The Railway Children

They were not railway children to begin with. I don't suppose they had ever thought about railways except as a means of getting to places. They were just ordinary suburban children, and they lived with their Father and Mother in an ordinary red-brick-fronted villa, with coloured glass in the front door, a tiled passage that was called a hall, a bath-room with hot and cold water, electric bells, French windows, and a good deal of white paint, and 'every modern convenience', as the house-agents say.

There were three of them. Roberta was the eldest. Of course, Mothers never have favourites, but if their Mother had had a favourite, it might have been Roberta. Next came Peter, who wished to be an Engineer when he grew up; and the youngest was Phyllis, who meant extremely well. Mother was almost always there, ready to play with the children, and read to them, and help them to do their home-lessons. Besides this she used to write stories for them while they were at school, and read them aloud after tea, and she always made up funny pieces of poetry for their birthdays and for other great occasions, such as the christening of the new kittens, or the refurnishing of the doll's house, or the time when they were getting over the mumps.

These three lucky children always had everything they needed: pretty clothes, good fires, a lovely nursery with heaps of toys, and a Mother Goose wall-paper. They had a kind and merry nursemaid, and a dog who was called James, and who was their very own.

Task 1: What is the meaning of these words? Use the context of the sentence.

Suburban ->

"They were just ordinary suburban children."

villa ->

"red brick-fronted villa"

Refurnishing ->

"or the refurnishing of the doll's house"

Merry ->

"They had a kind and merry nursemaid"

Task 2: Answers the questions below.

1. What do you think a 'house-agent' is?

   _____

   _____

2. From these introductory paragraphs, what impression do you get of the children's lives? Give **two** reasons to justify your opinion.

   _____

   _____

3. Write down **three** things that you are told about the children's home.

   • _____

   • _____

   • _____

4. Based on what you have read, what do you think might happen to the children later on in the story?

   _____

   _____

Suburban -> city / residential /

villa -> house

Refurnishing -> put new furniture in a room / rearrange the furniture in a room

Merry -> joyful / cheerful / happy

The Railway Children Answers

1. What do you think a 'house-agent' is?
   A 'house-agent' is a Victorian equivalent of today's estate agent: a person who sells houses.

2. From these introductory paragraphs, what impression do you get of the children's lives? Give **two** reasons to justify your opinion.
   Award a mark (up to a maximum of two) for any reference to the children having fortunate/privileged lives because:

   - **they have a comfortable house 'with every modern convenience'.**
   - **they have a Mother who obviously loves them very much and spends a lot of time with them.**
   - **they celebrate birthdays and other 'great occasions'.**
   - **they have pretty clothes, good fires, a lovely nursery with heaps of toys, and a Mother Goose wall-paper.**
   - **they have a kind and merry nursemaid (nanny).**
   - **they have a dog of their very own.**

3. Write down three things that you are told about the children's home.
   Award marks for any three of the following:

   - **it was an ordinary red-brick-fronted villa;**
   - **it had coloured glass in the front door;**
   - **it had a tiled passage that was called a hall;**
   - **it had a bath-room with hot and cold water;**
   - **it had electric bells;**
   - **it had French windows;**
   - **it had a good deal of white paint;**
   - **it had 'every modern convenience'.**

4. Based on what you have read, what do you think might happen to the children later on in the story?

   - **You get the impression that the children are somehow going to become more familiar with railways.**
   - **You get the impression that the children's privileged lifestyle is about to change.**