

The Little Engine That Could

Written by Watty Piper

Illustrated by Doris and George Hauman

Classroom Favorites



Teacher's Guide by Jennifer Lee Richards

A Perma-Bound Production

Synopsis

The little red train had a jolly load to carry over the mountain. She was bringing toys, dolls, and good things to eat to the little boys and girls in the city. But the little engine breaks down before reaching the valley. The dolls and toys all ask for help from several passing trains, but no one seems willing to help them. At last, it is "the little engine that could" that arrives to save the day.

About the Author

"Watty Piper" is the pseudonym under which Mabel Caroline Bragg wrote. Bragg was born September 15, 1870, in Milford, Massachusetts. She died April 25, 1945.

Bragg graduated from Rhode Island State Normal School in 1889. She began her teaching career at the same school. According to her students, she was gifted with a fine sense of humor and a knack for storytelling. Bragg was especially interested in speech and encouraged her students to speak well.

She continued to teach in normal schools until 1909, when she joined the publishing firm of Newson and Company to travel throughout the country demonstrating teaching techniques of a newly developed reading system. Bragg served as assistant superintendent of public schools in Newton, Massachusetts from 1916 to 1930. From 1930 until her retirement in 1940, she was a professor in education at Boston University. From 1940 to 1945 Bragg acted as an educational consultant.

About Watty Piper

Bragg's pseudonym, Watty Piper, is a house name of Platt & Munk, the original publishing house of *The Little Engine That Could*. Several other writings were published under the name Watty Piper at Platt & Munk, mostly rhyme, story books, folk, fairy or nursery tale collections. Many of these titles Bragg edited. Other titles include: *Watty Piper's Trucks*, *The Bumper Book*, *Children of Other Lands*, and *My Indian Library*.

The Little Engine That Could is an adaptation of Bragg's *The Pony Engine* which was illustrated by Lois L. Lenski and published by Platt in 1930.

There have been several adaptations of *The Little Engine That Could* by many different illustrators. The story has also been made into a motion picture by Coronet Instructional Films, (1966), and a filmstrip by the Society for Visual Education which includes a seven minute phonodisc, (1966.)

About the Illustrators

Doris (Holt) Hauman was born August 29, 1898, in West Somerville, Massachusetts. George Hauman was born May 19, 1890, in Revere, Massachusetts. George died in 1961.

Doris and George were married May 14, 1924, and had one son, Guy. The couple worked together illustrating children's books from their home and studio which overlook the ocean in Scituate, Massachusetts.

About her childhood, Doris states, "My happy summers were spent in Scituate in a cottage beside the ocean. I cannot remember a time, even as a very young child, that I did not yearn to be an artist. I had very little help until I was sent to Sea Pines Boarding School for Girls in Brewster on Cape Cod. There my ambition was helped by an understanding art teacher, and I spent every minute that could be spared from my other classes in the art room, drawing." After graduating, Doris went to Massachusetts Normal Art School.

George Hauman was educated at Eric Pape School of Illustration, Boston School of Painting, and Fenway School of Illustration.

"(He) showed an early interest in drawing. George attended children's classes at the Pape School for three years. Following graduation from high school he attended art schools, worked at the Forbes Lithograph Company and in commercial studios. He also did free-lance commercial art while he attended night school."

After George died in 1961, Doris tried to finish a few illustrations, but she "couldn't take it since she and George had been too close." She applied for a position as an art instructor at Derby Academy in Hingham, a nearby town, where Doris then taught for fourteen years.

She says, "Perhaps the best-loved book George and I illustrated is *The Little Engine That Could*. Every child I knew loved it."

Now Doris Hauman is legally blind and unable to do any artwork, but keeps busy knitting lap robes for veterans.

Critic's Corner

The books the Haumans both wrote and illustrated are: *Bread and Cheese*, *Buttons: Six Gay Stories with Pictures*, *Happy Harbor: A Seashore Story*, and *Surprise for Timmy*.

