Teachers&Writers

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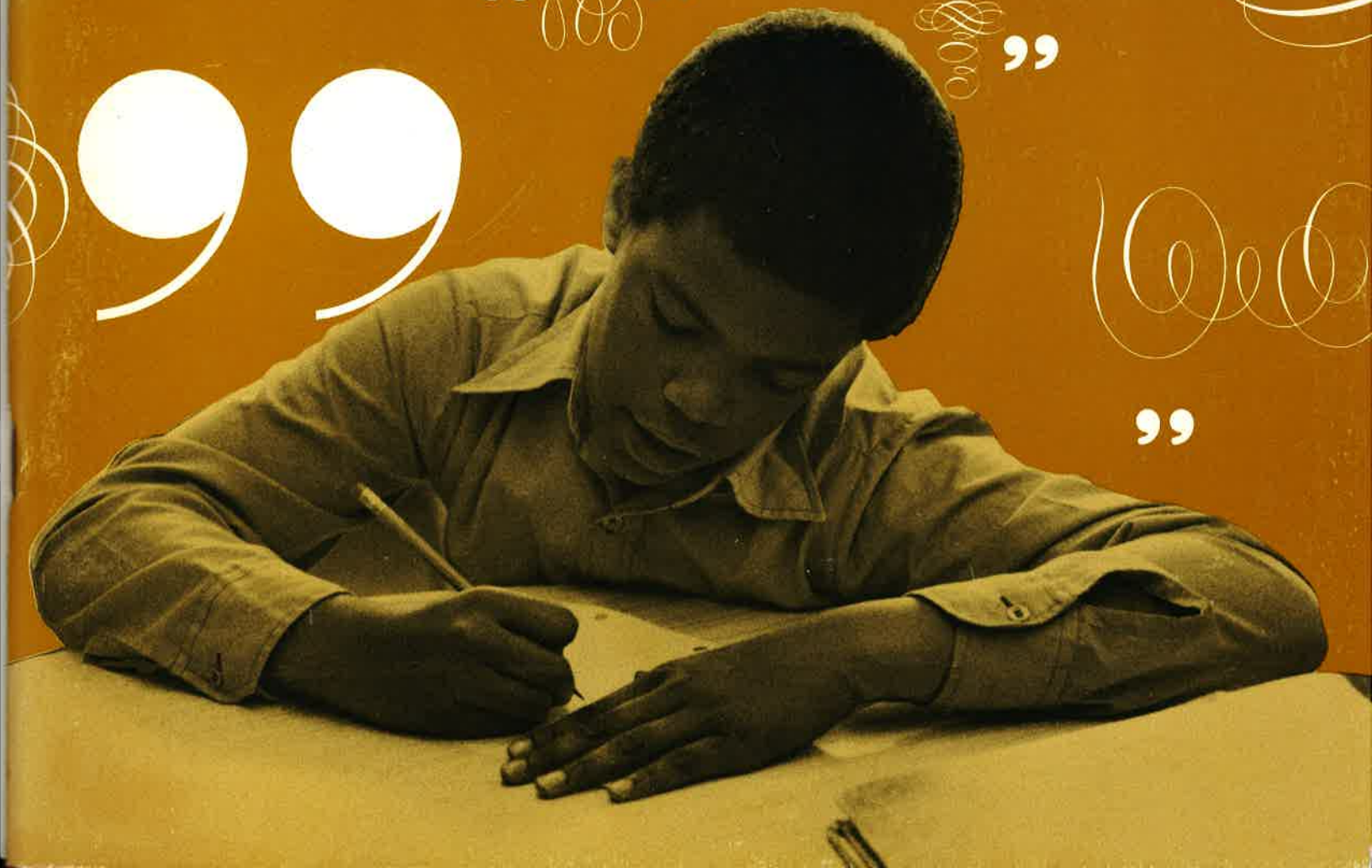

Teachers & Writers

Magazine **Volume 10, No. 1**

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Exchanges

JOHN KEATS AND THE FIFTH GRADE

By Carol Gold

I found the delightful sonnet called "Two or Three," by John Keats much as I find everything else: when I wasn't even thinking much about anything, just browsing, and avoiding the week's classroom planning. I knew that it had its archaic words, "foreign" kinds of references for my kids, but something about the regularity and the counting attracted me.

I typed it up on a ditto and cut the paper into a long strip—to save paper, but mostly because the form of the sonnet seemed to invite a change of shape, too.

TWO OR THREE
by John Keats

Two or three Posies
With two or three simples
Two or three Noses
With two or three pimples
Two or three wise men
And two or three ninnies
Two or three purses
And two or three guineas
Two or three raps
At two or three doors
Two or three naps
Of two or three hours
Two or three Cats
And two or three mice
Two or three sprats
At a very great price
Two or three sandies
And two or three tabbies
Two or three dandies
And two Mrs. Abbeys
Two or three Smiles
And two or three frowns
Two or three Miles
To two or three towns
Two or three pegs
For two or three bonnets
Two or three dove eggs
To hatch into sonnets.

The kids were absolutely delighted (no mean thing) with the sonnet, and tried to figure out what some of the references were, like "Mrs. Abbeys" and "sprats" and "sandies." Some we found in the dictionary and some we just made up meanings for, or just forgot about, if it was too distracting.

I've been teaching poetry for four years to different ages of children, and I've always been pretty open about any form which they may want to invent or imitate. I've never insisted on rhyming (except perhaps when limericks are written, and then the kids do the insisting) but I admit that I was tempted to insist over this idea. I'm very glad that I followed my instincts and just let the kids go! I doubt that the results would have been as terrific if they had been limited to rhyming and trying to count and make some sense, too. John Keats can be a tough person to match! As a matter of fact, when the booklet was completed and sent home, I couldn't resist the temptation of adding a short selection of my own—which didn't match the kids of course—and proved to myself for the millionth time: Do the assignments yourself, teacher!

NINE OR TEN

Nine or ten plugs
For nine or ten sockets
Nine or ten dollars
For nine or ten pockets
Nine or ten erasers
For nine or ten pencils
Nine or ten letters
Made with nine or ten stencils
Nine or ten games
For nine or ten kids
Nine or ten bets
Or nine or ten bids
Nine or ten nests
For nine or ten birds
Nine or ten sentences
For nine or ten words
Nine or ten walls
For nine or ten rooms
Nine or ten forks
For nine or ten spoons
Nine or ten babies
For nine or ten mothers
Nine or ten sisters
For nine or ten brothers
Nine or ten blankets
For nine or ten beds
Nine or ten hats
For nine or ten heads
Nine or ten balls
For nine or ten bats
Nine or ten dogs
For nine or ten cats.

By Marc Botnick

ONE OR TWO

One or two desks
For one or two kids
One or two pots
For one or two lids
One or two pencils
For one or two hands
One or two utensils
For one or two brands
One or two wars
By one or two Oldies
Who sit in their chairs
While young men catch coldies.

by Amy Rosenzweig

ONE TO TEN

I have one or two nostrils
And two or three bruises
Three or four pimples
Four or five shoeses.
Five or six earrings
Six or seven friends
Who are always faithful,
Even in the end.
Seven or eight scratches
Eight or nine plates
Nine or ten latches
That fit into gates.

by Karen Alexander

TWO OR THREE

Two or three twinkles
For two or three stars
Two or three nuts
For three candy bars
Two or three fires
For two humble matches
Two or three overalls
For three patterned patches
Two or three minks
For two lovely furs
Two or three cats
For three loud purrs
Two or three diamonds
For two sparkly rings
Two or three queens
For three mighty kings
And two wondering eyes
For all of these things!

by Lisi Phillips

THOMAS

by Joy Calhoun

After he moved to Phoenix, Thomas wrote to me intermittently for about a year, which is pretty good for a thirteen year old kid. But he is sixteen now, and I don't know where he is.

Thomas and I got together because we were rejects. I was hired to teach Spanish, because the school had a government grant for a language lab. Those were the days when the government was giving money away, and if you got it, you had to spend it, or you could not get more. They didn't have enough Spanish classes for me to teach, so they gave me a language arts class. The other teachers got to pick whom they would send to me, the patron saint of hopeless spellers. "Children who would benefit from extra attention," was how it was put. We all got extra attention because, unlike the other teachers, I did not let them "get started on their homework" in class while I sat quietly in front of the room watching them quietly copying lists of words. (Having them do anything quietly meant that you had *good discipline*.) I did not like to sit quietly any more than they did, and we worked together boisterously. We got extra attention from the principal and from the other teachers, too, who poked their heads in to see if we were all right, because we made noise. We chanted spelling words as if they were football cheers, working out complicated rhythmic patterns. H-O (pause) L-I (pause) D-A-Y, and T-U-E-S (going up the scale, pause) D-A-Y (on one, lower note). I wouldn't say that they learned how to spell, but it was more fun than having them copy lists, at least for me. When they copied lists, I had nobody to talk to.

A week after I got Thomas who was quiet (unlike the others) polite (unlike the others) and pale around the eyes, Miss Kayling, his former teacher (I use the word only in a relative sense, as identifying but not nec-

essarily describing the woman) handed me a stack of essays written by the students of whom she had disposed by giving them to me. Miss Kayling was a neat and organized woman. Never would stacks of messy papers be allowed to clutter up her desk. Even her files were orderly. I sat down to read the essays. I am sloppy, but I am conscientious.

"You might not believe that a mother could hate her kids..." Thomas wrote, "...but my mother won't let me read because she says it's bad for my eyes but it's realy (sic) because she hates me. She was suposed (sic) to take me to the eye doctor for exercises. She dint (sic) some and when I called her to pick me up she told me to get my fanny home and she wiped (sic) me. So I went to the police..." The essay continued but I did not. Thank you dear Miss Kayling for this interesting student. She had written on the bottom of the paper, hopefully, I assume, "Would it help to talk about this?" I did not know if this question was directed at Thomas or at me.

As soon as I had a free period I went to the office, where I was already known to the principal, Mr. Megan, as "that woman" as in "My-God-that-woman-can-nag." I never thought of myself as nagging, but I remember that my mother-in-law objected to me as a "gay, practical doer." I guess that gay practical doers get less gay as they get less done, and then they turn into "that woman." I said that I wanted to know what had been done about Thomas, and where was the police report, if there was one. The secretary looked nervous and said I had better see Mr. Megan. I stood. She sent me to Mr. Megan in the office on the other side of her desk. I repeated my question. Mr. Megan looked pained, and closed his door. He sat down again and began to read, making notes on papers on his desk. I stopped talking in the middle of a sentence. He said that he would work and listen at the same time. I repeated,

"What did the police report say about Thomas?"

He sighed. He put his pencil down. The office had inquired about Thomas's story. Thomas had gone to the police and the police had had his father come to the station with Thomas, and Thomas was reported to have said, in front of his father, that his (third, Mr. Megan thought) step-mother had not really beaten him, he had said it because he was mad. He then departed with his father. I asked if anyone had looked to see if he had bruises. Mr. Megan shuffled his papers. I left.

The next day I called Thomas to the doorway of the classroom where we could talk without being heard while fully visible to the class (as a moderating influence, I hoped). I said I had read his essay.

"I don't know what to do about this," I said. "Have you thought of judo?" Thomas smiled. I asked who the doctor was. Thomas did not know, but it was right next to the bank, downtown.

"I have to know the doctor's name," I said. "The name, try to remember his name."

Thomas looked worried. He could not remember the name. I wondered if I would be arrested for vagrancy if I loitered around "downtown" in front of "a bank" trying to find a doctor, whom I would not be able to identify unless I read through his files until I came to Thomas. The next morning while I, simultaneously, rearranged papers on top of my desk, crouched behind it to hide from the kids, attempted to think up what we were going to do that day, and tried to remember what we had done yesterday, Thomas came in and approached the desk. My students and I had already learned to respect each other's idiosyncracies. I did not read the notes they wrote to each other, and they did not greet me warmly in the morning. The wiser among them did not greet me at all. But, as it was Thomas, I did not pretend not to see him. I looked up.

"Yes, Thomas?" I said.

Thomas told me the doctor's name.

"How did you find out?"

"My mother told me." That is how he referred to his step-mother.

"Did you tell her it was for me?"

"No," said dear Thomas, "I said it was for a friend."

"Thomas," I said, "You did good." We smiled at each other. We were allies.

I called the doctor. Optometrists and dentists, especially those who are personally decent, furnish their waiting rooms with fake wood walls, brown furniture, *House and Garden* magazines (if they are in the heart of a large city, they may add *Fish and Stream*), and with a vacuous, young, well-rounded (everywhere, even in her face) girl with long, straight, bleached blond hair and no mind at all. Sometimes she has very short bleached blond hair but this does not affect her mental ability. The girl had never heard of confidentiality, a more than two syllable word, so she read Thomas's entire chart to me over the phone. Yes, Thomas had complained of poor concentration and headaches. These symptoms were due to visual problems. His eyes did not focus properly, so the letters appeared to blur as he read. Yes, he needed visual training, which had been started. She did not know why his last appointment had been cancelled.

Her ability to read was not matched by her ability to get a message to the doctor. For two weeks I called her daily, and left messages. I kept telling Thomas that I was trying to talk to the doctor. I think he be-

lieved me, but he knew that a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush (a mother in the coffin worth two in the kitchen? a doctor on the telephone worth two on the golf course?). At last the doctor returned my call. We discussed Thomas and the cost of the treatment. He offered to give a professional discount to the Lions Club if they would pay for Thomas's training. They did this sort of thing sometimes. I felt that life was complicated enough without my getting involved with the Lions Club. I asked why he would not give me a professional discount, as I would probably be bringing Thomas myself. In that case, he said, there would be no charge. But I had to have a signed note from the boy's father, giving permission. I returned to Mr. Megan.

Mr. Megan was a short fat man from downstate, who did not hate kids. He had other disabilities. He knew everybody in town. He had friends. He was well liked. He had connections. Once a year he stood in the line of traffic heroically challenging oncoming cars, collecting change from motorists for Rotary, oblivious to the fact that if he were killed he would probably be replaced by a principal who did hate kids. Given a choice between a kid and that amorphous lump known as *the community*, he would unerringly choose the community, just as I would unerringly choose the kid, but he would try to avoid the choice. He would not gratuitously try to make the kid miserable. I had worked in five schools and Mr. Megan was the best principal I had seen. With some confidence, therefore, I laid the matter before him. He promised to get permission from Thomas's father for me to take Thomas to the doctor during my free period which was right after lunch, so I would have enough time, as long as Thomas's other teacher did not mind his missing class. I did not think that Thomas would be missing all that much as he could not see the blackboard, but I said that I would arrange it with the other teacher, and that I would talk to Thomas's father myself, if he wanted me to. Mr. Megan said that he would take care of it. He liked to take care of things himself.

Three weeks later he had temporarily finished counting the lunch money himself after it had been counted by the individual teachers and checked by the secretary, and sorting the mail himself, after the secretary had sorted it, (I suppose to see whether any of the faculty was receiving atheistic or communistic mail. He believed in the American way, and had once confided that he found Oral Roberts a real inspiration). He had called the roll himself as the entire school lined up for pictures. He had had time to think about Thomas. He called the chief of police. After all, he knew the chief of police. Why leave a perfectly good connection to atrophy through disuse. The chief of police said that he would stop by the gas station at the corner of Belmont and Elm where Thomas's father worked, and talk to Thomas's father after he had talked to me. I began to feel trapped in an A. A. Milne fantasy ("...the king told the queen and the queen told the dairymaid..."). I went to the police station after school and repeated to the chief what he had already heard from Mr. Megan, who had confirmed to him his own report about Thomas's visits to the police station, first with and then without his father.

Two days later I was summoned to the office. Thomas's father would not sign because he was mad. He was mad because he did not consider this a police matter, and the chief had come in his uniform.

"I goofed," Mr. Megan admitted. "You can try." I said that I would try.

"I will be charming," I said. "I don't like to be charming, but I can."

I paused so he had time to realize that it was his ineptness that was forcing me to misrepresent myself.

I added, "I will tell him that I think the matter should have been handled with him in the first place; instead of going to the police at all."

I looked at him and he looked at me. He nodded slightly. There were a lot worse principals around than Mr. Megan.

"Sit at my desk," he commanded, rising. "You can use the 18-18 line."

"Claire is going to use the 18-18 line," he yelled out to the secretary. I had not known of the existence of the 18-18 line. Nobody could cut in on the 18-18 line, he explained. Nobody had ever cut in on any of the other lines when I used the phone, and I was momentarily confused, until I realized that I was being given the equivalent of a two-pen stand, or the key to the executive wash room. So I said OK, I would use the 18-18 line but I would just as soon stand up. We were both standing up, he on his side of the desk and me on mine. He sat down and worked on some papers while I waited for the 18-18 line to be free. I knew that the teacher who was covering my class during his free period was mentally cursing me for taking so long (conditionally, I hoped, because the delay was not my fault and he knew that Mr. Megan had his ways).

I got through to Thomas's father at last, and told him how terribly sorry I was that he had been the victim of a mistake, a mistake that I myself had nothing to do with. I told him that we all knew how eager he was for Thomas to have the best medical care, and that Thomas was an excellent and well-behaved young man and a credit to his Father-who-was-so-eager-for-him-to-have-the-best-medical-care, and that I understood how difficult it was for him (an excellent parent) to get Thomas, a veritable credit to his father, his race, his religion, and his

ethnic and socio-economic group, to the doctor during the day. Thomas's father said he would give his permission. I went to the gas station on the corner of Elm and Belmont right after school. He signed.

Thomas and I got to go in my car to the doctor's office every Wednesday where Thomas did hand-eye coordination exercises on an expensive piece of equipment, and Thomas came to my classroom the other days at lunch time, and looked from a chart in his hand to the chart on the wall, with one eye at a time. We spent a lot of time together and Thomas volunteered certain information about his family life. His step-mother Carol used to be his sister, because his father had been married to Carol's mother. His former stepmother, therefore, was now his grandmother. She ceased to be his mother when his father found out that she held his brother's hand in the fire to keep him from playing with matches. He divorced her and married her daughter (his former step-daughter), Thomas said. He called her "my mother" when she prevented him from doing something, and "Carol" when he talked about her. He remained quiet and polite and did not waver in his dislike of Carol because she tried to stop him from reading. We stopped in to see his father at the gas station sometimes on our way back to school. One day I assured his father that I knew how eager Carol (the mother, step-mother, wife, or sister, depending on the year and on one's point of view) was to help Thomas. I had asked the doctor, and he had said that it was perfectly all right for Thomas to read all he wanted to. I knew that it would be a relief to Carol to hear this, I lied. When we got back in the car, I said,

"Did you hear me, Thomas?" and Thomas grinned.

I told Thomas's other teachers about his eye problem, and that he could not finish copying his work from the blackboard because his eyes focused so slowly.

"He cannot find his place when he looks from the blackboard to his notebook," I explained.

"Please be sure that he has his work copied," I pleaded, because they wrote assignments on the board for the next day. They all believed in homework, to prepare them for high school to prepare them for college to prepare them for graduate school (or perhaps to work in the local supermarket) just as they believed in pre-nursery school to prepare them for nursery school to prepare them for kindergarten to prepare them for first grade. I thought that it might make things easier for Thomas at home if his grades improved. One teacher changed his seat to the front of the room, which indicated a good heart, if comprehension of Thomas's problem. Thomas never did finish his homework but he never gave anybody any trouble because he always had a book that he wanted to read tucked inside the book that the teacher wanted him to read, or inside the notebook into which he had given up trying to copy the assignments from the blackboard. He didn't care that much about the assigned work anyway, and neither did anyone at home.

About half way through the school year, Thomas reported that "they" had sold his dog and, two days after that, that they were moving. Two weeks later he was gone, after presenting me with a bottle of perfume called "Intimate," one of the words we had learned how to spell. He promised me to continue working with the eye charts. For about a year I got occasional letters, about how he liked to ride his bike around, and how hot it was in Phoenix. Then he stopped writing. I wrote two more letters. They were not answered. Maybe he moved again, or found other things to do. I never found anyone who told such exciting stories the whole time I was in that school. □

"DOROTHY'S HOME FOR FUNERALS" --A Documentary Videotape

by Dianna Morse

In the winter of 1975, I was working as the resident filmmaker in Charleston for the Filmmaker-in-the-Schools Program of the South Carolina Arts Commission. I had just begun a residency with about sixty students from Project GAIN, a program for students identified as potential high school dropouts. Other students I had worked with had made a variety of films: dramatic films about medieval knighthood, divorce, a robbery; animated films about the bicentennial, kung fu, ghosts; documentaries of a school bus, trash heap, farm, or person; instructional films for math or reading that were shared with younger children; and filmed takeoffs of television programs—commercials, game shows, soap operas, and situation comedies.

