

STORY  
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365

7 to 10  
YEARS

BUILDING BEAUTIFUL INSIDE

# THE PRESSURE TEST

A Story by Arkedelic



*Parents' Guide*

# STUDENT CONNECTIONS

## THE PRESSURE TEST

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## THE PRESSURE TEST

Mike didn't like group projects. Especially when they involved other people.

Especially when they involved Sam.

And especially when there was even the slightest chance of not winning.

“It's a science project, not a war,” Sam muttered under her breath as Mike rearranged the test tubes — for the third time.

Nik raised an eyebrow. “You know, the beaker won't explode just because it's not exactly 3.6 inches from the flask.”

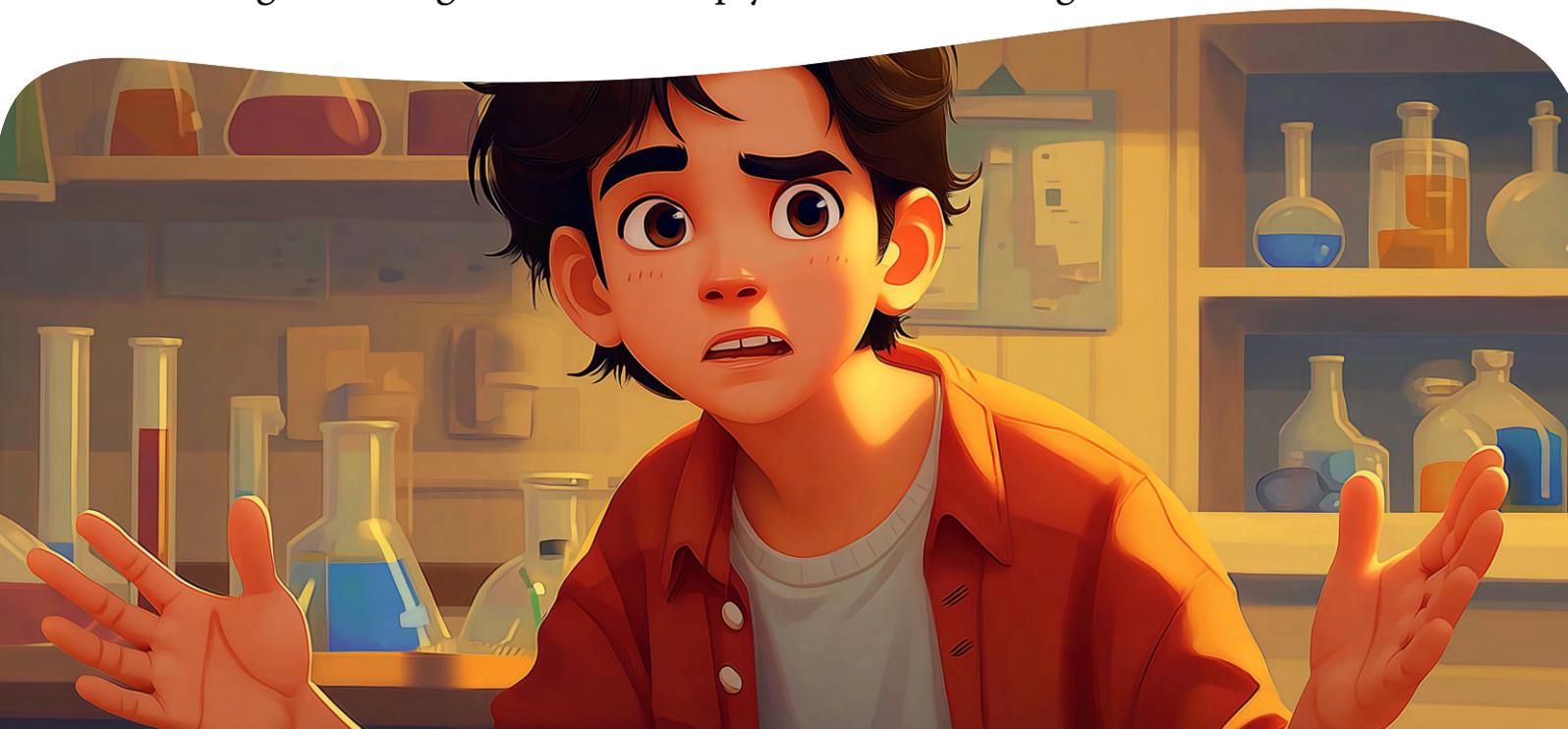
Mike snapped his fingers. “That's not how accuracy works. Precision is the whole point. We're doing a chemical reaction. One wrong move and it flops.”

