

# Teachers and Writers Collaborative Newsletter

VOLUME 5 ISSUE 1



ADALBERTO ORTIZ

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We are launching the publication year with a change in format in an attempt to make the material in the Newsletter more accessible. We hope that this will lead to an increase in readership, and that more teachers and writers will contribute to our pages. If you have an article relating to the teaching of the arts, we will be more than happy to consider your work for publication. If you do not wish to write a lengthy piece, but have a comment or suggestion, or an issue to raise that you think may be of interest, write us a letter. If we get a sufficient response, we will feature letters to the editor on a regular basis.

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# From The Editor

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As always, we hope that the Newsletter serves as a source of ideas, and as a catalyst. Our aim is to shed at least a little light on the creative process--on how teachers and students may help each other to discover its complexities. There is no way for us to dissect the process and lay it bare for all to examine. The method of perceiving it is necessarily indirect. So we try to present the actual experiences of writers in the classroom straightforwardly, in the hope that the workings of the muse can be glimpsed through their accounts.

The presentation of a greater diversity of experience is the only way we can begin to approach the attainment of our aim. We hope to hear from you.

Miguel Ortiz

## JANE SHUFER

### A WALK IN THE PARK

pink flowers nesting on  
bare limbs. a green and pink mist,  
a living mist. yellow on the  
ground. now white helps the mist.  
old houses rise above the mist.  
a white petal carpet on the ground.  
a flower, white, I found it.  
tinged pale pink, on outside  
petals only. inside snow white.  
two more. pink, Mrs. Berl  
dropped one. the reservoir is colored  
plastic, always moving. a pale flower  
is losing its petals. pretty cherry  
flowers. Judy S. gave me a white  
one. people on horses, so nice.  
Mrs. Alpert says this is great.  
a lovely bridge, an almost  
gothic pattern. yum! I don't see  
any water under bridge. green  
mist again with pink, snow white  
and pale pink. Old houses seen  
through it. A flame red coat  
against the green. a big flat  
rock, long imbedded in the  
ground, bigger than 2 or 3  
people. robin-red-breast?

### A PARK POEM

A green and pink mist fills the air.  
A  
soft white fog joins it.  
There  
is a green and yellow carpet on the ground.  
The  
yellow vanishes and white takes its place.  
A  
flower lies on the path.  
It  
is white as snow at heart, but  
Pale  
pink tinges the outside. Judy's  
Gift,  
as white as she is sweet.  
A  
Gothic bridge, all green. The  
Mist  
rises once again, accompanied by  
Fog.  
A bright spot of color flashes.  
I  
sit on an imbedded rock, 9 x 2 1/2 perhaps.  
A  
bird, I see a touch of orange,  
A  
robin? If so, then spring is really here.

## Two Kinds of Poetries

commentary by BILL ZAVATSKY  
on work by Jane Shufer / P.S. 84, Manhattan

Jane has a clear idea of what constitutes poetry for her. It's highly instructive to note what she fails to include in her "finished poem," what material enlivens her "notes" and how they differ from the poem-proper. Immediately there are several lovely phrases in the notes which Jane rejects for the poem: "pink flowers nesting," "a living mist" (really a superb phrase), "white helps the mist." What becomes clear is that Jane is giving up a lot of verbs/verbals ("nesting," "living," "helps"--all of them action words) in favor of a more static vision in her poem. Clearly the activity, the doingness of the walk, transferred itself immediately to her notes, but for some reason (which undoubtedly is her sense of esthetics, of what should make up a poem) it is rejected in the finished product. This is, I feel, a real loss: what is active and aggressive becomes static and "poeticized." The seeming "confusion" of the first nine lines, with their sentence

out by a steamiron on a mental ironing board. In fact, what Jane does in her finished poem is abstract, rather than retain the powerful concrete scenes she has noted down. One of the differences that struck me immediately on reading the two versions was that two people and two illuminating actions had disappeared from the final text: Mrs. Berl's dropping of the flower, and Mrs. Alpert's enlivening colloquial remark, "This is great." Judy's simple act of giving, so clearly noted in the notebook, has been prettified, poeticized; and while the comparison between the whiteness of the flower and the sweetness of Judy is highly sophisticated, it is also cliched. Other interesting observations are also dropped: the reservoir "colored plastic, always moving," and the beautifully observant and colloquial "people on horses, so nice." The exclamatory "yum!"--another indication of individuality and personality--is also lost, along with the

mum of words--for two lines of cliché: the corny old saw about spring being here at last etc. Obviously, a poem must end with some kind of moral; the final triumph of abstraction is moralism.

Jane's conception of poetry, it seems to me, drifts away from the "rawness" of observation into a "cooked" atmosphere where smoothness and cliché dominate. Jane is a reader, and it is clear that the tendency toward "literariness" pushes her toward a highly finished product that shoehorns reality out of it. People are erased and mist, the mist of the literary, the poetic subject, floods in.

I read the poems and spoke to Jane as clearly as I could about these transformations. I tried to impress her with the fact that there were two kinds of poetries: one that comes out of books, out of fantasy, out of one's "head," and another that came from

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**Well, that's the kind of poetry you like, isn't it? The kind that comes out of your head, the kind that's crazy?**

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fragments, is much more energetic and vivid--actually communicating the curves and twists and interpenetrating juxtapositions of real flowers on real trees--than the finished poem, where the activity is much more refined, much "smoother" ("fills," "joins," "vanishes"). Jane obviously believes that there is no room in her poem for this ruggedness, this "confusion" of vision; that indeed, a poem is a smoothed-down object, as if experience were something to be flattened

remarkably observed "flame red coat/against the green," which is abstracted completely as "A bright spot of color flashes." It is also interesting to note that the vivid and personal rock "bigger than 2 or 3 people" is completely flattened into a mere geometrical construction, "9 x 2 1/2 perhaps." And finally, Jane sacrifices the beautiful Emily Dickinson-type question in her notes, "robin-red-breast?"--a question which creates a living presence with a mini-

keeping a sharp lookout on things in the world. She said, "Well, that's the kind of poetry you like, isn't it? The kind that comes out of your head, the kind that's crazy?" I told her yes, that until recently I had pretty much thought that the fantasy kind of poetry was the best, but that I was now trying to see things, to really look at them, and to write about them the way that they were. I told her that both kinds of poetry were equally important, and that a good poet

## CENTRAL PARK POEMS

I was walking in the park.  
I saw a cherry tree with a tingaling  
smell. I saw a frankfurter man selling  
franks. There was an old bridge and a lady  
with a beagle. By the water there was a  
seagull. To get in the place around  
the reservoir we had to go under  
wire. And there was a man jogging.  
Carlos and John were throwing sticks.  
Sik was playing with sticks. Bill  
didn't let me lean on a car and  
the trains made loud noises and a girl  
and boy were kissing. When I was walking  
there was a greenish owl and a bumble bee.  
There was a man and lady riding horses.  
Then a man and lady were riding bikes.  
The franks smell so nice. But air near  
the water didn't smell nice. Then I  
looked at the ground--there was  
a rathole. Kids were bothering Bill.  
I saw a patrol car. When the class  
was going back to school Michael and  
Phillip fell. Then we went back to school.

ANTHONY TORO, fifth grade  
P.S. 84, Manhattan

Once me and my class  
went to the park and I saw  
a man on a bike. He fell on his  
backside.  
he fell on the flowers.  
Then the cops came and took  
him to headquarters.  
Then he took a blowpop tree  
and threw it on the cops.  
And jumped in the reservoir. He got to  
the East Side and jumped on a horse.  
He had a frog in his pocket.  
He didn't know it until he heard  
beb beb beb beb  
then he went kissing  
with a tree.

SERGE VILMAR, fifth grade  
P.S. 84, Manhattan

had to learn how to do them  
both well. I think she  
followed me, and that the  
talk was an important exper-  
ience for both of us.

It seems to me that this  
distinction, between fantasy,  
between "made-up stuff" and  
the "real world," is crucial.  
This is what all the talk about  
the "integrity of the object" is  
about. There are times when  
it is simply, well, not wrong  
to distort the tree or the rock,  
but. . . simply inaccurate,  
irresponsible to the demands  
of the tree or the rock. (It's  
important when explaining  
this not to fall into the same  
moralistic pit oneself; the  
tree possesses no morality,  
it is simply a thing with roots  
and leaves.) I've just finished  
reading Spring & All by William  
Carlos Williams, a book in  
which he tackles just this prob-  
lem.

Let me point out what is  
genuinely good in Jane's  
second poem. First, Jane has  
genuinely transformed her  
material, worked with it and  
on it. Whatever objections I  
may have to her sense of poetry,  
of what is poetic, she proves  
beyond a doubt that she has  
handled the material she has  
collected in a wholly artistic  
way--a remarkable achieve-  
ment for anyone, let alone a  
fifth-grader! If Jane has  
"suppressed" what I think are  
energetic, truly beautiful, and  
significant elements in her note-  
book entry, she has introduced  
other elements for the purposes  
of unity, notably the "mist,"  
which permeates and touches-  
together everything in her  
second, "finished" poem. She  
has strived for and achieved a  
delicacy that is only suggested  
in the notebook poem. Rather

than giving us process, she has given us the activity of landscape; her poem is quite "painterly." Perhaps she has "erased" most of the people in her notebook entry to concentrate more upon what she has decided is the real subject of her second poem, the landscape of the park (a highly selective portion of it). Regardless of what objections I have to Jane's equation of Judy's sweetness and the whiteness of the flower, she has succeeded--and I think quite brilliantly--in making Judy and her gift like another element in the landscape; that is, Judy and her gift are flower-life, the park is like a giant, white, lovely flower, indeed, the entire landscape/poem is like an enormous, delicate blossom that contains splashes of color on its "petals": a Gothic bridge, "A bright spot of color," a rock, a bird, etc. This is an extraordinary metaphor: park as flower. Judy obviously by her sweetness is more flower-like to Jane than her teachers; a fact which is clinched by her gift of a flower.

Also, rather than baldly

stating, "tree. . . tree. . . tree," as most of the other kids did, Jane chose to "Impressionize" her park; the trees and their green and pink leaves become "mist" rather than just tree-parts; the fallen petals are not just castaway elements, but part of a fabric; a carpet-weave. The first several Impressionist lines of her poem suddenly clarify: A/ flower lies on the path. Jane clearly knows what she's doing; she wants an Impressionist atmosphere, creates it beautifully in her opening lines, then, Wham!, presents us with a vivid 3-D flower! The dreamy experience of the opening suddenly jumps into reality, which is described in detail, then compared to a living/loved human presence, her friend Judy. The remainder of the poem, with its return to object and landscape (still an imaginative landscape folded in mist), cushions and surrounds the main experience of the poem: the flower-gift and its giver. Finally, like the sudden appearance of the flower on the path, a robin materializes, which like Judy and her gift, seems to call for a bit of

interpretation: "If so, then spring is really here." While I am still not convinced by the truism, it appears to me to be a satisfactory way of ending the poem. Perhaps a better ending would have been simply for Jane to return to the question of her notebook poem: "robin-red-breast?" Thus a cliché would have been avoided, and a sense of expectancy (stemming from the appearance of the flower in the path) might have been created. But perhaps this device is a bit too sophisticated; and as is, Jane has found a good solution, which at least has tradition and Spring to back it up! I want to talk to Jane about these things, and I want to backtrack and praise both of the poems. I want to talk with her about why she chose certain elements in her notes, and introduced others in her finished poem. Finally, in my opinion, both poems stand on their feet brilliantly, but I am interested in knowing (if she can tell me, and she may be unable to; art is itself and not an essay on what it was written, otherwise there would be only explanation and no poem) what conscious choices she was making as she sifted through the material. ■

### Further Suggestions:

1. Take another "poetry walk," this time without notebooks. The assignment would be to return to the classroom and write about it, or to write it at night and bring it in the next day.
2. Take a walk with pencils and notebooks, but ask the students to pick just one thing they've seen and write about it as fully as they can. This could be done without writing materials, too. The idea being focus.
3. As Williams writes, it is both impossible and unnecessary to "count every flake of truth that falls." What is important is detail, the observation of detail, which is always personal; somebody saying, "I like your shirt," or "You've cut your hair!" Such observations are always indications of personality and of individuality, and are essential to poetry. Thus, it would be more important for a kid to write about that big rock covered with orange spraypaint insignias than to try to encompass Central Park in a composition. Maybe shorter walks would do it.

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**Yet they seem to jump into any activity which has a workaday feeling  
and the dignity of adult life.**

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I had this grandiose scheme, to build a large screen out of cardboard and have the kids paint a triptych of heaven, earth and hell, as in Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights, and also write poems of a cosmic order. We bought the paints, I made the screen (very proud of that), I read Dante's Inferno and Blake and Rimbaud to get ideas for the presentation.

Tuesday I came in and Britt, Gene and Roberto were hanging around the writing room, so I asked them to lay a white coat of paint over the screen as a base. They were happy to. They stayed an hour after school, and helped me lug seven pieces of wooden furniture down to the basement storage room. People have been using the writing room as a furniture dump, and we had to get rid of those monstrosities to make room for the cardboard stuff. The three boys have an interesting thing going: all of them are so-called "under-achievers," bright but not into schoolwork. Yet they seem to jump into any activity which has a workaday feeling and the dignity of adult life. Britt is black, Gene white, and Roberto half-black and half-Puerto Rican (he calls himself a "Nick"). Roberto is the largest, strongest and beefiest, but also the most sensitive artist: he has a vulnerable edge at odds with his beefiness that's very attractive. Britt is a Great Pretender, the hero of all those soul songs about cool fools, terrifically good-looking and able to manipulate other people into doing his work, which is why, for all his intelligence, he has such a low reading level. Last year he made far and away the best videotape, orchestrating, scripting, playing the lead, editing staying with the project for months--showing how far vanity can lead a kid in the direction of good work. Now he brags about that videotape to every girl he meets; I've heard him. He already has a sequel planned entitled The Return of Robinson. I love Britt, but I wish he'd stop fooling himself. Gene is also handsome slight of build, and the best mind academically of the three. I wouldn't be surprised if he shared his homework sometimes in return for some of that masculine bonhommerie the three exude when they're together. Gene takes a few more joshing blows than the other two, and he's very sensitive to being playfully abused or threatened by Britt. I've seen him walk away from the other two saying "No, that hurt." What surprises me, however, is the degree to which this classically racially-balanced trio manages to get on without any hostilities.

## **The Marriage of Heaven and Hell**

by **PHILLIP LOPATE**



Wednesday, I brought the screen into Lois Phifer's room to work with the whole class. I realized I was taking a chance of messing up the writing assignment by giving them the promise of artwork at the end of the cycle--they would want to jump the gun. But I also didn't like the idea of hiding this final step from them. As soon as I set up the triptych, all the kids brought their chairs up front with great expectations, as if they were going to see a movie. Dolores stood on her chair complaining, "I can't see!"--"There's nothing to see," I answered. "It's a blank screen. That's just the point." I told them I had this idea of doing a heaven and hell mural and held up a monograph on Bosch to show them what a finished triptych looked like. Then I began talking about hell, first Dante's conception of it, and the idea that each sinner was given a punishment metaphorically appropriate to his sin: the killers were submerged in a bloody lake and shot with arrows if they lifted their heads up too high; the suicides were encased without a body in a tree because they had abused their bodies. Meanwhile, the first row of boys were pushing and elbowing and beginning to hand-wrestle. I should mention that half of Phifer's class are kids I know from last year, half are brand new...several Chinese boys who don't speak English and mainly roughhouse. The more attentive kids were the ones I'd had last year, but the others, who didn't quite realize yet that I'd be back week after week, were relating to my "presentation" as if it were some kind of traveling exhibit. I decided to do a collaboration poem with the class on the subject of how different sinners would get their just deserts. Not a bad idea. It generated some interest and some good lines: "The thief will have his veins stolen by the Devil/  
The person who hurt your feelings will have his feelings taken away/  
The swindler has all his money wrapped around his nose so he can't breathe/  
The hijacker sprouts wings and flies forever...."

