

The BIG Adventures of a Little Cabin Car

A Comprehensive Elementary Curriculum Guide

Based on the book of the same name, written and published by Diane Bakos
as part of The Colebrookdale Railroad Collection

Aligned to Pennsylvania Academic Standards (Grades K–4)

English Language Arts · Mathematics · Science & Technology · Social Studies
Visual Arts · Music · Health & Physical Education · Character Education

About This Guide

This curriculum guide supports classroom and museum educators who use *The BIG Adventures of a Little Cabin Car* to build interdisciplinary learning experiences for students in Kindergarten through Grade 4. Each subject section includes discussion questions keyed to specific events and characters in the book, hands-on activities, Pennsylvania Academic Standards alignments, differentiation strategies for diverse learners, and formative and summative assessment suggestions.

The story of Cabin Car 477768 — from its working days on the Pennsylvania Railroad, through a tornado, a long rest, a loving rescue by John Pfaltz, and its triumphant return to service on The Colebrookdale Railroad — gives teachers a rich, true narrative through which students can explore community, stewardship, resilience, Pennsylvania geography, and the history of railroading.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is organized by subject area. Each section can be used independently for a single-subject lesson or combined for a multi-day integrated unit. The book is designed to be read aloud, shared in small groups, or assigned for independent reading depending on the grade level.

Suggested Lesson Structures

Format	Description
Single Class	Select one subject section. Read the book aloud. Use the discussion questions and one activity. (45–60 min.)
Two-Day Unit	Day 1: Read aloud + Character/ELA discussion. Day 2: Choose one or two additional subject areas and activities.
Full Week Unit	Monday: Read aloud + character discussion. Tuesday–Friday: One subject per day, culminating in the Art/Music celebration activity.
Museum / Field Trip	Read the book before the visit. Use the Geography and Social Studies sections on site. Complete reflection activities after.
Summer / Library Program	Use the book as an anchor text across two to three sessions, mixing read-aloud, vocabulary, craft, and movement activities.

Section 1: Character Education & Social-Emotional Learning · Grades

K–4 | Standards: PA Core: CC.1.3 (Literature); CASEL SEL Framework

The BIG Adventures of a Little Cabin Car is the story of Pennsylvania Cabin Car 477768. It is, at its heart, a story about purpose, community, generosity, and resilience. The character education activities in this section support CASEL's core competencies: self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Big Ideas

- Everyone — and everything — has a purpose.
- Hard times do not have to be the end of a story.
- Generosity means giving something precious for the good of others.
- Community grows when people work together.

Discussion Questions

Grades K–1

- The cabin car felt happy when it had a job to do. What do you love doing? How does it make you feel?
- When the tornado came and broke the tracks, the cabin car was very sad. Have you ever had something you loved taken away? What did you do?
- John said he would fix the cabin car. Has someone ever helped fix something special to you?

Grades 2–3

- Why do you think so many people helped John fix the cabin car, even though it wasn't theirs?
- John loved having the cabin car near his house. Why did he decide to give it away? What does that tell us about him?
- The cabin car missed "rolling clackety-clack down the tracks." Have you ever felt like you were not where you were supposed to be?

Grade 4

- Nathaniel Guest writes that John "saw our potential when others did not." What does it mean to see potential in something or someone?
- At the end of the story, both John and the cabin car feel they are "exactly where they are meant to be." Do you think people always end up where they belong? Why or why not?
- What is the difference between preserving something because it is old and preserving something because it still has a job to do? How do we decide if something has value?

Activities

"My Purpose" Journal (Grades K–2)

Give each student a folded half-sheet of paper. On one side: draw yourself doing something you love. On the other side: complete the sentence, "I am meant to _____.". Share in a class circle.

Gratitude Letter (Grades 2–4)

Ask students to think of someone who helped them during a difficult time. Write a short letter to that person (modeled on Nathaniel Guest's letter to John at the end of the book). Letters may be shared, mailed, or kept privately.

Acts of Generosity Chart (Grades 1–4)

Create a classroom chart with two columns: "John's Act" and "A Time I Did Something Like That." Students brainstorm each of John's generous decisions (buying the cabin car, inviting friends, giving it away) and find personal parallels.

