

Picture It!

A Creative Adventure Inspired by The Boxcar Children®

Dear Educators,

The first chapter book of the beloved Boxcar Children® series is now a full-color graphic novel. In celebration of its release, this free educational program from Random House Children's Books and Young Minds Inspired invites students to use their own resourcefulness and teamwork to solve a mystery, just like the Alden children.

We hope that you enjoy the program and share it with other educators. Please tell us your thoughts about the program at ymiclassroom.com/feedback-boxcar. We look forward to receiving your comments.

Sincerely,
Dr. Dominic Kinsley
Editor in Chief
Young Minds Inspired

About The Boxcar Children® Series

Four brave siblings were searching for a home — and found a life of adventure! The Boxcar Children® series tells the story of the orphaned Alden children who create a home for themselves in an abandoned boxcar in the forest. Eventually, they go to live with their grandfather, who moves the beloved boxcar to his backyard so the children can use it as a playhouse. Their adventures continue!

NEW! An illustrated graphic novel version of Gertrude Chandler Warner's inaugural chapter book brings the timeless tale to life for a new generation of young readers, while championing the Alden siblings' journey of courage, resilience, and the enduring power of family.

Target Audience

Grades 2–5

Program Components

Available at ymiclassroom.com/boxcar:

- This one-page teacher's guide
- One reproducible student activity sheet
- Curriculum standards
- Additional activities for Preschool to Grade 3

Concepts and Skills

- Creative writing
- Communication
- Teamwork

Resources

- boxcarchildren.com
- boxcarchildren.com/for-educators
- ymiclassroom.com/boxcar

How to Use This Guide

Photocopy the activity sheet for students. It can be used regardless of whether students have read the book series. After class, send the activity sheet home for families to try together.

About The Aldens

- **Henry:** At age 14, Henry is the oldest sibling.



He likes to figure out how things work, which makes him good at repairing and building things. While he'll never brag, he's a great runner, too! It's not always easy being the oldest and having so much responsibility, but there's nothing that Henry can't handle.

- **Jessie:** Jessie, age 12, can always be counted on to take charge. She's good at being organized — she makes lists in her notebook and always keeps track of facts when there's a mystery to be solved. When her younger siblings need help, Jessie is there. She loves planning adventures and taking care of the family dog, Watch.



- **Violet:** Ten-year-old Violet is creative — she loves to draw, take photos, and play the violin. She's a little on the shy side, but because she's quiet, she's a careful observer. With her artist's eye, Violet picks up on important details that others sometimes overlook.



- **Benny:** Even though he's the youngest Alden at age 6, Benny still helps solve mysteries. He's always curious and full of questions. In fact, one of his favorite questions is "When is lunch?" because he's usually hungry! Benny loves playing with Watch and visiting new places.



- **Watch:** The family dog is a friendly, wire-haired fox terrier. The children found Watch in the woods when they lived in the old boxcar. Since then, he has been loyal to the Aldens, especially Jessie, who once removed a thorn from his paw. Watch also has a special bond with Benny, who gives him treats.



Activity: Picture It!

- **Share** the description of The Boxcar Children® and the Alden siblings with students. Ask if they are familiar with the series.
- **Explain** to students that they are going to work in teams to create mini graphic stories



with illustrations and brief text that solve a mystery, just like the Aldens. Students should take turns adding parts of the story.

- **Warm-up** with a practice story. Share the following story prompt with students and invite them to contribute sentences to continue the story, keeping in mind that the story needs a beginning, a middle, and an end. Continue until the story concludes or arrives at a good stopping point. Students might write their own endings. Prompt: *On our walk home from school, my friend and I saw an odd set of images on the ground. They looked like footprints, but they were not made by a shoe. We decided to follow them...*
- **Distribute** the activity sheet, markers, crayons, and blank paper folded into 4 or 6 boxes for students to create their graphic stories. As an alternative, students can use a digital tool that your class has access to.
- **Read** the directions as a class. The teams should plan their stories and create a draft before finalizing their graphic stories. Students might emulate the siblings' traits and skills as inspiration for their own characters.
- **Provide** students with guidelines such as story length, and any parameters for working as a team. For younger students, you might write the story as a class and then have students illustrate it.
- **Invite** the teams to present their final stories to the class.

Challenge! For older students, consider adding an extra challenge and element of fun by making it a shared story. Have each group create one 4- to 6-panel page of the story and then swap it with another group to add the next page of the story and so on until each story routes through all groups and comes to a conclusion.

Picture It!

Meet The Aldens! Henry, Jessie, Violet, and Benny are siblings and the main characters in The Boxcar Children® series. They work together, with their dog Watch, to solve mysteries.

Now it's your turn to solve a mystery. Use the story starter and prompts below to plan a graphic story. That's a story with brief text and illustrations.



Story starter: The doorbell rings. It's a delivery! I shake the plain brown box and hear something rattle. I open the box and find a key. "That's not very exciting," I say to myself. Then I see a note with a set of numbers on it. I have no idea what the key or numbers mean. I call...

1. Plan your story. Use the questions below to brainstorm what happens. Use the back of the sheet if you need more space.

- Who are the characters? _____
- Where does the story take place? _____
- Who does the character call and why? _____
- What clues will the characters find to help them solve the mystery? _____
- What challenges will they face? _____
- What is the key for? _____
- What do the numbers mean? _____
- How will the story end? How is the mystery solved? _____
- What pictures will help tell the story? _____

2. Create a draft. In a graphic story, it's important to be concise when writing and create pictures that help tell the story. Use the back of this sheet and plain paper folded into 4 to 6 boxes to write a draft of your story. (Remember to add the story starter!) Once ready, write and illustrate your final draft.

Elements of a Good Mystery

- **Characters & Settings** – Interesting characters and settings where the story takes place capture the reader's attention.
- **Clues** – Characters gather clues that help them solve the mystery.
- **Plot twist** – Sometimes something unexpected happens.
- **The reveal** – No one knows the solution until the end.