

teachers & writers collaborative
newsletter
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Some Personal Scenes Ron Padgett
Notes on "Writing-Through-Photographs" . . . Bill Zavatsky
Diaries Bob Sievert
Third Class Marc Kaminsky
How to Make Videotapes When You Don't Know the
First Thing About It Phillip Lopate
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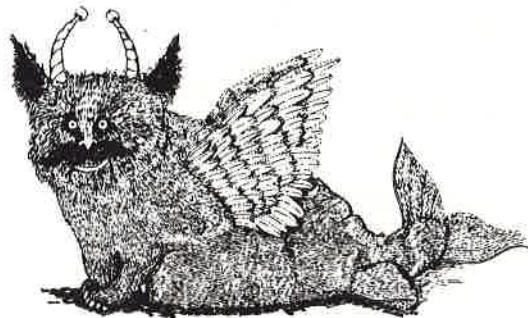
OUTSIDE CONTRIBUTIONS

- Creative Writing with Severely Handicapped
Children Barbara Merkel
The Farm School. Janice Turnansky
Letter from Madeline Bass
Writing in First Grade Anne Martin
The Classes of David Shapiro
the things that hang Hector Rivera

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edited by
phillip lopate



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EDITOR'S NOTE

We used to have a section in the Teachers & Writers Newsletter called "Failures." Refreshing as this was in a time when most classroom accounts read like rosy press releases, it now seems arbitrary. Who can isolate failures from successes? One is constantly growing out of or into the other. And many school experiences (in the hallways, say) qualify as neither success nor failure, but something more perplexing: "just life," the daily round.

In this issue we try to present a more accurate dynamic of the incessant pulsation between ups and downs, euphoria and crankiness, energy and exhaustion in the American classroom. There are new writing techniques to use in classes, as before--but no ideas divorced from their setting and egos. If the magazine may be harder to skim for ideas to bring in the next day, it's not our intention to frustrate the teacher in his desire for teachable suggestions, but simply to show how good writing ideas emerge from flesh-and-blood encounters. Hence the favoring of diaries, a somewhat refractory way of getting at "the kernel of the lesson," but one that sweeps in the flow of personalities and subjective impressions from all directions. "The value of the diary," notes Marc Kaminsky, "is that it allows its reader to find a way into a life, which he can recognize and use in his life. Brilliances of assignment won't do it. They are too quick to become a new, frozen form of authority. The diary throws everything off balance and lets the new thing come in."

* * * * *

This issue also reflects specific trends in the organization, which we feel might be interesting to share with readers. Teachers & Writers has been going through a period of experiment. This experiment can best be summarized as giving selective support to certain tendencies:

1. Individual involvement: Writers are spending more days in the school, attending faculty and parent meetings, and taking some responsibility for the host school's survival and improvement. The era of the butterfly poet, "likeable but elusive," is coming to an end. Whether this is an inevitable reaction to the artificial strain of being a visiting celebrity-specialist, or an impatience with the ghettoizing of "creative writing," the new writer-teacher tends to be more aware of the school as a social organism, and to sink deeper roots in it.
2. Teams: Teams have been set up to concentrate numbers of writers and artists in one school. A team, working together, can make a broader impact on the school as a whole, and do large-energy projects like school magazines, multi-media shows and teacher workshops. The team should also

allow for more exchange of ideas, better political support, and plain mutual morale-boosting. Whether it always works out that way is another story.

3. Collaborations with other arts: There have been systematic attempts to connect writing with other arts--music, painting, filmmaking, theatre, dance. Writers have been trying to reach children who are writing-shy by finding ways to extend verbal expression from the page to other media-- which sometimes means the writer learning the new skill, or working with the specialty teacher in his school or with another artist. This year Teachers & Writers is also sponsoring a printing workshop where children at P.S. 3 are learning to print broadsides of poems and other material.

4. Publications: In addition to the Newsletters, school magazines have sprouted up in nearly every school where Teachers & Writers works. We have also started a project to print limited editions of books by individual children who have written long fiction or collections of poetry.

5. Personnel: We have fired all the people who couldn't go along with numbers 1, 2, 3 & 4.

We have a lot of joy doing this, and we hope some of this gets across to the reader and helps him in his work.

P. L.

[Karen Hubert worked in the P.S. 75 project with a traditional fourth grade class and a sixth grade open classroom. She came into the fourth grade class and taught the entire room at once. With the sixth graders, she took smaller groups out of the class into the Writing Room. It's interesting to catch in these diaries the subtle adaptations that both situations required.]

* * * * *

I knew today would be a wonderful day. This was the first time I hadn't replaced sleep with anxiety on The-Big-Night-Before-Work.

I had Miss Rodgers' 6th graders first. As it turned out, Sue (Willis) needed to use part of the writing room, so we went to the back and formed a small circle, quite personal and close. We began talking about how one action can lead to a series of many others. How a story can take surprising twists in many different directions and that one single story is often made by choosing one possibility out of many. We began with imagining a character or thing in a situation of conflict.

Gina's: Hubert received a draft notice.

David's: Sue is in the bathtub.

Nayland's: Irving was getting out of prison in 15 days and it wasn't too soon. He had been arrested for juggling the books of his snowshoe business. All of a sudden he was approached by Masher Sheinbaum who informed him about a plan for a break.

Sue's: Laurie was in an orphanage, and was about to get adopted by some mean people.

Then we gave the character two possible ways of acting or being acted upon in this situation.

Gina's: 1. Hubert was a strong young American who was willing to fight.
2. Hubert was scared to get into the army and hated America.

David's: 1. Sue could drown.
2. Sue could get out and dry.

Nayland's: 1. Will Irving go along?
2. Will Irving tell the warden?

Sue's: 1. Laura will run away.
2. Let the people adopt her and then run away.

Expand each possibility as long as your interest lasts in it and end with two new possibilities, I told them. Abby, who is usually uninterested and lethargic, caught the idea and wrote. Zaires, a very quiet, shy little girl, agreed to verbalize if I wrote it down for her. This was her first creation in writing class:

A girl graduates school. 1) She goes to a ranch because she loves wild horses but falls into a pig pen and swallows mud and slop. Or 2) She doesn't graduate and becomes a nun or a bus driver for nuns, and then dies.

I was fascinated by the conflict between dirty and wild horses vs. religion. When Zaires began talking about nuns, I placed her in a habit and it seemed to fit.

They began to read theirs to one another... I teased them about the fact that they all killed off their characters in their final possibilities. They reasoned that had they not killed off their characters, their stories might never end.

Irving was getting out of prison in 15 days, and it wasn't too soon. He had been arrested for juggling the books of his snowshoe business. All of a sudden he was approached by Masher Scheinbaum who informed him about plans for a break. Will Irving

- 1) go along
- 2) figure that he has such a short time left, that he'll tell Scheinbaum to get out
- 3) tell the warden

1) Irving agreed and slowly walked off with Masher. After a while, he was supplied with a spear. He ran down the corridor with it down his pants leg. He suddenly tripped and the spear thrust up into his stomach. He slowly toppled over and died.

2) Irving murmured "very interesting," and slowly started down the hall. He was ushered back into his cell at the next clang of the bell. When he next woke up the break was

already started. His door was open and he wandered out into the tear gas filled corridor. All of a sudden, a burst of machine gun fire cut across his side as he toppled forward and died.

3) He rushed into the warden's office and told him all about it. When he got outside a spear hit him in the stomach and he toppled forward and died.

Nayland Blake

Sue is in the bathtub.

- 1) She could drown
- 2) She could get out and dry

1) She's laying there. Her mother and father walk in and pump the water out of her. The next day she is buried.

- 3) She could come alive again
- 4) She could rot and turn to bones

2) She would stand up, get out, put the towel over her and rub herself dry.

- 5) She could get towel cloth all over her
- 6) She could get an infection from rubbing too hard.

3) The next day she would dig herself out of the coffin, and out of the ground, go to her mother and be alive again.

- 7) She could get hit by a car while going home
- 8) She could make it home safely and her mother would scream.

4) She would rot in a few days, her bones would lie there like only her bones were buried.

- 9) Archaeologists could find them and they would be a great help to history
- 10) They could stay there and the worms would chew them. Then they would all be gone.

David Rebhun

Hubert received a draft notice. He was

- 1) A strong American who was willing to fight.
 - 2) Scared to go into the army and hated America.
- 1) Hubert rode to his draft board proud and
 - 3) did not pass his physical
 - 4) passed his physical
 - 2) Hubert was worried to go
 - 5) so he burned his draft notice and became a conscientious objector
 - 6) but he went anyway and passed his physical
 - 3) Hubert's pride was hurt and disgraced.
 - 7) But he pulled himself together and became an ALL AMERICAN CONSTRUCTION MAN.
 - 8) So he became a rebel.
 - 4) Hubert loved army life but when he saw someone spit on the flag he died of disgust.
 - 5) Hubert went to court and did not have to go to the army on the basis of him being a conscientious objector.
 - 6) Hubert was captured by the enemies and told them all he knew. Then he was killed.
 - 7) Yes, Hubert was there when all those good American construction workers rioted those radical students. He was hit over the head with a wrench. He did not die but he became a radical.
 - 8) Yes, Hubert was there when all those nasty American construction workers were there. He got hit over the head with a wrench and became a construction worker.

Gina Demetrius

* * * * *

Details

Along with the possibilities in writing came the idea of details, the many ~~many~~ details possible in telling a story and the choice of them. Today we ~~worked~~ on a description of a man's face, together, verbally, and then 6th ~~graders~~ were asked to create their own idea of a description or story, using ~~details~~. Many of the kids saw it in terms of size, the more detailed, the ~~smaller~~ the object being described gets. A few were more generally expansive. I plan to continue with this project of "listing detail" and then choose ~~out of the list~~ those details one wishes to keep in order to make a special effect. I will probably use some literary examples to give them a stronger ~~idea~~.

The Hotel Room

In a certain hotel room, 209 to be exact, two people were moving in. When they opened the door they shuddered with disgust. There on the wall just barely hanging was a lamp light with a dim light which cast just enough light to put the room in an eerie spirit. The shade was tattered on one side, and had a huge coffee stain on the other. The striped wall paper which was supposed to cover the wall was coming off in strips. The stuffing of the couch was coming out, and where it was not, springs were breaking through the upholstery. The window was streaked with an egg and some other unpleasant stuff. Brawled out on the floor were newspapers, evidently left from the last people that were there. The newlyweds ran down the stairs and left.

Gina Demetrius

1. Gina has dirt in her hand. It's brown dirt.
2. Mommy tells Gina to throw it in the wastecan.
3. Gina walks to the wastecan. The wastecan is half full.
4. Gina looks in and says "yuk" and sees some mold on some bread. The mold is purple.
5. There is hair on the mold. Pink hairs.
6. On the hair is lice. The lice is orange.

7. Gina keeps looking at it. Her eyes are suspicious.
8. Finally, Gina says, "He-Hello" and the purple mold with the pink hair and the orange lice just sits there in the electric blue garbage can.
9. Then Gina gives up and looks at something else.
10. She looks at some orange peels. The orange peels are brown. They smell like rotten apples.
11. On the peel there is an ant. The ant is sick. The ant has a wart on its nose.
12. On the wart there is a amoeba, and then the amoeba died because the ant bit the amoeba on the brown and smelly orange peel in the garbage can with the purple mold and the pink hair and the orange lice that Gina was looking at with the brown dirt in her hand.

David Rebhun

* * * * *

Total Disaster

My project for the 4th grade class was more or less a Flop. The idea was for the kids to make up their own writing titles, to be their own teachers so to speak, put them into an envelope and pick someone else's title, then write. I realized afterwards that it should have been "ask a question" rather than "make up a title," since they would have understood the funny possibilities of a question... They balked not only in the writing of titles; not one of them liked the title they picked out. A calamity! Thirty children grumbling, bored, and annoyed with the creative writing project, and teacher. Push ahead, I told myself, even though I was up to my knees in total disaster and sinking fast, Push ahead! No wonder they wanted to put theirs back and pick another one. We spanned from the most anally absurd to the most boringly real, from "My Best Friend the Toilet Bowl" to "My Dog." And a few were gathered from their TV sets and comic books. "The Cat Who Played Baseball" Wonerful Wonerful...

Naturally I thought about all this and discussed it over lunch with Mr. Orange. I felt that some of the failure came from the fact that they expect a creative writing teacher to visit them once a week and bring them a starting point for their own creativity. As soon as they themselves became their pool of ideas,

they did not trust one another's imaginations and resented, perhaps, the use of internal (classroom) resources rather than the external (me). From elementary to high school, they will be for the most part using as initial starting points someone else's ideas, yet expanding and filling them up with their own ideas. The framework, or even the spark is so often external, while the proof of their ability to create is always in what follows. I don't mind being the "teacher," the one with the ideas. That's what I am here for and it is a glamorous spot, standing up there, everybody looking at you. But I would like to use their ideas, and always try to find some activity--like the emptying of a desk or the silent deciphering of a book without words--an activity they can experience themselves so that they begin to form their own ideas and imaginings before I "bring in the title."

Phil suggested to me that I try to use the two qualities of my own work, my streak of perversity, and my feeling for familial ties. I am still thinking about how to incorporate these.

* * * * *

March 2. I walked into Miss Rodgers' class to gather my flock(?) and found them crowded around a small flying saucer shaped incubator, inside of which an electric bulb was shining on two fertilized chicken eggs. All eyes were on the cracking shells and on the little feathery bugs that were pushing their way out. A miracle, I thought, life, terrific! AND IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL! Wonderful. And inwardly I glorified the school system some more, wiped tears away from my eyes after considering my own elementary school disaster, but then as I turned slightly to my left, inches away from the incubator, I noticed a very large cardboard box (referred to by the kids as the "Coke Box") and looked in. To my amazement and horror there at 9 am with no sign of breakfast in my belly I saw this neat heap of dead chicks, the ones that never made it out, still squashed into their coffin shells which, whenever a kid banged the box with his elbow, jiggled and rolled around. I was willing to stay in the room and watch and talk, but then David said "I want to get out of here. Let's go to writing." So, along with David the rest of the usual 9 or 10 pulled themselves away from life and death in the American classroom and went to the writing room. After some initial talking (TV, TV stars and chickens) we began.

I feel a lot of warmth for these kids. I am always amazed at how integrated they seem as a group, how their own separatenesses (their different personalities and perspectives) almost seem to demand a certain tolerance from

and for each other. For instance, Beth S. didn't want to write, she was more engrossed in a fiction book on horses. At one point when we were all writing she gave a loud sigh. I asked her about it and she said that the horse was sick and "they" were deciding whether or not to put it to sleep. Nayland looked up and said very seriously, but without teasing or taking away from Beth's experience, "Those damn horse stories. They're always sad. The horses are always getting sick and dying. I can't read them."

* * * * *

Make Evil, Not Love

March 16

I tried a new approach with the kids. It's called, giving them a title... However, I surrendered with my flag waving above my head, rather than wagging behind me. (Remember the girl who was opposed to titles, circa January 1972? Same girl, new idea, I mean new approach...) WHAT IF YOU LOVED SOMEONE OR SOMETHING THAT COULDN'T OR WOULDN'T BE LOVED? That was the question... I'm not certain how I came to think of it. There have been no unrequited affairs in my love life of late... And I was, as far as I can remember, on basic-decent terms with my parents, friends, and cat... Let's just say something about the innate frustration implicit in that question had struck me. What I want to record here is what can happen to the idea that you "bring in" as soon as it hits the classroom.

The sixth graders didn't like the question at all. I suppose that what I had in mind was the exploration and description of a negative hostile person who gave off the sense that "he didn't want to be loved." In discussing the "question", Robert and Julie said that if you loved such a person, then he could be loved and then the rest of the group pretty much dismissed the idea as not making much sense. I brought up the idea of love being mutual love. No dice. I was seriously, and embarrassedly, reconsidering my logic, when I noticed something. They were all very, very uncomfortable with that word Love, and wanted to get rid of it as soon as they could, but also wanted to tease one another with it. Gina asked Nayland why he loved Nina (someone in another class, I think) and Nayland didn't look all that comfortable about answering. It was as if I had unleashed this new kind of weapon.

So, I changed the idea. What were some of the things they loved? Answers: pizza, coke, hot dogs, movies, television, etc. Okay, okay kids, (got cha dis time, ho ho) WHAT IF IT LOVED YOU BACK? (ho ho) All I got was a lot of reluctance and not much interest. They just were not into writing about that stuff because they weren't able to put their imaginations into it.

So, I stopped pushing it. Not every day is a golden success, my grandmother must have told me that...

Then I said, What if I had asked, "What if someone had you in his POWER?" (I pronounced power as Bela Lugosi might have, and stuck out my arms like a zombie.) Now they were interested.

What I have Learned

1. Stay away from sexy stuff, like love, it comes too close
2. Make evil, not love.
3. Power may be more interesting than you-know-what.
4. And more inspiring.

In fact, it was so inspiring, that they decided to make a movie in their class, a horror movie all about Powerful Creatures and the holds they have over one another. Boogie Boogie Boogie.....

With the fourth grade, I tried an initial discussion about things they liked and loved. Favorite clothes, food, places, etc. We compiled a big list. Then I made the switch, WHAT IF IT TURNED AROUND AND LOVED YOU BACK? They saw the humor in it and wanted to write. It was terrific. Every one of those kids responded to the idea, and everyone wrote. For some of them, it was the first piece they had done since I had come in January. I was very pleased because they were so turned on. I felt that I had succeeded with the whole class, and I wished I knew my secret...

March 29

It was the first day of vacation, which, I suppose, is as loaded with tension and as full of hope to a class as the night before Xmas is to all the kids lying sleepless in bed, waiting, waiting, waiting...

Although a vacation story (How did you, won't you, will you, do you plan to spend your vacation) is probably the obvious and too obvious thing to do, I did it.

Why?

Well, I walked into the room, and I could practically smell vacation. In their little eyes little V's were lining up like on a cash register. Bunnies and matzohs were filling up the air. And Mr. Orange was having his blackboard not just washed, but scrubbed shiny-penny clean by the biggest galoots in the class, you know, the ones who can reach from top to bottom in one

straight stroke, without leaving any streaks...

So of course it had to be a vacation story. But not just any vacation. Naturally it would have to be a vacation you couldn't have. And why couldn't you have it? Right, because HE or SHE, the all-powerful one in your imagination and life, WON'T LET YOU GO.

I did a very dramatic presentation, with ghoulish laughs and cruel eyes shifting from left to right. I offered myself as the prototype adult, although they could use any powerfully endowed, or magically omnipotent character they could think of, and this character they would have to convince, in some way, into letting them have a vacation.

An array of anger, an absolute feast of tortures, miseries and curses followed in their writing. A regular 100 per cent response. They sent HE or SHE everywhere, killed him or seduced him with kindness and good food.

The sixth graders decided that they were only coming into the room to talk, not to write, another consequence of the vacation. Most of them were girls and we sat in a circle and I listened to them discuss various methods for giving up cigarettes (methods all belonging to mothers and fathers) and for dieting. Julie got so excited that she unwrapped her BLT and ate her lunch right there on the spot. Women's Lib came up, brought up by them, and I mentioned that lots of WL's thought that women shouldn't be pressured to diet. This made absolutely no sense to them, they asked me to explain, I tried something along the lines of accepting your body as yours, etc. I keep seeing Abby's chubby face and her mouthful of braces opening into a kind of gape, then her saying "That's stupid." Anyway, although I have no specific predilection for these mini-consciousness raising groups, it was interesting to hear 12 year olds expressing similar attitudes to women 10 to 50 years older than themselves, and of course that includes me, too.

April 20th - Last week Ellen (4th grade) wrote a Sisyphus myth, of a torture that never ended. It simply came out of her naturally, and I really liked what she had done. So I decided to explain the Sisyphus myth to the whole class, and I had them each write a never ending, repetitive torture. They loved it.

April 26th - I told the 4th grade an embarrassing story, a true one that was really embarrassing for me to tell. One about a recent visit from a friend whom I have known since childhood, who came to visit me and wore a pair of awful smelling sneakers. I asked them whether they would have said anything to him or not, or how else they might have responded. Also I asked for their embarrassing stories, real or imagined. I hoped that I wouldn't get a lot of toilet stuff, but I was curious enough to take the chance. We discussed it for a long while, then began to write. Nice results.

And something else... Raphael showed me his new catchers mitt that he carries to school and keeps inside a plastic bag...

I would send you up Mt. Everest. You would climb and climb. You would be so tired. Up, up, up. But you just can't make it. But still the people start screaming at you "Go on, you make us work, now we are making you work!" But you can't make it. When you just fall down into the ice and rock. When suddenly you are being dragged. You suddenly feel very cold. We made it to the top they scream. But just when you are going to rest, they say "Time to go down." Ohhhh! you sigh and down down down you go. When you suddenly wake up in a bed. Many people are looking at you, many who work for you. You mutter some words. Everybody starts covering their mouths. They run out of the hospital and start screaming. And that's why people have vacations.

Ellen Feldman

I am going to torture my brother. I will put him in a room with knives sticking out. Right behind him is a big cake. If he moves, he gets scratched.

Jonathan Friedman

I have a pair of Ice Skates, that I love so much that one day when I was skating, I said to myself, boy, I love these skates. Then my skates started to love me back. I was hopeless. My skates stuck with me everywhere. They ate with me, slept with me, and made me go anywhere they went. They made me skate every day to make me like them better, but instead I hated them. Then one night when the skates were asleep and I was awake, I untied the shoe laces and the skates slipped off my feet. I was rejoiced, but before I could celebrate, I had to show my revenge. Then, I took my knife and killed them. I was free, FREE! The next day I threw a party. It was great, and I was free.

Matthew Goodwin

* * * * *

Videotape and the Dating Game

The sixth graders had finished their movie and Margaret Rodgers whom I like very much told me that her kids were working on plays, particularly Nayland who it seems was turning out page after page of looseleaf drama. I suggested the idea of using video with the kids and she was excited, so were the kids.

The kids didn't seem to want to improvise a play, they wanted to improvise television games. The Dating Game and the Newlywed Game. Nayland emceed it (a role, as it turns out, which comes to mean controller, writer, director of everything) and it was just remarkably funny. They were so beautiful. . . Long legged Gina, acting tomboyish to fill her "role" as an athletic girl. Chubby Beth who squirmed and giggled acting out her version of a sex kitten (her word). And Beth S. who pursed her lips and squeaked like a rusty introvert, a knitter of scarves and mittens. They were interviewed by David, small and skinny, who asked the same question 3 times and made the same slip each time: "What would you do numbers 1, 2, and 3 if you saw me with another man" (the correction was woman). David chose the least threatening female of the panel, tall gawky Gina who portrayed her role perfectly by collecting him as she might any trophy and carrying him offstage.

In the Newlywed Game Jeanne (the only black girl in this group) was "married" to Nayland, who put his arm around her. She was, I think, very pleased to have such a real simulation of affection happen. Her face had a kind of amazed distrust that loved every minute of it.

Nayland did an interesting thing. His conception of the husband was one of regression. Soon into the game he stuck his thumb into his mouth. During the game he baby-talked his answers and finally at the end he acted out a temper tantrum, in keeping with the character he played (who was disappointed at having given the wrong answer).

April 20th. Gina became the emcee in the Newlywed Game and turned the show into a realistic one, and it lost through a few rehearsals its fun and humor and of course its entire spontaneity. A conflict arose between Nayland's imaginative, satiric view and Gina's thoughtfully realistic one of making it look the way the "real thing" looked. We decided in the end not to videotape it but to start fresh on something else.

April 26th. I used the video for the first time with the kids. The damn pack was so heavy that it made me nauseous. Miss Rodgers' kids played around with it, aiming the camera at each other. Dialogues such as:

"Pardon me, Miss, but what is your favorite word?"

"Shut up."

"What word?"

"Shut up. Shut up is my favorite word."

~~The~~ JT and I decided to go out into the street and interview people. The ~~was~~ seemed interested and happy about aiming the camera away from themselves for a while. They asked some good questions about overpopulation, ~~None~~, the X ratings on movies, marriage and jobs, and the people answered ~~voluntarily~~. If they didn't like a response they disagreed with the interviewee ~~and~~ so when we came to two policemen, I held my breath.

~~We~~ returned to the classroom, showed the tape, and the rest of the class ~~recorded~~ they wanted to work with it too.

[Miguel Ortiz has been working for the last year at Joan of Arc Mini-School, a small storefront junior high school which is one of the experiments sanctioned and funded by the New York Board of Education. Though his original job was simply as visiting writing teacher for Teachers & Writers at Joan of Arc, he became so involved in the setting up of the school that he spent every day there tutoring, laying floors, going to staff meetings. He now teaches a course in storefront school maintenance as well as writing.

During this time Miguel's classes were observed by Frances Schwartz, an anthropologist specializing in education. We are very grateful to Ms. Schwartz for allowing us to reprint some of her field notes, which give a vision of the movement and feel of the classes as nothing else could. These notes document the special difficulties of teaching writing in an alternative junior high school, from the rare perspective of someone who is not the teacher-writer. Ms. Schwartz commented: "Miguel seemed to allow all the distractions and gossip to come out at the beginning instead of trying to impose a formal lesson. I think it was the right approach to take with these kids, especially in a class like creative writing, because after a few months they had gotten most of the horseplay out of their system and had come to respect Miguel's steady seriousness about writing, to enjoy expressing themselves, and to write tremendous amounts."]

First Class - Sept. 30

1:10 - Benjamin pushes table.

Rachel: Stop.

Benjamin: Go.

Yvonne: Come on, shut up.

Miguel: I want you to keep a journal. And write every week.

Benjamin: Write what every week?

Miguel: If you write poetry then write poetry.

Benjamin: I write songs.

Yvonne: Oh sure. (She laughs.) Some people josh all the time.

Three **Spanish** girls come in and sit at the end of the table... a few seats removed **from** the others.

Yvonne: Come on you guys settle down.

Benjamin: Guys?

Yvonne: You've seen one nigger you've seen 'em all. Seen one PR seen them all.

One of **the** Spanish girls has her head down on the table.

Miguel: Yvonne brought something in that she wants to read.

Benjamin: Oh no.

Yvonne: If you laugh I'll smack the shit out of you.

Carol, **the** interviewer, comes in and starts talking to one of the girls. Another **boy** comes in and starts talking to Benjamin. Miguel tells them to get out **if** they are not in the class.

Yvonne: (reads) This is called 'So this is revolution'.

Benjamin: (laughing)

Yvonne: What you all waiting for Benjamin shut up.

(The **poem** has many anti-semitic aspects. Talks about killing Jews and Jew boys with little hats on ... It makes me squirm.)

Rachel: Can I copy that?

Yvonne: No.

Rachel: I'm not going to do anything with it.

Miguel asks her how she starts to write. Says he wants to know because people **have** trouble getting started.

Miguel: How many people have trouble?

Benjamin: Usually there's something in the back of my head. The urge to do something.

Yvonne: Reason I wrote this I looked out of my window and saw little Jew boys with caps on their heads going to wherever they go for Yom Kippur. I thought about it and it looked funny.

Miguel: Lots of times you wait for things to happen. (To the 3 Spanish girls) Is there something the matter back there? You seem dissatisfied.

Girl 1: I ain't talking. Well I got nothing to say.

Miguel: You don't want to be in this class?

Girl 1: No.

Miguel: Well leave. There is no one forcing you to stay.

Girl 1: I can't, my schedule.

Miguel: Well there is nothing forcing you.

Girl 1: I thought it would be much better. This class is for poems and poetry?

Miguel: Essays and short stories too. What did you think it was going to be?

Girl 1: No other class to take. I had to take it.

Miguel asks the other girl.

Girl 2: I didn't say nothing.

Girl 1: She feels it inside but she won't say it. She's afraid.

Miguel: (asks the third girl) What about you.

Girl 3: No other class to take but this one.

Miguel: We'll try to work something out.

Benjamin puts his rubber band around his head.

Miguel: (to girls) Do you have other classes after this?

Girl 1: Yes.

Miguel: When are you free?

Girl 1: I have Spanish before.

Benjamin: Spanish Harlem. (laughs)

Rachel: Benjamin will you shut up?

Benjamin: She has something she wrote just now.

Rachel: I wrote it before, I'm just writing it down.

She gives it to Miguel and then to Yvonne.

Yvonne: Don't know what it is man.

Miguel takes it. Then Yvonne takes it from him. Yvonne reads it.

Benjamin: That's all? (laughs)

Rachel: Why don't you get out of here?

Miguel: Both poems today deal with specific things about being black.

Yvonne: Benjamin why must you always do this?

Miguel: Oh Ben did you take this class because there was nothing else?

Benjamin: You want me out?

Miguel: No, but I want you to not get in the way of everybody else.

Benjamin: That's how I listen.

The **3** Spanish girls are laughing.

Rachel: I can't talk when people laugh. (to Benjamin) Why don't you grow up?

Yvonne: He's grown up physically but not mentally.

Benjamin: What can I do?

Miguel reads a poem called Gestapo about a Jew's fear about the blacks getting them and being used by Nixon to knock them off.

Miguel: Who do you think the poem was written by?

Yvonne is playing with a little orange rubber ball. She stands up and walks around the room and at one point says Oh no it went down my shirt.

Girl **1** answers Miguel and gives interpretation of the poem.

Miguel: Would you say that this poem is anti-semitic.

Yvonne: No.

Miguel: Would you say that your poem was anti-semitic.

Yvonne: What?

Miguel: Against Jews?

Yvonne: Oh, yes.

Girl 1: Everybody afraid.

Melanie (school director) is at the door.

Miguel: I lost the greater part of my class.

Rachel: They went home.

Melanie: Schedule them out or went home?

Rachel: Susan and Diana and them went home.

Miguel reads a short poem about the Lone Ranger being black, not Tonto.

Jimmy: I know what he means. First saying black comes from Indian, now he's taking over, powerful.

Benjamin: Most blacks are part Indian.

Yvonne: I'm no Indian.

Rachel: Susan is.

Yvonne: I want to see her certificate.

Yvonne: About what time it is. (to Miguel) You said quarter to 2. That is it, I know I'm right.

* * * * *

October 14

Kids are sitting like this:

Mildred Yvonne Susan Diana
4 Spanish girls Linda 2
in red coats
Benjamin Miguel

Yvonne **is** smoking. She tells me not to write it down. If I write it down she says **that** she will get into trouble. Then she says that they are allowed to smoke, **that** some woman (Margo) smoked in there and didn't say nothing.

Yvonne: Benj really honey shut your mouth up for good.

Diana: Come on he wants to teach.

Yvonne: He can't teach you how to write. He said it.

Mildred **makes** a noise.

Yvonne: Mildred cut that out, you're america's no. 1 sexy.

Jimmy **comes** in and sits down next to Linda 2

DB **is at** the door.

Yvonne: (before he has said anything) Margo smoked here yesterday.

DB: Can I speak to you Yvonne.

Miguel **(to Benjamin)**: Do you want to start?

Diana **and** Susan get up and go over to Miguel and ask him for their books.

Diana: This is my favorite but don't read it to the class.

Susan: Yvonne settle down.

Mildred moves next to Diana.

Benjamin reads his poem. It is a fantasy type thing about a woman sleeping. The **last** line is Get up my pet, We have to go and pick up the Welfare check.

Everyone in the class laughs for quite a while.

Yvonne: (gets up and goes over to Benjamin) I got to give it you, that was really groovy.

