

Teachers & Writers

Collaborative Newsletter

Volume 5, Issue 2



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Getting At The Feelings

by PHILLIP LOPATE

As corporations go, so go the schools.

Creativity Corners

After centuries of neglect in mercantile America the inner life is finally getting its due. Every popular magazine, every rock record, every commentary on the American scene contains reference to a change in moral sensibility, away from the emptiness and sterility which is said to be the price of our material comfort, and toward a more emotionally meaningful, spiritual, fulfilling, personal life. I realize I am stating it rather cornily; but you know what I mean.

Once this hunger was felt, organizations like Esalen grew up to train leaders who would then impart to groups of people the capacity for heightened sensitivity. Corporations with personnel troubles, racially conflicted high schools, large churches, drug abuse programs began to make room in their budgets for sessions which would encourage "dialoguing" and honest expression of feelings.

This 'institutionalization of the feelings' took place quietly and almost sub rosa, but not without arousing suspicions that it was a way of vitiating rebellion. After all, a corporation might sponsor a weekend retreat or a series

of encounter groups between managers and workers: but when they returned to work the hierarchy would remain the same, the assembly-line would still be there, and the workers would still have no voice in decisions of production. A worker might have the satisfaction of telling off his foreman within a ritualized setting, but the workplace was a different story.

As corporations go, so go the schools. Space was made in the workaday curriculum for sensitivity, body movement poetry and tactile experiences. The sage administrator will render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's: a concession to the inner life, then on to the real work!

Some teachers did make the effort to connect the feelings and intuitions of children with every part of the learning process. But in most cases attention to the interior life tended to be reserved for special occasions, held ready as a treat or a favor. The ghetto-ization of sensitivity is exemplified by the teacher who asked me at a conference how she could "set up a Creativity Corner?" When I said with wonder that I didn't understand why she would want

to restrict her students' creativity to one small corner of the room, she answered peevishly: "You know what I mean." She was right: I did know what she meant. But I didn't want to.

Instead of viewing human creativity as the source of strength out of which all learning flows, the average public school sees it as something cute to put on bulletin boards or in assembly programs. This is true of Creative Writing, which seems destined to be cut off from the rest of the curriculum in spite of the efforts of Ashton-Warner and Herb Kohl and a hundred others to show the organic connection between personal writing and academic skills. Even the name, "creative" writing,* implies that it is an afterthought, something extraneous and in addition to "regular" writing--oh, very worthwhile of course, one wouldn't dream of eliminating it---but this very sense of its being worthwhile, this very tolerance which disguises condescension is the Kiss of Death. Poetry we won't even talk about: what could be more "worthwhile," more elevated, more isolated from the meat

*It would be interesting to study the history of the idea of creative writing: when and how recently such courses began to be introduced in colleges, as something apart from English composition; what battles had to be fought within departments to get the idea accepted. Then it might be possible to draw up a balance sheet weighing the advantages of concentrating on the writing of poetry and fiction, with the disadvantages of subtracting personal style from the rest of written thought.

and potatoes subjects?

Poetry is the exclamation point one gives to the well-apportioned classroom, the classroom "that has everything." Two sticks of poetry on the walls will do, one in front, one in back: like religious scrolls.

How often have I had to battle that iconic reverence for verse, as something fine and mushy that doesn't mean much but to which one still pays lip service, before I could get poetry and myself taken seriously? Until people see poetry as springing from all of life, they will isolate it in a creativity corner and treat it like a mascot.

Plundering the Feelings

At the heart of poetry is feelings. Some would say regenerated Language; both are necessary to make a good poem, but for me a poem which does not deliver the emotional goods is a waste of time. The feelings are the juicy part. I will put up with a lot of obscurity and meanderings if I feel the poet has a large heart underneath: but if he seems crabby, niggardly, listless, desiccated, who has the time? Poetry should replenish.

crepuscular, iridescent experiences which the child generally feels he had better leave outside the school door, but which obsess him and rob his attention. The teacher who would like his or her students to write deeply must first persuade the class that these emotions are not only allowed in literature, they are recommended. How to get a child to go beyond the product that one knows is facile and shallow for him--spiritually beneath him? maybe he was taught to write superficially by an earlier teacher; who knows? It seems pointless to fix the blame of the original sin when he first learned to deceive and hide behind written words. Most children (like most adults) are afraid to know what is going on inside them. Sooner or later they would have discovered the knack of literary evasion.

The business of teaching people to write has never seemed to me very far from getting them to acknowledge the true state of their feelings.

Having said this, I am suddenly very leery and want to retreat fast, qualify, caution. For we are now in that sticky area where poetry and

It is difficult

to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack

of what is found there.

(William Carlos Williams)

One reason why poetry should have a place in the curriculum is that it is able to turn to use those mysterious, grotesque, creepy,

psychotherapy can become cloyingly entangled with very maudlin, muddy results. (I know nothing about the new profession of Poetry Therapy,

which is used in hospitals and which is said to cure insomnia, impotence and grief!)

Most people would agree that it is a good thing to express feelings in writing. From this follows a series of questions that a teacher might ask: How does one promote a climate of healthy expressiveness so that children will not be afraid to put their feelings in writing? How does one draw the feelings out of shy children? How does one make the strong connection between personal feelings and writing? How does one teach children to make something literarily artistic out of their feelings?

Rather than begin to answer these almost impossible questions, I will say one way that I think doesn't work, though it is tried often enough. Here a teacher simply assigns the topic: My Feelings. I know one Miss J. who did this and got results like the following:

My feelings are sometimes
Silly
Sad
Happy.
Sometimes.....
I don't like my feelings and
Now,
I like my feelings.
Because
I am writing a story about
My
feelings.

Rocio Arias

I consider this poem a model of the tact with which children handle adult obtuseness. The topic was obviously too vague, and the child responded with brilliant second-guessing and a certain charm, though with hardly any self-exposure, while his teacher was delighted that he had

written a poem "all about his feelings." Her eyes lit up when she showed me the titles of the other compositions: Sadness, Who I Am, When I'm Angry....

This teacher was a rather melancholy, withdrawn young woman who found the school oppressive and who only came to life when she had a class discussion about feelings. Even outside the classroom she would steer every conversation in a probing direction.

The next year Miss J. showed me her list of writing topics. She wanted me to endorse her selection because I was, as she said, "also a firm believer in Creative Writing." The list assigned a homework entry in the child's diary for every date of the term:

SEPTEMBER:

- 11 - MY NEW CLASS
- 12 - MY LIFE AS A PENCIL
- 13 - ALL THE THINGS I DO WELL: DESCRIBE
- 14 - MY SUMMER
- 15 - MY WEEKEND
- 18 - MY LIFE AS A CRAYON
- 19 - MY HOME AND THE PEOPLE IN IT
- 20 - MY FRIENDS AND WHAT THEY'RE LIKE
- 21 - MY LIFE AS A CIGARETTE
- 22 - MY WEEKEND
- 25 - MY BIGGEST WORRY (ONE OR MORE:) DESCRIBE AND DISCUSS
- 26 - THE DAY I WAS BORN: DESCRIBE WHAT YOU'VE HEARD & WHAT YOU REMEMBER, TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU THINK IT WAS LIKE.
- 27 - MY FAVORITE PERSON (PICK ONLY ONE PERSON, OF EVERYONE YOU KNOW). DESCRIBE HIM OR HER. HOW DOES THAT PERSON MAKE YOU FEEL?
- 28 - THINGS I CAN DO WHEN

- I FEEL ANGRY.
 29 - MY WEEKEND
 OCTOBER:
 2 - IF I WAS MY MOTHER
 3 - THE SOUND OF THE
 RAIN
 4 - MY NEIGHBORHOOD
 5 - WHAT I THINK & HOW
 I FEEL ABOUT MY
 NAME
 6 - MY WEEKEND
 9 - WHAT MAKES A HUMAN
 BEING HUMAN? DES-
 CRIBE AND DISCUSS
 10 - WHAT JOB DO I WANT
 WHEN I GROW UP: DES-
 CRIBE
 11 - WHAT COLOR IS
 FRIENDSHIP? PICK ONE
 COLOR THAT COMES
 INTO YOUR MIND AND
 DESCRIBE YOUR FEEL-
 INGS.
 12 - MY TEACHER
 13 - MY WEEKEND
 16 - THINGS THAT MAKE
 ME MAD
 17 - THINGS THAT SCARE
 ME
 18 - THINGS THAT MAKE
 ME SAD
 19 - MY FAVORITE COLOR.
 DESCRIBE
 20 - MY WEEKEND
 23 - THINGS THAT MAKE
 ME FEEL LOVED.
 DESCRIBE
 24 - HOW DO PEOPLE SHOW
 THEY CARE ABOUT
 ONE ANOTHER? DES-
 CRIBE
 25 - THE NICEST THING THAT
 THAT EVER HAPPENED
 TO ME.
 26 - WHEN I WAS LITTLE.
 27 - MY WEEKEND
 30 - ME AND OTHER CHILD-
 REN; HOW I GET ALONG
 31 - ABOUT HAVING OR NOT
 HAVING A PET.

This went on for two more pages. I turned to the last entries: SUDDENLY THE SKY GREW DARK. MY WEEKEND, MY LIFE AS A SHOE, MY LIFE AS A FOOT BALL, MY WEEKEND. THE ACCIDENT,

ME - 1982, WHAT CONVER-
 SATION DID YOUR SHOES
 HAVE LAST NIGHT?

I was so embarrassed for her I didn't know what to say first. What a demonically mechanical approach to the inner self! Side by side with those old chestnuts about hobbies and weekends (nothing is ever lost), I recognized many "hip" assignments that I had seen or had tried myself in recent years, including the unspeakably cloying "What is the color of Love?" (which originated, sadly, in a Teachers and Writers workshop). We were all to blame, we were all responsible for not making clearer the flesh-and-blood genesis of these ideas. They looked so dead, dittoed up and served up as homework.

The very idea of pre-assigned topics for a diary was anathema to me. I ventured to suggest (very mildly!) that the student be allowed at least to choose a topic out of order when it was more in keeping with his mood that day. Suppose a child was feeling jovial and he had to write about Things That Make Me Mad? If one were truly interested in their feelings, one might get a better picture by allowing them to roam freely over the list... or even to write on a subject of their own choosing.

