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Special Issue!

CREATIVITY AND THE COMPUTER

SOURDOUGH WRITING
Teaching Computer Fiction Writing

by Dale Worsley

BY TEACHING THE WRITING OF STORIES TO children of various ages for several years, I have become familiar with the power that writing fiction has to change their perceptions of themselves and the world. Writing fiction (and poetry) can be an act of validation and affirmation that breaks down social, economic, and psychological barriers. Its use as a method of engaging children who have otherwise been alienated from the act of writing is indisputably effective. In these several years I never once used a computer and always got terrific results in my workshops.

Last summer Bill Kough, a visual artist, and I were invited to do a pilot project at P.S. 146, in the South Bronx, using computers in the classroom. It was to be co-sponsored by Teachers & Writers Collaborative and The Alternate Media Center (AMC), a division of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts that concentrates on the expanded use of computers in telecommunications and art. (For information about Bill Kough's other workshops in computer graphics, see the March-April, 1984 *Teachers & Writers Magazine,* Vol. 15, No. 4, and the Spring, 1984 *Muppet* magazine, Vol. 2, No. 2). AMC was to provide technical assistance and to broadcast our students'work on "Apple-bytes," AMC's cable television show.

I am not given to embracing the wonders of new technology. As a witness to such programs as Atoms for Peace

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and the early announcements of the popular wonders of the holograph, I am suspicious. Computers were no different for me, despite their widespread use in the home and the marketplace. I approached them the way a lynx approaches a porcupine, wanting the soft underbelly that satisfies aesthetic cravings, but fearful of the quills: commercial aspects of the technology designed to be consumed without any redeeming social qualities.

I learned how to use the Atari word processor at the Teachers & Writers Collaborative office, and wrote my own fiction on it for a while to get used to it. Though mildly pricked by the eyestrain of long exposure to the screen and by the odd distraction of seeing my words eaten up by the memory and spit back out by the printer, I did appreciate the ease of writing continuously and editing instantly.

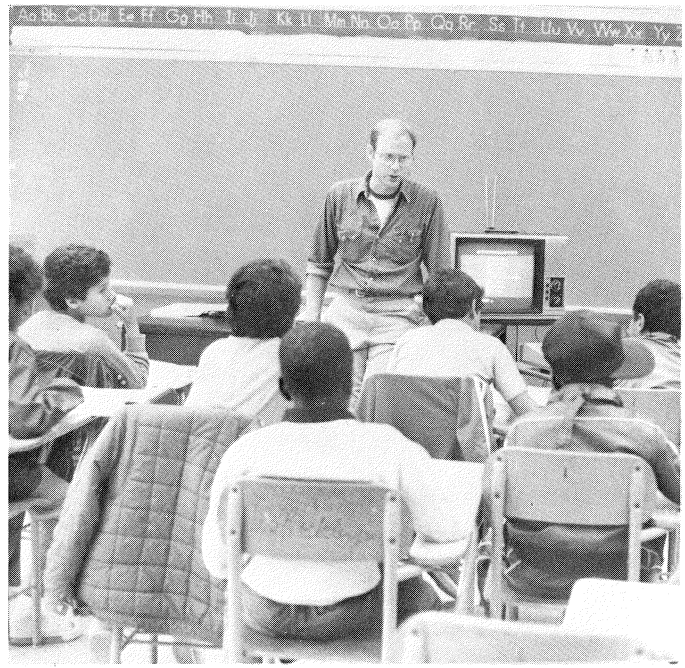
In the design of the project I focused on two goals: to enable my students to write better fiction and to expose children in ghetto areas to this technology so they might have a chance in the world more comparable to that of the affluent, who have banks of computers in their schools and personal computers in their homes. Whether these two purposes could be achieved simultaneously remained to be seen.

I had to take certain limitations and possibilities into consideration. My limitations were that I had only word processors (the Atariwriter, the Applewriter, and the Bank Street Writer) to play with. I didn't have the time (or the inclination) to study other writing software for the classroom.

The possibilities I had were determined by the nature of the word processor itself: in addition to creating and remembering text, it could edit, file, search, and print. What could be the advantages of these features? Accepting for theoretical purposes the possibility that word processing could advance fiction in ways undreamed of (much as the idea of "process" had advanced art in unpredicted and unpredictable ways), what could these features help to produce?

Having one computer among many children was going to make it impossible for any single child to develop his or her ideas extensively at the keyboard. I feared that their experience with the machine would therefore be meaningless. However, the computer could become significant to them if they didn't have to relate to it on an individual basis. It had a memory, so perhaps the memory could pertain to the group, which, being a student body, was a kind of mini-culture. Writing fiction doesn't necessarily have to be a private act, with ideas hoarded like money. It is meaningful precisely because the elements of fiction—character, setting, and plot—are shared by cultures, like icons. Each child, instead of writing a story on the computer all by himself or herself, could contribute an element and receive an element from another child. The computer could become a kind of cultural credit union, with every child making a deposit and receiving a loan. Everyone would have a stake in it, but no one would own it outright. The child's individual originality could flourish after being exposed to the ideas held in common. He or she could accept or reject them and use them in any way that was interesting. Because ideas would be passed along from story to story, I called the plan "Sourdough Writing."

On a disk I created models of the elements: a file of characters, with names and descriptions; a file of settings with itemized locations within each setting; and a file of generic plots. The plots seemed a little too formulaic to me, and I felt they might muddle issues in a classroom that would already be working with a number of new ideas, so I dropped them. I hoped the plots would be a natural consequence



of putting characters in settings.

So, having studied the porcupine, I was ready to attack it. The ten-week project was set up at P.S. 146. Every detail was seen to graciously by the principal, Luther Ragin, and Bill Kough and I were given different rooms on the same floor because although we would be working on separate projects there would be a connection.

Bill was set up to work with 14 students one at a time continuously throughout the day, using a special graphics tablet and stylus attached to the school's new Apple computer to produce visual images. I was to have three different classes of approximately ten students in the last three periods of the day, using an Atari 800 computer and the Atariwriter word processing program.

When all the organizing was done I found myself in my classroom a couple of hours before the first group of kids was to join me, with David Harkins from AMC to help me set up. It wasn't at all complicated. He was just there to calm me, because I was an idiot in the face of electronic problems, even if they were only a matter of making connections that in fact are simpler than those on a stereo. I am better about it now, and will turn anything on connected to anything.