I still didn't like the tone of distraction in the room. We handed out paper, and I asked the kids to write their own conception of a modern heaven or hell. We also divided up the group into work committees for the mural-painting which would take place in the afternoon. I roamed the different tables helping kids. The problem with a room divided into five clusters of five or six kids each is that each table develops its own solution to work and a very strong conformity within that group. So the finest writing all took place at the same back table, where Dolores, Soypathe and Carline each inspired the other to rhapsodies of some length and beauty. I mean these pieces were good! At another table several new girls, timid, sweet and wearing carefully ironed dresses, had decided not to write but to draw rather goofy floor plans of heaven, complete with the Fun Nun Room. The Chinese boys dutifully turned out a paragraph about hell, almost identical, about having to work 12 hours a day--none of the catalogue of Oriental demons I had hoped for--and went back to reading their comic books.

Tammy Einstein and David Romanelli, a new kid, both did exquisite maps of their chosen spheres. I asked them to write a story or description of what they had drawn on the right side of the page. I was struck again by the deep prejudice against or about writing. Tammy wrote a few sentences like "Nature is nice and I think everyone should be nice and live together." I asked her what was in the picture. She said wheatfields, cows, chickens laying eggs, a house. I said why don't you write that: Heaven is a place with wheatfields, cows, etc. I asked her why she had drawn quite specific things in her artwork, but been so vague in her use of words. I told her I understand words like wheatfields but had a little trouble knowing what she meant by Nature. Who knows whether any of this sunk in? She's an intelligent child and had a frowning anxious look while she was listening: what does this man want?

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**I told her I understand words like wheatfields but had a little trouble knowing what she meant by Nature.**

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Had lunch with Lois Phifer and told her my impressions of the class. That there were some dull patches, lack-lustre spots. Especially that table with the new girls. "They're just sweet girls," Lois laughed. "They'll come out by the end of the year. Leave 'em around Dolores and Virginia for a while." Realized she was right: I had been thinking of them as schizy or worse, and actually they're the finest fruits of an educational system that wants kids neat and behaved.

Lois has a fine patience for letting kids come out at their own rate. I still think she's started in too low a gear this term and that the class lacks dynamism. Actually we complement each other well.

The afternoon went beautifully. Several boys, R, G and B and David Romanelli went to work on the Hell panel. A group of girls, Tammy, Christine, Dolores, Lilly, gathered around the Heaven panel. Virginia and Dolores wanted to decorate and paint a chair, which was okay by me. The rest of the kids were out playing in the yard. I gave the muralists a few instructions before starting: to draw it first in pencil, to try to cover the surface with details, thousands of details, and most important, to watch what the person to the left or right was doing and try to link up with theirs, so that the composition would hang together.

The boys were coming out with a magnificent Hell. Fiery figures like Stan Lee comic-book heroes sprang out of a huge oil refinery; there were staircases and vultures and mysterious hulking monsters. The whole thing had an astonishing flow of action. Everything connected. Heaven was something else again: static cloudlets with happy figures imprisoned inside. Dolores had managed to get in her maternity clothing store. Lilly put in a few kites and apples. I was painting an inch frame around the border with special gold-leaf paint. Christine was the most alert to the possibilities of connecting; she did the yeoman's share of the work. Clearly we were up against the Miltonic problem of Hell upstaging Heaven.

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**The boys were coming out with a magnificent hell.**

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The kids worked again after school and asked to stay longer but I had to kick them out at 3:40 to go downtown with Mike Tempel. Little Yolanda was especially enjoying herself. She's a very pretty, proper-looking girl with a streak of something else. At one point Britt asked if she had a little brush. "Yeah, I got a little brush, but you ain't gettin near it," she answered. I was shocked.

On Friday, Sue and I were straightening up the room before having some kids paint the furniture. I wanted to take the triptych further and was wondering how to recruit kids from Lois's class when at that moment the whole group, coming up from lunch, entered the writing room to "look." The kids who wanted to stay simply stayed, and that was that. We got up a good work crew in Heaven this time: I threw a few boys into it--Romanelli, David Fried (another very good artist), Wayne and David Medina--plus Christine and Tammy. R, B and G were on Hell. David Auslander wanted to work alone on a chair--"no design, just solid colors"--and I thought that was fine. He did a thoughtful, professional job of it. He's the kind of kid who doesn't like to be swept up into group enthusiasms, and has a great need to be competent and useful. Virginia and Yolanda finished the colorful chair they were working on. Sue brought some boys in from Soroka's classroom and they started designing and painting the other furniture. The room was really humming. Kids were pouring paint into little paper cups, taping the sides of the chairs, moving from the sink to their area with no major trip-ups. At first I did a lot of throwing the right supplies into the different kids' hands, but then I realized that they knew where everything was. They know where every pencil is kept in that school. Some kids started whining: "Where can I find a thin bru-ush?" I fixed them an eyeball look and said: "You know where they are. Go get some from another classroom." They ran out and returned with a whole batch of brushes. Everything was going so well that I became ecstatic and just wandered around in a daze. Then the feeling got too much for me: the room was in full swing; I didn't need to be in it; suddenly I wanted to go get other people. I ran into the halls and said to Fredi Balzano and George Kelly: "Go see what's happening in the writing room." Then I wandered into Phifer's room. She had ducked in before and commented on how intelligently everyone seemed to be working (this was especially true at the Heaven panel, where they made a lot of fine decisions for connecting and jazzing up the place--famous Dead figures floating around, carnivals, a three-dimensional Ferris wheel, superhighways with trucks labeled God Industries). It was a shame, I said, that we didn't have someone taking photographs. No one but us would ever know how fantastic it was. "Oh, don't be too sure about that," Lois said. "I saw Jack Isaacs, a bigshot from the District Office, stick his head in and tell the other visitors: See, this is what a classroom should look like." ■

## **The Craziest, Sickest Person In The School**

Today, Dora Fuentes told me that, as I was passing by, Mario the janitor turned to her and said:

"There goes the craziest, sickest person in the school."

"Why, what did he do now?"

"He let the kids paint the sink!" (Blue and green--Gene Harrison had made an awful mess, and while he was cleaning it up he suggested it would be easier to paint than scrape. I agreed.)

"So what's wrong with that?" Dora defended me (she says). "It's the creative thing to do."

"Yeah, but it's porcelain!"



**PHIL LOPATE**

January 30, 1973.

The first day. Sun. Bitter cold. Wait a half hour for the Broadway bus. Bitter cold. First day. Don't want to be late. Impressions. Take a cab I can't afford.

Nothing's set up. Room 330, designated for Teachers & Writers, is occupied by a speech class. I spend a half hour in Mr. Forrestal's office (Assistant Principal), read a newspaper smoke a cigarette, pace. Outside in the hallway, students pass, coming back from lunch break, peer through the open door. Girls flirt. Boys supercool. I, frankly, am apprehensive.

Mr. Forrestal returns. Takes

has to leave. Prep period. I go with her. We sit and talk. She's easy to talk to, smiles a lot. Expressive hands. I tell her some of the things that I'd like to do--mainly approach writing as communication, an organization and transmission of perception plus imagination. (Did I really say that?) We agree I'll reinforce such grammatical things as punctuation, capitalization, spelling. Other than that, I'll be playing it by ear.

February 1.

The lady at the door recognizes me, doesn't ask me a questionnaire's worth of information. Good feeling. Belong. Go upstairs to Room 330. Room's open, empty. Leave my things and go downstairs to pick up children.

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## Write Seven Sentences About This Lion

From the diary of RICHARD PERRY

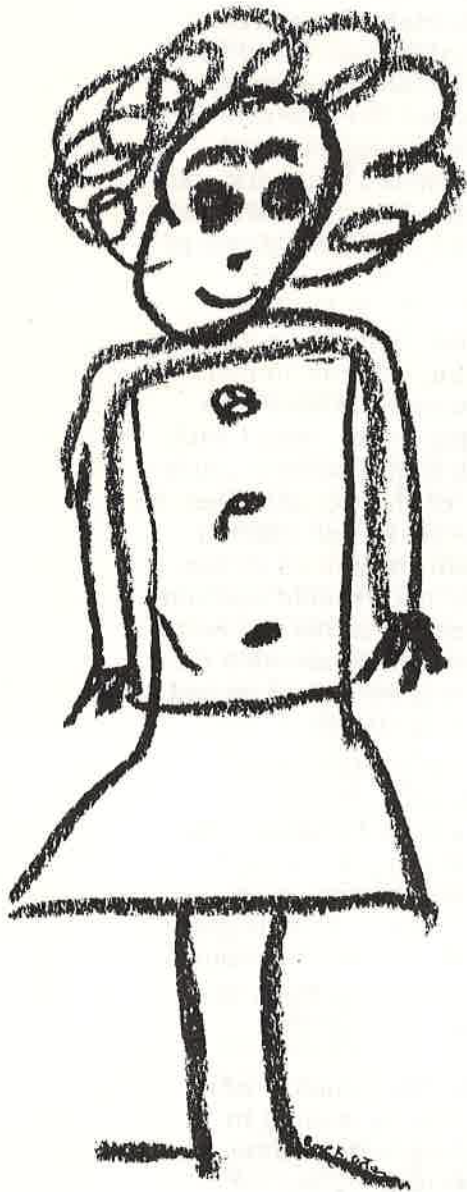
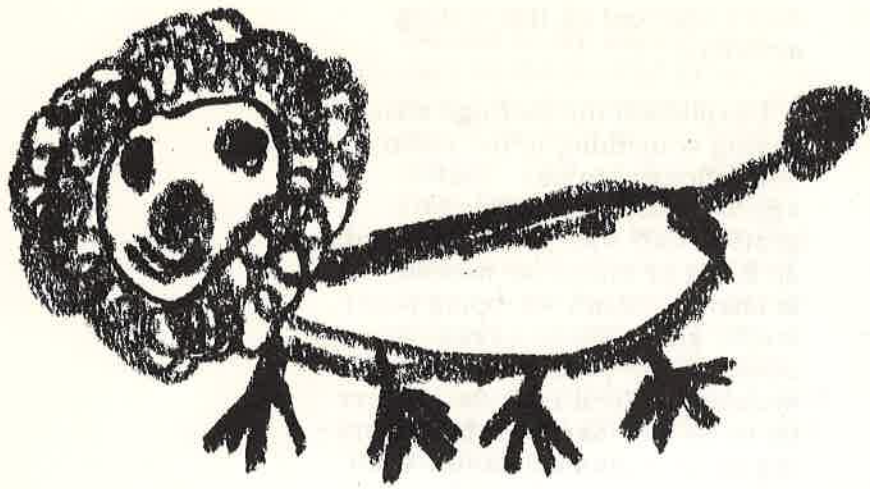
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me to Mrs. Keaton's fourth-grade class. Introduces me. She's tall, barbecue-brown skin; I like the way she moves. She has an awareness of self; eyes that say she knows she's attractive. I sit at a table in the rear, cross my legs and arms. Remember body language articles in Reader's Digest. Uncross my arms and legs. Students seem eager to learn, well-behaved. They pay very little attention to me. I'm surprised. Don't they know who I am?

After a half hour, Mrs. Keaton

After Mrs. Keaton calls their names, there's a lull while she writes their names. The eight children she's chosen take a moment to check me out. I check them out. She's given me a potpourri--couple of repeaters, two Puerto Ricans, two girls, two toughies. I smile at the smilers, nod my head at the straight faces, and give the toughies my "mother-fucker I laugh and joke, but I don't play" look.

We go upstairs. I realize



my first mistake. Didn't set up the room. No matter. Everybody sits. I tell them who I am, when we'll meet. I say the purpose of our meeting is to work on a particular type of communication. Ask what it means. Eight answers. Name some kinds of communication. I get it all. We talk about the tools of communication; prerequisites, get into a discussion of the five senses. We add to that a sixth sense: intuition, which I explain but don't name. From that we get into imagination. What is it. Hard to define, but we all know. Okay, all these things: the five senses, intuition, imagination, pen and paper are necessary for good writing. Losing them. Where is this dude coming from. An epidemic of cross conversations. We'll play a game. Imagination. Be a ballerina, a dog, a queen, a tightrope walker. Semi-successful for me; kids love it. Bull and matador bring down the house. Okay, cut, back to desks. Write your names for me and three hobbies you have. See where they're coming from. After that we work on imagination. Imagine a lion. Write seven sentences about this lion. Tell me size, shape, smell, feel, color, taste, sound. After each child reads. Got a little silly; tried mixture of sternness and laissez faire.

After that I asked if anybody knew the names of any writers. One child, Sean, did. (I hadn't heard of him.) When I say writer, I realize I'm being somewhat of a cultural snob. Somebody laid Thomas Jefferson on me.

Anyway I'd brought some books with me, with pictures of the authors on them. "How come they're all colored?"

somebody asked. Second mistake. Read a couple of poems by Langston Hughes, then let each student read a poem by Hughes aloud.

Taking them back to the class I realized that the sessions were going to need a lot of structure and a multiplicity of activities. Attention spans are brief. Maybe the kids got something out of today; I left with a C- feeling.

February 6.

Am still sort of experimenting, hoping things click. Sort of hesitant about jumping right into writing. A blank piece of paper can sometimes be pretty intimidating. Trying to get ideas of imagination, sensory perception, to lead naturally into writing. Problem is they really don't. They seem to lead more naturally into conversation, role playing, improvisation.

I decided I'd only plan one thing for this session. One problem is that the room doesn't really belong to us. It's used by many other groups, including two other T&W people. Some part of that room had to belong to us. Something had to be done to make it recognizable for the children as an extension of themselves. Hopefully it would relate to writing. Looked through old T&W publications; came upon the idea for wall space for graffiti. Well, there wasn't any wall space; one end of the room was blackboard, greenboard really; one windows, another already well covered with posters, charts, paintings, etc. All that was left were the closets. However, if the doors were kept closed, there was an area, not continual (strips of aluminum, spaces) but still usable. As it

turned out, composition of the doors sparked an interesting activity.

I explained my feelings about having something in the room that belonged to us. They agreed, thought the idea of a graffiti wall was good. We made up a list of things we needed; scissors, brown wrapping paper, staple gun. There were eight doors, eight panels and eight students. First everybody started to do his, her own thing, working on an individual basis, each to his own panel. Quickly problems arose. There weren't enough materials to go around. Five pairs of scissors and two staplers. Without my intervention they began to cooperate. Nathan, who's evolving as a leader, organized the work, designating jobs. For the first time I had a happy, working group of kids.

Meanwhile, Miguel, a slender Puerto Rican, with an impish face, had wandered over to a corner of the room, stood with both hands in his pockets studying a map of the world. Then he went to the board and started writing down the names of continents. He had trouble spelling a few and called to me for help. I went over and we sounded the words out together until he had the correct spellings.

