

MIKE MULLIGAN AND HIS STEAM SHOVEL

Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel

by Virginia Lee Burton

Themes: Friendship

Grade Level: PreK-3

Running Time: 11 minutes, iconographic

Summary

MIKE MULLIGAN AND HIS STEAM SHOVEL is about Mike Mulligan and his steam shovel, Mary Anne, that he has cared for and worked with for many years. Mike is proud of Mary Anne and suspects that she could "dig as much in a day as a hundred men could dig in a week." Mike and Mary Anne have dug holes for highways, canals, and train passages and have always performed better when people would watch.

As time goes by Mary Anne is passed over for jobs by new, powerful gasoline, electric, and diesel motor shovels. Mike Mulligan learns of a new town hall to be dug in a small country town. He decides that he and Mary Anne might have more success in a small town than in the city. Mike is able to get the town hall job for Mary Anne by promising that they can dig the cellar in one day.

Although the work is hard and slow, Mike and Mary Anne work harder and faster as more and more people come to watch their progress. When the hole is ready at the end of the day, even the once skeptical town selectman, Henry B. Swap, is impressed. However, one problem remains--how will Mary Anne get out of the hole she dug. Mike and Mary Anne dug so fast they forgot to leave a way out for themselves!

At the end, a little boy suggests an ingenious way for Mike and Mary Anne to manage their problem.

Objectives

- Children will explore friendships
- Children will investigate the results of diligence and hard work
- Children will examine problem-solving techniques

Before Viewing Activities

Talk with children about the roads and highways they travel

along with their families. Explain that in many cases passages had to be dug through rock or mountains of earth in order to create these roads and highways. Discuss the different kinds of equipment used to create these roads and highways, including bulldozers, excavators, paving trucks, etc.

Explain that the steam shovel is a machine that used to do the same kind of work that excavators and diesel shovels do now. As time went on, the steam shovel was replaced by more modern equipment. Encourage children to pay close attention to the work machinery does that allows us to enjoy traveling, whether by land, air, or water.

Have children think about people they have known, or possessions they have had, for a long time. Ask: How do you feel about these people (possessions)? What kinds of things do you do to show you care for them? How would you feel if you didn't know (have) them? What is the most important thing to you about these people (objects)? Why does knowing people or having something for a long time make them particularly special to you?

Share the book Mike Mulligan And His Steam Shovel with children. Ask: What kind of work did Mike Mulligan and Mary Anne do? Why were they having trouble getting work in the city? How did the little boy help Mike Mulligan and Mary Anne solve their problem? How do you think Mike Mulligan and Mary Anne felt at the end of the story?

After Viewing Activities

Explain to children that the story, Mike Mulligan And His Steam Shovel, was written long ago. After viewing, ask children: How can you tell that this story was written many years ago? How were the vehicles in Popperville different from the kinds of cars, fire engines, milk trucks, etc. that we use today? How did the people in the film dress? What would you like most about living in Popperville? What would you like least? Later, have children dramatize life in Popperville. You might want to have children work together to paint background scenery, including a general store, church, schoolhouse, and town hall to use in their dramatizations. If possible, provide clothing that is representative of the thirties and forties for children to dress up in.

Discuss the little boy's suggestion at the end of the film that is the answer to Mike and Mary Anne's problem of getting out of the hole they dug. Ask: What other solutions to Mike and Mary Anne's problem can you think of? After talking about possible solutions, have children take turns stepping inside a ring of classroom chairs. Tell the first child that he/she cannot break the ring, but must think of a way out. (Children might consider stepping over a chair, having a group of people carry them out of the ring, imagine that a magical balloon flies overhead and carries them out, etc.) Encourage children to use their imaginations as they consider solutions to the problem. As children take turns standing inside the ring of chairs, hand them a variety of objects. For example, you might give one child a ball of string and ask: How could you use this string to help you out of the ring? As children work, help them to see that there are many different ways to solve problems.

Give children an opportunity to invent a machine. Supply an assortment of art materials that children can use to create their own unique machines. (You may want to provide boxes, aluminum foil, construction paper, pipe cleaners, felt scraps, buttons, round cardboard, discs, etc.) After creating their machines, have children describe them and the work they do, to their classmates.

Other book based films and videos about friendship and machines are available from Weston Woods. These include:

Friendship

ANDY AND THE LION by James Daugherty

APT. 3 by Ezra Jack Keats

THE BEAST OF MONSIEUR RACINE by Tomi Ungerer

THE CATERPILLAR AND THE POLLIWOG by Jack Kent

DANNY AND THE DINOSAUR by Syd Hoff

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