The couple illustrated over thirty books written by various authors as well as illustrating *Stories That Never Grow Old* which was edited by Watty Piper.

Objectives

1. To discuss proper etiquette
2. To realize the value of high self-esteem
3. To learn about trains

Comprehension/Discussion Questions

1. Open up the covers of the book so the whole train can be seen coming over the mountain. After reading the story do this again and identify characters and places mentioned in the story. Did the students notice the flower on the cover has a face on it? (This may be covered when you bend the book.) Do the students think the story will be real or make-believe (fiction or non-fiction)?
2. After reading the title, examining the cover, the endpaper illustrations and the title page, predict the story.
3. Discuss what kind of art medium the Haumans used for the illustrations. (*Watercolors.*)
4. Define the word "classic" as it is used on the front cover of the book. (*A Platt & Munk classic.*)
5. Define what the statement on the cover of the book, "the complete, original edition" means.
6. Define the word, "retold." After reading the author's biographical information aloud, see if the students connect that the book, *The Little Engine That Could*, is like a retelling of Bragg's book, *The Pony Engine*.
7. Help the students understand what a pseudonym is and why an author would choose to use one.
8. After reading the first five pages ask the class who they think is narrating the story? Is anyone besides the author? Who could it be?
9. Have students try to discover where the funny little clown gets the red flag. (*pages 1, 35 and 36 show a red flag on the caboose.*)
10. Notice that the bears and many of the other animals are standing upright on their hind legs. (page 3) Is this realistic?
11. Discuss whether the students like or dislike the sentence formatting of the story. (With sentences winding from page to page.) Were the sentences harder to read by being laid out in this manner? Did the unfinished sentences make the students anxious to turn the page to find out how they ended?
12. What source of energy do the students think the engines seen in the story are powered by?
13. Discuss whether or not children in reality would have to rely on one train to bring them toys and food. (*Maybe in rural areas, but not only by train, possibly from some other form of transportation?*)
14. How do the students feel about the behavior of "The Shiny New Passenger Engine" and "The Big Strong Freight Engine" toward the little broken-down train? How do the students feel about "The Rusty Old Engine"? Which of all the engines would the students describe themselves most like? Which of the engines would the students want to be most like? Why? Discuss etiquette and how a person's feelings can be affected by the use or abuse of it.
15. Identify the many patterns used in the story.
Ex: The use of the expression, "the likes of you."

The similar descriptions of the departures of the engines:
"off he steamed" (The Shiny New Passenger Train)
"the Freight Engine puffed off indignantly"
"off he rumbled" (The Rusty Old Engine)

The repetitive manner in which the funny little clown asks the passing engines for help and deals with each of the rejections. For example, the sentence, "The (certain engine) is not the only one in the world," used by the funny little clown each time an engine denied them help.

Notice the establishment of the pattern, "I can not." which then becomes "I think I can." and "I thought I could."

Notice that the little train and all the dolls and toys were at first "sad," then "very sad," and finally "very, very sad" as each of the engines refused to pull them.
16. Define "indignantly" (page 22) and discuss if the students have ever acted this way or dealt with someone who behaved this way.
17. Predict what name will be given to the old and tired engine before seeing it. (*Kind Rusty Old Engine*)
18. Define "weary" and discuss what makes the students feel this way.
19. What does the expression "switching trains in the yard" mean? Compare the little blue engine's job to that of a tugboat's.
20. What time of day must it be if the sun is shown peeking behind the mountains and the dolls and toys say they need to get to the city before the children awake? (*Sunrise.*)
21. Notice that page 31, which shows the town in morning shadows, is the only page shown with darkness. Why would the artists have done this?
22. Notice that "the little red engine" is the only train that is not "named" by giving her description in capital letters. (Ex: "The Little Blue Engine") Why? Also discuss if the students have any objections to the fact that the little red engine and The Little Blue Engine are both female and the other engines are male?
23. When The Little Blue Engine leaves pulling the train, what do the students think will happen to the little red engine?
24. Define "hitched" (page 32) and discuss what other types of transportations use "hitching." (*Cars, campers, trailers, subways, tugboats, and towtrucks.*)
25. Compare the sizes of the dolls and toys to the people shown in the illustrations. Is this realistic? Do the animals look like toys?
26. Imagine what time period this story seems to be set in after examining the clothes on the people in the story. (Ex: page 34) Notice the boy dressed in the cowboy outfit. Is the boy playing make-believe, or is that his normal attire?