"They can do that during class time," she explained. "This is homework. Allowing them that much freedom of choice would make them confused."

I said nothing more, because I could see she was already offended by my lack of praise. Suddenly the sky grew dark....

I went away wondering to what degree children could see through such transparent

attempts to anticipate, to cor-
don off to psych-out all the
little private corners of their
hearts. If I had gotten such
a list for homework I think
I would have considered
suicide. Tonight would a ten-
year-old boy go home and
stare in desperation at his
shoes, wondering what dia-
logue to invent for them?

Once I saw two prep
school kids on a crosstown
discussing their English
teachers.

"She gives us a lot of
Creative Writing for home-
work."

"Eoyough! I hate that
stuff." (Little did they know
that one of the arch-perpet-
rators of CW was sitting near-
by then). "She makes us
pretend like we're a chair--"

"Yeah and you have to
write about your moods...
Like being dead and how it
feels."

"Eeoooooough! I would
never do that."

They continued to swap
notes, but I had to get off the
bus. In any case, I had heard
enough. Just as poetry had
become identified in the pub-
lic's mind with woolyheaded-
ness, so writing about feel-
ing states was getting a bad
reputation as something
vaguely shameful and wormy
that people tried to pry out
of you.

What is so comical is that
children generally parade their
emotions all day long, stamp-
ing out of rooms, weeping,
punching a classmate who
aroused their jealousy. As
a rule they are much less de-

vious in their show of feelings
than adults. Yet this cascade
of pathos and raging and sud-
den endearing attachments
does not seem to satisfy the
teacher with a hunger for ar-
ticulations about feeling.

The childish emotions are not
expressed in the verbal lan-
guage that such an adult will
understand, the language of
group therapy where the feel-
ing is mediated or tamed by
insight: "I feel very hurt be-
cause I feel that you..."

So the digging continues.
The adult with a psychologi-
cal bent, wanting to narrow
the distance between himself
and his charges, will try to
initiate the children into the
linguistics of emotion. "Of
course children are very
emotional," he might say.
"But they are unconscious
about it. They need to under-
stand their feelings so that
they can better manage
them."

It would be wonderful if
such a thing could be accom-
plished with the delicacy,
subtlety, professional know-
ledge and concern for the in-
dividual that it would seem
to require. But all I keep see-
ing is a wholesale attempt
to foist very broad concepts
of emotional health on child-
ren.*

Now that people have dis-
covered they were deprived
of a rich feeling life, it is
understandable that they want
their children to experience
all the variety and ecstasy
they missed. But feelings
cannot be commanded to per-
form; nor can they be impor-

*Take an example: an educational research laboratory which had had a hand in the development of Sesame Street is now designing a new government-sponsored children's television program which will "stress sensitivity and emotions." Apparently the old program was under attack for over-emphasizing "cognitive skills" at the expense of the affective and "social." When I first heard this I had chills down my back. It was not hard to imagine a cartoon selling the goodness of feeling to pre-schoolers. What rapacity, and yet what American ingenuity to market anything!

ted and forced into the diet like vegetables. They must be allowed to come out at their own time.

When someone tells a child to write a composition about "My Feelings," he is asking to get a very schematic, abstracted result like the poem cited earlier which has its own boundaries and conventions belonging to that peculiar hothouse genre that might be called, The Genre of Feelings; with a Capital F.

Flora Arnstein describes the reluctance of children to be put on the spot so directly in a fine passage written in 1946

"I remember an incident of my early teaching days. While I was feeling my way tentatively along various lines, there came the temptation to assign a subject upon which the children might write. If, I argued, the child-

chosen subject, sorrow, and she perpetrated the following:

SAD

I'm so sad, sad, sad.
I'd eat if I wasn't so sad.
But I won't eat--not one thing.
I'm so sad.
If I wasn't so sad, I'd play
And run about the streets with
the other children,
But I'm so sad, sad, sad.

No commentary is needed other than this: curiously enough, the child who wrote it was the same who had written the one sentimental poem in the class. The question arises whether she was not too accustomed to conforming and catering to the wishes of adults. Her compliance to my request would seem to confirm this supposition.

How much more healthy was the other children's re-

To ask a child to meditate upon the idea of Sorrow is strangely enough to draw him far away from the familiar face of sorrow which is the everyday world.

ren are stimulated to talk on a given subject, why instead of expending this stimulus in talk, should they not write? And so we had a short discussion on fear, and I asked the children to write their ideas. The poems that were forthcoming were not particularly enlightening, but just sufficiently so to prompt the insidious suggestion: What a rich source of knowledge about the children, their hidden selves, what a help to the understanding of them it would be if one could get them to write poems that would furnish a clue to their emotional difficulties. My punishment was speedy, unmistakable, and for all time effective. Only one child responded to my request to write upon the

jection of the subject! Children are not preoccupied with sorrow in the abstract.... Moreover, my motivation was not legitimate. However desirable it might be for me to seek to understand the children the prime reason for their writing was not to supply me with laboratory material."¹

The problem is not that there is anything wrong with wanting children to write about their feelings: but by inviting children to consider them as large abstractions one isolates Feeling from the concrete contexts that gave it birth and from which all its poignancy derives. To ask a child to meditate upon the idea of Sorrow is strangely enough to draw him far away from the familiar face

¹Flora J. Arnstein, *Children Write Poetry*, pp. 112-113.

of sorrow which is the everyday world, and to send him off into a fog. (That fog which is so often mistaken for Poetry).

Taboo Subjects

One more problem needs to be considered: the handling of taboo subjects. You will not notice in that list of diary topics to elicit the feelings any reference to sexual attraction, masturbation, excrement, the pleasures of hurting other people--subjects which occupy a great portion of many children's minds. So fascinating are these concerns that many poets who enter the schools with the purpose of encouraging children to express "whatever's on your mind" have been hit by a tidal wave of toilet jokes, sexual innuendoes and four letter words. This is to be expected, and not only because the kids are testing a new adult. What could be a stranger mystery to a child but that a certain act which he performs every day and which he knows everyone else performs every day, cannot be mentioned in speech or writing? Even families that tolerate frankness will have to tell their children not to talk about it in school or in other people's houses.

If a part of the ground had suddenly fallen away, it could not be more mysterious than this conspiracy to shroud commonplace elementary acts in silence. It would be expecting too little of children's curiosity to make them swallow so many secrets without its leaving a trace on their mental life. No wonder they speak about these things so frequently in the playground or whenever they can come

together unobserved. I once overheard a sandbox conversation in which two six year olds were talking about their mothers:

"my mother flushes me down the toilet bowl," said one and the other laughed and said something similar. I had no idea what function this talk had for them, but I knew they could keep it up for hours.

When adults ask children to write about their feelings they usually mean the 'acceptable' feelings, like Sorrow or Fear not the 'nasty stuff'; and they don't even have to make the distinction, they can do that with a well-placed frown. Some children will get into trouble by their failure to understand that expressing your feelings means within certain circumscribed areas. Cleverer children penetrate the hypocrisy of the code right away, and stay within the foul lines. But they pay a price for it.

There is no more serious threat to the development of authentic writing ability than the habit of censoring one's thoughts. If a child writes something which brings him a rebuke for being off-color, he will not make the same mistake again and again. But suppose he is thinking of these off-color subjects when paper is passed out for free writing? He knows he dare not write what is on his mind; he must invent a screen interest. If he is no good at this sort of pretense he will decide he "can't write," and will develop into one of those adults who confess, almost happily, that they can't write to save their lives.

Since writing is essentially thinking recorded on paper, and since everyone thinks, how is it possible that many people--educated people--by

their own admission "can't even write a letter"?

They must be terrified of committing their thoughts to ink. I gave known children who were outspoken enough with tape recorders but who had a religious fear of writing down what they just said. Writing is, after all, a form of evidence which can be used against you.

This black-and white evidential character of the written word is by no means lost on schoolchildren. They know the ropes. After several years of schooling most children will have internalized the voices of censorship to a degree that they protect themselves in advance through self-censorship. To the original taboo subjects, they may add fear of sounding stupid or (years later) fear of writing in a bad style; and the picture of self-censorship is complete.

It follows that those who become writers must either be strong enough or naive enough to override the claims of self-censorship. This may explain the tendency in serious writing to push the moral and formal limits endlessly a little further. Writers have always been drawn to the taboo: aesthetically, to breaking the rules of the form; morally, to exploring shadow areas in human relations and entertaining sympathy for transgressions, and thus expanding the possibilities of moral choice for everyone. The practice of literature is curiously bound up with the forbidden. The very act of

making literature seems to require the unlimited freedom to think anything, however dangerous. If writers like myself defend the right of children to express themselves freely, even naughtily, it is because we are backing a principle which we recognize is in our own self-interest.

Anyone who would encourage children to write must face squarely the problem: to what extent is he prepared to allow children to write whatever is on their minds? The problem becomes even more complex when it reaches

The very act of making literature seems to require unlimited freedom to think anything, however dangerous.

the stage of disseminating the writing. Let us say a teacher allows his class absolute freedom to write anything. Does that mean that everything should be read aloud if there is a class reading, or that everything should be printed in the magazine? Because one thing is certain: the level of administrative anxiety shoots up astronomically as soon as a thing is printed. "What you do in the privacy of your classroom is your affair," he might imply; "but that doesn't mean

you should let it go home to the parents!"

There is unfortunately no rule of thumb that can be offered to teachers in so many thousands of diverse situations, other than the pragmatic one that every questionable case must be decided on its own merits. My own impulse is to get away with whatever I can, given the local political situation in my school. Since I am opposed to censorship I see the decision not as a moral question but a political one. How many allies can be mustered among the parents and faculty, what is the temperament of the administration, what is the character of the local community, what is the size of the publications? (A good idea is to bury a risky piece in a hundred pages of stories and poems so that it won't stick out.)*

To be a creative writing teacher with children, one must be prepared to fight a certain number of censorship battles. This seems as much a part of the profession as knowing what a metaphor is. For even if one wanted to avoid any controversy, it is impossible to predict all the ideas and references that a wary eye might find offensive. Once I was called down to the Headmaster's office in a private school and reprimanded for mimeoing a poem which contained something about vomit. I had honestly not known that that mundane response to indigestion was on the Dirty List!

