



My Name is Mitch

Shelagh Lynne Supeene

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Consider the following question as you read *My Name is Mitch*:

What does learning to read mean for Mitch?

Story

Mitch is tired of being called Midget and being picked on by the class bully and he is tired of his mother's refusal to tell him anything about his father, whom she calls The Creep.

My name is Mitch MacLeod. On the first day of school I can tell that it's going to be a bad year. As soon as I walk into the classroom Philip points at me and yells, "Hey, Midget-brain, the kindergarten is down the hall." Everyone looks, naturally, including any new kids I might have had a chance with.

Chevy chips in, "Here, little boy, I'll take you to Mrs. Granoff." She holds out her hand. You'd never know that over the summer we were practically friends. She totally towers over me, but I ignore her.

Mitch MacLeod may be the smallest kid in grade six, but he has a great sense of humor and a strong backbone. He can read, sometimes, but never at school when he has to. "You don't know what humiliation is until you have a grade one reading buddy who reads better than you do," he says. But things start to change for Mitch when he creates an opportunity to stand up to Philip, his arch-enemy, when his reading begins to improve, and when his dad, The Creep, moves back to town.

Author

Shelagh Lynne Supeene has always loved to read, and she has always loved to write. She was already creating booklets for her parents to read when she was eight years old. Her family moved a lot when she was growing up. She remembers her growing sense of wonder at the world, her pleasure in Manitoba summers riding a sorrel cow pony named June. Plenty of daydreaming, plenty of freedom. In addition to writing, Lynne has worked in adult education and has studied Chinese language and philosophy. She lives with her husband in Waterloo, Ontario.

Curricular Integration

Language Arts

- Mitch is the smallest kid in his class. In order to understand how that might feel, have students write about an event from the perspective of something small like an ant, bee, mouse or spider. Have them describe how they overcome the things that block their way.
- In some cases, being small is an asset. Brainstorm such occasions as a class and discuss them.
- Create a list of synonyms for the word “small.” Once students have generated the list, have them select a few of the words to use in a poem about the positive and/or negative side of small.
- Mitch spearheads a plan to catch Philip stealing food. He takes black and cayenne pepper, hot mustard and super-hot horseradish to school to put on the bait food. Have students write a persuasive paragraph supporting or not supporting this behavior.
- Read a folktale such as *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* to your class. Have them discuss the book's message. Relate the information from the folktale to life at school. Discuss what lessons can be learned from the book. Have students write a letter to one of the characters in the book telling them about what they have learned and how it changed their thinking.
- Have students create Wanted Posters with positive messages like Wanted: someone with a sense of humour, a reading buddy, a role model. Make them bright and eye-catching.

History

- Throughout history many people have overcome adversity and humiliation to go on to accomplish great things. Research to find some of these people and write about their journey to success. Some examples are: Helen Keller, Albert Einstein, Nelson Mandela, Babe Ruth, Ludwig van Beethoven, Jill Kinmont and Stephen Hawking.

- Many inventions and discoveries were made by accident or because of someone's perseverance and persistence. They didn't give up or let others bully them into something. Find out about such events and research how these people triumphed.

Art

- Using a selection of quotations that reflect positive behavior and experiences, have students choose a quotation to copy onto a blank sheet of paper and then draw a picture to illustrate its meaning. For example: "*Everyone has the right to be respected and the responsibility to respect others.*" (bullying.org), "*all serious daring starts from within*" (Harriet Beecher Stowe), "*to see what is right and not to do it, is want of courage*" (Confucius) and "*hitch your wagon to a star*" (Ralph Waldo Emerson).
- Have students create a wordless picturebook to illustrate a situation from *My Name Is Mitch*. For example: the situation around Philip stealing food from the cloakroom, when the window shatters when Philip walks by it, Mitch sneaking out to visit his father or when Mitch reads his story *Inky Scribbler and the Magic Paper*.
- Use the words to the poem "My Grandmother's Plant" on page 28 as the basis for a mural about plants. Have each student draw the plant they think is described in the poem. Put all the plants on a mural that looks like a window sill or garden path.

