

# 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.

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