♦ Teacher Tips

- The afterword by Nathaniel Guest is rich with adult vocabulary and themes; paraphrase it for younger grades and read it aloud, in full, to Grade 4.
- The dedication ("For John Pfaltz, who knows that we all have a purpose") is a powerful discussion starter for all grade levels.
- For students experiencing personal difficulty, the cabin car's "long wait on the siding" can be a powerful metaphor. Handle with care and affirmation.

Section 2: English Language Arts · Grades K–4 | Standards: PA Core ELA: CC.1.1–CC.1.5; CC.1.3.K–4

The book provides a mentor text for narrative structure, vocabulary development, point of view, and informational writing. The first-person narration by the cabin car is a distinctive literary choice that supports study of perspective and voice.

Literary Elements

- Point of View: The cabin car narrates its own story. Ask: How would this story be different if John told it?
- Narrative Arc: Beginning (purpose + happiness) → Problem (tornado, rust, abandonment) → Rising Action (John + volunteers) → Resolution (Colebrookdale) → Reflection (afterword).
- Figurative Language: "clackety-clack," "swirled and whirled" — onomatopoeia and internal rhyme.
- Text Features: The book moves between narrative fiction and informational nonfiction (the afterword). Discuss how authors shift modes.

Discussion Questions

Grades K–1

- The cabin car says, "I loved my job!" What words in the story show it is happy?
- When did the story make you feel worried? When did it make you feel happy?
- Who is telling this story? Could a real train car talk? Why do you think the author chose to let the train car tell the story?

Grades 2–3

- Find two words in the story that describe sounds. What kind of words are those called?
- The story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. What is the main problem? How is it solved?
- Why does the author use bigger and bigger letters during the storm? How does that make you feel as a reader?

Grade 4

- The story is fiction, but the afterword is nonfiction. How can you tell the difference? What clues does the author give?
- Compare how Diane Bakos describes the restoration and how Nathaniel Guest describes it. What is similar? What is different?
- Write a new scene: John is telling his friends about the day he first saw the cabin car. Write it from John's point of view.

Vocabulary Development

Use the vocabulary table below as a pre-reading activity, a during-reading reference, or a post-reading assessment. Students complete the "Used in a Sentence" column independently.

Term	Definition	Used in a Sentence
<i>cabin car</i>	A special railroad car at the end of a freight train where the brakeman and conductor worked and rested. Also called a caboose.	<i>(Student writes here)</i>
<i>conductor</i>	A railroad employee who is in charge of a train and its passengers, and announces stops.	<i>(Student writes here)</i>
<i>brakeman</i>	A railroad worker who helped operate the train's brakes and watched for problems along the track.	<i>(Student writes here)</i>
<i>cupola</i>	A small, raised lookout tower on the roof of a cabin car, with windows for watching the train ahead.	<i>(Student writes here)</i>
<i>excursion train</i>	A train that takes passengers on a fun or scenic ride for pleasure, not just transportation.	<i>(Student writes here)</i>
<i>siding</i>	A short section of railroad track beside the main track, used to park cars or let trains pass.	<i>(Student writes here)</i>
<i>restoration</i>	The process of returning something old or damaged to its original good condition.	<i>(Student writes here)</i>
<i>scrapyard</i>	A place where old, broken, or unwanted metal objects are collected, often to be melted down.	<i>(Student writes here)</i>

Writing Activities

Narrative: A Different Point of View (Grades 1–4)

Retell one scene from the book from a different character's point of view: John, one of the volunteers, a child riding the excursion train, or the locomotive that pulled the cabin car to John's home. Grades 1–2 write three to five sentences with a drawing; Grades 3–4 write a full paragraph or short page.

Informational: Train Car Research Report (Grades 3–4)

Students choose a type of railroad car (boxcar, flatcar, tank car, passenger car, locomotive) and research its purpose, history, and appearance. They write a short report modeled on the book's afterword, including at least two facts and one illustration.

Opinion Writing: Should We Save Old Things? (Grades 2–4)

Students write an opinion paragraph answering: "Do you think it is important to save and restore old things like Cabin Car 477768? Why or why not?" Teach the frame: State your opinion → Give two reasons → Conclude with a strong sentence.

◆ Teacher Tips

- The book's use of first-person narration by an inanimate object connects to the literary device of personification — a Grade 3–4 standard. Name it explicitly.
- The typographic storm (growing text, scattered layout) offers a rare opportunity to discuss how visual design can convey emotion in a picture book.
- The afterword includes several complex sentences that are excellent for grammar study at Grades 3–4 (compound sentences, appositives, relative clauses).

