



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 3-5

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

M.C. Higgins, the Great

Virginia Hamilton

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

M.C. Higgins, the Great

Virginia Hamilton

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Identifying attributes,
compare/contrast, research,
decision-making, analysis
evaluation, understanding
values

Comprehension

Predicting, summarizing,
cause and effect, inference,
main idea

Writing

Word association/freewriting,
character sketch, poetry,
character journal

Vocabulary

Target words, word maps,
sentences, synonym match,
root/base words, vocabulary
sort, word chains, charades

Listening/Speaking

Role playing

Literary Elements

Characterization, conflict,
plot, foreshadowing, point
of view, theme,
personification

Other

Map study, illustrations,
collage, poster, genealogy

Summary of *M.C. Higgins, The Great*

M.C. Higgins, The Great tells about the story of Mayo Cornelius Higgins and his family who live in the mountains. Each day he sits on a 40-foot steel pole which was given to him by his father, Jones, and dreams of escape from Sarah's Mountains for himself and his family. Behind his home lies the wounds of strip mining, including a hill of rubble, which M.C. believes will fall and bury his home. When two strangers come to the mountain, M.C.'s life changes in ways he has never considered. He thinks one visitor has the ability to make his mother famous, and the other gives M.C. the freedom to believe and think in ways he has never imagined.

About the Author

Virginia Hamilton is the author of numerous novels for young readers, including *The House of Dies Drear*, *Zeely*, and *The Planet of Junior Brown*. She won the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 1992 and the Newbery Medal for *M.C. Higgins, The Great*.

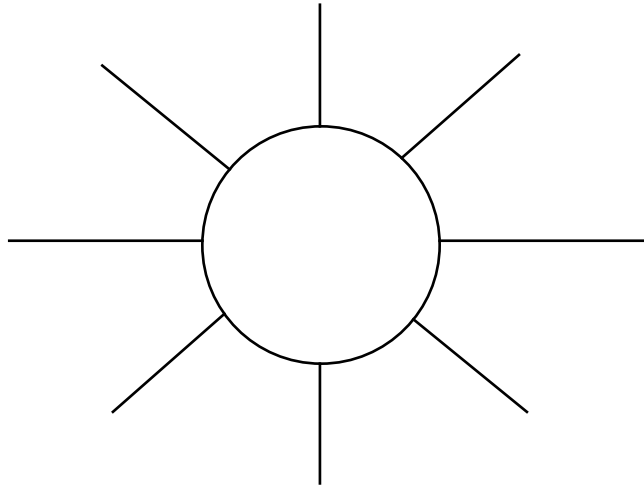
Introductory Activities

1. **Previewing the Book:** Have the students look at the cover and answer these journalist's questions: what? who? where? when? why? Based on their answers, students make predictions about the book.
2. Given the following clues, students write a paragraph predicting what they think will happen in the story.

strip-mining	steel pole	witchy	singing
Sarah's Mountain	friendship	prejudice	

3. **Character Journal:** List the main characters from *M.C. Higgins, The Great* and have students choose one. As they read the book, students write regular journal entries from that character's point of view. Journal entries should reflect on the events of the story. At various points in their reading, have students share their journal entries with classmates.
4. Create an attribute web (see page 4 of this guide) with the students for each of the following ideas: family, fear, home, friendship, determination, freedom. Focus on one word at a time. Begin by writing the word in the center of a large piece of paper. Ask students to quickly tell what each word brings to mind. Encourage students to elaborate on particular ideas.

Attribute Web



5. **Prediction Chart:** Have students set up a prediction chart (see pages 6-7 of this guide) to use as they read the book.
6. **Anticipation Questions:** Have students respond to each of the following statements with a “thumbs-up” (I agree) or a “thumbs-down” (I disagree) and discuss their responses.
 - It’s important to know about your relatives and their traditions.
 - Children must always do what their parents tell them.
 - You should not play with children who are different than you.
 - It is important to keep trying, even if you fail the first time.
 - It is important to like and believe in yourself.
 - People can change for the better if they have an open mind.
7. **Social Studies:** Have the students research the migration of their ancestors from their original cities, countries, or continents. Give each student a map of the world. Have the students use a colored marker to indicate each city, country, or continent where their ancestors originated. Display the maps in the classroom. Discuss: What happens to families when members do not live close to each other?

Chapter 7, pages 125-141

Vocabulary

clusters (125)	murk (125)	spring (127)	quiver (128)
swollen (128)	saplings (129)	tinted (129)	sickle (130)
clotted (131)	ginseng (131)	lapping (134)	penetrate (135)
simultaneously (135)	dapples (136)	gliding (137)	bewildering (138)
brazenly (138)	crammed (138)	smacking (139)	distorting (141)
reckless (141)			

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Banina coax M.C. out of bed? (*She wants him to watch the sunrise and go swimming with her.*)
2. Do you think M.C. really wants to get out of bed and go with his mother? (*Answers will vary.*)
3. When M.C. was much younger, what did he worry about (although he never told anyone)? Why? (*He worried that Banina was not his mother because she was so pretty, and he did not look like her.*)
4. What does Banina compare Hall Mountain to? Why? (*She compares it to God Almighty because it is high enough for heaven and older than anybody that ever lived.*)
5. Does M.C. agree with his mother about Hall Mountain being God? (*No. He says, "God can't be moved, but watch and see if somebody don't come along and move that mountain."*)
6. Why does Banina say that the Killburn family is witchy and different? (*Because they have the power to heal.*)
7. Why is M.C.'s daddy so bent against the Killburns? (*He says that their power might be for bad, and nobody knows who is related to who over there.*)
8. What four mountains ring the lake where M.C. and Banina swim? (*Hall, Grey, Young, and Sarah mountains.*)
9. Who is camping on the shore of the lake? (*The girl who came to town with James K. Lewis; the girl who gave M.C. a knot on his head.*)
10. Why do you think M.C. says, "You should have gone before she waked ... wish Daddy and the kids didn't come." (*Answers will vary.*)
11. Why do you think the girl waits in her tent until all of M.C.'s family leaves the lake area? (*Answers will vary.*)

Supplementary Activities

1. **Discussion:** Ask the students, "How many of you have seen a sunrise? How did the sunrise make you feel? Why? How did the sunrise make M.C. and Banina feel? Why do you think M.C. and Banina think a sunrise is so special?"
2. **Writing/Art:** Have students write a description of the sunrise in the mountains. Then, have them use water colors to paint a sunrise.
3. **Research:** Have students look in the daily newspaper or call a radio or television station to find the sunrise and sunset times for the next week.
4. **Research:** Have students research different swimming strokes. They should also look up safety rules for swimming. (The Red Cross or Parks and Wildlife Departments of their state might have information they could send for.)

Feelings

Describe _____ in the beginning

Summarize important events in the boxes below. Describe how the character feels after each one.

Event #1:

The character feels ...

Event #2:

The character feels ...

Event #3:

The character feels ...

Event #4:

The character feels ...

Event #5:

The character feels ...

Event #6:

The character feels ...

Describe _____ at the end.