As we set up we ran into a problem: where do you put the computer? (Where do you attack the porcupine? In the open? Under cover of brush?) Where you place it must be important and indicate a certain attitude, I thought. Instinctively, and in line with the bold approach that was necessary for pilot projects, I placed it right up front in the room, where it was visible through the little window in the door. "Let's make this a public act, by God," I said to myself. I surrounded the TV monitor (loaned by the PA, whose president, Janet McMillan, was very supportive of the project) with tables to prevent students from tripping over it. Students working at the computer would be in full view of their classmates.

The desks were lined up, the computer was running, and my example disk was in place. I went up to get my "approximately ten students" from Mr. Spottsville's class. They were a lively bunch, just in from lunch and the playground,

veins bulging with sugar and adrenaline. As I gathered them by their classroom door, their classmates were looking disappointed and betrayed (ouch!) and my students were well on their way to considering my program a trip to the funhouse. Good enough, but how about this break-dancing right there by the door before we even leave? They were able to calm down enough through normal methods of democratic (as opposed to authoritarian) control, and gradually were co-opted into the process of writing, but still, even during the last days, they occasionally couldn't resist, between sentences in a story, the impulse to fly out of a seat onto the floor and whirl a few spins.

Once I got them settled into their desks I explained who I was, what we were going to try to do together, and the type of behavior I expected from them (patience being the main requirement, as they would have to wait their turns to get to the computer). Next I questioned them about the people in stories, identifying the people as characters, and did the same with settings, then plots (to give us a reference point later, even though I would not be presenting them with plot models).

This way we established our terminology, clearing up some points such as the difference between ''stories'' as soap operas and the kind they would be writing with me. Some had thought that by ''characters'' I meant daytime TV actors, and by ''settings'' I had been referring to the studios where the soaps were shot.

I explained further that Bill's students would be illustrating certain parts of our stories, doing portraits of our characters, for instance, and also providing pictures of things for us to put in our stories.

Next, intentionally keeping a calm attitude in the classroom and delaying focus on the inert computer beside me, I got them more firmly mindful of the nature of stories by reading ''Dauntless Little John'' from Italo Calvino's collection *Italian Folk Tales.* Its central character is a young fellow with interesting traits who overcomes a giant in a scary castle, winning pots of gold from the dungeon. At the end Little John dies of fright when he sees his own shadow, perfectly exemplifying the idea of a twist. As always, the story worked like magic. Afterwards, the students named Little John's characteristics and I wrote them on the blackboard:

Little John

Brave. About as big as Keyshain. Ten years old. Likes wine and sausage. Doesn't obey giants.

When they got the idea, we invented our own class character, who turned out to be:

Mademoiselle Susquehanna

An 83-year-old lady. A widow. Happy. Tan. Middle class. Has five children. Builds beds. Has a rabbit. She has a sense of humor.

They saw that inventing a character can be entertaining.

Now it was time to switch to the computer. I said, ''Suppose you were writing a story and wanted to get a character to write about. You could go to a file cabinet and get a folder that contained characters, or, in much the same way, you could go to a computer that had characters in it.'' I picked up a disk and identified it, then brought a student forward to take it and put it in the disk drive. I instructed the student at each step and used the appropriate computer terms (disk drive, file, memory, load, etc.) as we went along.

The neat rows of desks in the classroom had crept forward by now and the students were crowded around the computer as close as they could get. When the student finally got my example file of characters up on the screen there was a chorus of gasps and comments. ''Hey, that's fresh. Oh, snap! Totally to the max,'' etc.

My example list of characters advanced over the screen and the children read them avidly. I made up quippish little incidents to illustrate how they might use these characters in a story.

I told them they were going to create their own class list and we replaced my ''Sourdough'' disk with a fresh one from their class. We created a file called PEOPLE and they read off the board while I entered Mademoiselle Susquehanna's characteristics into the computer, to be the first of the class list. As I entered the character (because they couldn't type), I made mistakes, which they quickly pointed out. I corrected the mistakes showing how the cursor could be positioned to erase and then moved back again to write. Finally, with suggestions from the class about which of the menu buttons to push, we saved the file, and the class was over.

The following two classes worked much the same way, but were more focused because they'd had more time to emerge from playground frenzy. By the end of the day I felt I'd joined successfully the issues of better fiction and exposure to computers, and perhaps made a good feint against the porcupine.

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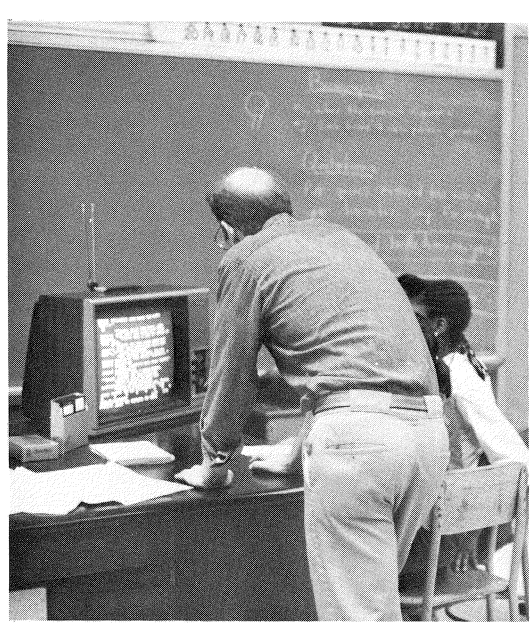
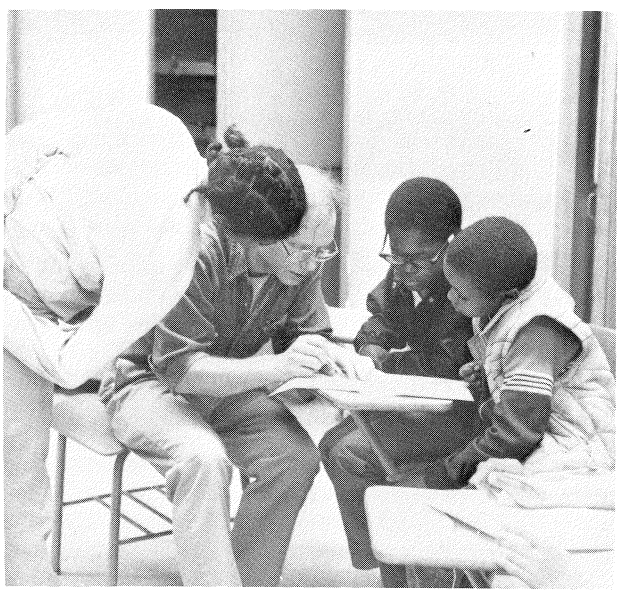
The next week the next kid on a roster came to run the computer in front of the class. I helped the student go through the process of getting the PEOPLE file up on the screen. After looking at the character created by the class the week before, the children sat at their desks with pencil and paper to create more characters. I stayed with the child at the computer, helping him create his.