Section 3: Mathematics · Grades K–4 | Standards: PA Core Math: CC.2.1–CC.2.4; CC.2.3.2

The story offers natural opportunities for counting, place value, measurement, data, and basic geometry — all grounded in the real, tangible world of a railroad car that students may actually visit.

Discussion Questions & Warm-Ups

- What number is on the cabin car? How many digits does it have? What is the value of each digit? (Grades 1–4: place value)
- Count the wheels on the cabin car. If a full train has ten cars like the cabin car, how many wheels would there be? (Grades 1–3: multiplication concept)
- The cabin car waited "days... and weeks... and months." Approximately how many days is three months? (Grades 2–4: calendar math)
- The cabin car traveled from Virginia to Pennsylvania. Estimate: how many miles do you think that is? How could you find the real answer? (Grades 3–4: estimation, mapping)

Hands-On Activities

Number 477768: Place Value Investigation (Grades 2–4)

- Write the number 477,768 on the board.
- Ask: How many hundred-thousands? Ten-thousands? Thousands? Hundreds? Tens? Ones?
- Extension: Write the number in expanded form. Round to the nearest thousand.
- Discussion: Why do railroads give cars numbers? What would happen if two cars had the same number?

Cabin Car Geometry (Grades 2–4)

Using a photograph or illustration of Cabin Car 477768, students identify and count geometric shapes: rectangles (sides and windows), circles (wheels), triangles (steps), and trapezoids (the cupola shape). They record their findings in a simple table.

Rebuild-the-Railroad Math Story Problems (Grades 1–4)

Create grade-appropriate word problems connected to the story:

- K–1: John has 4 friends helping. 2 more friends arrive. How many friends are helping now?
- Grade 2: The volunteers sanded 3 sides of the cabin car on Monday and 2 sides on Tuesday. How many sides have been sanded in all? How many are left? (The cabin car has 4 sides plus the roof and floor.)
- Grade 3: The Colebrookdale Railroad has 14 railroad cars and engines. If there are twice as many cars as engines, how many engines are there?
- Grade 4: A single rail is 39 feet long. If The Colebrookdale Railroad has 4.5 miles of track, approximately how many rails are needed? (1 mile = 5,280 feet)

Timeline & Measurement (Grades 3–4)

Students create a timeline of the cabin car's life using approximate dates: built as a Pennsylvania Railroad car (early 20th century); used in freight service; moved to excursion service; tornado damage; rescued by John Pfaltz; donated to The Colebrookdale Railroad; returned to service. Calculate approximately how many years passed between key events.

◆ Teacher Tips

- The number 477,768 provides a natural bridge between ELA (it's the cabin car's name) and place value. This cross-curricular hook is highly memorable for students.
- If you visit The Colebrookdale Railroad, have students measure the cabin car's dimensions and calculate its area and perimeter as a real-world geometry activity.
- Differentiation: For K–1, use manipulatives (cubes, tiles) to model the story problems. For Grade 4, encourage students to write their own word problems using facts from the book.

Section 4: Science & Technology · Grades K–4 | Standards: PA Academic Standards: 3.1, 3.2, 3.4; NGSS Connections

The story introduces several natural science concepts (weather, oxidation) and engineering and technology concepts (train systems, restoration) that support inquiry-based science instruction.

Concept 1: Weather — Tornadoes

Background for Teachers

A tornado is a violently rotating column of air extending from a thunderstorm to the ground. The book portrays the tornado's wind dramatically breaking apart the railroad track. Pennsylvania averages 16 tornadoes per year, making this a locally relevant weather hazard.

- What is the difference between a thunderstorm and a tornado?
- What does the phrase "swirled and whirled" tell us about how tornadoes move?
- How do meteorologists predict tornadoes? What warning signals should people know?
- Activity — Tornado in a Bottle: Students build a tornado model using two 2-liter bottles, water, glitter, and a connector. Observe the vortex and compare to the story's description.
- Extension (Grades 3–4): Research the Enhanced Fujita Scale. What category tornado could damage a railroad track? Compare tornado preparedness in Pennsylvania to Tornado Alley states.

Concept 2: Rust and Oxidation

Background for Teachers

The book describes the cabin car's "steel walls" growing rusty after sitting unused. Rust is iron oxide, formed when iron or steel reacts with oxygen and water. It is a form of corrosion that weakens metal over time.

