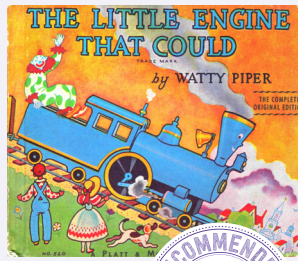# NEVER GIVE UP!

FOCUS on CHARACTER

The Little Engine that Could
by Watty Piper

Themes

Never Give Up
Determination
Confidence
Positive Thinking
Risk-Taking
Encourage Others

RECOMMENDED GRADE LEVEL **K**

This classic children's story reinforces the power of positive thinking and hard work through the character of a little blue steam engine. Young children will love the brightly colored illustrations and easily connect to the characters and their message of "never giving up" to accomplish a goal. This is an ideal book to read at the beginning of the school year to direct your students to an "*I think I can!*" attitude when talking about reading, math, writing or other kindergarten skills they will learn throughout the year!

Key Vocabulary

Rumbled: *move forward with a sound like thunder in the distance*
Merrily: *happily, joyfully*
Jerk: *sudden motion, and uneven tug*
Steadily: *in a regular, even way*
Snorted: *noisy breathing, often to express dislike*
Indignantly: *feeling or showing anger*
Weary: *tired*

Use a **toy train**, **photographs** or **illustrations in the book** to help students understand specialized vocabulary.

Train Vocabulary

Hitched: *train cars join together at the hitch*
Roundhouse: *round building where trains are repaired or can be turned around*
Engine: *the first car on the train that has the power to pull other cars*
Berths: *a sleeping bunk bed on a train*
Dining cars: *train car just for eating*
Parlor cars: *train car for sitting and talking*
Plate-glass windows: *large sheet of glass*
Passenger Engine: *pulls train cars with people rather than boxes and crates of things*
Freight Engine: *pulls train cars with boxes or crates of things*
Switching Engine: *used to move trains to a different track*

Discussion Starters

1. What was the happy little train loaded with?
Toy animals, dolls, toy clown, engines, airplanes, tops, picture puzzles, books, oranges, apples, milk, spinach, peppermint drops, lollypops. NOTE: In 1930, when this classic book was published, jack-knives were listed too. The image can easily be covered with a white sticker and the word should not be read to students if it is still included in your published book.

2. Where was the train going?
Over to the other side of the mountains to deliver toys and food to good little boys and girls.

3. What was the problem?
*The train came to a jerk and the wheels wouldn't turn any more. The train couldn't get over the mountain. Show a picture of a **valley** and **mountain** to illustrate the problem. Explain that the wheels were not broken; it just became hard and it took more effort to get up the steep mountain.*
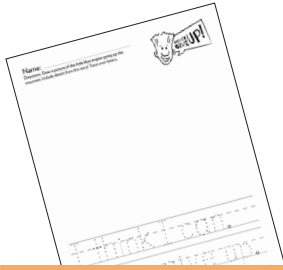
4. How did they try to solve the problem?
First, they asked a shiny new engine for help. **Did it help? Why not?** *Thought they were too important to carry toys.* **How did the little train and toys feel?** *Sad.*
Second, they asked big strong engine for help. **Did it help? Why not?** *Thought they were too*

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important to carry toys. **How did the little train and toys feel?** *Very sad.*

Third, they **a**sked the dingy, rusty old engine for help. **Did it help? Why not?** *Too tired. Must rest.* **How did the little train and toys feel?** *Very, very sad. Ready to cry.* Note that the sadness got worse with each no. **Have you ever felt that way?**

Fourth, they asked the little blue engine for help. **Did it help?** *Not at first, but the blue engine saw tears and thought of kids not getting toys or food so it decided to try and help.*

5. What helped the little blue engine get over the mountain?
Positive thinking, 'I think I can' (never gave up), helped the engine to keep trying. The clown, animals and dolls smiled and cheered, which encouraged the engine (encourage others)!

Writing Prompt

Draw a picture of the little blue engine going up the mountain. Include details from the story! Trace over letters "I think I can" and "Never give up."

Activities

Class Project or Bulletin Board

Together, brainstorm a list of what the students will learn (or have learned already) in kindergarten! Add to the list, as you enthusiastically explain kindergarten or their transition to 1st grade. Like the little blue engine, they need to *think they can*. Post the list in the classroom.