I discovered that when doing any work on the computer with the kids, it was less important to teach them every feature than it was to reveal each feature as it became necessary. I have seen instruction manuals showing how to teach computers without a computer, using illustrations of the keyboards. I find this concept ludicrous. Unless they have been scared off by an adult, children at the computer are fearless, as they should be, and will try anything, and will ask for help when they need it.

To redistribute the quite imaginative characters invented by the kids (whose characteristics in some cases showed the self-deprecating kind of alienation that ghetto children face in their lives) I typed them all into one file before the following session. I randomly typed in a student's name beside the name of a character. The next week (always using a new child on the computer whenever a new phase of the project came in) we used the search feature on the Atariwriter program to find the names of the children and the characters that had fallen to them. The text moves with sharp speed in this function, good for a minor thrill. If the students didn't like the characters given to them on a random basis, they could swap. I encouraged them to give their characters a try, though, on the principle that at first it is always hard to see what a character might do or where a story might go.



Assigning characters like this was the implementation of the idea that the elements of fiction can be shared by a culture, like icons. The names and descriptions of the characters came from the neighborhood, the dinner table, the video arcade, and the media, but in conformations unique to this school. (Some names: Candy George, Daleia Bumstaid, Lynn Laughinghouse, Chachi, Tan Brown, Yellowbelly John, Bisket Humpkins, Break Dance Tee. Some identities: break dancers, punk rockers, brave kids, sharp-tongued girls, graffiti artists, runaways, fashion designers, space captains.) I advised them to pay special attention to their characters' weaknesses, which would become useful in getting them into some kind of appropriate trouble, and their strengths, which could get them out.

At this stage the idea of using the computer to distribute characters was working remarkably well, but a big problem seemed to be evolving. While they were seduced by the pull of fiction and very much wanted to write their stories, they had a hard time focusing all their attention on the paper at their desks because they were tantalizingly drawn to the computer. Later this problem disappeared altogether once they became acclimated to the presence of this very active machine in their midst, but I didn't yet know this would happen and my early skepticism became aroused again.

In our next session we created settings. The idea was simple and easy to execute quickly: name a place and several locations within the place. For instance:

Zoo

1. Bird cage.
2. Lion house.
3. Ice cream truck.
4. Duck pond.
5. Offices.
6. Bathroom.
7. Elephant house.

I didn't distribute the settings as I had done with the characters (I had intended to in my project design) because it was becoming too confusing to keep track of all the exchanges. Besides, it was obvious to me now that filing and redistributing characters had already given the students a sufficiently vested interest in the computer.

By now, incidentally, I was less a stranger to my own students and others in the school and kids began coming to the computer room to hang out, write their names on the machine, compose love letters. Although students dropped by to use the computer, teachers didn't. I believe this is because teachers need to have time and pay to learn about this important new educational tool. They need and deserve incentives.

Now that the students had characters and settings in hand, I wrote the beginning of a story that illustrated how a character could be put in a setting and do different interesting things. My example story became useful for the next few weeks. I introduced complications in my story in sync with the progress of theirs. Along the way, almost inadvertently, I could make points about grammar. For example, I showed them how to make paragraphs and quotations, two common problems for fifth graders. They developed keen eyes for these things in each others' stories, more so when they were reading the stories on the screen than on paper, perhaps because with the cursor they could perfect the text immediately. Words on paper seem harder to change.

While I helped the kid at the computer enter the work he or she had done, the students working on stories at their desks were starting to have more questions, and I began to realize I had created a bad split-focus problem for myself.

Soon we received our first photos of the computer graphics Bill's students were making down the hall, in this case illustrated words such as "FIRE" with the letters burning, or "ICE" with icicles dripping from the letters. I passed the pictures out and let the kids use what they wanted. These colorful pictures were another powerful stimulant to the stories, introducing new character traits, plot twists, and setting features.

At this point the progress of the stories became more interesting to the students than the activity at the computer, which was a victory for my belief that contemplation should outweigh the flash of electronics. However, this aggravated

the split-focus problem for me, particularly in the second class. It was advancing rapidly and the students couldn't seem to get enough feedback on their stories. I started going crazy trying to keep up with the kid (or kids) who needed help entering a story into the computer and the barrage of questions coming from the writers at their desks. Though I was getting encouraging signs in my battle to flip the porcupine, I was taking quills in the nose.

To solve the problem, I trained the students to be teachers. I brought three, one from each class, and showed them in as much detail as possible how to teach basic word processing to other kids. In addition to learning this, they alternated in the student and teacher roles, learning the difference between teaching and overteaching (interfering). Two of the three turned out to be mature enough to handle the job. One sometimes became distracted and didn't cover my flank well in the heat of the attack, but was some help anyway. Later I trained them once more, along with alternates.

The other students found it bitterly unfair that I had chosen one of their group to teach them. I was able to calm them about this, but they would rather have voted on the student-teachers. Next time....

When we began, with the assistant in a chair beside the operator's chair, some of the students were comically reluctant to sit next to a classmate (''cooties''), but the computer's attractive face won them over and we proceeded successfully. Only occasionally did the assistant need help. I was liberated to cultivate the writing at the desks.

The assistant helped the student at the computer retrieve his or her unfinished story. By hunting and pecking on the keyboard, that student could either edit or continue the story. Usually it was more appropriate to edit. I didn't ask them to edit on the computer; they did it naturally.