In a more tolerant school

*We did this quite consciously with Eugene Poston's funny story in the first issue of The Spicy Meatball, which was 97 pages long. Someone in the district office still managed to find it and complain, but the controversy was defused when the Principal, Mercado, stood up for us. We were taking a chance and we knew it; but we figured it was better to test the water right away. It might have helped us that the magazine was released in the last week of school, and any flak came in the summer.

we were able to get away with "titties" in the first issue of the school magazine, and "piss" in the second. Every year we hope to liberate another contraband item.

It seems to me that many school censorship controversies can be headed off with good tactics and timing, courage at the right moment and a measure of diplomacy. When a teacher feels that a piece is interesting and effectively written, and will mean something to the child to see it in print, he should probably take the chance. However, if the piece does not "sit well," it would be foolish to stick one's neck out for an article one doesn't feel capable of defending strongly. These are the most troubling cases: when a child's piece has something in it one personally finds offensive.

This often happens in a second zone of taboo beyond the obvious forbidden subjects. Liberal parents who can deal with childhood sexuality and digestive functions often get upset at the expression of cruelty, bloodthirstiness or racial prejudice. One can foresee a time when the body will be accepted as natural and beautiful in American schools, while the last outpost of the unmentionable will be Hostility.

"Everybody be nice." How understandable a desire that is! Yet it will not recognize what children are really like and what they need. There is a schoolteacher who forbade a six-year-old boy to draw monsters; so he started a secret Monster club where they talk about and draw monsters.

The violence in stories written by children can be accepted as a drive toward excitement and climax. The cruelty they show each other

One can foresee a time when... the last outpost of the unmentionable will be Hostility.

is harder to take. There are some children who consistently use the shield of freedom granted by creative writing to get back at their enemies. I have stepped in and suppressed the reading of a story about the class's favorite scapegoat-- an overweight girl whom everyone loved to stick pins into and see her turned. The lowness of it sickened me; I had reached my own limits of tolerance. But I could as easily have suggested that the author fictionalize the name and one or two details, and it would have made a good story.

The existence of race hostility in children is more than understandable, given the strong ethnic feelings in this country. Yet most children would not dare record their thoughts on the subject. In one of my writing workshops using stream-of-consciousness, one sheltered Jewish girl permitted herself to speculate: "Why do Puerto Ricans talk so fast? Why do they all have such loud voices?(no offense)" I remember wondering the same thing myself when I was growing up! Because she had been honest enough to raise the doubt, I was able to clear it up after class. But how many children have prejudiced thoughts that are founded in ignorance, but that they are afraid to admit to (and possibly have the ignorance corrected) because it is forbidden to speculate aloud on racial traits in the classroom? Afraid to write about the racial gang-ups that they see every day with their

own eyes, afraid to confess their own ambivalence, they compete every year in an essay for who can write the paean to Brotherhood.

The schools are more interested in moral suasion than in teaching children to think. This is the greatest sin of American public education. It would rather have children parrot current moral attitudes which are supposed to add up to good citizenship, than to teach him how to think for himself: by using the evidence in front of his senses as a starting-point, and then analyzing the problem from different perspectives. The moralistic formulas may change they may embrace the conservative views the right the left pluralism, the Feelings or that perennially sunny invocation to "Smile," but the indoctrinative methods of training good citizens remain the same.

Unfortunately, Creative Writing has been selected to bear more than its portion of teaching the young to love the Good. Haikus are construed into homilies; essays used as sermons.

To summarize: if one wants children to express their feelings in writing, one must be prepared to receive feelings which are considered anti-social as well as acceptable. One must be willing to wade through a great deal of kaka and to have faith that something more interesting will emerge when the scatology has run its course. One must convince the children that the freedom to express their innermost thought is meant in earnest. ■

The above article is from a book in progress to be published in the spring of next year by Doubleday.

Two years ago, at the beginning of the school year, I began working with Jean Pitts' mixed fifth and sixth grade class at P.S. 61. I expected good things from this class, partly because of the kids, partly the teacher, and as time went by those expectations were not disappointed. I did notice, though, that one boy never wrote

He was now a sixth grader. He had also been put into the second-best class, demoted, so to speak, from the previous year's top class. While his work had not been bad, Miss Pitts felt that the change might do him good, that rather than being among the lowest students in the best class, he would develop more fully among the highest of

til then: the outline of the play was established and much of the dialogue improvised, so that each performance was different), and encouraged the troupe to give performances in other classrooms, where word had spread. I followed them from class to class, never bored for a moment. I was delighted by what seemed to me

Beyond Horrible Herman

The Case of Hector Martinez

by RON PADGETT

much, if anything. He was well-behaved, attentive and friendly, perhaps a trifle nervous or unsure. I was involved in other things in the class and didn't feel I had enough time to give Hector personal treatment, so I opted for what I felt was the next best, to leave him alone, be friendly, not pressure him. I sensed that pressuring him, even in a friendly manner; would backfire, so I simply laid off.

As the year went on there was little apparent change in his attitude about writing poetry, but then near the end of the year, to my surprise, he handed me a rather long and thorough poem. It wasn't a particularly outstanding work, but the effort involved, the degree of self-engagement, were laudable, and it made me happy.

Summer came and went. Hector never crossed my mind.

The following fall I found him in Miss Muczyn's mixed fifth and sixth grade class.

the second-best class.

Hector continued to write more frequently in my classes, but somehow the results weren't very exciting as poetry. They sounded more like scenarios, or summaries of stories. Hector began making them into little booklets with his own cover designs, which were bright and clever. At this point I was still too dumb to realize in what direction he might go, but his classroom teacher, Miss Muczyn, was more alert.

One day I walked into the room and found a play in progress, a puppet play* written, directed by and starring Hector Martinez. I was amazed at Hector's talent for mimicry: his imitation of the leading character, a girl rabbit courted by various male animals, was at once precise and hilarious. The play was a great success. I got excited about the play, returned the next day with a tape recorder, taped a performance, typed up a playscript (none existed un-

Hector's sudden blossoming, and I paid him a lot of attention.

I suggested to him that we could make a movie and his eyes grew as big as silver dollars. He soon came up with the idea of a film called HORRIBLE HERMAN*, in which a giant hand ravages the entire earth, growing hair on its flesh and smashing everything that comes in its path. We talked about this idea, trying to figure out how to make it practical. I didn't know much about film-making, but I did know that we could make the hand change by stopping the camera, doctoring the hand, shooting a few feet, stopping, doctoring, etc., and at some point one of us came up with the idea of having the hand change colors. We finally rejected the smashing idea because we felt it would be too unrealistic--no one would really believe it if a hand were knocking over toy cars and houses--and too compli-

*see vol. 5 issue 1

cated.

I borrowed a good 8 mm camera from Young Film Makers, gathered various props, and set up a shooting area in the art room, where the art teacher, Dale Kars, had laid out boxes of colored chalks and other materials. Hector was excused from his room and we shot HORRIBLE HERMAN that afternoon, a simple 7 minute film which took 3 hours to shoot! We were making constant adjustments so that the hand would appear to be floating

Not too long after that Hector presented me with the entry form for a Young Movie Makers Contest sponsored by the Kodak Company. The grand prize was a trip to Hollywood and a mini-course in film making, or a scholarship for several thousand dollars. Hector was undecided as to which prize he would choose. I told him to mail in the form to receive complete details before we started on a new film (I didn't think HORRIBLE HERMAN was professional

These three boys decided they would be Oriental karate experts: two Puerto Ricans and a Black.

in space, disembodied, changing colors and moving about menacingly. We had a wonderful time, and when I went out in the hall and saw that it was 3:15 I said, "Yikes" to myself, wrote a note for Hector to take home to his mother, explaining his lateness, and cleaned up.

Most of the editing was done in the camera--I tried to shoot as much of the film as possible exactly as I wanted it to come out on the screen, in sequence and ready to view. This, of course, requires more planning than one in which the film maker is at liberty to cut, rearrange, reshoot, etc.

I had the film developed, did some minor cutting, then showed the film to Hector's class. Some kids loved it, others were disappointed. They had heard it was supposed to be about Horrible Herman, a big monster, and this was just a hand with colors on it moving around. But Hector was ecstatic. He could hardly contain his joy. We showed the film to other classes, with Hector proudly in attendance.

enough), so that our new film could conform to any contest rules (length of film, etc.). He neglected to do so, so I did it. It took what seemed like eternity for the rules to come back, by which time I had already decided to go ahead with the new film and to hell with this contest.

Hector's idea for a new film involved karate, the great wave of which was beginning to break over the nation's youth. He had enlisted the aid of several classmates, Ronald Kelly and Tony Nuvoa. These three boys decided they would be Oriental karate experts: two Puerto Ricans and a Black. Immediately everyone realized what a strange Oriental Ronald would make, and when we finished laughing I suggested that art didn't have to follow life all that closely. I had several lengthy conferences and phone conversations with the boys, mostly with Hector, and the story began to take shape.

The new film, later to be called JAPANESE KARATE KILLERS, would be far more involved than HORRIBLE

HERMAN It would require a narrative, with decent acting, a likely setting (not the Lower East Side, where we live, but somewhere such as Chinatown), more elaborate props, more thought as to action shots, slow-motion, choreography, and the sheer logistics of getting the boys, the props, the camera, etc. all down to Chinatown at the right time.

I had to secure the permission of the parents, some of whom asked me to come to their homes and discuss the project. Tony had just come to P. S. 61 and his father, a hard-working bus driver, wanted to be sure his son would be in responsible hands. I had to convince him of my probity. (Little did I suspect that I was legally responsible for the kids the entire day of the shooting--had one of them broken an arm or twisted an ankle, I could have been sued, I am now told.)

At long last I collected the kids early one Saturday and we climbed into a cab with our collection of props and headed for Chinatown. This was my first experience of working with kids outside of school: I had often seen my students in the street because we all live in the same neighborhood near the school, but I had rarely been in what might be called a social situation with them, such as riding in a taxi.

