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ABSTRACT

Through dramatic play, children are free to use their imaginations to explore where their abilities can take them, and to experience feelings of control, power, and mastery. By building on their natural play experiences, students can begin to understand the true meaning of heroism and how they might start to develop heroic characteristics in themselves. This lesson plan, with a series of interactive activities, lets students explore their beliefs about heroes and heroism. By following the lesson plan, they will: share names of familiar figures they consider to be heroes, and then examine their reasons for such beliefs; view portraits of heroes from American history and glean background information on each; identify the heroic personality traits and characteristics of each hero; broaden their understanding of what makes a hero, enabling them to identify real-life heroes who surround them; share pictures and record reflections of their heroes, using these to create a Hero Hall of Fame; and consider ways they, too, may become everyday heroes. The lesson plan contains material on how to prepare to teach the lesson. It also contains suggested activities for the following lessons: (1) Introducing a Real-Life Hero; (2) Who Are Your Heroes? (3) What Makes a Hero? (4) Presenting Heroes from History; (5) Is There a Hero in You? and Extending the Lesson. The lesson plan provides information and ideas for teaching each lesson; cites learning objectives; gives appropriate grade levels (Grades K-2) and time required for each lesson; and outlines national standards for social studies, art, and English covered in the lesson plan. Lists several links to Web sites and other resources. (NKA)

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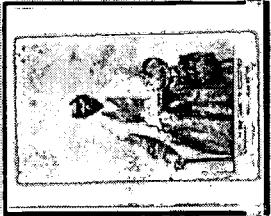
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Portrait of a Hero



Introduction

Visit any elementary school playground and chances are you'll see children pretending to be heroes from their favorite stories, TV shows, or movies. Through such dramatic play, children are free to use their imaginations to explore where their abilities can take them, and to experience feelings of control, power, and mastery. By building on these natural play experiences, we can help students begin to understand the true meaning of heroism and how they might start to develop heroic characteristics in themselves.

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Sojourner Truth
Courtesy of The Library
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Project)

[SUBJECT AREAS ▾](#)

[History & Social Studies: United States](#)

[Literature & Language Arts: Biography](#)

[Art & Culture: Visual Arts](#)

[CLASS LEVEL ▾](#)

Grades K-2

[TIME REQUIRED ▾](#)

[Introducing a Real-Life Hero and Who Are Your Heroes? - One 35-minute session](#)

[What Makes a Hero? - One 35-minute session](#)

[Presenting Heroes from U.S. History - Two or more 35-minute sessions](#)

[Is There a Hero in You? - One 35-minute class period](#)

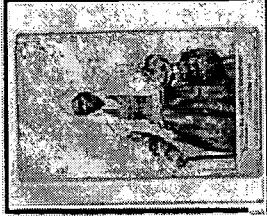
[Extending the Lesson - yearlong, ongoing activity](#)

Guiding Questions: What is a hero? What does a hero look like? What characteristics must someone have to be a hero? Who are some heroes from American history, and in what ways were they heroic? Who are some famous and not so well-known heroes in the world today? What can they teach you about behaving like a hero? Could you be a hero? How?

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Project)

Portrait of a Hero

Introduction

SUBJECT AREAS ▶

After completing the lessons in this unit, students will be able to: understand and define the meaning of the words hero and heroic; learn about heroes from U.S. history by observing details in pictures and listening to brief biographies of each figure and express why they are considered heroes; and demonstrate an understanding of how famous heroes and real-life heroes compare; they believe they can become heroes.

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Lesson Plans

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re you to access portraits of five figures from United States history through EDSITEMENT-reviewed Web sites. You may share these portraits with students at individual computer stations; by assigning small groups to share a number of computers; by means of inter-projected images displayed to the whole class; or by printing the images and distributing copies of them to students. You need to decide which format will work best for you, depending on the availability of ability of computers and Internet access in your classroom. Click-through directions for accessing the portraits are provided in the Entering Heroes from History activity section, under Preparing for the Activity.

