

# MIRETTE ON THE HIGH WIRE

## **MIRETTE ON THE HIGH WIRE**

by Emily Arnold McCully (G.P. Putnam's)

Themes: Art, Feelings, Friendship, Sports

Grade Level: K--5

Running Time 12 minutes

## **SUMMARY**

Set 100 years ago in Paris, this story features Mirette, whose mother runs the best boarding house in the city for acrobats, jugglers, actors, mimes and other show people. Mirette especially admires one boarder, a retired acrobat, Bellini, who can walk on the clothesline. After he refuses to teach her, Mirette practices in secret, impressing him so much that he agrees to give her lessons. Eventually Mirette learns his secret: he used to be world-famous as The Great Bellini but is now unable to perform because of fear. To restore Mirette's faith in him and herself, Bellini agrees to a comeback. He freezes with fear on the wire, until Mirette joins him and they finish the act together.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- Children will watch and hear a story about people in Paris, France, 100 years ago.
- Children will describe ways in which friends can help each other overcome fears.
- Children will identify and describe visual details about Paris around the year 1900.

## **BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES**

Ask children to guess from the name Mirette and from the cover art where and when this story might take place. Invite them to share what they know

about Paris, France, and explain that 100 years ago Paris was the center of the art world, and that many famous artists painted Paris street and rooftop scenes such as the ones they are about to see.

Locate Paris on a globe. Ask students to imagine that they live in a boarding house in Paris and know a lot of actors, artists and show people. The time is 100 years ago.

## **AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES**

Ask students to recall details of Mirette's friendship with Bellini: how they met, how she convinced him to teach her, what he had accomplished in the past, why he decided to perform again, how she helped him perform and what happened after their performance. Use this opportunity to discuss the fear of falling and other common fears and how people help each other overcome them.

Use the pictures in the program to introduce the Impressionists and other 19th-century artists. Replay the program, pausing so children can notice details in the pictures. Compare specific details in the pictures to details in paintings by Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec, Manet and other painters. Encourage students to notice the colors as well as the light and dark parts of both the program visuals and the paintings.

For more connections to art, encourage students to practice with watercolor and pastel techniques. As in the art for this program, use the watercolors for most of the artwork and use pastels or crayons to add texture and highlights. Show children how

shadows are rendered in grays and deeper tones, not black. Encourage them to draw pictures of themselves performing like Mirette.

Connect the story to sports by arranging a gymnastics exhibition, teaching children cartwheels and other simple tumbling moves. Children can also practice "low-wire" walking. In the schoolyard or gym, stretch a thick rope or cable taut along the ground and challenge children to walk on it without falling off.

To connect the story to history and encourage library and Internet research, challenge students to identify real-life daredevils and their feats. Suggest that they draw posters, compile timelines and arrange other materials they collect into a big scrapbook, for sharing with other classrooms.

Other videos and films about friendship and overcoming fear available from Weston Woods include:

**YO! YES!** by Chris Raschka

**HERE COMES THE CAT!** by Vladimir Vagin, ill. by Frank Asch

Other videos and films set in Paris from Weston Woods include:

**THE BEAST OF MONSEIUR RACINE** by Tomi Ungerer

**I, CROCODILE** by Fred Marcellino

**THE HAPPY LION** by Louise Fatio, ill. by Roger Duvoisin

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