

# The Emigrant Train

by Robert Louis Stevenson *from Across the Plains*

*Robert Louis Stevenson was a famous author of adventure novels. In one of his nonfiction travel books, he writes about his trip to the United States. In this passage, he tells of his meeting with a railroad newsboy. At that time, a newsboy was a boy who traveled on a train selling newspapers, snacks, and other items to passengers.*

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I must tell here an experience of mine with another newsboy. I tell it because it gives so good an example of that uncivil kindness of the American, which is perhaps their most bewildering character to one newly landed. It was immediately after I had left the emigrant train; and I am told I looked like a man at death's door, so much had this long journey shaken me. I sat at the end of a car, and the catch being broken, and myself feverish and sick, had to hold the door open with my foot for the sake of air. In this attitude my leg debarred the newsboy from his box of merchandise. I made haste to let him pass when I observed that he was coming; but I was busy with a book, and so once or twice he came upon me unawares. On these occasions he most rudely struck my foot aside; and though I myself apologised, as if to show him the way, he answered me never a word. I chafed furiously, and I fear the next time it would have come to words. But suddenly I felt a touch upon my shoulder, and a large juicy pear was put into my hand. It was the newsboy, who had observed that I was looking ill, and so made me this present out of a tender heart. For the rest of the journey I was petted like a sick child; he lent me newspapers, thus depriving himself of his legitimate profit on their sale, and came repeatedly to sit by me and cheer me up.

**Questions**

1. What does Stevenson mean by “I looked like a man at death’s door”?
2. What does Stevenson mean by “I chafed furiously”?
3. What does Stevenson mean by “uncivil kindness”?
4. Stevenson says his experience with the newsboy is an example of Americans’ “most bewildering character.” What was confusing about the newsboy’s behavior?