**The Little Engine that Could**

by Watty Piper

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!

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

Resources
Accelerated Reading Quiz:
5477

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.

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.

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.

Choose new adjectives:

| Little train                  | ___________ train | Little toy clown | ___________ toy clown |
| Happy little train            | ___________ train | Big golden oranges | ___________ oranges |
| Jolly load                    | ___________ load  | Red cheeked apples | ___________ apples  |
| Toy animals                   | ___________ animals| Creamy milk       | ___________ milk    |
| Long necks                    | ___________ necks | Fresh spinach      | ___________ spinach |
| Blue eyes                     | ___________ eyes  | Wonderful things  | ___________ things  |
| Yellow curls                  | ___________ curls | Good little boys & girls | ________ boys & girls |
| Brown eyes                    | ___________ eyes  | Little blue engine | ___________ engine  |
| Brown bobbed heads            | ___________ heads |                   |                     |

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.”