I am convinced by the success of using student-teachers that a computer can be a valuable aid to a teacher even with bad student-computer ratios. If the teacher trains assistants at the beginning of the year, the assistants can teach students at the computer and replace themselves periodically by training successive assistants. In effect the teacher's workload is eventually reduced.

The students' stories progressed apace in the next couple of weeks. I typed them into the computer, mistakes and all, in the mornings before classes. This took an hour at the most, each time, and included advancing my example story. (This was extra work for me in the pilot project, but in a classroom with more time the students could enter the stories themselves and the example story could come from a workbook or anthology.)

Bill's students were feeding us more pictures of binoculars, a hammer, silverware, space ships, limousines, helicopters, etc. and I was incorporating some into my model story. In the discussions about my model story at the beginning of each class I would introduce other principles of writing that naturally seemed to dovetail with our work. I talked about the importance of detail; I showed them how complications made stories more interesting; I continued to harp about quotation marks and paragraphs; I showed them how to make proofreader's marks on their first drafts to show themselves and me how to make corrections in future drafts.

At this stage there was no longer even a trace of a problem of their being distracted by the computer. Their stories were more important to them.

As they finished their stories they showed them to each other (sometimes at my recommendation, sometimes on their own) or came to watch the computer. They would throw in their two bits of advice to the writer at the keyboard and often spontaneous discussions would be ignited: how to use the computer, whether or not to use a real person's name for a character in a story, whether or not to change fragments to sentences, whether or not a story was logical, and what to do about it if it wasn't.

During this period of progress and harmony (the porcupine on the defensive, ineffectually twisting and hissing) I regretted that we had only one computer in the class, because only two students were able to work on it during any single period. To have rotated more to the keyboard would have limited their time to the point of meaninglessness. It is impossible to escape the fact that to derive the greatest advantage of a computer an individual must spend time with it.

By the beginning of our ninth session, many stories were complete, while others were near completion (first draft) or already into a second draft. I had been reading the stories at home when the students wanted me to, and making suggestions about how to work on them. A simple ''keep going'' was my most frequent suggestion. The kids just needed to be encouraged, and to get a sense of support while working across such a long span of time.

Although students had been sharing their stories and making comments to each other since the beginning of the workshop, I hadn't formally introduced the idea of peer criticism. I now discussed it in detail. We defined the words ''peer'' and ''criticism.'' I pointed out how literary criticism may involve positive as well as negative commentary. I told them to swap their stories and to note the following things: exciting parts and boring parts, places to expand with more detail and places to cut, whether the story felt complete or not, and any miscellaneous things they might think of.

At first the students tended to take each others' comments as threats, but they accepted my explanation that what seemed like a threat was in fact a favor. They also tended to make accurate observations about each others' stories but not communicate these observations to each other in enough detail. When the students criticized each others' work away from the computer, they tended to do it in broad strokes. When they worked together on a student's story on the computer, they tended to criticize particular details and grammatical errors.

At the end of the period I took all the stories in, even the unfinished ones, and put them on the computer before the final session. As I typed them in, I considered them closely and compared them to stories from similar fifth grade students elsewhere in non-computer workshops. The computer stories tended to be richer in imagery, character, and nomenclature but have less thoroughly developed themes and conflicts. (I usually have more time to discuss these latter elements of fiction in non-computer workshops.) But were they *better* because the computer had been present? It is impossible to say. I am just as happy this is so because I don't believe such a subjective phenomenon can be measured very meaningfully anyway. It seemed to me, however, that new approaches to teaching fiction had been discovered and I was immensely satisfied with the effect of developing stories from a pool of characters.

The reading of their stories took place in the tenth session. The first thing I did that last day, though, was hook up

a printer to the computer and show them how it typed their stories with incredible accuracy and speed. They were momentarily entertained by this ("That's fresh. Cool, man. Aw, tee!") but the interest peaked and fell within a minute. Letting the printer chatter away beside me, I began to read their stories aloud, and then turned their stories over to them to read to each other. "Turn that thing off, so we can hear," they said.

With the push of a button I flipped the porcupine and together the students and I feasted on their fiction.

For most of the students there was a special pleasure in seeing their characters appear in stories written by their fellows. (Sometimes a bit of possessiveness lingered, but only a negligible trace.) Likewise the classes were wildly enthusiastic to find characters, settings, and graphic images they had heard discussed around them for weeks, solidified into powerful stories, some hilarious and others sad, some fantastic, others realistic, and some too mixed to categorize.

My doubts about the possible deleterious effects of the technology disappeared. The computer had both enriched the culture of these students and helped spur their originality as individuals. Their stories had accomplished what legitimate stories always accomplish: the validation and affirmation of the lives of both the writers and the readers. Next year, perhaps, the characters they created can be retrieved and used as models for those who follow, establishing a kind of heritage.

Put in the hands of students properly (certain software is idiotically mind-numbing—I am not referring to this), computers can empower them and make them feel effective at a time in their lives when it can make a great deal of difference. They will be more engaged, less socially isolated from the mainstream. As much as the computer owns their world, they can, if given the opportunity, own the computer. It can be an extension of their minds, their thoughts, if we allow it, and it is better for us all if we do.

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Short Fiction from P.S. 146, Bronx

Darney Marson
by Shaun Anderson

Darney Marson is a green man from a planet called Maurse. There are only 40 creatures on the planet of Maurse. Ten of the people are red and 30 are green.

Darney Marson is a 365-year-old scientist, the most famous scientist of the planet Maurse. There are also people from a planet called Rusteja that are trying to control the planet Maurse. Darney Marson has made some M and M rockets that explode.

The king of Rusteja is Allenis Nixpance. The people of Rusteja called their king Maselis Allenis. King Allenis is a mad man that wears clothes from a famous clothes designer Aleenda Macy's. He had alligators and all of a sudden they disappeared.

King Allenis blamed King Darney Marson for stealing his alligators, so King Allenis got all of this soldiers and attacked Maurse.

But Darney Marson claimed that he did not steal his alligators. The soldiers of Allenis believed in honesty and the only reason why they were attacking Maurse was because they thought Darney Marson took their alligators.

Allenis was talking to his brother Tan Brown. While they were in the room, the soldiers decided to hear what Allenis and his brother were saying. They heard Allenis tell his brother that he had lied to his soldiers about Darney Marson taking his alligators.