I had found that the films which were the most involving for the filmmakers were personal ones, those in which the subject was particularly important to the individual. But how do you find that subject?

In the last residency I had tried asking students what *they* wanted to do in an effort to generate topics that were more personal. I shouldn't have been surprised when the response was "Sanford and Son," "Million Dollar Man," "Days of Our Lives," or other familiar television programs. Of course. That's the use of film which is most familiar to students—television.[1] I realized that I needed to set some limits.

I had read Eliot Wigginton's *Moments: The Foxfire Experience,* which describes how his high school students in Georgia publish *Foxfire* magazine, filled with their interviews and photographs of older people in their community who have special skills such as farming, crafts, storytelling, cooking, or remembering the past. I decided to try using a similar approach, making community documentary videotapes with these students. This approach, I hoped, would be successful in several ways. There were limits to the types of subjects that we would tape, but the topics chosen, within that structure, would be personal to the student filmmakers. The taping would allow students to work together in small groups and to meet new people. The project itself would provide a link between the school and the community. The tapes would celebrate the uniqueness of the community. Making and showing them (with the audience seeing themselves and their friends on the TV screen) would help to demystify mass media.

C.A. Brown High School, an inner-city all black school, seemed ideal for this community-oriented project. Almost all of the students lived within ten blocks of the school, and they knew each other and their neighbors. There were several playgrounds in the area, and lots of outdoors activity.

We began by looking at films, photographs and tapes. I introduced myself as a filmmaker by sharing my animated films, my documentary photographs of the recent county fair, and of statue grave markers (which caused quite a stir), as well as my latest work, "Beachwalk," a documentary videotape expressive of my feelings about living near the ocean.

I borrowed videotape portraits of area craftspeople—a netmaker and a basketweaver—from a local media center, the Charleston Communication Center, and showed these to the classes. I tried to elicit ideas for tape documentaries that the students might make themselves. But ideas weren't easy in coming. The students enjoyed watching the tapes, but I

[1]Some teachers assign the making of television-like programs, feeling that it is a good way to learn about television. My experience has been that unless approached as a parody of TV, it just won't come off. The students look silly. They could probably learn more about TV by touring their local station.

don't think that they believed that *they* could be in control of the medium.

We spent a week doing classroom exercises with students using the video equipment to film each other. We did pantomimes, told round-robin stories, experimented with manipulating sounds and shooting only a portion of "the picture," and we role-played practice interviews.

One day in class, after an exercise, we were talking about ideas—well, actually, I was talking, suggesting topics that lent themselves to community documentary tapes, hoping to hit on something that was important to someone. I listed crafts: doll-making, basket-weaving, net making, sewing; and skills: storytelling, folk-singing, cooking. The response was, well, not overwhelming. Gradually I realized that most of these students weren't ready to take the risk. They had only seen me seven or eight times, and who knew what would happen if they were to work with me individually or in a small group. I might embarrass them, they might fail...

The teacher, feeling my frustration, tried to focus on individuals in the class, "How about making little tapes about your pre-vocation assignments?" I groaned, inwardly. As part of a careers class, some of the students go "on the job" to observe life in the working world. A tape on a clothing store isn't exactly what I had in mind... She pointed out the students for me, "Let's see, Alvina is working in a fabric store, Richard observes at Simmons shoes, and Mary is at M&M Cafeteria." Well, it's a start, I thought, and who knows? It may lead to something...when Alvina spoke up.

"My aunt runs a funeral home. How about a tape there, at Dorothy's Home for Funerals?"

My eyes lit up. It sounded much more interesting than a cafeteria or a clothing store.

"Great!" I said. "Would they mind?—Who else would like to work on it?" The reaction was immediate.

"Not me."

"I'm not going inside of there."

I knew that we had hit on something big! No one was grabbing at the opportunity to get out of school. Finally, a quiet short girl, Cle, said that she would go with us and do the camera work. We arranged a date for the taping, and Alvina promised to call and make the arrangements at the home.

Several of the students approached me in the halls.

"You really going to the funeral home?"

"Yeah."

Their response was always the same: "You couldn't get *me* in there!"

Alvina, on the other hand, was nonchalant about the whole project. I asked her if she was squeamish about going to the funeral home. "No, I've been there before," she replied. Several members of her family run funeral homes.

The day of the taping, Alvina looked very polished, like a professional newscaster. Cle was absent. Absences! They're the number one threat to long term projects. We needed to find a replacement camera person. Fortunately, we had over an hour before we needed to leave the school. We grabbed Robert Williams, a quiet lanky eighth grader who was, if not enthusiastic, at least willing. Alvina, Robert and I found an empty corner of floor where they set up the video equipment. We taped ourselves, and played it back. Things looked good. The equipment was working. We loaded up the car. On the way to the funeral home I asked Alvina what kinds of questions she was going to ask. "Oh, things about the jobs they do," she said, nonchalantly. When I pressed her for more specifics, she assured me brusquely that she knew what she was going to do: interviews about their jobs and a

tour of the funeral home.

As a filmmaker, I was used to films being *totally* planned beforehand: scripted, storyboarded, discussed, revised, reworked. Even in documentary filming, you determined the angle, the audience, the approach. You could never plan well enough.

But with students planning is a gentle process. The way you plan affects the filming experience. The goal: that the students and participants feel comfortable, confident, in control of several options, free to make and discuss decisions. When you underplan, the self-consciousness hits quickly, and the students suddenly become giggle machines or shy statues. Overplanning scares students, too. ("There is only one *correct* way to make this film.") Then, the filming becomes an exercise in remembering what is right, rather than a process of active thinking, of weighing alternatives to see what might work.

Video enhances this active, on the spot thinking, by offering instant feedback. The tape can be rewound and played back at any time. It can even be erased and reused, facilitating retakes. So, students/actors don't have to be so nervous. Things can be redone a number of times if they don't go right, and everyone can see immediately what you have recorded

on tape (unlike movie film, which requires a minimum of three days for processing).

Well, we certainly hadn't overplanned this tape, but I felt good. Alvina seemed self-assured, and I had seen her do good interviews with other students last week in class. And, with the funeral home, we definitely had an exciting place to tour!

Dorothy's Home for Funerals is a large, clean white building with steeples and columns. Impressive! The inside was modest, homey, very comfortable. We met Dorothy's assistant, who is also Alvina's cousin, Francis Halsey, and unloaded our equipment in the reception room. I thought that Francis acted a little surprised to see us, although she was very friendly. I didn't press it. I was afraid to ask Alvina again if she had told them that we were coming. The atmosphere was comfortable. (I hoped it wouldn't change...)

Robert and Alvina put the equipment together and I checked it. We decided to begin with a shot of the outside of the funeral home, and with Francis we ventured outdoors.

"This is Alvina Moultrie from C.A. Brown speaking to you and interviewing a funeral home, Dorothy's Home for Funerals. This is Francie —Francis Halsey, the daughter of the owner of this place, Miss Dorothy Moultrie. Do you have anything to say?

I shuddered as Francis laughed nervously. We should have prepared more. How can someone answer a question like, "Do you have anything to say?"

But Alvina is composed, she laughs with Francis and says to the camera, "I think she's shy," and quickly offers her a *real* question, "Well, what kind of work do you do around here from being the daughter of Miss Dorothy Moultrie?"

Francis replies, "Well, I'm a jack of all trades, mostly I answer the telephone and just do a little bit of everything."

"Well, do you do anything like *embalming* or anything?"

"No," Francis laughs, "Not really."

But Alvina pursues, as she already knows the answer. "Are you going to school for it?"

"No, my daughter is...*planning* on going to school for it..."

"Who's your daughter?"

"Belinda Halsey."

"She attends St. Andrews?"

"Yes, she's a sophomore at St. Andrews High School."

"Well, did you get the whole look on the funeral home?" Alvina asks Robert.

Inside the home we taped a tour of the rooms: the reception room, three "slumber rooms," the storage area. Alvina is persistent with some questions and faltering with others, but the atmosphere stays the same: warm, casual, friendly.

We filmed in the storage area. Alvina said, "OK. She said that this right here is what you call a cloth casket. About how much would this casket right here run?"

Francis responded, "Well, it's medium priced...."

"What do you-all call medium priced?" Alvina asked, laughing.

"Well," Francis responded, getting off the hook, "it's according to the type of funeral you have—I couldn't really give you a price on it."

"Right," Alvina said, supportingly.

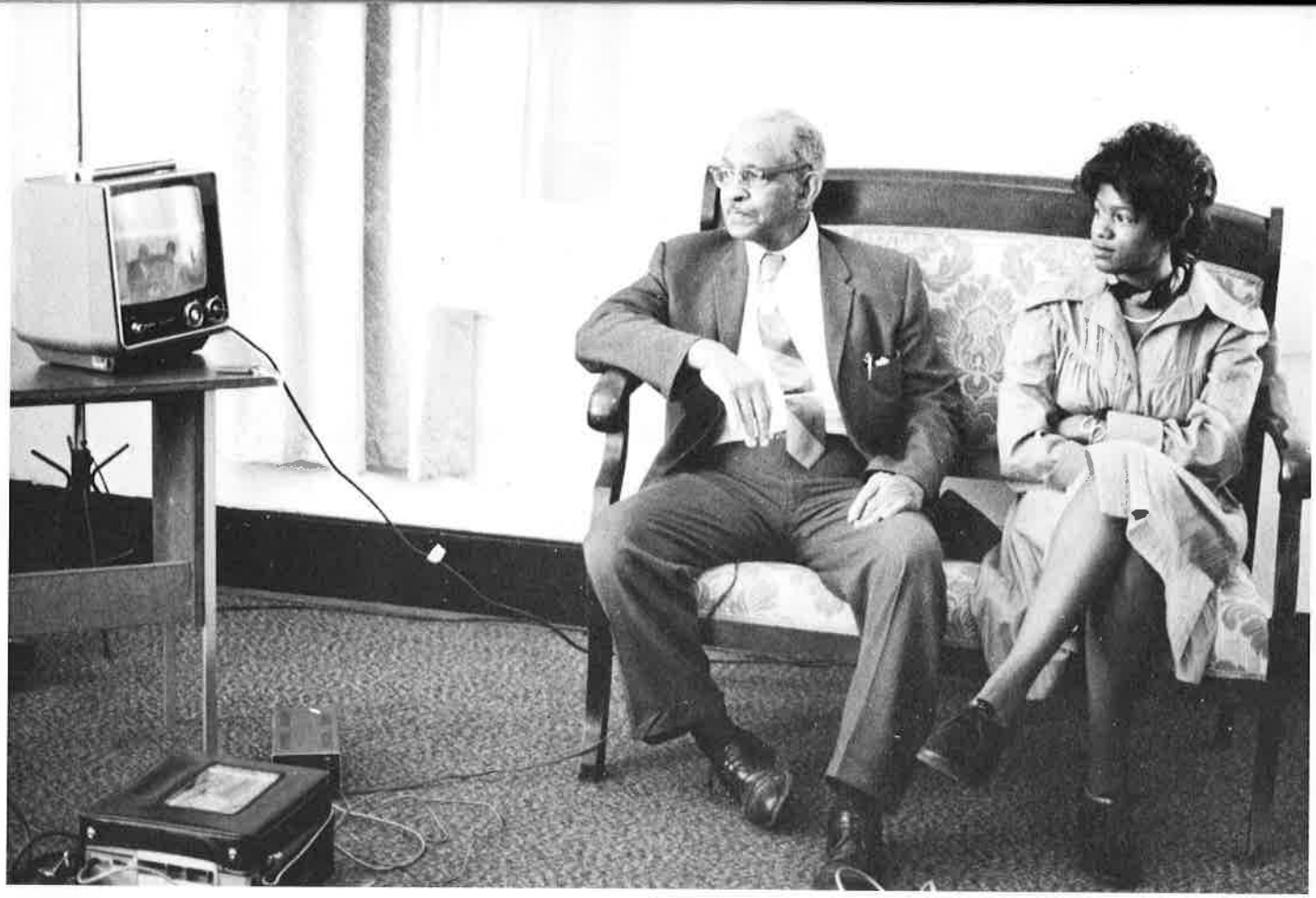
My involvement during the taping was pretty passive—I carried the equipment, gave support and kept an eye on the equipment to make sure that things were working and in focus. I suggested that we view back the tape we had shot. I was thinking that it would be good for Francis and Alvina to see themselves. They both exuded a "presence" that I was certain would be apparent on the tape, and seeing themselves looking good would lessen any nervousness that they might feel.

We returned to the reception area, rewound the tape, and played it back. This, more than anything else we could do, solidified the experience for all of us. I was proud. We all were. We shared a lot of smiles with no comments. The TV had shown us our experience, and it felt good.

I feel that the instant play back of the tape shows the real power of video as a communication and a teaching tool. By seeing the footage immediately a real bond, a trust, is established. Seeing yourself in this moving mirror, affects your self image. This is usually positive, but if people don't like the tape, changes can be made, or the tape can be immediately erased.

Dorothy came in, as well as Mr. Metz the embalmer. We played the tape back for them, and they wanted to be filmed. Alvina introduced Mr. Metz who made a few statements about embalming as a career, and Dorothy who explained how she had started in this business through her family. She encouraged others to consider this vocation, "I'm in hopes of many young ladies taking on the profession, because it is a wonderful profession and also a promising one, and one that you would always meet people, joy and sorrow, and tears and with gladness."

"Let's let them see that back," Al-



vina said, and we watched their two interviews.

Dorothy said, "There's a woman coming in this morning to make arrangements for her own funeral. Oh, I wish you could put her on the tape."

"Do many people make arrangements for their own funerals?" I asked.

"I have just one other," Dorothy replied. "A woman gave me $500 because she's afraid that when she dies her cheapskate nephews won't give her a good burial."

We all laughed.

The atmosphere was friendly, supportive, conversational. We talked some, and taped some, with different people suggesting what might be on the tape. After Dorothy left, Mr. Metz told us how the funeral business had changed over the last forty years or so, and he described how they embalmed in the olden days. "I came here in 1916, and there were quite a few things which, the conditions I would call deplorable. The means of disposing of the dead body... they had no embalmers then, they had, on the country crossroads they used to

sell caskets—a shell and you had to trim them, the interior of it. And a person die today, you'd have to bury them tomorrow. Sometimes in hot weather it was fairly bad for the dead body to lay in the condition that he died in, and in order to, ...to keep down the odor, they would use coffee, ground coffee sprinkled over it, and there's also a plant, a fern that used to grow, and they took that, and covered the body with that."

Then, Dorothy returned with the woman who had just prepared for her own funeral. Dorothy said, "This lady, she says she is going to make a statement—tell them what you came for..."

The woman sat next to Mr. Metz on the couch and took the microphone, "I came to make arrangements for my burial. (pause) And I want to be buried in a powder blue dress. And I'm not particular about a whole lot of flowers and stuff, but I just want to be put simple. I'm going to be buried on Bethel cemetery on James Island, and—" She stopped.

Mr. Metz, "That's it."

Dorothy added, supportingly, "I guess that's it."

The woman spoke, again, "I want to make it easy on my husband. He's not doing the best, and I want to make it easy on him, so he don't have to make the arrangements."

Mr. Metz said, "Well, that's a nice thing. I think we all should look forward to something like that—I think everybody should do it, but most just don't want to talk about it, we won't talk about it."

"Well, we take out insurance when we're living," the woman replied, "so it's no more than right to take out your—"

"That's right," said Mr. Metz. "It's just the same. I'm kinda thinking of putting my tombstone up!" We all laughed with him.

"Well, it don't make you die no sooner," the woman responded, "because we bought our graves from Jerry's in 1954, and, see—we aren't buried in them yet!" And we all laughed again.

Something about death. About sitting there watching two older people talk so calmly about the possibilities, the *inevitability* of dying, about arranging for their own deaths. It was very powerful.

"You'll find most people don't want to talk about it, but—that's the sensible thing," said Mr. Metz. "You're gonna die."

"Oh, yes, you're sure gonna die," responded the woman.

"And, uh, when you make preparations for it, I think that you have a better feeling for it, you know that what's gonna happen is what you wanted," said Mr. Metz.

The woman spoke calmly, "I try to live like I want to die. I try to live good so I can die good. Then when I think, too, that if you live right you don't have such a hard time dying."

Mr. Metz said, "You see these people in the hospitals, in homes, suffering and suffering, with more needles in them than in a pincushion."

"But I think they're holding to something, and they can't turn it loose," she responded, "and that's what make people can't die easy, because they're holding to something. —I try to wear this world as a loose fitting garment, and carry everything as I go, and don't hold on to nothing that's gonna hinder me when I get ready to go."

We packed up the equipment and headed back to school. On the way, we talked about afterlife. I was surprised that Alvina said that she believes in reincarnation. Robert and I were much less defined in our beliefs. I remembered that it was my birthday, and felt good about it. Back at school Alvina and I bubbled our good feelings, but it seemed out of place there.

Robert, Alvina and I decided how to structure the tape, and we began to edit it the next week. But on our first edit one of the machines broke. It took nearly two months to repair. I felt helpless. We had over an hour of unedited tape. No one would want to see *all* of it; it was too boring. But there were moments within the tape that were beautiful. We waited, and finally edited the footage to a twenty minute tape.

I asked the classes at the school if they wanted to see it. The response was an overwhelming *yes*. The students laughed a lot, and talked during the tape, like you do when you watch regular TV, but the talk was about stories of death, or funerals that they had attended.

Other video projects grew out of the tape. Students made videotapes with an area blacksmith, with a retired school teacher who was active in civil rights and a good friend of Martin Luther King, with a neighborhood woman who tends a large flower garden, at a nearby cemetery, at a nearby mission which has a daycare program for elderly women, and with a girl who is talented at hair braiding.

When the tapes are screened in the community, the response is always greater than I would imagine—people recognize each other, congratulate each other, thank the students and me, and smile a lot.

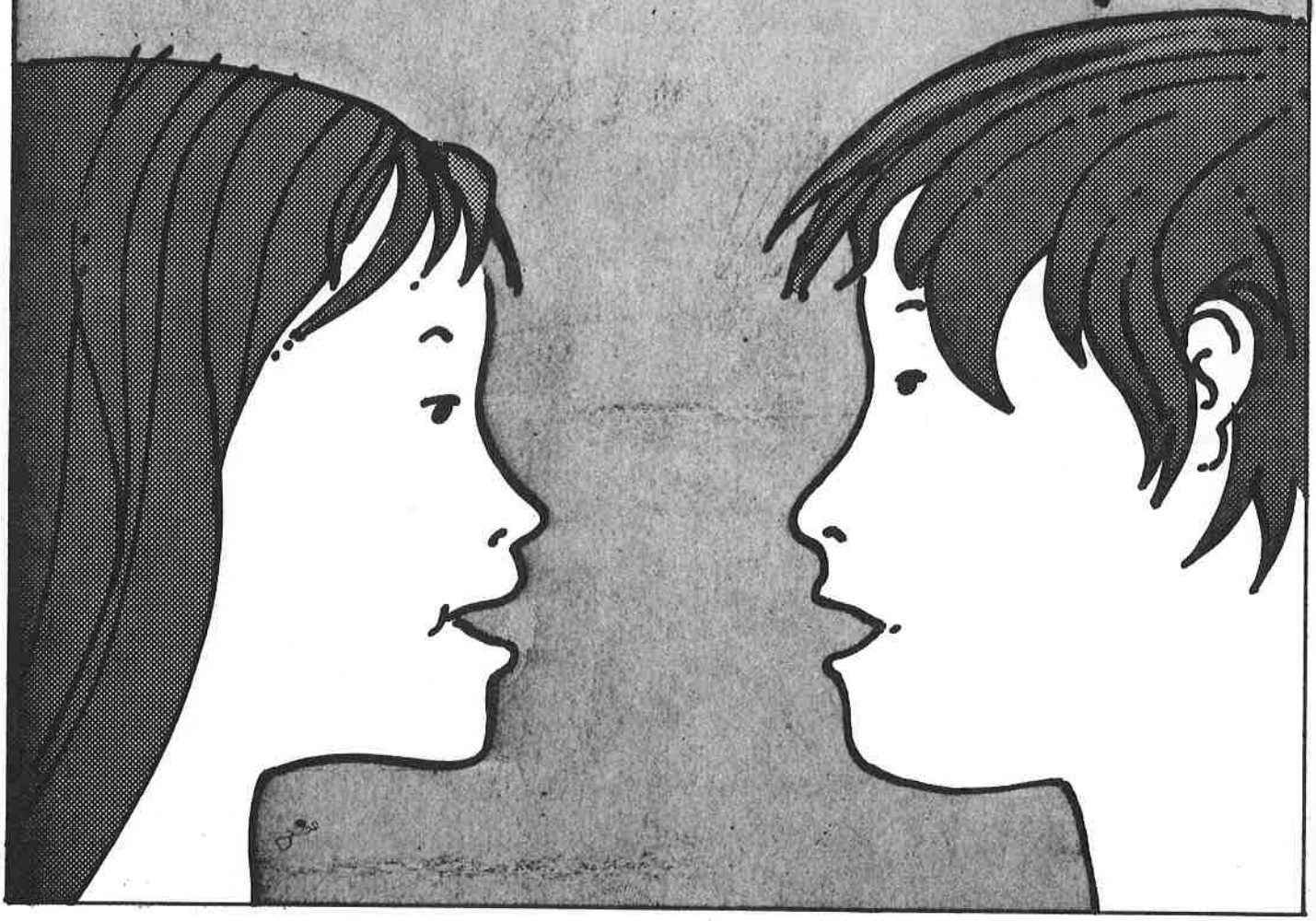
S.C. Arts Commission
Filmmaker-in-the-Schools

I would be glad to provide additional information about the S.C. Arts Commission's Film programs. Some of the student films and videotapes are avilable on a rental basis. For more information, write: Deanna Morse, Filmmaker-in-the-Schools, S.C. Arts Commission, 16 Charlotte Street, Charleston, South Carolina, 29403. □

Some Writing Lessons

Using Dialogue

by Meredith Sue Willis



I am constantly drawn in my own work to the writing of dialogue. It is one of my primary points of departure for the exploration of character; it is a way for me to experiment in the flow of the English language; it is frequently my choice for presenting the dramatic climax of a scene. I am so compelled by the power of dialogue that I sometimes wonder if I shouldn't be writing plays instead of novels, but in fact, when I examine my own prose carefully, I find that the dialogue is a skeleton around which I elaborate with descriptions of place and persons, internal monologue, psychological and sociological states. Why, I wonder, is dialogue so central to my writing, and does this centrality have any application to the teaching of writing?