- Why did the cabin car get rusty? What two things do you need for rust to form?
- Why is rust a problem for a railroad car? Could a rusty cabin car be safe to ride?
- How did the volunteers fix the rust? What does "sanded away" mean?
- Activity — Rust Experiment: Place iron nails in four conditions: dry air, water only, saltwater, and sealed dry container. Observe daily for one week. Graph results. Which condition caused the most rust?
- Discussion: Engineers who design bridges and trains use special paints and coatings to prevent rust. What other materials don't rust? (Stainless steel, aluminum, plastic)

Concept 3: How Trains Work

- What makes a train move? (Steam, diesel, electric — introduce energy sources by grade level)
- What do wheels and rails do? Why does the shape of the wheel matter? (The flange keeps the wheel on the rail.)
- The cabin car had a wood stove inside. What kind of energy does a wood stove use? Is it renewable?
- Activity — Simple Machine Connections (Grades 2–4): A train wheel is a type of wheel-and-axle simple machine. Show examples of simple machines in the story: the ladder to the cupola (inclined plane / steps), the stove (energy converter), the coupling that connects cars (lever concept).

✦ Teacher Tips

- The rust experiment works best starting Monday so results are visible by Friday. Use a photo log for documentation.
- Connecting the cabin car's restoration to material science (steel, paint, wood) opens a natural engineering design challenge: "Design a coating that prevents rust."
- For grades K–1, focus on the observable aspects: What did the cabin car look like before and after restoration? How do you know it was fixed?

Section 5: Social Studies & Pennsylvania Geography · Grades K–4 |

Standards: PA Academic Standards: 8.1–8.3, 7.1–7.3; C&E Standards

The story spans more than a century of Pennsylvania history and touches on railroading, community development, volunteerism, economic change, and the preservation of cultural heritage — all core social studies themes.

Pennsylvania Geography

Mapping the Story (All Grades)

Using a Pennsylvania map, students locate and label the key places in the cabin car's journey:

- Mariensville, Forest County — Knox & Kane Railroad, where John found the cabin car.
- Virginia — where John brought the cabin car first for restoration.
- Boyertown, Berks County — The Colebrookdale Railroad's home, the cabin car's final destination.
- The Colebrookdale Creek (Secret Valley) — the scenic corridor through which the railroad runs.

Discussion: Why might Boyertown be called the cabin car's "first home"? (Pennsylvania Railroad was based in Pennsylvania.)

Pennsylvania History & Railroading

- The Pennsylvania Railroad was once the largest railroad in the United States. When did it operate? What happened to it?
- What other jobs did railroads do in Pennsylvania's history? (Transporting coal, steel, farm products, passengers)
- Why did railroads stop using cabin cars / cabooses? What technology replaced them?
- Activity — Pennsylvania Railroad Timeline: Students create an illustrated timeline of Pennsylvania railroad history, from the early horse-drawn railways of the 1820s through the decline of the Pennsylvania Railroad to today's heritage railroads.

Community & Civic Life

- The cabin car was saved by a community effort. What is a community? What makes people work together?
- Heritage railroads like The Colebrookdale depend on volunteers. What is volunteerism? What volunteers have you seen in your own community?
- The book describes how The Colebrookdale Railroad brings people from "far and wide" to Boyertown. How can a railroad or museum help a town?
- Activity — Community Resource Map (Grades 2–4): Students draw or label a map of their own community, identifying places that were saved, repaired, or built by community members working together.

Economic Change & Preservation

For Grade 4: The story illustrates how industries change over time. The Pennsylvania Railroad, once the largest corporation in the world, eventually went bankrupt in 1970. Cabin Car 477768 went from a working freight car to an excursion car, then was nearly scrapped. Discuss: What is economic change? What happens to communities when major industries close? How do heritage railroads and other preservation efforts help?

♦ Teacher Tips

- Berks County and the Boyertown area have rich Pennsylvania Dutch heritage. Connect the railroad's role in this region to the agricultural economy it once served.
- The Colebrookdale Railroad's mission explicitly connects to community regeneration. This is an excellent opening for discussing what makes a healthy community.
- Pennsylvania has more heritage railroads than almost any other state. Consider assigning students to research a heritage railroad near their own home.

Section 6: Visual Arts · Grades K–4 | Standards: PA Academic Standards: 9.1–9.4 (Arts & Humanities)

The illustrations by Fatima Bilal give students rich visual texts for study. This section also includes hands-on art projects that extend the book's themes and develop fine-motor and creative skills.

