



MIKE MULLIGAN AND HIS STEAM SHOVEL

by Virginia Lee Burton



Teacher's Guide

Written By Wanda Miller

CLASSROOM FAVORITES

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Synopsis

This is a story about Mike Mulligan and his faithful steam shovel, Mary Anne. They had worked on many construction projects together. Mike likes to say that Mary Anne could dig as much in a day as a hundred men could dig in a week. Mary Anne and other steam shovels are being replaced by the new electric and diesel type of shovels. Mike does not want Mary Anne to be sold as junk.

Mary Anne has one last chance to prove herself. Mike takes her to Popperville, where the people were building a new town hall. Mike tells Henry B. Swap that he and Mary Anne will dig the cellar in one day. If they can't, the town will not have to pay them. People come from far and wide to see the thrilling race. This encourages Mike and Mary Anne to dig even faster. They are successful, but the glory of success is almost lost when they realize they left no exit for Mary Anne to get out of the cellar. A little boy who had been watching came up with the idea to leave Mary Anne in the cellar to become the furnace for the new town hall, and Mike Mulligan could be the janitor. So that is what they decided to do.

Author Sketch

Virginia Lee Burton (1909-1968) was an acclaimed American author and illustrator. She was born August 30, 1909, to Alfred Burton, an engineer and dean at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and British artist and writer Lena Yates. Jinnee, as Burton was known, spent an idyllic early childhood in New England; then, in 1917, her mother moved with Jinnee and her brother and sister to California, claiming the Massachusetts winters were ruining her health; Jinnee's mother apparently

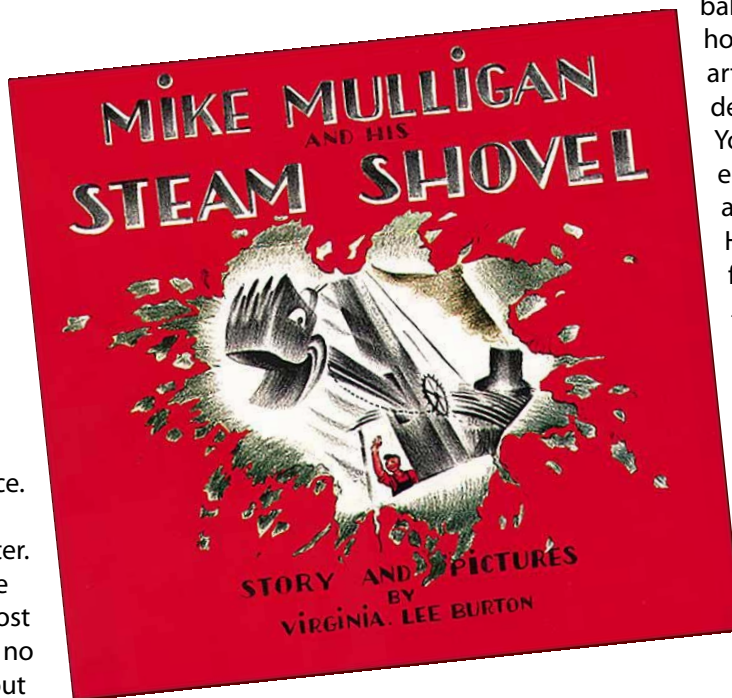
abandoned the family altogether in 1925 when she fell in love with one of her husband's former students, and Jinnee wound up in a foster home in California for a time.

A determined Jinnee, however, set her sights on becoming a dancer. She won a scholarship to the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco, and, with her sister, moved to San Francisco after high school graduation to study ballet. During this time, she also honed her skills as a sketch artist. In 1928, her sister had debuted as a dancer in New York City, and Jinnee was invited to join the same troupe, and she moved back East. However, her now-elderly father broke his leg, and Jinnee moved to Boston to care for him, giving up her dreams of becoming a professional dancer.

Undaunted, she got a job as a "sketcher"—a cartoonist and sketch artist—at the *Boston Transcript* newspaper and began to pursue a career as an artist. In the fall of 1930, at the recommendation of friends, she

took a drawing class taught by Greek-

born sculptor George Demetrios at the Boston Museum School; they were married the following spring. After their son Aristides (known as Aris, and now a famous modernist sculptor), was born in 1932, they moved to Folly Cove on Massachusetts' Cape Ann. In 1935, their second son, Michael (who became a successful businessman) was born. It was during this time, at the height of the Great Depression, that Jinnee decided to try writing children's books to supplement the family income. After some false starts, she began writing for her own children, hitting on stories that engaged them, and success soon followed. Her first published book, *Choo Choo: The Story of the Little Engine Who Ran Away* (1937), was a huge success, and enabled the family to buy a small house and barn on seven acres in Folly Cove; the house would become the basis for *The Little*



Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel

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House. In addition to continuing to write and illustrate children's books, Jinnee in 1938 founded Folly Cove Designers, a collective of artist that became famous for its vibrant, highly sought-after textile designs.