The very first words I ever wrote except for schoolwork and my signature were the conversations between characters in my homemade comic strips. Painstakingly I drew the irregular balloons above the figures' heads and printed things like "Hi" and "Hay" (signifying "Hey"). I began with dialogue in association with drawings because quite clearly my first beloved literary models were comic books: *Uncle Scrooge in the Klondike* and a version of Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage* were my all time favorites. I began writing, then, in the same genre I liked to read.

I think there is for me too a deeper reason for the attraction to dialogue. I was a great fan of radio in the years just before television came; the bodiless voices running on with their various stagey accents fed my imagination. I go back even further. I am on the patio in the dark with my mother and father, sitting on someone's lap and I can't see much, but their voices go on and on around me. Sometimes we sing hymns, sometimes they just talk on and on about everything, making a warm nest of language around me.

About a year ago I taught some creative writing workshops on dialogue, and was pleased by the number of children who seemed to respond well. It seemed unusually successful with the children who weren't doing very well in the language arts curriculum. When I began this fall at P.S. 321 in Brooklyn, though, the first teacher I worked with had a class of academically advanced fifth graders who were already doing a lot of creative writing. These were children who could already write long pages on command, but their prose was sometimes flat. I noticed some of them reading for their own entertainment adult books, often on satanic and gothic themes. I decided to begin dialogue writing with them by offering some short reading selections that I considered worth emulating for one reason or other, because I suspected they were already emulating something. I wanted them to write prose with intensity, with selection of detail and without worrying about how many sides of notebook paper get covered.

Experimentally I chose as texts to type up and distribute a short selection from *Yonnondio* by Tillie Olsen and the opening of Federico Garcia Lorca's play *Blood Wedding*. The Tillie Olsen piece is about a Depression-squashed family and the texture of their unhappiness. It is written with conventional quotation marks, and this selection included an impressive number of novelistic devices—some description by simile, "the dark walls of the kitchen enclosed him like a smothering grave"; some non-metaphoric slice-of-life description, "There was a sour smell of wet diapers and burned pots in the air"; and even a little internal monologue, "You hear, he reiterated to himself, stumbling down the steps, You hear, you hear." The selection from *Blood Wedding* is written in dramatic dialogue form, of course, but the style is spare and suggestive even for a play text. I liked this little piece for its mystery and atmosphere. The Tillie Olsen piece gives a whole picture, compactly but richly; the Lorca drama hints and leaves much unsaid.

....no one greeted him at the gate—the dark walls of the kitchen enclosed him like a smothering grave. Anna did not raise her head.

In the other room the baby kept squalling and squalling and Ben was piping an out-of-tune song to quiet her. There was a sour smell of wet diapers and burned pots in the air.

"Dinner ready?" he asked heavily.

"No, not yet."

Silence. Not a word from either.

"Say, can't you stop that damn brat's squallin? A guy wants a little rest once in a while."

No answer.

"Aw, this kitchen stinks. I'm going out on the porch. And shut that brat up, she's driving me nuts, you hear?" You hear, he reiterated to himself, stumbling down the steps, you hear, you hear. Driving me nuts.

From *Yonnondio* by Tillie Olsen

(A room painted yellow)

BRIDEGROOM: *(entering) Mother.*
MOTHER: *What?*
BRIDEGROOM: *I'm going.*
MOTHER: *Where?*
BRIDEGROOM: *To the vineyard.*
(He starts to go)
MOTHER: *Wait.*
BRIDEGROOM: *You want something?*
MOTHER: *Your breakfast, son.*
BRIDEGROOM: *Forget it, I'll eat grapes. Give me the knife.*
MOTHER: *What for?*
BRIDEGROOM: *(Laughing) To cut the grapes with.*
MOTHER: *(Muttering as she looks for the knife.) Knives, knives, cursed be all knives and the scoundrel who invented them.*
BRIDEGROOM: *Let's talk about something else.*
MOTHER: *And guns and pistols and the smallest little knife—and even hoes and pitchforks.*
BRIDEGROOM: *All right.*
MOTHER: *Everything that can slice a man's body. A handsome man, full of young life, who goes out to the vineyards or to his own olive groves—his own because he inherited them...*
BRIDEGROOM: *(lowering his head) Be quiet...*

From *Blood Wedding* by Federico Garcia Lorca

I doubt that many fifth graders, or ninth graders for that matter, will read the Lorca or Olsen in entirety, although there is no intrinsic reason they shouldn't. I doubt children really get much pleasure out of tragedy, though. I merely

wanted writing that I respect, that could be excerpted and still examined closely, and that had enough excitement to interest young students. A good family argument, hints of violence to come. To a teacher interested in getting ideas from this article, however, I would not necessarily insist on these texts or others like them. It would be much better to find your own—a bit of dialogue from a book you really love. Later in my work with the advanced fifth grade class I brought in a piece of *The Maltese Falcon* by Dashiell Hammett for slightly different purposes, but the conversation in the selection is a wonderful demonstration of character exposed through different styles of speaking:

> The fat man raised his glass and held it against a window's light. He nodded approvingly at the bubbles running up in it. He said: "Well, sir, here's to plain speaking and clear understanding."
>
> They drank and lowered their glasses.
>
> The fat man looked shrewdly at Spade and asked: "You're a close-mouthed man?"
>
> Spade shook his head. "I like to talk."
>
> "Better and better!" the fat man exclaimed. "I distrust a close-mouthed man. He generally picks the wrong time to talk and says the wrong things. Talking's something you can't do judiciously unless you keep in practice." He beamed over his glass. "We'll get along, sir, that we will... I'll tell you right out that I'm a man who likes talking to a man that likes to talk."
>
> "Swell. Will we talk about the black bird?"

Later I read a whole story that is almost entirely dialogue, Hemingway's "The Killers," and also a wonderful, powerful long scene from Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* in which an elementary school girl tries to force another girl to break self-imposed silence and talk. In this scene one character never says a word, but there is a dialogue just the same.

I read my selections from Lorca and Olsen to my fifth graders on the first day I met their class. My journal entry for that day reads:

> September 28
>
> Pretty much a stinkin' perfect lesson! These were the so called smartest kids in the school and I definitely felt it. They already do a lot of creative writing. I began by saying as I did in each class today that they could call me Sue, which everyone did whenever an opportunity arose. I asked for a volunteer to write on the board and got a chubby blond girl named Elizabeth (all day I had trouble from my vantage point in the front of the room telling girls from boys.) The board writer's job was to write What Happened. I then got volunteers for instant improvized sketches: a cop and hooky-player, three girls in a school yard and a new girl, two kids deciding who should wash dishes, a couple of strangers bump on the street. The class loved the acting, lots of liveliness, instant goodwill. Elizabeth meanwhile was supposed to be writing what happened. We discussed what she wrote, which turned out to be headlines (OLD LADY AND BOY COLLIDE ON SEVENTH AVE.)—her own idea, but just perfect for what I wanted to get at. When I started asking for more detail about what they had seen in the actual sketches, the tones of voice people used etc., poor Elizabeth threw up her hand indignantly and protested that I hadn't given her time to do any better, poor little teacher-pleaser. I explained that she did exactly what I wanted, that I had *wanted* the barebones assertion of the event. Then I handed out my samples, the stuff from *Yonnondio* and *Blood Wedding*. The class really liked talking about them, got my little pedagogic point about the difference between stating an event happened and fleshing it out to cause the reader to experience something. They picked up right off the differences between the two selections too, both formal things like the dialogue form versus the direct quotation, and the more subtle stuff. I asked for which they preferred and there was a general agreement that the Tillie Olsen piece was better because it was more realistic. Oddly though, I had felt as I read aloud that the class was more spellbound by *Blood Wedding*. They wanted to act out the selections, which I let them do, and then I gave the assignment, Continue one of the selections in the same style, or, if you prefer, write what came first.

Interestingly enough most of the class chose to write more of the *Blood Wedding* piece, even though they said they didn't like it so well. Was it only that they find the form easier to imitate (and it is a far clearer system than quotation marks) or was it that something of the unfinished quality of the excerpt made them want to complete the action, get rid of the uncertainty for themselves. Here are a few of their continuations:

(The Bridegroom goes to the vineyard)
BRIDEGROOM: *Oh, what beautiful grapes! (The Bridegroom yells, Mother yells out to him to be careful.) I'll cut two bunches of grapes off for breakfast. (The Bridegroom cuts one bunch down but he cuts himself on the finger.) OW! (Bridegroom is bleeding.)*
MOTHER: *What's the matter?*
BRIDEGROOM: *Bring me a towel quick! (Mother runs to aid the bridegroomm)*
MOTHER: *I told you to eat breakfast, but you had to eat grapes like a fool!*
(Mother brings him to the house.)

Chun Liu

MOTHER: *You shouldn't use knives.*
BRIDEGROOM: *Please.*
MOTHER: *Please me, nobody pleases me.*
BRIDEGROOM: *Good-bye.*
MOTHER: *Come back here.*
BRIDEGROOM: *What do you want?*
MOTHER: *I don't like knives.*
BRIDEGROOM: *Good-bye.*

ACT THREE *(3 Hours later)*
MOTHER: *Where is he? That damn knife. (Calling) Son, son where are you?*
BRIDEGROOM: *Mother, here I am.*
MOTHER: *What happened, son?*
BRIDEGROOM: *Big man kill with knife.*
MOTHER: *Oh my son!*
BRIDEGROOM: *Mother, help me.*
BRIDE: *Oh my darling, what happened?*
BRIDEGROOM: *Help me to a chair.*
MOTHER: *Oh my god he's dying.*
BRIDE: *Darling, don't die.*
(His last words)
BRIDEGROOM: *I love you Mary Jane...*
MOTHER and BRIDE: *Oh God...*

—Justine

THE NOVEL: BEGINNING

"You're fired," the boss shouted angrily at him. "And

you're a dang fool who ain't got no sense!" Those were the words Andy Cobbale had heard, but that was an hour ago. He had been roaming the streets wondering how he would face his wife. He was in debt and he would have to get a new job to support his family. He started home and soon noticed Jake. "Jake!" "Oh, it's you, Andy. I heard you got laid off." "Yep, I sure did and I don't reckon he'll give it back." "Oh well, so long Andy." Andy started going down the rough gravel road. In a distance he heard Bess. He sighed and continued on his way...."

—Susy Ashton

IT'S A HARD LIFE (Continuing the Novel)
...He stomped down the path on to the dark city streets, the overfilled garbage cans disappearing into the darkness of the evening sky! His stomach was growling, but he couldn't go back inside, not yet at least. He faintly heard the sound of Bess's crying. "Damn that brat always getting into trouble! Always wetting or other disgusting things like that," he mumbled to himself. The door opened, Anna walked to him. "You missed dinner," she whispered sweetly.

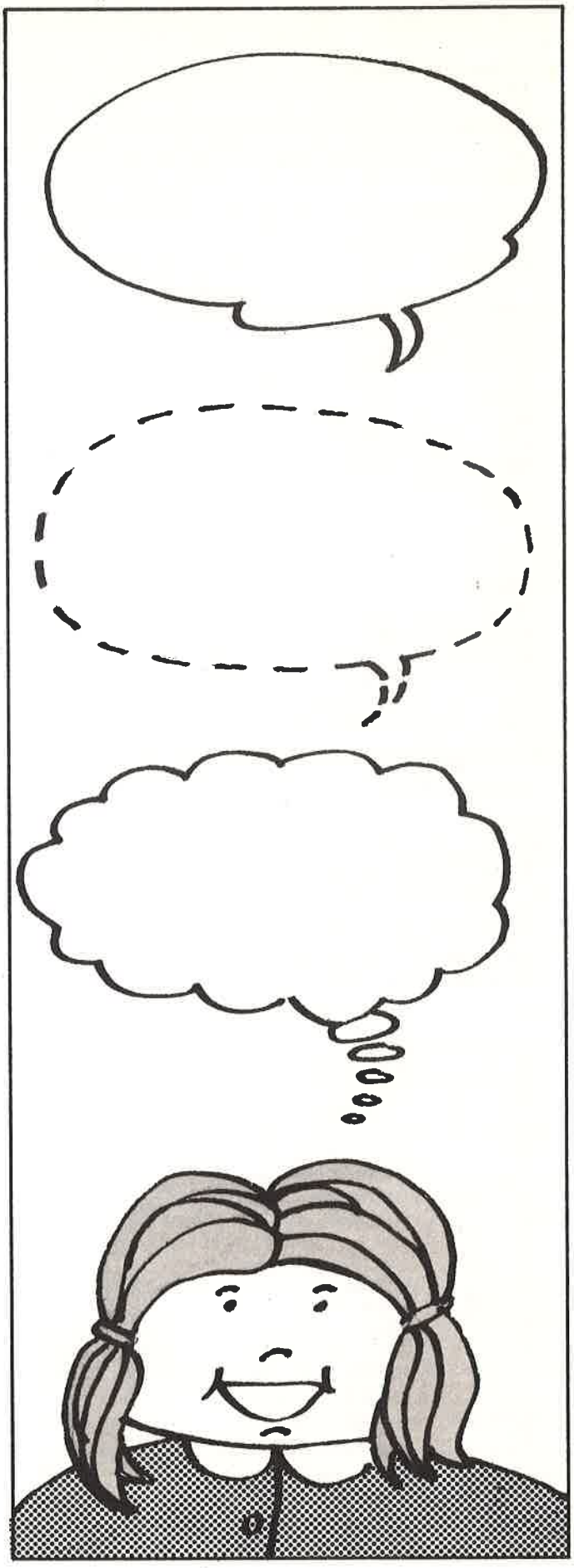
Julie Arenson

Students like the above were able to get very close to the original style of the selections I gave them. Susy Ashton even puts the dialogue in a theatrical but closely observed poor white dialect ("Dang fool" and "I reckon"). Other students went off in their own directions, many picking up the violence in *Blood Wedding* and nothing else, introducing police and underworld gangsters and pitched battles with submachine guns and bazookas. Elizabeth, the girl who wrote on the board, turned *Yonnondio* into a farce:

NUT DRIVING
As Bill was outside he spilled ketchup on himself and fell asleep. Three hours later Anna called wearily, "Dinner." Ten minutes later when he fails to appear, Anna, (carrying Bess) with Ben next to her, screams "He's dead!" Bess finally shuts up and Ben vomits on Bess making her cry again, which immediately wakes Bill and he screams seeing anna and Ben on the floor, waking them. Then Bill and Anna get all kissey and mushey and Ben finally says, "Let's go eat." Now in this time Bess hides, after countless minutes looking for her, Anna hollers "AAAA" and faints. Ben and Bill together call "Not again" and faint. Then Bess comes too and whispers, "My Plan worked," and walks away."

—Elizabeth R.

The following week the class had a substitute teacher and I commented in my log, "Teacher absent—with the group eager for bad word cut up but never forgetting for long they are supposed to be good students. Read (to great guffaws) their writings from last week. Then 10 minutes of writing real observed conversations and finally read aloud some of these pieces." The writing that day tended to be short and aimed at entertaining the other students, with several kids making conversations consisting of elaborate curse symbols ("Why you son of a **&¢%!" "How dare you call me a **&¢%!") Everyone loves those symbols; graphically they make a paper so striking. In spite of the light tone of the day, the general festivity over having a substitute and a creative writing teacher all at once—absolute dispensation to play—there were still a lot of interesting pieces written. This time I was surprised by the range of what the various children chose to report from



their lives, everything from the curse fests and other fights to family conflicts and interaction with pets.

PHONE CONVERSATION

FRIEND:	*So how are things in Park Slope?*
ME:	*Boring.*
FRIEND:	*My school is so modern. God. I swear!*
ME:	*Did you make any new friends?*
FRIEND:	*Yes, some but they're really strange. They've all got these accents and funny ways of talking.*
ME:	*Maggie...*
FRIEND:	*Oh, you know, we have this really fancy elevator in my new building.*
ME:	*Really? How's your mom?*
FRIEND:	*Fine. Ya know...*
MOM:	*Julie, get off the phone!*
ME:	*Okay. Bye Mag, I miss ya.*
MAG:	*Bye.*
ME:	*Oh Mag...*
MAG:	*What?*
ME:	*Forget it.*

—Julie Arenson

ARGUE

"Your mamy," says the boy to the other. There's a big crowd around them. Boy: "When you were born you mama died when she saw you!" Other: "When you were born your mama had a waist 200,000 inches." Boy slugs other. Man comes. Man: "Break it up, break it up." Crowd: "Blankedy Bleep Bleep." For a little while it goes on. Man: "Which one of you started it?" Boy: "He did." Other: "Bull crap. He started." The boys go around the corner and start fighting.

R.

Hi Nancy How you doing there. Fine. Guess what? What? My grandpa died. My grandmama cried to death. Want to go to the funeral with me? Yes, but what color do we have to wear? Any color you want. I'm wearing violet. What color are you wearing? Pink. Guess what my grandmother said before she died? God bless America Amen. Ha ha ha ha ha. Nancy: Bye. Debbie: Bye.

—Gwen

A CONVERSATION

ME:	*Hello puzze puzze puzze*
HAMSTERS:	*Silence (Run around the cage.)*
ME:	*I've brought you your food!*
HAMSTERS:	*nibble nibble, (Run about food)*
ME:	*Hello Harvey, time for check up! (Picks up Harvey.)*
HARVEY:	*(runs around arm)*
ME:	*Eyes, ears, cuts...No. Good. All done. OK now you, Upton. (picks up Upton)*
UPTON:	*(runs around arm)*
ME:	*OK you're all right. Now you Junior.*
JUNIOR:	*(Runs around)*
ME:	*Good, you're all right. (Going to other cage) Poor Flipper, you must be very lonely. Well, soon you'll have babies and then you'll be very busy.*
FLIPPER:	*(Looks at me)*
ME:	*By, by, cutesey.*

—Netania

At about this time I began work with another fifth grade class at P.S. 321, Mrs. Eisenberg's. This class was described to me as academically behind the one I'd been working with, and I was eager to try some of my same assignments on a new set of students. I visited the class and found it very pleasant. Mrs. Eisenberg runs a rather tight ship, but at the same time there is a lot of room for hugging and joking between her and her kids. The first session caused me some worry, though, because she and I seemed to be at odds over whether or not the kids were carrying out my instructions. When I give an assignment, I have definite goals and pedagogical points in mind, but I am usually willing for the kids to get something different out of a lesson than what I planned. My assignments are meant in the broadest way to get kids started writing, and when they go off in their own directions, I generally don't mind. I want above all for them to have a positive experience with writing. My teaching journal says:

> Lovely, lively kids, mostly black, a few from P.R., a Chinese girl, two or three white ones. I did a "What is a Conversation?" acting out thing—followed by an assignment to write an actual conversation they have heard. They loved the acting of course and certainly understood what is a conversation or dialogue. I even wrote a short sample on the board, mostly to demonstrate the name-of-speaker-colon form of writing dialogue. It seems easier than quotation marks. I was praising the kids right and left, including those who didn't follow instructions precisely, and then I realized that at the same time Eisenberg was going around the room correcting those same kids. Some of them got discouraged —or was it confused over the different responses from two teachers?—and balled up their writing and threw it away. They were writing narratives, not dialogues, and I was just letting them go, glad to see writing because it was obviously difficult for them. So painful to me. *I* am in trouble, not a good teacher, making kids feel dumb and confused instead of making them feel good etc. etc. etc.