His soldiers got together and took Allenis by force. Then they took Allenis and tied him up and threw him into the water.

The next day the soldiers went to the planet Maurse and asked Darney Marson did he want to be king of Rusteja. Darney Marson said yes and he owned two planets.

Then one day a wizard named Tafronsle Allzy Ononyo came to Maurse and Rusteja and ate a big piece of both of the planets. He had some plateaus for breakfast in Rusteja and some mountains from Maurse for dinner.

Darney Marson fell into a black hole and guess what he found there? King Allenis, and he had two horns and a forked stick. Darney was dinner for Allenis.

That was a story of a crazy person and a very evil, stupid one.

The Darksons Meet Gamera, the Flying Turtle
by David D. Brockington

There once lived a man named Charkey Darkson. He lived with his brother, Carkey Darkson. You see they were twins and had magical powers, but they used them in a bad way. One time they played soccer with this man's head. They did that because they wanted his store.

Suddenly Father comes. He's riding in this Super Duper oval top telephone bottom looking starcraft. He comes out with a baseball with nails sticking out of it. After that a mooncrater car came out and took them away.

Later on they went to the beach. And the funny thing about it was they drunk the ocean, shells and all, till it got boring. Then they drove away in style. So they went home and on the way they saw this huge turtle. He stepped on their father and killed him. The Darksons were mad. Then both of them double-teamed him.

One grabbed his leg, the other his head. They twisted different ways and killed him, then they died of a hernia.

Yellowbelly John
by Ivan Daniels

Yellowbelly John went to Alabama to visit his uncle John's farm. His uncle needed help on the farm, so John offered to help. First he went to milk the fish, but something was weird, the milk tasted like grapes.

Next he went to the pond to feed the swimming goats. Then he went with his uncle up in the rocket shaped like a car, so he could show John how to feed the crops in the rocket.

The next day John went to feed the green chickens and one of the eggs hatched and a skunk came out. Before Yellowbelly John went home, he went into the fields to see the flying grasshoppers and the flying kangaroos. While he was watching a kangaroo fell on his head.

A few hours later he found out he was in the hospital. When the flying kangaroo fell on him it broke some of John's ribs.

The next day John got out of the hospital. He decided he wanted to go home. Uncle John took him home in the rocket. When they got to the house, they started to land in the back yard, but when they landed they burned a hole in the lawn. Uncle John let his nephew Yellowbelly John off. John promised his uncle he would return soon.

Wennaskaka Veze
by Tanasha Hailey

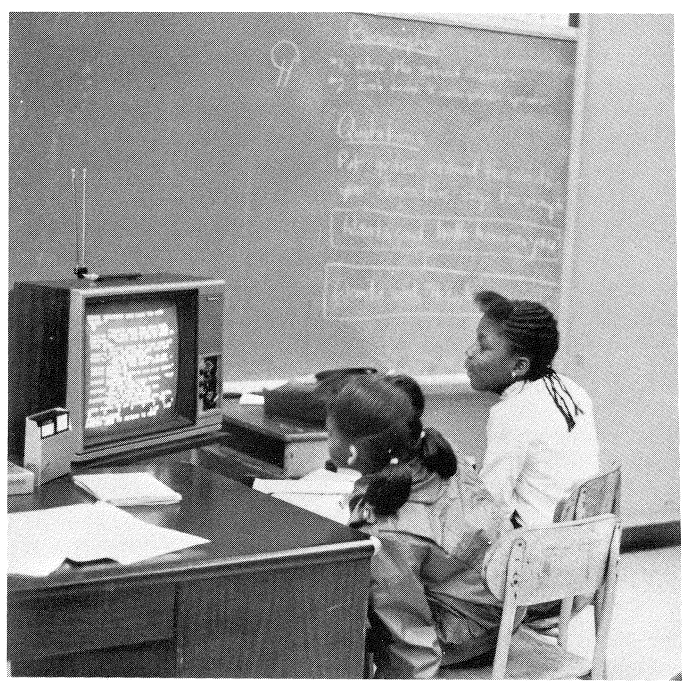
Hi! My name is Wennaskaka Veze. I come from the Planet V,S, 6, 12. I'm half moon zoe and half zerves. I have 75 children, 50 boys and 25 girls. I'm 116 years old. People say I have the skin of a soft, cottony pillow. I'm a widow. My husband died in 1900.

I'm about to tell you a story about my life. It all starts in Alien Park, at the Glass Alien Statue:

Homo: Hey Roro!
Roro: Yes Homo.
Homo: See that girl over there?
Roro: Yea! But so what. . . .
Homo: Isn't she beautiful?
Roro: Sure she is. Go over and speak to her.
Homo: All right, but will you come with me?
Roro: Oh, no, if Nono catches me she's going to cook my alien goose. Now go, I'll wait for you over here. Go, go.
Homo: I'm going. I'm going.
Homo: (Gulp) Hello.
Wennaskaka: Hi there.
Homo: What's your name?
Wen: What's yours?
Homo: Not fair. I asked you first.
Ho and Wen: Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha.
Wen: All right. My name is Wennaskaka Veze. I am 18 years old and I go to Alien Balien college.
Homo: Oh! What a coincidence. I go there too. My name is Homo Como and I'm 18 years old.
Wen: How nice.
Homo: C-C-C-Can you go with me to the prom June 5 at G.A. Statue Park?
Wen: Oh, yes!
Homo: All right. I'll pick you up at 8:30 at Isabula Island.
Wen: That sounds fine to me.
Homo: Great.

Isabula Island

Homo: It's 8:30 and she's not here yet. What's that right there?
Wen: Hi, Homo. I'm sorry I'm late, but I had to take a shower and go to the beauty parlor.
Homo: Oh, that was all right. You didn't have to go through all that trouble on account of me. By the way, we should get going.
Wen: Okay.



Moon Car Drive

Homo: This is my car. Car, meet Wenny and Wenny, meet Moon Car.
Wen: Hi, Moon Car.
Moon Car: Hi, Wenny!
Wen: He's so cute.
Moon Car: Thank you!
Homo: Please don't tell him that any more, he goes crazy.
Moon Car: Oh, mind your bees wax, Homo breath.
Wen: Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha.
Homo: Well, Moon Baby, let's go driving.
Wen: Wow, Homo baby, this car is like crazy, man.
Homo: Well, hold on to your fresh bod and we'll get grooving.