Create a '***Think I Can***' bulletin board in your room. Include a mountain and valley, car trains, with room to add pictures of students, and engines that pull the cars up the mountain with the phrase "*I think I can.*" Move the train further up each week. Eventually, have it go over the top and add the phrase "*I thought I could*" as students grow and learn in kindergarten!
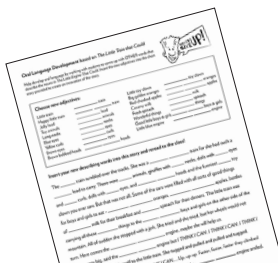
Oral Language Development

This story is a *great* example to use when teaching adjectives. The describing words used for the engines and toys provide great examples of one and two word adjectives. Help develop oral language by working with students to come up with *other* words that describe the nouns in the story. Insert the new adjectives into the short story (provided in the printable) to create an innovation of *The Little Engine That Could*. Consider introducing synonyms - other words that can be used to describe the same things.

Brain Break: Student Train

Have student line up to make the train. Select a student to be the engine. Using the list of things they will learn in kindergarten or first grade, have the engine choose **one** thing they really want to be able to do this year.

PRINTABLE:
Kid Writing

PRINTABLE:
Adjective Images

This activity can be an ideal transition activity when lining students up for lunch, recess or meeting the bus!

Resources

Accelerated Reading Quiz:
5477

Start the train:

1. Slowly move legs in small steps... Kid engine says, "I want to _____ (*something from the list*). *I think I can, I think I can, I think I can!*"
2. Have the rest of the room whisper cheer... *"Never give up, Never give up, Never give up!"*
3. Move a little faster, with the kid engine saying, "*I THINK I CAN, I THINK I CAN, I THINK I CAN!*" *with more excitement.*
4. Response from class... "*NEVER GIVE UP, NEVER GIVE UP, NEVER GIVE UP!*"

Repeat with different 'kid engines' each day!

Name: _____

Directions: Draw a picture of the little blue engine going up the mountain. Include details from the story! Trace over letters.

NEVER GIVE UP!

I think I can.

Never give up.

Oral Language Development based on *The Little Train that Could*

Help develop oral language by working with students to come up with OTHER words that describe the nouns in *The Little Engine That Could*. Insert the new adjectives into the short story provided to create an innovation of the story.

NEVER GIVE UP!

Choose new adjectives:

Little train	_____ train
Happy little train	_____ _____ train
Jolly load	_____ load
Toy animals	_____ animals
Long necks	_____ necks
Blue eyes	_____ eyes
Yellow curls	_____ curls
Brown eyes	_____ eyes
Brown bobbed heads	_____ _____ heads

Little toy clown	_____ toy clown
Big golden oranges	_____ _____ oranges
Red cheeked apples	_____ _____ apples
Creamy milk	_____ milk
Fresh spinach	_____ spinach
Wonderful things	_____ things
Good little boys & girls	_____ _____ boys & girls
Little blue engine	_____ _____ engine

Insert your new describing words into this story and reread to the class!

The _____ train rumbled over the tracks. She was a _____, _____ train for she had such a _____ load to carry. There were _____ animals, giraffes with _____ necks, dolls with _____ eyes and _____ curls, dolls with _____ eyes, and _____, _____ heads and the funniest _____ toy clown you ever saw. But that was not all. Some of the cars were filled with all sorts of good things for boys and girls to eat - _____, _____ oranges, _____, _____ apples, bottles of _____ milk for their breakfast and _____ spinach for their dinners. The little train was carrying all these _____ things to the _____, _____ boys and girls on the other side of the mountain. All of sudden she stopped with a jerk. She tried and she tried, but her wheels would not turn. Here comes the _____, _____ engine, maybe she will help us.

I'm not very big, said the _____, _____ engine but *I THINK I CAN. I THINK I CAN. I THINK I CAN.* And she hitched herself to the little train. She tugged and pulled and pulled and tugged.

*I THINK I CAN....I THINK I CAN....I THINK I CAN.....*Up, up up. Faster, faster, faster they climbed until they reached the top of the mountain. HURRAY! And the _____, _____ engine smiled.

"I thought I could. I thought I could. I thought I could."