Susan: Come on it wasn't that funny.

Linda 2 is reading a book. She doesn't talk at all.

Miguel: (to Benjamin) Did you intend it to be funny?

Susan: It sounded like a great love poem till the end.

Mildred: It was catchy.

Miguel: It was fantasy.

Yvonne: But when you're in love you can't see him.

Susan: When in love he's an angel after you see all the devilment he's full of.

Miguel: I know what you mean and no one knows that more than I do.

Benjamin: Oh spare me!

Three Spanish girls are giggling, two of them are crocheting.

Susan says something about the poem.

Yvonne: Susan please.

Susan reads her poems. She introduces them telling what they are about, which boy they were written to etc.

Miguel: Use when you write the same language as when you talk.

Mildred: Let her read her poem.

Susan: (reads another love poem) This I wrote for someone I liked very much.

Yvonne: (laughs when she finishes) Oh thank you Susan.

Miguel: Were you here last week or were you absent.

Jimmy: She cut like always.

Susan: This poem was written last May.

Benjamin: She wrote that to Maurice.

Susan: This was written to a boy I liked.

Jimmy: What ever happened to Danny?

Yvonne: It goes very nice.

Susan **offers** to read all of her poems from her notebook.

Diana **mouths** one poem with her as she reads it as though she has memorized it.

Susan: This one is for Danny.

Diana: MY Danny.

Then **she** introduces another one.

Susan: A long time ago Diana liked a boy named Albert. This is about him.

Miguel **asks** her what other poets she reads.

Susan: Don't read poetry, it just come to me and I have to write them down.

Miguel: Well how do you get the idea of what a poem is like?

Mildred and Diana won't read their poems out loud. Diana gives her book to Yvonne **but** she won't let her read it.

The **Spanish** girls are talking among themselves and one of them holds up her crocheting to measure it against herself. They are combing each other's hair **too**.

Miguel: I don't mind if you knit, but you have to be quiet.

Jimmy is reading something. Mildred is combing her hair. She goes out to the bathroom and comes back.

Yvonne: I can't write a love poem, I don't know what love is.

Diana **moves** to Yvonne's couch. Susan asks her why she moved and then moves **herself**.

Susan **gets** up, walks over to a side table. She turns on the light, takes a pamphlet that is there, and returns to her seat.

Jimmy: (to Mildred) You know my name don't you?

Mildred: No.

Jimmy **gives** her a pencil (which presumably she's asked for).

Susan **is** telling that her mother found out that she was reading The Sensuous Woman and she got into trouble with her.

Then she says to Yvonne: Me and Diana are women in love.

Susan asks Miguel how to pronounce Palma. It's Jimmy's last name.

Jimmy: You won a \$1,000. What if someone turns you down. Why not talk about getting thrown down.

Yvonne: Man I've been rejected.

Jimmy has an interchange with Susan about being rejected. She goes over and sits near him.

Susan: Oh you're talking about Danny. I don't ever want to discuss it never.

Yvonne: Diana wrote something touching.

Melanie comes to the door, Benjamin leaves.

Janice is outside of the room. Mildred and Susan go out.

Susan (comes back): Please leave this room in decent condition so Miss Goldstick doesn't have to clean it up.

Yvonne asks one of Spanish girls to see what she is crocheting. Then she says: Oh it's coming beautiful.

Yvonne: (to Miguel) You ain't got no good street poems.

Yvonne says she's going to go see Melanie. She leaves and then comes back.

Miguel: (Sonia's a name in a poem that he reads) Sonia is the name of one of the Spanish girls...the one who was outspoken the last time.

Yvonne: Who's Sonia? (The girls point to her) ...Hi Sonia.

Mildred has come back to the room and is not talking to anyone as the class breaks up.

Susan: (to Diana) What's wrong with Mildred?

Diana: I don't know, she won't tell me.

I leave with Miguel. Tells me that he gets paid for this job and likes working at a school like this very much... feels that this was a good class today.

Phony

Some people are honest
Some people are true
Some people smile
A smile that is blue

A blue smile
Can be dangerous
Untruthful and mean
Cos smiling faces
can hurt you

Baby I'm for Real

Do you understand
What love I have for you
Baby please don't go
I want to hold you a little more

Baby, please don't hurt me
Baby, I'm for real
Nothing in our past will change

Don't walk away
Don't turn around
Baby, love me
Baby, I'm for real

Diana Perez

Lovers Plead

Give me yourself for just one hour.
Give me your quivering mouth to kiss.
Let your strong arms hurt me.
I want nothing more from life than this.

Let me feel the sting of your love.
Let your hands fit around me like a glove.
Let our kisses linger forever.
I want nothing more from life than this.

And when we part
remember me in your heart
that our love may be strong.
Because when love is strong
it can't go wrong.

Susan Carr

November 4

Ben, Mildred, Sonia, Jimmy, Elsie, Luz and Diane

Mildred: They're going to be necking in the back. They go out with each other.

Elsie questions Mildred about it.

Mildred: He don't want nobody to know who he goes out with.

Elsie: Novios son Novios.

They use the tape recorder and perform an improvisation.

Mildred: We should have a real good play love scene.

Elsie: OK you two play.

Mildred: Want me to kiss him?

Elsie: Going to be some fainting here.

Miguel: I'm going to whisper to each of you what to do and you won't know what the other one thinks.

Diane: Luz, move back I want to see them.

They are playing out a scene in which Ben is breaking up with Mildred because he's found someone else.

Susan: (comes in) Sorry I didn't know where you were.

Kids hush her. Mildred and Ben performing on the couch; all of the kids, including Susan, who sat down, are watching.

Sonia: Ben talk to her, not the wall.

Benjamin: I would have said, Baby, it's quits.

Mildred: That's right, we say it's quits. That's how we do it.

Susan: Do it the way you quit Danny.

Miguel: OK play it the way it really was.

Mildred and Ben whisper on the side.

Ben: This is indecent.

Yvonne: (comes in) What was this--what was this--What ya doing? A play? (Yvonne stands in the middle) OK Take 2.

Susan: (looks over at Ben and Mildred) That's not how he acted.

Mildred screams.

Debbie: (at door) This what you let go on in your class?

Mildred sees Cynthia (Algebra teacher), runs out, comes back with her. Mildred pulls Chino over, kisses Jimmy on forehead.

Mildred: (about Cynthia) I wanted her to be my guest.

Susan: How about doing a murder scene?

Ben: Hey Miguel I'm nervous.

Miguel: (stops the improv) Neither of you are acting like you really feel.

Yvonne: Never in a situation like that.

Ben: You could smoke in here?

Mildred: That's her rule not the school's.

Yvonne: Shut up Mildred you don't follow rules.

Susan and Yvonne start a play about a junkie asking for stuff. Ben, Jimmy, Susan, Yvonne and Mildred are in the corner creating play.

Miguel: Hey set up one for me and Elsie. I'm going to play one with Elsie.

Yvonne: How about you play an over-protective father who won't let her out on a first date?

It's 2:00. Janice (the teacher of the next class) comes into the room and the group breaks up.

Die Whore Die

"Hey baby, you want to take me out?" Ever hear the nice sweet voice of a whore who would very much like for you to take her to your door. And come in and right away get in the bed and get a play.

"Hey baby you got my money," says the shrewd voice of her pimp. She knows if she don't she will walk with a limp. Or maybe not walk at all. He might throw her up against a wall. Then you hear a voice, "Don't hit me." She cries, tears in her big blue eyes.

"You lie, you petty whore. Lay your ass on the floor. Will you obey me and do what I say, because for this you have to pay."

"Spare me! Spare me! My big time pimp. You're so fine. You're so cute. You know I'll get your loot."

"Fine, fine but when?"

"Today, this will happen never again."

Then the next night you'll see her on the same corner with the same lyrics, "Hey baby want to take me out?"

Benjamin Bell

B. I. Q.

--Hello.

--Hello baby, what's going on in your little old head. Is there something you dread? Come out with it.

--If I do you'll call me a bitch.

--What? Don't say things like that. It's not true. You know I dig you.

--Yes, yes, I know. That's one thing you make sure it shows. But now our courtship is gone. Something has gone wrong.

--No, no it can't be. You know how much I dig you.

--Stop saying that. You make me feel sorry for you.

--Is that all you feel, sorry? Who is it! Who is it! I know it's not Ronnie.

--Ronnie, he's too good for me. He don't even know I exist. How could it be he?

--The way you talk about the guy you might think the Bat Boy could fly.

--I don't think I have anything else to say.

--Listen bitch you better stay. Stay on this phone or you'll wish you never called. Now listen, I want every thing back I gave you, except for the loving and kissing I gave you.

--Oh, please forgive me.

--Good luck.

Benjamin Bell

November 11

Miguel passes out poetry magazine (Hanging Loose) which he says he is one of the editors of and wants the kids to have it as a present. Miguel says that he has an African friend who teaches at a private black school and asks if he can bring his class over.

Yvonne: Sound like a good idea.

Debbie: Are there boys too?

Mildred: Are there boys there?

Debbie: Don't copy what I say.

Linda: (to Ben) Be quiet I can't read this when I hear you all reading out loud.

Miguel: (to Debbie) Were you ever here before?

Debbie: I don't know if I was here. I guess I was.

Miguel: I just want you to put ideas down on paper.

Yvonne: (to Ben) Cut it out.

Miguel: I need two people.

Debbie: Somebody told me that somebody gonna be a prostitute and talk someone into doing it I don't know.

Rachel: I have one.

Yvonne: Come here, is it nasty?

Debbie: By the look on her face you know it's nasty.

Mildred: That sex education course sure doing a lot for her.

Debbie: It do a lot for you. Nothing I didn't know before.

Yvonne: (to Mildred) YOU know what it's about, come here.

Ben: Boys too.

Ben and Mildred on the couch making out. Yvonne comes in as sister. She is calling her sister a whore. They keep laughing as they try to do the play.

Miguel: OK sit down now. I'll play the part.

Mildred: I feel embarrassed.

Kids ask Jimmy to do it. He says no.

Susan: Jimmy act your age.

Jimmy: Not in front of all these people. I do my thing in private you know that.

Susan: I do?

Linda: (to Ben) Be serious for once.

Yvonne and Mildred run into the bathroom laughing, then they try it again.

Linda: Come on Rachel let's do something.

Miguel: How about Sonia?

She refuses.

Susan is reading the newspaper and commenting on it out loud. Mildred comes to the door and is combing her hair. Then she stands and sprays it.

Susan: Do you carry hair spray around with you?

Vanessa comes in.

Mildred: Oh they were nasty Vanessa, they forced me to do a play.

Vanessa: I know they didn't force you.

Robin and Rosalind come in: What you all about in here?

They sit down and are told it is a stage and to move.

Vanessa: Oh OK, stages. (She moves to the couch) I'm going out to get my book.

They develop a scene about waiting in a courtroom. She asks Deb at one point why she is so hostile. One of the girls on the couch says cause she's a nigger and Debbie says that's why. The kids clap when they finish. Miguel goes outside with Ben, Linda and Rachel. Then he takes Yvonne out. They do a skit about Ben being a pimp trying to get her to be a prostitute.

1:45. Janice comes in and sits down on the floor. After the kids tell her she is sitting on the stage she goes over to the couch.

Susan and Yvonne do a skit in which Yvonne is the landlady asking her for money and Susan is an aspiring actress who has none. Vanessa is watching from outside. Robin and Rosalind come in and sit down.

Miguel: It's 2:00, if you want to do more we can or we can break.

No, they say, they want to stay.

Rachel and Miguel go out. They do one about a lady's cat dying and the funeral arrangements.

Debbie says that sometimes she thinks all they want to teach her in this school is sex. Monday she has a vacation, Tuesday health and sex in there, Wednesday Medical Center and Sex Education there, Thursday no, Friday health and sex again. Says at least they give her two days of vacation a week.

Tells Vivian that she's seen her health test and that she doesn't know what she got but she knows she failed.

Vivian: How embarrassing.

I met her at the fountain
on a hot summer night
The minute I saw her I
knew she was right
She was with her friend
in the middle of the crowd
enjoying the sound made
by the bongos, trumpets and mouths
I went over to her and asked her
her name
After a while she asked me my name
I got to know her pretty well.

Jimmy Palma

* * * * *

November 23

Luz

Miguel

Linda

Susan

Yvonne

me

Debbie

Rachel

Diane

Ben reads a poem.

Miguel: Any comments?

Yvonne: Don't like it. Don't understand it.

Linda: End and beginning is too rough.

Ben: Oh indecent.

Janice and Linda come in, sit on the floor, then the couch.

Jimmy P. comes in and sits on the couch between Yvonne and Linda and reads the newspaper.

Miguel: (to Ben) I think there's probably not enough contrast.

Yvonne: Too vague like boom she don't even sound real. Sound like a doll baby.

Yvonne reads a poem about a guy and how he looks and comes.

Rachel: Oh Wowo.

Diane: I told you.

Yvonne: (smiling) Diane I hate you.

Miguel: It's very effective and strong.

Susan: Why?

Miguel: There's something very distinctive about the way Yvonne writes. Yvonne, read it again.

Ben: No.

Yvonne: You read yours nearly three times.

Linda D. comes back into the room with food.

~~Diane~~: It doesn't sound phony.

~~Miguel~~: Lots of details that are real, that made you feel that way.

Susan and Yvonne ask Diane to say her poem. They start to sing it. It's ~~not~~ conceit.

~~Miguel~~ says that he's going to give a lecture about problems of improvisa-
~~ions~~. Refers to Mildred's one.

~~Yvonne~~: Mildred's gone now. No reason to bring up unpleasant memories.

~~Rachel~~ laughs.

~~Linda~~: Where did she go?

~~Miguel~~: Where did she go? Did she elope? What are you talking about?

~~Rachel~~: She's just absent that's all.

~~Yvonne~~: Gone Gone Gone since Friday (laughs)*

~~Diana~~ and Elsie come into the room and hand Miguel a paper they say is
from Mildred.

~~Miguel~~: You all big to think that what's bad to do was to entertain every-
body else. I think the good thing about the good ones was that
they express real feelings. The bad ones show how to be smart,
not how to feel.

~~Yvonne~~: I like to do monologues.

~~Miguel~~: When I read the notebooks I found a lot of good poems. You
wouldn't let me read them aloud because you're afraid of what
the other kids think. You want it to be "bad".

~~Yvonne~~: I think if people don't want things published that's their business.

~~Miguel~~: Look I want you to do a monologue.

~~Yvonne~~: Linda do a good one.

~~Linda~~: I ain't in this class. I'm just watching you all.

~~Ben~~: Can I do one?

~~Yvonne~~: Linda please do one. . . . Let's us do one, let Diana do one. Tell
how you go home and cry like you told me.

* Mildred dropped out of the school for several weeks because of an incident
that hurt her feelings.

Debbie: (to Yvonne) Hush Hush Give your mouth a rest!

Yvonne: Linda, come on Linda.
Guess who's going to be the first one--Mr. Benjamin Bell.

Elsie and Diana look at knitting magazine.

Yvonne: Come on get on with it. Ben do one you did with blood when you're scared.

Victor Allen sits down on stage. Linda and he have an argument; she accuses him of being childish.

Connie goes over to Debbie who has come back into the room.

Debbie: I was just sleeping, all because Lyn had an argument with Chino.

Nancy: (to me) Write it down. 'Crisis of girls with their boyfriends.'

Miguel: Yvonne get out of there.

Linda: She's running her mouth. Sit down and shut up.

Susan and Yvonne are sitting on the floor near Luz.

Susan: Ben kicked my coat.

Rachel: Come on Susan. Damn.

Miguel: 2:00. If anybody has another class go.

Ben: (gets up) I have French.

Miguel: Try to write some stuff.

* * * * *

The Way I Feel

I feel like I'm in a world of my own
I feel like I want to kill myself
My heart is beating so fast
I'm so short of breath

(Why) Is it because everybody hates me
or because they talk about me,
behind my back

The way people look at me
Their eyes tell me something
about myself.

What? I don't know
But believe me it isn't very good

Or is it about a boy
A boy I don't even know that
well. A boy whom I think I love
but not very sure of myself

"Boy" the way the kids tried to make
me understand
They tried to make me feel happy
in school

But no matter what they said,
I'm still in a world of my own

Mildred Diaz

[Ron Padgett, poet, has been working at P.S. 61 in the Lower East Side, Manhattan, for the past four years. P.S. 61 is also where Kenneth Koch did his teaching that led to the book, Wishes, Lies and Dreams. This past year Ron has been casting about for ways to make a more dramatic impact on the school as a whole. His diaries underscore the dilemmas and the possible solutions of a visiting artist working alone in a public school.]

With Miss Pitts' class gone I had the opportunity to visit the Art Teacher. I have been meaning to see her for some time. Her name is Mrs. Kars, a slender and attractive young lady, née Greef. When the kids finally had left we sat down, I introduced myself and gave her a quick rundown of what I have been doing in the school. The reason for my visit, I explained, was to expand my activities in some way, to break out of the classroom situation somehow, but remain in the school. I discussed Event Art a little, and said that while I don't at the moment have any definite ideas, that I'd like to work with her and her kids, or just her, to unite art and poetry in a form that would affect the entire school. For instance, maybe produce a little booklet to give everyone, a Mystery Booklet which would explain nothing, not why it was given out, nothing. I realized that in school everything was supposed to be made clear and explained, that the cultivation of mystery for its sheer fascination was ignored. She seemed to like my ideas and to be sympathetic to me personally. She mentioned how she had wanted to have her kids paint a dreary wall in the playground, but had been refused permission. We discussed this, and Mr. Silverman, and ARTnews, and related things, and then she said that she would be glad to do some joint projects, and I promised to keep in touch . . .

* * * * *

The secretary ushered me into Principal Silverman's office, where he and Mrs. Niebank (Markus' mother) had been having a conversation. She is the head of the PTA. I sat down with them at a table and we talked. I told them that until now I had been working in a private situation: I go into a single class, then into another single class. Now I had some more public ideas, which I presented:

1. Broadcasting over the school PA system
2. Painting the playground wall with words and pictures
3. Handing out mystery leaflets in the halls and classes

I assured them that there would be nothing controversial or inflammatory in any of this. Silverman liked all the ideas and approved wholeheartedly of 2 & 3--much to my surprise--but was hesitant about my grabbing the principal's mike and doing a parody of him. He said I could broadcast into classes where I had worked, but not to the entire school. He didn't want his image marred, an image he carefully built and maintains. I understood. In fact I was grateful for his granting me permission to do anything at all.

* * * * *

Today was great. I woke up with an idea from a dream I had been having, an idea I'll try next time I go to PS 61: I dreamed I was attending classes at Columbia University in Tulsa, Oklahoma (my home town). Columbia (my alma mater) had apparently been transported whole to Tulsa. The displacement reminded me of the Maidenform bra ads, such as "I dreamed I roller-skated down Fifth Avenue in my Maidenform bra."

For today's visit to Miss Pitts' class I followed up on a hint from Wilbert, a round-eyed and round-faced black boy, rather playful and mischievous but also intelligent, though not a flaming genius; last week he had written about kissing in dark corners, and his work had gotten a big response from the class. Today I asked the kids to write about kissing. Anything they wanted. They could write about real people kissing, or about imaginary people kissing, or about animals and plants or things kissing (I gave some extemporaneous examples, such as the clinking of glasses, the sun kissing the sky when it rises, etc.) or just about kissing in general, what it means and how it feels. I had drawn an enormous pair of lips on the board, and placed in front of them, on the chalk rack, a 5 X 7 color photo of Wilbert--the school pictures had just come in. The board looked great with those lips and a smiling picture of Wilbert.

Just as I finished my explanation Carmen Berrios, the live wire of the class, came in and shouted, "What do we have to do?" I told her to ask some other kids. Pretty soon a little group formed around Carmen with Lynn Reiff and Melissa Blitz and others, from which came an insane giggling. I knew they were up to something. Elsewhere in the class things were rolling along nicely, kids writing, comparing, laughing, warning me not to read their names, glancing furtively at Miss Pitts, who was well aware she was in for it this time. They would have her kissing the garbage cans.

I collected the papers. Carmen Berrios insisted that she read hers first, because it was special: in fact it took her and three others to present it, and then they had to sing it. It was based on the "hip bone connected to the

thigh bone" principle, and it eventually got to "the boy's thingy connected to the girl's thingy." Naturally the girls were unable to sing this line without cracking up. Everyone was laughing like crazy, including Miss Pitts and myself. Finally the girls managed to sing the whole thing, to great laughter and applause.

After things died down a little I read the others, which were equally interesting. I must say this is one of the most popular "poetry" ideas I've had. Some of the works even sounded like poems, such as Yuk's beautiful lines about the star kissing the sky, etc.

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This week on the blackboard I drew some grass and the trunk of a tree rising, then I broke off and higher above drew in some clouds. What's missing? The branches and leaves. What could I put there? A hotdog, someone says. With sauerkraut and mustard, and some birds on the mustard. How about the clouds, what could be coming out of them? A car. Who's driving? Nixon. I add, "The year is 1929, and he's only 10 years old. OK, a child Nixon driving a car out of the clouds over a tree with a big hotdog on it."

I pointed out how the picture and the idea from it resulted from putting strange things together, things which didn't ordinarily belong together, disparate things. I then told them about my dream in which Columbia University had appeared out West, and how in dreams we find things together which don't ordinarily belong that way, but that in dreams it doesn't seem so odd or out of place. Like you go in to take a bath and find the Eiffel Tower in the bathtub. . . . I mentioned the old Maidenform ads, which went "I dreamed I _____ something _____ in my Maidenform bra." I didn't want to get their minds on bras too much, especially after last week. I just wanted them to have a starting framework, where they could go about putting together two disparate things in any way they wanted.

They started writing and I walked around doing the usual thing, but very interested today in 3 Oriental girls because I have been doing some copywork and revision advising on some Asia Study projects, the translation of poems from Chinese to English. I learned that Yuk reads, writes and speaks Chinese well, if very reluctantly, and that Fung Ping reads and speaks just a little Chinese but is taking courses in the Chinese language, and that the new Oriental girl, Lisa, is Japanese, that she speaks, reads and writes Japanese, French and English! Wonderful girl from Yokohama. Yuk says there are no Chinese books at her house, Fung Ping ditto. I promised to bring in Chinese books, which I think really will interest Yuk, books like poems of Li Po and Tu Fu. As for Japanese books I'll have to get advice from friends who lived in Japan. At the same time I mustn't forget that most of the others are Spanish and I mustn't forget at least a volume of Garcia Lorca. I'm set on the idea of helping them keep their original languages.

It was time to read the poems back. Chris wrote the extremely beautiful line, "I dreamed that the heavens were attached to music." Now that's as

good as Auden or Eliot or Shakespeare or Campion or whatever. Some of the poems were infected with last week's ambiance, and there were several nasty references to one kid. Mostly it's two boys--they have dirty minds at this point. I think I'll talk to the class about this tendency to ruin poems with references to faeces, boogers, sex, etc.

But there are a lot of good lines and poems. Alex's: "I dreamed I flew through the sky on a piece of cactus" and others.

I had a talk with Chris: He's feeling left out because he wasn't in Kenneth's book. He asks me if I'm going to do a book, too, one that he can be in. I tell him not to worry, that his poems are so good that someone will publish them someday. I even explained Teachers & Writers to him!

I had a lot of "personal" scenes like this today, and I think I need more of them. Going in and doing a blanket-blitz on an entire class is OK and has its place, but that approach isn't going to keep working when I know a class well, as I'm getting to know this class. It's more of a workshop, or something like that.

And at the back of it all I have the nagging feeling that although I'm turning these kids on to language, the sort of bean spasm self-discovery and pleasure-joy approach to words (imaginative language), at the same time I'm up against insurmountable odds--the TV, the insanely incomprehensible way most people seem to talk, the clichés that come rolling out, the Monstrous Language of Politics and Education. That I'm pitted against these enormous and all-pervasive powers. That the kids are "liberated" or something but only during that "special" time, Poetry Time. Otherwise it's the same old business. Because I'm not trying to teach them subject matter, I'm trying to teach them a point of view, or an attitude, or a feeling for things, and a self-awareness, too. Outside the classroom they don't forget that $2 + 2 = 4$, but they probably do forget that just a few hours ago they were thinking of how heaven is connected to music.

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When I finished I asked the kids to listen to a few ideas I had been having about them and their writing. Here's a rough summary-paraphrase: "You kids are good, you're a smart class and you write well and I really like your class. But lately you've started to do things in your poems, sometimes, which tend to make the poems not so good as they can and really ought to be. You're putting in too many boogies (laughter) and too many toilet bowls (laughter) and too many insulting things about other people. To say that you dreamed you saw Markus pulling boogies out of his nose (laughter, tho' less) isn't really very interesting. You think it's fun to write that kind of stuff, and it is, but it's fun only because you're in school. If you said that to yourself alone on the street it wouldn't be interesting or beautiful. And sex (laughter). You all pretend you know all about sex when really none of you know anything about it: and you shouldn't necessarily know anything about it: you're too young. You'll learn what you'll learn later. But let's not kid each

other. Nobody here really knows about sex but everyone acts like they do, because it would be embarrassing to admit that you didn't, but I know better. Anyway, by putting in boogies, kicks in the butt, insulting things, these don't make your poems any better, they make them worse, because you have nothing very interesting to say about such stuff. You're copping out. When you can't think of anything you put in boogies. Anyway, that's my little speech, everybody understand what I mean?" Everyone looked like they did, and quite a few seemed relieved, somehow. Perhaps by the remarks about sex. I liked the way the kids seemed to feel when I finished. There was no admonition or brow-beating in my little speech, just telling them what I thought, without rancor or threat. In fact it was a friendly talk and when I left the room I felt as though I had just done them a big service.

In Les' class I started by reading the best poems of the I DREAMED idea, about five or six, plus scattered lines from others. Then I asked them to write poems like these, putting in things which don't go together; I emphasized this and gave a few extemporaneous examples, just to bring things home. I recalled to their attention last week's lecture in which I demonstrated how things got better when you wrote more or longer, and today I asked them to write a lot. A few groans from the Peanut Gallery, but they were stage groans, obligatory regular-kids groans.

The kids worked well and for this class produced a lot, and I particularly appreciated the efforts of kids like Wilfredo, for whom writing is something of a chore. Some of the poems had very nice things in them, but generally this class has its own form of Boogieism--in here it's Bowmanism. They attack Les constantly in their poems, and the cheap buzz they get from this distracts them from better things. They also enjoy attacking and making fun of the class Fat Kid, a rather shy and likeable little fat girl named Cathie. They all love the idea of sticking a pin in her to make her go boom or deflate: to them she is something of a balloon effigy of a human.

When I read back the papers I read the ones referring to Les, as usual, to which he responded with good humor by pounding his desk in mock anger and shouting, "Who wrote that? Extra homework for whoever wrote that!" I didn't have the heart for reading the remarks about Cathie--there were just too many and she is too sensitive on the subject. I'm cutting them entirely out of the poems when they're reproduced, and in the meantime it looks as if I'll be giving this class a little talk about Bowmanism and its parallel Cathieism: I can't let them keep ruining things like this. They're not really a bad bunch at all and it'll work out all right. Bowman said I should have banned him from the poems a long time ago.

* * * * *

I had a few minutes to spare on arriving, so I meandered around the halls until I found an interesting bulletin board with a big paper door on it and on the door the words "OPEN ME". Around the door were poems and stories by Miss or Mrs. L.'s sixth grade class, poems telling what they think might be found behind this door. A nice idea. While I was looking at these

A little girl said hello and I recognized her as one of my kids from Mrs. Magnani's 4th grade class two years ago, though I had forgotten her name. She was very friendly and familiar and sort of grown-up acting. I asked her about the board: Mrs. L. is her teacher. She took me and introduced us. (Class was out.) Mrs. L. had heard my name and knew all about the poetry program, and she was friendly but at the same time had a few axes to grind. "We studied psychology and I know my kids, while they aren't the top class, project their feelings directly, whereas the top class kids are able to pretend to be other things, to write in the third person." I told her I worked with Pitts and Bowman. She surprised me with, "You shouldn't restrict yourself to the top classes." I reminded her that Mr. Bowman's class was not the top class and that the kindergarten classes weren't even rated this way and that I had worked in Mrs. Magnani's, which was more like the bottom class. She seemed taken aback that I didn't fit her notion of what I was. (The fact of the matter is that she is instinctively correct: I do tend to favor the "top classes".) Anyway she was nicer after that and I promised to visit her class sometime soon. She gave me a copy of a little "newspaper" her kids had put together--the kind of thing that gladdens my heart--called VOICES OF THE LOWER EAST SIDE. She seems to be an enterprising and interested girl with some chips on her shoulder.

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When Miss Kars hears that we have permission to paint the school wall she is surprised and delighted. She's a very sharp young lady, I notice, because her sense of humor is finely tuned. We discussed the project, deciding that we should do the actual work in early spring, or as soon as the weather is beginning to be consistently pleasant, that we will use an oil-base outdoor paint, covering an area about 50 feet long and maybe 5 feet high, a band along the bottom of the wall. We decide that it would be a good idea to have kids do scale-drawings of the wall and produce a plan for it themselves. Then we'll go from there. I had mentioned the project to several kids in the hall, kids from Miss Pitts' class, and they had been excited, mostly about the prospect of getting outside. I mentioned how most kids, when asked to select one or two words to go on the wall, would put PEACE or LOVE. Miss Kars, thank goodness, was hip to this, as well as to the necessity of explaining how unoriginal an idea this was. I asked her if she would work with Miss Pitts' class on this project. She said fine, that they come to her on Fridays. I also pointed out to her that she'll have to handle the actual doing of the painting, or that she'll be in charge of organizing the activity, since she's always there. She was happy to do so.

I went downstairs and out by the playground to examine the wall. There's a lot of graffiti, or There are a lot of graffiti on the wall now, mostly names, no drawings. No obscenities, either. I didn't get any hot ideas for the wall, in fact it didn't suggest anything at all to me.

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I started talking about the art project for the wall. Mrs. Kars had done a few things with them already: a scale model drawing of the wall and filling it in. The kids were a little disappointed to hear that we wouldn't do the actual painting until warmer weather; although, come to think of it, yesterday was a perfectly mild and beautiful day. When one gets older one tends to be less immediate about doing things, it seems.

I started talking about how people hand you printed things on the street, and they almost always say the same thing, or type of thing: "Give me your money, give me your vote, give me your attention, give me your soul, etc." Pretty dull stuff. You are never handed a card reading, "Penny umbrella algebra mflk!" Never anything mysterious or intriguing, never anything to excite the imagination or to make no sense. I pointed out what a loss this is. Instead of communicating with us, these handbills turn us off and we throw them in the street. How nice it would be to be handed something beautiful, interesting, mysterious. So why don't we write down some things to be printed and handed out, to other kids, to teachers, to people on the street?

I gave some examples of what I thought to be appropriate, but I emphasized that this wasn't the only way of thinking about it:

"The Cherries are rolling down the street."

Which I explained was like code used during the Second WW to mean the bombs are falling on Germany, or something like that.

"The pieplates are noisy in Idaho."

We passed out paper and work started. I was a little disappointed to notice that Carmen Berrios, whose stomach ache I had caused, wasn't very interested. But Chris set off at top speed, and generally the kids liked the idea of putting things in code. (We had also discussed how maybe we could pass these out on Valentine's Day.)