By now the graffiti wall was completed. We took crayons, colored chalks, and everyone started working on the wall, comparing work, laughing. I said at the beginning of each session we would take ten minutes to work on our board. All agreed.

When the ten minutes were up, Sean said he wanted to play the imagination game again. I said fine, but we'll do it differently this time.

Instead of my saying what they would pretend to be, they would do the imagining and see if the rest of us could guess. This worked well the first two times around, then the imagination began to flag, and I would whisper suggestions. Kids seemed to get the biggest kick out of Nathan, a husky boy, picking flowers for his sweetheart, and Alicia, a tiny, elfin girl, performing surgery.

Later we talked about two of the things we're going to do this term. One--make a movie, using a shoebox and a roll of adding machine tape, and, two--compile a book to consist of stories, poems, drawings, etc. I hope to have someone come in and take some candid shots of the kids. These could go in the book also.

February 8.

Came in early and set up room. I've found kids work better if they don't have to touch. Particularly if they're supposed to be writing. So I have two set ups. One, for writing, consists of eight desks arranged in a rectangle. Off to the right of the platform there's a round table. It's not too large, but we squeeze nine chairs around it. Everybody, after working on the graffiti board sits down and we just talk for ten or fifteen minutes. About anything.

The kids are really into the imagination game I borrowed from Dan Cheifetz's book.

Today we talk about feelings. What are some of them? Can you describe one? Happy? Sad? Anger? We move to desks. I ask children to name feelings I

can list on the board. Then I assign a feeling to each child. Imagine you are that feeling. That is hard, too abstract. Okay, imagine right now you feel that feeling. This works. Write about it. Here is a sample of what I got.

Miguel Tossas: Crazy.

I feel like jump off the roof. Because I feel like doing it. When I mean it I might do it but by mistake and fall off in the air and fall on the ground head first and slam my head a hard ground and you will see me like a dead duck on the ground. Then the people around me will the cops to take me to the hospital and I will go home in two weeks.

Darryl Gibbs: Sick.

I am sick because Sean talk too much. And I don't know why I came to school. I didn't come to hear him talk.

Javier Perez: Mad.

I'm mad when I see a boy fight another boy and when I see my brother fighting I get mad. When I see my brother in the army died I get mad. When I see a boy getting a cake and I do not got money I be mad and I be hunger.

February 13.

Today after graffiti and imagination, round table discussion centered around hypocrisy (sic) of older people relating to children. Kids got into a really heavy rap about the tendency of figures of authority not to practice what they preach. Particularly parents and teachers. I suggested that we talk about it



again some time and try to figure out why this was so; also, if there was any solution we could offer. Perhaps we could figure out a way to let these people know, like in our book.

I used the book we plan to put together as a stepping off point to talking a little bit about the craft of writing. Previously, whatever they had written was accepted as was, no corrections, praise for those who had exercised initiative, imagination, encouragement for those who hadn't.

We talked about writing as a form of communication, just as speaking, as gestures were. We certainly don't say a person gestures poorly, in most instances we weren't going to say that people wrote or spoke poorly, unless that writing or speaking contained things that interfered with our ability to understand, communicate.

"You mean like messy papers?" Theresa asked. (Bless her little heart.) I said yes. If I or someone else couldn't read what was written there was no communication. Were there any other kinds of barriers? I got from them, with a little urging: spelling, capitalization and punctuation.

I took the first papers they'd done and handed them back; told everyone I wanted the papers redone. If anybody needed help, I would give.

One thing I encouraged was that they write in paragraphs. They're very literal. When I asked them to describe a lion that first time, using all their senses, I asked for seven sentences, and that's what I got.

There was very little resistance to the exercise. (I'd expected a lot.) Kids started to take pride in their written work.

After this we began actual construction of the book. Each student pasted his sheet on a 9 x 11 piece of colored paper and the first eight pages of the book were complete.

February 20.

Somehow the question of men and women came up. Oh, I remember. When we came into the room, the kids had gone to the window to watch to City College women doing karate on the lawn. Some of the fellows made some remarks concerning the ability of these women. The girls responded, defending.

So we started to talk about it in terms of differences between men and women. It was interesting that all the examples given were in terms of physical rather than emotional. Everytime an example was given, I would knock it down.

Example: Girls can't build bridges. Girls can't ride motorcycles.

Fellows started looking at me kind of funny. Whose side was I on? Was I some kind of faggot?

February 22.

Spent half the period on the man and woman question. Actually saw glimmers of insights in kid's eyes.

Discussed dreams. Wrote about them. Writing getting much better.

February 26.

Kids were restless today. Have been. Up and down. Shouting. I tried the "talk real low so they'll have to be quiet to listen" ploy. Didn't work. Glared. Nothing. Ignored them. Louder.

I think they're reacting to my defense of women. Or at least that's part of it. I had each of them take a desk and put it wherever they wanted. When they were seated, I gave them a ten-minute street lecture. Told them I didn't play that shit. Being fair didn't mean I was a punk. Threatened to kick ass and take names if I didn't get some respect. Scared myself. Everybody was ready to go to work. Who is that cat? Did word collages. Beautiful.

March 6.

Kids have really been working hard, so I decided no projects today. Just fun. First we sat around, had our usual conversation period. We're really beginning to relate.

After "talk about anything time" we discussed our forthcoming book. Kids said they wanted to form a club with officers. I suggested that instead of the regular titles, President, etc., since we were putting a book together, why not elect people to be in charge of certain things. Since we have eight

people, we created eight positions. If there was competition for a position, the rest of the group held an election. We managed to fill the eight positions with a minimum of hard feelings.

Nathan, the one I have most difficulty with in terms of encouraging him to write, was elected editor. I'm hoping the responsibility will be some kind of motivation.

After discussing what each person's responsibility was and stressing the fact that we all would help one another, we played imagination. Then someone wanted to play Simple Simon. What the hell! They've been working hard. Nathan won. We left laughing.

Oh, kids talked about anxieties of passing. New report card period. Very illuminating. I'm thinking of a writing assignment: "Why I want to pass to the fifth grade." Conversation revealed enormous pressures. Peers, parents, teachers, the universe!

March 8.

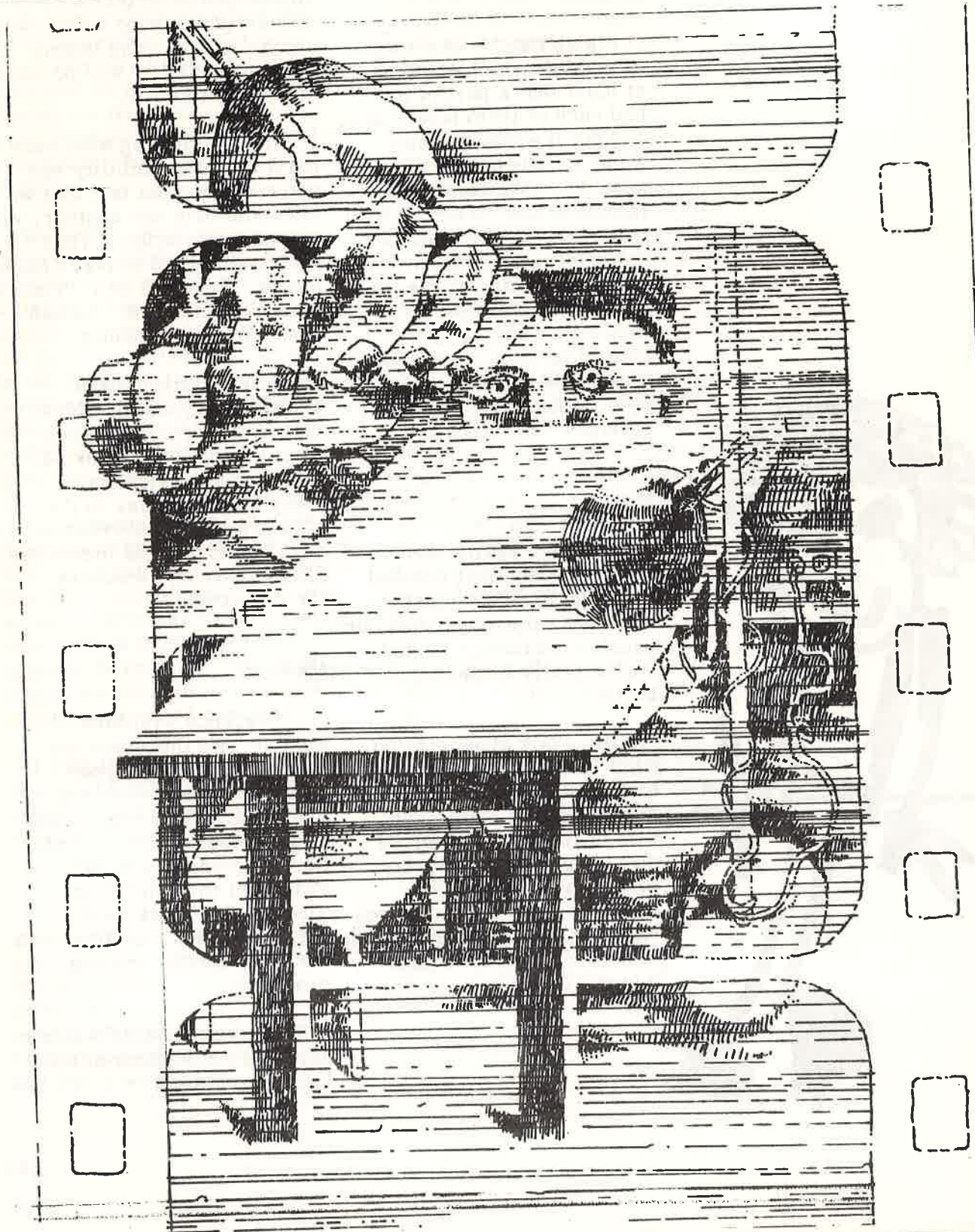
Conference with Mrs. Keaton. We discussed the kinds of things I've been doing; also the children's progress. She's really easy to get along with; most helpful. I arranged with Mr. Forrestal to switch from Tuesday to Friday so my session wouldn't conflict with the kids' special reading program.

Today was Parent/Teacher day, and I met some of the kids' parents. ■



# Horrible Herman

by Ron Padgett



LOVE STORY is a puppet play for three characters (p.40) performed at the front of the room behind a school desk draped with a little green felt cover. Above this stagelet, on the blackboard, is taped a lovely sign:

## LOVE STORY

by

Hector, etc.

Five kids are involved in the production (all either fifth or sixth graders). Three of them conceived the idea of the play and developed the dialogue and story and work the puppets and speak the dialogue. One girl introduces the production and reads time and setting lines: she says things like, "The next morning. . ." and "In the park. . ." when the scene changes. One boy is the Manager: the puppets are his and he takes care of all production details, such as posting the sign, folding the green cover, organizational problems in general. He also sits back during the performance with a terrifically satisfied look on his face. The only kid involved whom I know well is Hector, who was in Miss Pitts' class last year. He is quite the star of this production.

Here is the play's action: Poopsie, a white rabbit girl, is married to a monkey. Poopsie goes out walking and bumps into a skunk named Stinky. Stinky asks her if she'd like to date him. She says, "Sure, baby, any time."

Monkey is heard off stage calling, "Poopsie. . . oh, Poopsie. . . ." Stinky hides, promising to meet Poopsie here at eight that night. Back at home, Poopsie and husband are talking. Poopsie has to go out, for a walk in the park. Husband gives her five dollars to do this. She meets Stinky. They go to the movies. Husband wanders onstage calling, "Poopsie, oh, Poopsie. . . !" Stinky hides, Poopsie tries to explain her lateness, Stinky comes out and has a terrific grand Guignol battle with Husband. Poopsie finally breaks it up and declares she will choose between them. She eenie-meenies. She picks Stinky. They go off together and the announcer tells us they have gone on a vacation and that they lived happily ever after. Curtain.

There is nothing very special about the play's action, unless one considers the rather adult nature of its concerns. What is utterly delightful and genuinely entertaining is the way the puppeteers, especially Hector, animate their puppets manually and vocally. Hector plays the wife, Poopsie, whereas a girl plays Husband. It's a stroke of genius. Hector's voice-mimic Poopsie is absolutely hilarious, his sound effects, such as noisy kiss-smack-pops are beautifully timed and articulated.

I was enthralled. I followed the kids down to a primary grade class and saw a second performance, and then to a

double-class of about third or fourth graders and saw a third performance. They were all equally good. What is really interesting is that while the story line stays the same, the dialogue varies quite a bit. It's invented with each new performance, each time with flair and spontaneity and ease.

I told everyone I saw in the school that they should see this play, even the office ladies. I also asked the kids if they'd like to do more plays, in which I might be able to help them. How I'm not sure. They don't really need help artistically. They might need help getting permission to form a permanent traveling troupe around the school. This kind of thing has to be kept alive. It's the very kind of thing I yearn most for in the school: projects which originate with the kids and develop with them and are done for others, and in which the teachers stand back and enjoy themselves, too.

I should say something about Hector here. Two years ago he never wrote anything for me. He was a nice enough little boy, and lively, but he didn't seem to be into writing. Then last year he tried a little, and really came alive when I did films with his class. He suggested doing a film of a disembodied hand lying on a table and gradually growing hair and changing colors. That was all. It seemed pretty complicated at the time, what with 25 kids all trying to make a movie at the same time. Anyway, he really seemed interested. After that he started making little booklets, a story in each one. I've mentioned these before.

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**This present success of his is really the fruit of something that's been developing for some time.**

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They were nicely made booklets, with beautiful drawings and neat writing, but as fiction or poetry they didn't make it: they sounded like outlines for stories. Now I see that they were scenarios. This present success of his is really the fruit of something that's been developing for some time. I swear that a couple of years ago one would not have suspected this kind of fruition. Now I want to do the hand movie with him. Now I see that I was crazy not to do it before.

tor volunteered to go to barber shops and collect hair, which was a hilarious idea, but I'm afraid the hair thing will have to be dropped.

November 28.

Anyway, I finally got to Miss Muczyn's class and borrowed her puppet troupe for a while. We went down to a primary class, Mrs. Goldman's, if I remember correctly, and the

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### Hector volunteered to go to barber shops and collect hair. . .

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November 27.

Then I went down to Dale Kars' room and asked her to help me make a film based on Hector Martinez's Hand idea of last year. Mostly I needed to find out stuff about colors. We decided to use chalks to color the Mystery Hand in the movie. We tried out all sorts of stuff on kids' hands: the kids were totally baffled as to what we were doing. We just handed out chalk to some kids and said, "Color your hand, please." It turned into a little Happening, sort of. We never did bother to explain why we were asking them to do this, and they had fun. I hadn't meant it to be anything special, but it sort of turned out that way.

Then I talked with Hector himself, to see if he wanted to make the movie. Of course he loved the idea. I had called him out into the hall for the conference. He was interested and excited and felt a little out of place: I doubt if he had ever been quite so special before. It was an unfamiliar situation for him. We talked about the film and about technical problems. The biggest one is how to make hair sprout and grow from the hand. Hec-

troupe did LOVE STORY while I taped it on a Sony I had borrowed for the afternoon. There had been some dissension among the actors this morning and they weren't in the best of spirits, but I cajoled them into getting the performance together: after all, I had gone to a lot of trouble to borrow the tape recorder! Anyway, their performance started off sluggish, without its usual élan, and I thought to myself, "It never fails. . ." but then they got into it and it ended well. In fact, it went right beyond the end and the play continued, this time taking Poppie and Stinky down to Florida, where they have a family! (And without the benefit of marriage.) I think Mrs. Goldman had mixed feelings about the play.