Drama

- Using a talking stick to practice listening and communicating is one of the lessons from Education World that deals with bullying. Give a brief history of talking sticks and their use in Native American and Canadian culture, Decide on the topic you will discuss as a class. Have students sit in a circle and use the talking stick to indicate the speaker.
- Another example from the Education World site is "Simon Says." In this variation, students learn about each other, their similarities and differences. For example: "Simon say everyone with brown hair stand up. Simon says everyone who likes soccer stand on one foot, etc."

- The tables turn in Mitch's favour when he is the only person who can prove that Philip didn't break the window. In groups of four or five, have students debate whether or not Mitch should help Philip.

Selected Resources

Fiction

Avi. *The Mayor of Central Park*.

Bedard, Michael. *Sitting Ducks*.

Bloom, Becky. *Wolf*.

Card, Orson Scott. *Enders Game*.

Couric, Katie. *The Brand New Kid*.

Day, Marie. *Edward the Crazy Man*. (bullies, differences).

DePaola, Tomie. *Oliver Button is a Sissy*.

Elish, Don. *Born too Short*.

Fitch, Sheree. *Pocket Rocks*.

Hiaasen, Carl. *Hoot*.

Hoose, Philip M. *Hey, Little Ant*.

Keats, Ezra Jack. *Goggles*.

Lee, Ingrid. *The True Story of George*.

Munson, Derek. *Enemy Pie*.

Myers, Christopher. *Wings*.

Nickle, John. *The Ant Bully*.

Philbrick, Rodman. *Freak the Mighty, Max the Mighty*.

Polacco, Patricia. *Thank you, Mr. Falker*.

Pomerantz, Charlotte. *You're not my Friend Anymore*.

Pratchett, Terry. *The Carpet People*.

Walters, Eric. *Underdog*.

Nonfiction

(Dewey Decimal Classification numbers appear in parentheses where applicable.)

Barton, Bob and David Booth. *Poetry goes to School*. (372.64).

Broome, Sadie Allran and Nancy W. Henley. *Teaching Character... It's Elementary*. (372).

Christensen, Linda. *Reading, Writing and Rising Up*. (306.4).

Demi. *The Empty Pot*. (398.2).

Fletcher, Ralph and Joann Portalupi. *Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K-8*. (372.62).

Galdone, Paul. *The Monkey and the Crocodile*. (398.2).

Jones, Charlotte. *Mistakes That Worked*. (609).

Schwartz, Larry. *The New Dramathemes*. (372.66).

Step toe, John. *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*. (398.2).

Wullfson, Don L. *The Kid Who Invented the Popsicle*. (609).

Online

“Biographical Dictionary” www.s9.com/biography

“Random Acts Of Kindness Foundation” www.actsofkindness.org

“Bullying.org” www.bullying.org

“Good Character” www.goodcharacter.com

“Education World: Stop Bullying Now”
www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson191.shtml

A Few Words From the Author

Dear Readers,

It is a sad and annoying truth that some people delight in persecuting anyone who is different. Most of us have been teased at times, and some of us have been teased so meanly that it is really not teasing. It is bullying.

I did not begin *My Name is Mitch* thinking about teasing. I began it wondering what it would be like for a boy who did not learn to read at the usual time. I live near Mitch's school, which just happens to be Elizabeth Ziegler Public School in Waterloo, Ontario. That is the school my children went to, though Mitch doesn't know a single person that my children knew, because everyone in Mitch's story is made-up. The school has a hill that kids toboggan down, just like in *My Name Is Mitch*. And there really is a red tile hall, and one time that huge window really did break—an astounding sound. Of course most of the things that happen in the book are made up—the tricks and the big talk on the hill and the teasing.

Luckily, we all have more to us than whatever it is we're being teased about. Mitch isn't only a short kid who is late learning to read. He is much, much more. He is all the things that make him laugh, and make him curious. And so am I, and so are you.

Best wishes,

Lynne Supeene