When we arrived in Chinatown the boys recoiled: there were real people walking around on the street! They felt self-conscious. I did too, frankly. I didn't want people looking at me as I worked the camera. We veered across the street to a modern housing project on the south side of Chinatown. Back between the modern buildings was a secluded

terrace, with various walls and benches and flower beds. A few people were sitting or lying there in the sunlight, someone listening to a Mets game. They paid no attention to us. I suggested we start the film here: it would give us confidence, and it was a surprisingly interesting space. We set up and started to shoot. The first take was all wrong, so we repeated. As we were working, a man with a grim expression on his face approached us in an authoritative manner. I sensed that he was a guardian or representative of the property.

"You'll have to clean up this garbage now," was his opening remark.

My most Machiavellian self took control. My blood boiled, but invisibly. I felt that here, now, was a really educational situation. I felt that my reaction to this man would not only set the tone of the afternoon, but would teach the kids something basic about getting along in the world.

I could tell the man to kiss my ass. He would then slug me or call the Security Officer on duty, probably the latter. We would be escorted from the premises. Not a good result.

I could yessir him, pick up our things and sulk away. Not a good result.

"Oh, I'm sorry," I answered, "I didn't realize what a mess we're making. I assure you we'll have it cleaned up in no time."

(The "mess" or "garbage" consisted of our props.)

"My name is Ron Padgett and I'm a Special Teacher at P. S. 61 here in Manhattan. These boys have been assigned a special project, to make a school film, and we're here on location. I

hope you won't mind if we finish our job: it'll take only 15 or 20 minutes, and I assure you we'll leave the place spic and span." My tone was polite official, reasonable, but not obsequious. I had put the man in the position that if he were to order us off the property, he would be a monster.

"Uhn," he grunted, "but be sure this place is clean when you leave." And he stalked off.

I shot the boys a sly grin and they immediately understood what had happened. And we talked about it over lunch.

During the shooting here, a Chinese girl from the neighborhood wandered in. We coaxed her into being in the film, which is what she really wanted. Her name was Laura Louie and she worked fine. All three boys fell in love with her, immediately.

Now they had gained in courage and momentum, they were "into" the film. We braved the actual streets of Chinatown, following our outline, but incorporating whatever seemed useful or fun: we passed by a knife shop with quite a window display, and it was written into the script, for instance. We went to have lunch, and that was "written in" as part of the film. I worked the camera and made suggestions. The boys did the rest.

It was their first film acting, and I think they did remarkably well. The karate scenes were really beautifully done--a corny way of putting it would be: it was like classical ballet. Hector could be a fine dancer, it seems to me. The fight scenes were surprisingly convincing. They were teaching each other how to act and they were learning

about film making, and there were those moments, some too small even to remember, during which they learned other things about simply being alive and growing up.

One too obvious example was in the Chinese restaurant. Tony had never been to one. He had no idea of how to use the chop sticks. Ronald and Hector had more experience in this rather delicate area. Some had a better grasp of what a menu was and how it was arranged. We had some incredible conversations about fortune cookies and

As he leaves the restaurant, we might notice two suspicious characters lurking outside, one of them a blind man reading a Chinese newspaper...

the notion of putting words inside of food. None of the boys knew whether or not we should leave a tip, and if so, how much. I explained Basic Tipping. Hector had a twinge of conscience when he realized that he had never ever left a tip at his local soda fountain.

Time and again small situations developed in which the kids seemed to be learning something basic about just getting along in the world, the kind of thing they learn faster from an outsider than from their parents (this is true of my own son, too). I wish I had taken notes that day, but there wasn't time, and the rush of sensations

was too intense to stop and note them or think about them.

We finished the shooting that afternoon. The action went as follows: Ronald makes bets that no one can beat his strong man, played by Tony, who is a hefty kid. A lone fellow, played by Hector, accepts the challenge. Hector and Tony battle. Hector defeats the strong man. Ronald reneges on his offer and takes Hector on. Hector demolishes him too and seizes the money. He flees past the beautiful Chinese girl who has been watching this contest from a safe distance. She waves as he sprints past: he has no time for affairs of the heart.

He disappears into the maze of sights and sounds that is our Chinatown. Strange language, strange signs. He pauses before a knife store, surveys the display, goes in to buy a knife. When he comes out we might notice two suspicious characters in sunglasses, their faces covered with Band-Aids. These suspicious characters (Tony and Ronald) follow our hero to a Chinese restaurant where he has lunch. He loves his lunch. But the fortune cookie spills out this terrifying message, "You blinded me. I'll get my revenge. Signed, Ronald." As he leaves the restaurant, we might notice two suspicious characters lurking outside, one of them a blind man reading a Chinese newspaper, the other a derelict weaving around in the street. These two individuals follow our hero to a street where they attack him for the final climactic encounter. The two villains attack Hector with swords! In a stunning display of karate and sheer spunk he completely destroys them, the real coup de grâce

coming when he plunges his two fingers into the blind man's eye sockets and dislodges the ocular orbs: Ronald grabs his face in agony and, as he lowers his hands, opens them to reveal two incredibly bloody eyeballs!! Then the screen says, "The Bloody End."

I had the film developed and I did some basic editing at home, then took it to school and played it to the boys' class: it was an instant smash hit. Other classes loved it also. The only class which shied away from it was a timid second grade class: they thought the eyeballs were real. It scared the daylights out of them.

By this time I had realized that no judging committee on earth would award this film first prize: its violence and lack of professionalism left it out of the running, and by this time Hector realized that he was more interested in making films than in winning contests.

As the school year ended I heard that Young Film Makers, the New York group which had lent me the camera and given me much good advice, had a center for kids on the Lower East Side. I found out the details and gave them to Hector. I told him

that he could go to this center and learn more about movie making, and I strongly encouraged him and the other boys to do so, but secretly I thought nothing would come of this.

In the fall of this year (1973) Hector called me to ask if he could borrow the print of JAPANESE KARATE KILLERS to show at his new school P.S. 60, a junior high. I said sure and made arrangements to lend him the film-- he should have his own copy. I hesitantly inquired about the summer and Young Film Makers. To my surprise he said he had gone, had liked the people, had his own space there all summer, and had made five animated films!! as well as going on a field trip and working with videotape!! I was thrilled to pieces and I still am.

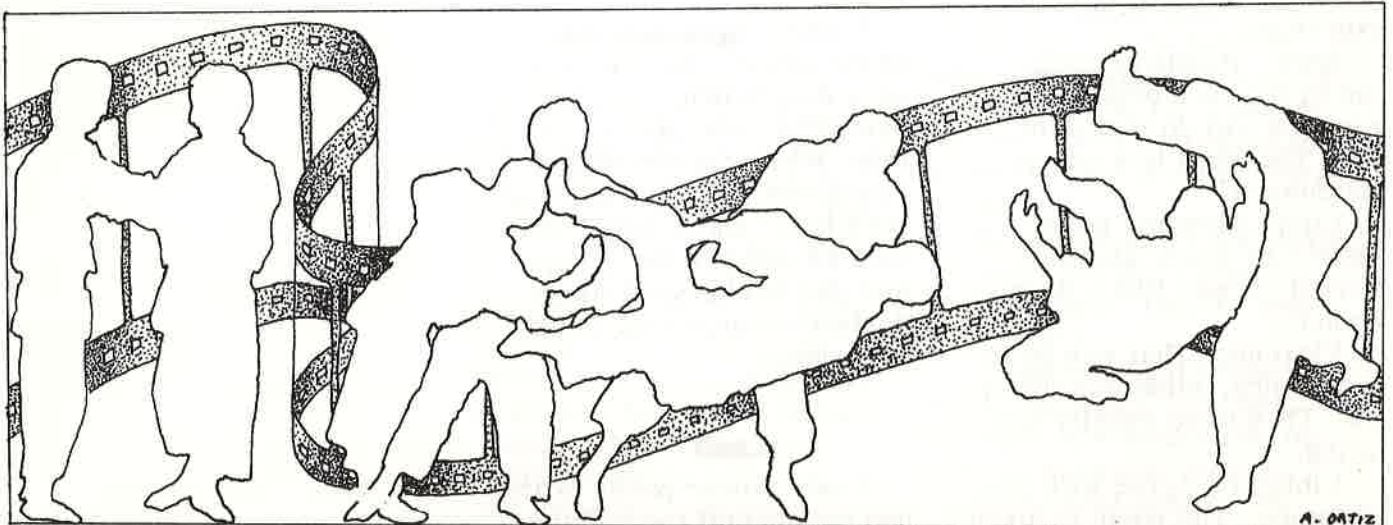
Afterword:

I had intended this piece not to be so much a personal diary of my experience with a single kid or group, but a discussion of how valuable this type of experience had been for me, valuable because it was removed from the typical school environment, with its restrictions, its tacit demands on standard behavior, its very school-

ness. I've had wonderful teaching experiences in schools, but none which equalled this one qualitatively. The making of this film turned out to be the most single valuable teaching experience I've ever had, because it was a complete experience: the children and I were friends working together on something which gave us mutual pleasure, instruction and satisfaction, in a "real-life" situation, and there was a way to give this pleasure to others, by showing the film.

In a recent teaching jaunt to Wilmington, several teachers there expressed a strong desire to work with some of their kids on Saturdays. Apparently the school system discourages or forbids this through insurance regulations. I don't really know the facts. I do know that while most teachers take a well-deserved rest on Saturday and Sunday, that some have special interests they would pursue these days, and they should be permitted to do so.

But it's not just weekends I'm talking about: I'm talking about the quality of the experience, a quality which, ideally, I'd like to have every time I teach, no matter when, no matter where. ■



After reading last week's poem, 'A Well-Mixed Cake', the group got into a heated discussion about which was more damaging: a word or a slap.

Yetta, a member of the original Thursday poetry group, returning now after several months, said: 'A patsch vergeht, und a vort basheht' (A slap is forgotten, but a word remains).

Florence: It all depends on who it comes from.

Lilly Palace asserted that

adults. A slap is detrimental and insulting and leaves a lasting impression, but between children and parents it's normal.

This evoked, once again, vehemence of disagreement between Florence and Lillian, who struck me as a rather opinionated champion of open-mindedness.

Yetta: Well, it depends on different relations. My husband, if he hit me, it would be a blow, it would be terrible, but words can

The Word Vs. The Slap

excerpts from a forthcoming book

by **MARC KAMINSKY**

based on writing workshops conducted for old people

words were positively more hurtful and vehemently defended this position against anyone who questioned or challenged it. When Florence reiterated that any form of cruelty is cruel. Lilly argued her position with something of a religious fervor. 'The sensitive individual will always feel the word more than the slap, I'm talking from experience.'

