

**Faculty of Commerce and
Management**

**B.COM. II SEMESTER III
Subject : Compulsory English**

Travel by Train

J. B. Priestley

John Boynton Priestley (1894 1984) was an English novelist, playwright, scriptwriter, social commentator, public speaker and broadcaster.

Priestley served in the army during the First World War.

After military service, Priestley completed his university education at Trinity Hall, Cambridge.

By the age of 30, he had established a reputation as an essayist and critic.

The Good Companions (1929) established Priestley as a novelist. In 1934 he published the travelogue English Journey, an account of what he saw and heard while travelling through the country at the height of the Depression.

He received several honours in the later part of life.

He declined both a Knighthood and a Peerage but in 1977 accepted the Order of Merit.

Travel by Train is a humorous account of the kind of fellow passengers we usually encounter on a train journey.

The caricatures drawn by Priestley tickle the funny bone of the readers and bring to life the circumstances of travelling with such people.

As the essayist entertains and engages us with his close observations, he also subtly and indirectly triggers the memory of a similar experience we have had on a train journey.

In this prose, Priestley describes short caricatures of:

- **The middle-aged women**
- **The heavy carriers**
- **The non-stop eaters**
- **The noisy children**
- **The cranks**
- **The innocent people**
- **The mighty sleepers**
- **The seafaring men**
- **The confidential strangers**
- **The elderly man**

The middle-aged women

The middle-aged women

Priestley explains the middle-aged woman as a person with a rasping voice and a face of brass. She evades into the smoking compartments that are already filled with smokers. She is described as a character who comes in shouting and bustling and she is accompanied by a dog that is only one degree less offensive than her.

The heavy carriers

They are the passengers who would go on a journey, taking all their odd chattels and household utensils, parceling them up in brown paper. Furthermore, they also carry baskets of fruits and bunch of flowers to add to their own and other people's misery.

The non-stop eaters

They are described as simple folks who board the railway carriages for the sole purpose of eating and drinking. Once they are settled, they pass each other tattered sandwiches and scrapes of pastry, and talking with their mouths full, and scattering crumbs over the trousers of fastidious old gentlemen.

The noisy children

The children are not good to travel with while on a train journey.

They whimper and howl throughout the journey.

In addition, they spend all their time daubing their faces with chocolate or trying to climb out of the window.

The cranks

The cranks are described as those who insist on keeping the windows open during the cold and desolate day.

However, they do not allow the windows to be open in the oppressively hot season due to the fear cold air rushing in.

The innocent people

They are the ones who always board the wrong train.

Neither do they have the understanding to interpret the complicated railway time-tables nor do they ask the railway officials for advice.

They climb into the train that comes first. In the midst of the journey, with a sudden look round the carriage, they enquire whether they are on the right train or not.

The writer has often wondered, whether these people will ever reach their destination.

The mighty sleepers

They are the ones who have sleep at their command.

Once they get into the train, they compose themselves and are off to sleep in a moment. Two minutes or so from their destination,

they wake up, collect their baggage and a moment later they go out, alert and refreshed. The author

describes these mighty sleepers as the descendants of the Seven of Ephesus

The Seven of Ephesus

It refers to the legend of seven noble Christians who lived in Ephesus, an ancient Greek city, who were fleeing the persecution of Emperor Decius.

They took refuge in a cave.

The Emperor knowing this, ordered the caves to be closed.

But as a heavenly intervention, these noble Christians fell into a deep sleep for 187 years.

When the cave was opened, these men came to know that Christianity was established in their county; they narrated their story and died.

The seafaring men

They make good companions on a railway journey because they are always ready for a crack with any man, and there is always an entertaining matter in their talk. But they can only be met in the coastal towns.

The confidential strangers

The confidential strangers are rarely seen and are compared to a very dull dog, which compels the co-passenger to yawn through the lengthy story of his life. He takes pleasure in talking things of his own interest.

The elderly man

The elderly man is a neatly dressed person who is always seated in a corner. He opens his conversation by pulling out a golden hunter and remarking that the train is at least three minutes behind time.

And from then on, his talk will be all of trains.

The author warns the readers to be aware of the elderly man, for he is the Ancient Mariner of railway travelers