5 Is There a Hero in You?

e Hero

is a hero to you. Using photo corners or photo glue, mount the photo onto the center of a piece of brown construction paper. Use a black marker to outline your photo and to trace around the edge of the construction paper. Add brown marker lines so that your mat now resembles a "wood grain" frame.* Bring the photograph to school and tell

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Learning Objectives

After completing the lessons in this unit, students will be able to:

- understand and define the meaning of the words hero and heroic
- learn about heroes from U.S. history by observing details in pictures and listening to brief biographies of each figure and express why they are considered heroes.
- learn how everyday people can be heroes, and demonstrate an understanding of how famous heroes and real-life heroes compare
- create goals and show-through writing and art-how they believe they can become heroes.

Assessing the Lesson: ([Download an example of a rubric for this lesson plan, in rich text format.](#))

Preparing to Teach This Lesson

This lesson will require you to access portraits of five figures from United States history through EDSITEment-reviewed Web sites. You may share these portraits with students at individual computer stations; by assigning small groups to share a number of computers; by means of computer-projected images displayed to the whole class; or by printing the images and distributing copies of them to students. You need to decide which format will work best for you, depending on the availability of computers and Internet access in your classroom. Click-through directions for accessing the portraits are provided in the Presenting Heroes from History activity section, under Preparing for the Activity.

Suggested Activities

- 1 Introducing a Real-Life Hero
- 2 Who Are Your Heroes?
- 3 What Makes a Hero?
- 4 Presenting Heroes from History
- 5 Is There a Hero in You?

Extending the Lesson

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- 1. Vocabulary
- 2. Observing and Describing
- 3 Comparing and Contrasting
- 4. Interpreting Written and Visual Information
- 5. Artistic Interpretation
- 6. Artistic Expression

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT ▶

National Council For the Social Studies

2. Time, Continuity, and Change—Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time, so that the learner can: (more)
4. Individual Development and Identity—Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity, so that the learner can: (more)

NCTE/IRA List of Standards for the English Language Arts

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of

PART I

LESSON 1

Warm-Up Activity: Introducing a Real-Life Hero

Select a photograph of a friend, family member, or mentor who is a hero to you. Using photo corners or photo glue, mount the photo onto the center of a piece of brown construction paper. Use a black marker to outline your photo and to trace around the edge of the construction paper. Add brown marker lines so that your mat now resembles a "wood grain" frame.* Bring the photograph to school and tell students you would like them to meet a mystery person who is a hero to you, then show them the matted photo. Explain that you will soon tell them about your hero, but for now you will display your mystery photo in the center of a bulletin board you have pre-covered with craft paper.

*If you are technology-savvy, you may consider making the frame-and the entire Hero Hall of Fame, as described in later activities-electronically, using clip-art picture frames and scanned pictures.

LESSON 2

Who Are Your Heroes?

Prepare a large chart divided into three columns labeled TV, Movies, and Books. Then ask students to brainstorm a list of TV shows, movies, and books they enjoy, and record the titles of these in the appropriate column. Next, draw a horizontal line beneath each list. Ask students if they know of any heroes in these three sources. Record these names beneath the corresponding columns. For example, if a child suggests that Harry Potter is a hero, record Harry's name under your column labeled Books.

Each time an example is given, ask the student to explain why he or she believes the character is a hero. Students may say that Madeline is a hero because she's friendly, Mulan is a hero because she's determined, and Lance Armstrong is a hero because he won the Tour de France. Next to each character's name, use a different color marker to write keywords indicating these characteristics and accomplishments.

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themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works. (more)

5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes. (more)
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge. (more)
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities. (more)
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning,

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LESSON 3**What Makes a Hero? Developing a Chart Checklist**

At a separate sitting, prepare another chart with each suggested hero's name listed down the left-hand side of the page and all the heroes' characteristics listed along the top. Leave room at the top for a title.