Thinking ahead to Hector's Hand movie, I thought we should shoot the thing indoors, since one can never count on the weather, and because the actual shooting will take some time and I don't want to stand out in the winter day. I began searching for the room with the most light in the school. I asked in the Office. They didn't know. Ask the Custodian, they said. Of

course he had no idea of what room gets the most light. I suggested the east side of the school in the morning. "Yeah, sun rises in the east," he said. So I should go to rooms on that side of the building. I thanked him for his help.

Now here is something interesting. The wall of the school facing east is almost all brick: only a couple of windows. The Library has a couple, hence good light, and one primary-grade room has had the bricks knocked out and glass bricks put in, but the rest are straight brick. Direct, natural light does not fall across the desks in the other rooms. The school windows are oriented toward the street, toward East 12th Street.

The Librarian told me it was impossible to use her room any morning, since she has kids there. Then she went on to complain about how her room will soon be painted, how she has to take all her decorations down, etc., and why couldn't they paint in the summer when the school is empty? I sympathized with her, and I realized I like her. We talked about unions and how the east wall is all brick. Finally, I decided that I had better count on the primary-grade room downstairs for shooting the movie, although I use the term "primary-grade room" loosely here: it's on the second floor. Actually it is used as a cloak-room for volunteer workers and paraprofessionals.

December 5.

Then I went up and secured the permission of Miss Muczyn to work with Hector Martinez in making the Hand

movie next week. She was just great. "You can come and get him any time you want and for as long as is necessary."

(A few days ago I had borrowed a super 8 Austrian camera from Young Film-makers and I've spent hours learning to use it--it's a very nice-looking camera, but it's not exactly the home-movie just-pop-in-the-film type.)

December 14.

It was a clear and sunny day when I woke up, and I realized that at last the day had come for shooting the Hand movie with Hector. I gathered the equipment, the camera, tripod, film, lenses, black cloth with special hole cut in it, and on the way to school found a big piece of cardboard to use as a false table-top, through which Hector could stick his hand.

I went into the parents' room and explained who I was. A girl came forward and gave me permission to use the room. I left most of the equipment there while I went up to get the colored chalks from Mrs. Kars, and when I found her I learned that I could use her room today--it had more light than the one downstairs. And it was to be empty! Then I went to fetch Hector: his class was in Science, but the science teacher kindly said, "Take him." Hector and I went down to the office to type up the titles for the film. Hector had come up with a good name for the film: HORRIBLE HERMAN. In the office we sat down at the typewriter and made credit cards, so to speak. One page read

P. S. 61 Poetry Films

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**Most kids seem to like it, though, because it was  
a film and a film is entertainment.**

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and the next one (suggested  
entirely by Hector)

In Association with  
Miss Goldenberg  
Productions

and the next one

Presents

and the next

H O R R I B L E

H E R M A N

and the next

by Hector Martinez  
&  
Ron Padgett

and then we typed up one for

-- The End --

We shot the credits first, using close-ups and a special close-up lens: they looked great. Then we arranged the tables, put the cardboard false-top between two tables, and put the black hairy cloth on top of that, so that from beneath Hector could stick his hand up and lay it on the table, a dismembered hand: Horrible Herman!

We started with just his hand au nature. Then we started adding color to it, so that it runs through a gamut of bright pastels. We talked about the film as we shot, and mid-way I realized that maybe the kids in Hector's class had gone back to their regular class and the teacher might wonder where he is, though I suspected the kids would tell her, since they

knew. So I ran down the hall to Miss Muczyn's and told her. "The kids told me," she said. I ran back to Art. Time was getting short. It was 2:50. We shot the rest of the film quickly, it seemed, but then I realized that we couldn't finish by 3. and I asked Hector if it were OK that he stayed after school a while. He was glad to. We shot the rest, and tacked on a nice THE END thing that Hector had thought up.

January 11.

With Bill Zavatsky's super 8 projector I showed HORRIBLE HERMAN to Miss Muczyn's class first, because that is Hector's class. A prep period teacher happened to have the class when I arrived, and she was glad to have me take over: the kids were restless. I ran through the movie once. It went well. Some kids were disappointed, others delighted. Disappointment: "Is it just gonna be this hand???" Delight: "How did you do that??" Most kids seemed to, like it, though, because it was a film and a film is entertainment.

Miss Muczyn returned and, seeing she had missed the show, asked if I would repeat it. She liked it a lot.

Of course, Hector was in seventh heaven. He wanted it to be on a Channel 13 show called YOUNG FILMMAKERS, a show I had never heard of, except from Hector. I told him I would think about it, but that, since our film is color, it might lose a lot of its beauty on a black and white TV screen.

Across the hall in Miss Pitts' class the window shade was still broken, so after trying to figure out a way to darken the room, we decided to move down to Dale Kars' room--Dale had come in to talk to Jean about something. We all adjourned to the Art Room.

There I showed the film again--Miss Muczyn suggested that Hector go with me, since it was our film, which was thoughtful of her.

We saw the film twice in this class, too. Again the reaction was various, but mostly positive. Like I said before, it is entertainment, and in a way this makes it hard to activate the kids to think up their own ideas for films, because entertainment usually makes us so passive. But the class was in a better mood than the one before, so I pursued the topic, and asked the kids to think about little movies they might like to make. To think about it here in school, at home, in their dreams. Miss Pitts agreed to remind them about it, because these very loose assignments tend to get lost in daily life.

Two kids brought up ideas immediately. A lot of them wanted to shout out their scenarios: "Wow, hey, how about. . ." but it was impossible to write them down this way. I calmed everyone down and tried to get them one at a time, but this had a souring effect on everyone's enthusiasm. Which somehow confirms my suspicion that the best way to work with movies and kids is on an individual basis, or a small group. The entertainment media unleash weird waxings and wanings of

enthusiasm in the kids, like disposable objects. It looks great one minute, and you throw it in the trash the next. "Or how about this? A monster. . ." etc.

Next week I'm going to run a sort of film tour through the school, showing the movie to as many people as possible.

It occurred to me, as I spoke to Jean's kids, that if we had a nice bunch of films like HORRIBLE HERMAN we could show them at graduation. Jean liked this idea a lot. Some of the kids, imagining the propriety and pseudo-solemnity of graduation ceremony, thought that HORRIBLE HERMAN and the like would be completely out of place. I was a little daunted by their propriety.

January 18.

I showed HORRIBLE HERMAN to several classes, two kindergarten and one fourth grade and then to Bowman's sixth grade class. The younger kids didn't seem to be responding very much, but when the film was over they said they really liked it. The teachers were patient; after all, what adult wants to watch a movie of a hand changing colors? As Miss Perelman put it, "It's not exactly DEEP THROAT." Has she seen DEEP THROAT??

Oddly enough, Bowman's class, the bottom sixth-grade class, was the most responsive. They commented on the film, oohed and aahed a lot, and seemed to get a kick out of it. Unfortunately, the film broke down in two spots where I had edited it before, so I couldn't show it to any other classes today. I did show another film to Bowman's kids, as a sort of reward, a film in



which I fly over Scotland in a biplane (taken on a vacation two and a half years ago). They liked this a lot, too.

When I finished and was packing up, Bowman said, "What, no follow-up? How about a poetry lesson?" I said OK, fine, er. . . . He said, "I even have the idea for it: What My Hand Can Do." So I drew a hand on the board and tried to suggest ways in which this assignment could be interesting. Like, if your hand were detached from your body, like in a dream, and could go around and do new and exciting things, what might it do? The results were pretty uninspired, but remember, this is a fairly demoralized class with little or no inclination to writing anything whatsoever on paper. Most of their responses dealt with scratching, breaking, strangling or outright killing or death. One of the best:

My hand can walk  
My hand can write  
My hand can fly  
My hand can jump off the roof and die

(Luis)

I can see where most of these kids are heading, and it drives me up the wall. So unnecessary! ■

### **THE BIG RED TRUCK**

by Gerald Villa

A beautifully written account of what happened when a junior high school teacher (Villa) brought a billboard picture of a truck to class. Copies \$3 from G. A. Villa Publishing, Inc., 141 Clearfield Drive, Williams-ville, N. Y. 14221.

November 1972

One thing I learned is that everybody likes plays: there are presently, within Phyllis's class, two plays being written at least, aside from the one I am working on. Rhonda's play had too many kids, was too subtle in a lot of ways for a mass audience that comes, mostly, to laugh. Still, we did produce it, and afterwards there were speeches upstairs thanking the kids, thanking me, thanking everyone. The kids like ceremony.

January 6.

I decided to start some improvisations today (I had tried a little bit before Xmas). One reason was that I had been missing the nice group feeling I had had with the kids when we were doing more mechanical exercises like automatic poems, etc. My plan is to tape the improvs, transcribe and print them up, then let the kids read them, change if they want, and do new ones--maybe with an eventual aim at doing something with videotape. So far the main trouble I see with this is that it favors the more aggressive kids. At least three quiet little girls who have done quite a lot of writing with me withdrew today--one because of the boys who were joining me to participate. On the other hand, two boys who always refuse to so much as put pencil to paper did a whole batman-robin sequence for themselves, complete with sound effects (overturned chairs and clapping hands) and a newscaster who says, "Well, Batman, how do you feel about getting beat up by the -----" whatever the villain was. The tape is the main enticement of course, but I am going to encourage them to

## The Play's The Thing

by SUE WILLIS

### A Skit

by Caridad, Sam, Amy, Peter, and Patrick.

Two men have an argument and start fighting. One shoots the other dead and a policeman comes up. The policeman says, "Suppose I shoot you?" and shoots the other man. Then the policeman calls an ambulance and when it comes the doctor and nurse put the bodies in and try to take the policeman. "Get on the stretcher, man," says the doctor. "Hu-uh!" yells the policeman. "I'm a police!" "You're a psycho," says the doctor.

think about more than just how they sound recorded. Also, since I share the room with Irene, I felt constrained to keep them in a corner by themselves, instead of giving them the run of the room for freer acting--so the thing was coming out more like a radio play: with these wild children this may be okay, or at any rate better than having them do nothing but fight and howl and roll on the floor, which is their essential preference in the matter of playwriting.

The Spanish-speaking kids had a good time: They announced a circus en espagnol, and we had to do the same thing about five times because each of them wanted to be the "master."

February 25.

Just now I am doing straight writing with only one class, Phyllis Soroka's. The last two weeks it has given me, moreover, some real pleasure. Two weeks ago I was in the throes of painting and moving, not writing myself, and I just couldn't face the performance business. Now kiddies, have I got a show for you, believe me when I tell you that this is really going to get you off! So I asked for volunteers and was confirmed in my misery when only three kids wanted to come: a fourth joined us later. For my own defense as a charismatic personality, I must add that Phyllis had just given them free time and kids were scattering for the game closet, the library and monitorships of one kind or another; they were involved in their own things. Anyhow, with this tiny group I finally did something that has long been a tenet of mine: that

the teacher should write, too. First we did some poems, a group poem, a public-private poem, then a "what I see with my eyes closed." I was nervous about writing with them, but took real pleasure in it. I was insulted when we read because the kids kept forgetting that I had something to read, too, and they were much more interested in what they had written. No respect for the presence of genius. Then we did a five-minute stream of consciousness. I did not read mine to them, because it showed things I wanted to keep to myself. For the first time I had real insight into kids who don't want to be read out, although I must say in my classes it happens very rarely--some kids like to be coaxed and others want to be typed up but not read out.

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When she told everyone that they all had to do writing, they all groaned, and I winced (Oh, Lord, take this cup. . . and why do I bother?). But I plunged on in, and it turned out my ace in the hole was Vickie's watch with only the second hand running. (The hour and minute hands indicated 3:00 or something, and I said, "Vickie are you sure this works?" "Of course it does," she says. "The second hand goes around, doesn't it?") I said everyone had to write for five minutes as fast as they could, etc. etc. --I had decided to try stream of consciousness with the large group. Kids wrote who don't usually; there is something about a nice clear rule like five minutes-and-then-stop that was easy for everyone to get hold of.

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It's a really moody class, too, much given to dull, low resistance and quiet ignoring of appeals to participation. Phyllis barrels ahead with a lesson, is too loud and strong to be challenged, but many kids adapt by playing cards under the table and ignoring her. Maybe that's one reason she gets along so well with Rico. He demands to be noticed, none of this doing anything on the sly: good or bad it's all up front, as we say in the popular subculture. I said, "Does anyone care if I type these up?" Rico said, "Not me. Put mine first on the first page."

But now I am working with Francisco, who is very conscientious: he dictated to me the outline for his video play and then took it home and translated it into Spanish. I was really impressed. He used me to sort of straighten out his ideas and give a few suggestions, then he did these two or three pages of straight translation. He is going to write dialogue and, wonder of wonders, we may get a lot of the kids into it because some girls are willing to dress up as Japanese soldiers. I hope they don't back out. Our only disagreement so far is that Francisco wants to get a genuine Japanese kid to play the evil President of Japan. I thought the Japanese boy might resent the part. "But," says Francisco, "he doesn't have to get killed."

I am still doing the little skits with Robin's class. We have now used the tape recorder and made scripts, and this Thursday we are going to use the video. The skits are pretty sketchy; in fact, the most fun for me was seeing

these disparate groups actually create little spontaneous plots, mostly slapstick and fairly funny, but not too deep. Group writing is sort of a seventh wonder to me. Anyhow, I'll give some fuller report on how this project went after the taping. The idea has a nice logic, progressing from writing monologues for a character to doing improv with the characters, to writing some dialogue for your character, to tape recording to get a fuller dialogue, to actually videotaping a small but measurable and presentable product. We'll see. These will be very rough; not much in the way of props or practicing, as opposed to Francisco's play, which I see as rather more elaborate and unified. ■

## A DIRECTORY OF AMERICAN POETS

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## IMPROVISATIONS

### El Circo Loco

papa Antonia, Mercedes, Miguel, and Michael.

Master: Senores y senoras, ahora presentamos el circo mas grande y mas famoso del mundo! Introducing the world famous two trapeze artists, Mercedes and Antonia. What is it like, Antonia, to be a trapeze artist?

Antonia: Very exciting.

Master: And you, Mercedes?

Mercedes: I like it, because it is fun.

Master: And here is the famous lion. You got anything to say?

Lion: Grrrrraahr!!

Master: Senores , y senoras, es el gran' circo del mundo. En esta esquina el monito!

Mono: Ehh ehh. Gimme a banana, eh eh, banana please.

Master: Y en esta esquina, el grand monstruo en cabeza al pierna, frankenstein!!

### A Crazy Hospital

by William, Serena, Cece, Juliet, Daniel, and Chin-pin.

Doctor: What's the matter with you?

Patient #1: I don't know. I think I have amnesia.

Doc: How did you get it?

#1: I forgot.

Doc: You forget too much.

Lady over there, what's wrong with you?

Patient #2: I think the tse-tse fly disease.

Doc: How did you get it?

#2: You're some doctor! Because they like to bite people. How many years did you go to school to be a doctor?

Doc: For about a hundred years. Hey, man over there, what's wrong with you?

Patient #3: I've got the tickatockatooocka phobia and you see this disease, when you get it you talk a lot and it's odd how it comes and you get and it an an you know it's terrible. . .