Rose: People arguing can bring each other to tears, a smack will do less damage. The word is a sharp instrument.

Lilly: When my father spoke--he never slapped--I cried, it was like a deep wound.

Florence: That was your experience, mine was different. They were equally humiliating.

Libby: I'd agree with you, Florence. The poem is about

be crippling. I almost died because of what someone said to me.

As a general proposition or truth, the issue was not resolvable; I said that it was less important to decide, as a general rule, whether the slap or word were more hurtful than to accept the validity of each one's experience.

Libby, more than any of the others, had the necessary detachment and also sympathy to be able to do this. What was significant, I said, was that each one had been hurt, and deeply, and said as much to the group, and that her general ideas derived from her particular experience.

Leah

Leah, whose poem 'Words' had touched off the collab-

orative poem under discussion, asked me if writers were not continually discontent. I said that this was a popular belief, but untrue. I said writers experienced both gratification and discontent in their work, like many other kinds of workers; that the gratification was as real and strong as the discontent and more fleeting.

Leah said she had always been discontented with her writing. 'It was a big step, to try to write again. I spent thirteen years writing, they said I was talented and that I should find a teacher. But this is the first I've written in years. Lillian inspired this when she said, 'Words are beautiful.' I thought to myself right off, 'Words move mountains, words move armies,' I thought of all the other things words do. You know I was never really satisfied with anything. But last week I felt a way of going back, this group has done that.'

'We inspire each other,' said Lilly.

I asked her if she was content with her new poem, and she said that she was-- but she seemed reluctant to say so.

Mr. Lerman

One of the case-aides referred Mr. Lerman to the Tuesday Club, so that he might be in the Poetry Group. Nearly blind, more than half-deaf, he sat next to me, breathing heavily, his hands palsied, his body leaning over to hear me better--causing a good deal of anxiety among the women--and myself--who were afraid he would fall over. His presence brought out all their motherliness; and,

in fact, he could have so easily become the focal point for concern and anxiety, that I had to tear myself--and the group--away from him, who sat in our midst pulling us towards him--and insist we go on with our work, and give Samuel Lerman every opportunity to participate, but not sit there waiting for him to collapse.

It was difficult at first, with him sitting next to me, so obviously ill, aged, decrepit; it was hard for me to concentrate on anything else. His physical presence weighed on me, pressed in on me, and moved me intensely: he made me both uncomfortable and filled me with a desire to stop everything and nurse him. However, we carried on.

I don't know how much he heard or caught of what was going on. He held the xeroxed copies of the poems half an inch from his eyes and read them over while we spoke.

'Can I talk now?'

'Wait till Leah finishes.'

Then he had the floor; he half stood up, and made the following speech:

'Comrades, let me call you comrades, I see a group with more souls than bodies, if not for souls you wouldn't be interested in poetry.

'A poet can be the one who cannot write. A poet can be the one who feels and observes. I will disregard the proper forms of a few things I read.'

He turned to me and asked: 'Should I correct them?'

No, I said, they're fine as they are.

'I will disregard this. Also, disregard rhymes. We want new modern forms. It's not to repeat what A, B, and C said better. My suggestion as an ex-editor

and as a Yiddish poet is this: anyone who feels to write should start with it, souls tell you what to put on paper. Start to be new. Start to do what you feel. Disregard what is old-fashioned--go on with it--don't look for rhymes--it's not a must--you souls need to show out, do you agree?'

Leah: I threw all rhymes away and it came out good.'

Lerman: Yes, give us something new, something your soul tells you to put on paper, were living in a new world. New blood, new feelings, new poems!

Oh, I am proud to see a group interested together to listen and learn.

The group applauded him enthusiastically; the old man nodded and nodded, delighted.

It was so sad! So vigorous a mind in such a decrepit body--his voice was shrill and cracked, he had to screw up his face into a grimace to get out the words, he could not hear what others were saying, he could barely see--but how alive he was!

Lerman sat down and re-

'Over twenty one.'

When pressed, he answered,

'Four times that plus five.'

Eighty-nine.

As he left, in answer to something someone said, Dora said: 'Dos is gold'(That is gold). When Rose tried to help Lerman put on his jacket, Dora intervened: 'Let be--he has one head.'

One Head and Two Hats

Shortly after Lerman finished speaking, Pincus, an earthy, angry, stocky old man burst into the room, screaming at the top of his lungs: 'That guy wants to walk off with my hat, stop him!'

Pincus has started or at least added fuel to the fire of more than one fight, so initially I was merely annoyed at him for disrupting the group. I quickly saw that he was implacable, disturbed, and perhaps justifiably indignant; I saw, moreover, he would in no way leave the room until he got justice. It was for him a deadly serious matter--his hat, after all. All right, I would go and

Yes, give us something new, something your soul tells you to put on paper...

mained quiet. About half an hour later he wrestled his body out of the chair. He said: I hope you help one another.

Dora quipped, with evident affection, 'Yah, we'll go straight to heaven.'

Lerman went around the room, shaking hands, and everyone stood up to shake his hand and say a good word to him. Rose asked: 'How old are you?' screaming it into his ear.

Lerman (and I'll never forget the silly and touching voice he answered with):

see what was happening.

A slight man was standing at the door--a man I've seen in the crowd week after week, noticing only the grotesqueness of his thin wizened face, and his manner of total incomprehension of all that is going on around him. He sits with his wife--equally grotesque, a small woman with a burst of shockingly red artificial hair. He carries his head slightly thrown back, and peers out at the world from half-closed eyes: what you are aware of is a pair of nostrils, turned out



to the world as if in a perennial state of beclottedness, gasping for air, and half-slits for eyes that have as much trouble seeing as the nose does in breathing.

A crowd collected to witness the scene. Pincus too ran up, demanded the hat, and the thin man—he is brain-damaged or in some other way impaired—had the manner of a long oppressed victim who for once is going to stand up for his rights. No, it was his hat, and he would not give it up, people were always trying to steal his hat, and he would not, he would not, let it happen this time. And what about the hat on his head? Yes, that was his hat too.

Before the thing was settled there was a fist fight, and unsuccessful attempt to involve his wife, who would not leave her card-game; futile and half-mad negotiations—finally Pincus grabbed his hat and ran.

Back in the poetry group:

Sol: The man claims he has two hats and he only has one head, he one head and he's looking for another hat.

Dora: No, he's looking for the head he doesn't have!

In the ensuing discussion, Dora turned back criticism of the wife by saying: 'She tries to keep him in shape, she watches him at every step, she's so worn out with straightening up after him.'

The Snout

I had brought in a passage from Loren Eisley's Immense Journey to read to the group, and though it was late, they asked to hear it. The passage is a strange combination of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Michealangelo's *Creation*, and tells of the exigencies that forced the fish which Eisley unscientifically calls the Snout to land. It is one of the grand moments of *Life*, a moment of creation, when out of ooze, out of con-

ditions certain to cause the extinction of a species, *Life* emerges.

The discussion of the passage was centered largely on the issue of belief, on Genesis vs. Darwin, on faith vs. open-mindedness.

Yetta, who was quite secure in her belief that 'we come from God,' could enjoy it 'like a fairy-tale.' But Dora could not, she spat out the word 'Darwin,' and that settled the matter.

I said I was not interested in changing anyone's beliefs, and I was quite content to view Eisley's landscape imaginatively. I said, of course, that I happened to believe in the truth of the passage, but that I didn't think it was necessary to do so to enjoy and be moved in the passage, just as one can find Macbeth meaningful and true without the belief in witches. The passage was vivid in its imagery, set in a (to us) unfamiliar landscape, and provided us with a pole for identification: the fish is, after all, an immigrant who survives --a fact not lost on Libby and Florence, both of whom responded to the heroic values implicit in the passage.

Dora was still naturally vehement 'If I believe the Jew is the sacred being in God how could I believe in Darwin?'

And yet, she was also curious: the group's interest in the passage, and their strong appeal to her to keep an open mind, was an invitation. She appealed to the man. 'Sol, what do you think?'

'Well, Dora, I have an open mind.'

'How many inches?' (General laughter.) Dora spread her thumb and index finger to indicate something small in size.

Sol: I was never a reader,

I never had time, now I want to learn, I want to keep an open mind. I think: Leave an opening, don't have a one track mind, or just one idea.

Someone was going to interrupt Sol, Florence I think, to defend Dora; but Dora didn't want defending. 'Let him speak,' she said.

Sol, like most of the group members, has enormous respect for Dora's quickness of wit, for her articulate and coherent point of view; he gave her unabashed praise.

Dora is an innately modest person and felt uncomfortable receiving the general onslaught of praise she now received.

Florence: I admire Dora because she has the courage of her convictions.