It should have been a good class, too, that day, but instead I was in that awful dilemma, so eager to make a success for me and for the kids, maybe I wasn't asking enough of them? I wasn't sure about Eisenberg either—was she angry with me or was she worried rather that the kids were shaming themselves and her in my eyes? This writer-in-the-classroom business is so much more complicated than I ever realized when I first started out at it seven years ago. To some extent I do have a different agenda from a regular teacher like Mrs. Eisenberg—I am in fact less concerned with grammatical correctness. More than once in the past I have worked out my problems by taking small groups of children out of the classroom and essentially ignoring the larger class unit. Some strong writing has come out of the small groups, but I have also been to some extent in opposition to the classroom, not a useful situation. In this case, too, there was the fact that I could see Mrs. Eisenberg is a good teacher; she has respect for her kids, and they have affection for her. I also respect the urge in a teacher to have a writer work with the whole class, to be a part of the total classwork rather than a bag of candy thrown to some few kids who have finished their other work. My next journal entry for that class is completely turned about in mood:

> Eisenberg was very complimentary to me! She wants me to continue with her whole class, is surprised by how well they are doing, she says, and says they looked forward to me coming. I was thrilled. I like the feeling in this class a lot,

and they are *quite* successful with the how-people-talk aspect of dialogue. I *must* type up and make copies of their work. Their own words reproduced on mimeograph paper is a real necessity if they are to make the *connection.* I intended to do some acting with them (of their own dialogues), next I'll give them the sheets of *Yonnondio.* Their reaction to *Blood Wedding* today—how were they different from the other class? Probably reacted a little more concretely, fewer kids got involved in the discussion, but not substantially different. No one said "This is a mysterious piece of writing," but on the other hand, no one said, "This is junk." They listened very carefully, were a responsive audience to my reading aloud.

The dialogues they wrote, their observed conversations from real life, tended to be short, and they did a lot of mother-child conversations because that was what my example happened to be. They have a lack of freedom to experiment with the written word as compared to the other class. They rarely, for example, do playful things like writing an important word in fat shaded letters; they don't do the asterisk-dollar sign-ampersand curse game either. Written language is, for most of them, a difficult field of endeavor, full of hidden mines of misapprehended rules. But oh they were thrilled when I handed out the long mimeographed sheets with their work typed on it. I was asked once, twice, six times if they got to keep the papers. I used to do more typing up of kids' writing, feeling it to be vital to demonstrate to the child that what he or she writes out of his or her own life is the same sort of thing as what appears in printed books—the enormous, beautiful idea that writing is a place to hear what people have to say, and also one way to talk yourself. So I used to type up everything and I exhausted myself doing it. Now I realize that there are a lot of children around who made the printed word connection long ago—several of the children in my Creative Writing Club at P.S. 321, for example, have parents who are professional writers, and several girls have informed me privately that they intend to be authors themselves when they grow up. A whole fourth grade class I am working with at this school have written novels and the teacher is presently using me as a resource on how to prepare manuscripts for submission and find markets! It amazes me when I think of it. For students at this level of awareness a selective class or school literary magazine is important, but not across-the-board typing of every word written. Mrs. Eisenberg's class, on the other hand, needed that typing up I did for them. I read *their* dialogues aloud with the same expressiveness I gave to the selection from *Blood Wedding*, and they discovered that the voices in their handwritten dialogues could be transferred to typed pages ("Did you type every *one* of these?" asked Armando, "You mean you typed thirty of these? Didn't that take a long time?"), and then, through reading, be transferred all the way back to the spoken word again. This is what I want them to see: that what is thought can be spoken can be written, and what is written can be spoken and felt.

In their pieces I was pleased to see them transferring the constructions of their spoken language to the written, even when those constructions and locutions are not standard English, because until they can truly grasp the connection between the spoken word (and the spoken word has to be the word as they speak it) and the written word, they will fail to become fully at ease with written language of any kind. Reynando, for example, is a boy who is just learning English, and it seems that every week I come into the class his spoken English is improving immensely:

JACK: Hello Mom.
MOM: Hello son, now why did you come late from school.
JACK: I was playing baseball with my friends.
MOTHER: Go to your room.
JACK: Okay Mom.
MOTHER: I am going to tell your father at what time you came today.
JACK: Please Mom don't tell father that I was playing baseball.
MOM: OK I won't tell your father because I don't want your father to hit you with the belt.
JACK: Thanks Mom, you are my best mother.
MOM: If you do that again, I'll tell your father.
JACK: I am going to school Mom, ok?
MOM: Don't you dare come late.
JACK: OK Mom I will try to remember.

—Reynando Taveras

CORELIS: Today you have to wash the dishes.
ABRAHAM: Because I didn't yesterday?
CORELIS: You have to.
ABRAHAM: No I don't.
MOM: You wash the dishes, Abraham!
CORELIS: Ha ha ha ha!
ABRAHAM: Mom, I am a boy, not a girl. The girls do the dishes.
NEXT DAY:
ABRAHAM: Today is your turn to wash dishes. Ha ha ha.

—Corelis Willmore

MOTHER: Eat your breakfast now.
ARMANDO: No! I want to go to my friend house.
MOTHER: Only for a little while.
ARMANDO: I wish you was asleep for a day now!
MOTHER: But I'm lucky I ain't asleep. Don't say that again.
ARMANDO: I going now! But I ain't coming back!
MOTHER: If you don't I will hit you hard.
ARMANDO: So!So! I will not come back here...Mom, I'm sorry. I forgive you, Mom. I'll eat my breakfast now. But can I go to my friend's house when I finish?
MOTHER: Yes you could, and listen to me from now on.
ARMANDO: I'll listen to you for my life.

—Armando

Armando is a really lovely kid, very bright and easy with words. When I read the story "The Killers" to the class a few weeks later he kept throwing up his hand and when I called on him he would grin with cunning and say "I *think*, I think I know what's going to happen," and then share his theory about the outcome of the story. Others became braver because of him and raised their hands with ideas and generally, thanks to Armando, my reading became full of participation from the class. I like his writing for the same reason. His personality comes bursting through; he is also in his short conversation showing a boy going through

changes. I especially like his cheerful offer to forgive his mother. After seeing this typed up Armando became very interested in writing, and every time we write, he tells me how good what he wrote is, and wants to be sure it gets printed in the next class publication.

After I read *Blood Wedding*, some of the class continued their observed conversation pieces, and others tried to continue the play. Beavin caught the mood of the piece pretty well, but definitely rearranged and modernized it to his own taste.

MOTHER: No, I will not be quiet.
BRIDEGROOM: All right, I'll take the knife myself.
MOTHER: If you take that knife, you will be sorry.
BRIDEGROOM: I'll take the knife if I want to.
MOTHER: I will put a curse on you.
BRIDEGROOM: They don't come true.
MOTHER: I curse a curse, like, my son die in a car.
(Later, Bridegroom had a car accident)
MOTHER: (with her son) I told you it will happen.
BRIDEGROOM: I know, but it's too late.
(And he died that night.)

—Beavin Fowler

MOTHER: Son, eat your breakfast.
BRIDEGROOM: Mother, I said I'd eat some grapes.
MOTHER: All right.
BRIDEGROOM: (Goes to the vineyard) Hi Jack, do you want some grapes?
JACK: OK, but just some.
BRIDEGROOM: OK, come on and eat.
JACK: I'll cut some for my mother.
BRIDEGROOM: Okay.
(JACK kills the BRIDEGROOM. MOTHER sees the BRIDEGROOM on the ground. She cries and cries.)

—Semsija K.

Others in the class found the assignment very difficult and struggled even to write something short in the style of the *Blood Wedding*. They seemed to me to be striving more to follow my instructions than the style of the piece. They became very involved in time-consuming tasks like printing out the name of each new speaker and making big fat colons. Others wrote essentially realistic, modern conversations that had little to do with the selection I read them:

MOTHER: No!
BRIDEGROOM: Who are you saying no to?
MOTHER: You. Who else?
BRIDEGROOM: If I was your brother, I would beat you up.
MOTHER: Oh yeah?
BRIDEGROOM: Oh yeah.
MOTHER: I am going to get you.
BRIDEGROOM: If you can catch me.
MOTHER: OK...

—Gary Smith

Frequently what might have developed into something powerful would be curtailed because the student ran out of energy or realized how slow it is to write down the words in his or her mind. And yet, perhaps because so much of the time was spent in dramatic readings by me and acting out their own work, they didn't groan over the assignment to write. This was the most exciting thing to me. The academically advanced fifth graders complained when the time came to stop talking and acting and write; this class seemed to be enjoying it. I had a suspicion, which is only theory, that they found the writing time to be when they could do something of their own, just their own, something communal and private at the same time. Some few were even doing writing during the week that they brought to me on Wednesdays. To combat the slowness of their writing, I didn't insist that they finish an assignment in one session; for those who did, I had a new assignment, but I allowed the ones who wanted to continue last week's to do so. Ignacio, for example, spent the better part of two sessions on the dialogue with his mother. It is not a sophisticated piece of writing, and when I read it I am dissatisfied in a lot of ways—it leaves out many things that would make it more vivid and dramatic than it is. This is partly at least a drawback of the dialogue form, the lack of description, but in spite of that, I would submit that Ignacio used the narrow focus on just the words to his own advantage. He manages to get a greal deal of the fond relation between him and his mother into this piece which is in the final analysis a city boy's idyllic fantasy of a picnic:

MOM: Let's go to Prospect Park.
IGNACIO: OK.
MOM: First do the sandwiches.
IGNACIO: Let's go now to Prospect Park.
MOM: Okay.
IGNACIO: I take the sandwiches.
MOM: Let's go to the corner for the bus.
IGNACIO: Let me get my half a dollar.
MOM: Look and see if you see the bus.
IGNACIO: I see the bus in 1st Street.
MOM: Get on the bus. We will get off at Flatbush Avenue.
IGNACIO: I see the park.
MOM: We get off the next stop.
IGNACIO: Mom, I am going to play ball with my friend.
MOM: Okay, but be careful!
IGNACIO: I will be careful Mom.
MOM: Come and eat a sandwich.
IGNACIO: But I am not hungry Mom. When I finish playing ball I will come and eat a sandwich.
MOM: So I will save you a sandwich for later.
IGNACIO: OK.
MOM: Come and eat your sandwich.
IGNACIO: OK I will eat my sandwich.
MOM: I lost my ring.
IGNACIO: Mom, I found the ring. It was in my sandwich.
MOM: We got to go home.
IGNACIO: What bus will we get on?
MOM: We will take the 41.
IGNACIO: OK.

—Ignacio

Yvelissa, on the other hand, did try to get everything into a breathless narrative of something important that happened to her. She seemed a fairly capable writer, so after I read her story, "A Bloody Day," it occurred to me that what happened was more striking and important to her than the flat description made it appear, so I suggested that she

write the same story again in dialogue form. I was expecting more terror and pain, but in fact her dialogue presents the experience as amusing, and her own character as far tougher and more wry then she appears in class:

TWO VERSIONS OF "A BLOODY DAY"

1. One day in my house I was playing tag and my little brother drop a glass and it broke and I ran over it and I did not have shoes and I got cut real deep and my mother took me to the doctor in the ambulance and the doctor took me to a room and took me 13 stitches and that hurt me.

And this is true.

2. (One day I was playing tag and my brother drop a glass.)
BROTHER: O my God, Mom I drop a glass.
ME: Oh I cut my foot and I'm bleeding a lot Mom!
MOM: Oh my God I have to call a cab you could bleed to death.
SISTER: Oh that looks ugly.
ME: Don't be stupid, it ain't going to look pretty.
BROTHER: Oh I'm sorry, I did not mean it.
ME: That's OK.
(And my mother took me to the hospital)
DOCTOR: She is badly hurt.
MOM: How many stitches?
DOCTOR: Thirteen.
ME: Mom, how much days do I have to stay in bed?
MOM: A week or so.
CARMEN: How are you?
ME: Fine and good bye.
(And I got to play and now I feel good. And this is true story.)

—Yvelissa Torres

As the weeks went on, even though I continued to work with the whole class, it seemed to me that more and more of the children's personal outlooks slipped into their writing.

One day me and my sister were going to the store and I got hit by a car. My sister said, "Oh oh My brother!" The man gave my sister a lollipop. She said "I am not a baby. You trying to bribe me. No you don't!" My sister kept crying "Mama!" So the man gave her a card. So the next day she went to the bank to get the money.

—Frantz

I have a friend name Rommel.
He is a sick boy now. He's not in school
because he don't feel well.
I wish he feel well soon
because he said to me
he wants to learn more.

—Djina Remi

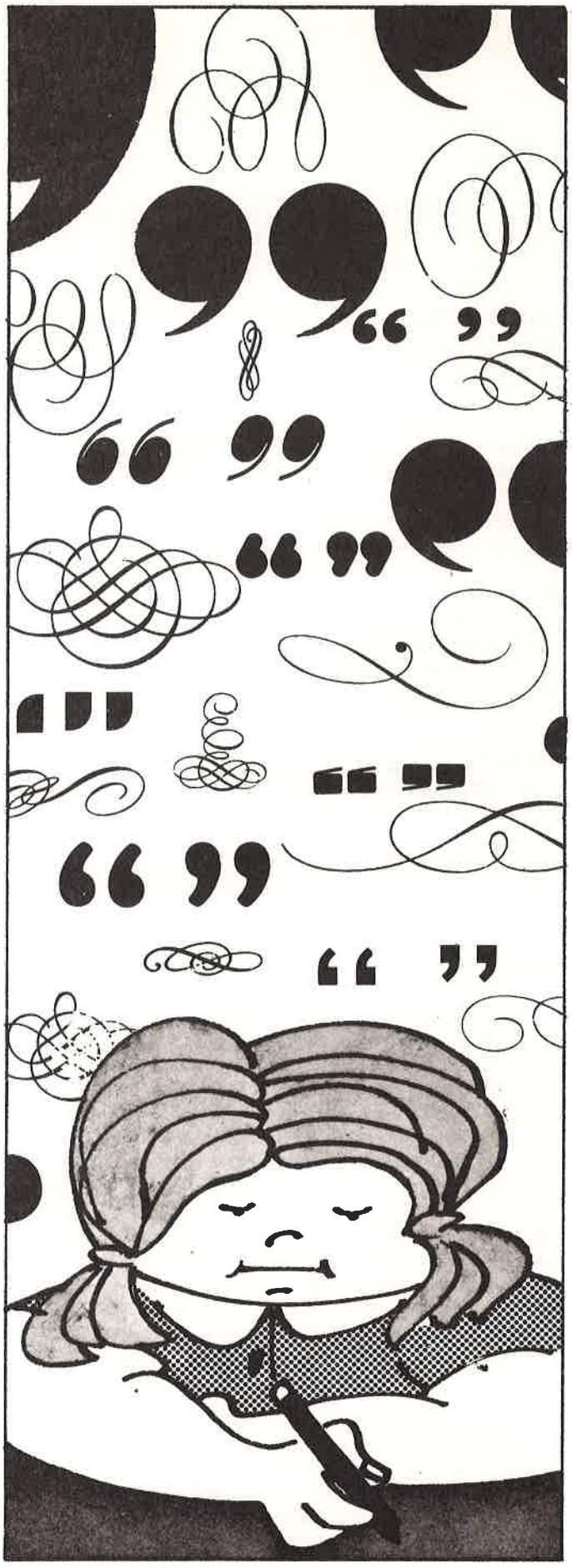
I am scared that my father might
have a crash with his truck. I
am scared that he might get killed.

—William

STARTING SCHOOL

One day I was starting school.
I feel scared and the day before
I was happy because I have a lot
of friends and I was playing with them.
KAREN: Do you want to play with me?
CINDY: No! I don't want to play with you.
KAREN: Please play with me, Cindy.
CINDY: I said no! I am leaving you!
KAREN: Don't leave me here! But Cindy Cindy—

—Karen Leung



I have with Mrs. Eisenberg's class stayed with the dialogue form because it is something they can succeed in using for themselves. I read them "The Killers" by Hemingway to suggest the element of drama and shape to their writing. I then asked them to write another dialogue, either observed or made up, with a conflict or fight in it. I am not enamoured of violent confrontation, but conflict gives, in essence, a means of organizing a piece of writing by building tensions toward a climax. Making something exciting happen sounds like a fictional device, but in fact non fiction writers use something far more similar to that in their writing than to the topic sentence type of paragraph construction we used to be taught in school. Rhetorically sophisticated writing or speaking builds to something dramatic for its convincing power.

LUCY AND HER BROTHER

Once there was a girl named Lucy. She had a brother. Her brother was so bad. One day Lucy was cleaning her room. Then she went to clean her brother's room. But her brother always used to leave his room a mess. He used to leave his room with food on the floor and clothes on the floor. So Lucy went to clean the room, but her brother didn't want her to clean the room. So they started to argue.

LUCY: You are a mess.

BROTHER: You always have to clean everything.

LUCY: Because I'm not like you. I always like to be clean.

BROTHER: So don't clean my room. I don't like anybody to clean my room.

LUCY: I hate you.

BROTHER: So hate me. I hate you too.

Then she stopped cleaning his room. Then Lucy went to her room and started to cry. Then her brother heard that someone was crying. Then when he went to see who was crying, he opened the door from Lucy's room, and it was Lucy. He saw her like that and said sorry and she said sorry too.

—Marisol

CONFLICT BETWEEN A DOG AND A BOY

One day a boy saw a dog in the window of the animal store. Then he wanted to buy the dog, but the dog cost eleven dollars, but the boy just had one dollar, so he saw a dog walking on the street. He didn't see anybody with him, so he took the dog home and gave him something to eat. He named the dog King. When the night came the boy was going to sleep, but when he was there, the dog was sleeping on his bed. Then the boy had to sleep on the floor. When the afternoon came, he was going to school. When he was going, the dog was following him. So everywhere that the boy goes, the dog follows him. So that same day the boy throws the dog away, and then King started to cry. The boy took the dog back because he was only a puppy and the boy bought the dog a bed with its name on it, King, and they sleep together in the boy's room and they live happy.

—Reynando

CONFLICT BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN

The man went out on the woman. They are taking place in the living room. Red sofas.

The lady said, "I'll punch you in your nose." The man said, "I dare you," and she punched him, and he was bleeding. She said, "I'm not going to tell you sorry because you went out with another woman." He said, "I'll buy you new furniture." "No, I already have furniture." "So your bed is broken. You need a new bed. And you need panty hose." "I don't want nothing. Now that you went with another woman, buy it for her. Anyway, you can't afford the money for it."

—Wanda

BETWEEN A GIRL CHAIR AND A BOY DESK

Once there was a girl chair named China and a boy desk named Japan. Japan liked to look at beautiful China. Japan asked China if she would marry him. She said yes.

At wedding.

You may kiss China.

For their honeymoon they decorated the house. China wanted the kitchen yellow and green.

Japan wanted it white.

China said, "I hate you because every time I ask you about something you say white."

Japan said, "Shut up before I kill you."

No you be- be- be-

Please please please"

With a big scream "OH OH OH"

—Karen D.

Dialogue, then, seems to me an ideal entry into written language for beginners. It can be written by a child able to do little more than write "OK" and "No" yet it can be used by Tillie Olsen, Hemingway, Hammett and Lorca with great effect. Especially good for working with younger students is the ready-made interplay between acting out and reading aloud and the dialogue form. At any point an interesting dialogue could be more fully dramatized by an individual or a small group and turned into a stage play or tape-recorded radio drama. Indirectly I have mentioned comic books as an already existing motivation for getting beginners to write.

I would also want to reemphasize that students who are writing dialogue should also constantly be reading poems, plays, and fictions where the spoken word has also been selected, transformed, and intensified in exemplary fashion. There must be the connection to the performing, entertaining arts; there must certainly be the connection to the spoken language; but there must also be literature.

Selected Bibliography of Books I Used in the Lessons Described in this Article

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Helping Students to Test and Diagnose Their Own Reading--

by Bill Bernhardt

1.

The testing of reading that goes on in schools and colleges causes more pain and misery and mischief than I like to even think about. Worst of all, in my view as a reading teacher, it does nothing to help students find out what they need to know in order to improve and it does everything to make them hate reading.

