

Masterclass 1 Multiple-Choice Comprehension Extract.

The Train Disaster.

1 Quite the oddest of many accidents associated with track repair work happened on the line
2 between Brighton and Lewes on June 6th 1851. Steam locomotive number 82 was running down
3 the slope between Falmer and Lewes with a passenger train. At a point where a high brick bridge
4 carries the line over a lane below, the train struck a sleeper* which was lying across one of the
5 railway lines and became derailed. The engine and two coaches fell into the lane below, killing
6 three passengers and the fireman*. The driver was terribly injured and died later.

7 How did the sleeper come to be lying over the railway track? There were a number of sleepers at
8 the side of the line because rebuilding the track was in progress although all the workers carrying
9 out this work were several hundred yards away from the spot where the accident occurred. They
10 strongly denied that they had left one of the sleepers lying on the railway track and it was alleged
11 that it was a wilful prank carried out by Jimmy Boakes, a ten year old boy who lived with his parents
12 in a cottage beside the railway line. Although it is highly improbable that he could have had the
13 strength to lift a nine foot long, heavy wooden sleeper on to the track, the wretched child was
14 subjected to a very thorough examination by Mr William Acton, the Railway Superintendent of
15 Police, at the Inquiry into the accident. But Mr Acton failed to trap the boy in to making any
16 confession of guilt and the mystery of how the sleeper came to be lying on the track remained
17 unsolved.

18 Now comes the curious sequel. Exactly a year later, on the same day and same month of the
19 accident and in exactly the same spot, Jimmy Boakes was struck by lightning and killed instantly.
20 Such an extraordinary coincidence proves nothing, but no doubt it was spoken of with relish by
21 the local priests in their churches as an example of the terrible consequence of divine retribution.

*Sleepers. The long bars which the metal railway lines rest on to keep the track secure and steady. In 1851, each sleeper was made of very heavy lengths of wood.

* Fireman. The driver's assistant who shovelled coal into the fire on a steam engine to keep the supply of steam going.

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[email mrsglassononline@gmail.com](mailto:mrsglassononline@gmail.com) with your Mock Test 2,3,4 enrolment details.

*Masterclass 1: Monday 7th September 2026 at 6.30pm.

Masterclass 2: Monday 21st September 2026 at 6.30pm.