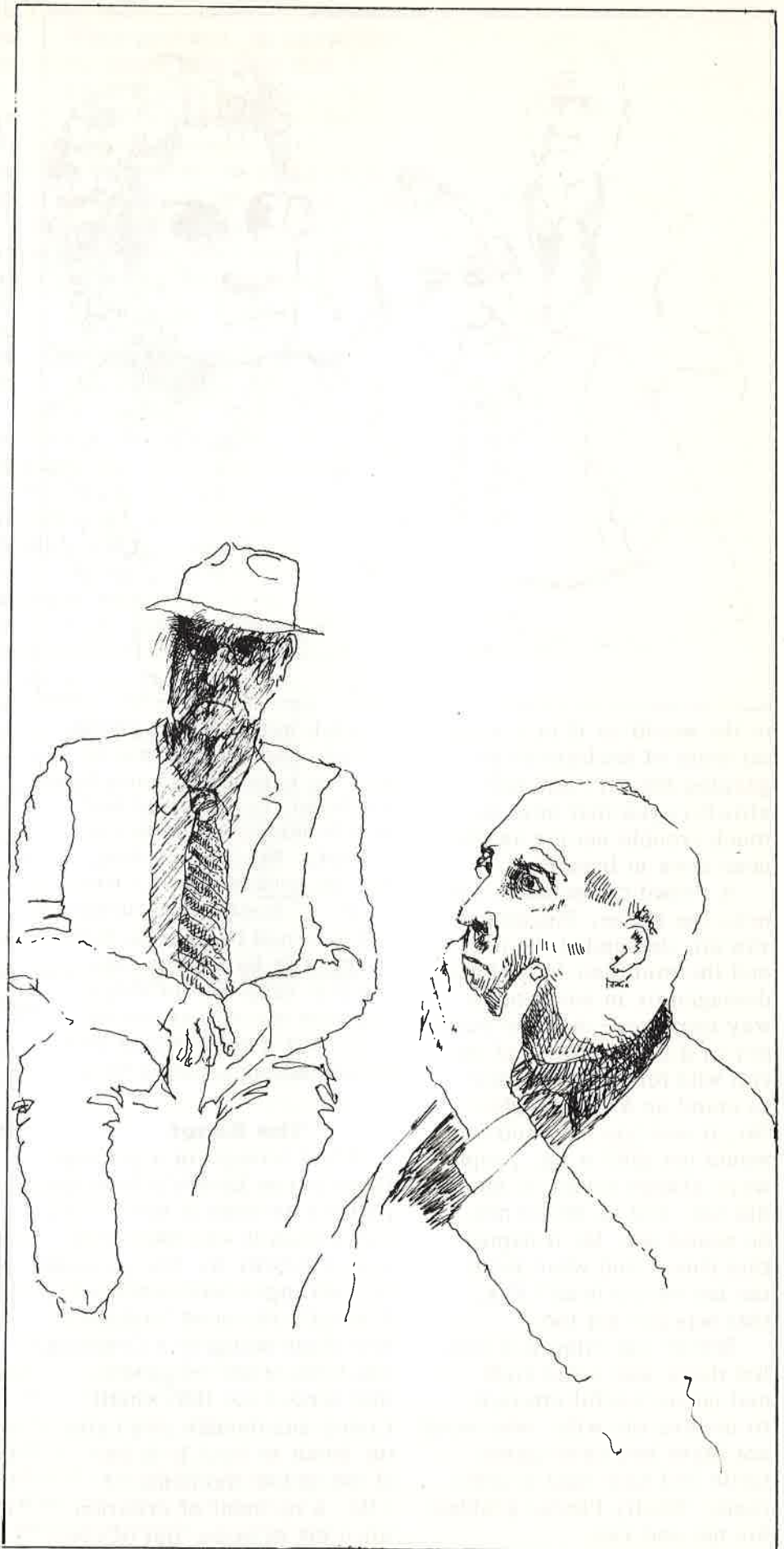
Rose: I disagree with Florence, you can't argue with a fixed mind, a mind with one idea, convictions can close your mind, but Dora has a superior mind.

Florence: When you reach Dora's age, maybe you'll be the same.

Dora: I was a chozer, a free-thinker, now that I'm older, I'm frum (pious).

At the end, Libby spoke about the virtues of open-mindedness and the equally valuable but different virtues imparted by conviction.

As we broke up, I asked each group member to do what Leah had done: seize something spoken in today's group, and use it as a starting-point of a poem. I repeated Lerman's words about soul-dictation and I also said that if some image or idea in the Snout passage took hold of them they might write about that. I suggested to Dora that she expand her incisive and funny statement about the two-hatted man missing a head into a poem or story. ■



The subtitle of Kenneth Koch's WISHES, LIES, AND DREAMS is "Teaching Children to Write Poetry". The term "teaching" could, in this context mean either "How To Teach", or "How I Teach"; and I believe the distinction is crucial.

I accept the book as the personal journal of a poet some of whose insights and ideas may be of use to me in my own work with children, in the same way I find useful the journals of teachers, writers and other artists in this Newsletter. I reject the book, as an introductory manual ("Teaching"="How To Teach"), and I think it is here that it has been most misused since its publication three years ago.

I'd like to give a couple of examples of the passages in WISHES, LIES, AND DREAMS which I have found valuable, because I think the uses can sometimes illuminate the misuses

1) I often use a tape recorder with classes and sometimes there are difficulties, it doesn't go as well as I want it to, something seems wrong with the medium, I didn't have any real cause for it in my head; Koch clarified it for me: "I found writing--or even typing--better than using a tape recorder. The time it takes to write or type a line gives the children a chance to work a little more on their ideas. And when the work is read back, it sounds more like a poem because all the incidental noise (laughter shouted comments) is left out." (P. 48)

2) Koch's way of inserting elements that give poems a surreal strangeness is a useful idea for me because my own poems, and my work with children do not tend that way. So I like for example, the Swan of Bees idea----making something of something else

Kenneth Koch's Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: THE SCRIPTURAL FALLACY

critique by DICK LOURIE

(a book of kisses, a boat of sinking water)---and I have decided to try something like that in my next cycle of classes.

But I believe it is in the context of my own experience as a poet in the classroom that these particular things are useful to me. I think if I were a teacher inexperienced in writing poetry with children I might not realize that this surreal strangeness is one aspect (or style or tendency) among many in contemporary poetry--- so that my own work with the children would tend to be more limited.

Or I might refrain from experimenting with a tape recorder in my classroom because Kenneth Koch says it doesn't work well for him--- regardless of the possibility that it might work for me and my class.

These are, it seems to me, the kind of errors that could be made by a person who understands "Teaching", in the subtitle as "How to Teach". Further what might such a person conclude using as the sole yardstick the

selection of poems by children in WISHES, LIES, AND DREAMS, about the direction in which one's own "Teaching Poetry to Children" should go?

Perhaps that poetry as written by children should almost always (not just sometimes) be concerned with fantasy--- which our theoretical teacher in fact might take to mean poetic imagination.

Perhaps (this converse is implied also) that children's poetry should hardly ever concern itself directly with their lives, their feelings, their experience, directly stated, unfiltered by fantasy.

Perhaps that precise observation (and precise rendering of it) is not appropriate to the poetry children write.

Perhaps that the proper stance for almost all (not just some) children's poetry is playfulness.

All of these are related; they all have to do with the particular style of how a certain poet works in specific classrooms in a specific school. The fallacy I am concerned with lies in trying to generalize from these specific experiences. You can't; any more than you can make general statements about poetry by extrapolating from the work of one poet.

I want it to be clear that I am not attacking Kenneth Koch or his approach---there have been discussions, criticisms, defenses, analyses, in this area, and I assume there will be more---but I am trying here to talk only about the way the book is used by others, in their classroom work. What I'm saying is that this book implies, often by omission, that Koch's methods are Methods, and that Koch's students are not the children of PS 61, but Children.

In at least one passage though, Koch himself is clear on this point:

"I was learning from their poems also. Having the children associate colors and sounds as preparation for the Color Poems and the Poems Written To Music was an idea I got from Mary Minns' poem and others like it. We were, the students and I, creating something like a literary tradition, and everyone could learn and profit from it." (p. 37)

When I work in a school

not a journal. I saw neatly printed on oaktag in an elementary school hallway several neo-Koch "I used to be" poems; but they were not the same as those of the PS 61 tradition, where, as Koch says, interesting and magical transformations and metempsychoses were taking place. These were quite obviously the teacher's idea; and the children apparently did the best they could with something they were less than stirred by: "I used to be a box, but now I'm a fox"; "I used to be a bee, but now

in their development as poets and what they might be ready for next." (p. 13) and this is one of the important passages in the book, because this is really the one thing we all need to know, how to be with the specific children in our specific classroom, and to see where they are going and what they want to write, if it's poetry-writing we're working with. That's how an exciting and organic tradition develops.

Most poets working in schools know this; some teachers don't, because they haven't worked

This is a good example of one of the 'fatal flaws' of American public education, the notion that the teacher ought to know exactly where the kids are heading, what the rules are, and precisely how they will get there.

I and those children and those teachers create a tradition too---it is organically grown out of that situation, that milieu, that bunch of people. It may or may not resemble in certain ways the tradition of PS 61. It may or may not produce poems based on wishes, colors, lies, comparisons, etc.

We could if we wanted make our work artificially resemble PS61's work. That's easy; in 10 minutes I could with a class reproduce a wish poem. All I have to do is impose the formula "I wish" on the children (One of the ironies here is how easily one person's organically grown form, developed specifically as an alternative to imposed form, can be taken by someone else and imposed on a group of children).

Of course that isn't what I or anyone else wants to do, but I know it happens sometimes because I've seen it happen. Koch is aware of the dangers here, but some of his readers are not; and they use the book like a method,

I'm a tree"; I used to be a rat, but now I'm a skunk".

What had happened here, in other words, was that they had made out of this pre-existing form, a kind of logical association game. In fact it was the pre-existence itself of the form that led to this. This is a good example of one of the "fatal flaws" in American public education, the notion that the teacher ought to know exactly where the kids are heading, what the rules are, and precisely how they will get there.

To use WISHES, LIES, AND DREAMS this way is as if you expected your lettuce to come up looking exactly like the stringbeans the professional gardener wrote his article about.

Again Koch himself says: "This (the Swan of Bees idea) was only one of many poetry ideas I had which were directly inspired by the children's work. After my students had written a few basic poems like Comparisons, Wishes, I began to be guided more by my sense of where they were

much with poetry. I believe if a teacher had to choose between using Koch's book all by itself as a "guide" to doing poetry with children, and using no book at all, that the wiser choice would be no book at all. Let the children explore by themselves, let them find out how to develop a literary tradition. They will do it if they are simply encouraged to follow their natural paths freely, to write what they want to write, and not be judged, only valued. You don't need books to develop children's writing, you just start them writing; the tradition will, as Koch points out, develop from the children reading and influencing one another's work.

What I'm suggesting, finally, is that WISHES, LIES AND DREAMS has sometimes been influential in harmful ways---it has been taken as How To Do It, not How I Do It; it has been treated as the work of the master rather than that of a colleague; it has been enshrined as gospel rather than incorporated into the body of useful knowledge. ■

Write Me Something

by BETTE DISTLER

I was giving the children assignments, mostly based on Koch's book, but I wasn't really teaching.