So I set out to invent a new kind of instrument for testing and diagnosing reading. I was determined to create something which would encourage students to use their common sense and powers of perception to study their own processes of reading. I also wanted to give them an opportunity to see for themselves what the activity of reading demands of everyone, at all times, whatever the content of the material read. In other words, I wanted it to be a test of the most primitive comprehension skills so that it would help students to read comic books and advertisements and newspapers better, not only school books.

Those who have taken this test have found it puzzling, frustrating, and time consuming, but also amusing and exciting. And most students have informed me, both during and after the test, that it has made them more aware of the practical steps which they must take to improve their reading comprehension. Further, they have said that many of these steps had already been recommended to them again and again. Never before, however, had they seen the sense of such advice, or *felt* that it was true in terms of their own experience.

I hope that other teachers will be moved to try this test out in their own classrooms, and that it will benefit their students as well. Before introducing it, however, I need to provide two cautions:

(1) It's intended for students whose primary difficulty is with reading *comprehension.* Those who have trouble sounding out words won't be able to do all of it.

(2) *It's not a good idea to try it out on your students before trying it out on yourself.*

2.

Directions (to be delivered orally when the test is administered to anyone other than yourself):

—This test consists of 15 questions.

—Each question, with one exception, must be answered either "yes" or "no".

—Every question, without exception, requires that you perform an action afterwards, and/or describe what you were doing while you were reading it. This action or narrative must make it absolutely clear that you have understood the question and have reasons for your response.

—The questions must be answered in the order given. Finish each one before going on to the next.

—The purpose of this test is to help you find out both about yourself and reading. Be prepared to take the time it takes.

(The directions may be re-read or repeated during the test if there is any question about them.)

3.

The test is below, in the box:

2. As I am reading this, am I looking carefully at at what I'm reading or am I being carless?
3. Do I just keep on along going if sense no make it?
4. Did I read questions 2 and 3 without asking myself any questions?
5. Am I taking the trouble to accurately decipher the sounds carried by the orthography of this sentence?
6. Do I know the precise juncture at which it makes sense for me to consult a dictionary for questions 5 and 6?
7. Did I try to read question 5 at the same speed as I first read question 2?
8.
9. If I read word by word is it easy for me to get the meaning and make sense out of what I read?
10. Can I group the words in any wayI happen to put them and still understand?
11. DO I NEED TO EMPHASIZE EACH WORD THE SAME AMOUNT?
12. Do I need to try varying the melody and expression of the phrases if they don't to my ear a meaning bring?
13. Can I make what is dark or cloudy clear without making a picture in my mind?
14. page on There can _____ _____ _____ _____ anything page I this do _____ _____ _____ _____? without
15. Have I taken the time it takes to fully understand this test?

4.

Please don't read further until you have done the test—or at least given it a try.

When I administer this test to a group of students I find that it helps if I walk around the room, looking over shoulders, spurring people on by saying things like:

"Until you can point to something with your finger I won't believe your 'yes' answer to question 2. O.K., so *you* say you were careful, but you have to convince me too; you can't convince me simply by insisting.

"So you've found 50% of the evidence in question 2. Now find the other 50%.

"No, you can't use a dictionary for question 5. And I can tell from what you muttered when you came to the fourteenth word that your 'yes' answer is untrue.

"So far, only ____ people have answered the most important question correctly. I mean the one that doesn't have a 'yes' or a 'no' answer.

"Why are you re-writing question 8? You were asked to write the *answer,* not the question. Why are you making this extra work for yourself? Or are you doing what I used to do on Algebra tests—writing the question to delay the moment when I had to start working out the answer?

"Just use your senses—including your common sense—and you will get every answer correctly."

I don't stop goading people until *everyone* has done *every* question and found the answers which make sense. Those who finish earlier can write out their answers in full whereas the slower students need only give their answers orally, or in a brief note. If I catch people telling each other the answers I say

"Let the others find out for themselves. You had your chance...now let them have their chance."

5.

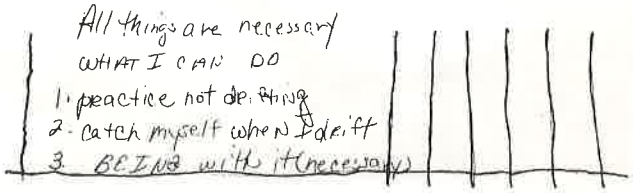
Please don't read further until you have finished the test.

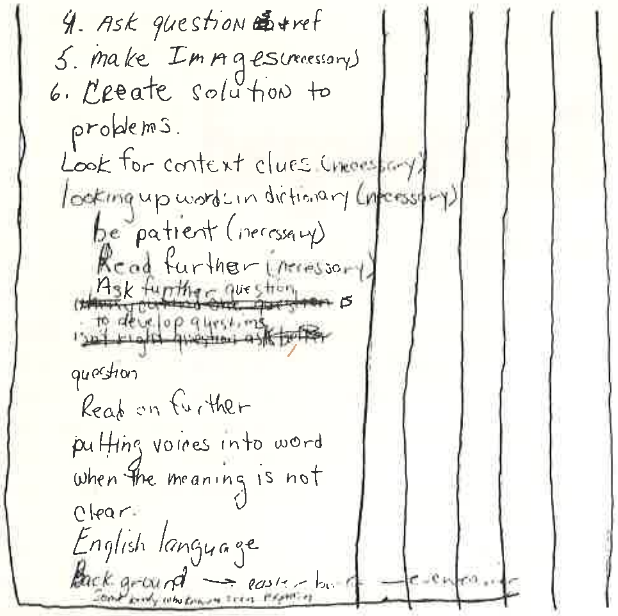
I said above that the most important question on the test is the one without a "yes" or "no" answer. In fact, it's a question which can only be answered by asking another question: "Where is Question 1?"

The majority of people who take the test struggle a long time before they discover the nature of the first question. Most of the other questions, however, are challenging for only a few moments. This is true because the first question tests what is at once the most obvious and the most neglected demand of all reading—that the person who reads must put himself or herself in an attentive and watchful state. He or she must make himself or herself into a sensitive instrument which is easily jolted. Without this inner preparation on the part of the person, reading cannot take place. One may be intelligent, knowledgeable in many fields where one has had experience, and possess a large vocabulary. But if one is not sufficiently "with it" to notice whether or not what is happening makes sense, one cannot read with comprehension or retain what is read.

6.

This test is only a beginning, but there is a way of making it the beginning of something. I follow-up by asking each student to make up a checklist based on his or her experience on the test. That is, to make up a list of practical "steps" which must be practiced. Each person's list is different, since it comes out of his or her own unique experience, rather than from the teacher. Here is a single example from a student's work:





4. Ask question ref
5. make Images (necessary)
6. Create solution to problems.
Look for context clues (necessary)
looking up words in dictionary (necessary)
be patient (necessary)
Read further (necessary)
Ask further question
to develop questions
question
Read on further
putting voices into word when the meaning is not clear.
English language
Back ground → easy – hard

This sample of a first attempt in making a checklist is sloppy and crude. It contains mistakes and confusions. It also contains items which the student herself chose to include even though they were not on the test. Why not? Since this is a learning tool of the student's own making it reflects where she is *now,* not where I want her to be, or where she may be after she starts using the checklist and sees the need for improvements in content and design.

7.

I hope that by now each of my readers is itching to extend, alter, and improve the test. Obviously, there are many more items which it could (and perhaps should) contain.

As I said at the beginning, what I set out to do was to invent a new kind of instrument for testing and diagnosing reading. One which would encourage students to use their common sense and powers of perception to study reading. I would love to receive feedback from other teachers who have tried it out in their own classrooms. □

Water:

A Week Totally Submerged

by Judith Steinbergh and Kate Austin

Take anything: a rock, a galaxy, a snake. We choose water as the center of focus for an intense week of organic learning for our teachers at Tufts University summer school. The course, entitled "Arts in Education" meets every morning for three hours for three weeks. Its purpose is to demonstrate experientially how all the arts can be integrated into the chosen curriculum and given equal importance as science, social studies, math, and language arts. While the first week concentrates on movement and drama and the last on poetry, the middle week directs the energy of all the arts toward the single theme of "water."

UNDERWATER POEM
It looks like the moon and sun
flying away. And kelp flying
with beautiful balanced
feathers swaying by little fishes
starfish dangling by the hot
sunbeams falling to no end
shiny fishes dancing balls
of no return no beginning or end
nothing like earth or space
flying looking like
beams of never
and beams
of tomorrow.

Michelle Faulkner
3rd. grade
Bessie Buker School
Wenham, Mass.

As fish pass by
I swim near the surface.
My bubbles are bubbling
as flipping fish glow
like light bulbs.
As a sting ray passes by
a sea anemone closes up.
Frosted plants
in the water fly.
I'm a sea diver and
that's what I see.

Jenny Bubriksi
3rd. grade
Bessie Buker School
Wenham, Mass.

It is the first day and we are lying on our backs around the room with our eyes closed trying to conjure up a special water place from our lives. A creek from our childhoods, a beach we visit every summer, a waterfall in the mountains, a city-puddle. What shapes and sound do we associate with this specific place. We transform them into our movements, letting the imagery flow through our bodies. Soon we are swelling around the room, lifting, crashing, flowing under rocks and up against leaves. We made sounds of water, the sound of froth and surf, of rock on water, and these transform the room. Remembering these motions, we climb into four foot lengths of colored tubular jersey and close the open ends around our heads. Now we can move like water without the slightest feeling of self-consciousness, surrounded and supported by this womb-like covering, extending all the joints and muscles of our bodies, moving beyond our bodies into the abstract of shape, color, and form. Inside this stretching cocoon, we twist, bend, and fold. We can see out, vaguely. Two of us move together and apart, creating water motion. Eventually, half the people remain inside jersey moving, sculpting, forming kinetic sculptures. The other half of the group is watching or sketching with crayons and magic markers the fleeting sculptural shapes. Move, move, move, freeze. Ah! Sketch. Move. We hang up the long shelf paper frieze around the room.

We write from this movement: "when my body moves it feels like water coming up from a dark spring, pushing over jagged rocks, under fallen branches." "Inside the jersey, my body feels like a frog nudging the taut surface of the water."

We talk about our special water place using comparisons to convey our unique experience of it using all of our senses. Going around the circle, we each say how light affects our kind of water. "The morning sun on my lake turns it to nickels." "At 8 p.m., the water is irridescent as peacock feathers." "In the moonlight, the ocean is a jar of fireflies." It is these specifics that allow others to connect to the writer's experience in the poem.

NOTES FOR A RAIN POEM

1. silver needles
   steam bubbles
   fish eyes falling
   babies' mouths

2. sealed under a tree's armpit
   rain all around

3. quick footsteps
   sheets sail in on water
   we drive to the ocean through rain
   and your hand is rainfall sliding down my neck

4. wet hay
   cows
   kettle
   yellow light

5. rain's cold eyelashes gather at our feet
   a thousand snakes fall to the ground.

Kathleen Aguero
from *Thirsty Day*
Alice James Press 1977

We ask everyone to choose something associated with water that they identify with closely. It can be a kind of water: river, ocean, marsh, delta, waterfall, tide, current, flood, ice, blow spout, geyser, etc; it can be something moving in water: phosphorescent fish, sea anemone, barnacles, silt, or eel grass. Write a poem in the voice of what you choose, but saying something about yourself. Concentrate on using comparisons in the poem.

The use of persona here is to allow new writers the freedom to talk about themselves in a personal way, but with a mash, in order to feel less vulnerable. Taking the metaphor from your environment is a common practice of poets and can be applied to any focus of learning (e.g. rocks, fruits and vegetables, sea shells, and animals.)

STORM

Under a great grey cloak
A tempest flies
Toward an innocent town
Tears
Anger
Quick temper
Me.

Valerie Berger
5th Grade
Lawrence School
Brookline, Mass.

TEAR

The eyelid opens like a secret opening.
A bit of dust comes in.
I am comfortable until I slowly drip like water
forming stalactites and stalagmites.
I clean the dust off.
When someone is sad, I call my friends
and we gush out like a miniature waterfall.

Ady Kendler
5th Grade
Lawrence School
Brookline, Mass.

We write for 15 or 20 minutes and share our poems out loud. (See Cathy's Waterwheel poem.)

For the second day, we ask that people read Chapters 1 and 2 from Annie Dillard's book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,* in which she observes as a poet and a naturalist, a small creek near her house for a year. Her chapter on "Sight and Insight" is one of the most exciting pieces written about "seeing" and we want people to come to this meeting with her kind of vision.

> Something broke and something opened. I filled up like a new wineskin. I breathed an air like light; I saw a light like water. I was the lip of a fountain the creek filled forever; I was ether, the leaf in the zepher; I was fleshflake, feather, bone.
>
> When I see this way I see truly. As Thoreau says, I return to my senses.

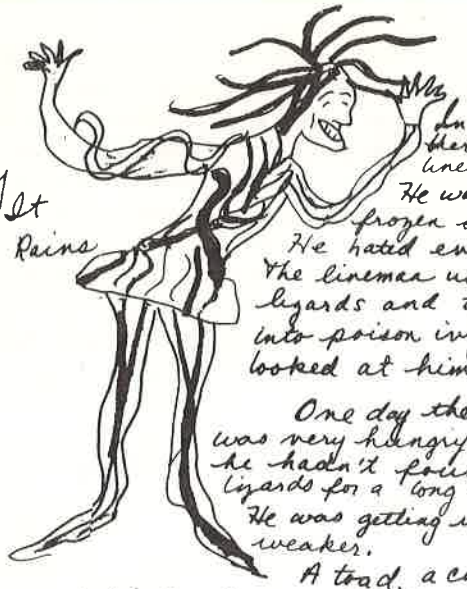
Annie Dillard
Pilgrim at Tinker Creek
Harper's Magazine Press 1974

We meet in an actual water environment, the Great Meadows Wild Life Refuge in Concord, Mass. where we make our circle like wood fairies on a mossy bank between the Concord River and the two huge swamps that provide refuge to thousands of birds and animals. Purple loosestrife makes a fire border along the edge of the swamp. We ask people to find a spot near water that interests them and, with their journals, crayons and magic markers, make notes and drawings about what they see and experience. What else do things look like? How might you name them? Chant them? Who might live here, under the water and around it? In the trees? Under the roots? What magical creatures can you conjure up? How do they move? What are their habits? What is their language? Begin formulating a myth or story about a water place.

In an hour, we come back together and share our notes and drawings. People have used this time in many different ways: to describe what is happening to them minute by minute, to draw some of what they saw, to begin creating mythological creatures, to record changes inside themselves, to notate bird calls with an invented notation, to draft a new poem. We all feel we would have liked more time in our spot alone, at least two hours, since it takes a while to reorient our senses to the small things around us: the sound of weeds scraping, the smell of clover, the color of duckweed, the activity of a dragonfly.

Cathy reads from her journal about a bird she's been watching, "Did he really cock his head in a 'Can you believe this' gesture when he held himself in an upside down position just a hair's breath of a second longer than he held any of his other positions." (See Andi's bird call notation and Mary's drawing.)

We discuss the oral tradition of poetry and dance in tribal cultures: how they were part of the daily ritual, not separate or elite, how poetry was chanted, danced, sung with instruments, masks, and body paint and how important it is to convey this to children. The effect of repetition and chant was to evoke power in the dancers and to facilitate



Why It Rains

Myth

In the beginning there was a lineman.
He was made of frozen snakes.
He hated everyone.
The lineman used to eat lizards and turn creatures into poison ivy if they looked at him.

One day the lineman was very hungry, because he hadn't found any lizards for a long time.
He was getting weaker and weaker.
A toad, a caterpillar, a gurgle bird and a monkey came out of hiding and formed a circle around the lineman.
They sang

Keely Weely Woompy Kowed
Keely Weely Woompy Kowed
Turn this lineman into cloud!

They sang and danced around the lineman for a long time. He tried to get up, but he was so tired. Slowly his body started to rise high into the air swaying and singing as it went.

The toad, the caterpillar, the gurgle bird and the monkey jumped and sang, pranced and giggled over the spot where the lineman had been.
They made so much noise that the cloud of the lineman burst and rain drops fell on the creatures. One by one they opened their mouths and the water seeped into them.

And that's how the rain came about many centuries ago.

M Cazalon

WATERWHEEL

I AM A WATERWHEEL

Ever returning to myself—
My source.

Yet—
I want to escape
I want to explore
I resent the confinement
I need a variety of tasks to perform.

I forget that— AS A WATERWHEEL
I have a noble purpose
I am needed
I am contributing
I am sharing
I am appreciated
I am creative - in a sense.

Sometimes one must be like a WATERWHEEL
Commitments keep you on track

But
I am free to choose the course I'll turn round on
Before that wheel begins to turn

TURN WHEEL
I need the momentum to stay balanced.
I know you'll rest some day -
And I can change directions then.

Cathy Sheridan
7.5.77

LOVE SPELL CHANT

behind the church back home
there is a sanctuary
with forest and brook
shadows and stillness
with filtered sun and strong sun
white rays of sun slicing through
air textured with the smell of damp earth

when I am with you that is where
we go and live together

the touch of you
the sound of your voice
saying my name making it new
looking and feeling and tasting and falling
in love with the golden hair
covering your right wrist

and I am sliding out of body slipping out of skin
entering and becoming our sanctuary

you are the sun on the brook and the water of
the brook
I am the spirit of young leaf floating on your surface

I am without form

your hands and mouth and tongue have multiplied

and you sun and you water are
designing me
molding me
making patterns of me
delighting in me
shaping me
smoothing me
sculpting me

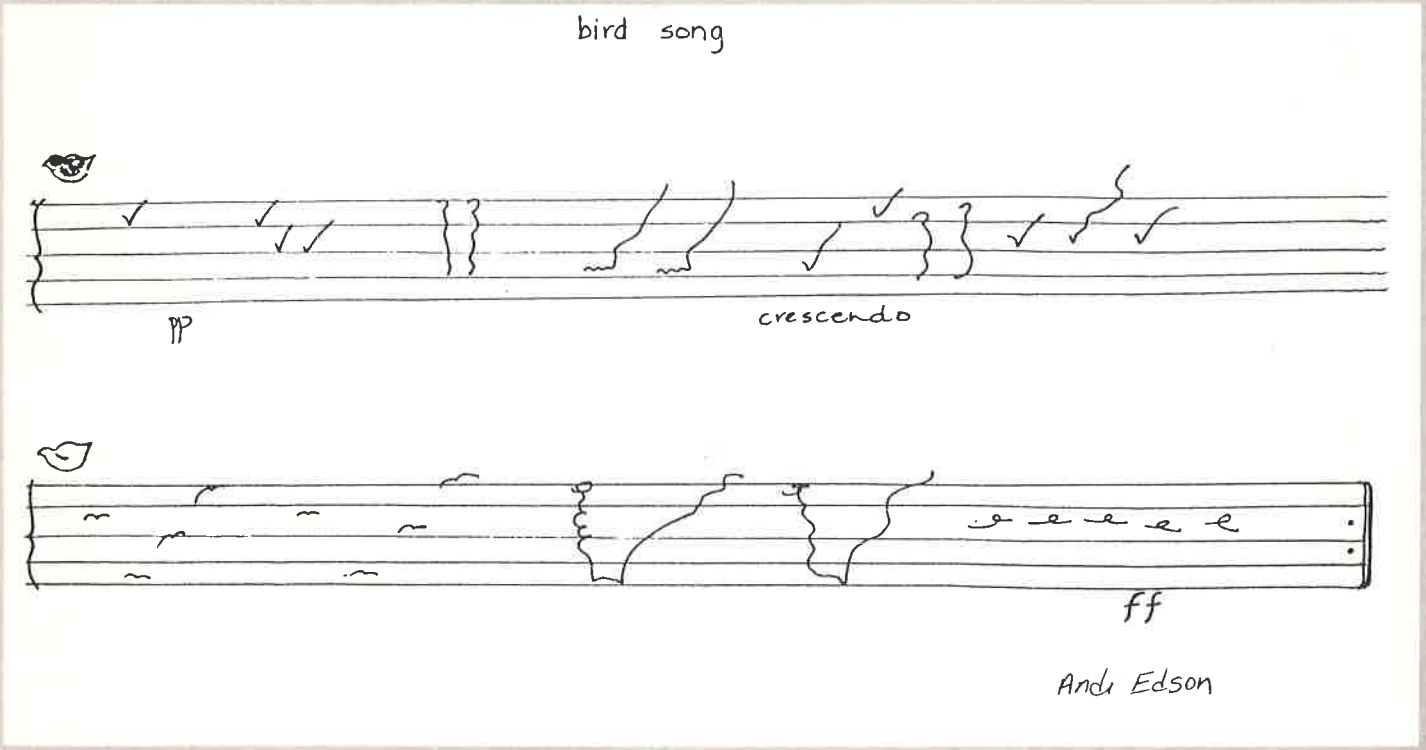
and I
I am willing
willing to become the woman you want
fluid and tender
edgeless and open
vulnerable and wanting

come with me
let us go
now
stay and never return

I am the gentle woman
I am the good woman
I am the mother of your sons
I am the giver of daughters
I am the source of wonder
you are the bringer of womanhood
you are the bearer of birth
you are the maker of the magical

Ah!
such a marvel is this thing called love

Francis Driscell
July 6, 1977



their transformation into other persona.