Glass Alien Statue Park

Wen: Wow, this party is real groovy.
Homo: Totally to the max.
Wen: Let's get some "Roach Punch," okay?
Homo: You get some Roach and I'll get some Spider Web beer.
Wen: That sounds groovy to me.
(To be continued.)

John Walker
by Charles Bryant

John Walker is sixteen years old. He likes to draw on walls. He writes Cosmo, Gismo, Ress, Code, Reven, Drazer, Crime, Reb, Eric, Rock, Power, Week, None, Bea, VIC, TBR, Tash, Seek, Crack, Semi, Quiz, Slate, Aids, Stone, King, Fight, Ice, Laugh, Brick, Tree, Fly Noodle, Water, Boro, Wood, Trance, Money Lee, Fizz, York, Volt, Voltage, Szaine, Safe, Dart, Rome, Popski, and Crane. And he never got in trouble.

The reason he never got in trouble was because he told people to watch out for the police. And he will write on thick stone.

He once wrote on a boy's jacket and they beat up the boy and took his jacket. He wrote on his pants when his mother told him not to do it because she paid a lot of money for his pants.

One day he met this boy and the boy said, "Draw something on my jacket."

John said, "It will cost you money."

The boy said, "Don't worry."

John drew on the boy's jacket and said, "If you don't have the money you are in big trouble."

Then one warm night John and his friends went to the train station to draw on the trains. They didn't know the police were expecting them. When they started to draw, the police came running after them.

They ran into an abandoned building. John's friend Chuchy, known as Phan, said, "Man, we blew it this time, man."

John said, "Not if I can help it. Follow me."

They ran upstairs to the roof and his friend Rob, known as Gismo, said, "Are you crazy? If we try to jump from roof to roof then you are extra crazy, man."

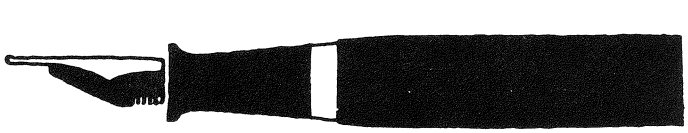
They all fell off the roof thinking that they were big, but they had done what the saying says: "The bigger they are, the harder they fall."

Brook Spring
by Charlene Davis

This lady I know is a punk rocker. She has 13 children. Their names are: Cindy, Jermain, Paul, Robert, Wanda, Micky, Darvin, Torriene, Twana, David, Hazel, Wanda and Baby Greg. She had them all dressed in different colors like her.

She had the kitchen painted orange and purple. She even painted her food all kinds of different colors. The water is red in the kitchen. The water is pink in the bathroom. The water is black in the toilet. They even have different colored fish.

She's going to paint her hair and she can't even get the paint out of her hair. She started to cry and she cut all her hair off with yellow scissors.



Break Dance Tee
by Braulio Rivera

Once there was this boy. His name was Break Dance Tee. He lived in a house. Tee was smart. One day when Tee was watching *The New Show,* he saw some people break dancing.

Tee loved to break. He even was down with the Breaker's Revenge. Other people were down too. Number One Darvin. . . Michael. . . Braulio. . . Rob. . . and other people.

One day when Tee was tagging up The Breaker's Revenge he got caught. They sent him to a home.

While Tee was in the home, he taught everybody how to break. They made a show. It was fresh. That was when Tee broke out and they never saw him again.

Movie Theater
by Tishika Williams

The movie is called *Splash.* It's about this lady that plays as a mermaid. She's pretty dumb and confused. Every time she takes a bath her legs grow longer and when she gets out of the tub, she has to take a blow dryer and put it next to her legs until they come back into normal legs.

She thinks that it is a sin to make love with somebody. One time her boyfriend tried to make love with her but she didn't let him do it.

She had to tell him something. You know what she had to tell him, right? If you don't you have not read my story. She had to tell him she was a mermaid.

Finally she told him. Do you know what he said? He said, "I don't care."

CAMEL SERENADE
New Computer Writing and Art

by Ron Padgett

THE USE OF THE COMPUTER IN WRITING IS going to be very interesting in the next few years. It is going to be interesting for teachers, who will have better software and new methods to work with, and it will be interesting for writers, who will explore the computer's new artistic possibilities. It will also be interesting for readers, because a new computer art/writing will call forth new ways of "reading."

My own experiences with the computer have lead me to these optimistic predictions. Naive and prejudiced, I originally suspected that the personal computer was technology's latest way of entertaining us away from more important things. The "hype" that accompanied the proliferation of the personal computer—"In five years everyone will *have to have a computer to survive*"—made computers sound depressing, enslaving, even tacky. Secretly, though, I was curious to know more about them. As a writer, I was intrigued by the flat, industrial-sounding term "word processing." Surely they couldn't do to words what they had done to cheese. But how was I going to find out?

The question was answered when the Atari Institute for Action Research donated two Atari 800's to Teachers & Writers Collaborative. Suddenly it became part of my work at T&W to learn about the computer. Before the equipment arrived I started reading computer books and magazines, which got me in the mood, so to speak; but I learned a lot more, and more quickly, through informal instruction from computer people at New York University's Alternate Media Center, who were about to collaborate with Teachers & Writers on school computer projects in writing and graphic art. Using a strictly hands-on method, in a couple of hours they taught me enough elementary word processing so that when I needed to learn more I could usually figure it out using the manual.

Over the next couple of months I came to what appear to be the writer's standard conclusions about word processing. It can be wonderful for writing prose. It allows you to write more volubly and freely and it makes revisions easy and even entertaining. It eliminates the agony of endless retyping. For poetry—at least the kind of poetry I was interested in writing—it was lousy, partly because of the restricted length of line on the Atari (36 characters), partly because it didn't "feel" right. The monitor, the computer console, the disc drive, the diskettes, the need for electricity, the lack of physical mobility, all these seemed contrary to the free—in every sense of the word—nature of the poetry I wanted to write. Ultimately, though, there was no getting around the fact that my feel for prose, especially expository prose, had improved.