Doc: That's enough! How did you get it?

#3: I was walking in the park and uh an uh I walked up to a man and he says I have tickatocka phobia and I saw oh that's too bad and he said will you do me a favor and hold this for me and uh. . .

Doc: That's enough!!

#3: And uh. . .

(Doctor gives him a shot)

#3: Ahh, I'm feeling sleepy. . .

Doc: You're supposed to, stupid. Okay lady, what's wrong with you?

Patient #4: I have a slight cold. (Coughs and chokes) I forget how I got it.

Doc: Isn't that a pity.

#4: What are you, anyway, a psychiatrist?

Doc: I'm a hundred year old doctor. I started being a doctor when I was one year old.

(Man with Tickatockaphobia wakes up)

#3: That stimulant doesn't last very long you know and. . .

Doc: Ah, shut up.

#4: And I wanted to explain to you. . .

(Doctor gives him another shot)

Doc: Ah that's better!!!



# We Are The Same

by JAMES P. CONWAY

---

Something tells me  
inside WRITE! WRITE!

---

We are in our room. It is old in here. The desks are carved with words. The words and the desks are bolted to the floor. The floor boards are bare.

A sink stands against the wall. It has faucets full of air. On the bottom of the sink a green stain empties into the drain. Standing beside the sink is a wooden ladder which leads up the wall to the ceiling. The ceiling is rived in repairs. Our room is right under the roof.

Dark shades cling to the windows, long cords blowing in the heavy air of New York harbor. This room has been here since 1906. We feel it.

Everyone has a separate desk and we are far apart. No one is talking. We are writing.

"I think my work imaginative. And when I write it I feel like I'm doing it. For instance

Justin is writing hard. He is sitting near the window. His feet are dangling as he describes the end of the world.

"On the end of the world the ground was shaking. The streets were cracking. I was in my bed when I felt the house shake. My bed fell over. I ran out from under my bed. I was scared! The sky was grayish. It was cloudy. Part of the ceiling caved in. It was a mess. All the lights were cracked. I tried to get to the living room, but I didn't make it."

A small boy with bird-bright eyes, Justin is seven. He knows what he is doing.

when I went to the moon. It is really fun! When I write it means a lot to me. When I write I see things I write. And I really mean it. Something tells me inside WRITE! WRITE!"

Justin puts himself into his writing. But he never takes too big a role. When he wrote about how the school bus ran into a truck his report was given as if it was written from the driver's seat.

David is Justin's friend. They sit together near the window. David loves sports and is a serious student of chess. He is now in the process of writing down all his days from the time he wakes up until he loses interest. His days are so true to him.

"This morning when I got up I was very tired. I got dressed and I went into my parents bedroom. I saw my father getting dressed. I asked if I could go down to get the paper in the candy store and he said yes. So I went down to the candy store and I got the paper. It cost 15 cents. I gave the man two dimes. He gave me change of a nickel. Then I went back upstairs and me and my father read the paper. We ate breakfast. I had cereal. Then when I finished I went into my room and brushed my teeth. Then I got my coat on and went to school."

David's writing has a patterned clarity: the boy watching his father dress, the boy and his father reading the paper together. These are moments to touch in David's experience. Unlike Justin, David doesn't enter his imagination when he writes. It will be interesting to see how he makes out when the subject is not himself. He will find his own way.

Josh sits in the far corner. He is a fast writer. He can do a whole page in five minutes. When he finishes he runs his pencil over the old words carved in his desk. Or he bothers the girls, looking over their shoulder, whispering words from their paper.

Josh can be very abrupt. Last week he caught me off

guard. We had finished writing and we were taking turns reading our work out loud. It was my turn. What I had written was about me in my adult male world, a description of my mind at work. I was reading it because it would show the children my thoughts and how I expressed them.

"Why don't you write like us?" Josh asked when I finished.

So today I tried. I tried to write like Josh.

#### MY HOUSE

"Inside my house the walls are white except in the kitchen. In the kitchen the walls are orange. The ceiling tilts. It starts 12 feet in front and it ends 9 feet in back. The floors are wood with carpets in every room except one. This is where we watch t. v. and where there is no furniture. There is a hall with a bookshelf. On the bookshelf are books and boxes with jewelry and statues of birds and men on wooden horses and an old pistol and a place to hide money. From the hall you go into a big room with a bed. There is also a sewing machine and a tape recorder for music. Sun when it shines comes in the big window and there are plants hanging. The big plant is asparagus. It looks like green string. Everything reflects in the mirror. In the kitchen is the sink and the garbage."

I finish reading. I look at them and I ask what they

think. They say they like it. But it's not written the way they write.

"It's all that stuff," says Josh. "We would never put all that stuff in."

"What stuff?"

So they tell me. It turns out they don't share my concern for detail. They say they would never give ceiling heights in their house even if the ceiling did have a dramatic effect on everything. They would never include all those things on the bookshelf which seem to tell so much. And the comparison I made between asparagus fern and the green string, which I really thought a child might use, has no value for them.

"Just say where everything is and you're done," Josh advises. "The rest is extra."

I look at my description again. I'm not sure. I don't like the tone, something superficial about it. Instead of an honest effort to capture my house from a new point of view I have only put down words, altering their arrangement and rhythm, trying to make myself sound like a child. Now all I see is parody. And I think I see something else. I think I see why. Here I am with them in our room. I write with them and they write with me. We talk together. But we are different. Yes, we are. I feel it from the moment I go into their class to get them.

"Bring your paper and pencil," I say. "You can't

write without paper and pencil!"

They look around. They can't find anything. The paper is supposed to be right here only now it's not. There is trouble with pencils, too. "The eraser is gone, I can't use this." That little pink thing every pencil is born with has a life of its own.

I myself am always in possession of paper and pencil. At home I keep drawers full of paper. My paper travels the world. I have my own pencil collection. Each pencil has on it an advertisement for American business or American government. I have pencils from different parts of the country. I know my pencils and my pencils know me. But I don't know these children. I do not know them in their search for. . . for what? Why is everything so hard to find? I've found what I'm looking for. It's easy. Yet for them it's not, and watching them makes me uneasy. I see them searching. I see it in their eyes as we write here in our room. After those first words they don't know what to write next. They stare, their minds in silence. Breathing silence. Then somewhere inside they see. Their eyes again focus. They look back at that paper and with that same pencil they go again in search. I see this more clearly in the faces of the girls. I also see more clearly my lack of understanding with the girls. We are different. But what is it I don't understand? Maybe I don't understand how deeply I am affected by my experience in this room.

If they are searching, what am I?

Sarah is left-handed. She sits near the closet which is always open in our room: one wall of hooks with nothing hanging. The closet has sliding doors which refuse to slide.

Sarah sits there. She writes with her head down on the paper, dark hair everywhere. Her pencil hardly moves.

### WINDOWS

"I like to look out windows and see what's going on. Or if I'm out I like to see what's in. And when it's dark except one light you can have an eyelash scout."

I tell Sarah what I think of her poem. I think it's great but I don't want to be overwhelming. I want to say more. There must be a way

Because we are only in our room once a week I decide the only way is for all of us to start sending letters. In these letters we will say anything we want. We will put them in envelopes and mail them.

But despite my careful effort to encourage her, Sarah shows no interest. Last week she didn't put one word on her paper. I write to her telling her I don't understand. She writes back.

"Dear Pat,

I have not written to you in a while. I am sorry about last week if you know what I am talking about.

Well let's get back to your last letter. Why don't you understand girls? I always thought you understood me. Is it because you are the only boy? I don't understand.

What other classes do you go to?

Please write back. I don't get much mail.

Sarah"

"Dear Sarah,

When you said you wrote me again I was surprised because I thought you weren't interested in writing these days.

You see I am a writer and I write all the time or I feel like I want to write all the time because I love words on paper. I want to use words and make them interesting.

Now that first thing you wrote, Sarah, that poem about looking out and looking in, that was really wonderful and I wanted you to write a lot and discover the world with words. But for some reason, like last week when you just sat there and didn't do anything, I thought you were giving up and I couldn't figure out how I could get you interested. And that's what I mean when I say I don't understand you.

Anyway, I like you. I enjoy my mail and every time I get a letter from you I'll write you a letter back. Please, let's do it, Sarah. Your last letter was honest and well

written. I read it 3 times. Write again soon.

Pat"

So now Sarah and I are correspondents. But I can't get a word in the mail from Caroline.

Caroline sits in the back of the room. Tall and blonde with a penetrating gaze, there is a glint in her eye, a hint of humor. For a nine-year-old girl this attitude is intriguing. However, she declines to write about herself. She was born in London, lived there a while, and that's all we know except she loves to write animal stories.

#### MR. MOLE AND THE RABBIT

"One day Mr. Mole was in his larder when he found that at his last dinner party, which was yesterday night when his two cousins had come over for supper (little mole and small mole) they had finished his last box of worms. So Mr. Mole took his spade and bucket and went to dig some up. When he didn't find any he saw the rabbit and asked if he would help. "All right," said the rabbit.

So Mr. Mole climbed on the rabbit's back and off they went. Mr. Mole stopped at nearly every stone along the muddy bank. Mr. Mole found a lot of worms and when he got home ate half a packet of worms because there is nothing better for a mole than freshly dug up worms. After supper



Mr. Mole had a long nap."

There is a question here of the diet proper to a mole. But Caroline doesn't have to depend on food for her plots. She has written of rats emigrating from one garbage dump to another. She has also told the true story of "Lacy the Spider" who lives alone with a man named Jones. So if Caroline ever decides to write human stories she will already have an advanced narrative skill.

Audrey is in the first row. She never sits in back. On narrow yellow paper she writes clear, almost delicate script. When she finishes her writing she may decide to illustrate her work with intricately frail lines running from the top of the page down through her words to the bottom. Or Audrey may decide to get up and run around the room, hide in the closet, gathering her friends to whisper and annoy the rest of us who are still writing.

Usually when it comes time to read what we have written Audrey won't. But today, even before we start to write, Audrey tells me she wants to read. She wants to read first. So I let her.

"The title of my story is 'GINA.'" Audrey stands with a smile in front of us. She looks toward Gina. Gina sits in the second row with a smile all her own. Audrey is a white girl with blond hair and Gina is a black girl with hair in a neat afro.

"Gina is a very nice girl. Many people like her. When I first came into Isabel's class I set my eyes on Gina. She is the prettiest girl in the entire school. All the boys like her. I do too. She is a nice girl. She is my kind. I hope one day she will be able to come to my house.

Gina has nice friends. Most of them I like but one or two and they are Della. I hate her! I can't stand Della. She is mean selfish ugly and every other thing."

Della sits in the middle of the room. Della is not white and Della is not black. Della is in between, and the agony on her face, her tears, give Audrey and Gina something to laugh about.

Della stays in her seat as long as she can but finally she runs crying from the room. I feel that I am part of her reason for running, since I have gone to her seat to comfort her but I am no comfort.

When I reach Audrey it is only her arm I grab but my grip is firm. My hand tightens. She protests. I feel myself squeezing the protest out of her. My hand is me. I am hurting her. Her eyes are wet. The intensity in her gaze dissolves as I let go. I watch her run. She slams the door behind her, leaving me with my hand to confront and these children all looking at me.

Are we different? Something in this room right

now says we are not. Caroline, Sarah and the other girls, Josh and me and the rest of the boys, we seem to know what has happened. Our feelings unite. Audrey's writing, her words, her voice, her smile stay with us.

We finish reading.

Actually we are almost all still here and yet we seem so few. Those two girls took something with them when they went. What remains is unspoken. Unspoken but not unexpressed. For it is finally in our silence that I see we are the same. I see it in their eyes and suddenly I recognize this moment. This is how we are when we write. ■



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# POETRY, POETRY AND OTHER THINGS

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## DREAM

I dreamed about a boy. He was a nice boy, but one thing, he did not like his mother. So his mother said, "Were you bad in school?"

"Yes, Mother, what are you going to do, Mother. You will not do anything to me."

So his mother said, "Why are you saying that to me. You was a nice boy with me, now you not."

He was bad to his mother because his mother didn't give him money to take drugs. So he went to his mother and said, "Moma, I will take your money."

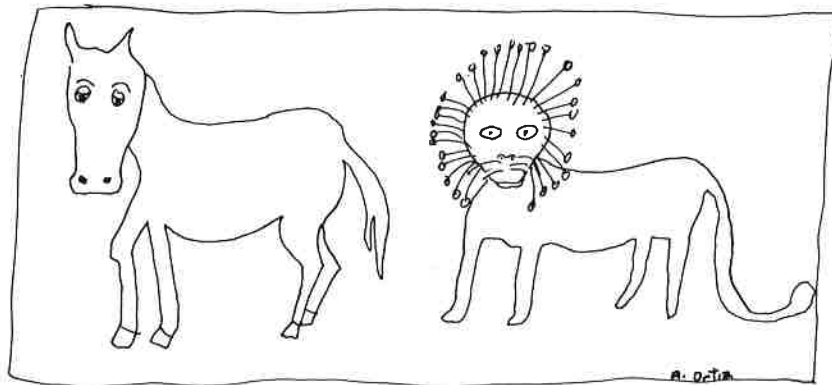
So he did. His mother was sick for a week. His mother sent a letter about how he did not like her. So he said, "I will go see my mother." He went. His friend said, "Do not go because she did not give you money for drugs. Go next week. She will not die."

So he did not go to see his mother for one week. He went to the bank and took money. He took 1,000 dollars from the bank. He took drugs until the money got finished and the Man saw him take the drugs. He went to jail and he saw a letter. It was about his mother. This is what the letter said about his mother and family:

"Dear Eddie, Your mother died. She died with a heart attack and you are in jail. I will talk to the man and see if he can get you out of jail."

So he went out of jail and saw his mother in a box, dead. He was crying and crying. So he died too, for taking drugs.

Javier



### HORSES ARE PRETTY

Some of them run as fast  
as a bus  
apple sticky  
wicky but why  
wind blows  
windows horses horses  
black horses

Michael Alpert  
P.S. 84, Manhattan

### POEM

I want to be a lion--  
I'll bite somebody!  
Maybe I'll come out to bite people  
if they bother me.  
I live in a cage of wood.  
Sometimes I run and play bingo,  
and puzzles, and with boys.  
I wear pants and socks  
and my favorite food is red beans.  
I like eggs and beans.  
I like Popeye--he likes spinach.  
I want a dress and pants  
and socks and shoes  
and sneakers and notebooks  
and pencils and food to eat.

Betty Melendez  
P.S. 84, Manhattan

## MOUSE TRAPS

One  
time  
I  
was  
walking  
down  
the  
street.  
And I  
saw  
three  
or  
four dead  
mice.

With all this yellow  
stuff around it.  
It made me  
sad.  
The mice were  
stuck in mouse traps.  
Ugh.

Nadia Lazansky

So far I saw nothing.  
But now I saw Jerome  
smelling flowers. And  
now I saw Mark smelling  
a flower called cherry. I  
saw a man running. I saw a  
boy running. Then I saw  
two men walk and then I saw  
men and a girl. I saw two  
horses. I saw three ladies.  
I saw a man on his horse.  
I saw a horse trying to  
throw a lady off. I saw a play-  
ground far away.  
I saw my friend walking on  
a piece of wood  
and I saw a police car  
and Francois throwing  
sticks. I saw a man playing  
a guitar. I saw a fight and  
a lady with a baby. I saw  
a girl and a boy fighting.