After a while I collected the papers and read them back. We had a good time trying to unscramble some of the messages. I really like Carlos' paper and I suddenly realized that he's a good boy and I've been overlooking or ignoring him because he's fat and ordinary-looking.

I gave Miss Pitts recent mimeo copies to hand out and I gave the Japanese girl a book of Haiku, the best one I could find, after going through several Oriental bookshops and not finding much of interest. She accepted the volume with complete shyness and silence with a tiny blush. (Contrast to Yuk's growing boldness and westernization--she spent the entire period reading TRUE LOVE comics, and after class, in the hall, when I suggested that she paint over the words with white paint and write in new ones in English or Chinese, she loved the idea. I told her to ask Mrs. Kars if she could do it in art class. Yuk really loved the idea of having these Aryan lovers speak Chinese to each other.)

(This one-to-one work is what I'm really digging a lot lately.)

Anyway, after I had finished reading the papers aloud I started a conversation with Miss Pitts. We stood at the front of the class, me in my jacket ready to leave, and talked about discipline, how and why kids "take advantage of" their substitutes. It was interesting that we had before us a living example of our conversation: at first the class was quiet, then murmurs, then talking aloud, then tiptoeing across the room, then open striding, until by the time I left the kids were sort of all over the place talking like mad, some boxing, etc., just like they are when a sub comes in. They had gradually run the gamut of their behavioural pattern, from proper with their teacher to wild without her.

We discussed open corridor ideas, "structured classrooms," etc.... Miss Pitts also told me how she herself had been obliged to flunk X (younger brother of Y) because his math was so poor; his math so poor simply because his attendance is. And how X's mother had written her an angry letter: which concluded, "Let's admit it: school is at best a bore, at worst a prison." Jean felt that this expression of radical opinion didn't fit the facts and that it was simply a spiteful and unhelpful reply to her having flunked X in math. Didn't fit the facts because X doesn't find school all that boring. I tend, however, to agree with both ladies. I understand the mother's position and I share her distaste for the public school system, but on the other hand I sympathize with Jean for trying to make the best of the situation she finds herself in. (I think Jean knows that there is little for her to do alone to change this system, and I don't think that's her role, to change things.)

I don't know why I've gone on at length like this, but somehow it seems relevant and important. I suppose I'm happy to learn that even one parent and one teacher are concerning themselves with the state of our school. Too many teachers treat it like a Good Citizen Machine and too many parents treat it like a State Babysitting Service, two hideous functions of school. It seems to me that citizenship, that is, taking a meaningful part in one's society on all levels, is not something that can be taught: it must develop from a healthy moral sense, and one can impart that, I think, to children. It is the lack of this sense that causes parents too often to "send" their kids to school and forget about it from then on. "My kids are in school, the end."

* * * * *

A crystal clear, bright and dazzling and utterly cold day, beautiful to walk through to the school.

I visited Mrs. Kars before coming to class and I saw some of the work that half of Jean's class had done last Friday and some that Mr. Bowman's had done earlier today. The drawings for the wall were OK but they suffered one hideous fault: they were done with no regard for the actual size and shape of the wall. Why had she let the kids do designs for a wall approximately 5 feet by 55 feet on a square piece of paper? I looked through the papers and found some really interesting, others less so. One kid had simply written, in wiggly block letters, an enormous word: HAND. Most had gone in for the LOVE PEACE BROTHERHOOD stuff, as I had feared. It's as

if the kids learn something in one class but don't carry it over into another. I doubt if Mrs. Kars pointed out the pitfalls in writing banalities. So I discussed this with her, along with the obvious necessity of making the scale drawings indeed "scale", long strips. She accepted my advice cheerfully. (She did confess to having had a bad Friday.)

Anyway, back in Bowman's: I told the kids I had seen their designs and liked them, but that I'd like them to do some others now and I explained the strip-proportions and why it was necessary to draw a long box on the paper and work in that area. I asked Deryl to pass out paper: he seems to have reverted a little, just as withdrawn and introverted as he was at the start of the year, which is a shame if it's true. He has to be treated delicately: too little attention makes him feel neglected and too much makes him nervous. Best to give him something to do so he doesn't have to sit there and vegetate.

I had the kids draw boxes and I gave them a little lecture about the PEACE LOVE BROTHERHOOD business, why we didn't have to say that stuff, no matter how desirable those things were. I asked them to do something that maybe no one else could think of, or just something different, and to use just one or two words, and to think about where they would put the words inside this long box, and how big the words should be. (I suspect that all those variables are beyond the grasp of most of the kids in this class, but it didn't hurt to mention them.)

I did a few at the board to be sure they understood the mechanics of the project. I asked for suggestions and, working with the class, came up with:

DETERMINE

SUEÑO

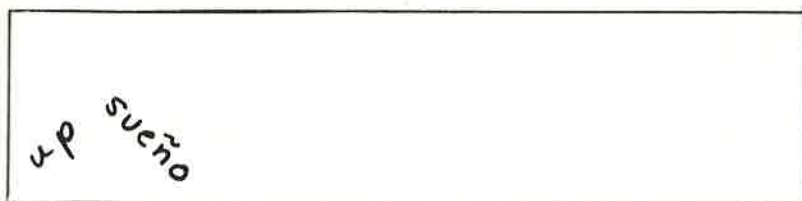
SEÑOR

SUEÑO

P

U

and finally



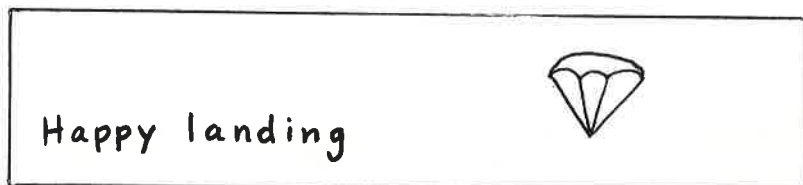
I pointed out that they could and should (if they wanted) use any language: unfortunately almost none of them think they can write Spanish and Benny Vinceform thinks he can't write Italian.

I told them to take 10 or 15 minutes. I walked around and helped from time to time, but most everyone seemed to be working pretty good, except one girl who, with bright eyes and a cheerful face, asked, "What are we supposed to do?" Ah! one in every class!

When the kids were finished I asked Mr. D. how I could display all the papers, since I could hardly read them aloud, and he suggested that I line them up in the chalk trough at the blackboard, which I did, and the kids came up and looked. Some seized chalk and drew on the board, others on the papers. Not too much. I was surprised by the high quality of the work. Hette Feliciano, for instance, drew this:



And an anonymous poet:



After this class I went into Jean's for 10 minutes or so to talk with Yuk, one of the Chinese girls. You'll recall that I gave her a book about a month ago --not to be confused with Japanese girl and book. Yuk promptly stuck her tongue out at me when I said hello, but she did so with an impish smile. It's incredible how much her behavior has changed since she came to this school. She's more "regular" now, less "Chinese". Jean told me that the kids weren't happy with their new seating plan: Lynne Reiff burst into tears when she learned her new seat is in the back of the room. Anyway, I asked Yuk if

she had read any of the book I had given her. She said yes and promptly dug the book out of her desk. The book was in perfect condition, which was very Chinese of her. She had read about half of it (it's about 175 pages long) and had read the Chinese and English translations. She said the translations seemed correct to her. I asked her if she had liked any of it and she said, "Yeah," which means she actually did. Her parents hadn't seen the book--her father is in Hong Kong anyway. I asked her if she would like to try reading some of the poems at home and writing some in Chinese like them. She said OK, which was wonderful of her. I promised to get her out of some other homework if she would do this. Jean immediately agreed. I really would love to have her writing poetry in Chinese and English and the Japanese girl in Japanese and English.

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Miss L. comes down to tell me I could join her class now to watch "The Electric Co." with them on tv, if I wished. Inside the darkened classroom the tube was beaming. It struck me as a good idea: aren't these the unregenerates? What could appeal to them more than tv? Then I noticed that only 5 or 6 kids were watching it with absorption: the rest were chattering, roaming about the room, fidgeting, etc. Then I realized that "The Electric Co." is something my 5 year old son watches. These kids are 11 and 12. Some of the girls have breasts. And on the screen a man is saying, "Milk b-----" holding up a bottle and pointing to it. We are supposed to say "bottle"!

After a few minutes the class becomes noisier and Miss L. shuts off the set --groans--and says, "Well, you weren't watching it." Of course they weren't, they were just using it as a nod-out period. The policeman downstairs keeps out the dope dealers but he can't keep out the tv.

Ack! I see I have to follow an unsuccessful television show! The kids quiet down a little but not too much. I start working on Funny Math poems--the only idea which would work here now--except something I have never even thought of, whatever it is--by writing

$$1 + 2 = 5$$

and going from there. I make a pretty good presentation but it's against a chaotic backdrop. The children speak spontaneously, to me, to each other, to themselves, in strident, sometimes piercing voices. I ask them to raise their hands if they want to talk, but they cannot hear this. When it's time to write I learn that almost no one heard my presentation, let alone understood it. They simply cannot hear. If I tell them in a loud clear slow voice that I am the poetry teacher they will ask me, quite seriously, a minute later, "Who are you?" One boy asked me my name and I said, "Ron, what's yours?" He then said, "But what's your name in English?" He meant, what is your name with Mister in front of it. I said, "Mr. Padgett." The boy's face brightened. He could relate to Mr. Padgett, not to Ron. I was totally appalled by all this.

Somehow, though, some of the kids started working. I went around giving them encouragement and explaining things. Only one kid asked about spelling, which surprised me. There are a few brighter and less demoralized kids in the class, of course, and it is they who sustained me in my hour of need.

After a while I collected the papers. My voice was tired so I asked Miss L. to read them. To my surprise, she had a weak voice and also was simply unable to command the kids' attention for more than a few seconds. I took some secret and evil pleasure in this. I walked over and took the papers from her hand, returned to the side of the room with windows and began to read in a commanding tone. The kids started listening, especially when I would make comments or ask questions about what I had just read. "School + look = guy." "What do you think that means?" No one had any idea, but they seemed mildly intrigued.

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(I ran into Mr. Silverman on the street and he asked me to drop in and see him today.)

I went to school today ready to work in the two kindergarten classes, but both were unavailable and I shifted my attention to upstairs (the higher grades).

Miss L.'s class was immersed in television, the art room was closed, so I went down toward Miss Pitts' room, when I bumped into her in the hall. She told me that a parent had objected to the Kissing Poems which I had recently handed back, and that Mr. Silverman was concerned. This was to be the subject of our meeting. Jean also told me that the kids were afraid that they were getting me into trouble. The all-knowing children even knew who the outraged parent was.

In the office Silverman had Miss Pitts sit on one side of a longish table, me on the other, with him at the head of the table. An interesting arrangement which I contemplated with mild boredom.

"Well, Ron, we've had some flak from parents, well, one parent, but I expect more any time. Have most of the papers come back, Jean?" (Silverman had ordered her to recall all the offensive poems--the kids were bringing them back to school, away from the eyes of their parents.) Jack continued his talk. It is hard to remember what he said because it didn't make much sense. He is necessarily a specialist in Public Relations: so long as it looks good it can't be all that bad. But this looks bad, and no matter how good it is, it still looks bad. What had been the motive BEHIND the Kissing assignment? I told him. I also told him that I had given the kids a lecture on how poor I thought their kissing poems had been and that it was a closed book for us. Jean managed to get a few words in edgewise. She was puffing nervously on a cigarette and he was puffing on an executive pipe. Jean's remarks were intelligent and somehow out of place: Jack's were respectable; my own were

self-assured and bright but somehow pointless. The trouble was that none of us knew exactly what we were talking about: motives? results? kids? creativity? censorship? community relations? I really had nothing to add to what I had stated previously when Jack had called me in. And I knew there were no "curse words" on the papers, so I knew I was secure on that point. And I knew, definitely now, that the poetry program has reaped such publicity benefits for this school that Jack would not lean on me very hard. Also, Jack and I had always worked remarkably well together--he is 100 per cent behind the poetry program and he's a sympathetic man. He began to go through his speeches again, peering over his rims significantly at me, and suddenly I felt a surge of anger. I snapped at him, a little, "Well what am I supposed to do about it?" He backed down so fast it startled me. "Oh nothing, nothing, I'm not asking you to do anything. I just wanted to have some ammunition if more parents call me up." I think he was taken aback by this atypical outburst of anger on my part. I cooled off and assured him that I would be glad to present, explain and justify my program to any and all parents. With that the meeting came to a friendly end with absolutely nothing new or useful having been said. I left the Office, but Jean was detained: she had some other situation to deal with now.

I wandered out chuckling to myself. I had made a Principal back down! Grrrr! I felt like King Kong. I can die a happy man.

Before dying, though, I went back upstairs and checked in on Mr. D. -- I didn't have time to see his class, but Laura, one of the students in that class, was in the hall on an errand and I took the time to question her. She told me that Mr. Bowman was gone for the year, which I knew, of course, and that Mr. D. was taking the class. According to her he was really a nice man. He only yells when the kids are bad. And if you make good grades he lets you do errands and stuff. I suddenly realized that Laura was doing well and was being treated well as a result: hence her enthusiastic opinion of Mr. D. Another thing that struck me was how mature Laura looked out of the context of the classroom, something that seems to be a rule.

I went on down to the Library and spoke with the Librarian, Mrs. Rogers, I think her name is. I asked her if she would mind helping me with a little experiment: I would like to buy some empty, unlined notebooks and place them in the Library at the kids' disposal, so that when they're in the Library and don't feel like reading, or do feel like writing, they can have these notebooks. Just to see what they do with them. Like turning on a movie camera and letting it run for an hour to see what happens in front of it. "You know what they'll write? F-U," she said rather good-naturedly. I assured her that I simply wanted to put the notebooks out and see what happened. I was certain there would be a certain amount of that kind of stuff, but perhaps something else too. She made an allusion to the kissing poems furor--it's all over the school! Anyway she was very nice in agreeing to help. "Not many kids are really interested in Library," she confided in me, "just a few, like Jonathan, who is crazy about books on puppets." I didn't know that and I wish I had! "And he asked me for books on puppets, which took over 2 years to order and arrive... he almost graduated before they came."

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I had wanted to see if Yuk had written any Chinese poems but she was out celebrating Chinese New Year (for a week!). I had a private conference in the hall with Jonathan. He seemed puzzled by my calling him out in the hall, where we had this conversation:

Me: Mrs. Brown told me you were interested in puppets, is that true?

F: Yeah.

Me: Do you have like a collection of them, and books?

F: Yeah.

Me: Do you put on shows, or have you written any plays for them?

F: Yeah, but just stuff I memorized. I didn't write any of it down.

Me: Would you write down some of the plays for me?

F: Sure.

He seemed very willing and happy to do this. I wanted to reward him on the spot so I told him I would get him out of some homework if he wrote down some of his plays for me. Of course Jean doesn't mind this at all. In fact she was surprised to learn that he has an interest in puppets.

The Bulletin Board Event

Feb. 3, 1972

On the way down the hall I let my eyes run over the bulletin boards which bore the usual paper shrines: this week it is Abraham Lincoln Week. Two weeks ago it was Martin Luther King, Jr. Week. Soon it will be Valentines. Little billboards to national sentiment. I don't object to this, but I do note that 1. teachers often loathe being assigned the job of tending the bulletin boards, and 2. children tend to rip and deface whatever goes up on the boards. It's not that the children hate the displays so much that they simply like to rip them down. It occurred to me that perhaps what is called for is a bulletin board display which is designed to be torn down. What might this be? I don't know. But I did have a flash in the hallway of a bulletin

board with hose-like feelers jutting out into the hall, waving like big pipe cleaners. I must remember to see what Jean thinks of my idea: perhaps we can come up with something interesting.

Feb. 17, 1972

I had a really good and pleasurable day at 61. I explained to them that I didn't want to have them write anything today, just talk. First I asked them about the Mystery Messages: had anyone handed them out? Only a few hands. To whom? Mostly to brothers and sisters. The project hadn't been the kind of success I had hoped. I was afraid that if I weren't there to give the mimeos back and to encourage the kids to give them out, that they would run out of gas, which they had. A few kids still planned to mail the Mystery Messages to friends, but on the whole I have to say that this aspect of the assignment was a disappointment. I should have been there to urge them on.

I forgot to mention that Alex Morrison told me that he had phoned people at random, just any number, and read some of the Mystery Messages to them. Their responses were on the order of "Little boy, you'd better get off the phone or I'll tell your mother," which amused Alex.

Next I discussed the school bulletin boards, how they are decorated according to the time of year: in February it's Lincoln and Washington and Valentine's Day, in December it's Christmas, etc. Which is appropriate. I also mentioned how the kids always tear them down. This month's Lincoln and Washington display, put up by Miss Pitts, had been torn down by Les' class, and then repaired by Les' class. It remained, a battered remnant of its original glory. One girl immediately suggested that we do a bulletin board which was all messy so the kids couldn't make it any worse: she was one step ahead of me. I said that that was my idea, to do a bulletin board which is meant to be torn down. The kids suggested various ideas: put a paper door on the board saying DO NOT OPEN and then when you open the door it says inside, "CAN'T YOU READ, STUPID?" Or a sign saying: "DO YOU WANT TO SEE A MONKEY?" and when the flap is opened there is a mirror. Markus even suggested doing a forest and in the forest a rubber flower with water in it, with a squeeze bulb to squirt water on the kids. Other ideas: stapling waste paper to the board in giant gobs, doing collages on the board, using long streamers of colored paper hanging to the floor, using balloons with messages inside, messages such as WHY DID YOU BREAK THIS BALLOON? and I had the idea of putting a little cologne in each balloon so that a nice scent would be released with each burst. I hit upon the idea of calling it a DISPOSABLE BULLETIN BOARD: milk used to come in glass bottles which one carefully returned for re-use, but now it comes in paper cartons one throws away. This image had some magic power, because, I guess, it was so close to home, and the kids really seemed interested. A lot of suggestions poured in and we had a really nice conversation on the subject of the bulletin board. Jean and I decided that since the board was hers to decorate this month, that she could change her current display near the end of

~~the~~ month, then if it is ripped to shreds it won't matter at all. She suspected ~~that~~ reverse psychology might protect the board and that nothing would be ~~ripped~~ down. Either way it's OK. I promised to bring all sorts of materials. I suggested that maybe in Mrs. Kars' class they could make some pieces for ~~the~~ board, since the sixth grade half of the class is in Art tomorrow; it turns ~~out~~, however, that they will spend their 45 minutes in Art just sitting: a disciplinary reprisal by Mrs. Kars for bad behaviour last week.

I also told the kids that I was going to put some notebooks in the Library, so ~~that~~ if they felt like writing when they were there, fine, and that Mrs. Rogers, ~~the~~ Librarian----ha ha ha! the class breaks up laughing! Mrs. Rogers! Ha ~~ha!~~ What's wrong? Her name is Mrs. Brown, not Rogers! (How did I get ~~Rogers~~ out of B-r-o-w-n?). I wrote "BROWN" on the board and said, pointing ~~ing~~ to it, "ROGERS". Everybody laughed. Two girls, I think Melissa and Carmen Berrios, returned from the Girls' room and looked astonished when I ~~pointed~~ to BROWN and said ROGERS. The other kids got a kick out of their ~~astonishment~~.

Feb. 23, 1972

I stopped off at Lamston's, a poor man's version of Woolworth's, to buy ~~some~~ materials to use in decorating the hall bulletin board: crêpe paper, balloons, etc. I put these with the newspapers, milk carton and egg carton I ~~had~~ brought from home.

Miss Pitts told me I had to see Silverman before we did anything, because ~~when~~ she had mentioned the bulletin board project to him this morning he ~~had~~ asked her to have me see him before we proceeded. I went down to the ~~office~~ and learned that he was out of the building, as they say, for the day. ~~Project~~ held up.

I went back up to Jean's class and explained the situation to the kids. As I ~~did~~ this I kept wondering what to do today. First I reminded the kids to ~~bring~~ things for the board, and to write little messages for the balloons, so ~~that~~ when said balloons are burst they will dispense a tiny message. I ~~meant~~ that they should write these at home, but one kid said, "How many ~~should~~ we do?" in such a way as to indicate he was ready to write then and ~~now~~. So I switched ideas and had the kids write messages for the balloons, ~~about~~ 5 or 10, and I asked them to refrain, if possible, from obscenity, ~~insult~~, etc., a plea that was heeded by perhaps three-fourths of the kids. One poor boy wrote about genitals; I recognized his handwriting and handed ~~them~~ back to him without comment: he was really surprised and embarrassed. I figured the best thing to do was a "No Comment" routine and let it go at that. Sometime during the writing I was asked how to spell "fortune", which I did ~~on~~ the board, and almost absent-mindedly wrote "balloons" under it. So the ~~name~~ is "Fortune Balloons" instead of Fortune Cookies.

I noticed that Deryl was sitting in Jean's class and that Mr. D. was absent.

Gert Weiner was teaching his class. Jean explained that 1. Mr. D. had resigned and a bevy of teachers were handling the class on a round-robin basis and that 2. She (Miss Pitts) had asked that Deryl be transferred to her class because he didn't seem to fit in the other class and she liked him. Later I asked Deryl why he was in this class now and he answered, happily, "Transferred." He seemed a lot more relaxed and easy-going.

As the kids finished their Fortune Balloon sayings they tore them off the paper in small strips and folded the strips and gave them to me. I realized that the best way to have them "read back" was to pile them on a centrally-located desk and let those who were interested come and unfold them. So that was how the reading took place. I read some. They varied in interest. I have the whole batch (except for a few naughties) on my desk. I think I'll read through them, pick the best and throw the rest away, then type up the selection. Tomorrow they'll be put in the balloons as they go up on the bulletin board, providing, of course, Mr. Silverman grants me permission.

Feb. 24, 1972

Expecting a minor confrontation with Silverman today, I dressed in brown slacks, white shirt and nice yellow pullover, nice shoes, then I looked in the mirror and refused to shave off horrible 3 days' growth of facial hair!

I had to chase around the school a little to find him, in the infirmary, where a boy was screaming and crying with a possible broken leg (the children tracked in snow, which melted, he slipped). Finally Jack came out and asked, cordially, what I wanted to see him about. I reminded him that it was he who had wanted to see me, about the bulletin board. He was, as I had suspected, utterly casual about it, offhand. When I said I wanted to do the bulletin board with the kids he laughed and said something like, "Fine, something mysterious, eh?" And off I went, just like that.

Upstairs, the kids were expecting me. They put away their books and Jean made a little speech about being quiet in the halls: those who felt they couldn't keep from making noise should stay in the room, although anyone who could control themselves and were interested in doing the project should help. So out in the hall we went. A few kids had already cleared the bulletin board of the remaining Washington-Lincoln decorations. Jean handed me the stapler and kids started handing me papers, some ripped, some with messages, some straight out of the wastebasket, sometimes telling me exactly where to put them. I began stapling things up like a maniac. Balloons with messages inside, baseball and basketball cards, gum wrappers, crepe paper, old homework, tv antenna, milk carton, ripped newspapers (one with an accidentally pertinent headline: LOWER EAST SIDE SCHOOLS IN TROUBLE), anything and everything seemed to fly up on that board. The kids were getting very excited and happy, and, on the whole, were pretty quiet. People going by in the hall stopped to gape, and Miss

SOME FORTUNE BALLOONS - Miss Pitts' Class (Grade 5 - 6)

You're marvelous!

1 + 1 is 4 if there is something wrong with your brain.

Kiss your local mother.

Don't open this.

I love you, stranger.

You are not a creep.

Help me. I'm a shoe, but beautiful.

Dance with the broom.

Your faucet is dripping.

If you open this, you're a nice person, but you still shouldn't open this.

Your boyfriend or girlfriend doesn't really love you.

You're a slob who breaks and rips things.

Oh! That hurt!

This doesn't make sense.

Today someone will break your heart.

I hate you because you broke me.

If you broke this balloon you will be hugged by a tiger when you go to bed.

All right! You're pretty.

Do the cha cha cha.

Your ping pong ball is falling off the table.

Goldenberg, the assistant principal, began to Shush the kids and watch with a mixture of admiration and bewilderment. "So we have an Open Corridor Classroom," she said aloud. The sheer interest was growing and growing: teachers poking their heads out the door, some pleased and some angry, but the project rolled forward, gaining a kind of incredible momentum and energy. It didn't get wilder, exactly, it became more absolute. I was stapling like mad and the bulletin board took on a monstrous, slightly appalling and strangely beautiful aspect. Kids from other classes, on their way to the bathroom or on errands, stopped and joined in. Things fell to the floor and were picked up and restapled. A few balloons burst--a beautiful noise in the hallway. After a while I got a panicky feeling: that kids were going to stream out of all the rooms, screaming, running toward the bulletin board, their hands laden with trash to staple up, and then one genius would set fire to the thing and that would be that.

I didn't think this literally--it's an image to describe the mounting panic I felt. It was a wonderful feeling, too, like the first time you eat something foreign and possibly disgusting and it tastes good!

At some point a lady appeared in our midst and began to bark out orders. You go to your room! You be quiet! You kids stop that! I was amazed by her. She was like something from outer space.

Finally it seemed time to stop: the kids might be on the verge of getting out of hand, the teachers and other school personnel (except, strangely, the janitor, who had the most to lose by this project) were exerting a kind of weird pressure for us to stop, like the Sheriff in the movies who says to the mob, "It's all over, return to your homes."

I asked who would like to help me pick up the mess on the floor and every kid did. We cleaned up the hall in a few minutes and went back in Miss Pitts' room. Like buzzards, kids from other rooms snuck up and began to steal the balloons--they acted as if they had never seen a balloon before--and Miss Goldenberg cracked down on them, "Did you tell them they could take these?" she asked us. "No," I answered. But I hadn't told them they couldn't, either, and I left it ambiguous because I didn't want to say yes or no. Just create this situation and see what happens in it.

This was yesterday. I'm sure that by now it has been torn to shreds.

Since I didn't take a camera, I should try to give you a verbal picture of the board. You know the kinds of things stuck up on the board: in general it all melted, flowed, crashed and slammed together in an abstract-expressionistic shout, like a haystack full of soldiers being machine-gunned. It was violent but lyrical, too, and it came out of the hallway wall like Dracula emerging bloody from the woodwork. In short it looked amazing. The mere fact that it stuck out was enough.

I hung around the hall for a while, or rather, lurked, to see how passersby reacted. Margaret Magnani looked at it with unbounded admiration. Most of the stray kids going by looked at it as a treasure pile they would raid if

they got the chance. It did look awfully glamorous, all that trash. I don't **think** anyone was really indifferent; it was a polarizing experience. The **Apollonian** types were taken aback. The **Dionysians** celebrated. A few of **the** kids didn't like it ("It's messy, a lot of junk!"). One girl put a sign on it:

NEW YORK'S BEAUTIFUL JUNKYARD

* * * * *

Footnote: I finally got the Chinese poem from Yuk. I had given her a book of poems in Chinese and English and asked her to read them and try writing something like them. She said she had done it but she more or less refused to bring it in. Today she did.

Yuk, at one point, grabbed a piece of paper from Fung Ping and handed it to **me**, much to Fung Ping's embarrassment. It was a poem! I'm really surprised because Fung Ping never writes anything with zeal and I hadn't asked her to write anything outside the class. Here is her poem; faithfully transcribed:

Trees grows like something ascend
Flowers are like beautiful antique
It seems like flowers bridge everywhere
Even at the blink of the mountains
Are the joyous summer air and flowers
Under the trees.
The streams and rivers achieve the cool
sparkling summer water into the seas
The seas are like a big barrel for nature
to store water in the summer. And so
the bureau of nature with a beard on his
face is smiling down on human's faith in
Nature

Fung Ping

I gave Mrs. Kars a check for fifty dollars and she will be getting the paint for the wall project as soon as the final confirmation comes from the District Supervisor.

My Dream

I came to the place of dream, the wind
blow softly blow away my worry and
unhappyness, I dance on the grass of
green. Suddenly, I find my dream behind
the tree. Such a sweet dream with life,
I dream of the flower of red, the grass
of green, the tree of high, the sun of
red, the air of clean, the wind blow
away my dream, such a sweet dream.

鮮的空氣。這夢是真的嗎？太美了。
色的草，高高的樹，紅的太陽，鳥語花香生
甜蜜的夢有了生命。我發現紅色的花，綠
在綠色的草。一陣陣的，我使入了夢香，多麼
我來到夢花園，風飄飄，吹散我的愁悶，我無
我的夢



NOTES ON ONE USE OF "WRITING-THROUGH-PHOTOGRAPHS" IN THE
CLASSROOM

Bill Zavatsky

[Bill Zavatsky works at P.S. 84 in Manhattan.]

Bill Binzen's wonderful book of photographs, Doubletake (published earlier this year by Grossman, at a steep \$3.95 in paperback), contains color photographs "made by combining two transparencies." Binzen explains:

Sometimes the two halves were taken a stone's throw from each other as with the mannequin's face and the old door (both Lower East Side, N.Y.) ... sometimes in widely separated places as with the inverted airplane (New Zealand) and the golf gallery in the rain (U.S.A.).

This superimposition of images, is, of course, nothing new to photography, although a number of younger photographers, like Binzen, have been recently exploring the possibilities of the photo-collage vigorously. It is a technique as old as literary metaphor ("My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"), but its current vogue owes directly to a widening influence-through-practice of the Dadaist and Surrealist theory of imagery most purely crystallized by the poet Pierre Reverdy:

The image is a pure creation of the spirit. It cannot be born of a comparison, but by two more or less distant realities.

It is a theory which pushes comparison beyond simple likeness and into a third arena in which a new species is generated, a species which is as unlike its parents as much as it mysteriously depends on them.

It is the history of our language and our art, from the kenning ("whale-road" for "sea") to Dali's lobster telephone. It is part and parcel of the cinematic vocabulary: montage, which Eisenstein in part learned from the novel; the dissolve, in which a slowly vanishing image links itself to the fresh, emerging image; the multiple exposure.

I had worked with photographs before, at the Bedford-Lincoln Neighborhood

Museum (MUSE). We were in the habit of grabbing for Life and National Geographic when the children seemed restless or bored in the past, and this winter we began to encourage them to turn from page to page as they wrote, incorporating anything that struck them visually into their poems. This transference of visual into verbal vocabulary produced highly successful Surrealist poems which drew on everything from advertising to the habits of laboratory octopuses, and produced exciting moments like: "Miss Goolang fights with a machinegun in the glowing mushroom army."

When I hit upon Bill Binzen's book, it seemed only natural to use it, because he had already done the work of uniting disparate images in a single photograph; because they were in color; and because in their mystery and beauty they seemed to lend themselves to a wide range of possible interpretation.

I purchased a second copy of Doubletake and proceeded to cut out and mount the photographs on thick paper to make them look as if I'd just picked them up fresh from my local pharmacy. After using them in one or two classes rather perfunctorily--"Here are some mysterious and exciting photographs and I would like you to make up a story or poem to go with them"--I hit upon a structure that seemed to present the pictures perfectly.