I started out in costume. I was a new poet who had written a children's book and who had swallowed Kenneth Koch's Wishes, Lies and Dreams. I was exciting but unreal. The children responded to my informality, even in the beginning there were glimmers of my reality. I was giving the children assignments, mostly based on Koch's book, but I wasn't really teaching. The teacher's enjoyed me. I was easy to copy. The kids liked sitting on the floor, having someone listen to them. Somewhere in this the truth, my truth, began to emerge. It took a while for me to let loose, to relax, to be who I was. Things were beginning to happen to me. I was writing poetry, working with a poet, developing a confidence, a trust in myself that was going to build and build until it included all of the children I met with every day. I began picking up more from the children. Instead of just giving them assignments I now had the need to know them, touch them, somehow communicate something, get them to feel, about themselves the way I was beginning to feel about me perhaps like an evange-

list of self. I don't know but I felt more, understood more and began to make contact. I remembered if someone said they hated their brother and the little girl who wanted to look like Raquel Welch and who wished she'd been absent the day they made a movie of themselves. I became a teacher who cared about each child, not just their poetry, not what they did, but who they were and how they felt about themselves, about each other, about their world. Exciting things began to happen.

I began to rely on my instincts. I had planned things in my head, but if the mood of the class went one way, I went with them. I became sensitive to the nuances, and the children responded as never before. I was going with their rhythms. I learned to listen and to ask questions. I never judged what was said or what was written. They had complete respect and so did I. The children had control over what they wrote. I never read anything out loud without permission and no one had to hand in what they had written. I had given them through trial and error exactly

the freedom I had gotten for myself. The more confidence I got in myself, in my poetry the more I trusted what was inside the children. I was developing a way of communication because I was communicating. One day I brought in a painting and the children wrote how they felt about it. I read them a poem I had written about the painting. They responded to my openness by being open; they knew I meant what I said or didn't say; there was acceptance on both sides. I had the children keep notebooks recording their feelings (personal notebooks, just for themselves); they were beginning to give themselves a picture of their private world. I told them I kept a notebook (that most poets do), and I read them a little bit from a small notebook I carry in my pocketbook. The sharing became easier and easier and developed naturally as we went along. Where once I had begun by precise assignments now I sat with the class and talked with them, felt with them. It was real, it was sharing; it was teaching. I found myself repeating again and

again "how did you feel , what did it feel like?" always bringing them back to inside themselves , where everything begins. Once I got a poem folded over and stapled on four sides, FOR BETTE ONLY. They were beginning to write from real feelings.

I had a sixth grade that I couldn't make contact with. I had tried different assignments but somehow they came off phoney. I knew I had to do something else. I went home thinking, trying to figure out how to reach them. I remembered sixth grade and being eleven years old; self conscious full of shyness and aggression, an exhibitionist with a glass ego, a state of limbo between little girl and woman. Then I remembered the one place I had read these feelings, *Catcher in the Rye*. I scheduled an extra class. I brought them into the Moppet* Room; (it's round and carpeted) we all sat on the floor. It was a half fast circle. They were reluctant (I had two boring classes to my credit). "I want to talk to you." They just looked at me. "I haven't been teaching you right." The circle got more cohesive. "I want to read something to you." I let Holden Caulfield take over. They were listening. Something was real. I skipped through the book: "this is where he ran away. . . this is when he was at school. . . he's wandering in New York. . ." I stopped reading. "What do you think?" They began to talk: " It sounds real. . . He talks real" "Do you know how he feels?" They nod their heads. "Do you like it?"

there is no question. "OK. . . that's what it's all about: They are feeling something. "Write me something. . anything" "Anything?" someone asks, "Anything," I say. Round two is beginning. . . They hand me their papers and leave. A boy asks me the name of the book again and writes it down. A girl stays a minute to talk to me. I'm alone. I begin to read the papers. The sexual fall out might be some kind of record. There were a couple of deliberately "obscene" papers. There were a lot of references to making love and in some papers it was very beautiful. There was no question this was a grade A test. I walked into their classroom. Some of the kids looked frightened. I knew they thought I'd come to lynch them. I was cool. "Listen," I said, "I read your papers. I wonder if you would do me a favor? Would you preview this film, tomorrow , The Lady and the Tiger? I'm thinking of using it in some of my classes and I want your opinion." They nodded their heads, I set a time, and I left.

The next morning they were another group of kids. They knew something was different. They didn't know it was them. We watched the film, got into a discussion of the king's jealous daughter. It was time to go. Would you write a little something about how it feels to be jealous. Someone can drop the papers off in the Moppet Room. " The papers came in later, no obscene words , just kids writing about feelings and perhaps soon some poetry. ■

*Media-Oriented Program Promoting Exploration in Teaching is a Tittle III program currently operating in the Woodbridge Schools, New Jersey

The great Medieval unit grew out of an enthusiasm of Ruth Lowy, the cluster/art teacher for the first floor hall group. She and Phil Lopate, the other writer in the same hall group, had already made some plans for miniature castles, stained glass windows, banners and tournaments in the gym. My first introduction to the whole plan came when I walked into Robin Rubinger's room armed with my usual twentieth century tricks for turning children into writers, and Robin said, "Oh, I didn't tell you; we're all doing a medieval unit." The class was already making a sort of bestiary-cum-monster book. That was when I first saw that I had a future teaching medieval literature to fifth graders.

I was actually delighted. What eyebrow raising from my friends when I say casually, "Oh we're doing Everyman with the ten year olds, that's right ten year olds, and the

Mid-Evil Times

by SUE WILLIS

**A foggy spooky winter when
Everybody marched around with candles.**

Canterbury Tales. The kids are writing a dance of death play, and I taught them analogy and the great chain of being. Phillip is reading to his class from Dante's Inferno. "Intellectual history, political science geography-- I could teach them anything because, ladies and gentlemen, one of the marvels of working with children is that: science fiction, American Indians Mount Olympus, the Olden Days, King Kong and Godzilla land, the Middle Ages and Marvel Comix are all fascinating.

My own attitude toward the Middle Ages is less informed than enthusiastic; I have no scholarly qualms about mining the Middle Ages for the hooks that will catch the children's interest; I accept telephones in a dance of death play, and when I tell Chaucer's Knight's Tale, I give Queen Hippolyta of the Amazons a touch of women's liberation consciousness. When I tell "The Wife of Bath's Tale" and the class demands an uglier witch, I give her a hunchback and more warts. Phillip did a class poem by having his group imagine what a time was like that we now call the Dark Ages:

A foggy spooky winter when
Everybody marched around with candles.

Nobody claims it's historically accurate, but on the other hand, the epithet "Dark Ages" has carried an emotional force that has misrepresented the Middle Ages for generations. At the same time I have quite seriously tried on occasion to teach myself Anglo-Saxon, and I have read the Canterbury Tales in Middle English. In my initial excitement over this project, I reread all the literary introduc-

tions in my textbooks; I picked up Henri Pirenne's History of Europe and The Waning of the Middle Ages by J. Huizinga. I read Everyman plus some lyrics and ballads. I made little charts for myself, to see where Beowulf stood in relation to the Crusades and The Canterbury Tales. I had a thoroughly lovely time thinking and reading about the Middle Ages.

Back in the classroom, I found the kids divided in two groups when it came to Medieval Times. First there was the dracula-dragon crowd, then the knights-and-ladies crowd roughly corresponding to the kids' economic classes. That is, kids whose families take them to the Metropolitan Museum thought Knights and the kids whose families don't, thought monsters. I think someone showed them a picture of Saint George and the dragon. When I think of the Middle Ages, I think dirty fabliaux and the bubonic plague and "Whan that Aprille" and saints knucklebones and Gregorian chants.

Two of the handful of songs I can chord on the guitar are the medieval ballads "Greensleeves" and "Barbra Allen." The interesting point about the oldest version of the latter is that it specifies the reason Barbra wouldn't fall in love with Sir John Graeme: at a big feast, he toasted all the women present in turn, but not Barbra, and she was deeply insulted. This high seriousness over details of courtesy is intrinsic to the chivalric code. My first lesson was a mixed bag of such comments, plus singing handouts of the Lord's Prayer in Anglo-Saxon, Middle English, Early Modern English (King James Bible) and twentieth century English. The class was impressed with the funny sounding language: I don't think they really believed it was English. Some weeks later, I gave them for fun, and to make them examine the old languages closely, a mistranslation exercise using fragments of Old French, (from The Cid). The object of a mistranslation is to write a poem-piece inspired by a few lines of a language you don't understand. Many words in foreign languages are reminiscent of words in English. Unusual poems can come out of it. Then, on the first day I asked them to write a short piece from the point of view of a person or thing or animal in the Middle Ages. Nelly and Cynthia were fascinated by the absolute power of queenship; their characters give orders to their servants, who included everyone in sight. Ayala, also playing with power, saw herself as Lady Ayala the official head-chopper-off. Gretchen wanted to write a horse story; so all traces of the Middle Ages disappeared after the first sentence to be replaced by "a sweet little filly" and a "huge Dapple Gray." Trips to the Cloisters and to the armored division of the Metropolitan brought out the thirst for esoteric facts and words. At the Cloisters at least half the class started searching the rooms for something the art teacher had described: "Is that a triptych? No, I think that is." Back in the class room one group of boys painstakingly began making chain mail out of soda can tops; others made books of illustrations of weapons and armor. They perfected and hung on the walls sketches they had made of art objects and architectural details at the Cloisters. Felix Moreno is probably the only nine year old in existence to have drawn in some detail, labelled,

THE DARK AGES

In the Dark Ages the sun blacked out
And the moon blocked the sun
People were going around in dark felt suits
A foggy spooky winter when
Everybody marched around with candles.
Wolves went Awooooooh--
Bats flew through the air like haunted quails
Ghosts rattled their chains.
A war was fought with fire and cap guns
And water pistols that shot electricity,
That burned their felt suits.
They are fighting over a gold key
That opened the door to light,
That was kept inside a cover
Inside a cloud
In a place where they had never been
Inside of heaven.
A white place, white as snow
Bleary and foggy white as ghosts
White as flowers in heaven.

October 11--After Cloisters trip
P. S. 75 Manhattan.

and grasped the function of the PYX. It may never help him make his way out there on the big bad Street, but he certainly had a wonderful complacent expression when Robin, his teacher, expressed her pleasure in learning something from him.