(Tip: Feel free to expand this list of characteristics by adding some that you believe children would agree their characters share.) Briefly review the first chart with your class. Then introduce the second chart. As students look on, draw vertical lines down the chart, placing each characteristic into a separate column. Read each suggested hero's name and make an X mark beneath the characteristics that apply to that figure. As you develop your chart, point out that many of the figures they think of as heroes share certain characteristics. Title your chart "What Makes a Hero?" Your finished chart should resemble the one shown here.

What Makes a Hero?

	Friendly	Determined	Brave
Madeline		X	
Mulan	X	X	X
Lance Armstrong		X	X

Revisiting Your Real-Life Hero

Draw students' attention once again to the real-life hero displayed on the bulletin board. Invite them to guess the person's identity and relationship to you. Then tell students the story of why this person is a hero to you. Make your story as detailed as possible. If you have any supporting photos or documentation, such as letters or keepsakes from your hero, share these with the class. Be certain to include lots of concrete examples that pinpoint your character's heroic attributes. You may also wish to compare and contrast your hero with the students' suggested heroes, as well as the heroes from U.S. history (to be discussed in the next activity). End your story with a question inviting student input about your hero.

(E.g., "This is a photo of my Aunt Angie. She's a real-life hero to me.

enjoyment,
persuasion, and the
exchange of
information).
[\(more\)](#)

**Curriculum Standards
for the Arts**

1. Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes (more)
3. Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas (more)

[View your state's
standards](#)

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http://edsitement.neh.gov/lessonplans/portrait_of_hero.html
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8/27/2001

She can't climb up a building like a superhero, or fly rockets to the moon like astronauts. She never wrote a newspaper, was never on a winning team, and never led anyone to freedom. She doesn't have big muscles, but she has a big heart. When I was six years old, my mother broke her leg and couldn't take care of us. Aunt Angie stepped in to help. She cooked and cleaned for us. She did our laundry and read over my homework. She listened when I was frightened. She took me to visit my mother in the hospital. She never complained. When my mother became well, Aunt Angie moved back to her own house, but she didn't forget about me. She wrote me letters telling me to keep doing my best and be brave every day. I saved these letters and will read some of them to you over the next few days. Here is a heart-shaped locket she gave to me. Inside is a picture of us. Whenever I look at it, I think of all she did for us. To this day, my mom says Aunt Angie is a hero because she was unselfish and caring. I agree with my mom. What do you think?")

Add your hero's name to your "What Makes a Hero?" checklist chart. Ask your students to help you place X marks next to your hero's name, indicating which of the attributes listed across the top of the chart help describe your hero. Help students understand that an attribute such as bravery can apply to big and small actions. Ask students to name any other heroic traits belonging to your hero that are not listed on the chart. Add these new characteristics to the top of the chart. Then, in addition to adding X marks next to your hero's name, use X marks to indicate which other figures on your list share these new traits.

LESSON 4 Presenting Heroes from U.S. History

You will need portraits of the following historical figures, which are accessible through the EDSITEment-reviewed Web sites (see Preparing for the Activity):

- Benjamin Franklin
- Chief Joseph
- Helen Keller
- Jackie Robinson
- Sojourner Truth

Introduce this activity by reviewing the "What Makes a Hero?" chart. Tell students they are now going to learn about some special people

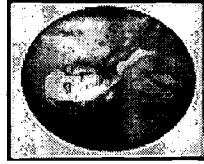
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from U.S. history. Explain that after learning a bit about each person, they will be able to decide whether or not these people are heroes.

Preparing for the Activity

Begin by downloading portraits of five figures from U.S. history, accessible through EDSITEment-reviewed web sites. Individuals or small groups of students may take turns visiting the computer to view these portraits. You may also display the images to the whole class, or print the pictures and distribute copies for students to keep. Click on each of the thumbnails images for larger image.