Lawrence Newton

P.S. 84, Manhattan

## EARS

Ears are to hear with and to listen with. They are important in the body but not only that. Because there are more important things in the body, like the eyes. I am glad I am not an ear because the only thing I could do was hear.

Ears are something like sea shells. Ears are like potato chips. There is something I hate about ears. Because when my ear hurts, I get a horrible pain, like if a cockroach got in your ear and started moving around. In the middle of the night when everybody's asleep, the ear listens to the silence. The silence says to the ear, "Go to sleep," and the ear becomes invisible like the heart.

Lucy Rosa

## INSANITY

With an open eye nothing can be seen. But with the closed eye the entire world is open to you. With the open eye death, destruction, and poverty, with the closed eye life, serenity and eden. Hell! no one understands the word as thoroughly as me. But who am i? A mere speck of dust on this moth ball we call home. I am insignificant; but so is everybody. Insignificant is nothing, and nothing is Fantasy.

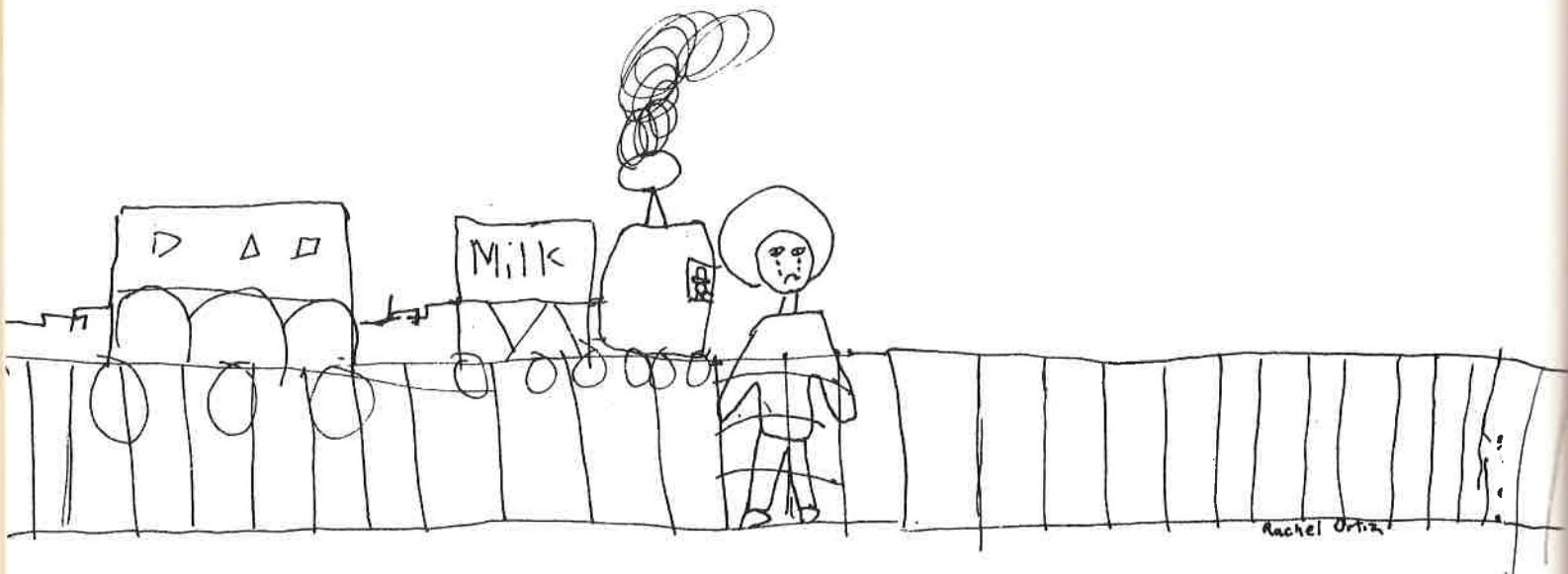
Matthew Mandelbaum

## HELP! HE'S GOING CRAZY!

His head is whining  
He feels like a stampede of elephants stampeding  
over his head  
His stomach is going wild, feeling as if things  
inside are complaining moving around  
Groaning, Groaning  
His eyeballs are rolling, feeling as if everything  
around him that he looks at is against him  
Feeling as if he should tear everything apart  
His fingers are out of control about to do anything!  
His face is all scarred up  
His mouth in such a position I  
feel like Count Dracula

No no No !

Eve S.



I'm in my room  
Watching the tube  
    look a man is flying  
    look a plane is swimming  
A mortal person dives through the  
    screen  
A turtle vomits out hatred  
I see a baby drink the hudson  
I saw a man piss in the gutter  
The liquid like a river disappears

David Chalot

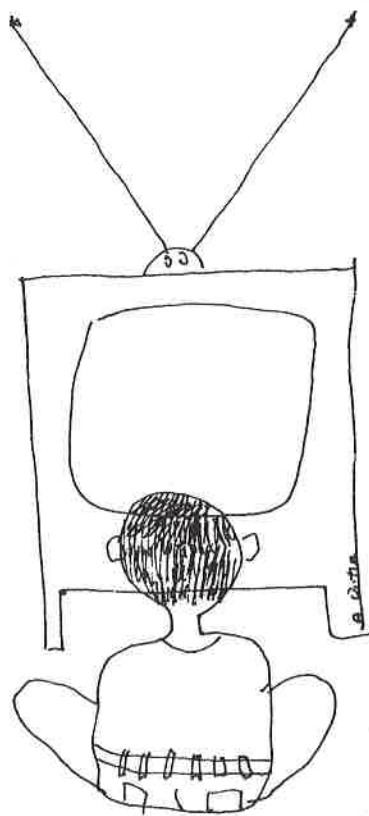
POEM

Brightly the moon shines  
The sky bounces up and down.  
A horse can gallop.  
The rabbits hop.  
A ball bounces up and down,  
then tolls to the other side of 1976.  
A meatball falls out  
of a pot and rolls to  
the circus and goes  
into a clown's mouth.  
A balloon can  
Bounce and sometime  
Go POP like a  
rubber band.  
A rubber tree can  
Fall and bounce back  
up.

Diana Donato  
P.S. 84, Manhattan

Her hair is like a helicopter beating  
the air.

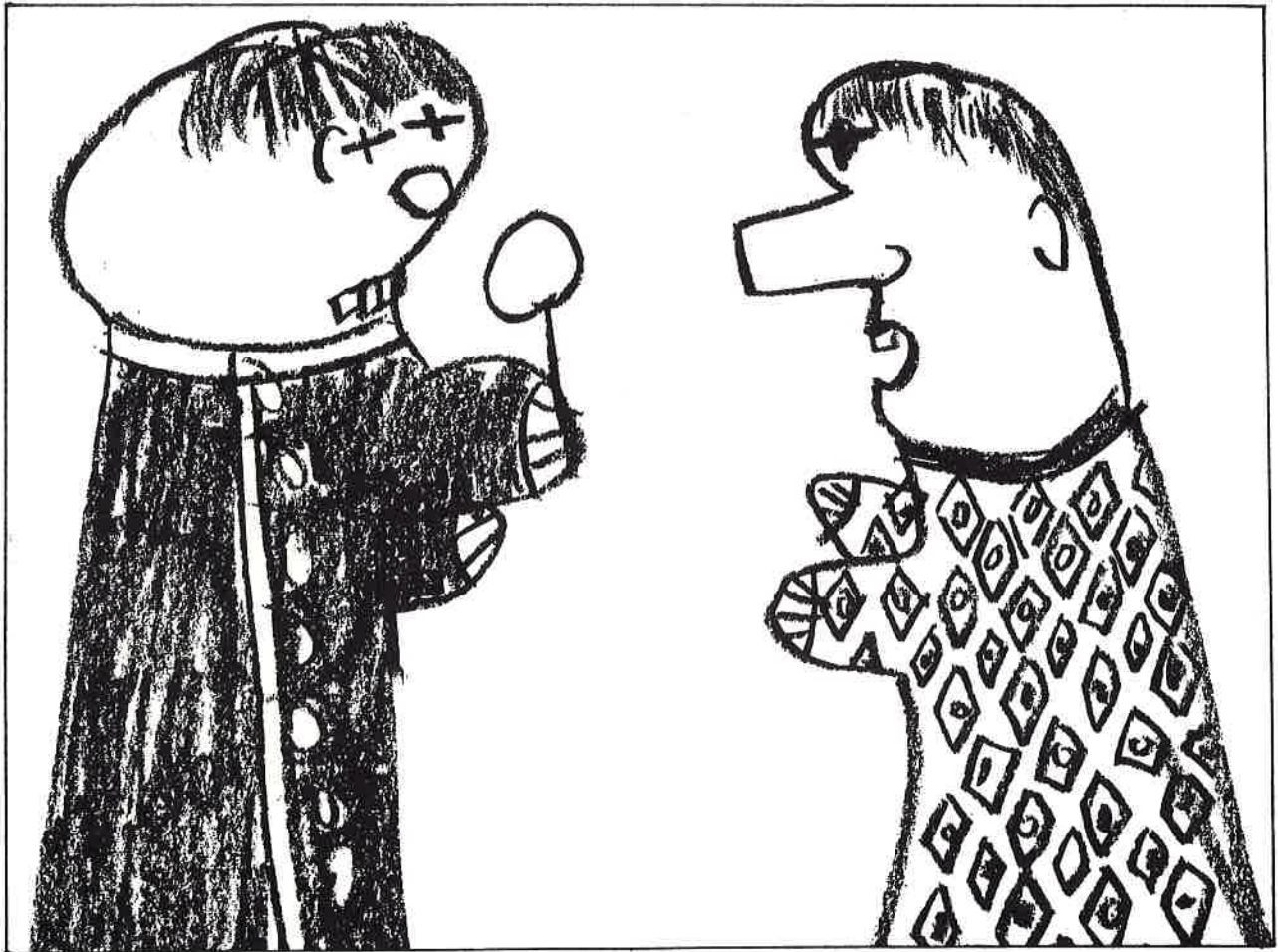
Elba Melendez  
P.S. 84, Manhattan



LOVE

SOBY

with Hector, Gizelle and Jerry, as Poopsie, Joe and Stinky



One day a girl was walking down the street.

POOPSIE: Hi!

STINKY: Hi!

POOPSIE: What's your name?

STINKY: Stinky.

POOPSIE: My name is Poopsie. You want to go on a date today?

STINKY: Why not!

POOPSIE: OK, I'll meet you at 7.

### Scene 2

JOE: Poopsie!

POOPSIE: Yes, darling.

JOE: What have you been doing?

POOPSIE: I've been at the park.

JOE: Doing what?

POOPSIE: Oh, playing around.

JOE: OK, what's for dinner?

POOPSIE: Roast pork and. . .uh. . .  
shrimp fried rice.

JOE: OK, let's eat.

POOPSIE: I'll see you later.

### Scene 3

POOPSIE: Stinky!

STINKY: Yeah!

POOPSIE: Oh, there you are. Are you ready?

STINKY: Yeah.

POOPSIE: Let's go to the movies.

"The movie was over. . . ."

### Scene 4

STINKY: You want a chocolate sundae?

POOPSIE: No, thank you, I'm not hungry.

### Scene 5

JOE: Aha, Poopsie, I caught you with him!

POOPSIE (to STINKY): Get down!

JOE: What have you been doing with him?

POOPSIE: Nothing. He's my friend.

JOE: Tell him to come out.

POOPSIE: No.

JOE: I would like to meet him.

POOPSIE: OK. Stinky! Stinky!

STINKY (offstage): Yeah?

POOPSIE: My husband here wants to meet you.

### Scene 6

JOE: What have you been doing. . .! I'll kill you, I'll murder you!

(JOE and STINKY fight. General Pandemonium.)

POOPSIE: Hey!

JOE: I'm making the shrimp fight. Come on!

POOPSIE: Not that kind of fight.  
(To STINKY) I'll see you later.

### Scene 7

JOE: Poopsie!

POOPSIE: Yes, darling.

JOE: If I see you with that Stinky again, you'll be in trouble. You understand?

POOPSIE: He's just my friend. He sells me clothes.



JOE: I should hope so.

POOPSIE: OK, I'll see you later.

(JOE leaves.)

POOPSIE: Stinky! (Sings)  
O where O where has my Stinky gone  
O where O where can he be?

STINKY: Somebody call me?

POOPSIE: There you are, Stinky. Stinky  
I want to find a way to get away  
from that nasty old hairy pig  
husband.

STINKY: We'll go back and I'll slap him  
so hard in the chest. . .

POOPSIE: No, don't do that, just let's try  
to get away for a vacation and leave  
him all there. So c'mon, I'll meet you  
at 8 o'clock, get packed.

Scene 8

"It was 8 o'clock . . ."

JOE: Poopsie!

POOPSIE: Yes, darling.

JOE: Where are you going?

POOPSIE: I'm just going to the store.

Scene 9

STINKY: You ready?

JOE: Wait a min. . .!

POOPSIE: Oooops!

JOE: Aha!

(JOE and STINKY fight, with POOPSIE  
between them.)

POOPSIE: Don't fight, don't fight! OK,  
I'll choose it out. I'll see who I  
really love. Eenymeenyminy,  
mo, catch a nickel by the toe, my

mother said to pick this  
one. (Chooses STINKY.)

JOE: How dare you!

POOPSIE (to JOE): I'll see you later.

JOE: I'll have to run away.

POOPSIE: Yes, it's much better.  
(To STINKY) Stinky, are you ready?

STINKY: Yes.

POOPSIE: First, hows about a little kiss?

(They smooch loudly.)

POOPSIE: Ah! Beautiful and good! Now  
let's get on the plane, we must catch  
the plane fast.

Scene 10

"The plane came. . ."

POOPSIE: Well, let's say goodbye to New  
York City. We're going to Miami.

STINKY: Goodbye, New York City.

POOPSIE (blowing kisses to New York):  
Goodbye!  
(Sound of airplane.)

"The airplane left. . .)

Scene 11

POOPSIE: Here we are in Miami. Boy,  
this is beautiful!

STINKY: Yeah, it is.

POOPSIE: Gee, let's go home. I have to  
tell you something.

Scene 12

"They arrived at home. . .

"They had little kids."

POOPSIE: Boy, don't they look nice?

STINKY: Yeah.

POOPSIE: They're beautiful. Darling,  
I still love you.

STINKY: I still love you.

(They smooch loudly.)

POOPSIE: I'll see you at home.

"They lived happily ever after. . ."

- Curtain -

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## TEETH

My teeth are always biting me. They have a mind of their own. When I am eating something they don't like, they bite me so much I have to spit it out. They don't like artichokes (which is my favorite food), persimmons, steak. I hate when they do that. Someday I am going to get them all pulled out.

Nadia Lazansky  
P. S. 84, Manhattan

## BIRDS

I like birds because they sing beautifully. I like their colors too. I once said to a bird, "Bird, come over here. I won't hurt you." The bird was walking to me. When it almost got to me, my brother scared it away. My brother was scared of birds. That's why he scared them. Only for one day he wasn't scared of them. That day he left them alone. The birds were happy.

Brasilia Rodriguez

OUR BRAVE POLICEMAN

Alex, Eric, Susan, Richard, Becky, Ileana, Angel,  
Michael F., Randy, Sara

SCENE 1: (Streetcleaner is cleaning the street)

Interviewer: Mr. Streetcleaner, do you like your job?