27. Notice the raindrops and flowers on the tree on page 36. Could these be dew drops? But why is the trunk candy cane striped?
28. Have students share about experiences they have had in which they at first doubted themselves and yet accomplished the challenge. Did encouragement from others help them reach their goal? Why? Discuss the "power of positive thinking" and how the funny little clown and the little engine that could used it to reach their goals.

Student Activities

1. Read the book to and/or along with your students.
2. Read other books written by Watty Piper.
3. Read other books written and/or illustrated by the Haumans.
4. Read other book versions of the story, *The Little Engine That Could*. Vote on favorites and make a horizontal bar graph of the results with a train car or engine representing each vote.
5. Use watercolor paints to make illustrations for student written books.
6. Have students make up pseudonyms they would like to be published under. Research to find what other people use pseudonyms in the field of writing and illustrating. Discuss the use of the name changing for professions such as writers, actors and performers and why they are desirable.
7. Read other fiction and nonfiction books about trains, etiquette and/or self-esteem, such as *Polar Express* by Chris Van Allsburg and/or *Hello Gnu, How Do You Do? A Beginning Guide to Positively Polite Behavior* by Barbara Shook Hazen.
8. Have students role-play settings in which etiquette needs to be applied. (Such as attending a party or moving between two people in conversation.)
9. Try to find other books in which the text winds its way from page to page, similar to the format of *The Little Engine That Could*.
10. Research about the invention of the steam engine, different types of trains, types of locomotion and the historical expansion of train transportation across America which began in the 1800's.
11. Research the various words used to name trains such as locomotives, "iron horses," or engines.
12. Conduct experiments with steam, electricity and diesel fuel to learn how they create power.
13. Predict what trains of the future will look like and how they will be powered.
14. Bring in a battery powered train set or have someone bring in their collection of trains. (Visit a train collectors' store or a collector's home to see the types of platform models hobbyists construct.)
15. Have students bring in all the train "paraphenalia" they have in their homes and make collection displays around the room.
16. Bring in wooden "train whistles" to blow. Ring bells like those seen in the book.
17. Have a railroad engineer visit the class, see a film that has trains in it, and/or listen to a tape recording of train sounds.
18. Have the class wear blue and white striped engineer hats and overalls to school one day. (Or at least have a set for the students to try on.)
19. Have the students share stories about trains they have seen or train trips they have taken.
20. Go visit a train station and, using a schedule, make a variety of math word problems that deal with telling time and measuring time intervals.
21. Have students interview grandparents, great grandparents, or senior citizens they know about their experiences with trains. Share these in class. (Maybe tape record a written interview?)
22. Have a "dress up" day where the students can use costumes to become "toys, clowns, and dolls."
23. Make small and/or large sized models of trains. (Shoe boxes could be turned sideways and connected to create "inside and outside" dioramas of the different types of trains. Refrigerator boxes could be used for a "Reading Railroad" reading center.)
24. Play the board game "Monopoly" after researching about the different railroads that are mentioned on the gameboard.
25. Learn the songs, "Oh, Susannah" and "I've Been Working on the Railroad." Sing these during set changes or intermission for a class play of the story. Have songbooks (sheets) so the audience can sing along too.
26. Use paperchain-like cut-outs of train cars and engines to display on the walls around the room. These could be used to show achievements made by students; learning a number set of the multiplication tables could = a car or engine, etc.
27. Learn about the mechanics of train travel and how more than one train can use the same tracks at the same times.
28. Notice the copyright information for the books is in Roman numerals. Learn how to read Roman numerals and have students write their ages in them.
29. After reading the book, name all the animals and toys shown on the train on the cover of the book.
30. Name the various cars of the trains. (Ex: engine, cargo car, refrigerated car, and caboose.)
31. Notice how clouds, trees, and smoke are illustrated in the book. Go outside and observe these items and compare the illustrations to the real thing. Have students try to illustrate the same items using a variety of art mediums such as: sponge painting; tissue paper cut outs laid out on paper and then painted over with starch; or charcoal.
32. After studying the patterns established in the story, cover up the text of the books and see if students can tell the story using the picture alone. Have students try to do a "storytelling" of the book without scripts. Using puppets or a feltboard and felt illustrations might be helpful.
33. Have students infer the use for the red flag shown on the caboose (pages 1, 35 and 36). Research about flag types and their uses.
34. Name synonyms for the word jolly. (page 2)