Benjamin Franklin

Courtesy of The Library of Congress,
Prints and Photographs Division, Detroit Publishing Company (American Memory Project)

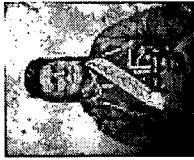
Benjamin Franklin: Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston on January 17, 1706. His father left England with fellow Puritans who were upset with the British King, and settled in Boston, where he met Ben's mother. Right away, Ben's parents thought he was a genius and encouraged his love of reading and writing.

Ben wrote a book called *Poor Richard's Almanac*, a guide to getting ahead in the world that offered a calendar and quotes about life. It was the best-selling book in the colonies, selling 10,000 copies in one year. Ben was constantly searching for ways to make things in everyday life better. Among his many inventions was the lightning rod, a pole at the top of buildings and ships that protects them from being struck by lightning.

Ben guided the openings of a local fire company, library, college (called an academy), and hospital—some of which were the first to be established in North America. He also represented the 13 colonies in debates about government with the British king, helped write the Constitution—the fundamental law of the United States, and signed the Declaration of Independence.

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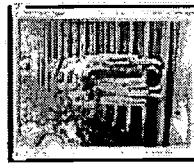
Chief Joseph
Courtesy Western History/Genealogy Department,
Denver Public Library (American Memory Project)

Chief Joseph: Chief Joseph was born in Oregon in 1840. He was from the Nez Perce group of Native Americans. His Native American name was Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekt, which means Thunder Rolling Down the Mountain. Joseph's father was the chief of his tribe. When his father died, young Joseph became the new chief.

When the U.S. government tried to force Chief Joseph's people to leave their land, Chief Joseph said no. He wanted his people to live where they had always lived. But when the government threatened to kill his people, Chief Joseph decided that they should move.

Some of the young men in Chief Joseph's tribe still didn't want to leave their land, so they started fighting. The Nez Perce people fought with the government for a long time, and many people in Chief Joseph's tribe were killed.

Finally, Chief Joseph decided that they shouldn't fight anymore. Too many of his people were dying. "I am tired of fighting," he said. "From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever."



Helen Keller (w/Mrs. Calvin Coolidge)
Courtesy of the Library of Congress (American Memory Project)

Helen Keller: Helen Keller was born in Alabama in 1880. When she was a baby, she became deaf and blind. Because she couldn't see or hear anything, she couldn't learn to talk. She lived in darkness and silence.

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Helen was very smart, but no one knew how to teach a child who couldn't see, hear, or speak. Helen became angry and stubborn, and her parents didn't know what to do.

When Helen was six years old, her parents found a special teacher named Annie Sullivan. Annie taught Helen to spell words with her fingers so that she could communicate with other people. In six months Helen learned 625 words.

Helen wanted to learn as much as she could. After learning the finger alphabet, she learned a special alphabet called Braille so that she could read books. She also learned how to understand people's words by putting her hands on their lips when they spoke.

But all of these things weren't enough for Helen. She wanted to learn how to speak with her voice. This was very difficult, and some people said she shouldn't even try. But by the time she was sixteen, Helen could speak well enough to go to school with sighted and hearing children.

Helen graduated from college when she was twenty-four years old and spent the rest of her life trying to make things better for deaf and blind people around the world.



Jackie Robinson

Courtesy of the Library of Congress (American Memory Project)

Jackie Robinson: Jackie Robinson was born in Georgia in 1919. At that time, the southern part of the United States was segregated, which means that black people and white people were not allowed to go to the same schools, drink from the same water fountains, or even play on the same baseball teams.

Jackie was a very good student and an excellent athlete. After he graduated from college, he joined the U.S. Army. When he left the Army, he became a professional baseball player. Black players then had

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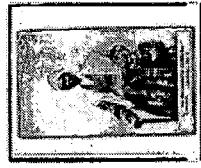
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their own teams, which were called the Negro Leagues. Jackie played for a Negro League team called the Kansas City Monarchs.

