READING AND SPEAKING

Saroo's story

1 Look at the pictures and read the title and caption. What do you think happened to Saroo Brierley? How old do you think he is now? Discuss with a partner.

2 T1.8 Cover the text and listen to some of the things that Saroo says about his story. Answer the questions.

1 Where did Saroo fall asleep?
2 How old was he?
3 Why was he scared? Which city was he in?
4 How do you think he ended up in Australia?
5 What do you think is the significance of 14 hours and 1,200km?
6 *'I zoomed down and bang – the waterfall where I used to play.'* How did he 'zoom down'? What did he find?
7 Why didn't he recognize his mother at first?
8 What did his mother do? What couldn't she do?

3 Read Saroo's full story. Are these statements true (✓) or false (✗)? Correct the false ones.

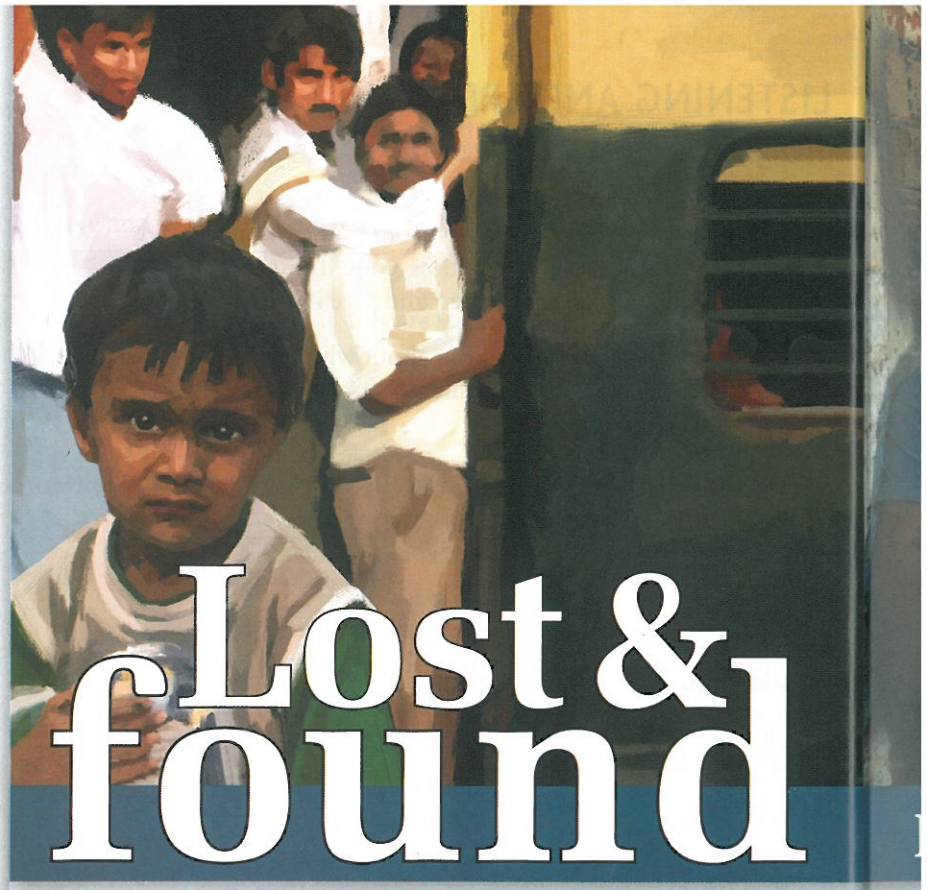
1 Saroo and his brother both had jobs cleaning the trains.
2 Saroo fell asleep at the station in Calcutta.
3 He lived on the streets and continued to work on the trains.
4 He was given food and shelter by a man.
5 He was adopted from an orphanage by an Australian family.
6 He had a happy childhood in Tasmania.
7 When he found his hometown his mother was still living in the family home.
8 He moved back to live with his birth family.

What do you think?

- Would Saroo be happy living back in his hometown? Why?/Why not?
- Why would his story make a good film?
- Who in your class has ever used Google Earth? What for?

Vocabulary work

4 Find the highlighted words or phrases in the text. Work out the meanings from the context.



Lost & found

Saroo Brierley was only five years old when he got lost. He was working with his older brother as a sweeper on India's trains. Together they travelled hundreds of miles up and down the vast network.