Visual Literacy Discussion

- Look at the book's cover illustration. Before reading, what do you predict the story will be about? What clues does the art give you?
- The illustrator gives the cabin car a face. What emotion do you see in each picture? How does the artist show feelings without using words?
- During the tornado scene, the words of the story are arranged in a swirling pattern. How does that design choice make you feel? Have you seen other books where the words are part of the art?
- What colors does the illustrator use most often? Why might she have chosen those colors for a train story? (Tuscan red was the Pennsylvania Railroad's classic color.)

Art Projects

Build a Train Car (Grades K–2)

Using cardboard tubes (paper towel or toilet paper rolls), construction paper, bottle caps for wheels, and markers, students build their own model train car. They give it a name and a number, decorate it in their chosen "railroad's" colors, and write one sentence about what job their car does.

Before and After Art (Grades 1–3)

Students fold a piece of paper in half. On the left: draw the cabin car rusty, broken, and sad. On the right: draw it repaired, painted red, and happy. Focus on using color and expression to show the change. Display as a classroom gallery.

Design Your Own Ticket (Grades 1–4)

Students design a train ticket for a fictional ride on The Colebrookdale Railroad. Their ticket must include: railroad name, departure location, destination, date, and a small illustration. Discuss the elements of graphic design: layout, font choices, images, and color.

Train Memory Game (Grades K–4)

Students draw and color pairs of train-related images (locomotive, cabin car, station, ticket, bell, signal, tracks, bridge, tunnel) on index cards. Cards are mounted on cardstock and used to play a classic matching memory game. This activity reinforces vocabulary and can be sent home with families.

Photo Book / Class Journal (Grades K–4)

Document the curriculum unit with photographs. Students write captions for each activity. Compile into a class book. This models the author's craft of combining words and images to tell a true story — connecting back to the book's own form.

♦ Teacher Tips

- Pennsylvania Railroad Tuscan red (a deep brownish-red) is a historically significant color. Show students examples of PRR equipment and discuss how color becomes part of an organization's identity.
- The book's typography during the storm is an excellent mentor text for students experimenting with visual poetry or concrete poetry.
- If you visit The Colebrookdale, assign students to sketch one car or detail that interests them on-site.

Section 7: Music · Grades K–4 | Standards: PA Academic Standards: 9.1–9.4 (Arts & Humanities); National Core Arts Standards

Trains have inspired musicians and songwriters for generations. This section connects the book's themes and soundscape to music education through listening, movement, composition, and cultural study.

The Sounds of Trains

- Listen carefully. What sounds does a train make? (Wheels on rails, whistle, bell, steam, conductor's call.) Make a list on the board.
- The story uses "clackety-clack" to describe the sound of wheels on rails. What kind of word is that? (Onomatopoeia.) Can you think of other onomatopoeia words that describe sounds?
- The train's bells rings, or its whistle blows, when the train is moving or stopping. Why is sound communication important on a railroad?

Train Songs & Musical Heritage

Train songs are a major tradition in American folk, blues, country, and gospel music. Introduce students to the following categories and representative examples for classroom listening:

- Work songs: Train songs grew from the labor of building America's railroads.
- Folk and traditional: Classic railroad folk songs capture the culture of train travel in the 19th and early 20th centuries.
- Children's songs: "Down by the Station," "I've Been Working on the Railroad" — lyrics, rhythms, and call-and-response.
- Film and storytelling: Film scores that evoke trains through driving rhythms and whistling melodies.

For each selection: What instruments do you hear? What mood does the music create? Does it make you feel like you are on a moving train?

Composition Activity: Our Train Song (Grades K–4)

- Step 1: As a class, brainstorm train sounds and words from the story.
- Step 2: Create a simple rhythmic pattern using body percussion (clap, stomp, pat) to represent the train wheels. Practice together.
- Step 3: Add a simple melodic phrase (spoken or sung): "Cabin car, cabin car, rolling down the track / Cabin car, cabin car, brakeman on the back."
- Step 4: Add verses that students invent, each describing a part of the cabin car's journey.
- Step 5: Perform the class composition with conductor signals — one student is the conductor who signals start, stop, fast, and slow.