Streetcleaner: Yes.

Interviewer: What are you doing?

Cleaner: Cleaning up, what else? The streets are  
dirty. Yeech.

(Enter Teacher and Class)

Teacher: Everybody keep together.

Kids: NO no NO!

Teacher: Now, childre--

Boy: Why do you always call my mother every Friday.  
You've got a habit of calling my mother. Every  
time I'm going to do something, you say Sit Down!

Teacher: Sit down.

Girl: No.

Boy: No.

Teacher: Stop throwing down wrappers.

Girl: I'll throw down wrappers on you!

Teacher: Stop what you're doing!

Kids: NO!NO!YOU can't tell us what to do!

Teacher: Police! Mr. Policeman!

Police: Hey, uh ma'am, well what's the trouble?

Teacher: My students are rebelling.

Cop: Ooh.

Teacher: They're very dangerous.

Cop: Aaaaah.

Teacher: Oh no the children have handcuffed the

policeman. Children, children, look, look,  
it's Henrietta Hipps the movie star!

Kids: Ugh, ooo, she's ugly, the worst looking one  
I ever saw!

Boy 2: I've seen better horror movies on TV.

Boy 1: Look at her shove her hips.

Cop: Oh I wish I could scare somebody instead of  
being scared of everybody.

Interviewer: What do you think of the movie star?

Cop: Well, big hips. Real wide face. And scarey.

Movie Star: This is a bratty neighborhood. I wish I  
was back in my old little town. And I have many  
jewels and they cost a lot of money.

Robber: Aaah. I'm going to get that lady's jewels.  
I've heard of her all over. I'm going to get her  
beautiful fur coat. I'll be the richest robber  
in the world. I think I'll get that policeman first.

(Robber sneaks up on Policeman and the Kids  
decide to do something too)

Girl: I will throw this firecracker down. Look that  
silly cop is scared. Go handcuff him. This is  
your only chance. Oh look that silly scarey cat.

Cop: (Screams)

Teacher: The robber is about to rob the movie star!

Boy 2: Popcorn, popcorn, yeah, I want some popcorn!

(Cop has come back and handcuffed wrong person)

Cop: Come on. Let's go down to the station, I'm taking  
you in.

Movie Star: But I'm the movie star!

Streetcleaner: That's the stupidest movie star I ever  
saw. And that's the cowardliest police. Because  
he doesn't do anything. I think he's scared of a  
little cockroach.

Cop: Don't say that about me.

Streetcleaner: He can't beat up a fly.

(Streetcleaner is sweeping, a fire cracker goes  
off: everyone runs)

In my room on the front of my door there is a picture of Michael Jackson! and the picture is just Weird he looks so real I cant bear to look at it but I'm just really scared to take it down and every night I wonder seriously whether It's the devil or what! My mother says Robin the Devil comes in many forms. It makes many faces and moves I see it but no one else does. Now on Circle of Fear a program that comes on Saturday at 9:00 P.M. The Devils Daughter The Devils Demons and next week another show of Devils and possessing Children. I hate it, I really talk to the Picture and In my dreams it answers. My dad and Mom say I watch to much T.V. Maybe and Maybe not. I Keep telling Myself its Onley a Picture. Maybe I Shouldn't have written about it I consider it personal.

OOOH I'm Scared!

Robin Matthews

#### MY PANTS

I have a pear of pants. I got them from a friend they were too small on her. They were in good condition. Then one day they split in the back. So I sloppily sewed a gigantic patch. Then it started to rip all over the place. I was very sad because they were too messy to wear to school. They are very comfortable. They feel loose and the waist doesn't hurt. They were a wine color. Soon they also had paint on them. They still are very comfortable even though they have big holes in the knees and a big patche in the back and torn and shredded bottoms Now I just wear them in the house. But I still love them.

Emily Gubert

I don't see why I feel like this about writing things on paper. I guess it's because I'm a oral person. I can only write when I'm in the mood for doing so. Also my feelings reflect in my stories. I feel teachers should not make children write about things they don't want to. I hate doing things that I don't want to.

It's impossible to say certain things when you don't want to.

The things I write go according to my mood.

Anoniryam B.

The earth shakes  
And beautiful white powder billows into the air  
Like money falling down from the sky  
Some people run and some people fly

And beautiful white powder billows into the air  
People are crying cause they know the danger  
that exists  
Some people run and some people fly  
People getting high off all the Heroin flying by

People are crying cause they know the danger  
that exists  
Babies O. D. , too  
People getting high off all the Heroin flying by  
It's so hard for your mind to resist

Babies O. D. , too  
The earth shakes  
It's so hard for your mind to resist  
Like money falling fown from the sky. :

Helen Crippen

I love you sweet Leaf  
though you can't hear  
Even though your substance is smokey  
it just seems to disappear

though you can't hear  
You bring me such a pleasant atmosphere  
it just seems to disappear  
I like the leaf either green or brown

you bring me such a pleasant atmosphere  
Your smell & your odor is strong but mild  
I like the Leaf either green or brown  
I could be with you all the time & never  
feel down

Your smell & your odor is strong but mild  
I Love you sweet Leaf  
I could be with you all the time & never  
feel down  
Even though your substance is smokey

Diahann Campbell

If I want to sleep  
You don't want to  
If he want to sleep  
She don't

You don't want to  
What can I do  
She don't want to  
What can he do

What can I do  
What can you do  
What can he do  
What can she do

What can you do  
I want to sleep  
What can she do  
If he want to sleep.

Bing

I wish I didn't know how to tell time  
Tick tock time, tick tock time  
Tick tock go the worms in Melissa's  
grave  
I'll go to hell if I don't pray  
Summer's coming so I think I'll pray  
for snow  
Summer choked on an ice-cube and died  
The ice-cube cracked in the soda  
The first thing to notice is when  
the walls are cracked  
That was the first time for everyone.

Diahann Campbell

I have a relationship to my salt shaker. It's  
so pretty and white and it shakes out salt very  
well. It salts everything, stuffed cockeroaches  
and french idiots are just some of them. Oh oh,  
I've got to go now here come those nice men with  
the white coats.

Sincerely yours,  
Napolean F. D. R.  
bonapart

William Rubinovich

## GETTING UP IN THE MORNING

Getting up in the morning, man  
It's just not my bag  
I could sleep forever  
I always fall back asleep

It's just not my bag  
Everything's so blurry  
I always fall back asleep  
Trying to get yourself together

Everything's blurry  
My mind is a blank  
Trying to get yourself together  
Just can't seem to do it

My mind is a blank  
Getting up in the morning, man  
Just can't seem to do it  
I could sleep forever.

Helen Crippen

## WRESTLING

The Bruiser picks up a chair  
to hit the photographer.  
Antonino Rocco kicks the Bruiser  
in the face.  
The Bruiser picked him upside down  
and smashed him on the floor,  
like he's a gorilla.  
The people are hollering!  
The police are breaking it up!  
The Bruiser jumps like a monkey  
to stomp the man.

Tyrone Neat

## THE PLACE TO BE

This is the place to be in my own little corner  
it is fun to sit here and think whenever I have a  
problem I can sit here and work it out. . The most  
comfortable spot is in my bed it is really comfort-  
able when I am under the covers.

This is the place not to be because you will wait  
a long time to get something. It is called the  
math area you won't like it there.

Gwendolyn Lewis



DRAGONFLY

It is dead  
    outside the park.  
        It is dead,  
                crumpled.  
                        All the beauty  
Is gone. It  
    looks like opal  
        silk. Dirtied, messy  
                silk. It is  
sad.  
    It is soft  
        cool twilight. A  
                silken cloak  
                        thrown over  
The world. It  
    smells green and  
        nearby is the  
                stone wall of  
The park.  
    It is cool soft summer night.

Jane Shufer  
P. S. 84, Manhattan

Easy rider thats what I see  
looking for my soul that is in me  
1-2-3 maybe I'll see what I'll be  
when I'm 19 and see that I be  
some kind of animal with  
sight of an eagle, cunning of a fox  
the swift strike of a cobra  
but graceful as a swan  
I know what I am.

Julio E. Calzado

by Sharon

I'd rather be a  
crayon than a pencil  
because a pencil  
is dull and can be  
rubbed out,  
but a crayon is bright  
colorful and full of  
joy.

## THE TEACHER'S LONELINESS POEM

CANDY NATTLAND

Will you listen if I say what it is that's loneliest. . .

- sitting in a room corner, white walls, on the floor,  
dirty hair & crying --- after someone walked out  
the door.
- Gerard's lower lip trembling with those soft eyes just  
melting.
- looking at faces in a faculty meeting & wondering what all  
these people are mouthing about
- tense kids at 2:00 P. M. with one hour to go & no energy  
left.

& you shrink smaller & smaller into GETTING ANGRY.

- Yeah - it really stinks - where's the support - get yourself  
together - Fuck you man. It's hard to get out of bed  
in the morning sometimes - when it's very very cold &  
you pretty much know that your car isn't going to start  
& you think about the pile of crap on your desk that  
needs to be corrected & those reading scores that other  
teachers keep talking about - & how Eric isn't learning  
to read because he thinks there's something bad about  
putting a cat in a freezer & where's Bobby's father.
- & you do try to work it out with those you love - patient  
talking, understanding, listening & listening & it's hard to grab  
yourself when you don't listen to yourself very well -
- walking down the hall at 7:45 A. M. - before there are any  
voices in the School - knowing that your supervisor is  
coming to see if you're 'fit to work with children.'
  - well - why doesn't Arthur call & say "Hey Cand - let's run  
away in the truck. Let's go camping in Canada for the  
rest of our lives."
  - But it's the worst loneliness to sit around wanting that  
to happen.

Candy Nattland, winter 1973  
2nd grade teacher, Edgemont School  
Montclair, New Jersey

I began by asking Rebecca if she had spoken to any of the group members during the week.

Rebecca: The days are so short, and I'm used to being alone. People aren't interested, and I'm not interested in broadcasting. I'd rather listen, except once in a while, to give out a little bit.

you don't have time?

Rebecca: Well, Marc suggested I take the phone numbers of two people, and I didn't say anything.

Rose: Why didn't you speak up at the time?

Rebecca: This group satisfies me temporarily.

Ann: You should become active in the club.

Libby: She says her days are short, and she's occupied with something that sustains her, so where's the depression, so let's close it.

Rebecca: I have to snap out of it myself.

# The Ingredients of Life

excerpts from a forthcoming book by **MARC KAMINSKY**  
based on writing workshops conducted for old people

Rose K: Well, you brought us in Rebecca, we misunderstood you last week.

Rebecca: The news of bad--it made me lonely and depressed, it made it worse, but I didn't want sympathy.

Rose K: Well, we were stupid enough to think you agreed with a great suggestion.

Leah: I was the one who asked if she wanted to take my phone number. I thought we could speak on the phone --not about problems, but something gay.

Ann: What do you mean,

Rose F: If you have no time, it must mean you're satisfied with yourself, that you're doing something and there's no time to be depressed, that takes depression away.

Rebecca: I used to babysit, and then I was alone again, I lost a lot of sleep.

Bella: You're not alone, there are over 12 million widows in America.

Ann: Here we're all widows.

Dora: We are also short of time, she has momentary problems, but the moment we have to soothe her moods

\*

Rose K. was particularly disappointed with Rebecca for apparently closing up after she had opened up to the group the week previously. The truth is, as Rebecca made clear, that she had no intention of maintaining contact with group members during the week. It was, in fact, Rose who had really opened up, and in giving support to Rebecca last week, had revealed a side of herself she had never before shown in group. Her anger, instead of being directed at Rebecca, came out when she said "we were stupid enough" to believe you wanted our help, and we were mistaken.

She was disappointed because she had become clearly more invested in Rebecca.

When the group was pushing her to become involved in more activities, I asked if it was O.K. for Rebecca to feel right now that coming to the poetry group was satisfactory for her. Ann-- who returned after a week's absence, a little less judgmental--said, "Yes, it is, she might be getting enough here." I said that for someone so "used to being alone" I thought Rebecca was doing a lot for herself, coming regularly week after week and participating.

But to Rebecca I made another point. Her insist-

Windows on an Ancient Day: An Experimental Sabbath," which had moved her deeply. The prayers were in English, and the rabbi, during the service, had asked each person to turn to his neighbor and ask him how he was and if there was something he could do for him.

She read an article--or rather, a passage from an article--which said that increased emotional maturity is the goal of life, and the three cardinal virtues to grow towards are self-knowledge, self-control, and unselfishness.

Rose has begun making important contributions to the group: she has a keen grasp of what the group is

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**One doesn't usually think of old Jewish women espousing the cause of the Palestinians --another eye-opener.**

---

ence on isolation, her refusal to accept sympathy, her feeling that she had to do it all by herself, warranted challenging. I told a little parable I made up on the spot to answer a particular need. An ox pulled a cart into a ditch on a wet day, and the farmer was stuck there, unable to move. Was it all right for him to accept a pull from somebody else?

Bella: This pull I got from you, Marc.

\*

Once again, several people brought in work to share with the group.

Rose K. told us about "New

all about and, in her discussion of the passage, stressed that each member still had growth ahead of him, and more maturity to gain.

Dora read her piece on "independence for minorities"--she appears to be more aware of politics and political environment than the others. There was a polite non-response to this; either they didn't take it in, or they did hear and wanted to avoid the rather controversial issue of Palestinian liberation. One doesn't usually think of old Jewish women espousing the cause of the Palestinians--another eye-opener. At any rate, nobody picked it up.

Leah read a poem she'd written this week, "Words," which was received with a great deal of enthusiasm.

Libby said she liked "the truth in it"; what moved Ann was "the way it's said."

I introduced them, formally, to Metaphor--an old acquaintance of theirs, I told them, whom they had passed in the street hundreds of times, but now they were going to meet him and find out something about him by conversing with him.

Using Leah's poem as a starting point, they made "A Well Mixed Cake." As they spoke their sentences about "words," I re-read back what they'd written, and paused occasionally to comment on a sentence in which something had been strikingly--metaphorically--put. By the end, they were less given to abstract statement and sententious and platitudinous lines and were speaking in full voice, making use of their familiar metaphors.

I think no poem has given the group greater pleasure, as a group, in the making. There was a sense of: "look, we're really doing it." As line was added onto line, and the group got a sense of its abundance and fertility, the women became more and more like kids I'd worked with, laughing, clapping hands, congratulating each other--a general heightening of pleasure and responsiveness.

## WORDS

Words are the gateway to the heart  
Words are the windows of the soul  
Words move mountains, words move armies  
Do not betray their trust  
Use them wisely, use them cautiously  
Keep silent if you must.

Leah

## THE BOSS OF WORDS

You are the boss of your words.

Not always: you don't make any impression on a person who's not receiving.

As long as the words are in your mouth you are the boss.  
The moment you let them out you are no boss.

Your words are changed,  
they are misinterpreted,  
you can no longer recognize them.

A word's not like a bird:  
a bird you can bring back.

Dora, Ann and Libby

a vast range of education should be offered to adults and we should bring up our children in a better system. Our top leaders of the U. N. are educated but they lack of understanding.

In reference to the Palestine question they should give independence to a minority group who have suffered a great deal of hardship if the people throughout the world have the proper education they would understand that independence of the minority is important for the safety of peace.

Dora

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## A WELL MIXED CAKE

---

The words I heard about the young father's release from a prison in Asia--I was relieved because he was relieved.

Words are a pathway of understanding, and words are a road to dismay and sadness.