We read examples of how repetition and parallel structure were the primary techniques used to hold the poems together in these tribal cultures and how this technique is still one of the easiest and most successful in poetry. We talk about naming something in as many ways as possible, which some tribes felt gave them control over that thing. Naming in parallel structure sets up a strong momentum and almost carries the chanter along on its own built-up energy.

o wise stream—o living flow
o milky confluence, bank cutter
alder toppler
make meander,
swampy acres elk churnedmud

Gary Snyder
Mountains and Rivers Without End
Four Seasons Foundation 1961

As background, we recommend *Technicians of the Sacred,* ed. by Jerome Rothenberg, Anchor Books, 1968, which is filled with examples of poetry from tribal cultures around the world.

Later in the morning, Andi writes this River Chant:

lazy river
quiet river
rustling river
mystery river
self-indulgent river
rippling river
pastel river
paint dubbed river
flowing river
gurgling river
cracking river

shiney river
deep river
birdy river
nobody's river
everybody's river
tweetering river
thrilling river
slow river
living river
buzzing river
eternal river

Andi Edson

And from Judy's river poem:

shshshsh wind the soft pursed lips

wind brush the fish
wind rub the fish rib
fray the surface
river fish turn sleek as a fur seal
river fish ripple over into mud
river fish bend its bark back
river fish quieter than mud

Judith Steinbergh

We give our writers the power to change anything they want to change using these ancient techniques and also incorporating nonsense words as the actual "spell" part of this "magic spell" poem. Each person takes a home-made instrument from my bag and practices her chant with percussion.

MAGIC SPELL ON WATER MOSS

Bika - Luka

Take this stream into your velvety depth
Take this wine spraying water and become round and bossy

Leeka - Bika - Ka beek

Oh bulging moss cushion put rock ferns on your door sill,
drip them with crystal beads and wait until the sun is just right
to create your fairy establishment...
Swell out and when your rainbow atmosphere is brilliantly irised...
soften your seat for a water ouzel.

Kalee - Akela - Kika

Kate Austin

We divide the group in half. People share their magic spells and chants with other members of their group. Each group chooses one ritual to perform using movement, voice, and instruments. We end the morning in the grassy circle between the waters. The sound of our mysterious language and curious instruments rises above the cattails and loosestrife like a magic spell. Occasional birdwatchers, encumbered by equipment, are befuddled by the spectacle we present.

The assignment for the following day was to continue the flow of the morning in the journal; and in addition, to choose one important relationship (with parent, child, sibling, husband, lover, or good friend) and using two symbols from the water environment, write a poem to reflect the nature of the relationship.

Back at Tufts the next morning, we share these very moving poems. We work in groups of four and choose one of the poems to dramatize using the poem as narration, along with movement, props, and instruments. The group dramatization "By the Riverside" by Helena Zurecki-Villarroel is a magnificent piece using the tubular jersey, the roots (a red bag) emerging out of the green bag, the water blue jersey moving around the other spaces, filling them up, tugging and pushing at them. We are fortunate to have video equipment on hand and are able to tape and play back the three pieces so that we can get a sense of our

own creations. The process and the performance are very exciting, a real high point of the week, and the video is a well-timed accessory.

BY THE RIVER SIDE

I am the bending willow tree.
You, the tingling river rushing by.
Two separate entities abiding.
Yet in the far reaching depths
of time,
One single soul intertwining.

My long and willowly arms reach out to you,
My strong curious roots enlace in you.
You sweep over, around and under me.
And when seasons come, your banks
swell up and hide me.

By nature I try to keep rooted,
Yet in one form or other I long
to glide.
And parts of me explore with you
and knowingly travel to a source.

You tend to sweep and drift,
always seeking adventure.
Yet as the droplets of falling rain
that help to form you,
You always come and seek comfort
in me.

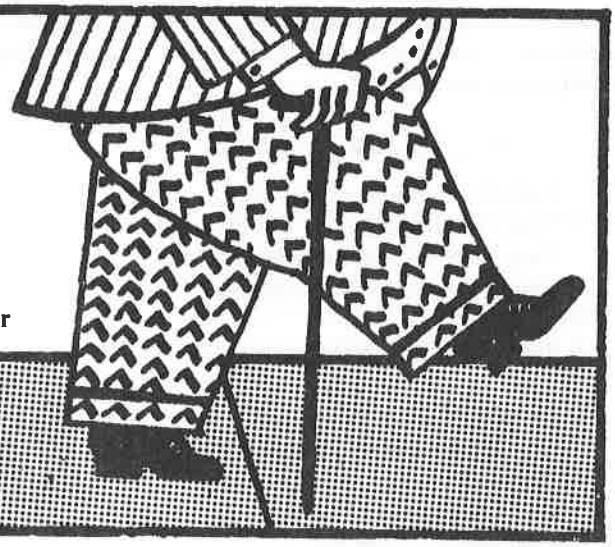
Our faces change as years go by
and still two separate beings we seem.
Yet our hearts and souls are one.
No matter what
time carves in us.

Helena Zarecki-Villarroel

Our goal for the final day of the "Water Week" is to integrate all the techniques we've been exposed to during the prior two weeks (movement, mime, mask, myth, chant, magic, music, watercolor washes, pastel and craypas sketches, and so forth) into the performance of two water myths. We spend the first half of class in silence, each person reviewing notes, drawings, poems, chants, mythological creatures, and writing a water myth, incorporating many elements of the past week's work. We split the group in two and have people share their myths. People are used to all the media available by now and can work well and quickly together. We have some costumes (elastics, scarves, shawls, yarn, feathers). In the presentations we use masks, face paint, painted backdrops. We use sheets of mylar and integrate the visual elements into the sound and movement of the performance.

"Why It Rains" by Mary Cazabon is performed using yarn and elastic webbed around the "lineman" and masks to portray each creature. The focus of our sharing is for each other. Again, we video-tape and play back the presentation of these myths, a true culmination to a full week of water. □

Creating Characters and Stories in the Classroom



by Bart Schneider

Writing stories is like telling lies. It takes some real imagination to keep a good lie going. If you're a natural, one lie leads gracefully to the next and before you know it you've been all over town. You do your darndest to keep your lies straight so that you won't betray yourself and have to own up to the unglamorous truth.

To create a believable character or story, a writer must bear down, just like an adept liar, to take responsibility for everything she or he has already described.

When I work with children on stories I talk a good deal about this idea of credibility. If a student wants to write about a 400 pound man, that's fine, as long as she or he is willing to earn a 400 pound character. It's not enough to say: there was this 400 pound man walking over to his girlfriend's house with a bunch of flowers. I want to know what this guy feels like in his skin so that I can really believe him as a character. Is he muttering to himself as he walks down the street? Has he worn a suit that's too tight for his build? Is he sweating under his triple chins? Does he feel, every now and then, like turning around and leaving his flowers at the foot of a lamppost? Or has he somehow come to terms with his hulk? Does he swagger majestically down the street with an ebony cane, daintily holding a bunch of primroses? Whatever the way the character goes the 400 pounds have to be accounted for. They can't be treated incidentally.

Creating Characters

I work in groups of six or seven kids with a 5th and 7th grade class. I explain to them that together we're going to make up a few characters, that we'll build the basic plot that grows out of the characters, and they'll have the job of writing the story and bringing it in the following week. The children really seem to enjoy this kind of collaboration. It gives them a boost, a place they can start from on their own. I aim at having the character sketches be not much more than a police sketch. Here is one a group of kids from the 7th grade class created:

> Winifred Hubble—A middle-aged man dwarf with red hair. He is 3 feet, 7 inches tall. He is a poet who can only talk in poetry.
>
> Gertrude Hubble—His wife; has life-time hair curlers in her hair; a perpetually runny nose. She is missing one front tooth and whistles through the space in her teeth when she talks.
>
> They live in an underground house with three rooms. Winifred works for the Acme Poetry Company writing greeting cards.

Several good stories grew out of this sketch. There were very few details in this sketch but I believe they were significant enough to carry the interest. When someone blurted out: "How about making him a poet who only talks in poetry?" I was delighted, but reminded the kids that if that was the case they'd have to create all his dialogue in poetry. I thought that would be more than they could chew, but it actually proved to be the perfect challenge.

A group from the 5th grade took their sketch in an altogether different direction. I had talked with them at the beginning of our session about my ideas of how stories are like lies. They leaped on the idea, and created a great character sketch which poked a little fun at me and my "lying" ideas.

> Lila—She is a liar with long curly blonde hair. She's twelve years old. She always wants her own way. Whenever she lies her mother makes her eat soap. Kids can tell when she lies because bubbles float out of her mouth.
>
> Nellie—She is Lila's best friend and tries to help her change her ways so that she might be saved from more bubble punishment.
>
> The bubbles filled the neighborhood. When the Fire Department came and sprayed the bubbles with water the bubbles grew even bigger.

That's where we left the sketch. Some hilarious stories grew out of it.

Generally, I start out these character sessions talking about our goal of a completed story. I ask if anybody has ideas about the kind of characters they'd like to write about. Usually I get blank stares at this point, perhaps a suggestion of Batman or Luke Skywalker which I flatly refuse to discuss. I tell them that we're going to

create something vastly more interesting: a real, life-like character just like us. At about that time I ask for specifics. "Let's create a man. How old is he? What's he look like? What kind of work does he do? How does he feel about himself? Is he lonely? How come? What would he rather be doing?" One question leads easily to the next and I keep after the kids 'til I feel they are curious enough about a character to create him or her for themselves.

It seems to me that success in a writing exercise like this depends on the degree to which real curiosity can be awakened in the children. If they can get to the point where they are really imagining what it feels like to be somebody else, quite different from themselves, I feel they have achieved something very important, even if their actual writing varies in consistency.

PERHAPS

Every year for the past eight years, Mr. Geostalt had been coming in for a complete physical. And every year the hospital staff had been surprised that such an old man could be so healthy. That is why it was such a shock to Mr. Geostalt to find that his blood pressure had gone up 25 points. It must have been the stress of the auditions, the constant rejection. Back in 1951 he hadn't had to audition at all. Everyone wanted a handsome, successful young comedian. But no one wanted a once blacklisted old man with age spots in place of hair. He abhorred employers who thought a good laugh depended on good looks. He hated them almost as much as he hated the critics who sneered at his attempts to get a job as, "trying to juice the meager remains of his career for all they are worth." He was bitter toward the whole theatrical world.

NEW YORK—Retired comedian John Geostalt died last Saturday of a heart attack. At his funeral one of his friends was heard to say, "Perhaps he's better off, poor old John."

Laura Stone
age 13

POETRY NOBODY COULD BUY

Clive Norwood had a pretty simple life. He was a bachelor and a salesman. The company he worked for was called Lighting Conversion. He had no enemies and got along with everyone.

One morning, same as usual, his good friend Ken Jackson came to pick him up for work and honked the horn twice in his Mustang. No one came out so he honked it again, then waited for five minutes. "I wonder if something is wrong. Living in a big city like San Francisco, there's no telling what might happen."

Ken went over and knocked on the door. Hilda the landlord answered.

"Hilda, where in the world is Clive?" Ken asked.

"I don't know. He left the key in the mailbox," Hilda puzzled.

Well they called the police and they made a real big deal out of it. On every paper you bought, the front page read, "Clive Norwood Missing—Whatever Happened to Good Guy Clive Norwood?"

Some say he was kidnapped, some say he was just too nice. The name Clive Norwood faded away as the years went past and was seldom mentioned.

What really was the matter? Now Clive was tired of that old city. He had decided he was going to live out in the Oregon mountains. "I'm going to do it," he said to himself.

Well, it wasn't so easy as he thought it would be. After a year went past he had made a couple of friends with a raccoon he named Black Magic and a hawk he called Sundown. As for the Indians, they weren't wild, they were very helpful and good friends.

He had started to write poetry. There were only certain times when he would write. Early in the morning he would go to this open green field surrounded by redwood trees. Clive would sit on this blanket the Indians had made for him and would write on white binder paper and use a brown pencil.

He was a very good poet. He would listen to the sounds in the forest and write about them. Sometimes he would write about the nearby creek while watching the water flow down.

At night, while sitting in his favorite chair in front of his fireplace with a cozy fire going, Clive would read his poetry.

He soon found no need for money. Clive had trained Sundown to take things to the village. So he gave Sundown his poetry to take to the village for people to read, and soon he was famous for his poetry. People had offered him money and things you would only dream of getting, but he refused it all. He was happy where he was.

So whatever happened to good guy Clive Norwood?

He wanted his poetry to be something you didn't have to buy.

Renee Burns
age 13

AN ACUTE CASE

Gertrude called for the second time to her husband Winifred, who was working in one of the three rooms of their house which was merely a hole in the ground.

"Winifred (sniff) time for (sniff) dinner!"

Winifred called back absently, still busy working. He worked for the ACME Poetry Company writing greeting card messages.

"Coming my dear,

For you I am true," he replied. Then, in a whisper, "Except when it comes to your cooking!"

Gertrude asked half-curiously, "Aren't you finished with that poetry yet?"

Replied he,

"For ACME I work hard
and true
But then I'd do anything
for you.
So out I will come, my dear."

Gertrude, blushing said, "Ah, get back to the point. Besides (sniff) it is *dinner!"*

Winifred came out of the den, sat down and said,

"I'm going on a journey,
It will be far away,
So please pack me a picnic,"

and again in a whisper,

"Though I'll probably eat out
anyway."

Gertrude sighed, though she was a bit used to this going off, what with his leaving to find an inspiration for his greeting card poetry.

"Where (sniff) are you going (sniff) this time (sniff)?" she asked. Getting no answer she turned around. "I said—" No one was there. Apparently Winifred had just— gone. Just like that! Gertrude shook her head and turned back to her cooking.

Chapter 2

Winifred took the left fork in the road because rumor had it that this was the way to the abode of a very famous wizard. Winifred thought to himself, unaware of a dark shadow creeping stealthily behind him, "I know I shouldn't have gone off and left Gertrude like that, but one more of her questions and I would have blown up! I guess that's because of my red hair, "Winifred chuckled, then gasped. For standing right in front of him was a big burly man with a club. Said the man, "I' be trubblin' ya' only fa' minute of ya' time. Jus' han' ova' ya' money an' there'll be n' trubble!"

Frightened half out of his wits, Winifred said shakily,

"I have no money,
Please let me pass," then summoning up his courage,
"You half-heated ass!"

The man gave no reply, just conked Winifred over the head and rifled his pockets. Finding nothing, the man crept away disgustedly.

Chapter 3

When Winifred came to, he shook his head, and he started his journey once more, thought to himself, "It takes all kinds!" Then changing the subject, "I sure hope the wizard can help me with this poetry problem of mine!"

All at once Winifred came to this house, or more like it, a cave. Winifred walked in cautiously and called,

"Is anyone home?
I sure hope so.
Cause if they weren't,
I'd have to leave,
And I don't want to!"

Winifred was startled 'cause his voice had gotten very loud and deep.

"What does it want, we ask, what?" A man, very little, with a pointed hat and cape came out of, it seemed, the woodwork. He, the wizard, "If that's what it was," thought Winifred, glared as fiercely as he could, though Winifred didn't think it was too fierce, asked angrily, "What does it want? Hurry, we hasn't much time!" Then seeing that Winifred was laughing silently, kicked him in the shin. "What's so funny?"

Said Winifred chuckling all the while,

"Oho, my little man,
It's you!
Looking like a child,
With that hat and cape
of blue!"

The expression on the wizard's face was first startled, then furious. "It thinks we are a child, eh?" said the wizard. Then very calmly he made Winifred's nose a foot long.

"Child, eh?" said the wizard, chuckling as he had warts grown all over Winifred's face. "My good dwarf," said the wizard, choking with laughter, "We're one thousand years old!"

Immediately Winifred was sorry for opening his mouth. Abruptly the laughter stopped. "We know why it is here," said the wizard as he restored him to Winifred's great relief, "and we will help it. We think it has an acute case of 'Poetitis'. What we need is a hair curler." As Winifred opened his mouth to speak the wizard said sharply, "Shut its mouth. Getting the hair curler is its problem. There's a catch. It must get the hair curler off something's head, and they can't know about it. Now go!"

The wizard pushed Winifred out the door and slammed it. Winifred knew just what to do. He would just go home and get one of Gertrude's lifetime hair curlers out of her hair. We sped home, not thinking how *to go about it.*

This time, on his way home, Winifred made sure there were no thugs or hoodlums hiding anywhere.

Chapter 4

When Winifred got home, he tried to sneak up on Gertrude and rip a hair curler out of her hair.

She screamed, "What (sniff) are you doing you (sniff) maniac?" Holding her head, she ran into another room. Soon she came out, looking cautiously at Winifred. "I'll cook some dinner but don't (sniff) come near me!"

They ate in silence with Gertrude sneaking glances at Winifred. Finally he exploded,

"I'm not a freak,
In a circus side-show!
I'm your husband,
In case you don't know!"

That stopped the glances.

That night, in bed, when Gertrude fell asleep, Winifred came upon a plan. He took some scissors, cut off a curler and thought, "Wonder why her mother didn't think of this years ago!" Then he put it in his pocket and went to sleep.

The next morning, Winifred again said,

"I'm going on a journey
'Twill be far away.
So please pack me a picnic,
Tho' I'll eat out anyway."

And again Gertrude, not having realized one hair curler was missing, asked, "Where do you think you're going (sniff, sniff)?"

"I'm going on a journey
Far, far away
A place of magic witches,
And wizards,
A place where they use
Chicken gizzards for potions
of love and hate
Oh, and I'll be late for supper
So please don't wait!"

And with that, Winifred was off to see the wizard, and bring him the hair curler.

Chapter 5

When Winifred got to the wizard's cave he saw a sign on the door. It said, "Closed on Wednesdays," which it was.

Nevertheless, Winifred pounded on the door. Finally, the angry-looking wizard answered.

"What does it want? We're closed on Wednesdays! Go away! It can come back tomorrow!" But then, seeing it was Winifred and the hair curler, the wizard opened the door, and grabbed the curler. Then he put it in a huge box. "Now we have 1000 curlers! It sees that we have just washed our hair and we can't do a thing with it! Now to help it out." The wizard got down a bottle from the shelf labelled "aspirin," then assuming Groucho Marx's famous expression, said, "Take two and see me in the morning!" Then, doubled up with laughter, he shook his head saying, "We're only kidding!" He gave Winifred a green liquid which Winifred downed quickly.

"Now say something!" said the wizard.

"Am I talking in poetry?" asked a hopeful Winifred.

"No, now it can leave. Goodbye, don't come back."

Winifred sped home once more.

Chapter 6

The next morning Winifred casually asked, "Are you done with the sports yet?" □

Cassie Hanson
age 11

The Seasons of a Writing Workshop

by Alan Ziegler

I was asked by someone who enjoyed a publication of writing by my students, "How do you elicit such work?" Elicit—I like that word, "to bring to light." One aspect of writing is a kind of selective illumination, sometimes connecting material by spotlighting two images and leaving the rest of the stage dark. Teaching writing is, in part, helping students learn to use the light grid. To what extent can teachers encourage this creative process, without being overly directive and perhaps even blocking it?

Students may be "in the dark" about exactly what a writer (or other artist) does; writing teachers can, at the least, share their experiences as writers, talking about what it is like to create—where a work of art comes from, and the frustrations and joys of seeing it through. Often I've helped a student out just by letting him or her know that I, too, have problems writing, can't get started or can't get the words to make me smile with satisfaction. And teachers have told me an important part of my classroom demeanor is that I can communicate to students my thrill with language when it works. But there has to be more. Even if such consummate artists as Blake and Shakespeare were to have visited local classrooms in their day, there would have come a time during the period when the kids would have said, "But Mr. Blake, what are we supposed to write today?" Would Blake and Shakespeare, under the pressure of three workshops a day, have tried to formulate their approaches into gimmicks? Would Blake have asked his students to "write a poem with a vision in every line?" Would Shakespeare have assigned dialogues, "imagining that your mother is the Queen, your father the King"? Some good writing would have come from such assignments, but it is likely that many students would not have had an intense experience of discovery, what Rollo May refers to as a creative "encounter."