Jinnee's life was marked by success achieved through overcoming apparent setbacks. In a 2008 story in *Vogue* magazine, Jean Nathan writes that Burton's "richly productive life is an inspiring tale of fashioning new worlds," and her books reflect that pioneering spirit and determination to overcome. Her older son, Aris, says in the same article, "From her books I learned that no matter what is thrown at you, you deal with it and keep going. That theme is all through her work." She died in 1968 at the age of 59.

Critic's Corner

Acclaimed illustrator and author Virginia Lee Burton created books that were noted for their unique style and upbeat storylines concerning technological change; they featured primarily female main characters (including a female house and a female steam shovel) and happy endings. Trained as a dancer and artist, Ms. Burton also founded and led the internationally renowned Folly Cove Designers, composed of artists living on and around Cape Ann, Massachusetts, north of Boston; the group, which operated from the late 1930s until Burton's death in the late 1960s, got its start when Burton began giving art lessons to neighborhood women. Folly Cove Designers became famous and sought-after for its one-of-a-kind block-printed textiles and designs.

Although Burton won the 1942 Caldecott Medal and a 1959 Lewis Carroll Shelf Award for *The Little House*, and a 1948 Caldecott Medal for her illustrations for *The Song of Robin Hood* (edited by Anne Malcolmson), she did not win any awards for *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* (1939); she did, however win something perhaps even more important: literary immortality. *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* has been wildly popular since its release, with critics and others echoing the opinion of Jim Trelease in *The New Read-Aloud Handbook* that the book is a "modern classic." Like many of Burton's stories, it tells of faithful friends and the perils of technological advance, and makes the point that "new" is not necessarily "better." Readers over the years have embraced her message: none of her books have ever been out of print, and together they

have sold nearly 7 million copies.

Timeline

- Before** Mike Mulligan and his steam shovel, Mary Anne, were very useful, helping dig canals and roadways and landing fields and the cellars of skyscrapers. Mike believes Mary Anne can dig as much in one day as 100 men could in one week.
- Now** Electric, gas, and diesel shovels have replaced steam shovels. Steam shovels are no longer wanted for big jobs in the city. Mike and Mary Anne are sad.
- One day** Mike learns that the little town of Popperville is building a new Town Hall. He determines to go with Mary Anne to dig the cellar. They leave the city and travel to Popperville.
- In Popperville** Henry B. Swap, a selectman, makes a deal with Mike: he and Mary Anne will dig the cellar in only one day, or forfeit their pay.
- On the day** All the townspeople come and watch, spurring Mike and Mary Anne to greater speed and accuracy. They just manage to finish the cellar in one day-- but they are stuck, having forgotten to dig a way out!
- Then** A little boy suggests Mary Anne be converted into a furnace, and Mike Mulligan be made the new janitor. The problem is solved, and Mike and Mary Anne get paid. Everyone agrees.
- Now** Mary Anne is now the furnace, happily heating the new town hall. Mike Mulligan lives in the basement, rocking on his rocking chair, eating fresh apple pies brought by Mrs. McGillicuddy, and swapping stories with Henry B. Swap.

Objectives

1. The students will become familiar with vocabulary words from *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*.
2. The students will be able to retell the story of *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*.

Meaning Study

1. What is a steam shovel?
(It is a machine used for digging that is powered by steam)
2. What is a canal?
(A canal is a waterway constructed across land, for ships or boats to pass through.)
3. What is a highway?
(It is a main road.)
4. Define the word automobile.
(An automobile is a four-wheeled vehicle with a built-in engine; a car.)
5. Describe a skyscraper.
(A skyscraper is a very tall building.)
6. Who are selectmen, and what do they do?
(In New England, they are members of a board of town officials elected to run public affairs.)
7. What is a cellar?
(A room or several rooms completely or partly underground, usually beneath a building; a basement.)
8. What does the word argue mean?
(To dispute or disagree about something.)
9. What does a janitor do?
(A janitor is a person who is hired to clean and take care of a building.)
10. What is a furnace used for?
(It is used to heat a building.)

Comprehension Study

1. What is the name of Mike Mulligan's steam shovel?
(Mary Anne)
2. What did Mike Mulligan say about Mary Anne?
(She could dig as much in a day as a hundred men could dig in a week.)
3. Why do you think that Mike said that Mary Anne could dig as much in a day as hundred men in a week if he wasn't quite sure?
(He was very proud of her.)
4. How long had Mike and Mary Anne been digging together?
(For years and years.)
5. Why do you think Mary Anne did not grow old after many years and after much work?
(Mike took such good care of her.)
6. Name some of the things that Mike and Mary Anne dug.
(The great canals for the big boats to sail through. They cut through the high mountains so that trains could go through. They lowered the hills and straightened the curves to make the long highways. They helped smooth out the ground and fill in the