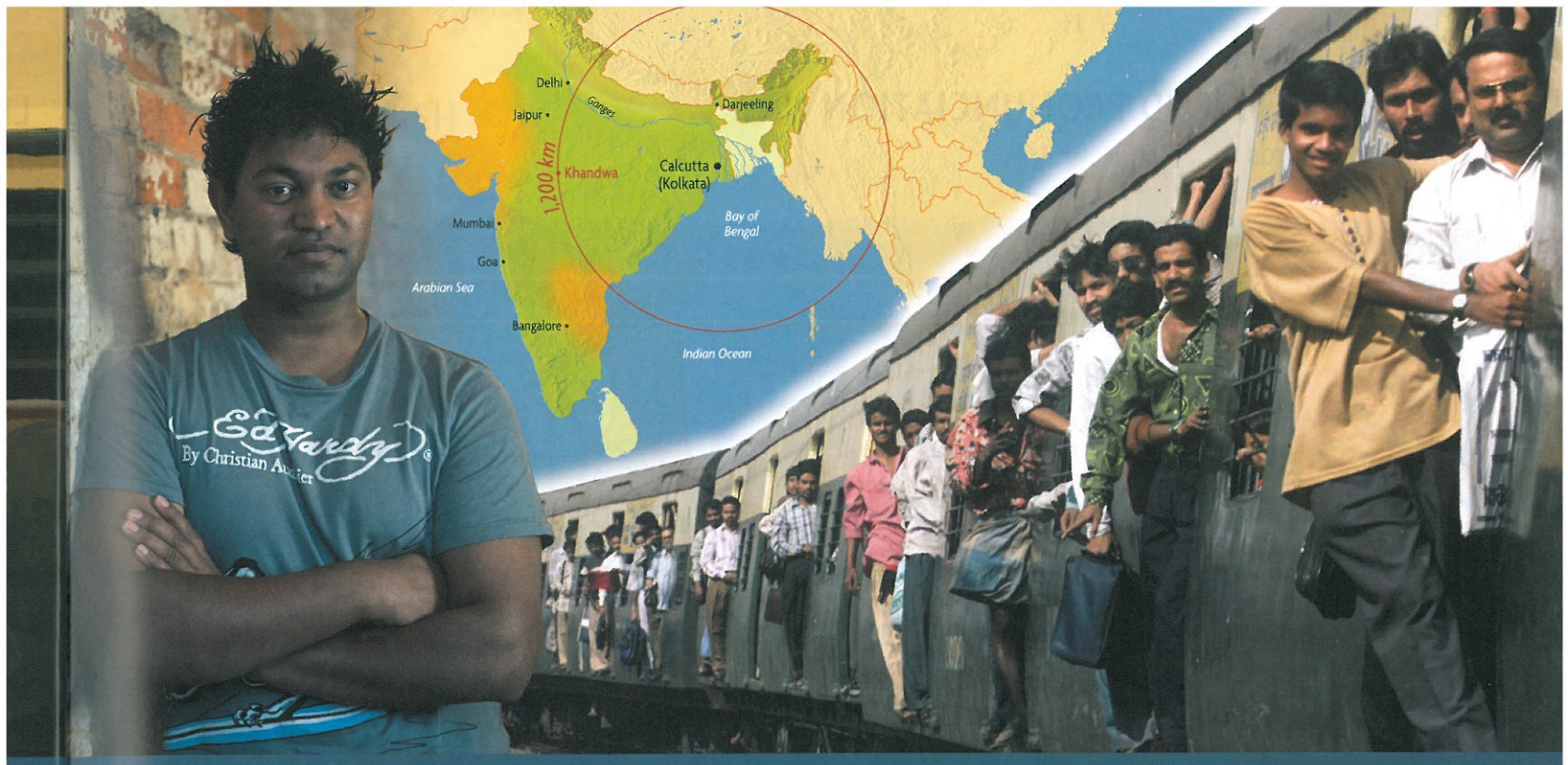
"It was late at night. We got off the train, and I was so tired that I just sat down at the train station, and I ended up falling asleep."