I had been reading Russell Edson's marvelous prosepoems to a fifth grade class, stories in which parents hurl babies at ceilings and argue over damaging the ceilings, in which old men fall in love with themselves before mirrors and propose marriage to themselves, in which houses rear up on their porches when men straddling their roofs cowboyishly holler "Giddyap!" The children followed the poems closely, and our discussion turned to the inanimate, probably when somebody objected, "But houses can't jump!" I remarked that most of the things in the world had no mouths, could not talk the way we do, but told us things all the same. How the clock tells us the time. That eggs yodel as they cook--"It's hot! Don't touch!" We began to make a list of things that talked without mouths: the tide, a whirlpool, a sky filled with ominous clouds, the various smells of the flowers, the signals of the changing seasons. I told the children that the French poet Paul Éluard wrote that the poet speaks for things that have no voice, and then read them Charles Simic's superb poem, "Stone" (from his book, Dismantling the Silence, Braziller, paperback):

Go inside a stone
That would be my way.
Let somebody else become a dove
Or gnash with a tiger's tooth.
I am happy to be a stone.

From the outside the stone is a riddle:
No one knows how to answer it.
Yet within, it must be cool and quiet
Even though a cow steps on it full weight,
Even though a child throws it in a river;
The stone sinks, slow, unperturbed

To the river bottom
Where the fishes come to knock on it
And listen.

I have seen sparks fly out
When two stones are rubbed,
So perhaps it is not dark inside after all;
Perhaps there is a moon shining
From somewhere, as though behind a hill--
Just enough light to make out
The strange writings, the star-charts
On the inner walls.

Here Simic penetrates an object and lends his voice to muteness. He answers the stone's riddle with his own imaginary solution. The children were still absorbed, with me. I then told them that I was going to distribute some photographs to them, because although pictures have no mouths, they tell stories anyway. I asked them to be the poets of their photographs, to lend their voices so that the photograph could tell its story. I emphasized that this story was the only story the photograph could have; that what they heard the photograph saying to them was the right story. (It didn't matter what the photograph said to anybody else.) I asked them to look at the pictures very carefully, to really see into them, the way the poet saw inside the stone--and guaranteed that they would be surprised if they did. (Binzen's collection, which also includes black & white photographs, will furnish 32 photographs in color, including the cover, enough for the largest class. I encouraged trade-ins, but insisted that if a trade was made, the child would be "stuck" with his or her second choice.)

I asked them not to begin their writing with useless introductions: "In this picture...", "The man in the picture is...", etc. I had it in mind from the beginning that the writings should stand alone, could, without the reader needing to refer to the photograph. Most took the suggestion. And most of the students wrote two and even three stories or poems, rushing up to trade in the picture they had finished with.

"That's the most writing you've done all year," one teacher remarked to a child.

Two kids running in the
water with their winter
clothes on at the
sea shore but there's this
tree right in the middle
of the water but the
water looks like snow
and the orange part looks
like sand and the water
goes up to a certain point
and stops and in
the water there's this
big face the water is
pinkish blueish color and
the face is pinkish blueish
too. and the branches of
the tree are going right into
the face and one of the
kids is walking out into the
water the water has really
straight lines through it

Michelle Dicesare

Two little girls running into
the water the water has
wheat in it and right
across the middle there's
a big line of trees and
on the other side of the
trees there's snow about
3 feet high and then
there's mountains and
it's snow capped Looks like
the land is all flat
till the mountains and
the water and the
wheat and snow go
on for ever and
the two little girls
are in the middle
of no where

Michelle Dicesare

Mystery in the Dark

One night there was a shriek it was the moon. The trees said, Why did you do that? You are driving me crazy every night you make a noise. Now stop it. What's wrong. Your pants are too tight? Well if they are loosen them. Come on, please!

What's that? O there's some one in the house! Help!

James Kalinsky

The Leaves' Life

It starts out in the spring blossoming. It's pretty young and healthy. Then in the summer there's even better weather and it gets to be bigger, beautifuller, stronger. Everything goes fine till fall. Then there's bad winds, wings on frosts. If it hadn't been for the strength it had stored, it would have died right then. By winter it was very weak, and winter was even worse. It knew it was going to die so it produced a seed to take the place of itself. Then it died. Soon after it came dried out and very light. Then a wind picked it up and brought it up to heaven, and there it rests on the clouds.

Bill Belloise

The World

Birds flying over the ocean
and a paint brush mark. The
brownish sky. The ocean as
a line through the picture.

Paul Kaufman

The shadow of a former beauty who is sad because her hair-dresser slipped with a razor and kind of took off her hair. She is standing by a church door praying for a quick recovery of her hair and a win when she sues her hair dresser for hair slaughter on the 5th Amendment. She looks like a person who is about to cry but is sorry for her hairdresser when he has to pay 500 dollars because of the sue.

Jimmy Cifelli

A man is gazing over a lake.
He seems to be flying over the lake.
He has a strong imagination.
He imagines himself on a subway riding over the water.
The subway train is practically invisible
There are some park benches nearby
They look very real on one side.
They even cast a shadow
The other side just blends in with the lake
He imagines a hillside filled with trees
A motorboat speeds around to their owners' delight
But then even the man disappears.

Steven Ignelzi

One day a boy got lost and once found a real ugly thing. It bit him on the finger and he could not get it off. So he brang it home with him. He looked in the mirror and saw that it looked exactly like him. So he called it Cousin It.

Richard Pity

The New York Butterfly

New York City is like a butterfly.
The blue sky are its wings
The outer edge of the wings are
 lined with roses.
Buildings are stripes on the wings.
People are small pokadots.
Then leaving no trace,
It flies away.

Sharon Breitbart

The Monster

There once were two men. They lived in Newfoundland.
They went to the seashore. They saw something very weird.
It looked like a sea monster. The two men look at it with
surprise. The things moved very slowly.

The men throw rocks and stones at the monster. It roared
and roared and then started chasing the men. The men ran
to the coffee shop. The monster stopped running after them
and went back into the bluish green sea. The men came out
of the coffee shop and went home.

Susanne Luongo

The Day the Sun Exploded

A little girl is rushing home
to tell her mom the sun exploded
The street is full of
colored rays and the cars
gazed in wonder

Julia Lu

[When P.S. 129 in Harlem requested an artist and a writer to join efforts in reaching the same group of children, we asked Bob Sievert and Marc Kaminsky to do what we knew was a difficult job.

Teams of artists from different fields have worked in schools before, with results ranging from liberating to catastrophic. Obviously an organic approach to the arts could best be accomplished by collaborations between sympathetic artists; just as obviously, there would need to be considerable coordination for the different aesthetics and egos to mesh. Sievert, a painter, and Kaminsky, a poet and playwright, had known each other for some years so that the problem of learning each other's ways was minimized. Even so, their relationship underwent a strain during the period of collaboration. We publish this account, abridged as it is, to give others who will experiment in this direction some advance information on the problems they may have to confront.]

First Workshop - Nov. 17, 1971

Project this week: Make a face by cutting out different parts from the materials - ears, nose, hair, mouth, eyes. Afterwards we take down work descriptions. This one written about a crying face:

She is crying because she mad. Her name is Miss Jacobs
and she is crying because her class is bad.

(by Georginna)

Teacher is very beautiful black girl - Rhonda Jacobs. She is very positive about projects - helps greatly.

Rhonda calls up Tues. night - and tells me she will be out - Georginna has socked her - Georginna's Moms has come in and socked her - she is going to the precinct to press charges.

* * * * *

Second Workshop - Nov. 24, 1971

Rhonda was out - The class was in charge of a substitute named Barbie - the amount of distraction was high - in addressing the group no one person was able to hold more than 3 or 4 seconds of attention - both Marc and the substitute disappear looking for a room for Marc to work in - I am alone with both groups for 15-20 minutes - at first I thought it was for only two or three minutes... time wears on - slowly I keep asking them to get in order... We begin to talk about what each group was doing the week before - such general discussion groups are of little use. Everybody talks at once - the School Principal comes in - group is unbelievably attentive - She wishes them a Happy Thanksgiving - they seem unmoved as she twinkles out... We start to have face making contests... everyone has a turn at making ugly faces - after particularly good ones I ask - who can draw that? Marc reappears with substitute - ten minutes of who goes where - everybody doesn't want to go where they're supposed to. The ones who are going with Marc all beg to stay and the ones who are supposed to stay are all saying they want to go - at this point I just give up trying to sense any order - I take out the supplies I have purchased and proceed to work - I am re-establishing last week's problem with this group (faces) - Am sitting in the middle of the floor not giving a damn what is happening around me - cutting paper - making a man - trying to get him to look as crazy as I feel... Slowly interest in him develops - they all want to copy exactly what I've done - I say "sure" and take up the pieces and ask them what they see - "A spooky face" - "A bug-eyed monster". Over 1/2 the class is working now... the supplies are being examined with great curiosity. The minute the markers are discovered many abandon the cut paper and begin marker drawings - one horrible little girl (horrible in her persistent nagging for attention) has been following me around for 10 minutes with a sheet of paper insisting that she can't draw - insisting - insisting - finally I grab the paper from her - What is it you want to draw - A house - I take a marker and draw a box on a horizon line - HERE YOU DO THE REST - For the remaining 1/2 hour she is engrossed with windows, plants, people, trees - filling in this box to a lush drawing - Suddenly there is so much happening so many different projects I am dizzy with delight - Now Barbie has reappeared at the door (you could hear the latch click open). She is obviously panicked by the supplies being over everywhere. She starts screaming for the place to be cleaned up - nobody wants to stop working - the other students (Marc's group) reappear. Marc starts to solicit work descriptions - Barbie is now holding a yardstick - the kids deftly sidestep her - They are gathering up the supplies now -

Marc called and asked what I was doing - suggested we all do breathing sounds together - I object saying such young students could not understand concentration of exercise and would just make noise - He insists that we do a group game together, Trust the Circle.

* * * * *

Third Workshop - Dec. 1, 1971

When Marc shows up at 1:20 I tell him the class is not ready for group thing (Rhonda had just had big fight with them) Marc insists on doing it - He starts off by explaining he has brought in presents and gives them their poems back - Next he starts readings - Soon there are chants - As the time goes by I am getting madder and madder - he has not even attempted the Trust games he proposed - it is 1:35 - Now he has them jumping and cheering - I tell him that we must separate the groups - there is less than an hour left - instead of the kids having gone through an intense concentrated experience their energy is wild - Finally I am alone with my students -

I ask what does a tree or plant start from - after several attempts "a seed" is decided. We go through the various states of progress of a plant and discuss what is where - leaves are at the end of a branch, fruits on ends of branches, roots go into the ground. They have a hard time focussing on this information - to pick up verbally - So I yell out - "We're making trees today." Everybody starts!

At the end of the day I leave the group with Marc - I am still furious with him - I must make lines clearer as to when we share the group. I tell him I am angry.

A very difficult week has followed - I freaked Marc out by my reaction to him - telephone calls back and forth - Marc feels that I am acting morally superior - he asks to remove the problem from blame - I just want to be able to teach. We straighten out our differences over dinner at FOOD.

* * * * *

Fourth Workshop - Dec. 8

I decide that I will try the piece of change idea. So I begin by giving an example on the blackboard - I try to get the kids to give me examples of their own. Some of these:

A HOUSE - IT BURNS
A HOUSE - IT SNOWS
A LADY - SHE FALLS DOWN

Next I put out the supplies - scissors, markers, crayons, colored paper, glue, felt (patches and remnants in red, blue, white, green), tape. I show them that they can take 2 different colors of paper and put them together for each side of the problem - this becomes a thing they all grab onto - everyone

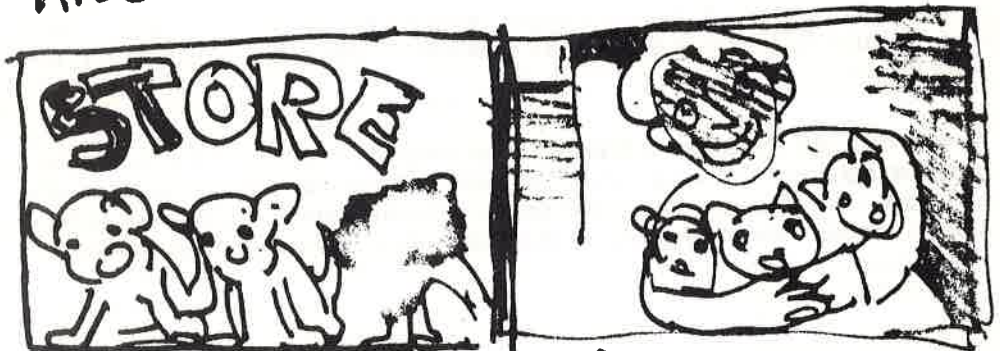
WHAT HAPPENED

A PIECE OF CHANGE
GIVE EXAMPLES
DOUBLE IMAGES



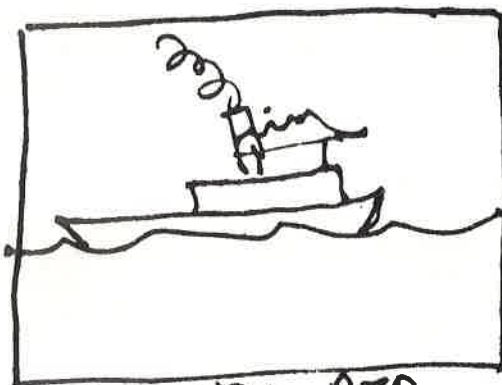
4 TREES ON A
HILL

ONE FEL DOWN



3 PUPPIES IN A
WINDOW

I BOUGHT THEM
ALL



A BEAUTIFUL RED
BOAT.



A MONSTER ATE IT.

is putting 2 pieces of paper together - a few have no idea why - but they go ahead and do it. This is something that always happens - a definite act or operation becomes an end-all - everyone does it. . . .

(Later) Denise and Maurice have been over in the corner with heads bent in work - now Denise runs over to me - look look - She holds out an elf - a 3D stuffed mannikin 6 inches tall - made with felt, tape, glue - Maurice has one too - They are really ingenious - We play with them - They sing Santa's Coming to Town.

* * * * *

Fifth Workshop - Dec. 15 (FUR TRIM ART)

Last week everyone was getting into Christmas so I decide to go out and get some materials that will lend themselves to Christmas - I got a whole batch of rolled cotton - white fur and decide that this week we'll make fur trimmed art.

There is a Christmas tree in the back of the room - Kenneth G. keeps running to the light switch and turning off the lights so we can see the Christmas tree lights. Annette starts screaming Shut up Shut up - the whole thing smells of disaster. I start my ahems - listen - finally six or so people are listening so I start my fur trimmed rap. We talk about Santa's fur trimmed coat - Think of other things that could be fur-trimmed effectively. Here is the list.

FUR TRIMMED:	Clothes
	People
	Dogs
	Cars
	Animals
	Books
	Trees
I tell them about the	Furniture
Dada fur dishes - -----	*Dishes
they are unimpressed.	Roller Skates
	Footballs
	Cigar Boxes
	Teachers
	Christmas Trees

I say O.K. Let's make some fur trimmed art -
"You mean Santa Claus?"

Six Santas begin. The cotton is attacked - everyone is trying to get a large piece - downright hoarding - Steve is trying to make a stand up sleigh - the engineering is too hard for him - it collapses 3 times. He crumples the paper and sulks.

Liselle brings a drawing to me - it is 2 women with huge Afros, on blue paper. After questioning I find out they are dancers on a stage. Out of several scraps of paper I show her a stage - She likes it and cuts out her dancers - She works for the rest of the period - cutting - adding figures - taking away - the end result is 3 figures - 2 on a stage below - one is saying to the other "Don't shake yourself at him" - I ask her what it means - "The one saying it is the wife of the man below. He has taken her out to the show and this lady comes on the stage to dance. She shakes at the husband so the wife must go on the stage to stop her."

There are 6 Santas working out beautifully - cut out painted and furlined - they are going together slowly with a great deal of care and attention - I am very aware of how much they have grown in just five weeks - Of special interest is Brenda's Santa - He is several shades of blue - no reds - just blues with fur lining, very effective.

Maurice has made a very elegant car - the windows are furtrimmed - this piece is the only one that meets my fantasy of the class - fur lining on everything. Rhonda is back clean up time.

* * * * *

Sixth Workshop - Jan. 12, 1972

I intend to do newspaper collage - cut out work have the kids look thru papers find things develop them - cut down on materials - have things limited.

Marc calls Tues. night and we both decide to do the thing together - Marc has some thematic material he wants to present - He is into Creators and creatures... he wants to have the kids develop creatures - I figure this is quite possible to combine with my intentions - Creatures can come from the newspapers -

Marc meets me at the agency - I have brought 2 books filled with creatures - one on American Indian work and one on African and Oceanic work.

Marc, Rhonda, and I sit down with the kids - we go into the whole rap about creatures. We tell stories of creations - Pinocchio - Frankenstein - show pictures - they are impressed with the African sculpture's genitalia.

I take out a creature I have made out of newspaper and hang it on the board. I explain we can make creatures by looking thru the papers. We tell everyone they can do as they please - Write or make a creature. The division is equal - they thoroughly examine my shopping bag for materials - 3 empty paint jars - 2 Elmer's glue - scissors - markers - large bottle India ink - brushes - foil - newspaper

Brenda finds a large carrot photo - "This will be a face" - the search is on - everyone scans the NY Times for large useful images - Maurice finds a large clockface, Steve wants to help him

Liselle has made 2 circles - "This will be faces - help me make a body" - I tell her to lie down on the floor - I trace her onto opened newspaper - Everyone digs this technique - more tracings.

Kenneth G. is running around. On the other side of the room Marc and Rhonda are busy with dictations - taking down words - I am disturbed that with all 3 of us in the same space there is still that unoccupied margin of people in the center just working off energy - I haven't mentioned it before but always there are some not doing anything racing around. Must they do something? Is it my hangup? Why can't they scream and horse around? Why do they not participate? I visit several - Anna - Victoria - Annette -

Don't you want to do something? "No"

OK - Would you like me to help you do anything - We could

"No - that's OK"

I return to the workers - they have need of me. The others make me feel abandoned - Is that how they feel? I AM PRODUCTION CRAZED!

Maurice and Stephen have cooperatively made a beautiful large creature - They give me a work description. Rhonda is helping Liselle make hair - Liselle has chalked in a beautiful marbled dress. - Stunning I tell her. She says I talk like a lady - my masculinity smashed I retreat.

Janet in the meanwhile has made a fantastic creature that is spread with 1/2 bottle of Elmer's Glue mixed with India ink - I used to explode at squandering like this - now I can see the sense of it - She has made a beautiful piece. It is powerful and wild. Denise has finished her work - an eskimo-like figure with a face of scribbled ink - it looks authentic Shamanistic - how could she know? - the clothes are black - colored stars dot them - the head is fringed. I decide I must photograph this work.

David's been working by himself - he has made a creature but clearly the ideas are from my piece - the construction and forms are the same - several people comment on it - David is slightly embarrassed - he says a long "Soooo!" That's the break you take by making an example - but how nice that in a large class only one has chosen to follow -

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Eighth Workshop - Feb. 25

I go to Marc's house to talk to him about the class - We talk about things

relating to teaching - about his life - my life - We eat a spinach and mushroom omelet - We will work together in the same space, the same time - We will share a theme - a project that Marc has in mind - Other Worlds - Marc has questions to put to the class - I will have them draw these other worlds.

We go to school together across town in the car. Marc has greatly prepared himself with a discussion we are going to have with the students - I realize my preparation is much more in the materials I am bringing - a large roll of drawing paper - craypas - glue - ink - brushes - myself

In the class discussion everyone wants to express himself - after each talks they become bored with hearing each other - a competition is on to be heard. The less competitive of the class lose interest. Marc plays it out a long time, finally the writing assignment is made, I am caught off guard - I quickly must state what the art component is - somehow I am confused because the writing has already begun - my bag is examined - the paper is unrolled - the largeness of it turns on the kids

(Later) I am weary of the disorder around the room - we must finish early - there is a surprise party for Rhonda in the works - I am glad - exhausted after an hour - very disturbed - I question Marc about it afterwards - He says it's been a terrific class - shows me the writing in his hand -

* * * * *

Ninth Workshop - March 3

Marc and I are working together - I want to get into gardens - Marc is hesitant - he agrees - he suggests a strong input in the beginning of the class - we will give them information on seeds, compost, what plants need - lots and lots of new words - Marc is going to create a dramatic situation out of things coming into a garden.

Everything starts out well. Then I see Kenneth P. (large-uncontrollable-angry) is gathering up a war party - he and 3 others grab some finger paint (4 jars) and shred off a large piece of paper. They dump the jars upside down - and looks of joy gleam in their eyes - not the look of work to be done - but more of I can really take this trip into a mess - I decide to work with them - I get in and start telling them that fingerpaint is fine but you must look at what you're doing - I repeat the phrase over and over "look at what you're doing" - Kenneth P. is upset I have gained control - he decides to chase several girls with paint covered hands - I must leave the painting to get him to wash himself (DISARM)

I have also brought paper cups and dirt - we start to fill cups with dirt to make "gardens" - the idea excites them - Lisette, Luanda, and Brenda have brought in containers with gardens already started - philadendron - about 10

of us gather at the dirt bag and fill cups - some students want to decorate the cups before planting them. Around this time 5 or 6 boys start drifting back - they discover the paper cups - Maurice makes a walkie talkie out of 2 cups and string - they are amazed it works - everybody wants a walkie talkie...

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Tenth Workshop - March 17

Marc was not able to come*- I have brought with me more garden supplies - cups - soil - seeds (Morning Glory, Forget Me Nots, Mung Beans, radishes) - also string, glue, paint. There are two fields of interest today - 1) is the art workers 2) is the gardeners. First setup is very interesting - 6 or 7 students have made an art factory - great concern with the setup - I will formalize the set up more next time and see if this increases their productivity.

The "Bad Guys" - Kenneth P. and Kenneth G., Dondi, William and David all seize cups, they want to make walkie talkies again - I agree - I try to get a walkie talkie play started - I communicate to Kenneth P. my idea over the walkie talkie - he considers it and then rejects it - For the rest of the time the class will continue with walkie talkie systems across it - interlacing work activities will be walkie talkie conversations - Rhonda and I get into some of these - What is amazing is how this activity does not disrupt - the hum of the class absorbs it -

Stephen is very busy in the back of the room with David - They have left the room and returned with extremely large papers - They construct kites about 5 ft. in height. They want to fly them out the window - All the string is in the communications system. Edward has seized the idea of balloons along with 3 others - his piece is a tin foil balloon with a papercup as a gondola - very effective. Rosalyn and Luanda are making houses - Luanda's house is totally charming - two pieces of paper, one as a base, the other curved as a roof and pasted - A garden surrounds it - Rhonda Jacobs has made a woman to stand within the house and several pieces of furniture - It contains elements of house-church-school - She tells me of her experiences in Mississippi. I understand this is a very deeply felt piece - All I can tell her is it is beautiful

The art factory (Denise, Janet, Brenda, Rhona, Vicki) all are into making houses - 3 walls no roof - a clear distinction between inside and outside - several have gardens - these projects are all clearly perceived - all beautifully worked. Our time together is nearing the end. It is not without the usual turmoil - many distractions - fights - Jose, fat and sweet, leans against a desk - He tells me he wants to get out of this class - Why? I ask - All the time fights - fighting all the time. I begin to see the class anew. I am now aware of the specific nature of the problem - the minute they have

*[Note: Shortly afterward Marc left the project and Bob continued alone.]

nothing to do or no direction then comes the outbreak - I doubt I can fill this last half-hour but at least the problem is becoming clearer in my head.

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Eleventh Workshop - March 28

I have decided to give a very definite structure to the class - very definite project - At home the night before I make two fish on strings - cut out and fins attached - the idea being everyone will make a fish - also I will divide them into work groups - modeled after the previous "work factories" of the past weeks - I shopped for various papers two days before and feel this will be a real test after several weeks of chaos if a really structured project will allow them to work well!

I bring in the fish - Rhonda has the class really tight - I begin to understand there is a power struggle happening - 3 or 4 strong students - Vicki - Denise - Kenneth P. - all have their followings and Rhonda is in battle with them -

I show them the fish after they have settled into work groups - They respond beautifully - Everyone is excited - They all start talking whales - For the whole afternoon everyone works - I am overcome with joy - We all run around to check out different people's work - 1/2 of the class makes whales - they work large - they are engrossed - None of the usual flurries. Even the sharing of materials is done with a minimum of effort - The whole thing is accomplished with the spirit of cooperation.

Maurice has a fantastic idea - he makes two fish and staples them together and stuffs it - a stuffed fish red with chartreuse lines - several other stuffed fish appear - Into the room comes Win Pei, a teacher who suggests we hang the fish all over - Kenneth and I start hanging the fish on the rear wall - the class becomes a magnificent underwater environment - As we finish, the most violent fight I have ever seen in a class breaks out between Kenneth and Vicki - He's much larger - she's meaner - unbelievable blows - it ends with me holding off Kenneth as Vicki stands there screaming and howling her rage at what has happened to her - I understand that the fight was over control - Rhonda has banished all her (Vicki's) minions to their seats - Kenneth's slowly retreat - Vicki is the loser - Her reign as queen has ended - all she can do is howl - and it is a howl from her innermost being - She keeps sputtering about how it shouldn't have happened.

The room is clean, Rhonda has them all in their seats - Vicki still screams in the rear - Rhonda is strangely more authoritative. I feel something decisive has happened but cannot connect it to any of the previous two hours' work.

Oh yes - the seeds are all sprouting. I fear over the vacation the seedlings won't make it - but I forget to mention it.

What I'm feeling right now - with Bob & Marty & Steve just out the door - is **a kind** of pain which slowly settled down after the class - the pain of defensiveness - my after-reaction to several things that occurred in the class, primarily my reaction to Bob, before we work something out - talk it out - **my feeling** I've wounded him or 'invaded his turf' makes me extremely **defensive** - something that's come up several times in our working together **& the** thing we discussed most before beginning the workshops together -

Marty & Steve's* presence in the class also complicated things for me - before class I was tense, felt the tension in my body that I feel now - as soon as I started making contact with the kids the tension left me & I was into that - their wanting to hear & read & participate in what came out of last week's class & so when I got off on that trip with them - making the rhythm section to the reading of the poems, by them & me & Bob & Rhonda - I began to go into two places - one was staying with the kids, starting to come up with ways of using the energy they were putting out to go into the assignments - into acting out one-word poems, etc - but also, my awareness of 'the adults' inhibited me - Bob was not getting 'equal time' in the thing, and Steve & Marty who seemed to be digging the kids' excitement were a kind of pressure on me too, one that I wasn't really conscious of, but I could feel my mind juggling things - I really didn't feel free to let start actively focussing the energy towards the writing & at the same time the 'being observed pressure' however minimal kept telling me: start making it into something, & was pushing at me - so there were various tugs going on & I couldn't give full concentration to the situation at hand - this written in part out of the defensiveness & trying to understand what happened -

In writing this - with a slight headache now - I'm more involved with my relationships with the adults than with the kids - feeling blocked now - slightly inhibited from just letting it all out - exploring on paper what went on for me - but these are the concerns at the moment - whatever competitiveness exists between Bob & I became today a source of tension because of 'being observed' - I'm slowly realizing now how subtly this affects things, so let me start there, I think that would be the most fruitful, how I felt about Steve's coming, not knowing then that Marty was coming - there was the vague preliminary body tension & then when Steve & Marty entered the room I was already into the kids & felt relaxed but soon I began to feel vague

*[Director and Assoc. Director of Teachers & Writers Collaborative.]

pressures again - an unfreedom to let things follow their course, which is how I usually do things, trying to 'seize the time' - pick up on what's in the room & give it direction - I think Bob & I might have been able to cue each other in somewhat better - perhaps - had it not been for Steve's & Marty's presence - the pressure 'to do a class'; to 'look like you know what you're doing at every moment' - not that that's what was coming from them, it was in me, as a reaction - in short, I am more trusting of children - and my grown-up students - than of 'adults' - colleagues, with whom I have a more complicated relation & with whom it takes longer for me to build up trust -

Then, too, Bob & I do have difficulties at times in giving & receiving each other's cues - another thing that heightened it this time was that this is the first time we tried doing a part of the class together - my idea was a breathing-thing, & Bob rejected the idea & right now it suddenly hits me that in the interest of peace with Bob I said Okay, because of his feelings about the breathing-together, which I love doing, & which puts me in a good place for working with people - of course if Bob was unhappy with the idea, it wouldn't have made for unity - because of the special problems we have working with the same class divided into two groups it would be important to find something we both could enter into equally, pulling everyone into a circle, & then divvying up - but right now what hits me is my disappointment at his non-acceptance of the idea, & tho I felt no anger then, I realize it was there - the kind of anger you feel when you feel turned on by something you want to pursue & someone throws in a roadblock of some kind -

Two people, with two very different energies, each one a strong presence, a strong teacher - it's difficult; the whole unity-thing was pretty much unrealized, never even began to take effect.

What happened was the kids wanted to get their hands & voices on & into last week's work, so the reading took place. In the discussion afterwards, Bob said he got angry at how the thing developed, where I took & let it go to, because it was to a very different place than where he wanted to go - just before this, I heard a part of what Marty was saying to Bob about his recovery from the chanting, bringing the kids into the plant-project, and mentioning the fact of my greater activity during the reading - 'Marc's situation' - this put me uptight -

Bob & I have overlapping areas of uptightness, or rather, compatible ones; his is that his turf, his area, is going to be invaded - & afterwards he'll tell you he is angry - the effect on me is to make me at certain moments cautious & defensive about doing what I want to do, going my way - my uptightness has to do with a very guilty conscience about competitive feelings - when things are working in a balance, as they often do between Bob & I, it's fine - but if the balance shifts either way, it's hurtful - that is, it makes me a bit anxious when the kids want to come into my class again, & not work with Bob, even tho I'm of course pleased - working alone with the kids is much simpler for me because the guilt-machine can't get started over whatever success I have with them & the sometimes unmanageable judgment-machine I am in control of: that is, I feel free to recognize holes in the class, failures to see or do something, & feel basically good about the

recognition tho it may at times be painful, but if I see it & draw conclusions & use it, the judgment-machine isn't on top of me.

I think Marty & Steve's presence fueled up my judgment-machine & gave it a little too much tank-like thrust, just crushing everything before it: all the things that failed to happen became glaring failures in my eyes, & heightened my uptightness. It was these 2 primitive engines going at it that made me uneasy after class, & put a block between my head & the experience of teaching those kids today.

This is a difficult entry to write - one impulse is positive & exploratory, & already I feel better having gotten some of the truth out - another is protective & defensive, but it is this one which will inhibit any painfulness & learning along with any self-exposure - I can only get to the truth of the whole situation by clearing away the personal garbage first -

To get to the nitty-gritty without further do, today's class touched closely on what is the most pressing - or one of the two most pressing - 'unresolved conflicts' in my life - my relation to my brother - in this case it was Bob - it is something that still makes difficulties for me & without going into the specifics of my relation to my brother (I don't think I can explore what happened today without bringing this one in somewhat) - the difficulty is this: I was very much the eldest son - & favored - & outshone my brother, hence the double-feeling at certain moments (as after today's class) of the inappropriateness-illegitimacy & hurtful nature of it's being 'Marc's situation' - that for me is like - or it becomes in my head - a harsh condemnation. The truth is, in certain situations my expansiveness does crowd out others, & it's something I have to look out for; my after-reaction against myself is also too harsh, & so the guilt, which I can only get rid of by doing exactly what I'm doing here, going into it, freeing myself of it by getting it all down & out - my anger comes in when I begin to feel super-inhibited for fear of stepping on 'my brother's' - Bob's - toes; so there it is. It only gets bad if I don't give myself the freedom to work it out with brother-Bob and/or inhibit myself out of fear of arousing brother-Bob's anger. The point is, we both need breathing-space.

