concept of secret codes and ciphers, which are used often in the series. Teach students different coding techniques, such as substitution or letter-number correspondence. Then have them create their own codes and challenge their classmates to decipher them.



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Family-Related Activity Ideas

- **Character Party:** Assign each student a character from the Boxcar Children® series and ask them to plan a party based on the personality and preferences of that character. They should consider the types of food, decorations, and ambiance that would be fitting for their character. Students can present their party plans to the class, explaining their choices.
- **Family Recipe Exchange:** Ask students to bring in a favorite family recipe or a recipe that holds special meaning for them. Have a recipe exchange where students share their recipes with their classmates. Encourage them to discuss the significance of the recipe and any traditions associated with it.
- **Family Skit:** Divide students into small groups and ask them to create a short skit that depicts a family meal, holiday, or adventure scene inspired by the Boxcar Children®. They can incorporate dialogue, gestures, and expressions to portray the dynamics and interactions between family members. Encourage them to highlight the values of sharing, communication, and togetherness.

Adventure Activity Ideas

- **Design a Survival Kit:** Ask students to imagine they are going on an adventure similar to one from the books. Have them create a kit that includes essential items they would need to in the wilderness. Ask the students to explain their choices and justify why each item is important.
- **Map Skills:** Provide students with a real map of the New England area, where a lot of the Boxcar Children's adventures take place. Ask them to identify key locations mentioned in the books and plot the characters' journey. This activity will help students practice map reading skills and spatial awareness.
- **Invent a Mystery:** Have students work in pairs or small groups to create their own mystery story inspired by the Boxcar Children®. They should include clues, suspects, and a solution. Encourage them to think critically and logically as they develop their mystery, ensuring that all the pieces fit together.

Chart Your Reading Adventures with This Story Sequencing Worksheet

Use the blank square to draw what happens in the story.
Use the blank line space to write in your own words what happens in the story.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Book Title: _____

	First: _____
	Next: _____
	Then: _____
	Finally: _____

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THE BOXCAR CHILDREN®

Book Review

Share Your Thoughts

Name: _____ Date: _____

Book: _____

Genre: _____ **Number of Pages:** _____

Start Date: _____ **Finish Date:** _____

I Give This Book:
Circle the number of stars you give this book

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

My Favorite Character Was: _____

Because: _____

_____

_____

My Favorite Part Was:

Would I recommend this book to a friend?

YES / NO

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Chart New Words

Record new words on the chart. First, write the vocabulary word. Next, write what it means. Then, use the word in your own sentence.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Book: _____

New word	New word's definition	Sentence using new word

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Character Analysis

Name: _____ Date: _____

Book title: _____

Draw a portrait of the character you choose:

My character is: _____

General description: _____

_____

_____

_____

Character traits: _____

_____

_____

Actions my character took: _____

_____

_____

_____

How my character changed throughout the story: _____

_____

_____

_____







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THE BOXCAR CHILDREN®

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Welcome to STEP INTO READING®

Beloved by generations of families, the first book in the Boxcar Children® series—adapted into this Step 2 leveled reader—is full of wholesome fun, perfect for children who are learning to read simple sentences.



9780593901816

"I can say with confidence that the STEP INTO READING® series has been a great supplemental tool for teaching kids how to read."

—Patricia Smith, Boston Public Schools Elementary Teacher, LETRS training

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