

# Streetcar!

W.M. Akers

“That!” said Francis. “I want to ride on that!”

“Put your hand down,” said Mom. “It’s rude to point.”

Francis didn’t care what was rude. This was the coolest thing he’d seen on his entire vacation, and he wanted to make sure everyone knew about it. Francis and his family were in New Orleans, and even though the city was supposed to be fun, Francis couldn’t tell why. They had spent the entire day walking back and forth on streets that all looked the same. At each corner there would be another old house. On the second floor would be a crummy-looking wrought iron balcony. The houses were all different colors, which should have been fun, but the colors were boring pastels. They were girl colors, which explained why Francis’ sister, Angela, was so excited by them.

“Oh wow, Dad,” she would say. “Look at the detailing on that ironwork.”

“Why don’t they make the iron into fun shapes?” asked Francis. “Like swords or rocket ships or pirates.”

“You don’t understand anything about detailing.”

Detailing was Angela’s new favorite word. She used it about 15 times an hour. She had also taken to correcting the way Francis said things. If he saw Burgundy Street and said the word like the color, she would say, “Actually, they say it ‘*Bur-GUN-dy*.’” If he tried to sound out

Chartres Street, saying it like “charts,” she would testily insist that it was pronounced “charter,” even though it wasn’t even spelled like that. New Orleans was confusing.

But finally he had seen something that made perfect sense. Something that wasn’t confusing or boring or pastel: a streetcar, trundling down the middle of the road, with a hook connecting it to the cable above.

“Can we ride on it?” he asked. “Pleeeeeeease?”

“Ugh,” said Angela. Ugh was her other favorite word. “Streetcars are for tourists.”

“But we are tourists! And buildings are for losers.”

And with that, Francis did the only thing he could to save the afternoon. He ran, pounding his feet on the sidewalk, huffing and puffing in a mad dash to get to the streetcar before it moved on and took all the fun in the world with it.

“Angela! Go after your brother!”

Mom and Dad weren’t much for running, so they let Angela do it for them. She charged after Francis, her long legs making up the ground easily. But he had too good a head start. He leapt onto the back of the small red streetcar, landing perfectly. Angela stumbled as she jumped and landed flat on her face.

“Two bucks!” asked the conductor.

“It’s on me,” said Francis, as he extracted two wrinkled dollar bills from his pocket.

“All right, let’s go,” said Angela, as she dragged herself to her feet.

“We are going! Look!”

And Angela saw that it was too late. They were already on their way. Panicked, she asked the conductor where the streetcar was headed.

“You get on the car, you don’t know where it’s going?” asked the conductor, whose New Orleans accent was as thick as cane syrup.

“Just tell me!”

“We go to the aquarium.”

As Angela frantically texted her parents to meet them at the aquarium, Francis watched the city slide by beside them. At that speed, the buildings didn’t look so boring. They seemed to blend together, swirling into an unbroken streak of pastels. Even the silly balconies started to look like a fun place to put your feet up and have a soda. And on his left was the river, wide and flat and brown and magnificent.

“I can see why they call it Big Muddy,” he said, as his sister plopped down onto the seat beside him, inspecting her skinned knee.

“What?”

“I said, I see why people call the river Big Muddy. I guess it is pretty cool how old this town is.”

“Yeah,” she said. “And look at the ironwork on the side of the streetcar!”

“The detailing is wonnnnnnnnderful,” he said, and she socked him playfully on the shoulder.

“I guess a streetcar ride wasn’t such a bad idea after all.”

“And just wait until we get to the aquarium!”

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What does Francis want to ride?

- A** a bicycle
- B** a roller coaster
- C** an elephant
- D** a streetcar

2. What is the setting of this story?

- A** San Francisco
- B** Los Angeles
- C** New Orleans
- D** New York City

3. Read these sentences from the story: "Francis and his family were in New Orleans, and even though the city was supposed to be fun, Francis couldn't tell why. They had spent the entire day walking back and forth on streets that all looked the same. At each corner there would be another old house. On the second floor would be a crummy-looking wrought iron balcony."

What can be concluded from these sentences?

- A** Francis wishes that his family had a balcony on the second floor of their house.
- B** Francis does not enjoy looking at houses in New Orleans.
- C** Francis is worried that he and his family will get lost in New Orleans.
- D** Francis wants to see more old houses in New Orleans.

4. Compared to Francis, how does Angela feel about the houses in New Orleans?

- A** Angela likes the houses in New Orleans more than Francis does.
- B** Angela likes the houses in New Orleans less than Francis does.
- C** Angela likes the houses in New Orleans as much as Francis does.
- D** Unlike Francis, Angela does not have strong feelings about the houses in New Orleans.

5. What is a theme of this story?

- A** People who seem mean when you first meet them can turn out to be nice.
- B** People who seem to dislike children often ride streetcars.
- C** A place that seems safe can turn out to be dangerous.
- D** A place that seems boring can turn out to be fun.

6. Read the following sentences: "And on his left was the river, wide and flat and brown and magnificent.

"I can see why **they call it Big Muddy**," he said."

What does "**they call it Big Muddy**" mean?

- A People refer to the river as "Big Muddy."
- B When people in New Orleans get upset, they say, "Big Muddy."
- C Francis and Angela think the streetcar should be named "Big Muddy."
- D It is easier to say "Big Muddy" than "wide and flat and brown and magnificent."

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Francis does not enjoy walking past houses in New Orleans, \_\_\_\_\_ he enjoys riding past them on a streetcar.

- A thus
- B namely
- C but
- D so

8. Where is the streetcar going?

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9. Why do the buildings look less boring to Francis from the streetcar?

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10. Does riding the streetcar change Francis's attitude toward New Orleans? Explain why or why not, using evidence from the story.

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## Teacher Guide &amp; Answers

**Passage Reading Level:** Lexile 700

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8. Where is the streetcar going?

**Suggested answer:** The streetcar is going to the aquarium.

9. Why do the buildings look less boring to Francis from the streetcar?

**Suggested answer:** Responses may vary as long as they reflect the story. The buildings look less boring to Francis from the streetcar because of the speed at which the streetcar is moving. They seem to blend together in a pastel streak, and the balconies on them seem like fun places to put up your feet and have a soda.

10. Does riding the streetcar change Francis's attitude toward New Orleans? Explain why or why not, using evidence from the story.

**Suggested answer:** Students should recognize that riding the streetcar does change Francis's attitude toward New Orleans. He begins to enjoy things about the city that he didn't before, such as the buildings and how old it is.