35. Define the word "bobbed" as in "brown bobbed hair." Do any of the students have this hair style? Research to find out when "the bob" became "the fashion." (1920's)
36. Have a clown visit the classroom or have students dress up as clowns.
37. Have students try to identify all the various animals on page 5. Have students bring in any of these toys that they have or their favorites and use them at recess.
38. Notice the book, *Stories that Never Grow Old*, edited by Watty Piper. What kind of stories could be in such a collection?
39. Use the globe to name the continents shown on the book on page 5.
40. Notice the faces on the fruit on page 6 and the term "red-cheeked" used to describe the apples. Have students give descriptions of other fruits in a similar way.
41. Research about fruit trees and learn how to identify their blossoms. Plant different types of fruit seeds and compare and chart their growth. Grow some spinach.
42. Notice how milk is illustrated on page 7. How do students usually see milk packaged? Do the students notice the "feet" and the "faces" on the bottles?
43. Notice the faces in the lollipops. Make and eat lollipops.
44. Eat some spinach, oranges, apples, and/or peppermint candies.
45. Survey the class to see how many students like spinach. (Survey a grade level or even the whole school!) Record results and display for all to see. Maybe use smiley faces and frowns to represent the number of people liking or disliking spinach and place them in a bar graph or pie graph.
46. Think of different adjectives to describe milk, oranges, apples and spinach. Have students use their senses to help them choose.
47. Define "merrily" (page 10) and sing the song "Row Your Boat" together and then in a round.
48. After reading page 12, have students roleplay as one of the dolls or toys and improvise what that character would have "cried out" to the shiny new engine.
49. Have students identify the "names" of the engines by noticing the capital letters which set them apart. Have students identify and write the capital letters that are in their names. Identify their own initials.
50. Research about windmills and make models of them. (If possible go see one!)
51. Notice changes in the facial expressions of the little red engine throughout the book. Have students describe what emotions the facial expressions of any of the engines imply.
52. Have a "snorting" contest. (Page 14) Read the book *Are You My Mother?* by P.D. Eastman and see the snorting machine.
53. Define "berths," "plate-glass," and the expression, "the likes of you." (pages 14-15)
54. Find the roundhouse on different pages of the book. Research about "roundhouses" and the places engines are serviced.
55. Have students predict what the name of the black engine will be. (page 17)
56. Notice the Mother Goose character "Humpty Dumpty" on page 18. Look back in the story and try to find him anywhere. Notice how easy it is to locate him during the rest of the story. Read some Mother Goose rhymes.
57. Define the word "bellowed" (page 20) and go outside and practice bellowing some school cheers.
58. Research about printing presses. (page 21) Write a make-believe newspaper that would be printed in the city on the other side of the mountain. Have students brainstorm what the headlines would read after The Little Engine That Could brings the train and its cargo to the good boys and girls. Create a class newspaper and "print" copies for other classes. Learn how paper is made and how a book is made. Read the book, *How a Book is Made*, by Alike.
59. Notice the doll's pleading gesture on page 30. Have students improvise what the doll is saying. Have the students ever used this gesture to get what they want? Did they receive their wish?
60. See how many of the buildings of the city the students can identify. (page 31) (A church and a school.) Discuss what other buildings usually belong in a city. Make a model of the city with milk cartons. Cartons can make a table display, or if the bottoms are cut out, the back side of the building can be stapled to a bulletin board for a wall diorama.
61. Have the students hold a "conductors" contest and see who can say, "All Aboard!" the best. Use a conductor's hat for a prop. Notice that there are no humans shown controlling the trains.
62. Have students improvise what the dolls and toys would cheer when The Little Engine That Could begins to pull them over the mountain.
63. Make bonnets like the one seen on page 34. Notice the variety of hats illustrated in the book. Play an adaptation of "musical chairs." Use enough hats so that everyone but one person starts with a hat when the music begins. Then randomly stop the music and eliminate the person that is caught without a hat. Also remove one hat each time the music stops. Give the winner a special hat as a reward.