“Relax,” said Sam. “It's a vinegar-baking soda volcano. Not nuclear fusion.”

Meanwhile, just across the classroom, Mario, Sid, and Jane were laughing as they tested their homemade pinwheel turbine. It wasn't fancy, but it worked. The blades spun in the wind from a tiny fan, and even Ms. Chen, the science teacher, had smiled when she passed by.

Mike had noticed. And his jaw had tightened.

“Let's change the design,” he said sharply the next morning.



Sam blinked. “What? Why? It’s already working.”

Mike refused to look at her. “Because it’s boring. Everyone’s done volcanoes. We should do a baking soda rocket instead.”

“But we only have one day left!”

Nik tried to protest, but Mike overrode him. “We have to win. You want everyone thinking Mario’s idea was smarter?”

Sam crossed her arms. “Since when is this about Mario?”

Mike didn’t answer.

The rocket test failed. Twice.

The third time, it launched sideways, hit the wall, and splattered pink foam all over the project board.

“Great,” Sam groaned. “There goes our grade.”



Mike’s face went red. “You didn’t screw the cap tight enough!”

Nik shot up. “What?! You were the one who—”

“Let’s just clean it up,” Sam said quickly.

Mike didn’t help.

During presentations the next day, Jane’s group went first. Their turbine lit up a tiny bulb and earned a small round of applause. Sid high-fived Mario.

Mike’s group went last. Their volcano worked — sort of. But the foam sputtered out, limp and slow. No sparkle. No surprise.

After class, Mike stomped out. “It’s not fair,” he muttered. “They just got lucky.”

“You mean we just weren’t prepared?” Sam replied coolly.

Mike whirled. “Oh, please. Like it wasn’t your idea to go back to the volcano. If we’d done my rocket—”

Nik had had enough. “Dude. You changed the plan, then blamed us when it didn’t

work. That's not leadership. That's... insecurity."

Mike went quiet.

The hallway suddenly felt too bright.

It was Jane who found him in the library.

Not reading.

Just sitting.

"You okay?" she asked gently.

Mike sighed. "Everyone thinks I'm the smart one. I can't mess up."

Jane sat beside him. "Is that a rule?"

Mike looked at her. "I'm the topper. My parents talk about it all the time. My teachers expect it. I expect it. If I lose... I don't know who I am."

Jane leaned back. "You're Mike. The kid who knows the periodic table by heart. Who helped me figure out that frog dissection gagging. Who once built a solar oven from a pizza box. You're smart, sure. But you're not only smart." without

He stared at the table.

"And," Jane added, "you don't have to step on people to stay tall."

Later that week, Ms. Chen returned the grades.

Mike's group had done okay. Not great. Not terrible.

Mario's group had scored higher.

Mike glanced across the room, then did something shocking.

He walked over.

"Hey," he said. "Your turbine thing? It was actually pretty clever."





Mario blinked. “Thanks?”

“And,” Mike added with a quick look at Sam and Nik, “I’m sorry. I wasn’t... great to work with.”

Sam nodded. “Next time, let’s actually work together.”

Mike smiled. “Deal. Also — maybe someone else can arrange the beakers?”

Nik laughed. “Please. Anyone else.”

That afternoon, as they all walked home, Jane nudged Mike.

“Feels better, doesn’t it?”

He shrugged. “Still kind of stings.”

“But you owned it.”

“Yeah,” Mike said slowly. “I guess that counts for something.”

And for the first time in a long time, he didn’t feel like he had to win to matter.

He just had to show up.

As himself.