Therein lies the key: how to make & allow for breathing-space for each of us, so that we both can give to those kids what is ours to give & what we want to give - separation is the simplest answer & this is what I was talking about with Steve in the kitchen, one which I liked - Bob suggested we do a class together, & said it would have to be 'structured' - it certainly would! Things planned carefully advance, so the kind of thing that happened today would not happen, due to Bob's & my different energies & gestalts. And this is what I have against the idea - my tripping-off on something that happened might involve us in the same conflict that occurred today; and I really don't want to have to walk into class with my tripping-off impluse turned off, feeling unfree about extending & building on & just going with some ember a kid throws out & blowing it up into a roaring fire around which everyone dances - if Bob ain't exactly dancing over it, well, trouble. There would certainly be a strain in it for me, this 'structured' class - structured because we would have to build partitions to leave each of us enough breathing-space - so any

bonfire I blow breath on wouldn't eat up Bob's oxygen -

Bob & I are both initiators - I know something of how he works, his body-breath works, it is a slow, gradual entering into the group-thing, waiting, waiting, lying there, feeling his way into, slowly, the group-process going on, hanging outside of it, & then moving in, solidly, sturdily, massively, as a kind of bass, basso, support, for the whole thing; he is both in it, at the base, but separate, outside, not that he holds back, or doesn't give - but he remains massively & solidly himself, keeping that self solidly intact: he's a Taurus, I'm a Libra - an air sign - big difference - the point about my using these signs is this: I enter in quickly, (I am describing our dance group, but it says everything about how we work in teaching) - establish eye-contact, body-contact fairly quickly, sometimes because I need the support of it, the touch of the outside-thing; to make for a group-process, in the dance group, I enter someone else's rhythm, willingly & gladly, to make the larger thing of a breathing together - the weakness of Bob's strength is that he holds on to himself too much, at times when it would be good to let - the weakness of my strength is that I give myself up too quickly and too excessively when at times it would be good to remain separate - you can observe this in the way we teach - my method may be caricatured as a giving myself to the class, going on their trip, & then once we are all together, getting my hands on the steering wheel & making many small turns, this way, that way - but the ship is afloat, & I'll as much as possible leave hands off & let other pilots steer so long as the current is running & taking us, moving us, towards the poem, or new knowledge of any kind. When things are going well in a class of mine there are several pilots, & each one is working on the part of the ship that he wants to deal with; I move around, co-ordinating some, sitting & listening & asking questions some, & answering whatever questions are put to me, if I can....

HOW TO MAKE VIDEOTAPES WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW THE FIRST THING ABOUT IT

Phillip Lopate

[During the Christmas vacation we met with Young Filmmakers and MERC (Media Equipment Resource Center), who agreed to loan us a videotape set-up--one 1/2" Sony AV Portapak, one TV monitor, a videotape camera, a tripod, lights if necessary--for the rest of the school year. In return we would hire a MERC technician who would supervise the use of the equipment and teach videotape to the kids. The equipment would be available for use by the writers in the P. S. 75 team and interested teachers. We were still in the dark as to what we would do with it, but we knew we wanted to experiment with videotape, to see what effect it would have on the classrooms, whether it would generate more or different kinds of creative writing, whether it could reach kids who didn't like to write. Myself, I wanted to learn it for my own pleasure and curiosity. The writers received some basic instruction from Jaime Caro, MERC's director, and we were more or less ready.]

Videotape proved to be a lot more engrossing than I anticipated, and I spent the rest of the year on it with Lois Phifer's class. My whole mode of operation in the classroom and relations with the kids changed now that I was working with smaller groups on specific, long-range productions. It isn't that I abandoned standard creative writing, as that I became interested in how to take the written word one step further, into another medium, and by doing so convince kids of the immediacy and practical application of their written ideas.]

January 6, 1972

First day back after vacation for me. I wanted to rehearse a play for the coming of the videotape next week. Where to begin? The kids made everything easy today. Their class has been studying conflict situations. Britt and Ricky say they've got a great idea for a video play, all about how a fight starts. This chimes in well with Adiel's schoolyard play of several weeks before, which I had hoped he'd expand. "OK this morning I'll work with one group--Adiel, Britt, Ricky, Roberto, Francisco, Juan and some girls..." "Ooo--ooo!" --"Karen and Virginia. And this afternoon we'll rehearse the

the play that Maria, Marissa etc. wrote." Tommy and Gregory: "Hey, why can't we be in it?" I'm ready to apologize but Lois Phifer says forcefully: "I told you to finish writing your play, didn't I?" The right tack-- lets me off the hook. "Yes, you guys write a play and we'll act it."

March into the writing room. Britt takes over and starts spinning out a plot, telling everyone who they're going to be. Even Karen falls into line. Unfortunately Adiel's script hasn't a chance in the whirlwind of Britt's fantasy-making. Adiel appears to take it phlegmatically, with characteristic resignation. I could force them to adhere to Adiel's schoolyard plot but I'm also curious to see what Britt will pull out of the hat. Which becomes known as:

THE GANGSTERS AND THE GIRLS--Two girls are walking along discussing how their mothers never let them have any fun. Britt strolls up and tries to make a pass at Karen. She shakes him off and the girls enter a bar. "Johnny Walker Red." The bartender, Ricky, won't serve them because they're under-age. Britt, who has followed them in, gallantly insists that they be given the drinks. Ricky refuses, says he'll lose his job. Britt punches Ricky and Roberto and Francisco jump in on Britt's side and somehow Ricky and Adiel chase away the three other men, but not before Britt has threatened to come back and kill them. Meanwhile the girls are thrilled at men fighting over them and decide to throw a party for Britt, Roberto and Francisco. Britt and his gang decide to rob an old man to buy tuxedos for the party.

At this point I had the feeling that the improv was disturbing Irene and her group who were working at the other end of the Writing Room, so we moved it down to the auditorium. It was packed with little tiny kids. Everyone screaming. I took my group into the makeup room behind stage. The makeup room had its own bathroom and someone used it: but the toilet kept flushing.

We arranged a few tables and chairs to simulate a living room, and everyone started acting the teenage party scene. It was obviously a delicious scene for them to do, though compared to the high octane action of the first part nothing was happening. Stilted small talk, a little dancing (to imaginary music) between Karen and Britt, potato chips. It suddenly struck me that the kids needed to play out this courtship scene which was very much on their minds, but they really didn't know how it went. Hence the shyness. Roberto and Adiel were getting bored in the background of Karen's and Britt's flirtation, but like true partygoers, remained watchful. Just as I was casting about for some way to make the scene "dramatically" interesting ("A fire?" suggested Roberto), the water from the toilet lapped under the door and flowed into the makeup room. A flood! The kids surprisingly wanted to go on acting the scene--all except Virginia, who said plaintively "I don't like water." --"Don't pay any attention," said Britt. --"Now wait a second, this is serious," I found my voice. "Francisco go and find the custodian, tell him what happened." Adiel went too, bringing back the martyred janitor Mario who sees his life as a losing battle against the forces of dirt.

I took one look at his face and scooted the kids onto the stage. Howard Berger, the Science cluster teacher, was on the apron entertaining the kindergarten kids with some weird pantomime. Suddenly the curtains were pulled behind him and we had sealed off a rehearsal area. At this point the drama took a turn into violence and pathos. Britt was shot by the bartender on the way home from the party. His friends were gathered around him. He asked for Karen, as he lay on the ground. "I can't die," he said to me, "I'm the hero."

"No you die," I told him.

I wanted a death scene.

"How does it feel to be dying?" I asked. Britt's eyes fluttered upward. Howard Berger came backstage to see what was happening. Instinctively I held him back from the action, as if to say, "Don't interrupt their play." But he said, "I want to play too, don't push me away."

"OK you be the doctor." Perfect for Berger with his goatee. He laid his ear on Britt's chest. "I don't think he has much chance."

"What are his chances?"

"Ninety-nine out of a hundred he won't last." Karen began wailing. So Britt died. Karen died soon after of a broken heart, Francisco and Roberto died avenging Britt, and Ricky was arrested. They wanted to keep it going but it was already after the lunch bell and I was meeting Irene for lunch.

January 12

This was our first day of working with videotape. We got there at 9:30 and the kids were so excited with the equipment that we stayed till 3. J. T. Takagi, the MERC technician who will be working with us, did a beautiful job of putting the video tools into the kids' hands right away, instructing without intruding too much or dominating. JT is about 18 years old, Japanese, a freshman at Antioch who's working this term. She's pretty calm and the kids liked her. So did I. In the morning we taped The Gangsters and the Girls in the writing room. Karen made herself the announcer and re-named it The Karen Richardson Show! The first two takes didn't register because the kids forgot to push the camera button. Just as well because they needed to rehearse.

Sound was a problem. Partly because portapak videotape is still on a primitive level soundwise, partly because the room is large and hollow. We may have to shoot against corners more instead of placing the camera in the middle of the room and panning across empty space. The kids tended

toward one continuous camera shot, and it will take awhile before they see the need to break the action into shorter camera setups.

We took the machinery back to the class and everyone gathered around for the replay. The kids had been working with concentration all morning; Pat Ronda said she wished Karen would devote that kind of energy to math. All during the day different kids came over and thanked me personally for getting them the equipment. They then thanked JT. They are really touched when someone goes out and gets them something. Maybe that's why I love working with them so.

Over lunch we decided to split the remainder of the class into two groups. JT would take a group of kids who fitted neither into Britt's nor Maria's circle--kids who are very often left out of things, wallflowers, the little people. These included Saul, Soypathe, Wendy, Irlia, David A., and Robin. JT told me later that they had managed to improvise a whole play in which Saul (who's VERY shy) played the detective. Soypathe also opened up beautifully. David couldn't stop telling me that now he knew how to work the equipment. They will record the play first thing next Wednesday. As for JT, she was very pleased and obviously enjoyed working alone with her own group of kids; easier for her to define her role in the afternoon than in the morning when I was around to boss things.

I arranged to take the second group, Maria, Marissa and the other girls who were in the beach blanket play, and rehearse them once without the videotape. I had read the girls' play and it was lovely. It had come out of an introductory playwrighting session I did with them a few weeks ago. The girls had gotten together all week, managed to stop arguing long enough to write this play and type it themselves. They handed me a finished script.

The Double Daters

Scene One: The Beach (Everyone is sitting on their towels and eating chips.)

Carol: Oh, Peter, would you get me some hotdogs or something?

Peter: O.K., Hunny, but wait right there, you hear?

Michael: Lynn, BABY, how about you?

Lynn: All right, get me a soft drink.

(Boys go to get food.)

Icke: How about a little skinny dipping, Tina Baby?

Tina: Shame on you, Hun!!!

(Doug walks on down the beach)

- Lynn: Look at that big hunk of man!
- Tina: Now he's nothing like my man!
- Doug: (Whistles) Hi "CHICKS"
- Peter: Michael, look at the big husky guy stealing our girls.
- Michael: Yeah, he's taking away our girls!
- Doug: How about a dip?
- Michael: Listen, Buster, what's the big idea of stealing our girls?
- Doug: Bug off.
- Peter: Why don't you pick on someone your own size?
- Doug: (Stands up) I am your own size.
- Carol: Hey Doug, I think you better split.
- Doug: Yeah, chicks, I'll see you later.
- Michael: Why you girls hanging around some big guy like him? What's the matter with me?
- Lynn: Nothing, just forget it.
- Michael: Let's go in for a dip.
(So they go in the water)
(Meanwhile)
- Tina: I wonder why I didn't chase him like they did?
- Icke: Cause you have me.
- Tina: All right.

Scene Two: The Double Date (Sitting down at a night club)

- Waitress: What will it be, cutey?

Lynn: (Clears her throat) I'll take the order.

Carol: Four martinis on the rocks.

Waitress: Four martinis on the rocks.

Bartender: Right on, honey! (Pours the drinks)

(Carol, Lynn, Michael and Peter leave the bar and get into a car and everyone talks about Women's Lib until they run out of gas... the car does too.)

Peter: Well, we ran out of gas without a gas station in sight.

Michael: All right, girls, start pushing!!!

Girls: Why do we have to push?

Peter: Women's Lib!

(The women get out of the car and push)

Michael: All right girls, come on.

(Peter and Michael get out of the car, taking the girls' hands and walk away hand in hand)

THE END

By Xiomara Romero, Marisa Powers,
Christine Huntington, Maria Silsdorf,
Stephanie Ashe, Virginia Gonzalez,
Julie Stetner

Once in rehearsal some racial tensions started coming out. Stephanie (black) thought Christine and Maria (white) were having everything go their way. Maria said: "You weren't even supposed to be in it!" Somehow the last scene in the car had been written in such a way that only the Maria-Marissa-Julie-Christine clique were given parts. I made some fast suggestions--have Stephanie (the waitress) ask the four if they could give her and her friends a lift home. Maria was resistant. Stephanie said--"what's the matter, you think we're not good enough to ride in your snuffy car?"

In the end everyone was happy with rehearsals, bouncing on the furniture and the rug and wanting to do it again and again. We drew up a list of props for next week's shooting.

An interesting sidelight to the girls' play, The Double Daters, was that they

insisted on having no boys and playing all the boys' parts themselves. Maria was most vociferous on the subject of no men. The girl-girls will wear dresses and the boy-girls dungarees.

January 18 - We Don't Want Stephanie in Our Play

Second rehearsal. Stephanie makes the most of her small part by wiggling her toosh and acting like Tina Turner. She has been having fights all week with the others: usually I took her side when I thought she was being left out because of color. But it isn't race so much as style: their well-behaved, cool, self-confident vs. her explosive, insecure. Today all the girls were rolling around on the pink rug (our substitute for sand) getting into the proper mood, when Stephanie leapt up. "Wait a minute," she advanced on Maria, the pretty blonde girl with slightly crossed eyes. "You shouldn't've poked me before." What was her beef? It seemed to drop from the sky. Stephanie came at Maria with a bopping fist-jabbing bravado that horrified and tranced Maria. She threw one punch before anyone could stop it and Maria ran out in tears. I held Stephanie by the arms. "You can't do that!" I said. Suddenly Stephanie's eyes were wet, she became outraged. "How come she could touch my face before and start with me, you didn't say nothing!"

"Stephanie it's not the same!" I yelled. "You hit her hard. Can't we have a rehearsal without once, for once, this fighting and wasting time and... damnit!" My voice was so loud it frightened her and me. I ran out to the corridor to check Maria. She was sobbing against a crack in the wall and the other girls were trying to console her.

"Maria, ... I'm sorry," I said. "Is it all right if we start again?"

"I don't want to be in the play any more!"

She quieted down. Stephanie came out curiously to see the fruits of her labor. Maria, that perfect blonde angel-faced child, trembling against her friend Virginia Gonzalez's maternal body in the cinderblock corridor of P.S. 75.

Virginia: "I'm going to tell Mrs. Phifer on Stephanie!"

"Wait a minute--"

"No I'm goin'!"

I stopped her with my arm and said, "Listen, Stephanie, do you think you can calm down long enough and cooperate with Maria on this play?... Because if you can't you're NOT in the play any more."

"I'm in the play!" said Stephanie.

"Not if you can't cooperate. Well? Do you think you can cooperate or not?" I thought to myself, I'm talking like a parody of a school teacher, extracting phony reconciliation formulas. "Do you? I'M ASKING YOU. Can you work together with Maria on this?"

"I don't know," Stephanie said sullenly.

"All right, then that's it. You go back to your class. We'll rehearse without you." I started "guiding" Stephanie down the hall.

She broke out of my grasp and shouted at Maria: "Don't think you're getting away with anything. I'm going to be waiting for you outside and I'm going to cut your face up."

"So long, Stephanie." I led the kids back into the room to rehearse. The run-through went fairly well this time. We were discussing props and costumes for next week when I opened the subject of what to do about Stephanie. I said I thought she added a lot of energy to the acting.

"But we don't want Stephanie in our play," said Marissa. "She'll remember things from the past and then she'll get angry."

January 19

What a devastating day! And I thought it would be so easy. All we had to do was shoot the two plays we'd rehearsed last week. The introduction of the videotape equipment again created a great stir, spoiling Howard Berger's science lecture. He was philosophical about it. JT took the "little people" group she had been working with alone last week into the yard to tape. I told Maria's group to make titles for the beach play, while waiting for JT to get back. Roberto and Ricky wanted to do a war movie so I worked with them on a script--Gene and David joined in, adding a few comic touches to the script--but Ricky was hurt. "We wanted this to be serious." A serious play about how we defeated the Krauts in World War II. The idea was so hopelessly dull to me that I let Christine take me away to settle a dispute about some costumes.

As for myself, I had a case of media over-stimulation--too excited and jittery to concentrate on anything. I felt like a ringmaster tossing lions into separate rings. I had divided the work so totally that, like the classic administrator, I had nothing to do myself and felt ill at ease. Maria's group wouldn't stop quarreling and yelling. I hustled them into the Writing Room to get ready. We were all succumbing to the mad pressure of

accommodating too many groups of kids, too many productions in one day --simply because we didn't have the will to say No.

"How did it go?" I asked JT when she returned.

"You can't believe how crazy it was down there. These same kids who were so well-behaved in the classroom, they went haywire when they got outside. Everything distracted them: fire engines, other kids. The tape itself looks fine. It came out really good."

"Good." Onto the beach play. They rehearsed their lines; Stephanie was ultra-sullen. When it came time for her to say "Shame on you, Hon" she merely said "Shame on you," and the other kids turned on her, yelling "Hon!" We videotaped anyway and the take was very stiff. The kids were dismayed with the results though they couldn't put their finger on what was wrong.

The camera had recorded everything--our embarrassed pauses, our whispered stage cues ("You're supposed to go over there!"). We felt ridiculed by it. It had shown us exactly as we were, --no, not exactly: in a puny cardboard facsimile, like a diorama that made everything look silly. It may be significant that the Double Daters, which started out with a much tighter, better written script than the Gangsters and the Girls or Saul's Murder Play, was the least alive of the three videotapes. Its own dialogue seemed to be stifling the sort of casual openended freshness that videotape celebrates.

We watched the tape of JT's group at lunch with several teachers. I had not yet seen it and it turned out utterly charming. Everything takes place within the same enclosed play space. People on the phone who are supposed to be separated by miles are sitting next to each other, supposedly indoor scenes take place outdoors. At one point the detective asks "Where's the body?" and the camera pans downward no more than a foot away to pick up Wendy lying placidly dead on the ground. It's so funny and unexpected to see her there, right by their feet. While Gwen is stabbing Soypathe, Phyllis Soroka said to me, "I see you agree with the Commission's Report that says TV violence doesn't beget violence. It's a questionable point." I didn't know what to answer Phyllis. Did she want us to tell children to stop using their fingers as guns?

We took the equipment back to MERC at 3. I was shot. I'm still trying to process the strange experience of seeing the kids' plays on tape: how the rough edges, the imprecision and invasion of extraneous sounds and the "off-stage" details ate into the verisimilitude of the dramas. I'm learning the hard way about the peculiarities of videotape. I had thought of it as a kind of 16 mm or Super 8 with instant playback. How wrong I was! I remember seeing some Super 8 films Miguel Ortiz's 6th graders had made. They had the fresh naive flavor of early silents--a closeup of the barking dog, the titles spelled out in pebbles on the ground. In contrast videotape seems a shockingly sophisticated medium which delivers more information than its users intended or bargained for. In the Super 8 films we laughed more with the kids, as creators; on the videotape we laugh more at the kids.

JT and I got into a rather defensive argument/discussion with Scott Morris, a young video expert and MERC's second-in-command, who said the problem we were running into was that videotape isn't suited for dramatic fiction, that it's used best in capturing the flow of "documentary reality." Scott also said the videotape experience at its core is not especially in being taped and seeing yourself on tape, but in operating the camera. That is, videotape is a perfect extension of the way you see and move, a record of each person's particular style of vision. To prove his point he showed us some documentary footage of an anti-war demonstration his workshop members had taken, which looked to me like every other documentary of a demonstration.

MERC Director Jaime Caro disagreed both with Scott and us. He thought videotape was about FEEDBACK. And what we were going through now (self-criticism) was part of that feedback process. Scott suggested the kids videotape the rehearsals and the setting up as well as the dramatic action of the plays.

My Nineteenth Century armor was beginning to clamp into place. If feedback was the message of videotape and the recording of documentary material its cardinal use, then goodbye Carl Dreyer, goodbye transcendent art. I realize that in poetry I have final control over the work. I can change one word and put it next to another and eventually say I stand behind this work. Videotape seems to demand more of a wise passivity and a surrender to the "cosmic flow" of which I'm not sure I'm capable. The takes tend to go on and on because--unlike a movie camera whose button usually has to be held for the duration of the shot, thus building up a physiological anxiety and the desire for a new shot--the videotape camera's button need be pushed only once, and you can walk away and leave the building and the camera will go on filming moronically in whatever direction it's pointed.

Actually all of these theoretical points worried me less than the fact that Phifer's class and I had already become interested in dramatics. I hated to give that up, especially since fictions were so much better at bringing in a larger group of kids as actors and extras. Persuasive as Scott's arguments were, there can be only one cameraman at one time, and what was I going to do with all those other kids, if we did nothing but documentaries. JT and I insisted we were going to stick with dramatic work for a while longer and see what happened. Maybe we'd be pioneers.

Bruised, JT and I repaired to a coffee shop. We agreed between ourselves that we would try documentaries sometimes. Taking up Mrs. Feigin's request to tape her Food Fiesta seemed a good place to start. Maybe we could also have kids do five-minute portraits of everyone in the school, pairing one kid with a subject, or doing groups interviewing one person. JT made a list of possible school activities we might document: the open corridor program, the lunchroom. I admired the tenacity with which she kept analyzing today's mistakes, a really thorough mind that kept pressing for the mysterious missing part. Amazing.

Afterwards as we were walking toward her bus she asked me how I felt.

"Blank," I said. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I'm feeling depressed," she admitted.

"Well--cheer up."

January 25

The Double Daters is almost all filmed. It's good, if a little stiff: it reflects the character of this particular set of girls. The videotaping definitely benefited by being broken into smaller shots. The girls were seized with a perfectionist itch: wanted to do scenes over and over. The acting got a little sharper. Tammy was an excellent camerawoman.

There was some sabotage at the start that ruined our first takes. Stephanie was so infuriated because she couldn't hold the mike (I'd promised it to Dolores who had no acting part) that she stood in front of the camera and wouldn't move. I told her there was no reasoning with someone who blocked the camera--either she moved or was out. Xiomara unwisely pushed her toward the door. Two minutes later Karen--who wasn't even in the play--charged in to beat up whoever had touched her friend Stephanie. I got them both outside, telling JT to go ahead with the shooting, and in the corridor with Stephanie weeping against the door I explained the situation realistically to Karen. Karen said: "Oh. You didn't tell me that part Stephanie. If she won't cooperate give ME Stephanie's part." A little bit of friendly double-dealing. Then she changed her mind and decided the best bet was still to beat up Xiomara. In the end, miraculously enough, Karen went back to class, Stephanie returned to the writing room and worked smoothly with us for the rest of the day.

By that time Dolores was yelling and throwing herself around. Having come into the play to be given a part, she kept begging the girls for something to act and the girls with characteristic clubbiness rejected her. I found little things for Dolores to do, but she was still miserable. Finally I confessed to her, "I wish there was some way I could make this day better for you. It seems like a bad day. Isn't there any way you can stop being sad?" Later she handed me this little note.

Philp

I sorry for what I did. Is just that I got
so mad.

Goodbye
Dolores

I love the melodramatic "goodbye." I keep coming back in these diaries to the sudden heartache which is almost the genius of Lois' class. Sometimes after a stormy crying thing I'll just feel dazed, as if someone had punched me in the stomach. And the kids, I think, know that they have a way to get to me with emotional displays.

* * * * *

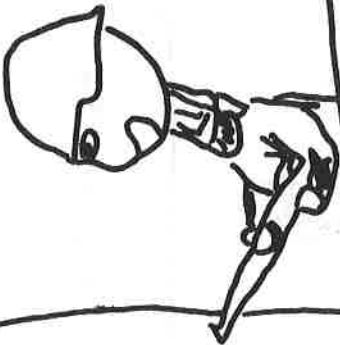
Decided to teach Phifer's class something about the grammar of filmmaking. This in order to get them thinking more ambitiously in terms of visual effects, and beyond the single-take syndrome. Lois Phifer wasn't there and the substitute wasn't there mentally but I raised my voice above the din and grabbing a piece of chalk wrote down

CLOSE-UP
MEDIUM SHOT
LONG SHOT
CUT
PAN
ZOOM
TRACKING SHOT
FADE
DISSOLVE
FEEDBACK

As I defined each one JT would demonstrate it with the camera and the kids would look at the result in the monitor. We even tried a stop-frame gimmick with one person pretending to be in a car and advancing a few feet with each cut. Some kids were still running around... I was yelling information at them, the scene was getting more and more manic, the goody-goodies shushing the others, I refused to give up, wanting them to "learn something" -- there are times when learning is not a spontaneous "doing" activity and ya just gotta shud up and lissen--unwilling also to give them a lecture on behavior because I remember how I was in school when the substitute came in. I told them it would help if they mapped out their shots beforehand by drawing a shooting board, with each shot labeled as long, medium, etc. and the figures sketched in and the dialogue underneath. Very sophisticated concept, storyboards. I was sure no one got hold of the info.

A miracle. That afternoon Roberto brought me the first two scenes of the war movie he had been working on with Steve Lapinet. His shooting board was full of the terms and effects we had discussed that morning, with lucid little drawings that were worthy of a professional. (See example.) Tommy and Gregory wandered in at 3, while we were packing up the equipment. I had suggested Gregory do a video script of his story, Sir Launcelot Duber-nickle. Gregory was very excited, and JT showed him her own shooting scripts from a folio-sized black notebook she carries around. She even ripped out a few blank pages for him which was enough to get him started.

Zoom in on German



German: Stop or I will

Shoot

Pan from side to side

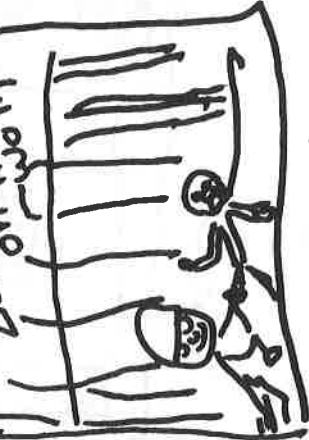


Action

Zoom to sarge as he is shot



Zoom in the men

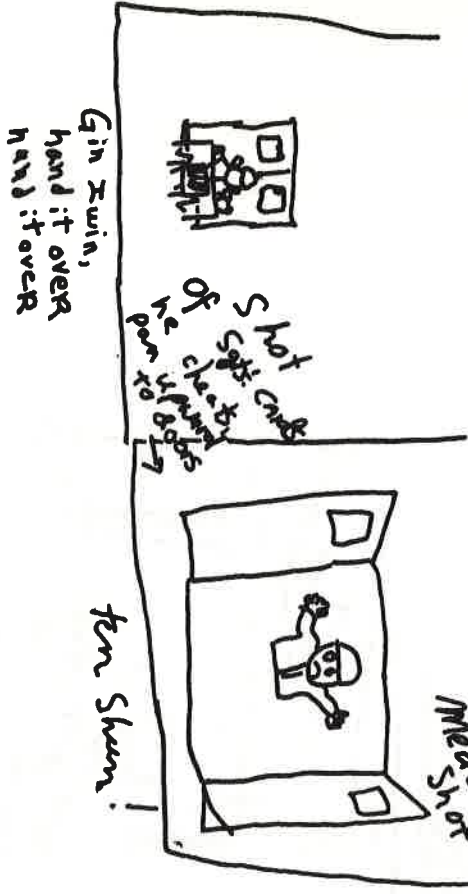


Sarge go on

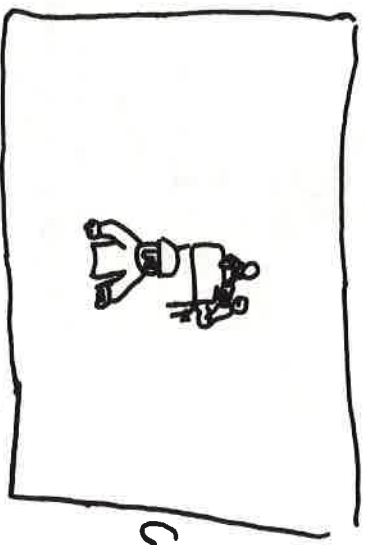
Ricky: NO I'm staying
feedy Bear 45 Calling 475
send medic Rock wounded

Scene 1

Shot Rack clearing back to the camera
pick up card from his leg.



cut



Back of Gen.

cut

Lieutenant! (without looking)
Oh get out of here
Sarge: You don't know
who you're saying that to.

February 2 - Portraits in Videotape

Lois got everyone quiet to listen to us so I realized a speech was in order ... I said we wanted to collect a library of videotape portraits on people in the school. Everybody knew what a portrait in painting was like. What is a portrait in words?

"Description?"

"Good. Description, or biography, or autobiography. But how do you show what a man is really like on film?"

"You don't just ask him questions," said Julie, "because he'll probably lie. You have to spy on him."

This seemed an interesting idea. How do you find out the truth about a person? If you think he's lying, maybe you can ask him more questions and trip him up. The discussion continued very much in focus. David made the interesting point that people have a special way of talking to an interviewer for television. He called it "Microphone language." Just as the discussion was trickling out Howard Berger walked in. "Ah, our first victim!" I said. I asked him if in fact he would consent to being interviewed.

"Why not? I'm a ham. Can I make it up or do you want me to tell the truth?"

"I'd prefer you tell the truth."

"Then I can't be as funny."

"Why not? Reality is pretty funny."

"Not in my case. It's sad. Tragic. If I'm going to be interviewed I need an easy chair," said Howard, and left to fetch one from the Writing Room.

The girls were all a-twitter to ask him personal questions. I recommended that they write down, say, 10 questions. We would still have to work out the order of questioning and lots of other mechanics. One of the kids had a brainstorm and suggested we put the chairs in a row facing Berger, like a panel. Another, Ricky, came up with a proposal to introduce Berger in front of a hand-held curtain and then pull the curtain aside, revealing Howard in his easy chair smoking a pipe. A homey touch.

The easy chair was a stroke of genius because it changed Berger's whole bearing and created a special dramatic space in the room. As we were setting up, Lois gave the kids a strong talk reminding them the best way to interview was to listen hard. Talk naturally and if you see the person is starting to get on to something interesting, pursue it. Don't just ask the next question on your list.

Almost all the questioners were girls. They came up to me giggling and

showing me their lists, with items like: "Would you climb the Rockies for Mrs. Rubinger?" and "Do you see other women behind your wife's back?" The boys were either operating the equipment or tensely keying up for the war movie. Roberto was worried I might break my promise and spend the whole day on this "goeey interview stuff." Odd how quickly everything gets sexually polarized in this group. . .

