

Resource 10

The Little Engine That Could

Reading Guide

This story is about a train is on its way to take all kinds of good things to the boys and girls on the other side of the mountain. Suddenly, the train breaks down. She cannot move another inch. Every other engine that comes by refuses to help. Then finally, the smallest little engine decides to help. “I think I can, I think I can...” the engine says over and over again as it pulls the train with all its might.



The Little Engine That Could by Watty Piper

Theme Link(s):

These can best be utilized AFTER reading the story with your child.

Stating Needs/Asking for Help – We all feel sometimes like we can’t do something. Sometimes we find out that we can, but sometimes we need to ask for help. It’s okay to ask parents, teachers, friends and family to help us. Ask your child if she/he has ever had to ask for help. What were the results?

Perseverance/Not Giving Up – The toys had to hope that an engine would help them. They kept asking different engines for help, until finally *The Little Engine That Could* agreed to help them. Ask your child if she/he has ever felt like something was too hard. What happened?

Believing in Yourself – *The Little Engine That Could* had never been over a mountain, but she still agreed to help. As she tried hard to get up the mountain, she said “I think I can...” She had a positive attitude and believed in herself. Share with your child a time when you had to remind yourself that you could do something – even if it seemed really hard. Ask them to think of a time they did something that was really hard.

Being a Hero – *The Little Engine That Could* really saved the day. Now all the kids would be happy, because she offered her help and because she tried really hard. “*How have you been a hero for someone?*” Explore this idea without judgment, and be sure to react favorably, however the child responds – especially if she/he says that she has been a hero for someone. If the child cannot think of a time when she was a hero, help her do so, or suggest that now that they know that heroes help others before they help themselves, they can be a hero too! If they cannot think of a way to be a hero, perhaps the suggestion could be made to comfort a friend who is sad. This can be heroic.

Purposes

- Listens to stories read aloud.
- Demonstrates increasing levels of engagement.
- Shows steady increase in number of words in listening vocabulary.
- Develops understanding of main events.
- Develops awareness of character traits from story, such as humility, perseverance, and inner strength.

Read the Story

Help children to identify setting and characters, as well as to track story events.

Suggested Vocabulary

The Little Engine That Could is a longer story, and there are rich themes mentioned above and at the end of this guide which you might wish to explore with your child. There may not be enough time to cover the vocabulary, read and discuss the story, and then address the themes at the end of your session. Depending on the maturity and readiness of your reader, you may wish to address unfamiliar vocabulary during the reading of the story. When possible, this reading experience might be best divided into two sessions to allow for richer discussion as well as thorough reading.

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Use these words during story time and throughout the day:

- **rumbled**
made a low rolling noise, like thunder
- **jolly**
feeling good, happy
- **creamy**
smooth, like peanut butter or ice cream
- **merrily**
full of happiness
- **jerk**
a quick movement like when someone pulls your shirt
- **snorted**
an angry, rough sound, like a bull letting out air through the nose
- **passenger**
someone who is on board, a traveler
- **berths**
places to sleep on a train
- **waiters**
people who wait on other people, like a server in a restaurant
- **parlor cars**
fancy parts of the train where passengers who pay extra can sit in their own chairs
- **roundhouse**
a building where trains rest and get fixed, shaped like a circle
- **bellowed**
made a loud, deep sound
- **indignantly**
speaking or acting in a way that makes someone feel not important
- **dingy**
dirty
- **rusty**
brown and rough – looking like metal left out in the rain
- **weary**
exhausted, tired
- **hitched**
to fasten together with a hook, like a trailer to a car or a horse to a fence
- **tugged**
pulled hard
- **valley**
the place at the bottom of two hills or two mountains
- **steadily**
surely, with confidence, without being interrupted

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Extending the Book

- For children ready for the challenge, have them help you read the title of the book *The Little Engine That Could*. Use your finger to underline the title, letter by letter and sound it out if necessary.
- Repeat multi-syllabic words (merrily, steadily) slowly and carefully, helping children to learn to pronounce them.

Connections

- Help your child make connections to the text. What do they already know about trains? Perhaps they recently saw a train, or a toy train. Maybe they have ridden a train. (text → self) What other books does this book remind them of? Do they know other stories with a train as a character? (text → text) And finally, how does the story remind them of something else, like a time when they wanted to give up but tried really hard instead? (text → world)

A Model for Reading

Use the following to help you plan your book reading:

- “*The title of this book is The Little Engine That Could. The author of this book is Watty Piper.*”
- “*What’s this on the front cover of the book?*” (Point to the engine and the other characters – child responds)
- “*Yes, this a happy little train.*” Ask the child what he knows about trains. (“*A long time ago, trains were a very popular way for people to travel. Trains are still used a lot today to carry things from one place to another, like farm animals, or things people buy.*”)
- “*At the beginning of the story you will see that the train is moving along fine, carrying all sort of great things for little girls and boys. But then she has a problem and she needs help. Nobody wants to help her, until the little blue engine comes along. Thank goodness for him! He really saves the day!*”