**THE END**

## VALUES FROM THE STORY



### 1. How do I raise a child who doesn't blame others for everything that happens?

**Context in the story:** Mike consistently deflects blame — accusing Sam and Nik when their experiment fails and claiming Mario's team “just got lucky.” He avoids responsibility both in the moment and after the project ends, until a conversation with Jane helps him reflect and take accountability.

**Real-world connection:** Many children struggle with owning mistakes, especially when they tie their self-worth to success. Blaming others becomes a defense mechanism to protect their confidence. Over time, this habit can damage friendships and prevent genuine growth.

**How parents can use the story:** This story helps children see how blaming others often stems from deeper fears — of being wrong, being judged, or feeling “less than.” It offers a relatable scenario where blame doesn't solve the problem but worsens relationships. Parents can use Mike's journey to gently ask, “Have you ever felt like Mike?” and open a conversation about pressure, responsibility, and honesty. Rather than punishing blame-shifting, focus on helping your child feel safe enough to say, “Yes, I made a mistake” — and know that doing so is a strength, not a weakness.



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## 2. How can I raise a child who doesn't need to control or put others down to feel strong?

**Context in the story:** Mike takes control of the project, dismisses his teammates' ideas, and changes plans last-minute — not out of confidence, but fear. His need to control is driven by his desperation to win and his belief that only his way is good enough.

**Real-world connection:** Children who feel pressure to “always be the best” may try to control group situations as a way to protect their image. This can lead to conflict, rigidity, and hurtful dynamics where others feel dismissed or dominated.

**How parents can use the story:** Mike's arc reveals that controlling behaviour can mask insecurity. This gives parents a powerful lens: when your child acts bossy or dismissive, look beneath the surface. Are they afraid of failure? Are they unsure of being liked unless they lead? Use Mike's moment in the library to talk about what real strength looks like — listening, adjusting, and letting others shine. Reinforce the idea that shared control doesn't mean weakness. It means wisdom and trust.





### 3. How do I handle it when my child twists facts or blames others to escape consequences?

**Context in the story:** When their project fails, Mike changes the narrative — insisting others made the mistakes and denying his own role in the outcome. Even when it's clear he altered the plan, he avoids the truth until his guilt and Jane's gentle honesty bring him to admit what really happened.

**Real-world connection:** Children sometimes stretch the truth not to deceive maliciously, but to avoid shame or protect their identity, especially if they're used to being praised only when they win or succeed. Twisting facts becomes a shield from emotional discomfort.

**How parents can use the story:** Mike shows how twisting facts isn't always about dishonesty, it can be about self-preservation. This distinction helps parents respond with understanding instead of just correction. If your child reshapes events to dodge blame, talk through what they feared would happen if they told the truth. Reassure them that being honest won't cost them your respect — in fact, it builds it. Let them see that the strongest version of themselves is the one that can say, "That was my mistake... and I'm still okay."

# Assessment Questions for “THE PRESSURE TEST”

**Q1.** Why did Mike feel he had to win every time, even when the project was just for fun?

**Purpose:** To help children understand that pressure to always succeed can make learning and teamwork stressful instead of joyful.

**Follow-up:** Have you ever said something at home that you wouldn't want others to hear in public?



**Q2.** To show that trying to control everything can damage trust and teamwork.

**Purpose:** To show that younger kids often copy what they see and hear from older ones.

**Follow-up:** What happens when one person in a team stops listening to others' ideas?

**Q3.** What did Mike begin to understand after the rocket failed and the volcano fizzled?

**Purpose:** To remind children that mistakes can lead to self-awareness, empathy, and growth.

**Follow-up:** Can you remember a time something went wrong, but you learned something important from it?

**Q4.** Why was Mike’s apology to Sam, Nik, and Mario so meaningful after everything that happened?

**Purpose:** To teach that saying sorry isn’t weakness — it’s strength that rebuilds relationships.

**Follow-up:** How does it feel when someone apologises to you sincerely\ or when you do it yourself?

**Q5.** What did Jane mean when she told Mike, “You don’t have to step on people to stay tall”?

**Purpose:** To help children see that success isn’t about being the smartest or the best — it’s about showing up as your real self.

**Follow-up** What does it mean to you to “stay tall” without competing or comparing?

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with another interesting story!



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