Some people felt that it was time for black and white baseball players to play on the same team. They had to find someone who was willing to be the first black player in the Major Leagues, which is what the white teams were called. Jackie said he would do it, even though he knew it would make some people angry.

Jackie started playing for a Major League team called the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. He became one of the best players in the Major Leagues. Soon, other great black players like Willie Mays and Hank Aaron also joined the Major Leagues.

After he stopped playing baseball, Jackie continued to work for equal rights for all Americans. Today, there are players of many skin colors and nationalities playing in Major League Baseball—all because Jackie Robinson dared to be the first African-American player in the Major Leagues.



Sojourner Truth
Courtesy of The Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division
(American Memory Project)

Sojourner Truth: Sojourner Truth was born in New York in 1797.

When she was born, her name was Isadora Bomefree. Because her parents were slaves, this meant that Isadora had to be a slave, too. The white family who owned Isadora traded her to another family when she was a child, so she couldn't see her parents anymore.

When Isadora was 30 years old, slavery was outlawed in New York, and Isadora became free. But there were still slaves in many other states. Isadora wanted to help other slaves become free by telling everyone how terrible slavery was. She decided to change her name to Sojourner Truth. "Sojourner" is a word for someone who travels. Sojourner chose this name because she wanted to travel around the country telling

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people the truth about slavery.

Sojourner Truth visited many different parts of the United States and became very famous for her speeches. Although she didn't know how to read or write, she published a book about her life when she was 50 years old. People who read Sojourner's book or listened to her speeches would sometimes cry because they thought she was so brave. Her words made people want to help other slaves become free.

When slavery finally ended in 1865, Sojourner moved to Washington, D.C. to help black people get houses, food, and jobs. When she met President Abraham Lincoln, he told her that he had heard all about her wonderful speeches.

To begin, give students time to look at each portrait. As you did with the mystery photo of your personal hero, ask guiding questions to promote student observations. For example, you might ask:

- What do you notice about this person?
- Do you know a real or pretend person who looks like this?
- What exactly do you notice about how the person is dressed?
- Does he/she look like a hero?
- Do you think the person could be alive today? Why or why not?
- If you met this person, do you think you would like him or her? Why or why not?

Model observation skills for students by noticing aloud some details, and by leaving others for the students to discover.

Tell students that they will be learning about each of these people. Have students use a show-of-hands to vote for the figure they want to learn about first. (Tip: One class period will probably allow you enough time to discuss two figures, or you may wish to spread this activity out over several sessions, discussing one historical figure per session.) Read aloud some background information about this person's life. (Download a brief reading about each figure, in rich text format.)

After the reading, add the person's name to your chart list of "What Makes a Hero?" Have students take turns putting an X mark next to the

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person's name to indicate which of the characteristics listed across the chart help describe that person. Ask students to decide if the historical figure had any heroic characteristics not yet listed on your chart. If so, add these to the chart, then review the list of names to see if any of the other suggested heroes share these new traits.

Repeat this process with the other historical figures, filling in the chart as you read about and discuss each one. As you proceed, ask students to notice how the heroes on your chart are the same and how they differ. It also may be helpful to encourage student groups to act out these historical figures' heroic behavior (i.e., have them demonstrate what the hero may have looked like, performing one of his/her bravest acts).

LESSON 5 Creating a Hero Hall of Fame

Remind students that heroes are not just found in history or in books, TV, and movies; people they know can be heroes, too. Ask each student to choose a real-life hero they especially admire in their lives. Tell students to bring to school a drawing or photograph of their heroes, and ask them to be prepared to tell why these people are so special to them.

Remove the photo of your hero in the center of the bulletin board you covered with craft paper. Title your display, "Our Real-Life Hero Hall of Fame." As children bring photos to school, use photo corners or temporary photo glue to mount each one on a piece of construction paper. As you did with your hero's photo, use markers to draw a frame around each picture and have children use art supplies to decorate each frame.