♦ Teacher Tips

- "I've Been Working on the Railroad" is in the public domain and appropriate for classroom use. Work with your school music teacher to integrate formal music instruction alongside this unit.
- The rhythm of "clackety-clack" (short-short-long) is a natural entry point for introducing rhythm notation: two eighth notes and a quarter note.
- Oral history: Many students will have grandparents or community members who remember train travel before highways became dominant. Consider a classroom visitor.

Section 8: Health & Physical Education · Grades K–4 | Standards: PA Academic Standards: 10.4, 10.5 (Health & PE)

Movement activities bring the story to life physically while developing gross motor skills, cooperation, and body awareness. These activities are appropriate for the classroom, gym, or outdoor space.

Movement Activities

"All Aboard" Train (Grades K–2)

Students line up one behind the other, each with hands on the shoulders of the person in front. The leader is the engineer. The class moves together through the room or hallway making train sounds. When the teacher calls "switch," the front student moves to the back and a new engineer leads. Discuss cooperation: Why must everyone move at the same speed? What happens if someone pushes or pulls too hard?

Freight Sorting Relay (Grades 1–4)

Set up a relay race in which students carry "cargo" (beanbags, soft blocks) from one end of the gym to the other and sort them by color or shape (representing different types of freight: grain, coal, lumber). Discuss: What did Pennsylvania railroads carry? Why did freight movement matter to communities?

Tornado Safety Movement Break (Grades K–4)

Teach tornado safety positions (crouch down, protect your head) and weather signal words through a movement game. When the teacher calls "Thunderstorm!" — everyone sways arms. "Tornado!" — everyone drops to a safety crouch. "All Clear!" — everyone stands and moves to a designated "safe station." Connect to the science discussion on tornado safety.

Restoration Obstacle Course (Grades 2–4)

Design a simple obstacle course that mirrors the cabin car's restoration: crawl under a table ("sanding rust"), carry a block to a box ("replacing a board"), roll a ball through cones ("painting the new side"), and ring a bell at the finish ("she's ready!"). Groups time each other and cheer at the finish.

♦ Teacher Tips

- The train movement activity builds cooperative skills — a strong bridge to the Character Education SEL section.
- Tornado safety is a legitimate emergency preparedness topic in Pennsylvania. Align with your school's emergency preparedness curriculum.
- The freight sorting relay can be made more cognitively demanding by labeling cargo with math problems that students must solve before sorting.

Section 9: Field Trip Guide — The Colebrookdale Railroad · Grades K–4 | Standards: Experiential Learning Extension

A visit to The Colebrookdale Railroad in Boyertown, Pennsylvania, transforms the book from a story into a living experience. Students can see Cabin Car 477768 in person, ride the train through the Secret Valley, and meet the volunteers who keep the railroad alive.

Before the Visit

- Read the book aloud and complete at least one discussion activity from each of the ELA, Social Studies, and Character Education sections.
- Study a map: locate Boyertown on a Pennsylvania map and trace the route from your school.
- Create a class KWL chart: What do we Know? What do we Want to know? (Save What we Learned for after the visit.)
- Assign student "jobs" modeled on railroad roles: engineer, conductor, brakeman, historian, artist, journalist, mathematician.

During the Visit

- Find Cabin Car 477768. Can students find the number on the car? Where is the cupola? Can they count the wheels?
- Journalists: Take notes or sketches of what you observe. What is the same as the book? What is different or more detailed?
- Artists: Sketch one car, one detail, or one view from the train window.
- Mathematicians: Count the cars, measure the station platform (pacing), estimate the height of the locomotive.
- Listen carefully: What sounds does the real train make? How does "clackety-clack" compare to the real sound?

After the Visit

- Complete the KWL chart. What did students learn that surprised them?
- Write a class thank-you letter to The Colebrookdale Railroad and its volunteers.
- Students write their own short "story" of the cabin car from their own perspective as a passenger.
- Create a class display: combine sketches, writing, photos, and maps into a classroom "Colebrookdale Exhibit."

♦ Teacher Tips

- Contact The Colebrookdale Railroad in advance to arrange an educator briefing. Staff and volunteers are enthusiastic partners in education programs.
- The Colebrookdale runs excursion trains on scheduled days; plan well in advance for school groups.
- The railroad operates through the Colebrookdale Creek valley — a beautiful example of Pennsylvania's natural landscape that connects to science and geography standards.