That fateful nap would determine the rest of his life. He thought his brother would come back for him but when he woke up the brother was nowhere to be seen. There was a train in front of him. Perhaps his brother was on board. He got on it to look for him. However, Saroo did not meet his brother on the train. Instead, he fell asleep again and when he woke up 14 hours later he had a terrible shock. There were hordes of people pushing, rushing, speaking in an unfamiliar tongue. He had arrived in Calcutta (Kolkata), India's third biggest city and notorious for its slums. He was nearly 1,500 kilometres (930 miles) from his home. Soon he was sleeping rough.

"It was a very scary place to be. I don't think any mother or father would like to have their five-year-old wandering around alone in the slums and train stations of Calcutta. I was scared. I didn't know where I was."

The little boy learned to fend for himself. He became a beggar, one of the many children begging on the streets of the city. Once, he was approached by a man who promised him food and shelter. But Saroo had learned to be suspicious of such people and ran away. In the end, he was taken in by an orphanage and put up for adoption. He was adopted by the Brierleys, a couple from Tasmania, Australia.

"I accepted that I was lost and that I couldn't find my way back home, so I thought it was great that I was going to Australia."



Lost Indian boy finds his mother 25 years later!

Saroo settled down well in his new home. But as he got older the desire to find his birth family became increasingly strong. The problem was that as an illiterate five-year-old he had not known the name of his hometown. All he had to go on were his vivid memories. So he began using Google Earth to search for where he might have been born.

It was difficult but eventually Saroo hit on an effective strategy.

"I multiplied the time I was on the train, about 14 hours, with the speed of Indian trains and I came up with a rough distance, about 1,200km."

He drew a circle on a map with its centre in Calcutta, with its radius about the distance he thought he had travelled. Incredibly, he soon discovered what he was looking for: the town of Khandwa.

"When I found it, I zoomed down and bang – the waterfall where I used to play."

He journeyed to Khandwa. He found his way around the town with his childhood memories. Eventually he found his home. But it was not what he had hoped for. It looked old and shabby, as if nobody had lived there for a long time. A neighbour said that his family had moved. Then he struck gold, another neighbour said he knew where his mother lived now. The man guided Saroo to where three women stood waiting. He stared at them blankly. Only the woman in the middle seemed remotely familiar. The man gestured towards her. 'This is your mother', he said.

She had been young, in her thirties, the last time he saw her. She looked so much older now. But behind the weathered face, there was something unmistakable, unforgettable, his mother, Fatima.

"The last time I saw her she was 34 years old and a pretty lady. I had forgotten that age would get the better of her. But then I recognised her and I said, "Yes, you are my mother". She grabbed my hand and took me into her house. She couldn't say anything to me. She had a bit of trouble grasping that her son, after 25 years, had returned. She had long feared I was dead."

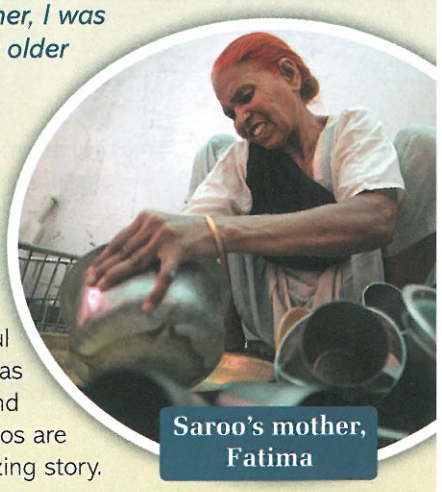
Fatima had searched the train stations for her missing son but she had never ventured as far as Calcutta. She couldn't imagine he had gone so far. However, she had never lost hope – a fortune teller had told her that one day she would see her son again.

And what of the brother with whom Saroo had originally gone travelling? Unfortunately, the news was not good.

"You see, a month after I'd disappeared my brother was found in two pieces on a railway track. We were extremely close and when I left my mother, I was heartbroken knowing that my older brother had passed away."

His mother had never known whether foul play was involved or whether the boy had simply slipped and fallen under a train.

Saroo Brierley's lifelong wish had been to see his birthmother again. He feels incredibly grateful that this wish was granted. He has kept in touch with his newly found family. And now Hollywood studios are eager to make a film of his amazing story.



Saroo's mother, Fatima