The interview began. I can't tell you now much Howard Berger contributed by being verbal, gracious, expansive and patient. Even when the same questions were asked twice. He also helped the kids sharpen their questions. When one girl asked, "What do you think of Mrs. Phifer's figure compared to others?" he answered: "That depends on whom you want me to compare it to. If Raquel Welch that's one thing. If Mrs. Z—— (a large staff member), that's another. No. I think Mrs. Phifer has a stunning figure."

They asked him about teaching and he was quite candid--said he almost quit last year when he had a sixth grade class but this year he was much happier as a cluster teacher. The only questions he didn't answer were his age (which the kids guessed--36) and the saddest thing that ever happened to him. Lois noted that the kids were really probing and trading information: for once they didn't care if they were on camera. A break-through, of sorts. She suggested that all future interviews take place in that easy chair corner. Clearly part of the success of the event came from its spatial clarity--Berger in the chair, the kids facing him in a row, camera to the front, sound man at Berger's feet. The pleasures of structure. Howard was exhilarated at the end. "When's my next screen test?"

* * * * *

The War Movie - Advantages of Outdoor Shooting

In the afternoon we took the boys out to film the battle scenes in the snow. Marissa, Maria and Xiomara begged to come along and learn how to operate the camera: later they were given parts as Red Cross nurses. Riverside Park was lovely and moody and could well have been the Black Forest. Wherever we pointed the camera it turned up a gorgeous picture. The snow was falling throughout, a light snow, not sticking, and to the right was the West Side Highway.

I had given them my pup tent to set up as part of the war maneuvers, hoping that this task would be a perfect vehicle for videotape (fusing real-time documentary processes with the dramatic). The kids hadn't a clue how to set it up. Neither did I! I'd just gotten it as a gift--but I didn't tell them that--said we would merely shoot them trying to figure it out. After two unsuccessful attempts they finally found soft marshy ground and got the tent to stand. Roberto, Britt and Ricky were eager to start the fighting; some of the other kids were just trying to keep warm. I had an easy feeling about

everything. So nice to be outside on the first snowy day. This is certainly one of my biggest highs of the year.

Even so, there were casualties. David refused to go down the little hill because he was sure he would slip on the ice. And Britt's saying "Come on, it's easy!" didn't help any. Poor chubby kid. I remember what it was like for me as a kid, those times when jumping from eight feet to three feet seemed an impossible ordeal. I tried to help David with the bland "scientific advice" that there was more traction going down sideways, but he looked at me like: If only life were that simple! On top of everything, David had brought his two magnificent toy machine guns for the war movie and in the midst of shooting decided that the other kids had only let him have the General part to use his guns. He walked off the set sobbing and I ran after him. Coaxed him back with a mixture of sympathy, persuasion and--as a last resort I realized I had one more ace--adult command. It seemed that he had purposely set up a situation to be exploited. But then, I keep seeing that even on the best days school is a Darwinian struggle in which some kids learn how to take the limelight and others to be extinguished in the corner.

The battle scene played itself out against a fieldstone parapet which the kids used effectively like the one in Wild Bunch. Britt, the German-black sentry, was knocked on the head and "dropped into the ravine." There was much shooting and wounding in the legs. Fighters fell in long shot with the casualness of Godard's death sequences. The snow turned everything poetic. We played it back in the classroom for Lois at 3:15, still shivering, and even the retakes looked breathtakingly cinematic. (Now I think location shooting is the way to combat the boxy blandness of the videotape image.)

February 8 - On the Run

This was a lovely day. Just so full. We knew we would have to divide the video time between Mrs. Phifer's class, which was to do another portrait, and Mrs. Feigin's Food Fiesta. But as soon as we entered the building the girls from the Double Daters ran up to us saying Stephanie's mother had lugged her portable organ in to play for the wedding scene. Naturally she was going to be furious if we couldn't film her today. We agreed we would tape it during lunch. I took the girls into Asst. Principal Kelly's office to rehearse. Maria and Marissa sat on top of Kelly's desk (he wasn't there) and called their mothers to tell them they couldn't go home for lunch, and would their mothers please bring their costumes in? So nonchalant... Christine, looking out the window into the yard, thought we should film the wedding scene under the white wooden arch that does look like a canopy; then afterwards for their honeymoon they could climb over the fence to the swings. I thought this was an ideal summary of their status as children playing adults.

"But what about the organ?" asked Maria with that fretful concentrated look of hers, one eye moving toward the nose. "How can we plug it in outside?" --"We can't, unless we plug it into the clouds. Let's just intercut the two scenes and shoot her first inside." Just then a kid from Feigin's class ran in saying there was an emergency. JT didn't have an important piece of equipment... Listen, I said to the girls, I may be gone for fifteen minutes but we'll definitely do it during lunchtime. Meanwhile, rehearse your scene! "We will." But they seemed more worried about the costumes than the actual play. One thing these girls don't need to do is rehearse a wedding scene.

In Mrs. Feigin's room JT and the kids and several adults were gathered around the miraculous videotape pack. Mrs. Feigin was dressed up elegantly for the food fiesta and everyone was smiling. But there was no takeup reel! JT apologized for forgetting to check the set. I looked around for a likely errand boy, and slowly it began to dawn on me that I was the one. "If you take taxis both ways," said Mrs. Feigin, "it will only be twenty minutes." But I had no money! I borrowed \$5 from Mrs. Feigin and hurried out.

Gritting my teeth in the taxi...

At 11:15 I entered Mrs. Phifer's room to do another portrait. The wedding scene girls were pulling at me because they didn't know how they were going to videotape and eat their lunch. They would be too late for the lunchroom. I said that I would buy them lunch. Since I was absolutely broke I deferred that organizational decision till a later hour. The decision that was right upon me, like a Great Dane sticking his paws on my chest, was: Who would we use for our portrait? I made a quick scouting trip of the floor and all the teachers were chicken. Finally Kelly agreed to be interviewed as soon as he was finished with some pressing business.

While waiting we watched the Berger interview and I discussed with the class two problems, one technical, one thematic. First, how could we set up the scene to avoid panning across so much empty space and so many non-involved faces to get from questioner to subject? Tammy came up with a good spatial idea. Have the kids divided into 2 smaller groups on both sides of the person, and the camera back more, facing all. That way the camera would have to pan only an inch from one side to the other, as compared to the old way, in which sometimes the camera had to do an 180 degree pan before it picked out the face of the questioner.

Second problem: How could we dig deeper into a person's life? It wasn't enough to ask them whom they would like to date. What are the important things in a person's life? We made a list on the board: LOVE, WORK, FRIENDSHIPS, CHILDHOOD MEMORIES, MONEY, HOBBIES, POLITICAL VIEWS, FEELINGS, DREAMS OF THE FUTURE.

Mr. Kelly appeared, looking handsome and sartorially dressed as usual, in a herringbone three-piece suit. He is remarkably young for an AP--26, black, hip, liked by almost everyone, including myself. Perhaps because of

his position the interview began very stiffly. The kids spoke too softly to hear. George was not being very open either; Lois Phifer and I, with our foreknowledge, had to drag out of him the admission that he is an accomplished musician who has given recitals. After the usual questions about various teachers' figures, he started warming up, saying how he liked to put on the stereo after work and drink beer. He admitted that he thought someday of changing fields. Then someone asked him: How come he got so angry in the lunchroom? And Julie Stetner wanted to know: How come he didn't listen to the kid's side of the story.

Could you be more specific? said Kelly. Julie cited an incident about lunchroom passes in which he had assumed she was lying and "I wasn't lying, I was right and you were wrong." Kelly stated his memory of the incident, which was quite different. David A. wanted to know if he believed in the slogan "Respect your Elders." No I don't, Kelly said, not unless they merit your respect. I could see beads of sweat break out on his forehead. Kelly was being very honest (if defensive) in answering, and they kept circling in on the area of punishment. They had a real live AP in the hot seat! Someone asked if he had ever gotten into fights, fistfights, with people his own age. "Yes, on occasion. I try to stay out of them because I'm quick to lose my temper." Did he ever have any arguments with Mr. Mercado (the principal)? someone asked. Yes.... Did you ever win one? --Yes, occasionally.

The kids were seeing the underlying structure of the school. We ran out of time, but everyone agreed this had been a great interview. Berger, who had seen part of the interview, said: "They seem to be learning a great deal from this. What it is exactly I don't know, but."

* * * * *

Lunchtime: we ran to fetch Stephanie's mother for her organ solo, The Wedding March. She is an impeccably stately, attractive woman who plays the organ very very slowly, picking out the notes one by one. The girls had their coats on, ready to zip out to the yard for their scene, and stood perplexed, as we taped what must be the most drawn-out performance of the wedding march in modern history.

Then down to the yard. A snowy wedding. Everyone was freezing. Emily made a fine priest. Christine dropped the ring in the snow. I got a chance to be the cameraman. The girls ran over to the fence, the grooms lifting their brides over it as a "threshold" and then tearing off to the seesaws and swings. End of the Double Daters, thank God.

We went off to lunch at the pizza parlor. This was the nicest part of the day. Maria and Marissa had managed to get their hands on \$3, which helped pay for Xiomara, Stephanie, Christine, Virginia and myself. We ordered seven burgers and cokes, everyone feeling so relaxed and grown up on school time. The girls were talking about their summer experiences. Finding jellyfish,

ants, crabs, the blue ocean in Puerto Rico. I was temporarily too tired to speak, enjoyed the privilege of eavesdropping on 10-year-old conversation. It was lovely sitting in that bright snack bar with the sun coming across our formica table. But we had to get back.

Back to find that Tammy and Julie were hurt because they had missed going along. I sneaked them in with me to the Food Fiesta. All I had to do was tell Mrs. Feigin that they hadn't had any lunch. She's really very kind. The room was packed with kids, parents, educational dignitaries stuffing themselves with the incredibly tasty ethnic dishes which the parents had prepared. Posters from many lands and a pious statement on the board that you can take a first step toward understanding people by learning to love their food.

A very warm, cluttered, happy feeling in the room. And in and around people's feet some kids were conducting interviews while others were watching the monitor. Mr. Mercado liked being on camera. Asst. Principal Tritt was interviewed. The footage was sloppy and chaotic, but somehow the videotape experience had enhanced the effectiveness of the Food Fiesta without usurping it. Mrs. Feigin was pleased.

At 3:00 we trooped back to Lois' room and collapsed on the couch. Now that she's stolen our chair, she's set up a lovely little relaxed corner with couch and throw-rug to go with it. Dolores and Britt and Robin were doing instant plays for us, just showing off the way kids do. Dolores put on my white winter coat and pretended to be a very snooty rich lady. Britt did an imitation of me. "Here's Phillip." He came bopping in with a big smile, acknowledging non-existent applause, and then said: "Today we're going to do a film about... a film about... now let me see... what was I just thinking?"

We played back the wedding scene and it came out surprisingly well. Then about 15 minutes of Kelly. We were totally zonked out, watching the telly at three in the afternoon.

February 16 - Sir Launcelot Dubernicle

It never stops being good. We spent all day today on Gregory's Sir Launcelot Dubernicle, in which Sir Launcelot saves a lady from having her brain transplanted by the Mad Scientist and his brainless assistant Igor. Lois Phifer asked "Can I work the camera?" in a voice like a little girl, and since she was so keen to be in on it and couldn't leave her class unattended her solution was to move the whole class to the writing room (our Hollywood). I was afraid we'd have a hard time keeping the kids quiet during takes; but it wasn't bad. The directing was shared by JT and Lois and myself; whenever

one got distracted with a kid's personal problem the other two pushed it forward. It's "child's play." The kids do most of the work. Sometimes I wonder what it is I do. Mainly hover.

What a funny play! Gregory had written and drawn a shooting board but the improvised dialogue fleshed it out much further. They tied up Soypathe in a white sheet and a wonderful ball of twine and put her next to the operating table with its collection of colored bottles and a battered broken doll's head in a strawberry box. Tommy explained to her: "I am going to transplant your brain into this head with the help of these chemicals." He elaborated a great deal of pseudo-scientific explanation, then said "Is there anything you want to say?" and pulled off her gag. On the first take she had absolute stagefright and finally managed to say: No. The second time, I had given her a speech about making things up even when you forget your lines, which I doubt she understood because Soypathe is always in a fog. This time Tommy pulled her gag off and she looked at us for help. Karen Richardson, standing behind the camera, made a horror scream pantomime and Soypathe let out a scream, only five seconds after it should have come: NO! DON'T DO IT! Then he put the gag back on. He turned to the coffee machine, which was supposed to be a computer, and as he leaned down to throw the brain-transfer switch he quipped: "Which would you like? Black? With Sugar? Or Chicken Soup?"

Gregory was waiting off-camera, having Wendy see if his mask was on straight. Always neat and cool, Wendy was a perfect makeup lady. Strange to say, though Gregory had written the script, he had no interest in controlling the production. All of his intensity was concentrated on his entrance (in cape and mask) as a superhero. It amused me that he had given Tommy much the longest part, taking for himself the heroic but very brief and dull role of Sir Launcelot.

When he finally did jump in, he was fairly static, throwing Roberto (Igor) off him and then standing wistfully with his hand on his waist as Roberto (twice his size) struggled up and tried to ready himself to look shattered by the next rude push. CUT! I took Gregory aside and told him to punch, make a fist. Use the uppercut and--giving him the exact opposite advice that I usually tell them when they're going to film a fight--whispered in his ear that he should really punch hard. Take 2 was a lot more roughhouse, with Gregory jumping on tables and flying at his opponents' necks. In fact, when the shot ended it was discovered that Tommy had a bleeding nose. He lay quietly for a few minutes on the couch while Dolores applied her grandmother's surefire method for stopping blood--a penny on the forehead!

With Tommy stretched out we filmed the flying sequence where Sir Launcelot, having rescued Soypathe, flies away with her. I was curious to see how they would solve the problem in technical terms. Personally, I had no idea how to do it. Someone suggested that the two get on top of the hospital table and we wheel it around, shooting them only from the waist up. A very surreal calm effect. (So what if the ceiling is in the frame). Then the cameraman suggested that we mount the camera sideways to give it more the illusion of flying horizontally through space. Lois was pushing the

wagon; she kept telling me, "This play's really going good."

Strange that it is good, with such an unlikely cast. The largest speaking part taken by a kid with a partial cleft palate (Tommy), the superman played by a fragile, polite boy who doesn't fight, and the captured girl so befuddled she even forgets to scream. Most of Tommy's speeches still come out like he has marbles in his mouth--even though we did hide Wendy under the table with the mike--but it doesn't matter that much because the set is so convincing and the motif so familiar. As Tommy goes twaddling on about chemical formulae and telepathy and memory we watch because of his beautiful aplomb. It reminded me very much of early Zacherle and the longeurs of his horror talk show. I was fascinated whenever Tommy was wrapping Roberto's head with a surgical bandage or extracting the sponge (brain) from Roberto's head. Any physical process has a compelling attraction on videotape--from setting up a tent to tying your shoes. This seems the key to overcoming the problem of verisimilitude in dramatic videotapes.

Roberto made a grand slobbering Igor. I told him privately to repeat like a dumbbell everything Tommy told him, so that the audience would have double the chance to understand. "Now pick up the girl." --"You mean you want me to pick up the girl?" etc. A fun day.

March 15

Today we made a videotape documentary about the school lunchroom. I'd wanted a change of pace from fiction-fantasy, and thought it would be good to focus on the lunchroom, since everyone knows that's a problem in the school. Plenty of action guaranteed. I warned the kids a few weeks earlier that we would be taping the lunchroom, and we discussed the best way to get across the nature of the problem (chaos, overcrowding, awful food) and the possible solutions. This morning we brought our camera down at 10:30, before the onslaught, to tape the cafeteria ladies preparing the meals. We got amazing footage. The interviews with the ladies were hilarious, because the interviewees were so bad-tempered and sour:

Kids: Do you like working in the cafeteria?

Lady: What a stupid question! (Wanders out of camera range)

Kid: Why is it a stupid question?

Lady: (Returns) I said it's a stupid question because you think I'd be working here if I didn't like it?

Kid: (Timidly) How long have you been working here?

Lady: I don't see how that's any of your business!

2nd Kid: Do you think the kids in this school are nice or bad?

Lady: You're one of them yourself, you should know! I seen you coming up here asking for seconds.

One lady actually held a tray in front of her face like Joe Valachi. Lois Phifer tried to explain that this was not going to be shown anywhere, it was just a class research project... No dice. The lady refused to lower the tray.

A school official didn't want us filming inside the lunchroom once the kids had arrived because it was "an illegal situation." Overcapacity. We waited till the Principal came by, interviewed him about the lunchroom, then moved the camera in, using his proximity as a shield. It was total anarchy, hand-held camera at its purest! That's to say, at a certain point the controls went, I lost contact with the camera crew and it was every man for himself. Kids were singing, rolling on the ground, play-fighting, yelling, playing cards, some of it typical lunchroom behavior, some staged for the camera. Fifteen minutes later we reeled out of there and sat down in a stairwell to catch our breath; I decided to stage a self-criticism session (videotaped) about how they thought the filming went. "Awful!" said Maria. "Disgusting" said Marissa. Why? "Because they were just showing off for the camera, they weren't being real," said Robin. "Well then it was a documentary about how people respond to having a camera around," I said bravely; "that's just as interesting a documentary." They didn't buy it. They didn't seem very upset, either. We had had a good time.

Viewing the tape in the classroom, I was impressed with the flavor of one continuous take. It was an excellent record of the way the eye and body of a cameraman respond to crisis situations. The raw picture of institutional life reminded me a lot of Fred Wiseman's documentaries on mental hospitals and high schools. I was more than pleased with the results: perhaps because it was my brainchild, I had conceived it and pushed it through. For once I wasn't the patient midwife of one of the students' scripts. The kids, on the other hand, took an immediate dislike to the tape. They couldn't stand the wobbly camera work, the poor sound, and finally hooted it off the screen. I suspect they also couldn't stand an accurate picture of the squalor in their lives, which they know all too well and would instantly trade in for a super-man plot.

March 23

Our big problem so far is screening. We have made so many tapes and don't

know what to do with them once they're made. They disappear into boxes. The kids and I rush into a new production. There's a technical problem: we have only one portapak, and usually the pressure to shoot is great, and we can't exhibit tapes and shoot at the same time. Either one ties up the portapak. So we end up doing a new tape. All that beautiful footage, I wish we could leave it with the kids in a corner to look at again and again. They need more passive viewing time to ingest what they've done.

[This problem was eventually solved when the Teleprompter Cable TV company agreed to give us a half hour slot a week to broadcast tapes made by P.S. 75. The program is on cable TV every Thursday from 2:00 - 2:30.]

THE SUBSTITUTE TEACHER--A CLASS MAKES A PLAY

Observations by Martin Kushner

[Neil Breindel's sixth grade was taught by poet Phillip Lopate at P. S. 75. The week before the class described here, the kids began improvising around the theme of The Substitute Teacher, a play they will make to perform at graduation.

In their first improvisation, the tallest girl in the room, Lisa, played the prim substitute; the kids as the class responded to her with paper airplanes, running in and out of the coat closets, mimicking her words, and generally making a lot of noise.

At the end of that class, five boys volunteered to prepare a script for this week showing the progression of a quiet, well-behaved classroom breaking into chaos and madness with the arrival of a substitute teacher. Phillip had stressed the importance of showing the change in detail, a step by step sabotage of the teacher, rather than just an explosion of noise and movement.]

When we come in, the class is finishing up a math lesson; a great cheer goes up as Phillip enters the room. Breindel says, "Phil, we're just going to finish up this lesson and then you can have them." He repeats this to the kids, which lets them know exactly where it is--that the math lesson is important and that they won't stop it in spite of their anticipation of working with Phil. He satisfies the kids' impatience by saying exactly what will happen in the next ten minutes.

We sit in the back of the room during the rest of the lesson. Breindel silences a few kids saying, "You're wasting my time, Phil's time, and your time by getting off the lesson." He includes Phil and the kid's excitement in his mild scolding. Bravo.

The math lesson is over. For the next hour, Phil and the kids brainstorm to put together the pieces of a script. The script assigned last week is not written. Phil first suggests that the five kids who volunteered to write the script go with him to another room and work alone, but he suddenly changes

his mind because he wants the whole class to work. He remarks that many kids came up to him before the class to suggest ideas.

"Why come up to me clandestinely with your ideas? Let's talk about them right here so we can all hear the ideas and share the ideas back and forth."

The kids launch into a barrage of ideas. From all corners of the room they name activities that could be taking place while the substitute tries to teach:

playing jax
boys scaring girls with a snake
a battery of paper airplanes
an argument that develops into a fist fight.

Phil listens to every idea and gives an instant gut reaction:

That's a terrific idea.
That won't work because...
What do you think of that idea? (To the other kids)
That's great. Let's have some more examples like that.
That's a bad idea (a response to some clowning around ideas).

Phil seems to have an urge to drive through any distraction, to get on with it, to create a serious work atmosphere not by any scolding or moralizing, but by doggedly talking and questioning only à propos the play.

Stephen makes this comment: "When we rehearsed the last play, the rehearsals were always full of noise; we were running around and it never came together, yet when we got up on the stage to perform at the end, everything was perfect." He implies that the rehearsals were not so crucial.

Phil explains that during the rehearsals in spite of the apparent chaos, the points of the drama were being worked out. They were establishing a kind of musical score which would always be there to work from. He demonstrates by walking, saying there are different points in a straight line and that they had to come up with the points so at the end they can walk the whole line. Stephen understands. And the class begins again, furiously calling out ideas.

A girl suggests that the principal walks in with the inspector at a certain moment when the kids are wildly running around the room, looks over the situation and says, "Oh, don't mind them, they're rehearsing a play." Pirandello couldn't have done better!

Phil writes their ideas down on the board, all over the board, in no particular order. Later they will write down the script. A heavy-set boy, Marvin, records all that is on the board in his own order; he acts as some sort of script consolidator.

Someone else takes off from the idea of the principal coming in --he says everybody immediately gets quiet. Phillip notes that there are now two very

different choices for the kids on the arrival of the principal: one, that they continue their wildness, and the other, that they become like little angels.

I'm sitting in the back of the room and start flapping my arms. I suddenly have the image of the kids as actual angels, all in white, floating, wisping, around the room, in front of an approving principal. Phillip starts dancing around a little, picking up my cue, flapping his arms; my instinctive suggestion is picked up: the kids come up with ideas about angels. One boy says, "One kid goes flying up in the air." Phillip screams "That's it, beautiful."

The kids start coming up with suggestions for a pulley system, to make someone fly on stage. The room is exploding with energy.

A boy shouts, "We'll all have halos made out of tin foil. Then when the principal comes in, we'll go under our desks and come up with halos and wings."

Phillip suggests that everyone will have halos but only one person will have wings, he will fly. "And that should be the meanest kid in the class," another boy suggests.

Stephen, the best actor, volunteers for the flying role.

At that moment, the real principal of the school, Luis Mercado, walks in. The kids start behaving like angels. He walks over to the teacher's desk, does some business, oblivious to what is happening in class. The kids start joking. Phillip says smiling and laughing, "You're embarrassing me. That's the principal." The kids laugh and quiet a bit.

Never is the entire class involved during Phillip's visit. There are frequent interruptions, kids come in from other rooms, kids drop in and out of the discussion. At one point or another, everyone gets into the act, but sometimes it is just one boy or girl poking his/her head out from a workbook and making a suggestion. One silent girl (Nina) suddenly comes up with a great suggestion for a scene in front of the curtain between the principal and the school inspector, before they come into the class where the substitute is teaching. While the curtain is closed, she suggests, the kids can set up as angels and the devilish boy can get into the harness for flying up in the air. It's a terrific suggestion that solves a myriad of technical problems and offers a theatrical way of breaking up two scenes.

The class goes on this way, with kids making suggestions and Phillip responding immediately, saying "Shut up" and "I can't hear" when there is literally too much noise or interference for the work to continue. Every kid's comment on the working out of the play is accepted and dealt with; it is an atmosphere where one feels inclined to contribute.

Breindel sits at his desk, acting as the disciplinarian to help quiet the room at times (Phillip sometimes lets the noise take over, then gets the class back, all the time thinking on his feet, his concentration and ability to go

with what is given is a superb teaching gift). Breindel's quieting the kids is supportive; it is not the mean teacher shutting up the kids for his own satisfaction, but out of respect for the work that is going on. He offers to stay after school to help the five boys write the script, which will preserve and arrange the ideas generated by today's improvisations.

The Substitute Teacher

Scene: A regular classroom standing around waiting for the substitute.

(Teacher walks in with Principal)

Principal: I'm sure you'll like this class, and what is your name.

Teacher: Mrs. Zelda Lefkowitz. (Writes "Z. Lefkowitz" on the blackboard.)

Principal: Oh, yes, before I leave I must tell you that the kid in the blue is a mental case, and the strait-jackets are in the closet.

Substitute: Thank you. (Principal leaves.) Good morning class. What do you usually do in the morning?

Students: Math! Social Studies! Free Play!

Substitute: Now let me make one thing perfectly clear. If you want to speak, you MUST raise your hand first. Do you understand?

Class: Yes teacher.

(Good little girl raises her hand.)

Substitute: Yes?

Good Girl: I'm the monitor. Just if you need me.

Substitute: Thank you.

(1st Boy raises his hand, drops it before the teacher can call on him and starts talking to his friend.)

Substitute: Be quiet!

2nd Boy: Teacher, may I go to the bathroom?

Substitute: No, not now.

2nd Boy: You want me to make in my pants?

Substitute: If you want to, go right ahead.

3rd Boy: Peowi! Peowi!

2nd Girl: (Raises hand, Teacher calls on her) Teacher, what does the Z. stand for in your name?

Substitute: If you must know, --Zelda. Oh I almost forgot, let's sing the National Anthem. (Everyone stands and runs through it in double time.)

Substitute: That sounded more like mumble jumble to me, but let's skip it. On to work!

Good Girl: We usually start with some math problems.

Substitute: Thank you. What's your name again?

Good Girl: Liz. I'm the monitor, just if you need me.

(Teacher turns around to write some easy math problems on the board. Meanwhile, two kids start playing jacks, notes are passed, etc. They stop as soon as she turns around again.)

Substitute: Do the math problems I've put on the board. When you're finished sit still.

(She sits down at her desk. 4th Boy sneaks around her and erases the problems.)

5th Boy: (Raises hand.) How can we do math when there's no problems?

Substitute: There are problems on the board, if you can't SEE THEM YOU'RE BLIND. Now start. (Looks around.) Hey, you're right. Whoever did that stop it!

(Bad Leader secretly starts passing out battle notes in a systematic way.)

Substitute: WHAT is going on?? What is this child's name?

Class: Charles! Henry! Tom, Eddie! (One boy starts skipping around, singing:)

Oh my name is MacNamara
I'm the leader of the band

Substitute: Sit down! I'm starting a bad student list. (Writes Bad on the blackboard. Someone jumps up right away and erases it.)

Bad Leader: (Yells) PLAN CS 8, you two guard the door.
Knock desks down! Front row, get ready, aim
fire. Second row now, ready, aim, fire. Air
planes released. Fire!

(The curtain closes almost all the way. Two look-
outs are stationed outside, in the hall. From the
far side of the stage the Principal and the Inspector
come walking slowly on.)

Inspector: What's all that noise?

Principal: Oh, the children are having a free period.

Inspector: (Wiping off dust with finger.) Does this school have
a custodian?

Principal: Yes we do have a custodian, but in a sense we have
over 800 custodians, because all the teachers and
the children help to keep it clean.

Inspector: 800 custodians, eh? Then how come it's such a
mess?

Principal: Well the children are encouraged to express them-
selves. There's a sort of creative mess. It depends
how you look at it. For instance that boy over there,
(points to one of the lookouts who is tossing up a
paper ball) he may seem to be playing with a toy air-
plane, but he's actually solving a difficult mathema-
tical problem.

1st Lookout: Oh bless my butt, the Principal and the big Inspector!
Warn the class fast. I'll stall them.

2nd Lookout: (Yells through the curtain opening) Yo! Hey, the
Principal is coming with the big I.!!

Inspector: And what kind of special programs do you have here?

Principal: (Reading his mail) We have an open library program,
a bi-lingual program, a breakfast program, we have
videotapes. But most important everyone gets along
well in this school. There are no fights and ...

(1st Lookout blocks his way.)

Principal: Excuse me son. --Let me just take you into one of
our classes. Er, not this one. The next one down
the hall is one of our better sixth grades ...

1st Lookout: (Blocking his path again) Can I ask you something?

Principal: What is it?

1st Lookout: How do you spell Supercalifragelisticexpialidocious?

Principal: S-U-P-E-R -- uh listen, we're in a hurry, ask your teacher.

2nd Lookout: (To Inspector, blocking his way) Want to see a great report? This is all about the sun and the eclipses.

Inspector: It looks very interesting. How about that sixth grade class--

1st Lookout: (Loud whisper) Faint! Faint!

(2nd Lookout collapses)

1st Lookout: Oh my goodness, he fainted!

Principal: What's the matter, boy?

2nd Lookout: (Groans) Mhrirr....

Principal: Nurse, Nurse! -- Go down and get the nurse. She'll take care of it. Now let's go in.

(Nurse comes on, drags off 2nd Lookout. Curtain opens to show the children sitting at their desks, with halos around their heads, and one boy suspended in air, flapping a pair of wings.)

Principal: See what an orderly class this is?

Substitute: What?????

Principal: (Breaks in) I know how much you like this class but you don't have to go too far into it.... We have some exceptional children here. See that kid? He's an angel.

Student: Here teach, have a donut. (He does this to stop the teacher from telling the principal about what happened.)

Inspector: It looks pretty good.

Principal: We better be going now, bye. I'll see to it that you

[The George Washington High School Annex operates as a mini-school, or experimental high school, with 100 students participating in specially designed classes. The Annex is several blocks from the regular high school, which is an ethnically explosive trouble spot in the essentially middle-class Washington Heights area of Upper Manhattan.]

Bill Mackey, photographer and journalist, worked with Parry Teasdale, a member of Video Freex sponsored by Open Channel, and Miss Pat Van Horn, English teacher. Their group was comprised mostly of Black and Puerto Rican students, with a few whites. Mackey's, Teasdale's and Van Horn's intentions were to explore the tensions and dynamics of the school and the surrounding neighborhood through the use of videotape: that is, to use as a starting point the community's social problems, to study them and train the students as reporters, videotapers and researchers, preparing a documentary program for local cable TV.]

March 10, 1972

Today I divided my group into two sections consisting of six students each. Each one consists of three boys and three girls. One section worked with me using my tape recorder and the other used a recorder belonging to the school that Pat Van Horn has use of. Each section was assigned to cover a different section of the neighborhood and to conduct interviews both on the street and in various shops along their respective routes.

Each team rotated the role of interviewer among its members with the others acting as assistants. In some cases two students would go ahead as advance scouts to try and set up people as potential interviewees. Before the subjects were quite aware of what was happening the others would be upon them with the tape recorder. With the team I monitored this tactic was about 90% successful. The few people who refused to be questioned were rather nice about it.

Some of the results of these interviews were amusing. In one case a young man responded to the question of what he thought about the students at George

Washington High School Annex by saying that in his opinion George Washington was a great president! Further questioning developed the fact that this man had only been in this country one day. He had arrived the day before from the Dominican Republic. Some time later a little girl of about four years of age gave the same answer when the question was put to her mother.