Summer came. I retreated to the hills of northern Vermont, taking an Atari with me. It was there that my view of the computer widened more dramatically. Through my son Wayne, who for the past few years had been discreetly spending time in video arcades, I fell under the spell of video games. When video games are good they are *very* good. (After one particularly feverish, obsessive night of playing *Crossfire* until five a.m., I developed an alarming case of joystick thumb.) It was also through my son, though, that I was initiated into the mysteries of programming. Not only had he been playing *Wizard of War* in the arcades, he had also been learning programming in school.

I couldn't let him get "ahead" of me, so I began Atari's self-tutorial program in BASIC. When I wasn't sure about some point or other, Wayne explained. He found the "bugs" in my exercise programs. Although not a sophisticated programmer, he pointed out some slicker programming techniques. Without meaning to, he showed me that he was no longer the little boy who needed his father's help: the tables had turned. I felt a strange new respect for him as a young man.

I already respected his artistic ability. Since the age of three he had created imaginative poems, stories, drawings, and cartoons. Now, with the computer, he began to write programs that produced graphic and sometimes witty results on the screen. One night, just before we were to have dinner with our neighbor Joe, he quickly wrote a progam that produced the flashing yellow word "JOE'S," with an animated arrow, like a diner sign, pointing in the direction of Joe's house. After a certain number of flashes, a siren began to wail, the screen went dark, and the words "It's a raid!" appeared.

Over the next few weeks I meddled in his computer doodlings. One day I walked by the computer and saw on the screen an Egyptian pyramid that kept hypnotically reappearing in changing colors: it was like a visual song in the mind of a desert animal. I said to Wayne, "Put 'CAMEL SERENADE' at the bottom." He did, so that it appeared one letter at a time, coinciding with each new pyramid: C, CA, CAM, CAME, CAMEL, etc. The slow, rhythmical appearance of the letters suggested not only the camel's gait, but also brought forth associations with the words inside "camel" and "serenade": C suggested "see," CA suggested California, CAM suggested a machine with parts moving at measured intervals, CAME suggested "arrived,"

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and so on, with a particularly pretty suggestion that the camel is named Serena. Of course I had none of this in mind when I asked him to add CAMEL SERENADE to his graphics.

Over the next few weeks we came up with some funny and serious and beautiful little works, many of which involved visual images, sound, words, and motion. Sometimes, just to see what would happen, we borrowed commands from programs in books we didn't even understand. These new works were a cross between poetry, graphic design, and animated cartoons. I had never seen anything quite like them.

Wayne created his final masterpiece of the summer by parodying a portion of Atari's program for the BASIC self-tutorial course. He listed the program and then creatively revised it. Where the program had asked questions such as "What is the correct command for printing 'hello'?" he had it ask ridiculous questions, such as "What is the correct command for Jack Lord's hair?" (he was an ironic fan of old *Hawaii Five-O* reruns). Where the Atari program had some little computer musical motif, he put a wild selection from Japan, a New Wave rock group. The resulting scramble—a completely insane tutorial program that no one could possibly follow—was a wonderful dadaist parody.

In the meantime we had begun to work on a pilot project that had been floating around in my fantasies for the past year or so. I had been dreaming of creating writing games for the computer, games that would be as much fun as *Crossfire* and at the same time as true as possible to my experience of writing creatively. In a couple of weeks we roughed out a first version of one of these games. With the help of more advanced programmers, I have since developed six such games, which hopefully will go into production in the not too distant future.

To create the kinds of art works Wayne did on the computer you have to know how to do some programming. Very few of the poets and novelists I know—mostly thirty and over—know how to program. If they use the computer it is for word processing only. Over the next few years, though, there will be more and more creative kids coming out of school with the ability both to program and to write creatively, and when that happens we will begin to see imaginative computer art works for which we have as yet no name. ●

Three Atari Programs in BASIC

by Wayne Padgett

1.

```
0 REM THE VIEW
1 REM BY WAYNE PADGETT
10 GRAPHICS 1+16
20 POSITION 0,8:? #6;"      THE VIEW"
30 FOR YY=1 TO 900:NEXT YY
40 A=60:GRAPHICS 7
50 SETCOLOR 4,9,14
60 SETCOLOR 2,0,14
70 SETCOLOR 1,10,12:COLOR 2
80 PLOT 80,0:DRAWTO A,80
90 PLOT 100,20:DRAWTO A+20,80
100 PLOT 123,10:DRAWTO A+38,80
110 PLOT 60,6:DRAWTO A-20,80
120 PLOT 42,27:DRAWTO A-45,80
130 PLOT 140,30:DRAWTO A+55,80
140 IF A=100 THEN 170
150 A=A+1
160 GOTO 80
170 ? "        CLOSE THE BLINDS, EH?"
180 FOR YY=1 TO 900:NEXT YY
190 COLOR 3
200 A=0:B=0:C=159:D=0
210 PLOT A,B:DRAWTO C,D
220 A=A:B=B+2:C=C:D=D+2
230 IF B=80 THEN GOTO 250
240 GOTO 210
250 FOR YY=1 TO 900:NEXT YY
260 GRAPHICS 1+16:SETCOLOR 2,0,10:POSITION 0,9
270 ? #6;"       THE END"
280 FOR YY=1 TO 900:NEXT YY
```

2.

```
0 REM JOE'S
1 REM BY WAYNE PADGETT
5 C=0
10 GRAPHICS 2+16
11 IF C=6 THEN 80
20 FOR X=1 TO 17
30 POSITION X,5
40 ? #6;" ->"
50 FOR T=1 TO 100:NEXT T
60 NEXT X
65 ? #6;"        JOE'S"
67 FOR T=1 TO 400:NEXT T
68 C=C+1
70 GOTO 10
79 C=0
80 FOR P=100 TO 10 STEP -1
83 IF C=10 THEN 150
90 SOUND 0,P,10,8
100 NEXT P
110 FOR P=10 TO 100
120 SOUND 0,P,10,8
130 NEXT P
135 C=C+1
140 GOTO 80
150 GRAPHICS 0
155 COLOR 1
160 SETCOLOR 2,0,1
170 ? "IT'S A RAID!!!!!!!!!"
175 FOR I=1 TO 500:NEXT I
180 GRAPHICS 2
185 SOUND 0,0,0,0
190 ? #6;"THE END"
200 FOR I=1 TO 900:NEXT I
205 GRAPHICS 0
210 END
```

