

# THE TEACHER FROM THE BLACK LAGOON

## THE TEACHER FROM THE BLACK LAGOON

by Mike Thaler, illustrated by Jared Lee  
(Scholastic)

Themes: Feelings, Friendship, Growth and Change, School

Grade Level: K--3 (Ages 5-8)

Running Time: 8 minutes

### SUMMARY

This program uses exaggeration and humor to help children confront their fears about the first day at school. The narrator is a boy who has heard terrible stories about teachers. He learns to his horror that his teacher will be Mrs. Green, the worst of them all. Sure enough, Mrs. Green turns out to be a green monster with a tail, whose breath burns children to ashes and who teaches fractions by biting a student in half. When he wakes up from this nightmare, the boy is so glad to meet the real Mrs. Green that he forgets to be afraid of school.

### OBJECTIVES

- Children will watch and hear a funny story about overcoming fear of school.
- Children will recognize that many common fears are based on exaggeration and rumor.

### BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Start by discussing the title of the program and

defining the word lagoon. Ask children what kind of movies or TV programs the title reminds them of. Very young children might have to be told that a famous scary movie is called "The Creature from the Black Lagoon." Ask children to guess from the title what the story will be about and whether it will be a real or imaginary tale.

### AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Review the story by asking children to recall what they thought were the funniest moments. Have them identify the clues that show the monster teacher was imaginary. Discuss the differences between the imaginary teacher and the real Mrs. Green. Ask children to share why the boy might have imagined such a horrible teacher. Lead children to recognize that many of the things we fear most are nowhere near as bad as we imagine them to be.

Connect this story to writing by asking children to remember and write about their first day of school. Encourage children to write poems and songs as well as stories.

This tale makes a hilarious class play that children will enjoy acting out. To involve as many children as possible (and to avoid fighting over the juicy roles), encourage children to invent other monster teachers for the beginning of the story, when the boy is still wondering about who his teacher will be.

Connect this story to math by writing story problems on a "Monster Math" theme. Encourage children to contribute their own story problems. You might divide children into teams and have teams challenge each other in Monster Math Matches.

Follow up on the theme of conquering fears with a bulletin board display about monster movies. Have children help you gather the titles by interviewing parents and other family members about movies they remember and by drawing pictures of the strange monsters they've learned about. Encourage children to explore how monster movies are made. Then discuss how costumes, lighting, and sound effects create scary characters and scenes. Ask children to share why they think scary monster movies are popular, discussing how confronting imaginary monsters helps us confront our real fears. This activity would be especially effective around Halloween. It can also be effectively combined with reading or viewing related videos, such as the titles listed below.

Other related videos and audios available from Weston Woods include:  
IN THE NIGHT KITCHEN, by Maurice Sendak  
MISS NELSON IS MISSING, by Harry Allard, illustrated by James Marshall  
THE ISLAND OF THE SKOG, by Steven Kellogg  
WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE, by Maurice Sendak

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# SHRINKING VIOLET

## SHRINKING VIOLET

by Cari Best, illustrated by Giselle Potter  
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

Themes: Families, Feelings, Friendship, Growth and Change, School

Grade Level: K—3 (Ages 4-8)

Running Time: 17 minutes

## SUMMARY

To the delight of Irwin, the class bully, Violet is so shy that she can't stand people watching her. But though she is "allergic to attention," she pays close attention to others. In private, she can sing like Elvis or sneer like Captain Hook. When her teacher gives her a part in a class play about the planets, Violet is terrified, until she learns that her part, Lady Space, is a mysterious voice that speaks from offstage. On opening night, Irwin's inept acting as Mars almost ruins the play. From offstage, Violet saves the performance, puts Irwin in his place, and learns to appreciate herself.

## OBJECTIVES

- Children will watch and hear a story about overcoming shyness and handling bullies.
- Children will learn to appreciate individual feelings and talents in themselves and others.

## BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Start by discussing the title of the program, explaining that "shrinking violet" is an old-fashioned term for a shy person. Ask children to help

you define the word shy as well as to describe the kind of person that is the exact opposite of shy. Explain that this story is about a shy girl and a bully who always picks on her. Suggest that they pay close attention not only to these two main characters but also to the other people who appear in the story.

## AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Go back over the story to make sure children picked up on the nuances of the plot. Use the subsidiary characters to help children remember details. For example, encourage them to recall that although Violet is shy, she has a good friend, Opal, with whom she can share feelings. Irwin is a bully, and everyone knows it, since he has to write "I must be kind to others" one hundred times. Review Violet's secret talent for acting and remind children how she developed it by watching others, even though she herself hates being watched. Discuss why the invisible Lady Space was a good role for Violet in the play, and how she used her good memory and acting talents to forget herself and rescue Irwin. Discuss what the story teaches about the difference between people's outward appearance and their hidden talents.

Connect this story to science by having students present a similar play about the planets. Use Mrs. Maxwell's saying ("My very excellent mother just served us nine pizzas") to help children remember the order of the planets from the sun. Have children go back over the pictures of the play and identify

how each character's costume reflects the characteristics of a planet. As children plan their play, encourage them to draw and make their own planet costumes.

The program's art is drawn in a childlike manner that can inspire children to make art of their own. Go back over the program frame by frame to point out details in the drawings, such as patterns on the clothes, the writing on books and student papers, pets, and people in the neighborhood. Encourage students to draw portraits of each other and their neighborhood, using details to add humor and individuality.

Connect the story to writing by encourage children to retell the story from the point of view of Irwin or one of the other kids in Violet's class. Or suggest that children write imaginary reviews of Violet's play. Have them go back over the program and look again at the illustrations to see the actors in their roles. Shy children might especially welcome this opportunity to get back at Irwin and give Violet the praise she deserves.

Other related videos and films available from Weston Woods include:  
CHRYSANTHEMUM, by Kevin Henkes  
THREE CHEERS FOR CATHERINE THE GREAT, by Cari Best, illustrated by Giselle Potter  
THE UGLY DUCKING, by Hans Christian Anderson, adapted and illustrated by Jerry Pinkney  
A WEEKEND WITH WENDELL, by Kevin Henkes

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