

*This is an example of “found poetry.” I used only questions and statements that I culled from a New York Times discussion board. See page 2 for the complete background. A version of this poem appeared in **The Arrow Finds Its Mark**, edited by Georgia Heard.*

Ask a Subway Train Operator

As a boy I always dreamed of
being a subway motorman.

Questions I’ve
long had:

What’s the fastest speed you drove your train? How often are you tempted to pop a wheelie? I think about this every day. Why do the trains always start with a jerk? Why do people constantly use the “soccer foot” to catch closing doors? I’ve always wondered. How much pressure do you have to put on the “dead man’s throttle” to keep it from popping up? I hope this question isn’t too ghoulish! Can you confirm the existence of mole people living in the subway tunnels? Why do the new trains smell like ear wax? The whole car can smell it! Are there days when driving the train isn’t fun? Do you sometimes forget that it is light outside when you ride in the dark all day? Are you tempted to pop a wheelie? I will admit I’ve gotten the temptation to do so. Has anyone ever fallen in the tiny gap between the train and the platform? What do you do when Mother Nature calls? Did you ever need to go in reverse? What do you think it will take to get America’s trains on par with the rest of the world? How do you get to work each day? Is it lonely with limited human interaction? What gets you “excited as a kid” about your job?

Does it feel
claustro-
phobic

in the tun-
nels in the
dark?

Is there any way
my dream could
come true?

What do *you*
think about
all day?

In May, 2010, the New York *Times* website asked readers to post questions to Mr. Dennis Boyd, who operates trains on New York City's No. 4 subway line. Two hundred and seventeen readers wrote in with all sorts of questions and comments about Mr. Boyd's job as train conductor. I went through all 217 postings and pulled more than a hundred questions and reader comments, then arranged some of them to look like an old-fashioned choo-choo train.

Mr. Boyd answered many of the questions on the *Times*' website in early June. You can read the questions, and Mr. Boyd's responses, here:

<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/31/ask-a-train-operator/?apage=3#comments>

<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/02/answers-from-a-train-operator/>

Here's the link to the published version of this poem:

http://www.amazon.com/Arrow-Finds-Its-Mark-Found/dp/1596436654/ref=sr_1_15?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1425595145&sr=1-15&keywords=georgia+heard