3.

```
0 REM SMALLER & SMALLER
1 REM BY WAYNE PADGETT
4 GRAPHICS 1+16
5 POSITION 6,8:? #6;"SMALLER"
6 FOR X=1 TO 900:NEXT X
10 GRAPHICS 3
15 COLOR 1
18 ? "    HERE I AM."
20 GOSUB 125
35 FOR DELAY=1 TO 1000:NEXT DELAY
40 GRAPHICS 4
42 SETCOLOR 4,4,4
45 ? "         I THINK I AM SHRINKING."
50 GOSUB 125
55 FOR DELAY=1 TO 1000:NEXT DELAY
60 GRAPHICS 6
62 SETCOLOR 4,6,2
65 GOSUB 125
70 ? "       EVERY DAY SMALLER & SMALLER..."
75 FOR DELAY=1 TO 1000:NEXT DELAY
76 ? :? :? :? :?
78 SETCOLOR 4,2,2
80 ? "OR AM I JUST GETTING FURTHER AWAY?"
85 FOR DELAY=1 TO 1000:NEXT DELAY
87 SETCOLOR 2,2,2:? :? :? "WHICH DO YOU THINK?"
88 FOR DELAY=1 TO 1000:NEXT DELAY
90 SETCOLOR 4,2,2
92 GRAPHICS 1
93 ? #6;"     ANSWER PLEASE.":? CHR$(253)
95 ? "YOUR ANSWER:";
96 DIM ANSWER$(50)
97 INPUT ANSWER$:? #6;"                "
98 ? #6;"MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT. GOODBYE."
99 FOR DELAY=1 TO 1000:NEXT DELAY
100 GRAPHICS 0:SETCOLOR 2,2,10
105 FOR DELAY=1 TO 500:NEXT DELAY
110 GRAPHICS 2
115 SETCOLOR 4,6,8
120 ? #6;"      THE END"
121 FOR X=1 TO 900:NEXT X
122 GRAPHICS 0:END
125 PLOT 5,5:PLOT 15,5
130 PLOT 5,15:PLOT 15,15
135 RETURN
```

Oops

We goofed. We left out a whole chunk of Elizabeth Simons' article in the previous issue. Here's the omitted text, which goes just before the beginning of the first new paragraph on page 2.

•

To understand why I view naming traditions as valuable requires a bit of background in modern (or contemporary) folklore. Modern folklore is definitionally the same as traditional lore. It is the stories, jokes, traditions, customs, and the like that we have put into oral tradition and kept alive by passing them from person to person. Traditional folklore is that of ancient peoples, epics (such as *The Iliad*), folktales ("Cinderella"), legends (the headless horseman), proverbs, riddles, and folk music. All this folklore is not "ours" in the sense that we no longer keep it alive through oral tradition; we know it from books. However, we still do have a rich oral tradition, and it is to this that I am referring when I say modern folklore or modern oral tradition.

Modern folklore includes children's games and play (tag and playing house); it is slang and desk top graffiti; it is ways to pass notes in class, dating rituals, and teenage folklore; it is heroes and heroines and modern urban legends such as "The Babysitter" or stories of albino alligators in city sewers; it is jokes. It is family folklore, rituals, and traditions, from family whistles to what we eat at Thanksgiving dinner and whom we invite. Be it Hispanic, black or white Anglo-Saxon Protestant, we all have our family and ethnic lore. Most recently I taught the folklore of names in a high school of mostly white middle class suburban students.

In my ninth grade class I started by writing my full name (Elizabeth Jane Radin Simons) on the chalkboard and saying, "Ask me questions about how I got my name."

Eric, the first student to speak, was confused by my having so many names and asked, "What's your real name?" I laughed; it was a good question. They are all my names but when I married I dropped the Jane. Tait, whose mother has been married three times, said laughing, "It's a good thing my mom didn't keep all *her* names from the past."

Next came a good question from Brian, "What other names did your parents think of?" "If I had been a boy," I told him, "my name would have been Edward."

Susan, one of the more playful members of the class, asked, "Didn't anyone ever call you 'Peaches' or something like that?" "Alas," I told them, "no one ever called me Peaches, but I do have a nickname, Liz, and when I was a child I was 'Lizzie.'" Susan wasn't satisfied with this, she wanted something "crazy." And at that moment I remembered a family nickname I had totally forgotten, "dear, dear Elizabeth." My father had coined it—the first dear because he loved me and the second because I was so expensive! My father delighted in this nickname and still likes to tell stories about why it was so appropriate. "Dear, dear Elizabeth" wasn't quite "Peaches," but Susan seemed satisfied.

"Why did you drop the Jane instead of the Radin?" Brian wanted to know. Alison had an answer, "No one ever does that." A hot discussion ensued about keeping last names after marriage and divorce. And Michelle brought some closure to the discussion with this observation, "Just because she got married she didn't want to forget where she came from." A beautiful point. Michelle understood that my name, a symbol of my past, was something I might want to keep after marriage as a way of maintaining my ties to my family—"where I came from."

•

We also misspelled the name of the foundation sponsoring Elizabeth Simons' work. It is the Skaggs Foundation. We apologize for these errors.

PLUGS

Creative Word Processing in the Classroom, edited by writer/teacher Jon Madian, is a relatively new newsletter for children, teachers, and parents. It contains friendly writing ideas for use in the classroom. Three issues per year cost $9 when payment accompanies subscription order ($11 if you ask to be billed). Multiple subscriptions at lower rates. Creative Word Processing in the Classroom, 2210 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 365, Santa Monica, CA 90403.

Research in Word Processing Newsletter serves as a clearinghouse of information on computer-based writing instruction at all levels. Addressed to the academic community, its bibliographies are particularly good. $12 per year. The Editors, Research in Word Processing Newsletter, South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, Rapid City, SD 57701. ●

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We are in the process of computerizing our magazine mailing list. As a result, some of our records may have been incorrectly transferred to the new system.

If you receive any inappropriate correspondence from us, if your name or address is grotesquely misspelled, or if you have reason to believe that our new information about your membership or subscription is incorrect, please let us know right away. We'll be sure to correct that naughty computer before the next issue.

Thanks very much for your patience and your help. ●

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