(Read page six and seven)

- Have the child find the train and identify that it is chugging along over the tracks and across the bridge. “*Who is watching the train go by?*” (child responds: cow)

(Read page eight and nine)

- “*All of these things were inside the train. Does this train remind you of anyone else who brings toys to little girls and boys?*” (child may respond: Santa Clause)

(Read page ten and eleven)

- Have the child identify all of the yummy treats and foods. Which ones does he/she like to eat? “*How might all of the little girls and boys be feeling about the little train bringing all of these wonderful things?*”

(Read page twelve and thirteen)

- “*Look at the train’s face. How do you think she is feeling?*”

(Read page fourteen and fifteen)

- After reading, ask the child how the little clown and the dolls and toys might be feeling now. (child will respond – guide them toward “hopeful” or “excited”)

(Read page sixteen and seventeen)

- Ask the child about how the shiny new engine is acting. Is he nice? What is his face like? *What does he mean when he says, “I pull the likes of you? Indeed not!”* (You might need to explain that he is bragging, and acting like he is better than the little train because he is fancy on the inside and the outside. The Shiny New Engine doesn’t want to have anything to do with the little engine.)

(Read page eighteen and nineteen)

- Ask the child to predict. Will this big strong engine pull the little engine? (child responds)

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(Read page twenty and twenty-one)

- After reading “Please, oh please...mountain?” Ask the child: “*Are the dolls and toys asking nicely? Are they polite? Do you think the Big Strong Engine will help?*” (child predicts) “*Why won’t the Big Strong Engine help?*” (guide child to answer: he thinks he is too important) “*How would you feel right now if you were the little engine, or one of the toys or dolls? Might you give up?*” (allow for responses)

(Read page twenty-two and twenty-three)

- After reading, ask “*Do you think that a train that is OLD and TIRED can pull the little engine over the mountain?*” (opinions will vary)

(Read page twenty-four and twenty-five)

- After reading the page, have the child tell you about how the dingy, rusty old engine looks. Is he big and shiny and fancy like the other ones? Does he look strong?

(Read page twenty-six and twenty-seven)

- “*Does the Rusty Old Engine think that he can help? What is he saying to himself?*” (“I cannot. I cannot. I cannot.”) “*Have you ever felt like the Rusty Old Engine?*”

(Read page twenty-eight and twenty-nine)

- “*How does looking at this picture make you feel? Why are the toys so sad?*” (answers will vary)

(Read page thirty and thirty-one)

- “*What did the very little engine do when she saw the toy clown’s flag?*” (stopped quickly) “*Do you think this little engine might help?*”

(Read page thirty-two and thirty-three)

- “*Does this engine look different than the others?*” (child may notice the smile on her face)

(Read page thirty-four and thirty-five)

- “*Is the very little engine thinking more about herself, or about the boys and girls? What does it mean when she hitches herself to the broken-down train? Is she going to help pull the train and all of the toys?*” (Check for understanding. Read again if necessary and help child to understand that help has arrived.)

(Read page thirty-six and thirty-seven)

- Read the words “**tugged** and **pulled** and **pulled** and **tugged** and **slowly, slowly, slowly...**” with inflection that shows the great effort the little engine is making. Emphasize the smiling and cheering of the dolls and toys. This is a climax moment in the story.

(Read page thirty-eight and thirty-nine)

- “*Why do you think the Little Blue Engine says ‘puff, puff, chug, chug?’*” (answers will vary – help the child understand this is really difficult for the train. Perhaps the child can think of a time they were trying to go up a steep hill or a lot of stairs and it was difficult. Could this be how the Little Engine is feeling? Is she gasping for air?)

(Read page forty and forty-one)

- Ask: “*Wow, what **happened!**?*” (Help child see that they actually made it to the top of the mountain.) “*What must the toys and dolls be saying?*” (Child may respond: We did it! Yes! Awesome! We are going to make it to the boys and girls now!) Perhaps the child has hiked up a mountain or done something that was hard like climbing a mountain. Discuss if it is a good time to do so, or continue the story if child is very engaged.

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(Read page forty-two and forty-three)

(Read page forty-four and forty-five)

- “*Maybe the Little Engine really **said**: ‘I thought I could, I thought I could,’ and maybe not. Maybe the sound of the train just **sounded** like she was saying it. How does a train sound?*” (Allow the child to make a train noise, then make the noise for the child to the rhythm of “I thought I could, I thought I could...”)

(Show page forty-six)

- Show the picture of the Little Engine on page 46. Ask the child if they think The Little Engine That Could did the right thing. “*Should the other trains have helped?*” Ask why or why not? (answers will vary) Help the child recall why the trains that didn’t help chose not to.

Reinforce Reading

Ask the child to discuss with you the themes covered in the text (restated here, for your use).

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