Bibliography

Something About the Author. Volumes 32, 19 and 24, 1983.

GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT THINKING SKILLS

To ensure that students are using various levels of thinking skills use the following guidelines: (Adapted from Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive thinking skills.)

Comprehension and Recall:

Exercises which ask students to: match, discover, identify, listen, research, locate, or observe. Such as:

Comprehension/Discussion Questions #1 and 9.
Student Activities #27, 30, and 50.

Application:

Exercises which ask students to: list, construct, paint, sketch, manipulate, interview, or experiment. Such as:

Student Activities #5, 12, and 21.

Analysis:

Exercises which ask students to: classify, categorize, compare, contrast, survey, or advertise. Such as:

Comprehension/Discussion Questions #19 and 25.
Student Activities #41 and 45.

Synthesis:

Exercises which ask students to: invent, compose, predict, role-play, imagine, create, produce, estimate, combine, or infer. Such as:

Comprehension/Discussion Questions #17, 20, and 26.
Student Activities #8, 13, and 38.

Evaluation:

Exercises which ask students to: evaluate, judge, debate, discuss, recommend, choose, or decide. Such as:

Comprehension/Discussion Questions #11, 22, and 28.
Student Activities #4 and 51.

Vocabulary Test

Place the following words in the sentences in which they belong.

freight

bellowed

bobbed

dingy

creamy

1. Sarah drank a _____ smooth strawberry milkshake.
2. The train carried all different sorts of _____ such as coal and lumber.
3. The giant _____ , "I smell the blood of an Englishman!"
4. The rubber duckie _____ up and down in the bathtub.
5. The windows of the house were hard to see through because they were so _____ .

Comprehension Test

Draw railroad tracks to connect the matches.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. The Teddy Bears | a. "I thought I could, I thought I could." |
| 2. The Rusty Old Engine | b. Waved a red flag at passing trains. |
| 3. The roundhouse | c. Needed to rest his weary wheels. |
| 4. The Little Engine That Could | d. Had carried printing presses. |
| 5. The Shiny New Passenger Engine | e. Where all the good boys and girls lived. |
| 6. The Big Strong Freight Engine | f. Where engines live when they are not busy. |
| 7. The city in the valley | g. Have almost no necks at all. |
| 8. The funny little clown | h. Has sleeping cars. |

Answer Key

Vocabulary Test

1. creamy 2. freight 3. bellowed 4. bobbed 5. dingy

Comprehension Test

1. The Teddy Bears a. "I thought I could, I thought I could."
2. The Rusty Old Engine b. Waved a red flag at passing trains.
3. The roundhouse c. Needed to rest his weary wheels.
4. The Little Engine That Could d. Had carried printing presses.
5. The Shiny New Passenger Engine e. Where all the good boys and girls lived.
6. The Big Strong Freight Engine f. Where engines live when they are not busy.
7. The city in the valley g. Have almost no necks at all.
8. The funny little clown h. Has sleeping cars.

OR

1. g 2. c 3. f 4. a 5. h 6. d 7. e 8. b



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