

Understanding the Author's Language:
Across the Plains

Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson is known for his novels such as *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*. Because of he was often ill, Stevenson traveled around the world in search of a location that would improve his health. He wrote about his travels. He wrote about his 1879 train trip across the United States in his book *Across the Plains*.

Below is a passage from *Across the Plains*. Stevenson writes about a railroad newsboy who was a boy who traveled on a train selling newspapers, snacks, and other items to passengers.

from

THE EMIGRANT TRAIN

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, I 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"?