Since there is a large Spanish-speaking community in the area I suggested to the students in my teams who were of Latin extraction that whenever they considered it would be more likely to get a positive response from a subject that maybe it would be better to conduct the interview in Spanish and they could later make an English translation from the tape. Everybody thought this a good idea and decided to give it a try. The results were highly successful.

On at least six instances during this session Latins who were at first put off by being approached with a question and were about to continue on their way immediately stopped, smiled and consented to being interviewed as soon as a Spanish-speaking member of the team stepped up and rephrased his question in Spanish. This practice turned out to be a great morale booster for the Latin students. In fact one student of Filipino background came up to me at the end of the session all smiles and said that today was the first time since coming to the United States two years ago that she had not felt embarrassed about her Spanish accent.

At the end of the session when the two teams reassembled in the classroom I asked them to write English translations of all the Spanish language interviews during the coming week and have them ready for evaluation at our next session.

* * * * *

March 24, 1972

One of the first places my team visited was a shoe store on St. Nicholas Avenue. As we entered the store two of the male students were in the lead; one had the mike in one hand while the other was carrying the recorder. There was only one clerk in the store at the time and he was on his knees fitting a customer for a pair of shoes. When he looked up and saw the two students advancing toward him he obviously mistook the recording equipment for some kind of weapon. He jumped up and back at the same time, tripping, almost falling over and emptying the shoe box in the process. He started to blurt out that there was no money in the store but stopped in mid-sentence when he realized that what the students were carrying was only harmless recording equipment. His face reddened and he started blustering in Spanish. One of the students later told me that what he said was something to the effect of "What the hell did they mean by sneaking into the store and scaring the hell out of me like that for?" One of the girls answered him in Spanish, explaining that they only wanted to interview him in connection

with our project and apologized for having alarmed him. He was in no mood to be placated possibly because he was embarrassed for having overreacted to our entrance.

He was about to order us out of the store when his customer, a woman in her early thirties, who it turned out was also Latin, said that she had some opinions about the school so the students proceeded to interview her while the clerk went back to fitting her with shoes. He became interested in the questions and soon was interjecting his own opinions into the interview. The whole thing was carried out in Spanish.

Before we left the store, the students succeeded in getting three more interviews from people who came in while they were taping others. This episode was our highlight adventure for the day.

* * * * *

April 7, 1972

Due to a climate of continuing tension between students of different ethnic backgrounds at the Main building, Mr. Kalish, the Assistant Principal, felt that in the absence of the teacher it would be best if we confined our activities of today to the premises. This was to avoid any charge of irresponsibility on the part of the school administration by outside interests in case of any untoward incident that might occur while we were out in the streets unaccompanied by the responsible teacher. Both of us concurred in the logic of his position.

As a result we decided that the best course of action was to begin with a showing of the street interviews followed by the usual critique assisted by re-runs of various portions of the tapes for emphasis. After this the remainder of the session would be devoted to deciding which documentary would be produced and a working out of as many of the advance details as possible.

The session went off without a hitch. The first hour was devoted to the street interviews as planned. And the showing confirmed for me what I already knew from observing the original shooting --that they had done a damned fine job.

However during the course of the session it became painfully obvious that some of the tensions afflicting the students in the main building were beginning to rub off on the students here in the Annex. I suppose this was inevitable in view of the fact that in general the same ethnic mix obtained here as there. There were subtle signs from the start of the session that all was not peace and tranquility between them: the Dominicans seemed just a bit more clannish than usual; the Puerto Ricans were drawn together in a tight little knot; while the Blacks sat together on the other side of the classroom

facing the Dominicans and beaming a subdued hostility in the general directions of both the Puerto Ricans and Dominicans!

The only students who did not seem to be caught up in this atmosphere were the few who, in terms of class-ethnic percentages, would have to be classified as "other." They were too few in number to constitute an ethnic entity and therefore had no vested interest in defending any group-totems. A good example of the latter is, I think, a Greek-American student, Leo Mitsokis. He seems to maintain excellent relations with members of the three other dominant groups and usually comes to class every Friday with a bundle of the Young Lords newspaper under one arm and the Black Panther Party newspaper under the other. He offers either one for sale with equal enthusiasm.

Today, watching him sitting there nonchalantly toying with his pen, I could not help thinking that in any conflict between the three major ethnic groups Leo would be an excellent choice as "honest booker" to serve as a go-between among the others. After all, he would have no "axe to grind" and his motive the most noble of all: his own survival in a world in which he is hopelessly outnumbered by other ethnic forces. Survival in such a world depends to a large degree upon how well one practices the subtle art of accommodation-- and Leo seemingly practices it with considerable élan.

It is not that he is in any way obsequious; his style can best be described as that of wit and drollery--both of which he possesses in abundance! He gives the impression of being above the battle; yet he is aware of what is happening around him at all times.

As the tape was being run occasional sarcastic remarks were passed back and forth between various members of the crews on how one or another of them had performed his/her task. Almost invariably the criticism was leveled at a member of a different ethnic group. The remarks in themselves were not devastating; it was the underlying tone of hostility behind them that jarred. It was obvious to both Parry and me that the showing of the tapes was to some extent being used as a convenient vehicle for letting off steam.

After a whispered consultation, Parry decided to attack the problem head-on and without directly referring to what we had observed happening among them. And without referring directly to the crisis now in progress at the main building. We decided to see if we could turn the undercurrent of hostility into more constructive channels.

Accordingly we emphasized the positive aspects of their productions. We pointed out that no one watching the results without having been on scene when they were recorded would have any way of knowing whether they had been produced by Black, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Anglo-Saxons, a team of monkeys from India, or a combination of all of these! We stressed the point that the only criterion the average viewer would use was: whether the result was good or bad.

Then we asked them to look at the tapes again, this time taking pains to note some manner in which their colleagues had performed their tasks

exceptionally well. Being basically honest, they responded favorably.

Taking this as my cue, I suggested that in view of all the exciting and dynamic things happening at G. W. H. S. at this time, perhaps they might consider doing an in-depth documentary on G. W. H. S. They responded enthusiastically to the idea and it was finally decided by them that this was the way to go.

The rest of the session was taken up with defining the scope of the project and working on the preliminary details.

[Sue Willis is part of the P. S. 75 team and worked with 2 classes last year.]

November 11: Using Lists as a way of getting into Poetry

I liked doing the lists with some kids more than others--some who have been trying very hard to do what I want simply fail to grasp the 'crazy' principle of monster menus and nonsense poems. Most of the middle class kids seem greatly liberated by the idea of composing disgusting meals or making a funny poem from arbitrarily chosen words; other kids, especially two spanish-first-language girls simply become frustrated when I say "Write anything--it can be as crazy as you want." They, and some others have a dsire for neat, precise instructions. The beauty of the lists (I had twenty or so in two languages on strips of paper spread on the table--everyone shuffled around until finding one suitable to mood) was that they could be either very structured (Ten things I do every day; ten things I see on my way to school) or very wild (ten impossible things, etc.). Thus a girl like Antonia who quietly slams her book in despair when she doesn't get the feeling of what I want could do a complete exercise, just like everyone else. She chose things she does every day and the list was a neat series of school subjects including 'homonyms' of all things. I am leading up to saying that I think I am going to track my groups more than they are now--to put the kids who write fluently in one group where they can write whatever they want: they don't need prompting, only the proper atmosphere. For others like Antonia I want to work with the really big challenge of finding satisfying outlets for what she wants to say. But some of the kids overwhelm her with their happy facility with word games.

My big success today, however, was with the Spanish speaking kids. I used the lists, with the instructions in Spanish (10 cosas rojas; 10 cosas locas, etc.) and got nothing very elaborate, but had a lot of fun getting it.

In Phyllis Soroka's class I did a fill-in-the-blanks caper: I gave some end rhymes and some end words not rhymed and then lines with only the first word of the poem given and the last word. There was a lot of confusion and the hard workers like Antonia and Chin-pin either refused or seemed very

displeased with their productions because the rules were not defined enough for them. CeCe who writes a lot on her own said she did it too fast and it wasn't very good but her things were actually witty: we talked about how sometimes you can do something worthwhile that isn't your hardest possible labor. That is just fun. She liked the idea but I was really telling it to myself. I was happiest, though, with Patrick and Miguel who both have big problems with the language: Miguel's English is simply limited; Patrick speaks perfectly but doesn't make the transition to paper very well. Miguel seemed inspired by having a few of those elusive words given and he came up with one short poem that I really like ("Funny are the birds, Funny are the bears up on the mountain...").

I was happy red
It smelled of a robber.
Instead it was a broken ruby.
It was trying to make itself rusty.

Juliet Elkind

Funny are the Birds
Funny are the bears up in the Mountain,
Funny are the dogs when they are eating,
John said.

Miguel Chacon

Maybe I am a Butterfly
Maybe I am a doo-doo
Maybe I am a Mayflower
Maybe I am Dr. Pepper.

John Umbach

1. He followed me from school.
2. He made me cry one day.
3. The second day he punch me on the face.
4. The third day I told my father that a boy was following me.
5. But my father didn't care.
6. Then I started to count 1, 2, 3 etc. till my mother came.
7. Then I remember that I had to do my homework.
8. After I did my homework, I went for a walk on my bicycle.
9. Then I was tired and went home.
10. Then when I got to my house they had a party.
11. It was my birthday.

Ingrid Arios

If I was in a house by myself
Then I looked at a picture
Then also I look again
Then I said that eyes are looking
at me
Every day
Every day
She don't stop looking at me
They are big, but not very big
Her eyes try to say
I do not hear but my self.
I am waiting and you never can.
You have me because I love you.

Antonia Izquierdo

I am a person who lives in New York.
I feel happy because I am back in school.
My heart beats really hard when you put on your furry coat.
I start laughing when you put on your sun glasses.
I also get scared when you look sick, like now.
Don't ask why.

Margaret Vargas

You know what I mean, Amy.
She knows it but she is pretending.
Look at her father
He's doing nothing about it.
He just smokes tobacco.
Fine help he is.
If that's the way she wants it
That's the way she gets it.
Like always.

Christine Hills

* * * * *

Phyllis Soroka wasn't too happy when I pulled out the kids from the Martian play--she was having a food fair or something which I hadn't known about. People at that school don't seem to know what is happening a week in advance and since I'm not up there convenient to running in the day before teaching I am often unexpected even though they know I'm coming. I suppose I should avail myself of the services of Ma Bell and start calling Mrs. S. and Mike Tempel the night before I teach. Anyhow, the food fair held down the number of kids who came for the play and it worked out very well, I thought--I especially liked the end of the play. We had demonstrated the special effects possible from video feedback--the weird swirling lights--I don't even know whose idea the end was, but there was a final battle between the Martians and the Earthmen in which two powerful laser guns were aimed into each other: one was a negative force and the other a positive and they caused some incredible chain reactions that resulted in a mixture of swirling lights and wailing voice-sounds which faded and allowed an announcer's voice to sum up the play by saying, "and that was the end of our universe...." A real smash-bang-up finale.

We had a showing of video plays to Mike Tempel's class and I was impressed once again by the gleeful cruelty of humanling to humanling. One kid had done a lengthy and wordy explanation of how to make a battery operated telegraph and the class literally hooted it off the screen. They didn't hoot down Frankendoc or the puppet play but there were lots of mutters of dissatisfaction. I can't tell if the spectators were jealous of the artistes or maybe they simply refuse to see anything valuable in the work of another kid. Anyhow, afterward we said Anyone who wants to do more work with video stay around and everyone left but a group of boys and a group of girls. The original plan was for J. T. to take a group for further work, but since there were two groups, I am involved again. I've decided to do writing too, however. I get a kick out of seeing these kids putting together ideas for a play. Their initial premise was that they wanted to do stuff with those crazy video

machines; Ricky wanted to do trick photography, "Like making a rock down in the park look like a mountain," he said, "But not a comedy, because we don't have a sense of humor." But Linus disagreed and conceived the great Mountain Climbers play. Linus wrote the script (or at least the first part of the first scene) in painstaking neat handwriting. Ricky drew costumes; Damon made little scene sketches (at my suggestion) and bounced on the furniture. Arlie made a list of needed props. Lord knows if they'll ever finish the script as the act of writing out words is far less interesting to them than thinking up costumes and arguing over whether the best rocks are down by the playground or at 94th Street. The argument ended amicably when they realized they were talking about the same rocks. The girls' group is planning a thing with witches. I love the way they make something out of whatever is at hand or head.

* * * * *

October 27 (The following school year)

We (Phillip, Karen, Bette, and I) had a meeting Tuesday: we had a really good discussion, I thought: there were no big issues of business, so we ended up talking about what we are doing at PS 75, a very interesting and fresh topic. Karen talked about the importance of process over product, Phil read some stream of consciousness pieces which were good, both as introspection and as products: he was trying to define his success, felt it had to do a lot with his own mood that day which was introspective, concerned with why kids prefer other activities to writing. I am rather amazed this year by the volume of work I've been getting from Phyllis' class: they just write and write, fifteen, nineteen, even more kids turning in something each day: it has so much to do I think with the fact that she and I are sharing the class, literally, I present the topic (a surprise to her) and she gives a gloss on it quite manfully whatever it happens to be, we get some words from the kids, then they write and she and I work with them one to one: she does a lot of taking dictation and making the kids rewrite their own words which seems quite successful. I float among the others, talking, encouraging, reacting. It's fun.

Thursday I came in to get Rhonda's play book which I promised to type up copies of for the play. Also to visit the bilingual class that I may be picking up: it has three teachers and at least three girls I taught before; I just sat around and watched and got in the way, but I had a great conversation with Patria who was one of my kids last year. She brought me a paper she had written, first in Spanish, then English, showed me her math book in Spanish: she is a physically mature girl, woman figure etc. and very quiet, very much more content with herself in this class. We had a linguistic discussion: she is so pleased to be learning to spell Spanish properly as well as English.

She says she always forgets that little thing that goes over the "n" in Spanish; I knew what she meant, couldn't think of its name either: we drew it in the air. It's hard to say how working with the class will turn out, but I'm up for trying. I read Spanish, anyhow. Right now my best energy seems to be flowing into Phyllis' class; three may be too many, it's hard to say.

Phyllis Soroka's class: There was a lot of action today, to say the least. A mother was visiting, and Phyllis suddenly discovered that the mother's son was the only kid missing from the class and no one seemed to know where he was. So she ran out, leaving me in charge of the classroom which promptly seemed to disintegrate before me. I had decided that I would try something less like an essay or a story: we would do sense impressions: Close your eyes and use your ears, what do you hear? The idea of course was to hear what you ordinarily miss, but what happened promptly was that about six fire engines wailed by, causing great excitement and deafness. Then when we did get eyes closed, the kids decided that the point of the exercise was to see how much you could ululate and bark and pound. This was when Phyllis left me.

To my utter amazement, a number of kids turned in papers, mostly very literal, listing precisely what they heard: most of them similar: the clapping, tapping etc. Some kids, notably Jed and Serena, used the inner rhythm and the explosive quality of the words to some effect; Justin, the kid who was missing, turned up and wrote a paper, the first he has written: Karen had him last year and said he didn't write: he is very sophisticated intellectually, it seems, but his paper had a nice touch: a tapping pencil keeps pushing into his thoughts, repeatedly. Steven, Alex, Robert and Jonathan F. all sit together and seem to move as one: they decided to write today, decided collectively, because either all write or none, with Jonathan F. being slightly independent of the others. They mostly wrote what each other had said, hilarious witticisms like Suffering Succotash and Choo-choo charley. Robert seems to have heard wolves and bears when his eyes were closed: I asked him if he heard those in his head and he giggled. Antonia wrote a short thing: somehow, whatever she writes has a touch of poetry in it: she lists the fairly mundane things she hears, and then she says, "And all what I heard was city noise." There are two very quiet girls, Therese and Eva who do everything together; Eva is Chinese and I can't tell, but she may not understand English: when you talk to her she listens and smiles at appropriate times but doesn't say anything. They are frighteningly literal in taking assignments, but last week they did do the previous week's assignment, the story about the monster chair. They are so quiet and good and when I say something responding to what they write they seem either (a) disbelieving that I could say anything but Good or Bad or (b) they just want to get away and not have any interaction with an adult. When I was in grade school I wanted none, but none of that one-to-one stuff from my teachers: I liked their praise, but not when it was given to me personally: my school world consisted of achieving and drawing pictures of a private world on the margins of my old papers.

The rest of the morning I had a rehearsal of Rhonda's play. They have already done a little work on it, with some practice teachers, I think: they

want to put it on for Phyllis' birthday, November 16. They are great kids, full of energy and I think they could be good actresses: the nucleus here is Rhonda and the group of black girls who sit together in that corner of the room extended to two white girls because they ran out of people and two more black girls from Neil Breindel's class. The girls are all taller than most of the kids, sixth graders I guess, and very clothes conscious. Rhonda is something special: she writes plays, stories, apparently endlessly with no prompting. The first day I visited the class, Janice cornered me and made me listen to her practicing memorizing Bible verses. Margie also writes and draws, is tall, elegant and quiet: doesn't seem to participate in the school world with her full self: she ran to get the kids from Breindel's room without my knowing where she was going and ignored my shouting at her--not from defiance, but just sort of floating after her own pursuits and not hearing me. Vickie is very pretty and fights with Jose and any other good looking boys in the class: she and Janice have a fist fight in the play. All of these kids have been turning in writing assignments, except Vickie.

Repeating Poem

Oh ishcabibel rainy days are no fun.
Why be so fussy, Caryn?
Because that's the way I am.
Oh.
Why be so fussy Caryn?
Because I am.
Oh.
Good-bye, I am going roller skating.
Because I am.
I'm going to study in my room.
Good bye, I'm going roller skating.
Oh ishcabibble rainy days are no fun.

I am going to writing class, Mr. Tempel
O.K., but be back soon.
Sue, should I take a pencil and paper?
Yes, you should.
O.K., be back soon.
I'll try to.
Yes, you should.
O.K.
I'll try to.
Yes, do that.
O.K.
I'm going to writing class, Mr. Tempel.

Caryn Schwartz

OUTSIDE CONTRIBUTIONS

We have expanded this section in the newsletter because of the many worthwhile articles we have been receiving from teachers across the country. As our organization is based in New York City, our publications naturally reflect to a disproportionate extent the urban point of view, urban problems, urban schools, etc. The only way of correcting that imbalance and sharing experiences with teachers from rural areas and different specialties (see the article on physically damaged children) is to publish outside contributions. We are grateful to the writers in this section who took the trouble to tell us what they were doing. Let's keep this exchange alive. Please continue to send us your experiences if you are doing work with writing or related fields, or if you've come across student work which deserves wider circulation. The address is: Teachers & Writers, c/o P. S. 3, 490 Hudson Street, New York, N.Y. 10014.

CREATIVE WRITING WITH SEVERELY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

from Barbara Merkel
Charlottesville, Va.

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your note in November inviting me to submit some of the children's creative writing. I am teaching at an institution for severely physically handicapped children. This involves cerebral palsy, arthritis, spina bifida, etc. Some children can't write very easily at all. Some have no coordination in their hands and/or legs. They are in the institution because their families can't, or won't care for them.

What usually happens when we write stories or poems, is that I suggest a topic. Then we either write a collective story (me scribbling it down to be recopied later) or everyone impatiently waiting his turn as I scribble down the individual story being dictated. This year, despite the physical limitations involved, two children have tried to write several short sentences on their own. But they have so many ideas and their fingers are so slow! One boy has used the typewriter, but gets annoyed at all the mistakes he makes. (As do the others--they are perfectionists on the typewriter, and soon give up in disgust. There are two girls who can write well enough, but they are hung up on spelling. I have given speeches on how spelling isn't important, the idea is, how they can ask me for words and I'll put them on the board--very little success along these lines. We do not have formal spelling, I have never stressed it. They enjoy having "a test" once a month.

I am teaching the primary room, with from 5-7 children in it at different times during the day, with an age range from 7 years--12 years. Everyone except Mark uses a wheelchair or crutches or a walker.

Here are some samples of the children's work: (Last April I asked "If you could be anything in the world, what would you be? How does it feel to be what you have chosen?")

Danny Taylor (age 8)

I am the great big sun. I am up in the sky. I keep everybody warm. I come out in the day. I am real hot. I am your star.

Mark Hinton (age 7)

I am a wolf! I eat people! I feel mean! I want to be a wolf because I am grouchy. I want people to eat, and rabbits, and muskrats. I am thinking about scratching people up. And about showing my sharp teeth. And I like being like that. The end.

Jackie Wilson (age 8)

I am the moon. I change my shape. I am up in the sky at night. I'm cold. I'm lonely. I shine at night. It makes me happy to have people look at me.

A few more asides: the institution is called Bloomfield, and it used to be run by the Episcopal Church; it now is part of the Albemarle County School system.

Jackie wrote this story last May, 1971:

My Story - Jackie Wilson (age 8)

One day I saw a truck. I wanted to find out who was in it. It was my next door neighbor. I asked him to take me to a telephone booth and he did. He was a nice man. He was friendly and kind. And then he asked me which telephone booth I wanted. And it was the one on my right hand side. And then I made my call. I was calling my mother far away. First I called the operator and then I called my mother. I spoke to her for a few minutes and we had a nice chat together. We told each other goodbye and that was the end of that part. I walked to a shop, and it was a pastry shop. And I got me a donut. I came to that man's truck and I came back home. And then mother came over but I wasn't expecting her. And we went up to my room and I had some records. I played them. Then mother left. Then I cried. And then I watched her leave and that was the end of my story.

The end.

This year we have had a very unstructured afternoon program, and some of the children dictate stories to me at this time.

I also would write down snatches of conversations that I particularly liked and made it into a 'book' for that child.

November 1971--we had been growing different kinds of bean plants from seeds ever since September. Nancy Fisher (age 9): "Mine looks like it's spitting out little leaves."

The following story is not just wishful thinking. Doris can move around and cook and sew very well:

A Happy Story - Doris Waller (age 12)

I'm going home today. And when we go home we have to go under a long tunnel. I don't like it because there is a whole lot of water on top of us and I'm scared because the water might come down. And when we get out you can see all the water on both sides of us, and boats in the water.

I'm going to help my Mommy put up the Christmas tree and decorate it, and help her cook--cakes and greens. I love that. Only kind of cake I like is chocolate.

Then when I finish that, I'm going to visit my grandma and put the presents under the tree and play with my sister.

One time my Grandma was going someplace and she left the door open. The dog broke loose, ran in the house and ate a pie! That was funny. She had to bake another one.

I'm going to go home and give my mother my silver dollar. And that's the end of my happy story.

I can't wait to go home.

The end

Snow - Nancy Fisher (age 9)

I like snow.

I like snow because you can roll it up in a ball and throw it at each other.

I throw snowballs at the tree.

I make it get all white and fluffy.

I like to hold it when it's real cold.

Roll it up in a ball--

And throw it in somebody's face.

It makes me think of a rainbow that is falling all to pieces.

And when I throw it at a car

It makes the car look like it has a cap on.

I like snow.

Marion's Story (age 9) - (an overheard conversation)

Do you know what my brother did when he was changing my fishes' water? He killed one of them he was so rough. I'm going to get a new fish.

The end

I bound it into a book, using cardboard, contac paper--the whole works. She really was proud of her own book and hopefully will be encouraged to participate and write some stories consciously.

An Old Man - Danny Taylor (October 1971, age 9)

One day there was an old man who walked with a cane. He is 40 years old. He went out for a walk. After he went for a walk he came back home and went to bed for a while. Then he got up and he cooked his own dinner and ate and ate and ate. He was almost about to bust! Then a visitor came. The visitor talked to him. Then he left.

The end.

I feel that I am including a lot of confidential material, but I feel it's necessary to understand why I think some of these pieces are so great. Mark has cerebral palsy, and for him it means that he doesn't breathe properly and so speaking is very hard. He also finds it difficult to write. His head is teeming with words, ideas, and punctuation. He seems drunk on it sometimes. He is reading somewhere on a second grade level; his main passion is cars. In the following stories all the punctuation is his. He told me exactly how to write everything. And when he didn't get understood, he would try to write it on the board.

I want to include one he actually physically wrote himself not because I think it's one of his best, but because you'll see that he is ready to learn about syllables:

Danny and Me - Mark (age 8)

Danny and I went to the park. Danny sees a fly! We ran! Danny sees another fly! We run to Danny's car. I say: "Danny, go get your gun quick!"
"I won't," said Danny stoutly.

The end.

A Bean - Mark

One day I planted a bean. It was a navy bean and I had to be very careful not to run over it with my car. My car is a MUSTANG and I wash it every day, because kids throw tarry-rocks and dirt at it. So dirty that I have to even wash the hubcaps and inside the car, and take out the mats.

The end

My Car and Truck - Mark

This is a story about a boy named Mark. Mark liked cars and trucks. He wished he had a car and a truck and one day his wish came true. A beautiful Chevrolet car was waiting for him. "Yippee!" said Mark, jumping into the Chevrolet. The seats were comfortable. Mark had a safety belt. He put it on. Then he started the motor and put it in reverse. It had automatic transmission. Then Mark put it in drive and he went as fast as the speed limit. There was a license plate on the front and back of Mark's car. Then Mark got a truck with manual transmission. Mark said to himself, "I must get a garage because I don't want the rain to dirty up my car and truck. I am very worried." He said, "How am I going to do this" Hmm. Hmm. Let me think." He thought and thought. At last he said, "Aha!" Now I know what to do. I'll go to Mr. Kimberly and I'll get a garage. Aha! I'll buy it."

(end of Chapter 1)

Mr. Kimberly and Mark - Mark

Mark said to Mr. Kimberly, "I would like to buy a garage for my car."

"Very well," said Mr. K.

"Oh goody, goody," cried Mark.

"So, how much does it cost?"

"See that garage over there,"* said Mr. K.

"What garage?" said Mark.

"Over there," said Mr. K.

"Oh, I see what you mean," said Mark. Mark said excitedly,

"I did not know that you had a garage that cost \$1."

Well Mark had the garage in a sec. He paid Mr. K. \$1 and walked home. He put the garage in his front yard where he

*(He wouldn't let me put a question mark here.)

parked his car and truck.

A few days later it was time for the garage to be checked. Mark called up Mr. K. on the phone. Ding-a-ling went the phone over at Kimberly's garage.

"Hi," said Mark. "It is time for my garage to be checked." "It is not November 23rd."

"I'm probably wrong," said Mark. He looked at his calendar. "I **AM** wrong!"*

"Look here," said Mr. Kimberly. "I can't have this."

"Well then," said Mark. "I am sorry. I really am, but I have to hang up because I have to eat dinner. Good-by."

Mark went in to his kitchen to cook his dinner. He ate it. He had biscuits and pancakes and a glass of cocoa.

"Oh my, wasn't it good," said Mark. "I'll have to go to Kimberly's garage and I have to change clothes." So he did. Then he got into his truck. His back-up lights turned on and he first went to the Volkswagon shop because his truck battery was going down. When he got there he lifted the hood up. He looked at the battery then he went towards a Volkswagon bus. His truck was a VW truck. "There was not a battery," cried Mark. "They should put a battery in," he sputtered. A VW man asked him, "What are you doing?" "Oh," said Mark, "I am looking for a battery but I can't find one."

"Oh," said the man. "I see where one is." And he did put the battery in.

The end

Sometimes we read these original stories during story time. The children took their homemade books to keep "forever" at Christmas break. Some are keeping notebooks (to feel like grown-up students I think) and these will probably be filled by June.

*(He wanted italics, but I couldn't do that, so he accepted this.)

Teaching writing at Farm School is not like teaching writing at a public school--there exist real and significant differences between what I've read in Koch and the Teachers/Writers Newsletter and what I experienced at Farm School. I sense that those differences are somehow basic to the differences between free school (loosely defined) and public school, or at least to different perceptions of the relationships between teachers, children, and school.

I used to make lots of lists.

I can touch them now, pull them out from the backs of folders and the bottoms of drawers and the green-papered notebook I liked because it was green. There's one in bold-lettered red magic marker--

1. Things to share
poetry, stories, music, pictures
2. Shared stillness
awareness of sensory stimuli, or each other
3. If you could be any plant, what would you be? What would you do? What things would you feel? Any animal? Any color? Any shape? etc.

Number 12 is nice--Opening and closing--movements, visual work, words; and Number 19--Exploring the space around you. Here's one called "Contrasts which can be explored with the body, with the brush, with the pen;" hard-soft, heavy-light, tall-small, etc. Or "Qualities to think about and do things with," or lists without names--Write letters. Write political speeches. Write to music. Choose one sound and use it. And lists of phrases for Koch-like formula poems. And cut-out photographs from Life Magazine, very pretty, and lists of ideas for working with them.

They're nice lists. They're not what I would write from, they're not the sort of things I wrote when I was a child--I was a prolific Nancy Drew-style mystery author--but they're nice.

Sometimes they worked. I'd put a sign on the bulletin board that said "Writing Workshop" or "Creative Expression" (I came to prefer "Writing

Workshop, "--it seemed more straightforward), and gather up paper and some sharp pencils and hold court in the treehouse or a corner of the Quiet House or the nest in the field. Sarah Beth and Henry really grooved on "I Wish" poems and Rachael did some fine "Third Eye" 's and Sarah Beth and Kim produced some noise poems that I liked and did some nice artwork at my apartment when we went there to play records.

Far out (or fa-ar out, as we used to say it).

One day Kim said she wanted to do writing and I pulled out two or three suggestions from my stockpile. She very politely asked if she couldn't just write.

One day I went to a university writing class (taught by a Collaborative person, in fact) and was told to appear at the next class with two story beginnings modeled after stories in our text. I disappeared.

One day I realized that I was dreading coming out to Farm School.

When I'm troubled I hide in books. So I looked at the Newsletter again. I reread Koch. I grabbed for my notes and lists. Then I lay for a long time on the floor and looked at the ceiling. I thought about the class I didn't come back to. I thought about Mike Butler and Ronald Sukenick and Berenice Fisher, the finest teachers I've had the joy of learning with. I thought about my own writing. I went to the typewriter and started to ask it questions.

Why does a person write?

Is everyone a potential writer?

What kinds of things can a teacher do to bring out writing talents in his students?

Why would anyone want to perform a writing exercise set for him by another person?

What might it be about public school that makes writing assignments work there?

What might it be about Farm School that makes writing assignments not work there?

What might that say about teaching writing to kids?

What might that say about public school? about Farm School?

I made a list called "differences between Koch's situation and mine"--
at public school

kids had to be in his classes
his role as initiator was clearly defined and accepted
he had a limited amount of time with the children
the general structure of the system discourages creativity and
poetry

at Farm School

I'm working only with children who want to be there
the relationship between me and the children is not the traditional
authority figure/subject relationship fostered by public school
I'm there for whole days at a time, not merely an hour or two
most importantly, the total structure of the school encourages
creativity

Kids at Farm School write. Not all of them. But there are some who really like to write, the way I liked to write when I was a child. Some of them keep journals, some of them read and write stories and poetry, some of them talk novels (John Holt makes the point in What Do I Do Monday? that for a child, talking is often the key to later writing). And they're able to move when they feel like it, create fantasies, think about themselves and the world unhindered by the busywork that goes on in public school.

I'm not putting down what Koch and other people are doing. It's fine, it's good. But it can only be seen as "teaching writing within the structure of the public school." Sure the kids like it--you would too if you had to do what kids in public schools have to do. How nice to have this friendly, far-out person in your classroom! How nice to have your ideas accepted! How nice to be able to express things inside your head in any way that's made available to you!