In this article, I discuss some ways the teacher can help students find and illuminate their own material. (I have used these approaches mostly at the fifth grade level and higher.) Of course there are no set guidelines—sometimes you have to hold someone's hand, and sometimes you let them go off by themselves, even if it means they stumble a bit.

Gimmicks—highly structured writing exercises with "sure fire" results—are good for beginnings, as confidence builders, and later on as occasional cures for writers block. But beware of addiction. Gimmicky exercises can foster a stimulus/response approach to writing, with the students dependent on the writing teacher. My ultimate goal is for students eventually to internalize something about the impetuses to write, and this requires some self-determination.

But one can go too far in the extreme away from structure. I've made the mistake at times of providing too little structure before a class was ready for it, and realized I was not giving the students what I had to offer. What I try to do—after a few structured exercises—is to find that famous but elusive happy medium, by heading the students in general directions without mapping out their courses. For several sessions we talk about the various "places" we get our poems from. Many poems have a dominant "orientation," and I devote a session to each of these orientations, such as: experience, emotion, imagination, observation, allegory/metaphor, and, the most difficult to explain, language (words, phrases, that seem to take shape mysteriously—perhaps the word "wheelbarrow" or the phrase "This is just to say" which kept running through William Carlos Williams' mind). Within each of these categories, which of course overlap to some extent, the students decide what they want to write about. Several examples of professional and student poems help them get the feel of the particular orientation. (A small anthology of student poems follows this article.) I talk about various techniques and devices used in specific poems, so that "poetic terms" come up in the context of discussing a living piece of work. But eventually it comes down to writing, and the students have to focus on something.

Often the first step is the hardest, and there will be some puzzled young faces. I do not want to hear, "I don't know what you want us to write," I tell the class, but rather, "I'm not sure what I want to do. Can you help?" Yes, I can help, but it takes time and individual attention. Sometimes we brainstorm as a group—in one case we listed a dozen times in life when interesting memories take root. When we were finished, the blackboard looked like an "activity card," with examples like "the first day at camp." The difference was that the activities had come from the students.

The writing teacher should not only be involved in the triggering process

(more on that later in this article), but should also pay attention to possible detours that crop up along the route. One of the most appealing aspects of an artistic venture is that it can take whatever shape you want it to. Changing horses in mid-stream might get you wet for awhile, but it also might take you to an interesting place you hadn't considered when you set out on your journey. Poet/teacher Richard Hugo makes the distinction between what triggers the writing of a poem and what is generated during the course of the writing. What starts a poem may not be there when it's finished. One memory may generate a deeper, more interesting, memory. Or an observation may generate a memory, in which case the students should be encouraged to pursue the material and not worry about "doing the assignment correctly." Matisse, speaking about his paintings, said he would start with one thing—perhaps a chair or a table—but by the end would be hardly aware of the subject with which he started.

After the students have built up a substantial folder of writings, I begin to have open-ended sessions, occasional at first, then perhaps every other session. I approach these sessions as I might my own writing. Sometimes I go in with a beginning point (a flash, an idea, something that happened to me) and try to develop it with the class, so a "writing idea" is formed organically right in the classroom. Often I read the class a piece of writing that has captivated me, be it a poem, newspaper article, etc. Many times, more than one idea will evolve. My job is to keep the class from getting too scattered, and to know when to stop talking and start writing. Then I will sum up what we've been talking about, perhaps distilling our discussion into phrases on the blackboard the students can refer to. In other sessions I bring in preconceived writing ideas that allow for maximum participation by the students.

Sometimes there is little or no class discussion. The students have the option of developing new material or revising old work from their folders. (Feedback from the teacher and/or other students is usually helpful during the revision process, but that's another article.) It's quite all right if they just want to make neat copies of old work (it can be a satisfying endeavor, and sometimes an improvement is made). They can also read each others' work. Any activity related to their writing is fine. Many times an old poem will suggest a new one. In conferences I might say, "I think this poem is finished, but you have a line here that is intriguing and you might start a new poem or story with it." One fifth grader, Chrissy Keller, had the line, "the long gone past forever" in a poem, and I suggested she write a poem with that as a title. The new poem ended with the lovely line, "they will always knock at/ my brain forever."

Triggering writing is a hit and miss business. There is no set formula, but there are things one can actively do. William Burroughs suggests going for a walk and concentrating on only one color—for example, looking closely at everything red. By narrowing your scope of attention, you might see something you otherwise wouldn't have noticed. Other times it happens more by chance—for Proust,a dip into the cookie jar resulted in an enormous fistful of remembrances of things past. Sometimes you can inadvertently say something to a student that will set him or her off.

In a sixth grade class, Nancy Arnold asked me for a suggestion. I was en-route to another student and, somewhat distracted, blurted out, "I don't know...write about the wonders of life." I was kidding. A few minutes later, feeling I had been too flip with her, I returned in order to give her some "serious help." But she was writing busily and shooed me away. Later she handed me this:

MY DEFINITION OF
LIFE AND DEATH

I've heard that...Life is a bowl of cherries. You live, then each one is eaten which means death. Life goes on endlessly, until—the wonders of your mind get eaten like the bowl of cherries. Baby, child, teenager, adult, senior citizen—The last cherry is you. The wonders of your mind are too old to remember the times when you were young. Life is...That's what the world needs, a definition of life. The wonders of your mind get rusty. Slowly, slowly, the cranks stop turning, the wheels stop going and a little man comes down from your brain to your heart and says it's all over, bub. Then you float in the air. Feeling numb. Not thinking. Floating, twisting, turning. Now it's not so smooth. It's rough. Things going through your mind—CRAZY, DREAMING, ZOOM, ZANG, ZING. STOP. It comes to an end. You feel a large thump. You fall, never to move again. You, the cherry, have gone into heaven's stomach.

Nancy Arnold

There was something about the phrase "wonders of life" that set this in motion. I read it to my class and they responded strongly. Writers constantly influence each other in form and content, and Nancy's poem triggered other "life and death" poems. Here's one, by Alex Omura, in a quite difference voice. He utilized the approach of building a poem with a metaphor, which we had done in an earlier, "structured" class:

Life is an iron bridge
It will be slowly built.
At the right moment,
when it is finished,
it will be unveiled.
All sparkling, new and strong.
It will grow in fame,
and more and more be used.
It will sway in storms
and come out the same.
Now and then it will need
a new paint job,
or a girder will be replaced,
but that won't affect it much.
As it grows older
more and more people
will depend on it.
Its personality will be
more and more known.
One day the first signs
of rust will be discovered.
It can't take
all that it used to.

Slowly it will rot
and eventually be closed down.
Finally it will collapse,
but a new bridge
will be built
with the broken pieces.

Alex Omura

It is helpful when a writer feels a sense of importance for what he or she is writing about. You must connect with your material and care enough about it to live with it for awhile. (Kurt Vonnegut talks about writing a novel as being similar to getting married.) When the writer is connected to the work, there is a good chance this will carry through to the reader. Several years ago, James Taylor spoke about the sense of conviction in his songs, and how they communicate even if the listener doesn't know exactly what's going on.

The following poem, by high school student Yan Yan Lau, illustrates this kind of connection and conviction. I don't think a poem like this would have been written as a result of a specific exercise; it is an example of how an important emotional situation was filtered through language:

A butterfly flew but it didn't meet
the air.
Who is at fault? Maybe next time
they will say hello.
Magic marble and shiny pennies are
all I have to hope that you'll
understand.
Our silence is our bond but this
magic
will not endure.
The secret lies in words but this
breaks the magic.
Maybe they'll meet tomorrow.

I told Yan Yan I liked the poem very much, and she asked, "Do you understand it?" I replied that I did, in a way. She giggled and said, "How can you understand it?" and I replied, "You're speaking a language I can grasp the sense of, even if I don't know the meaning of each word. It communicates to me, even if I don't know the background."

At this point a friend of Yan Yan's said, "That's what so great about it—I know what's going on in her life so I can appreciate it at that level, too. But it has something for everyone."

Some experiences, feelings, fantasies etc. simply "need" to be written. One student wrote a harrowing story about his father's murder. Thinking it might have upset him to write it, I made a point of catching up with him later on. He saw me, smiled, and before I could say anything, said, "I want to thank you for letting me write about my father. Teachers never let me do it before; they always said, 'Oh, you don't want to write about that.'"

This was a case in which the subject matter was unpleasant, but not the act of writing. It's like someone saying, "Oh, I feel better just to talk about it." Of course not all subjects that "need" to be written about are unpleasant; they can also be exciting and happy, as in, "I must tell you the most wonderful thing..." It is important for teachers to be accepting of emotional and experiential extremes when they come up, and possibly suggest to students that extremes can make for powerful writing.

Although sometimes we feel strongly about something and write to "express ourselves," vent our feelings, there are other times when we don't know what we're feeling, what we want to say. Perhaps we have a vague feeling of something, or miscellaneous thoughts are distracting us. I'll point out that all of us—students and teachers—sometimes during a class, movie, ballgame, etc., find ourselves thinking about something else. A writing workshop is a good place to track down these stirrings. The following is an example of such an exploration, written by John Tshibula, a sixth grader:

Oh what am I doing going crazy
out of my mind I feel dizzy away
from everyone except girls all
kinds of girls. Girls whose shapes
I like or love, and girls whose
shapes I hate. Girls with terrible
faces and beautiful shapes, girls
with terrible shapes and beautiful
faces.

Oh what am I doing—
judging someone
and letting my opinion praise some
and embarrass others.

Just dreaming off into a world of
beauty
or a world of crazy,
oh must I judge?
Or look and listen and learn
to know what is my reason
for writing this.

I also encourage kids to write directly about the things around them—things they might not consider "worthy" subjects for poetry. Wild imagination can result in spectacular poems, but our day-to-day life doesn't have many spectacles. "Quiet" poems can be quite moving and mean a great deal to the writers. I'll ask students to "pay attention" to their surroundings, and to themselves. Here is an excerpt from a fourth grader, Lisa Bracero:

...looking at things I never stopped to look at before. Like my new ladder for my bunk bed. It has a dark brown on one step and a light brown on another. And my new pillow case—I never knew it had a small pink flower right in the middle. Then when I am in the middle of my quietness I hear a key jiggling....

This kind of writing helps students develop a feel for details (probably one of the five most-used words in every writing workshop). Other students have written about their pets, families, or neighborhoods, such as this one by sixth grader Karl Baumann:

Buildings standing so tall
Like brave men
But look! I see Freddy 173 on them
I see blood on the stairs, I see a
Fire in one of them.
But at night, the moonlight shining
On them,
They look like a forest

There are some students who will thrive with or without a writing workshop. These students, though, usually need more than just the "space to write"; they need someone to help them shape that space. I had a high

school student, Sherry Spitzer, who had made for herself plenty of space to write. When I began visiting her class she brought me stacks of poems written outside of school, most of which were at this level:

I came at you with my love
But you just didn't care
I needed you so very much
But you just wouldn't share

I was hurt and feeling down
Just because you weren't around

With her permission, I "pushed" her, and her writing transformed. This is a later example:

I am the woods
you are my hunter
who invades and
destroys
all of me

You shoot my deer
Blood all over
and leave the
dead carcass on me
rotting away

But you also
make my
trees grow, planting
seeds, and you are
my companion

No one dares travel my paths
and I am lonely
until you come
and destroy me again

A writing workshop should be an environment with its own changes of seasons, where the nature of the activities can vary from week to week. Occasionally it's good to have an out-loud reading of recent work, so the students get a sense of what else is going on in the class, or other classes. A focal point is the students' folders. I like it when students work on the covers of their folders, but rather than a nice neat cover (which makes it look like a finished book), I prefer the ones where the kids constantly add new drawings and/or "grafitti." It gives the feel of the workshop, something ongoing, growing. At the end a nice finished book can be put together.

When the writing teacher veers away from highly structured exercises, he or she risks disorder and frustration in the classroom. Although I believe that students should accept frustration as part of the writing process, I don't believe in *fostering* discouragement as part of the learning process. Sometimes I'll fall back on a tried-and-true gimmick. They can be fun, and that's a big part of it.

What follows are samples of poems in three of the "orientation" categories mentioned earlier in this article. These poems can be helpful in eliciting writing, but make sure the students understand that although they might be influenced by these poems, their objective is not to make clones, but perhaps distant cousins.

OBSERVATIONS

Once when my aunt died in
California you should see the
ambulance with the sirens
going around Rooo Rooo
Rooo Rooo
it was skinning
blocks
My mother
looked out the window
we ran down the
stairs my aunt was
laying on the ground
Isha said what
are you laying on the
ground for
it's dirty
They picked her up
and put her in the
ambulance

OMAR SMART
3rd Grade, P.S. 161
Manhattan

The room is empty now, except for one child.
Paper party hats and candy wrappers
lie haphazardly on the floor.
Streamers hang on the ceiling, making a delicate
bridge from wall to wall.
On the table
spilled soda and melting ice cream
form a dirty river, weaving its way
between soggy potato chips.
Near the child are
ripped wrapping paper and broken bows.
Tears flow down the child's pink cheek.
Dressed in a white suit, he sits clumsily
swallowed by a giant chair
holding in his hands
a dead doll.

CINDY GELPER
Finkelstein Memorial Library, Spring Valley
(Young Adults workshop)

The old woman with nowhere to go
waits on the street corner
with her hair tangled
and her dress faded.
She decays in the sun
and moon
but no one helps her cross.
Her face is as pale
as a pink and white balloon,
but all people say is, "poor thing."
In her shopping bag she carries
all her worldly possessions,
her dead canary
and $8,
also her diamond wedding ring.
She decays like wood railroad tracks.

Soon a young girl about 23
comes and crosses the old woman
to the other side of the street.
"What a nice girl,"
the old woman says.
They walk together hand in hand.

LISA BURRIS
6th Grade, P.S. 11
Brooklyn

EMOTIONS

When I am sad
I feel like going for a walk.
When I come back
I feel much better.
Still I am sad.
The only thing that would make me
feel better is to call for my friends.
To forget about the whole thing.
Then I think to myself
what if my friends aren't home.
Now I made myself feel sad again.
I feel like a worm
struggling along
the sidewalk.
The feeling really never
gets out of my head.

JENNIE MONTANINO
4th Grade
Atlantic Avenue School

When disgusted and annoyed
I feel like chalk pressing
and crushing upon a huge board
leaving behind its contents
dead and lifeless
severed in two pieces
like A&P ground beef
under the buns of the
doublemeat cheeseburger
enclosed in an envelope
to be mailed to nowhere
forever.

MIKE MALONEY
10th Grade
Mineola High School

MAD

My mouth burns up.
I jump so hard
I fall through the floor.
When I hit the bottom
Of the earth,
It echoes through the universe.
When I tell my mother
She understands the life I'm in,
Tells me I can stay up late.
I hope I get mad
A lot more often.

DAVID PATTERSON
4th Grade
West End School

Depression leaves you in
a room alone with your life
scattered all over,
trying to clean up the pieces.
It feels as if it
will never get back to normal.
When you don't know
where to put something,
the mess begins to pile up.

LAURIE ROMAN
10th Grade
Lynbrook High School

JEALOUSY

The feeling is coming
I know it by now
my face gets hot
my eyes start to close
my fists get clenched
then the tears start to come
I hate her
I cry
not meaning a thing
I wish I were dead
They don't love me at all
they love her more
I try to tell myself that's wrong
They love me, too
but I find myself
crying too hard to believe myself.
Then I calm down
and try to smile.
It worked
I'm happy again
all of a sudden they love me
again.

KAREN HALFON
5th Grade
Willets Road School

WAITING

A little girl sits
under a night table
ready to play a joke.
It is past her bedtime
but she thinks it will
not matter.

Her mother comes to
read a book, lying on
the bed. The girl
wants to jump out
from under and say,
"Boo." But something
within her is holding back.

She cannot come out
from under the table—nervously,
she moves around trying
to get up the guts to
follow through with her
joke.

Her mother hears the
sound and calls
the dog—
"Is that you under there?"
The little girl laughing
under her breath!
How silly.

Finally, several minutes
later, she gets up out
from the table with an
embarrassed look on her face.
It is very late and
way past her bedtime hour.
Mother furiously asks
what was she doing all that time.

The little girl, scared
and shaking, tells her
she was looking for her
necklace—and runs out.

She will never forget
that experience, for she
had lied to her mother
for the first time.

NANCY ALPER
9th Grade
Lynbrook High School

CRESCENDO
for Sarah

It was cold on those piano nights in
winter

Small piano fingers
told they would become
long thin piano hands played
scales
arpeggios
played with shoes on because
small bare piano feet hurt
when they pressed that cold piano
pedal.

I loved the Indian song.
Staccato.
Loud.
Forte.
I struck those white ivory keys
with luscious fury.
They hated my Indian song
so loud
so crazy
Staccato.
Staccato.

Choppy and loud
like the little girl inside
of that small piano child
whose small piano fingers
played andante.
The small flannel piano girl
wearing shoes on small piano feet
because it was cold
and small bare piano feet hurt
when they pressed that cold piano
pedal

on cold piano nights
in winter

NANCI SILLER
Young Adults Workshop
Findelstein Memorial Library
Spring Valley, N.Y.

NOTE:

The poems in the main body of this article come from the following schools:

P.S. 173, Manhattan: Nancy Arnold, Alex Omura, Karl Baumann, Lisa Bracero

P.S. 11, Brooklyn: John Tshibula

Lynbrook High School: Yan Yan Lau, Sherry Spitzer □

Laying Yourself On the Line

by Dan Cheifetz

Writing is laying yourself on the line. It's a confrontation with blank paper in which you have to expose your thoughts and feelings to cover that paper. For those to whom writing does not come easily, it's a little like getting up on stage and performing, a personal and scary moment of truth. And it's especially tension-producing for many students, because writing for them is so often associated with being tested and graded.

So I see part of my task as a "creative writing" teacher as trying to lighten that tension, to make writing less charged and more playful, less something you have to do for school and more something you might want to do for yourself.

At the same time, I felt it my responsibility to help students grasp some ideas that underlie good writing. For example:

...Writing so that one idea follows logically from the one before and flows easily into the one after. In other words, learning not to jump all over the place, so the reader can follow you without strain. This is training in thinking as well as writing.

...The importance of details and specifics in good writing. Generalities are usually borrowed and generally boring. But the data one gets from one's senses, and what we hear when we tune in to our own inner voices and feelings and fantasies, give us everything we need to write interesting things. From these sources, we select the details and specifics that make our writing come alive. It comes alive because it is our own. The trick here is to learn to trust one's special experience of the world as valid, and to value the eccentricities and peculiarities that make each one of us unique.

...The process of revision. Many students have a built-in resistance to rewriting: "I've done it...it's boring to do it again." Boring or not, there's no substitute for giving your work another look, a critical review as if someone else had written it, in order to improve it. Those who overcame their resistance to revision had the satisfaction of shaping something crude or potential into something more finished and beautiful.

So, in working with students at P.S. 153 and Jr. H.S. 164 this year, I had two objectives: to try to make writing as an activity more fun, or at least less heavy. And, since writing is an essential skill, as well as an art, to give them practice in the writing fundamentals I have mentioned. Since the writing proficiency of my students varied widely, I tried to come up with writing assignments that allowed students who were uneasy with writing the opportunity to succeed, and at the same time give plenty of creative latitude to more confident students who were willing to take some imaginative risks.

I tried to challenge their inventiveness. I tried also to help them prove to themselves that writing is not just an aspect of school work but could be useful and a source of satisfaction in their personal, inner lives. And I wanted to build their confidence in themselves as writers. My message was: If you can talk, you can write. If you have dreams, if you like to "make up stuff," if you feel things deeply, if you have relationships important to you, you can write.

Here are some of the things I asked them to try:

I wanted them to invent something new, something that would work by magic or by electronic impulse or by any other power they could dream up, which would be useful or give pleasure in their personal, everyday lives—and then write an ad or a commercial describing and selling their invention to others.

I asked them to imagine someone or something in a crisis; to pretend they were that person, animal or object in trouble, and then to give him, her or it a voice on paper.

They wrote sets of instructions—directions to someone to do something or go somewhere. These instructions were to be clear and connected, and to be as everyday or as "far out" as they wanted them to be ...anything from how to bake a cake to how to conquer the universe.

They also did a simple exercise describing, in detail, a person, place or event they had personally experienced.

They chose interesting characters, real or made up, and wrote scripts working out a conflict between them. They also wrote about important changes in their own personal lives, the process of moving from one state of mind or feeling to another—both the facts about the change and how they felt about it.

