Mike Makes His Mark is the fifth in a series of films produced by the National Education Association in cooperation with the National Association of Secretaries of State Teachers Associations. Other films in the series include Secure the Blessings, What Greater Gift, Skippy and the Three R’s; and Freedom to Learn.

Mike is a teen-age boy who wants to quit school and find a job. As the story begins, Mike is toying with a radio amplifier at breakfast, as his father angrily exclaims: “I don’t want to hear any more about quitting school! Put that radio junk away and pay attention!” Referring to the new school which has just been opened in the community, the father harangues his son with: “We paid plenty for that school!” and warns him that he’d better be there if he knows what’s good for him. “Alright,” Mike grumbles, “I’m goin’!”

As the boy sulks off to school, his mother pleads: “Try not to get into any trouble on the first day!” But Mike is in no mood to be good. On the way, he exhibits unwarranted antagonism towards the policeman on duty at the school crossing, and loiters to talk to Eddie, an older boy who has dropped out of school. Mike admires

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2 AV Communication Review 2:72; Winter 1954.

3 Ibid. 3:138; Spring 1955.
Eddie, who has a job, a “hot-rod,” status at the local pool hall, and complete freedom from schools and school teachers.

As he roars away, Eddie taunts Mike with: “Be a good boy and mind the teacher!” The schoolbell rings, Mike winces at the sound, and then, in a gesture of defiance, he deliberately makes a heavy, black mark around the column at the entrance to the new school building.

During assembly, in the auditorium, he picks a fight with another boy, until reprimanded by the teacher, and listens indifferently to the principal’s remarks, perking up only at the latter’s reference to the mark someone has just put on the building. “No one’s to remove it,” warns the principal. “It’s to stay there. Every-time you go in and out, look at it! Think what it means!”

Mike’s classroom teacher is thoughtful, attractive, well cast. She studies the previous records of her pupils, using them “not to judge the student, but only as a reference and a guide.” She finds Mike’s cumulative record somewhat above average, but his achievement not up to what he might do. Significantly, she notes that he is two full years below his grade in reading.

When Mike fails to integrate with the school program, the teacher sees the school counselor, Mr. Tatum. Tatum agrees to talk to the boy, the opportunity arising when the counselor comes upon Mike looking into the deserted, and unlocked industrial arts laboratory. He follows Mike into the room, finds him examining some radio equipment. Mike grudgingly admits his interest in the subject of radio, and, looking at the wiring job another student has done, allows that “anybody could do better than that!”

The counselor suggests that Mike might be interested in joining the “Kilowatt Club.” He invites Mike to his office to pick up a few books that might interest him. During the course of their talk, Mike’s suspicions are gradually allayed by the counselor who finds that the boy doesn’t see the relation of history, of “things that happened a million years ago,” to his interest in radio, and his desire to get a job in the field of electronics. Tatum gives Mike a book on how Mark Twain reached a decision to get his education first before becoming a river pilot, and how he resisted the temptation to be like a friend who “had money, used hair oil, owned a gold watch”, and quit school at an early age to become a “steamboat man.”

“One of the good things about the new school program,” explains the film, “is that teachers have a chance to meet and talk about student problems.” In a school staff meeting, it becomes apparent to Mike’s teacher, and to the counselor, that Mike does