But there is something that seems very basically wrong with that. There's something wrong when you need an assignment to be able to express yourself. There's something wrong when your writing comes not from a real and felt need to write but from a game that's set up by someone who's in a position to do that because you're a kid in public school and everything that you do there is initiated outside of you.

But what about technique? Won't the assignments help kids develop the tools they need so that when there are things they want to write about they'll be able to do it well?*

I wrote those questions down too. I thought they were valid until I went into a writing class and had an assignment laid on me. Certainly technique is important. I use it when I'm writing, I'm aware of it when I read someone else's work. Which isn't to say that there might not be some place for some individuals for specific exercises to improve technique in writing--but I haven't found any in my own writing or teaching and I have yet to be convinced of them in other people's work.

* Perhaps what makes a difference is whether the assignment is given just to get the kids to turn out something--sentence completion poems, etc. --or is given because you have an exciting idea that you really want to share with the children... addressing yourself to the children vs. addressing yourself to the decoration of the wall.

I brought books to Farm School--that's how I started when I was little, I read books. I brought out poems and read them and put them up on the wall. I sat with paper and pen in front of me and wrote down what children dictated to me. I talked with them.

I'd like to have been more assertive in establishing some kind of structure for sharing and criticizing work. I'd like to have brought out more different kinds of writing to expose the children to. I'm sure that there are ideas I haven't thought of yet.

But I'm still learning.

I sincerely believed that each child could be a good writer, I tried to make them know that. I like to write, I write, it's something that's important to me, that makes a difference in my life. I tried to make them know that. And because they were able to experience me as a human being, not merely as a Teacher, those things came across in ways that can't often happen in public school.

That, I think, is what teaching writing should be. That's how school should be.

It's not enough to come into the schools and, operating out of the set of values and attitudes that obtain within those red brick walls (Doctorow thought of them as purple--that's nice), to think that real changes are being brought about in the lives of the children there. They're not.

That says something about teaching writing. To me, it says things even deeper about changes that are made within the public schools--whether individual teachers set up open classrooms or open-minded administrators institute modular systems or schools-without-failure programs or writers come in to teach poetry there. Those things are all nice, they'll all make school a little more pleasant for the children. But they're not the answer. As long as those things take place within the institution of the public school, perhaps as long as they take place in anything that is called a school (although I'm not certain about that, it's an idea that's still new and strange to me), they're not changes that really address themselves to the questions we need to be asking about the education of children and its relationship to the society as a whole.

I don't know what all of those questions might be. I certainly can't answer them for anyone. But it's time to start formulating them. It's time to start examining the total picture rather than simply working on the symptoms of a bad system. It's time to stop feeling good about the products that children turn out under our smiling direction and begin to direct ourselves to determining the real issues that have to be dealt with--and to deal with them.

Back to the typewriter and having meant to tell you about some summer stuff that happened, suddenly, in New Jersey....

These children had been singled out for summer school because of supposed deficits in their achievement. Self-images VERY LOW. Fears about language and writing VERY SEVERE. Blocks to personal experience and feelings very big, BUT very ready to take down for many of them. Much eagerness to reach for themselves, once reassured...and, of course, once we passed the bluster, show-off, put-on, nervous "slipping" and testing. As with most kids, of all kinds, lots of violence, fear, power-hunger, and love.

Again I found the use of pictures a helpful and vital part of their expression. And an avenue to words... especially for the kids most threatened by pencil and paper. (Bette Distler used the method of typing for the kids as they told their stories...)

During later sessions, even more, I encouraged them to draw pictures and then either write about the picture, or tell me, and I put it down for them... Or we'd start with stories--- a memory, a bad experience, a time in the country, something scary... then the picture, then the words again.

I got this idea from something else, in the 1st grade:

(some of them could barely write at all, after 1 yr. in grade 1)
I thought they at least could do their own names. told them to DRAW A PICTURE OF YOUR NAME, gave examples, called attention to the ones who caught on quickly and began work.
no pencils, I passed out only large art paper and crayons.
(this went over in 4th grade too, by the way!) The results were big and gorgeous... and liberating.
then we tried drawing pictures of favorite words: foods came out, and words like GOOD or SHUT UP and a nice dancy one on the word PRETTY

Maybe kids who are terribly afraid of words (and writing) can really get to something by finding out that letters are things they can manipulate, that words are tools, that they are masters, that words are pictorial, that color is relevant to words, that their own names are beautiful in many ways. Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Aram Saroyan, concrete poetry, Kenneth Patchen, and calligraphy... are all in this...

Note: as to psychology-social services - and the poetry:

one session, in 4th grade, a boy was so hostile to his "friend" and so intrusive with the words of their fight, and so eager to disrupt the group with the name-calling etc., that I asked him to write about how mad he felt... he started to talk about what a nut-head mental retarded (favorite slip) the other boy was. I said NO, write about how mad you feel; write about yourself. I gave him pencil and paper and asked him to sit away from the group. He went near the window and did. He wrote a strong piece. He felt pretty good.

Another boy, (I later found, from the teacher, that he could never sit still, had many learning problems) Raymond, found a useful gimmick. (DON'T MANY writers?) He repeated final words, and sometimes he achieved good rhythm, sometimes a subtle "point" this way (see the mimeo)-- mostly by half-accident, half-wise-crack, plus a bit of sound-sense. I did finally tell him when we began to get bored and annoyed by his reading his repetitive poems all the time; but we could honestly praise several of his results-- for sound and sense and wit as well. Afterwards I realized this was deeply connected with his hyperactivity, and perhaps one of the rare school opportunities to channel it more or less appropriately, even constructively. Raymond ran with his pencil, then, and he was acceptable, and he himself could accept some limits.

Well, those are the main points I wanted to set down. I'd like this letter back - or a copy - some time - to show the East Orangers - their summer school was excellent in many ways. OEO Funded. Winter session is bleaker this year. Cutbacks everywhere. Hope you and your programs have a good year.

Best Regards

Madeline Bass

Introduction

In my absorbed reading of successive issues of the Teachers and Writers Collaborative Newsletter, I was struck by how little material there was about the writing of very young children. There were wonderful diaries about all other levels of elementary school and high school, but there were only very few scattered contributions about kindergarten or first grade. I think there is a lot more to be said about writing in the earliest school years.

It seems to be widely assumed that first grade merely performs the function of teaching technical skills which can then be applied later on in creative effort. There is also the unspoken assumption that very young children have not yet developed the drive and intensity to work at written communication beyond a very cute, stereotyped sort that can usually be found tacked up on bulletin boards. The consequence of these assumptions is that most first grades concentrate on reading and "skills," relying heavily on commercially prepared materials, and that writing is a subsidiary subject consisting mostly of handwriting practice and answering questions about reading.

This approach to primary teaching leads to a lot of the damage that T & W is so much concerned with undoing, and it's time that these assumptions were directly confronted. My own experience convinces me that first graders are not only well able to make a start on learning to express themselves powerfully through the written word, but that furthermore, if they are not helped to do this, they may build up fears and dislike of the whole writing process, which may remain with them throughout their lives (unless of course they are lucky enough to be released by T & W or some other source). It seems to me we should concentrate more on giving young children a good start with writing in their primary years, so that they can grow steadily in their sophisticated use of written language, rather than resigning ourselves to undoing the damage of mechanical "skill teaching" later on. The Newsletter has had many discussions about the need for using tricks, props, or gimmicks to stimulate writing, because the children were so reluctant and afraid to write, due to their previous school experience. Instead, it might be more worthwhile to put the emphasis on reaching children and teachers at the primary level. Then it might be easier to dispense with the artificial devices for getting around children's inhibitions about writing at the higher

grade levels.

My own comments about teaching writing to first graders only barely touch on the limitless possibilities, and I would very much like to hear from other people who are working with this age group.

* * * * *

On the first day of the term, when I asked my new first graders what they would like to do during the year, one little girl said, "My mother and my sister want me to learn to read, but I don't want to read. I just want to learn how to write." It's obvious why writing should have such appeal to most young children--it's active, it uses tools closely allied to art work (magic markers in color are particularly prized), and it's considered an especially grown up thing to do and generally evokes praise from other people. Of course "writing" doesn't necessarily mean stories and poems to a very young child. It might just mean filling pages with letters, numbers, printed names, or words copied from TV, signs, or books. I see my task in teaching writing to very young children as the attempt to make clear the connection between the child's pleasure in manipulating language orally and his pleasure in doodling on a piece of paper. In other words, I hope that gradually each child will realize that he can use letters and words to capture thoughts and experiences, that he can be playful, serious, or factual in his writing, and, most importantly, that he can learn to do this independently, in his own style.

When you consider the tremendous range of knowledge necessary in order to transcribe thoughts onto paper --the sounds of letters, the shapes and sizes of letters, the physical control of a writing tool, the order of letters in a word, the order of words in a sentence, the (often irrational) spelling of every word, the staggering amount of technical know-how before you even begin to struggle with the ordinary difficulty of self-expression--it seems a miracle that six-year olds can begin to master these during a year at school. And yet, towards the end of the year, most of my first graders can write a couple of sentences by themselves, quite a few can write creditable stories, poems, or descriptions, and some advanced writers can easily dash off pages of whatever they feel like writing. It is the growing sense of accomplishment that makes teaching writing to first graders such a gratifying task, even though it's a long struggle before the children can actually produce interesting writing. Not only is it a challenge to help children gain a minimum of ease with mechanics in order to free them to write, but it's an even greater challenge to keep them eager to work at a task that is so fraught with difficulties and so slow to show dramatic results.

If writing becomes a natural part of everyday classroom life from the first day on, before the children have learned to know letters or sounds or reading, then it isn't as likely to seem so formidable later on. In order to create written communication without the frustration of mechanics, I encourage the children to dictate stories, both individually and as a group. Although I use dictation much more during the first part of the year, I like to continue

using it even after the children have learned to write, as a way of recording complicated thoughts more quickly or of involving the whole group in making up a poem or story together. Sometimes group dictations come up spontaneously, and I just grab a piece of paper and write them down. The following examples from two different classes just happened to bubble up, the first as a reaction to a factual book about dinosaurs, and the second during a sweltering September afternoon in a stuffy classroom.

Some Dinosaur Thoughts

Get that dinosaur out of that picture, and put him on a scale.
He's ripping our book, he's ripping it up,
So put him on a scale.

So we put him on a scale,
And he broke the scale.
Oh, no! He broke the scale!

Let's put him in the zoo,
Or put him in jail,
Or tell his mother to keep him home.

(The dinosaur's saying, "Boo hoo.")

Hot Weather Thoughts

When it's hot it makes you want to...
Go in swimming,
Jump into freezing water,
Turn on a fan,
Turn on the air-conditioning and lie on the bed,
Go to sleep,
Have a popsicle,
Eat ice cream,
Eat ice cubes to make you cold,
Eat watermelon,
Put ice cubes on your head.
Get in a freezer (then you'll be freezed and turn into ice cubes),
Jump out the window and fly down, and the air would make
 you cool,
You could land in the snow,
Go in the snow and put your head in it.
Take a piece of paper and fold it and put water in it,
 And then put water on your face whenever you get hot.
Get on your bunk bed and drink miles and miles down the road.

More often, a group dictation may be a deliberate effort to describe something familiar in a new way. I often start by suggesting a nature topic, such as rain, snow, or wind, on a day when the children have just experienced some rough weather. Sometimes I ask them to describe it to someone who may never have seen it, and this may evoke some interesting comparisons. Or sometimes I ask them to imagine that they are the ocean or a leaf or some other inanimate object, and that they tell me what they see, hear, and feel. I usually give them a little while (sometimes overnight) to think about it, and then try to choose a time when the children are alert and relaxed. Mostly I get so many contributions from so many sides at once, that I have to slow the gallop enough to be able to scribble things down. Afterwards, I sometimes change the order of the children's ideas to help put them into a kind of loose sequence, but I never change any words or grammatical constructions or add anything myself. The children love to have the whole thing read back to them, and they gleefully identify each person's contributions. The result (which I then duplicate and give to all the children) may turn out something like this:

Snow

Snow makes things look white and bumpy,
And it falls on roofs and tree branches.
It's like a white ceiling, but it's soft.
You can make a snowman,
And you can have a snowball fight,
And go sledding, and skiing, and skating.
It's water when it's cold and turned to ice.
It makes places colder.

Snow falls from the sky in little flakes
That are soft like feathers,
But they're cold.
They are like little stars that have holes in them,
And they're pretty.
They are like drops of milk
Or an angel's tears.

Snow is like when God is trying to figure out
What to put in the whole wide world.
He put snow for the children to play in,
And for the winter, so that it could be different
From summer, spring, and fall.
It's so that when Santa flies and gives children presents,
He could bring his sled on the white snow.
It's to make the city and towns and country look pretty.

Snow doesn't make any noise.
It's quiet, like you're not talking

And there's no T. V. or radios or records.
Or when you go to bed and nobody is up.
Snow is like little pieces of cloud
That broke off and fell on the ground,
And nobody knew
Because they couldn't hear it.

After working with many kindergarten and first grade classes, I have noticed that while individual children differ tremendously within a class, each new group begins to develop a kind of class character based on the inter-action of the various components of the group. Not only do some groups tend to be more volatile, or particularly artistic, or sociable, but they may develop quite specific tendencies of thought and temperament. This emerges very clearly in the kind of writing that they do, both by dictation and in their own writing. The group that made up the dinosaur thoughts was a bunch of very bright individualists who somehow seemed to be unusually aware of language, and interested in symbolic thought. They requested some sessions to work on a group poem, and they went at it with great seriousness and critical awareness, rejecting some contributions and praising others. The following poem was one on which they worked like this, including the sequence of ideas (which most first graders are not very concerned about) and the result is a more polished, if also more self-conscious, product.

Rain

Rain is like little pieces of crystal
Falling from big rock clouds in the sky.
When it's raining hard, it's mad at the flowers
And makes them weep.
It hits you and wants to get you wet.

Rain is like seeds dropping down on the ground.
The flowers are bending over, the grass is dry.
The hedges are dying.
Rain is tears dripping from weeping clouds.

Perhaps the clouds are sad
Because it's cold in the sky.
Perhaps they want to come down to the earth,
Or go in a house to wash the dishes, or make a shower.

Or maybe it's too hot in the sky
And the sun is shining too hard,
Making a golden rainbow
Like a backward smile
Or a painted frown.

Perhaps one reason why this group became so particularly interested in writing poetry was that Jonathan happened to be a member of the class. Jonathan was one of the rare type of gifted children who understood immediately every suggestion touched upon in class, and then would go home and work out ramifications for hours on his own, just for his own pleasure. He always knew what he wanted to learn in school so that he could go on and explore things in depth by himself afterwards. Along with his unusual intellectual capacities, he was a modest, friendly, humorous child, and he was respected and loved by all the other children. Although writing poetry was only one of his many interests, Jonathan responded to our class discussions of poetry by starting a notebook of original poems and stories. Here is one of the poems he brought to school:

I wish I could ride
With all the other horses.
And no horse would say, "Ha ha ha."
And they wouldn't kick sand at me.

And I could go with them
And pick berries and milkweed and thorns,
And go out in the desert
And out on big plains
Where I could run for miles
And where the sun is red.
But I am too little to go.

But although Jonathan's writing undoubtedly sparked up the class, almost all the children seemed to share an affinity to poetic thought. When I asked them to think about the night and dictate individual poems to me, timid, dependent little Christine (the youngest in the class, not even six yet) came up with this poem:

The night is dark and long,
The night is damp.
And the cars are like little giants
Coming up the road.
And the cats miaow in the night,
But I don't pay any attention
So they go to sleep.
And I think that the night is long.
Only that I think when I go to sleep
That things are dark and short.

Peter's poem about the night included the line, "The light of the moon shouts over the world." And Robby's had the haunting phrase, "But in the winters of the night..." Even the cliché subjects, such as springtime (during May) brought some surprises. I especially liked the one that Chris wrote because of its (i. t. a. inspired?) pseudo middle English spelling:

Spring is Hire

I luvve the spring
With butrfliys flutring abote
And flowrs bloming up
And plants groing
Bees in the ar fliing to flowr to flowr.
I luvve the bees thay give you good huny.

In sharp contrast to these poets were my children in last year's first grade, a very sweet, friendly, academic group. When I read poetry to this class, the children listened politely, and some of them even enjoyed some of the poems, but they were clearly not fired up by my reading. When I tried to evoke discussions of poetic symbols, the children again politely, but very firmly, made it clear that they were not interested in metaphor. On the other hand, if I started to read a factual book about nature or Indians, they would fervently beg me to read "just a little more" even if it was lunchtime. These children were extremely sensible, literal, down-to-earth types, and the kind of writing they enjoyed doing most were diary-type personal "news" or nature descriptions. Thus, examining things on the nature table, they wrote descriptions like the following: "Daffodils are all yellow inside, and their inside has black little spots, and they have yellow petals outside." Or, "This shell looks like a tornado and sounds like the ocean." Or, "The coral looks like it has the chicken pox and big bumps. It's weird."

When we had a family of baby mice, the children observed their growth and wrote notes on their progress every few days. Right after the baby mice were born, Gigi wrote, "The baby mice are cute and pink. They are the smallest babies that I have seen. Their eyes are closed. They drink milk from their mother." A few days later, Andrea wrote, "The babies are pink. The class thinks that one of the mice crawled into the jar by itself and then the mother pushed all of the babies in. First I never saw them eat, but then I saw them drinking from their mother. I don't like the mice because they scare me sometimes. They remind me of bats." Some days after that, Anda observed, "The little mice are white and they are runny and I am surprised." On our last official observation, Julie wrote, "The mice are much bigger. They have more of fur. Their ears are like their mommy's ears. They eat what their mommy eats." All the children enjoyed the observations and writing about the mice, and they each had a mouse book to take home.

After the first months of school, I gave each child a writing notebook, covered with bright colored paper and the child's name. Every week I asked the children to write their news in their notebooks, but many children began to make more frequent entries of their own. One of Stephen's entries read, "I went to a parade and I got a cork gun, and my cousins took the gun away from me, and I was mad!!!" After a trip to New York, Susie wrote, "I was on the Empire State Building. The cars were so little they looked like toys. The people looked like ants because they were so little, and the building was higher than all the skyscrapers." Lisa wrote, "Now I have another loose tooth, and it is on top of my mouth." The children liked to read these items aloud to the class, and there was often a lively follow-up discussion among the children. Once the discussion about an incident became so heated and prolonged that after 15 minutes or so some of the members of the class said they were sick of hearing about that subject, and I invited the participants to finish their talk out in the hall, which they did, returning to the room with a look of peaceful satisfaction on their faces.

While most groups of children don't exhibit such extreme definite characteristics as the two groups I just mentioned, there always is a great deal of variation in outlook and interests even in children as young as first graders. I think it's important for a teacher to expose children from the very beginning to a great variety of types of writing, so that when they've had a chance to try out stories, fairy tales, news, poetry, description, factual material, jokes, riddles, etc. they can choose to pursue the kind of writing that is most akin to their own styles of thought. By "expose" I mean both reading examples of each and asking all the children to try to write some. That may seem like asking quite a bit of first graders, but it's amazing how well they can rise to the challenge. Sometimes it is the children who seem least ready to do academic work who produce the most interesting and original writing. Time after time I have been surprised by children who were termed "immature," who couldn't or wouldn't quiet down or listen, the ones who were always hiding under a table or being singled out by specialty teachers as uncooperative, and who (sometimes to their own amazement) showed great aptitude and pleasure in dictating and writing. It was only after trying many kinds of writing that Dougie could decide he wanted to write a natural history book about dragonflies, or that Susie and Emily could write the script of a play, or that Elizabeth could write pages of romantic fairy stories, or that Johannes could painstakingly write a blow by blow account of his family's camping trip.

If it is important to introduce an unlimited variety of writing styles and types, it is even more important to accept each child's writing on its own terms. Young children are usually eager to please the teacher, and they are apt to produce what they know will be well received. If a teacher has a preference for one type or style, the children (if they like her) will probably try to fit themselves into that mold, whether it's Dick and Jane or Haiku. Since I take writing seriously, so do the children, but I try to guard against expecting or preferring any particular form or style. I do lay down the ground rules that there has to be some effort involved and that the writing should be reasonably genuine. This still permits individual children to interpret assignments rather freely, and it leads to some oddball writing that might

otherwise never show up within a classroom. Six-year-old humor tends to be somewhat eccentric anyway, and for adults the humor lies partly in its very incomprehensibility. When I asked the children to write about something they love and something they hate, Greg came up with this:

I hate Mom to turn out me
And kiss the light.
I love Mom to turn out the light
And kiss me goodnight.

Joe, a quiet, deadpan little fellow sidled up to me with this:

I am a lollipop.
If you can read this
Scratch my ear.
O. K. I will scratch your ear.
If you can't read this
Tell someone to read my story.

When I ask the children to describe a member of their family, I usually get a great variety of responses. If the children are assured that I am soliciting neither pious sentiments of devotion nor defiant denunciations, they can feel free to write either or neither. Here are some comments on mothers and siblings. All of these were written by happy, more or less welladjusted middle class children. Five year old Haig wrote:

I like my mother when she gives me a lot of
presents, and sometimes she goes and tells daddy
to play with me.

Another five year old wrote:

My mother is always mad at me when I do something that
is an accident. I am always mad. I wish I could give Mom
a spank and shout at her. When she is nice to me I am nice
to her.

Karen, who loves animals, wrote:

I like my mother best because she feeds my cat. My mother is the best in the world.

A bright, precocious second grader described her mother:

She screams at me almost every time I sit down to read. She also screams at me whenever I am a little slow in dressing. She hardly ever stops screaming at me. I can not think of one time that she has been nice to me.

As for brothers and sisters:

My brother does not share and he is not polite.

My sister wears slobbery slippers and she wears a crummy coat. My sister rides her slobbery bike all the time and she says "blah blah blah" to everybody all the time.

My sister is so funny when she pulls my hair, I laugh and laugh.

My brother fights with me. He has glasses on. He's mean to me and my Mom too. I hate my brother. He's dumb. Golly I wish he was not in my family.

My little sister does not eat much. She likes everybody and she shares her stuff. She gets mad when people don't share with her. Sometimes she looks very pretty.

The most enigmatic and original comment about a family member was Todd's single line description: "My mother looks like a peeled potato."

When I say that I ask a great deal of first graders, I mean that I ask a lot potentially. The first independent writing efforts of such young children are bound to be stilted and way below their actual language ability. By the time they get one word written down, they have usually forgotten the end of a projected sentence, and it comes out all wrong. Yet the children are usually proud of these first meager efforts because they know they have written

something all by themselves. They seem to be able to accept quite realistically the gap between their present writing ability and their potential in the future. It is my job to keep taking each child a little further each time, so that gradually the gap between the faltering first steps and the possibility of a rich, varied use of written language becomes perceptibly smaller.

Alison, an artistic, creative child, wrote her first independent story on Halloween. "This bat flew up above the devil house." By spring time she was writing poems like this one about the ocean:

Waves are me.
In the night and in the day
I splash on rocks.
And when I go down,
I go down the crevices.
I go quietly
And swiftly.

Jeff, whose Halloween story consisted of "A ghost went out on Halloween and scared all the people," a few months later was writing:

I like trees because they give us shelter.
And they give us food. And they give us shade.
And I like trees because you can climb them.
And they make the world look green.

And:

I want to be a dog
So I can bark
In the thunder and lightning.
And I can run fast
As a shooting star.

Looking over my years as a teacher of young children, I would be inclined to agree with the little girl who felt that writing should have a higher priority in first grade than reading. In order to write well, a child has to learn reading anyway, since writing involves all the same--and more--skills than reading. And while reading can be a passive, sometimes even meaningless, experience, writing by its very nature has to actively involve the child in all his complexities of thinking and feeling. If writing (including dictation) takes place in kindergarten and first grade as an important means of self-expression, along with art, music, dance, crafts, and drama, children are much more

likely to become literate, and perhaps more in touch with themselves, very early in their school lives. And teachers of first grade children will have something more to look forward to than the dull routine of workbooks and exercises. Whatever the teacher manuals say about specific "skill teaching," I think that even in first grade the broad skill of writing takes precedence over the peculiar aims of textbook lessons, and that moreover it provides one more channel of close and continuing communication between a teacher and the children in a class.

THE CLASSES OF DAVID SHAPIRO

Prefatory Note:

These poems were all written by Wendy Van den Heuvel, ten years old, under the guidance of poet David Shapiro. Wendy was given private lessons in poetry-writing for close to a year, which is so far as we know a unique pedagogical situation. The results represent an interesting collaboration between adult and child sensibility, and a beautiful, fragile kind of poetry.

Tears Are Broken Easily

And my tears go away
Dreaming of Santa Claus on Christmas Day crying
When its Christmas Eve the tears stay
Snow is made out of ice and ice is made out of water

Dreaming of Santa Claus on Christmas Day crying
He falls asleep
Snow is made out of ice and ice is made out of water
And tears are made out of trying

He falls asleep
When his deer go drifting past
And tears are made out of trying
And I am made out of tears

When his deer go drifting past
And my tears go away
And I am made out of tears
When its Christmas Eve the tears stay

Story About Teeth

Teeth were walking down the street
He bumped into Mouth
And Mouth said, I need a pair of Peace
(Because he doesn't have any Teeth)

And so the Teeth went, Clackety clackety clackety
The day was blue, the song was red,
The trees were fingers skying,
And the sky was splendid with a mouth moon.

So some Eyeballs came walking down the block
Singing a song of yellow colored finger eating happiness.
And they were eating chocolatecovered moosefingered jellyfingered
Rolls. So they ate the Mouth and the Teeth up, and went away,

Drinking chocolate milk. Moral:
Never bite around when you can bark.
Moral #2: Never drink and eat chocolate milk.
Moral #3: Never judge teeth by their mouth.

Now

Now the stars are gleaming
Like boats shining
In the river of rootbeer
And I am dancing to the music it makes
My room feels green
Because I am as green as the morning sun
The squirrels go to sleep with their nuts
The deer go to sleep with their fawns
Under the tree of happiness
And I will not go to sleep anymore
Because of the boats shining in the river
And I will not go to sleep
Because I hear my mother crying, White sails.

the things that hang

most things either float or hang
if it's not suspended in mid-air and it comes down by itself,
there must be something attached to it to keep it from falling
things can also float in the water, in space
they can become suspended in mid-air
they can also stick out like an arm or the wings of a plane
but hanging is the most interesting way of all
in the old days, when someone committed a crime
what they usually did if they decided to take his life was
to hang him and he was suspended in mid-air by a
piece of rope attached to a tree.
Flags when they're not waving usually hang from
a pole, which is paying a great tribute to the hanging
idea, since a flag is the way a nation puts identity on itself
But the greatest hanging of all
is done by your balls.

Hector Rivera

[This poem comes from the workshop Armand Schwerner conducted in the
Lower East Side Prep, Manhattan.]

CONTRIBUTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

KAREN HUBERT has an MFA in writing from the Columbia School of the Arts. She has won several short story contests and is at work on a novel. For the past two years she has taught writing, animation and videotape for TWC at P.S. 75.

MARC KAMINSKY's first book of poetry, Birthday Poems, was published last year by Horizon Press. He has also been published in Columbia Review, US, First Issue, American Scholar, Sing Out, and other magazines. He has worked with the Open Theater and his plays have been produced by the Columbia Players and at the Judson Poets Theater. This year he conducted poetry groups with old people in Brooklyn.

MARTIN KUSHNER was director of TWC last year. He studied acting and directing at Yale Drama School, produced street theater in New York and Boston, and directed at Smith College and the University of Pittsburgh.

PHILLIP LOPATE is the author of a volume of poems, The Eyes Don't Always Want to Stay Open (SUN Books) and a novella, In Coyoacan (Swollen Magpie Press). His works have appeared in the anthologies A Cinch, Equal Time, and other magazines. He is coordinator of TWC's special program at P.S. 75 in New York City, and editor of the newsletter.

BILL MACKEY is a photographer and journalist. This year an ABC television program featured his photographs of Camden County, Georgia.

MIGUEL ORTIZ was born in Bayomon, Puerto Rico, in 1944. He has lived in the Bronx since the age of nine. He is a graduate of the New York City High School of Music and Art and of City College. Mr. Ortiz is an editor of Hanging Loose, and he has taught poetry workshops with the Academy of American Poets, and with the Collaborative at P.S. 54 in the South Bronx and the Joan of Arc Mini-School.

RON PADGETT was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1942. He has published Bean Spasms with Ted Berrigan, and co-edited the Anthology of New York Poets with David Shapiro. He has had two books of poetry published recently: Great Balls of Fire (1969, Holt, Rinehart) and The Adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Jim and Ron (1970, Grossman), illustrated by Jim Dine.

FRAN SCHWARTZ's notes on Miguel Ortiz's class are from field work at the Joan of Arc Mini-School for a Ph. D. thesis in anthropology and education at Teachers College and Columbia.

DAVID SHAPIRO's latest book of poetry, A Man Holding An Acoustic Panel (Dutton), was nominated for a Antional Book Award in 1972. He has worked with children at MUSE, and through the Academy of American Poets and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

BOB SIEVERT is a painter who has had several one-man shows in New York galleries. He teaches full-time at the East Harlem Youth Center.

SUE WILLIS's stories have been published in Epoch and The Minnesota Review. She has an MFA in writing from the Columbia School of the Arts. She has taught writing and drama and videotape for TWC at P.S. 75 for two years.

BILL ZAVATSKY edits two poetry magazines, Sun and Roy Rogers. His poetry has appeared in a number of magazines including The World and Juillard, and his first collection of poems is scheduled for publication soon. He also teaches writing to younger children at MUSE and under the auspices of Poets and Writers.

WRITERS IN 1972-73 PROGRAM

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PLUGS

POETRY IN THE SCHOOLS - CALIFORNIA #1/October 1972

A collection of diaries by writers in California schools. The introductory essay by Stephen Vincent, the director of the program, is a classic description of the trials, tribulations, and joys of writers in schools. Copies are \$1.50. Write to The Poetry Center, California State University at San Francisco, 1600 Holloway Avenue, San Francisco, Ca. 94132.

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ART RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

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- Arriving: N. Y. C.
- Chinese Folk Songs
- Christmas in Puerto Rico
- Chinese New Year Customs
- Chinese Children's Games

STILL AVAILABLE FROM TEACHERS & WRITERS

THE WHOLE WORD CATALOGUE

Our last issue of the newsletter was a practical collection of assignments for stimulating student writing, designed for both elementary and secondary students. Activities designed as catalysts for classroom exercises: personal writing, collective novels, diagram stories, fables, spoof and parodies, and language games. Includes an illustrated resource section on materials to supplement the assignments and to suggest further possibilities: surfaces, printing, duplicating, display materials, and teaching tools. Annotated bibliography.

\$1.50

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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, recorded the readers in a tape library, and designed a set of language exercises based on the readers. Mr. Landrum concentrated on the natural competency of the children with spoken language and with vernacular stories and tales out of their culture and their community. The first part of the book describes the way Mr. Landrum collected the material. The second part reprints the children's writing, with sections of Chinese stories, The Black Idiom, A Book of Dreams, and many other unusual and creative tales.

\$1.00

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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, and much of it is reprinted in the book.

\$1.00

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