If we could build a coat of armor around our emotions, words couldn't harm us.

Words brought happiness to this mother who heard her son was still living.

When I need words the most, I'm at a loss for them.

Words are therapy, and the tongue is the main object that makes it all clear.

A sharp tongue can do a lot of damage.

The tongue is the boss of the body. Life and death depend on words--what the tongue speaks out.

Words are like a thunder--they can come down like a blast. Words can be like a rainbow also--they have many colors.

Are words in the Bible the true thoughts of God? Words of the prophets--they help us to live.

Words are the mountains of our imagination.  
Words are the skeleton of our souls.  
Words are the garment of our body.  
Words are the heart of our everyday living.

Words have eyes to penetrate into the false and the truth. Words are like a ripple in the ear--good news is wonderful words.

Words have fears, and words have love and compassion.  
Words have feet that lead us on.  
Words have hands that soothe the sick.  
Words have the secret source of a spring of water--like the fountain of youth.

Words are the ingredients of our life.

--Dora, Leah, Bella, Ann, Rose, Libby, Henrietta, Florence, Rebecca.

It was Mohandas' story but he seemed unable to play the protagonist's role. Mohandas was a member of my fifth graders work-shop group at P.S. 129 in Harlem. We met on Thursday mornings in a large airy room set aside by the school for arts and writing activities. A foot-high, 80-foot-square wooden platform was in the room as a makeshift playing area. I had asked the 13 children in my Thursday morning group to tell a story--something that had happened to them, something they had dreamt or daydreamed about or that they just made up. . . and then to play any role in the story they wished. They were to cast the other parts (animate or inanimate, animal, vegetable or mineral) from among their classmates.

This was Mohandas' story, more or less verbatim: "There was this bad boy who was mad all the time. He needed a coat, so he asked his father but his father said no. So he ripped off some money from his father and mother. He bought the coat in a store and then he hid it good. His father found he was missin' the money and called the cops. Then his mother found the coat and told his father it was the bad boy who took it. Then I don't know what happened--they put him in jail, or something. . ."

"Good story," I said. "Now, let's play it. Who do you want to be the bad boy?"

He pointed to himself.

Then he picked the rest of the cast, and we were ready to improvise.

I suggested that the first scene be between the father and the boy, to see what their relationship was like.

The boy Mohandas picked for his father was his best friend, Leslie. Leslie was a joker, and a pretty talented one. I reminded him that this was Mohandas' story, and that he should be sincere in his part and try to play it in the serious spirit of the story. I said it, but I didn't have much hope it would penetrate.

"Your grades are terrible," Leslie said, looking down his nose at Mohandas.

"They ain't so bad," Mohandas said mildly.

"They're disgusting," Leslie said, warming to his power role. "Go to your bed."

And Mohandas obediently exited.

"What do you think?" I asked the group.

"It's boring," said one boy.

A girl said, "He didn't act very mad like he's supposed to."

"He's not a bad boy. He's a good boy," said a third child.

"Try it again," I suggested. "You start, Mohandas."

Mohandas said, "I need a coat."

## Mohandas and the Bad Boy

by DAN CHEIFETZ

Leslie said, "You don't need nothin'. You're just a bad boy."

"No, I'm not," Mohandas said, offended but intimidated.

"Go to your bed!" Leslie thundered.

Mohandas looked at me.

"Do I have to do like he says?"

"Do you always do what your parents say?" I asked him.

"Yeah!" he said.

"Never talk back to them?"

"Nah," he said, in a tone which implied I must be crazy to imagine such a thing.

"Well, okay," I said. "But this is your story, and you can pretend. You're not Mohandas, you're this disobedient boy and you need a coat, and you think you deserve one. Start it again, father."

"Why don't you do better at school, boy?" Leslie said. This time he moved forward and grabbed Mohandas' arm. I started to reiterate my long-standing rule of no touching, but I didn't have to. Flinging off Leslie's arm, Mohandas moved about four determined steps away from him and faced around.

"You always say I'm no good!" he said. There was conviction in his voice and good, fierce play-anger.

"Don't you be snotty

with me, boy," Leslie came back, mugging and drawing himself up tall.

Then Mohandas began doing something that I found fascinating. He began marching around Leslie, in a narrowing circle, as if he were stalking him.

"You don't care about me. You never give me nothin'!"

"I give you food and a bed. I give you this house to live in."

Mohandas stopped moving, his body arched toward Leslie.

"You never give me nothin' I want!" he said.

Leslie was enough impressed to stop mugging for a moment. "Well," he said, somewhat lamely, "your grades are terrible. You--you gotta do better to get something."

"I'm tired of hearin' you tell me what I gotta do all the time." Mohandas continued his march of anger, moving around and around his play father, giving him hell. One striking thing was his sincerity. Even though Leslie, his pretend father, had never really gotten out of himself and into his part, Mohandas had stayed with his all the way. His story had been about the rebellious, individualistic, angry, needy Mohandas. He had wanted to play that part, to be the "bad boy" of his secret fantasy, but he hadn't known how. He had had so little contact with that other Mohandas. Now I had given him permission



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**But good educators, like good psychologists, know that the repressed energy of anger and rebellion must surface somewhere, and better creatively than destructively.**

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to become that boy--with his mind, his body, his face, his gestures, his imagination, his walk--his whole self.

It is this "whole self" that creative dramatics attempts to reach. I am always surprised and moved by the almost magical way this kind of activity can release a child--help him reach inside, to contact parts of himself that would never otherwise see the light of day. In relation to an experience like Mohandas, some might counsel, "let sleeping dogs lie--why stir up feelings that are better left alone?" But good educators, like good psychologists, know that the repressed energy of anger and rebellion must surface somewhere, and better creatively than destructively. The more a child contacts what's inside him, the more balanced and satisfied a person he is and will become. This is not training in rebellion; it is education in experiencing the self.

And of course I am not only talking about playing out repressed roles. Drama encourages the child to discover and project the inner resources of his personality, his intuition, his special experiences and attitudes toward life, his own fantasies and ideas. Only in this way will he come to know himself, and become aware of what he is capable of. I would bet that Mohandas had

never before told a story about his own inner feelings and needs. Television and other media feed children with other people's fantasies. This was Mohandas' own--and it was exhilarating to me that he could get in touch with a fantasy that was not a romantic adventure or some other escapist version of life, but one of anger, deprivation and inevitable punishment immediately relevant to his life and his world, and to play it out. Such an experience helps a child give more value to what's going on inside him.

It also provides the kind of open-ended experience--one without right or wrong, good or bad--that is too rare in education. Mohandas' "father" discovered the money gone in a later scene and the police arrived with mouth-sirens wailing (in almost all the children's stories, the police play an important part--a kind of fuzzi ex machina). Then the bad boy was discovered. Leslie, the father, had no mercy on his son:

"Send him to reform school!" he demanded of the cops, and the mother agreed.

But at this point, one of the other girls in the group gave out a sympathetic "Awww!"

"You have a different idea?" I asked the girl, Deborah.

Deborah nodded emphat-

ically and I suggested that she come up and play the mother, to see what would happen then.

The new mother said to the father, "He needed that coat. You can't send him to jail."

"He's a thief," said the adamant Leslie. "He's gotta go. Take him away," he said to the cops.

"I want a new husband," Deborah demanded.

"I'll be the husband," said Shawn, a cocky boy with a modified Afro.

"I'm the husband!" said Leslie defiantly.

"Well, let's see what Shawn will do, just for fun," I suggested.

"Leslie relinquished his place reluctantly, and Shawn came up.

"You gotta go to jail," said Shawn. "When you come out, I'll buy you thirty suits, because I'm rich."

"How about that, Deborah?"

"No," said Deborah.

"Okay, let's try someone else. Let's have another father. And another son, too."

"I want him to be the husband," Deborah said, pointing to a beanstalk-thin boy named Joseph.

"Do you want to, Joseph?"

Joseph nodded and came up. For the son, I picked a boy who hadn't done or said much to date.

Joseph said, "You take the coat back and I'll buy you a new one if you need it."

Deborah smiled. She was satisfied. But a surprise ending was in store!

"I won't take it back!" said the latest rebellious son.

We stopped there. I commented that they had proved there are lots of ways a story can go.

Of course, I hadn't started the group with improvisations. Not that they would have been incapable of improvising on some level almost from the outset. But I wanted them to have some training in observation and concentration; in using their bodies to create detail effectively; in working together as a group, as well as playing together. (We played a number of drama games that loosened them up, got them operating as a group and helped show them that there was fun in all of this.) I also wanted to convince them that what I really was after from them was neither showing-off nor "show-biz" but something of themselves to show the group.

At this point I would like to clarify what is to me an important distinction for someone wishing to use creative dramatics as a means of edu-

cation. This is the distinction between theatre and drama. I have had great difficulty at times in getting this distinction across as far as children are concerned. Thus, the minister of a church at which I was directing a workshop told a conference of ministers of his denomination what a fine job I was doing at his church "training our children to be fine little actors and actresses." When he reported this proudly to me, I disappointed him by saying that this was exactly what I was not doing.

Brian Way, in his book Development Through Drama, has ably clarified this distinction:

"Theatre is concerned with communication between actors and audience.

Drama is concerned with experience by the participants. . . Communication to an audience is beyond the capacities of the majority of children and young people. . . To view from the standpoint of traditional or conventional professionalism is to adopt a scale of values that is entirely irrelevant, leading to judgments that exclude the majority, particularly in the early stages of discovery. . . Drama encourages originality and helps some fulfillment of personal aspiration, and this is important to the full development of personality because even among the best teachers there can develop a tendency to help pupils fulfill only teachers' ambitions for them. . ."

So, creative drama has

no intention of developing fledgling actors or actresses, and does not impose any standards of conventional theatre. Instead, it assumes that everyone has the creative spark. It provides one serious way for the teacher to bring out an individual's creative capacity, which is so often hidden. One reason that children hide it is because as a value it is usually subordinated to the value of "knowing the right answer." Drama can be one means of suspending that unremitting educational structure that says one way is right and the other way wrong; and of un-freezing children from the adult-charted hierarchy of self-evaluation that tells them they are "bright" or "slow" or "average." Altogether, it is a way to give students some much needed self-esteem and the conviction that they have something good inside no one else possesses.

Of course, drama is no magic leveler. Some individuals are indeed more equal than others, and it is difficult for a teacher not to praise a moment of cleverness, or insight, or talent in a child. As in everything else, we can't help but admire the superior response. The point is, to give all children an opportunity to touch in themselves their own springs of creativity and imagination, however deep or shallow it runs. So often I have been surprised at how apparently "dead" and lusterless children, who rarely participate, let alone volunteer, come out of their shell of shyness and low self-esteem to do quite remarkable things. Part of it is the

knowledge that their work will not be graded, evaluated or compared to others.

We began in the group with simple non-verbal communication. The first session I led them into the room without a word, and communicated a number of things to them with gestures only: Be silent. Gather in a circle. Join hands. Sit down. Lie down. Stand up.

"This is the way the body talks," I said. "It can get a lot of messages across without one word."

We played several games. I had noticed that they had all swarmed to the blackboard when they came in, to write on it and then erase what they had written. So I made up a blackboard game, in which the children close

mime it. It could be something good or bad, sad or fun, or a dream if they preferred. The group would then try to guess it. What I got at first almost without exception was media stuff--mad scientists, Bill Cosby and Flip Wilson, Superman and all his super-colleagues, including Super Fly. Especially Superfly. Even several of the girls did him, or, alternately, Shaft.

Some of it was done cleverly. One boy beautifully imitated Bill Cosby's walk and drawl. Harry, the lone Chinese-American boy in the group, who wore glasses, set two chairs a few feet apart. He got up on the platform, looked intensely offstage, whipped off his glasses and arranged himself between the backs of the chairs, his arms held

usually results in a few children doing a lot of things and the others hanging back. A few didn't take their turn; one girl wouldn't even look up at me when her number was called.

Those who did work seemed to derive a lot of satisfaction from just getting up in front of the group and holding their classmates' attention for a while. Most, however, did their pantomimes very fast, and very sketchily. Their objective was to tell their story so their peers could immediately guess what they were doing. The object of the game in their minds was to get the correct response and get it over with. Children, as most adults, are torn between wanting

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**Children, as most adults, are torn between wanting to perform and being too self-conscious and worried that they won't do it 'right.'**

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their eyes, one child writes a hidden word that can be pantomimed, chooses someone to disclose it to, who then plays it before the group. After letting the player play it out (no guessing before he or she is through--a strict rule), the player chooses one of the upraised hands for guessing the word. Another variation of the game was to write a "group word" that required several people to pantomime; the writer of the word becomes the director of the group, who play out the word, according to the director's instructions.

At another session, I asked them to think of something that had happened to them recently, and to panto-

in the famous flying-through-space position. The other children really enjoyed that; he apparently was a kind of class mascot and they enjoyed his Superman style without stint. Several children did variations of the "mad scientist" bit. One boy swallowed a potion, violently stuck out his tongue, made a face and fell down, writhing.

Most of the children were willing to do something. I assigned each a number, so each would have an automatic jumping off point for their work. This took away the need to make a decision about whether to volunteer or not, which

to perform and being too self-conscious and worried that they won't do it 'right.' The fact that most of the shy ones overcame their reluctance was a good sign.

What they did served to get them up and working. But my suggestion that they do something from their own lives and heads didn't penetrate at all, at first. That there was anything in their own experience worth "acting out" just didn't seem plausible.

I worked with what they gave, of course. I encouraged them to take more time, to think "in their heads" about the reality of what they were doing, rather than

try to imitate someone they had seen on TV or the movies.

I asked the boy who had done the "mad scientist" with the potion to repeat his work. When he had finished, I asked the group to comment. I said that I didn't want to know whether it was good or bad, but how they felt about what he had done. One girl said she liked the way he had stuck out his tongue, but that he had done it "too fast."

I asked the "mad scientist" to close his eyes and think about what changes he might go through after he took the secret potion. What did it actually feel like to swallow something like that? Afterward did things happen inside him all at once or little by little? I asked him to do it once more, but this time to show us outside what the scientist was going through inside, and maybe that would make it more interesting.

The boy did it again, but about the same as he had done it before. He seemed to be in a hurry.

I said, "Listen, take your time. Take as long as you need. We'll pay attention, don't worry."

When he took the potion again, his eyebrows shot up and his eyes opened wide. He grabbed his throat and opened his mouth wide like a fish gasping for water. He began to get weak in the knees, and wobbled spectacularly around the platform. He fell to his knees, then down to hands and knees, then flat out. His audience enjoyed it, he enjoyed their approval, and I didn't need to say another word except, "Terrific!" Instead of "getting it over with" he had been willing to dig into himself to find an understanding of the process of change. Not an easy task. It had taken

work, inner work, to show the process to us.

After that, a girl did a dream she had had, and we were off the media bandwagon. She pantomimed being attacked by a gang. She was cornered, thrown into a cell. A guard came in and tried to choke her. She fought him off, but then others rushed in and she went under. As in so much of what these children did, physical violence was a central element. The girl, rather overweight and awkward, but quite self-possessed, played her dream very well. The spirit of nightmare was in it, trapped helplessness, sickening horror. She flailed her arms about wildly when the gang attached. She used her own hands to show the choking part. Her body seemed liquid in the scene where she was being overwhelmed. She made us feel it. ■

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*A forthcoming book about his teaching experiences will be published*

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