Section 10: Assessment Strategies · Grades K–4 | Standards: Formative and Summative

Formative Assessment (During the Unit)

- Exit ticket: "One thing I learned today" + "One question I still have."
- Discussion observation: Use a simple checklist to note which students contribute to discussion, what kinds of comments they make, and whether they cite evidence from the text.
- Vocabulary check: Quick partner quiz — one student defines the term, partner gives a thumbs up or helps correct.
- Drawing + caption: Students illustrate one scene and write a one-sentence caption. Review for comprehension and vocabulary use.

Summative Assessment Options

Option A — My Own Story (Grades K–2)

Students write and illustrate a short book (3–5 pages) about something in their community that was "saved" or repaired — a park, a building, a tree, an animal, a friendship. Assess for: narrative structure, use of at least one vocabulary word, clear beginning/middle/end, and expressive illustration.

Option B — Preservation Report (Grades 3–4)

Students research a historic landmark, vehicle, building, or artifact in Pennsylvania that has been preserved or restored. They write a two-page report covering: what it is, why it was important, what happened to it, who saved it, and why it matters today. Modeled on the book's own afterword.

Option C — Interdisciplinary Portfolio (All Grades)

Students compile a portfolio containing: their vocabulary sentences, one piece of writing (narrative or opinion), their math problems, their train car art project, and a reflection: "What is the most important thing I learned from the story of Cabin Car 477768?"

Rubric Guidance

Criteria	4 — Exceeds	3 — Meets	2 — Approaching	1 — Beginning
Comprehension	Demonstrates deep understanding; cites specific text evidence	Shows solid understanding of main events and characters	Shows partial understanding; some details confused	Minimal understanding demonstrated
Vocabulary	Uses 3+ unit vocabulary words accurately in writing	Uses 1–2 vocabulary words accurately	Attempts vocabulary; some errors	Little or no vocabulary use
Writing / Expression	Clear, complete writing with strong voice and	Complete writing with minor errors	Partially complete; some errors	Incomplete or very limited writing

Criteria	4 — Exceeds	3 — Meets	2 — Approaching	1 — Beginning
	correct conventions			
Creativity / Effort	Exceptional creativity; clear sustained effort	Good creativity; solid effort	Some creativity; adequate effort	Minimal creativity or effort

Appendix: Pennsylvania Academic Standards Alignment · Grades K–4

Subject	PA Academic Standards	National Framework
English Language Arts	PA Core ELA: CC.1.1 (Foundational Skills), CC.1.2 (Informational Text), CC.1.3 (Literature), CC.1.4 (Writing), CC.1.5 (Speaking & Listening)	CCSS ELA-Literacy; NCTE Standards
Mathematics	PA Core Math: CC.2.1 (Numbers & Operations), CC.2.2 (Algebraic Concepts), CC.2.3 (Geometry), CC.2.4 (Measurement & Data)	CCSS Math Standards
Science & Technology	PA Academic Standards: 3.1 (Biological Sciences), 3.2 (Physical Sciences), 3.3 (Earth & Space), 3.4 (Technology & Engineering)	NGSS: ESS2, PS1, ETS1
Social Studies	PA Academic Standards: 5.1–5.4 (Civics), 6.1–6.5 (Economics), 7.1–7.3 (Geography), 8.1–8.3 (History)	C3 Framework for Social Studies
Arts & Humanities	PA Academic Standards: 9.1 (Production), 9.2 (Historical/Cultural Contexts), 9.3 (Critical Response), 9.4 (Aesthetic Response)	National Core Arts Standards
Health & Physical Education	PA Academic Standards: 10.4 (Physical Activity), 10.5 (Concepts & Strategies)	SHAPE America Standards
Character Education / SEL	PA Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Health Framework	CASEL SEL Competencies

About the Book & the Railroad

The BIG Adventures of a Little Cabin Car was written by Diane Bakos and illustrated by Fatima Bilal. It is published as part of The Colebrookdale Railroad Collection, a series of books celebrating the history and community mission of The Colebrookdale Railroad Preservation Trust, based in Boyertown, Pennsylvania.

The Colebrookdale Railroad operates excursion trains through the Colebrookdale Creek valley — known as the Secret Valley — on rails that date to the 19th century. The railroad is staffed almost entirely by volunteers and is dedicated to connecting people to place, history, and one another through the living experience of heritage rail travel.

To learn more, plan a school visit, or inquire about educator programs, contact The Colebrookdale Railroad at colebrookdalerrailroad.org.