



Alertness in History

Kate Shelley (1865 - 1912)

The sounds of the storm grew louder and louder outside the farmhouse in Boone, Iowa. Kate Shelley listened carefully for sounds of distress from the animals in the barn as she helped her mother clean up the dinner dishes.

Did you spot the "I Will"? Kate kept her eyes and ears open while doing a task.

The loud clanking sound in the distance reminded Kate that the railroad crew would be checking the track along the creek in preparation for the late night train. "Crack!" A bell rang loudly! Kate realized that the bridge had collapsed and that the engine had probably fallen into Honey Creek!

Did you spot the "I Will"? Kate heard and recognized the warning signals.

Although she was only 15, Kate left the children with her mother and ran to the creek to see if the men were safe. As she neared the bridge, she gasped! The track ended suddenly in the middle of the creek. As she held her lantern high and called out through the wind, she became aware that the surviving men were trapped in the rising water.

Did you spot the "I will"? Kate chose to do right by putting aside her personal comfort and safety to check on the safety of the railroad crew. She had decided in advance to do what was right.

Kate ran along the track toward the station at Moingona, Iowa. When she came to the bridge over the Des Moines River, she crawled along the slippery track, ignoring the waters raging beneath her. Thoroughly soaked and exhausted, Kate arrived at the station and burst through the door, exclaiming that the bridge was out before she collapsed on the floor. When she was able to speak again, she asked if they somehow could stop the midnight train and if they could rescue the crew from the rising water.

Did you spot the "I Will"? Kate warned others of the danger of the collapsed bridge.

Some of the station crew were able to rescue the exhausted survivors from the waters of Honey Creek, while another took a lantern to the platform to stop the train. The telegraph operator sent a message to hold the express train at the last stop. The midnight express was stopped in time. Over 200 passengers were saved because of Kate's alertness and courage!

Did you spot the "I Will"? Kate's warning helped others to stay away from a very unsafe place.

The new bridge was built in 1901 and was named Kate Shelley; Kate was recognized with a medal from the state, a scholarship, and a lifetime railroad pass. Furthermore, a Chicago newspaper raised the money to pay the mortgage on the Shelley farm.

Kate was alert and responsible and brave. Because of her good character, Kate Shelley saved many lives!

Concept by Character First

Story by Kelly Sorge



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Alertness Game

How many words can you make from the letters in~
"Alertness vs. carelessness"?

(You can use a letter only as many times in one word as it appears in the three words. For example, you can use the "v" only one time, but you can use "s" seven times.)

Tip: you can make at least 44 words.

(The answers appear on the coloring sheet.)