I also asked them to imagine that a disaster had taken place at home, and they had to choose only one person, animal or possession to save. Before they could write about it, they had to decide which person or object had the greatest value to them personally, and why.

I also asked them to create a myth or sci-fi tale.

In an exercise combining writing and drawing, I asked them, first, to write down every personal asset they had—everything they liked about themselves, every skill they possessed, every quality about themselves others admired; then they were to pick out one or two of these personal qualities or skills and create an *ad for themselves,* displaying these traits in words and pictures.

MATCHES

As long as I can remember, when I was ten years old I carried a pack of matches with me wherever I went. I didn't do anything bad with them as kids do. I would just light one and see it burn all the way down to the stick.

On one occasion, I lit one of those matches in my room. Suddenly, the match fell on the rug. The rug caught fire so fast that I just stood there. Lucky for me, my sister came into the room, pushed me aside, took the cover off the bed and smothered the fire.

This terrible shock not only taught me not to light matches, but also made me dislike matches altogether.

Betty Ovando
J.H.S. 164, Manhattan

ROACH

One lonely Sunday evening in the month of December, I was eating crumbs off the floor. The Johnsons had people over for dinner, and they were expert droppers. I really enjoyed myself eating cake, bread, collards, etc.

It was a perfect day, until about 8 o'clock. I was about to jump into bed when I smelled poison. I became terrified. What could an old, stuffed, and sleepy roach do? I peeped out of my crack and saw young people running in all directions. I yelled for help, but nobody stopped.

Now the scent was almost unbearable. I dashed out of my house. I was feeling very drowsy. All of a sudden, it became dark and the air thin. It was a shoe coming down on me. My first reaction was to dash away. I did just that. Where I would go was no concern. I started to run faster and faster. After a few minutes, I became tired; I stopped. My mind began to start on a solution to the problem; then, suddenly it came to me. Go live with my sister. I did.

Tyrone Harris
J.H.S. 164, Manhattan

A FIGHT WITH MY SISTER

Last week was a bad week for me. I had a fight over a shoe box. What a dumb thing to fight about? Well, this is how it started.

My sister was cleaning the house and I had wanted to make a bat out of the box. My sister said that it was her box and nobody is going to use it but her. So I said to myself, who does she think she is? I told her that I was going to use her shoe box just to see what she was going to do.

Well, I got the scissors and I started cutting it. She got mad and started hitting on me and then we got into a fight.

My aunt broke it up. We didn't talk to each other for about two days. When anybody called me on the telephone my sister said that I am not to talk about boys and boyfriends on the telephone. Also, I am not to talk for long minutes on the telephone if any boy called me. She said she would tell my mother what I talked about on the telephone. When her friend called she talked about anything she wanted to talk about. She can listen on any phone call she wants because we have two telephones in the house.

But this week is much better because we are talking to each other again.

Heather Crichlow
J.H.S. 164, Manhattan

MOTHER-IN-LAW PILLS

Are you sick and tired of your mother-in-law? Well, try new Mother-in-Law pills! Just 1 pill in her water and poof! She becomes very sweet. Just go to the nearest drugstore and ask for Andrews Mother-in-Law pills, the most miraculous pill ever made! Secret formula makes it work.

Janis Andrew
J.H.S. 164, Manhattan

PUPPY LOVE

When I was ten years old, I lost my puppy. Even when I was eleven, I couldn't forget her. My mother and I went to Miami, because she wanted me to forget all about what happened. But I couldn't. Then she got me another one. When she brought it to my house, I wasn't there. I was in my cousin's house. She went over there and got me.

When I saw the dog, I started to cry, because my lost puppy and the one my mother brought to my house looked just the same. I had some changes in this new life; the puppy was the one that changed my life, and I still have my puppy.

Nitza Rivera
J.H.S. 164, Manhattan

CRISIS OF A FEMALE WHOSE MAN WALKED OUT ON HER

I don't believe it. He said he loved me...but yet he walked out on me. It figures. I tell him I'm pregnant and he walks out. I should've known what I was in for when he first said he wasn't the kind that settles down. I want this baby. I'm sick of hearing about abortions from my friends. I don't want one. What I do want is my man; I want my child to know who his father is. My child shouldn't be born out of wedlock. How will I support my child? I'll have to get a job; but it would be stupid to start a job, then take off just to have a kid. I should have thrown him the hell on out of the house when I first found out I was pregnant!! Yeah, I bet he'll be back in time... When he thinks I either got rid of the child or had it already. But I got news for him. He's not touchin' this child since he didn't want no part of it.

Corliss Groves
J.H.S. 164, Manhattan

SIDEWAY GLASSES

Attention every student! Do you know everything in school? Are you failing many tests? Well, we've got your answer. Our side-way glasses see sideways while you are looking front ways. You can get it in black, brown, or mixed colors only! How do side-way glasses work? Well, you sit next to a smart person and put on side way glasses. That way, you will see what the answers are to a test. We don't consider this cheating, because the answers are there by coincidence. The teacher will never suspect anything. You see, side-way glasses are especially designed for students 11-18 years of age. If a teacher sees through them they'll look like ordinary glasses. If all the students in your class are dumb, sit next to the teacher.

Act now and as a bonus side-way glasses turn to shades in the sun.

Juan Melendez
JHS 164, Manhattan

THE DOG I LIKE

I like that dog. I like it so.
I like her so much, she makes me glow.
Her body is pink. Her eyes are blue.
Blue as the clear waters
that glow in the sun.
And when she sees a dirty dog, she wants to run.

Shevaughn James
P.S. 153 Manhattan

MY FRIEND

I like my friend. Why? Because when I look at her cute dimple, I get goose pimples. She weighs about 56 lb. She is intelligent. She dresses nice. She acts nice in class. She has long hair. She is fun to play with. She talks a lot with Patricia. She has nice earrings. She has eyes like a cat.

Wayne Johnson
P.S. 153, Manhattan

THE MOUTH ERASER

This is the greatest thing that ever happened for the average kid. It's "the eraser." Not just an eraser, but a mouth eraser.

It erases teachers' mouths, when you don't feel like listening to a boring lesson. It can also erase angry mothers' mouths when you're getting ready to be argued at. And if you act now, you'll get this hand eraser so those angry mommies won't be able to hit you. So hurry—get yours today for only $5.99!

Robin Phoenix
JHS 164, Manhattan

CHUCK

Chuck is fat as a blimp. But Chuck is cool. He weighs 78 pounds and is 2 feet 5. He likes to play basketball and football. He can really play basketball well and football well too. He likes to play tackle. He eats a lot of food. He's fat but he's still cool and my man. Chuck, Chuck, we want Chuck the man!

Stacey Larkins
P.S. 153, Manhattan

THE PARTY

My birthday finally arrived. After school I came home. I was very surprised because a lot of food was on the table. I changed into my pretty dress. I came to the table. Everybody was there. I blew out the candles. My parents and aunts clapped. I cut the cake. I took a big piece of cake. My mother put the music on, and we all danced.

Later, my aunts and uncles went home. My mother took off the music. The time: 4:00 in the morning. I took off my dress. I helped clean up the table. I got ready for bed. I slept and dreamed of what a lovely time I had.

Susan Clarke
P.S. 153, Manhattan

TRUST

I was walking through the park one day. I saw my friend Lucy smoking. I was very surprised at her because, around her block, when she's with her mother, she is a saint. So when I saw her, I just opened my mouth in surprise. At last, she saw me. She got very nervous. She came up to me and told me she was not going to smoke again if I didn't tell her mother. I said o.k. I trusted her, and she trusted me.

You know, she never did smoke again. She kept her promise and I kept mine.

Josefina Fernandez

MY TRIP TO RICHMOND

One Easter week, we drove to Richmond to visit my Grandmother. On the way we saw farms with horses, cows, pigs, and chickens on it. When we got there, my Grandmother said how tall I had grown. The she made a big dinner for us.

The next day we went to our aunt's house and we had an Easter egg hunt. After that, we went home to watch T.V.

The next day we had to go home. Before we left, my Grandmother gave us each five dollars. On the way back we saw a deer run across the road. Then we were home. I didn't want to go back to school, but I had to.

Andre Greene
P.S. 153, Manhattan

BAD BIRD

I am a very nice bird. My friends and parents like me very much. I like them too. I do my homework and chores.

One day I saw a very bad bird. He went around flying low over people's heads and pecking windows. He asked me to join him and be bad, but, as you know, I'm a very nice bird. I said no.

But, one day, I started going around pecking windows and flying low over people's heads. I stopped. I didn't know what was wrong with me. Then I started again. I saw a lady and I flew low over her head. She threw a rock at me and hurt my wing.

I was bad for about 3 years but I still didn't know what was wrong with me. One day I sat down and talked to my mother and told her my problem. She said the only thing I can do is to put my mind up to it.

The next day the bad bird came back and asked me to join him. This time, I said no. So he flew away and started his bad stuff. I started to be bad again. While I was flying one day, the hunter shot at my wing and the bullet went all the way through. After I got over my illness I learned a lesson: Never join anybody in their gangs when you feel they are doing wrong.

Alfred Adams
P.S. 153, Manhattan

MY BLOCK

My block is medium size. On one side of the street, it is clean. On the other side, it is dirty. There are many buildings on the block. Some are tall and some are short. We have a school and schoolyard on our block. There are two vacant lots. On one side of the street, there is shade and on the other side, there is sun. Most of the buildings have 6 floors. Sometimes it is noisy, and sometimes it is quiet.

I like living there because all my friends live there.

Hope Beatty
P.S. 153, Manhattan

THE DAY I RISKED MY LIFE

When my father took my brother and I to the park during the summer, I had a skate board and my brother had his bike. He is four years old. I was skate boarding when a car pulled in the parking space where my brother was riding his bike. I stopped skate boarding and ran to get my brother and pushed him out of the way. My skate board went under the car wheel and the car ran over it and crushed it.

All the people were yelling at the driver who had not seen my brother on his bike. I had risked my life for my brother. I lost a skate board but I did not mind because a brother is more precious than anything in the world.

Myron Inalls
P.S. 153, Manhattan

ANGELS HAVE CRISES TOO

I am an angel from heaven. One day all of a sudden the clouds blew up. I fell on the ground. Then one of the devils from "hell" came to the earth while I was falling and blew up one of my wings. The next thing I knew, the "devils of Hell" held me prisoner.

It was very terrifying! I had to eat garbage all through the day. They (the devils) made me wash in dirty oil, when I wanted clean water.

Then, an angel disguised as a devil had me clean and tidy again. All of a sudden, she came out of her disguise and formed me into an angel again.

Sandra McNeill
P.S. 153, Manhattan

BIRD

I wish I had a bird that sang to me everyday and said hello to me when I came home. □

Trina Jenkins
P.S. 153, Manhattan

Contributors' Notes

KATE AUSTIN is dancer-in-residence in Quincy, Mass. where she teaches drama and dance in the public schools. She is interested in establishing a sense of community in and out of the classroom through movement and drama.

BILL BERNHARDT teaches reading and writing and coordinates the Developmental English program at Staten Island Community College. He is the author of *Just Writing* (Teachers & Writers, 1977).

JOY (CLAIRE) CALHOUN was born in New York City and grew up in Connecticut. She has worked as a lab assistant, clerk, waitress, secretary. She was a steward for the United Rubber Workers when she worked in a rubber plant, and for the United Steel Workers when she worked in a fabricating plant. She has taught junior high school and high school in New Jersey and Illinois. She lives in a town west of Chicago with her husband, son and cat. She is presently working on her second novel and trying to find a publisher for the first.

DAN CHEIFETZ is the author of *Theater in My Head* (Little, Brown), about children's improvisational theatre. He has led Teachers & Writers workshops in creative dramatics and related arts in Harlem and Queens public schools and has trained teachers to use creative techniques in the classroom at CCNY, Lehman College and at several public and private schools.

DEANNA MORSE studied filmmaking at Iowa State University. She received her Masters in film and teaching from Goddard College. She has worked professionally at WGBH Boston, the Virginia State Department of Education, as well as for numerous commercial film companies. For the past three years, she has been a filmmaker with the South Carolina Arts Commission. She has personally produced a number of short animated films.

BART SCHNEIDER teaches in a Title IV C project, Expressive Writing in the Schools, in Fairfax, California. His poems and stories have appeared in many magazines. He lives in San Francisco.

JUDITH STEINBERGH is poet-in-residence in the Bessie Buker School, Wenham, Mass., where she is working with teachers, administrators, and other artists to integrate the arts into the curriculum. She has published a book of poems for children, *Marshmallow Worlds,* and co-edits a poetry newspaper, *Grist.*

MEREDITH SUE WILLIS spent twenty years in West Virginia and has now completed another ten in New York. Her fiction has appeared in publications such as *Story Quarterly, The Little Magazine, Commentary* and *Mademoiselle.* Her novel, *A Space Apart,* will be published by Scribner in the spring of '79.

ALAN ZIEGLER coordinates the Writers-in-Lynbrook program in the Lynbrook (Long Island) school district and teaches writing workshops in two schools in New York City; he is in his fifth year with Teachers & Writers Collaborative. His poetry and prose have appeared in numerous publications, including *Paris Review* and *The Village Voice,* and he is co-editor of *Some* magazine & Release Press. *Almost Grown,* which includes poems by teenagers in his workshops accompanying photographs of teenagers by Joseph Szabo, is published by Harmony Books.

Staff

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Teachers & Writers Publications

THE WHOLE WORD CATALOGUE (72 pages) is a practical collection of assignments for stimulating student writing, designed for both elementary and secondary students. Activities designed as catalysts for classroom exercises include: personal writing, collective novels, diagram stories, fables, spoofs and parodies, and language games. It also contains an annotated bibliography.

THE WHOLE WORD CATALOGUE 2 edited by Bill Zavatsky and Ron Padgett (350 pages). A completely new collection of writing and art ideas for the elementary, secondary, and college classroom. Deepens and widens the educational ground broken by our underground best seller, the first *Whole Word Catalogue.*

IMAGINARY WORLDS (110 pages) originated from Richard Murphy's desire to find themes of sufficient breadth and interest to allow sustained, independent writing by students. Children invented their own Utopias of time and place, invented their own religions, new ways of fighting wars, different schools. They produced a great deal of extraordinary writing, much of it reprinted in the book.

A DAY DREAM I HAD AT NIGHT (120 pages) is a collection of oral literature from children who were not learning to read well or write competently or feel any real sense of satisfaction in school. The author, Roger Landrum, working in collaboration with two elementary school teachers, made class readers out of the children's own work.

FIVE TALES OF ADVENTURE (119 pages) is a new collection of short novels written by children at a Manhattan elementary school. The stories cover a wide range of styles and interests—a family mystery, an urban satire, a Himalayan adventure, a sci-fi spoof, and a tale of murder and retribution.

TEACHING AND WRITING POPULAR FICTION: HORROR, ADVENTURE, MYSTERY AND ROMANCE IN THE AMERICAN CLASSROOM by Karen Hubert (236 pages). A new step-by-step guide on using the different literary genres to help students to write, based on the author's intensive workshops conducted for Teachers & Writers in elementary and secondary schools. Ms. Hubert explores the psychological necessities of each genre and discusses the various ways of tailoring each one to individual students. Includes hundreds of "recipes" to be used as story starters, with an anthology of student work to show the exciting results possible.

JUST WRITING by Bill Bernhardt. A book of exercises designed to make the reader aware of all the necessary steps in the writing process. This book can be used as a do-it-yourself writing course. It is also an invaluable resource for writing teachers.

TO DEFEND A FORM by Ardis Kimzey. Tells the inside story of administering a poets-in-the-schools program. It is full of helpful procedures that will insure a smoothly running program. The book also contains many classroom tested ideas to launch kids into poetry writing and an extensive bibliography of poetry anthologies and related material indispensable to anyone who teaches poetry.

BEING WITH CHILDREN, a book by Phillip Lopate, whose articles have appeared regularly in our magazine, is based on his work as project coordinator for Teachers & Writers Collaborative at P.S. 75 in Manhattan. Herb Kohl writes: "There is no other book that I know that combines the personal and the practical so well...." *Being With Children* is published by Doubleday at $7.95. It is available through Teachers & Writers Collaborative for $4.00 Paperback $1.95.

VERMONT DIARY (180 pages) by Marvin Hoffman. A description of an attempt to set up a writing center within a rural elementary school. The book covers a two year period during which the author and several other teachers endeavor to build a unified curriculum based on a language arts approach.

THE POETRY CONNECTION by Nina Nyhart and Kinereth Gensler. This is a collection of adult and children's poetry with strategies to get students writing, an invaluable aid in the planning and execution of any poetry lesson.

TEACHERS & WRITERS Magazine, issued three times a year, draws together the experience and ideas of the writers and other artists who conduct T & W workshops in schools and community groups. A typical issue contains excerpts from the detailed work diaries and articles of the artists, along with the works of the students and outside contributions.

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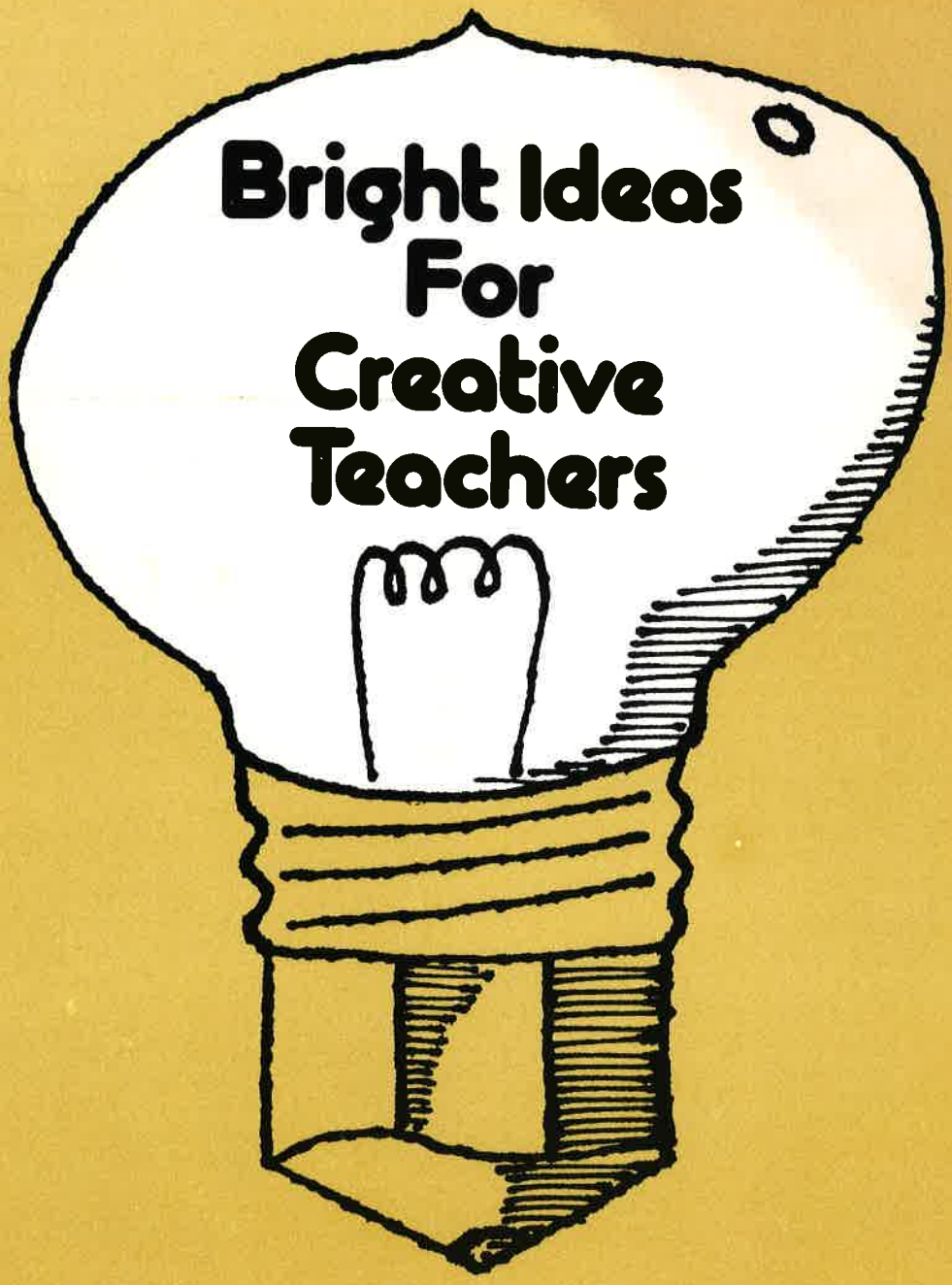

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