Then, as students watch, think aloud as you use an index card to record a brief descriptive summary of your personal hero. ("Let's see, first I need to write my aunt's first and last names here, and then I'll write, 'This is my Aunt Angie. She's a hero to me because she took care of me when my mother broke her leg. She taught me about caring and Then I'll sign my name here so everyone will know who this picture and card belong to.'") Display the card beneath the photo of your hero. Then help students develop similar cards to display with the pictures of their heroes. (Younger children may dictate their ideas for you to write.) Encourage students to name specific heroic characteristics that help

describe their real-life heroes.

As children complete their cards, add them along with the framed pictures-to your Hero Hall of Fame display. Provide class time for each student to present his or her real-life hero to the rest of the class. Use these presentations as an opportunity to help students conclude that heroes are not always famous and that some of our greatest real-life heroes might be known only to their families and friends. You may consider recording student presentations so that you can later share them, along with the Hero Hall of Fame, with parents and other students.

LESSON 6

Is There a Hero in You?

Ask each student to recall a heroic trait he or she admires in his or her real-life hero. Have students think about how they might begin to behave in these same ways. For example, if a student says his real-life hero was kind, ask that student for some specific ways he might become kinder himself. (Tip: Use this process to emphasize the small ways children can be heroic—for example, by making a special card for someone who is sick, or by speaking up if one child is hurting the feelings of another.) Offer students drawing paper preprinted with the sentence starter, "I can behave like my real-life hero when _____." Help students complete the sentence and then ask them to use the rest of the page to illustrate their ideas. After sharing the pages aloud in class, display the pages as part of your Hero Hall of Fame display. Later, bind the pages into a class book of "Ways I Can See a Hero in Me."

Extending the Lesson

After reviewing all that they've learned about heroes and heroism, help your class develop definitions of the words hero and heroic. Compare these definitions with their ideas about heroes at the beginning of your study. Ask, "What have you learned about what it means to be a hero? How have your ideas about heroism changed from when we began this study to now?"

Sharing books and stories about heroes and heroism is a natural way for you to extend the lesson on heroes. Classic children's literature offers a wealth of unlikely but inspiring heroes. A mother bunny, a

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retired lighthouse, a timid bull, an aging steam shovel, or a well-loved stuffed animal are just a few of the protagonists from which you might choose. Have students identify heroic figures from their favorite books and discuss the qualities that make these characters heroic.

Students may then invent their own heroic characters and write original stories about them. Older students may draw upon recent reading assignments for inspiration to write and illustrate picture books featuring heroes of their creation. Younger students may listen to a story, then draw a series of pictures featuring a hero of their own creation. They can also write or dictate sentences explaining each picture. See the Resource List below for a list of suggested titles.

Links to EDSITEment Participating Websites

- [American Memory Project](#) (Library of Congress)
- [National Portrait Gallery](#)
- [NYPL Digital Schomburg](#)

Other Resources:

The following works of children's literature feature a wide variety of inspiring heroes:

- The Country Bunny and the Little Gold Shoes*, written by Dubose Heyward and illustrated by Marjorie Flack (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999)
- The Little Engine That Could*, written by Watty Piper and illustrated by George Hauman and Doris Hauman (Penguin Putnam, 1999)
- The Little Red Lighthouse and the Great Gray Bridge*, written by Hildegarde H. Swift and illustrated by Lynd Ward (Harcourt Children's Books, 1974)
- Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile*, written and illustrated by Bernard Waber (Houghton Mifflin Co., 2000)
- Make Way for Ducklings*, written and illustrated by Robert McCloskey (Penguin Putnam, 1999)
- The Story of Ferdinand*, written by Munro Leaf and illustrated by Robert Lawson (Penguin Putnam, 1993)
- Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*, written and illustrated by Virginia Lee Burton (Weston Woods Studios, Inc.)
- The Velveteen Rabbit*, written by Margery Williams and illustrated by William Nicholson (Morrow/Avon, 1999)



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