- holes to make the landing fields for airplanes. They helped dig the cellars of tall skyscrapers.)*
7. What happened when people stopped to watch Mike and Mary Anne dig?
(They would dig a little faster and a little better. The more people stopped the faster and better they dug.)
 8. Did the new gasoline, electric, and diesel motor shovels change things for Mike Mulligan and Mary Anne?
(They took away all the jobs from the steam shovels. Mike and Mary Anne were very sad.)
 9. When this happened, what was done with the steam shovels?
(They were sold for junk or left out in old gravel pits to rust and fall apart.)
 10. What happened to Mike and Mary Anne?
(Mike loved Mary Anne and didn't want her to be sold for junk. They kept looking for work, but no one wanted them anymore.)
 11. How did they finally find work?
(Mike read in a newspaper that the town of Popperville was going to build a new town hall. They went to Popperville. Mike told Henry B. Swap that they could dig the cellar in just one day. He told Henry that if they couldn't do it, he wouldn't have to pay them. Henry B. Swap liked that idea and gave them the job.)
 12. Were Mike and Mary Anne able to dig the cellar for the town hall in one day?
(Yes, many people came to watch, which helped them to dig faster.)
 13. What happened when they finished digging the cellar?
(They discovered that they had dug so fast and so well that they had forgotten to leave a way to get Mary Anne out of the cellar.)
 14. How was the problem solved?
(A little boy thought of an idea. He said they could leave Mary Anne in the cellar to become the furnace for the new town hall and Mike Mulligan could be the janitor. Everyone agreed with this and was happy.)

Student Involvement Activities

1. Have books from the related book list available for your students to read during silent reading time.
2. With your school librarian's help, your students could do short research reports on steam shovels and other heavy machinery.
3. Have your students illustrate their favorite scene from the book. These could then be placed on the bulletin board.
4. As a whole class, brainstorm other ways in which

Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel Virginia Lee Burton

Mike Mulligan could have solved the problem of Mary Anne being stuck in the cellar with no way out.

5. After brainstorming other ways to solve the problem, have your students write a new ending to the book. These could then be published in a class book: *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel—New Endings*.
6. Using a toy steam shovel, and other toy machinery, have your students perform *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*. The students could take turns playing parts. In preparation for the play, your students could design the scenery with the help of the art teacher. Dialogue could be written on index cards for the characters. A narrator would also be needed. This play could be performed for another class and/or parents.
7. You might be able to arrange to have someone from your local highway department come to your class to tell how roads are built.
8. After reading this book, it would be an excellent time to take a field trip to your town or city hall to find out how your local government works.
9. Read other books written by Virginia Lee Burton to or with your class.

Vocabulary Test

(40 points)

Match the following vocabulary words with their correct definitions by placing the correct letter in the blank.

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1. _____ canal | a. members of a board of town officials elected yearly to run public affairs |
| 2. _____ highway | b. a waterway constructed across land, used by ships or boats |
| 3. _____ automobile | c. a person who is hired to clean and take care of a building |
| 4. _____ skyscraper | d. a very tall building |
| 5. _____ selectmen | e. a main road |
| 6. _____ cellar | f. used to heat a building |
| 7. _____ steam shovel | g. a digging machine that is powered by steam |
| 8. _____ argue | h. a four-wheeled vehicle with a built-in engine |
| 9. _____ janitor | i. another word for basement |
| 10. _____ furnace | j. to disagree about something |

Comprehension Test

Part I: Fill in the Blank (15 points)

Fill in the blanks in the following sentences using vocabulary words from Part I.

1. The Erie _____ was dug so that boats and ships could travel through it.
2. When we went to the city, we saw a tall _____.
3. Mary Anne became the _____ for the new town hall.
4. Mike Mulligan and Mary Anne dug the _____ for the new town hall in Popperville.
5. Henry B. Swamp is one of the _____ in Popperville.

Part II: Essay (45 points each)

Answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. Name some of the things Mike Mulligan and Mary Anne dug together.
2. Explain the relationship between Mike Mulligan and Mary Anne.
3. Think of other things that could have been done to solve the problem of Mary Anne being stuck in the cellar. Explain your answer.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY TEST

(40 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. b | 6. i |
| 2. e | 7. g |
| 3. h | 8. j |
| 4. d | 9. c |
| 5. a | 10. f |

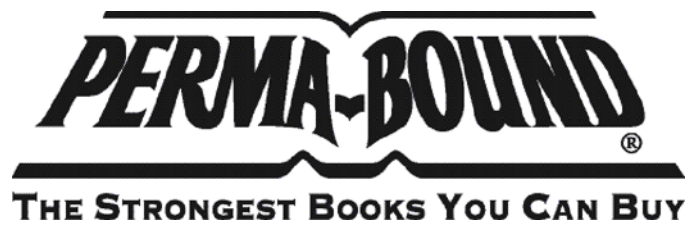
COMPREHENSION TEST

Part I: Fill in the Blank (15 points)

1. Canal
2. skyscraper
3. furnace
4. cellar
5. selectmen

Part II: Essay (45 points)

1. They helped dig the great canals for the big boats to sail through. They cut through the high mountains so that trains could go through. They lowered the hills and straightened the curves to make the long highways. They helped smooth out the ground and fill in the holes to make the landing field for airplanes. They helped dig the cellars of tall skyscrapers.
2. Mike and Mary Anne had been digging together for years and years. When the new types of shovels came along, Mike did not want Mary Anne to be left out to rust in a gravel pit or sold for junk. Mike had taken such good care of Mary Anne, and she had come to mean a lot to him.
3. Accept reasonable answers.



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