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.

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
THE HAPPY LION written by Louise Fatio and illustrated by Roger Duvoisin

Machines
HERCULES by Hardie Gramatky

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