At about this time, I had a small personal revolt against matters of the imagination, and I was full of my readings on Medieval intellectual history and political history. The classroom teachers were not Medievalists at all-- I think one of the far reaching values of this project was that they had a good time learning in this unit too. Robin's growing enthusiasm for the Middle Ages included her finding one of those adult coloring books of the beginning of the Canterbury Tales, complete with a record in the back of a reading from it. I myself was in a mood for sharing all that good wholesome whole-grain information that I often feel is somehow off-limits for us creative personnel. The challenge is to find ways of explaining simply and entertainingly without condescending. I xeroxed world maps and we put dots for Jerusalem and circled Europe. This lesson fell conveniently during the Israel-Egypt/Syria war so I could tie the Crusades with two thousand years of problems among Christians, Jews, and Moslems. We made timelines and wrote a class poem about time. "A hundred years," said Nicky, "That's how long announcements last on the P. A. speaker." One day I wrote analogies on the

board to show the point by point allegorical comparisons possible when you look at all of creation in a single hierarchy, with a place for everyone and thing, or in microcosms of that hierarchy. God is at the top with the devil in Hell at the bottom and man somewhere in the middle. Analogically, the King would be at the top, serfs toward the bottom, but the infidels down on a level with the damned. "Why, you could put anything into this way of looking at the world", I said in my excitement. "Even the animal kingdom: here's the lion on the top with the king, and the snake on the bottom with Satan"--- but unfortunately my pig came out on the same level as common people, and that brought down the house, and the class ended with much guffawing.

At the same time I was doing these lessons with the whole class, I was beginning play-making with them in small groups of seven to ten children. As part of the preparation, I told them the story of the Everyman morality play. Everyman, of course is not a given name but a label, and the character is not to be a person, but an emblem. The personages in the poem-play all have names like Death, Goods, and Kin. I spoke of the Medieval interest in death: that people died younger; many children never reached adulthood; an awareness of death was important in religion. In one group we chose a variety of types of characters: robbers, litterbugs, a good woman, a bossy woman, one who talks too much. Each child wrote a sketch from the point of view of his or her character. William wrote, and then read aloud in a deep, gratified voice, "I am the robber.

I love to rob people. I run
down the street and snatch people's
pocketbooks and run off. And then
she says Help Help and she calls
the police and then I get to my
hideout and count the money."

Then we did improvisations with these characters interacting. In the end, a character named Death came out and took all their hands and we danced in a circle around the room. Shielda and Gwen stayed with me after the others left and wrote the beginning of a connected story using the available characters and some of the actions they had improvised. This narrowing down the organizing minds of an improvised play is usually an essential step. The last half of the play they dictated to me. At our next meeting we extended the dialogue with a tape recorder. As the play progressed more children joined in until there were a total of ten with parts. Kimi came up one day and said, "My mother is an actress and she says this play doesn't sound very Medieval to her, not with all the telephones and police sirens." "Ah," said I, "But the spirit is Medieval." The next day Kimi said her mother still didn't think it was Medieval even in spirit, but she had decided to read Everyman. We finally presented the Dance of Death on a double bill with Phil and his class's A Medieval Play

We did our play in front of the main auditorium curtain because it still had some of the feeling of improvisation about; all the characters lined up

and introduced themselves; the last one was a pale little blonde girl with green make-up around her eyes and cold cream on her lips, wrapped in a sheet-shroud. "I am the person Death," she said, "I am going to get all of you." The other characters hooted her off the stage and went about their business. The business was quite varied: some farce some violence: a theft from a rich man's safe is followed by the thieves being mugged and beaten by two robbers. A gun battle ensues in which not only the cops and robbers are killed, but so are the litterbugs. The thieves die from being beaten; the rich man kills himself; a good woman has a heart attack. The stage is maggotty with writhing children happily hamming up their death agonies. Death comes out and begins taking them all by the hand; I step up and say "Thank goodness I'm a teacher and Death can't get me!" but you guessed it, little white death comes right over and does take me. We all join hands and go out wailing into the audience and pick up people and take them around the aisles with us. We thought the play was very edifying

Meanwhile, in the classroom, I had moved on to telling the stories of The Canterbury Tales. I tried to read at least a line or two of the actual Chaucer. The class liked the chivalry in The Knight's Tale where two young prisoners-of-war fall in love simultaneously with the fair

**Thank goodness I'm a teacher and Death can't
get me.**

Emilye. The theme of this tale is related to the theme of another one of our small group's plays that was developing. The importance of the chivalric code to the Middle Ages was a system of rules for war, and to a lesser extent, a system of game-rules for love. In the Knight's Tale, the two young knights learn to have order in both their hate and their love; instead of hand to hand combat in the forest, they join in a tournament over the beloved. In our play, there is a devil, Curtis, a professional teacher's nemesis who causes war between two castles. He disrupts their ordinary lives with unseemly hair pulling fights between the queens; even at the tournament he turns one of the knights into a dragon. Curtis loves his part; whenever the whole group is fighting and kicking and shoving on the stage he dances and laughs off to one side; this was his own reaction to the commotion and I quickly insisted it be part of the play. For all of his love of big excitement and fighting, Curtis quiets quickly with a hand on his head; he is not a particularly bitter kid; he just delights in noise and action. At the end of the play, when he is foiled, the other characters form a circle around him and have a ritual dance while he squirms on the floor.

The kids seem to have an essential grasp of the value of ceremony: I want to present the plays in the halls, in classrooms, wherever we can pull together an audience. They insist on the auditorium, the magic place where your private dramas are transformed into performances

and cheering. Phillip did a lesson on ceremony; he asked his class to write some that might take place today:

Ceremony for Separation

Drink Wine.
Go to court.
Bring in some monks.
Make a giant cake.
Tell everybody what you did when you were together.

There is a quality here of sensing the importance of how things are done, whether or not the significance of adult acts is grasped. The same Curtis who plays our disruptive Devil-force wrote a ceremony for going to church:

1. First you have to wash up.
2. Put on your church clothes.
3. Brush your hair.
4. Put on your coat.
5. Walk to church.
6. Sit on the back seats.
7. Pray.
8. Mom say "don't" laugh or play in "church"
9. Go home.

The Ceremony of Good Children Going to Church

Phillip and I and the teachers too felt the need for some sort of formal event that would pull together and heighten the meaning of all this Medieval inspired activity. We had projected some sort of Medieval festival for later in the year, but Halloween seemed a good time for something to happen. One of the analogical sets that throws some light on the Middle Ages for me is the Procession:: Crusade::Pilgrimage::the Progress of Life. Thus the Crusades were journeys for God, fun, and profit--adventure and religion. All human estates could go, poor foot soldiers and kings. The pilgrims who tell the Canterbury Tales too have a religious object although some would like to be healed by the saint's relics for their pains; others are taking a vacation. Each day of one's life is a sort of pilgrimage too. On religious occasions the relics of a well-loved saint would be carried about in procession for the edification of the people. The crowd would join in hoping for miracles of healing, to see the action to see how everyone was dressed for the festive occasion. This was the nature of the Medieval Procession we planned for Halloween. There were Halloween costumes to show off, there was a school to be impressed with our audacity, and then there was this nameless compulsion to celebrate.

Phillip came for the procession as an infidel, a Turk. I came as a leper-beggar. The classes lined up for the procession at opposite ends of the hall. I had a stocking over my face with eye holes cut out so that my features were mauled; there was a sign around my neck: Leper, Unclean! I had an alms cup, and, quasimodo style, I frightened little children who had come out for a trip to the bathroom. We had one sword resplendent in aluminum

foil; We had one gauntlet of soda pop top chain mail. We had a count dracula and a devil, and girls in long dresses with high cone hats. We had ghosts. Leading the procession were three monks in black hooded cloaks. One carried a cassette with Gregorian chants playing; a third carried a box three pretty girls made the day before, covered with gold paper and with the shape of a cross cut out of the top. Inside lay hairs and fingernails; relics of the saint. Led by the lame leper, we started down the hall chanting, Gobb-el, Gobb-el, Gobb-el, Gobb-el. Our chant rose above the modal music. "Hey", Gretchen whispered to me. "It sounds like 'Hole-y God, Hole-y God.'" We walked slowly with more dignity than I had expected, all a little awed by the power of our chant and appearance. I can't say exactly what we looked like because my eye holes kept slipping out of place; I know I saw the other procession coming toward us with a silvery knight clanking in front and Phil towering over the kids: the teachers never even knew I was there because my face was mashed and several of the fifth graders are taller than I am. I became hoarse quickly from leading the Gobb-el Gobb-el. The dark monks pressed at me from behind; faces popped out of classrooms; teachers herded them back, Secretaries in the office lifted their hands from their typewriters and swiveled their heads as little as possible to follow our progression around the office; in the basement, in the District III offices, a perfectly sane looking adult male pulled his sports coat over his head and ducked into a doorway. When we passed, he jumped out and wiggled his fingers at us.

We spilled out onto West End Avenue, but our energy dissipated in the light. A few housekeepers stopped rolling their shopping carts to look at us; some of the alcoholics on 96th Street lowered their pint bottles. It was over. The leper had come without shoes; there were holes in her stockings. In the Middle Ages, the end of the journey was the saint's tomb or the Holy City, or Heaven. For us, it was a return to the ordinary school day, to the green halls, to being more or less orderly--our devils temporarily repressed. For a little while, though, the Public School had been transformed by strange rituals, alive with chanting and peopled with citizens of a past world an inner world. ■■■

A MEDIEVAL PLAY

ANNOUNCER: We have a play about the Middle Ages in which we turn back the years and the centuries to the time of kings and queens and cats

(The King and Queen are sitting on their thrones. Cat comes on.)

CAT: I'm the smallest
I want milk
Give me some sleep

KING: Nice, nice, little cat.

CAT: Meow. When are you going to give me some milk?

QUEEN: What a nice cat. What's your name?

CAT: Samantha.

(The Messenger comes in.)

MESSENGER: I got a telegram and it's good news. The Queen is pregnant.

QUEEN: I'm having a baby! Spread it all around the kingdom.

KING: Why don't we get married?

QUEEN: We have to figure out who's going to be the flower girl, who's going to be the ring boy.

(They dance around).

SCENE TWO-THE WEDDING

(Bells ring. Music plays. The King and Queen come in.)

MINISTER: Do you promise to lead this woman to your arms forever and forever? Please take care of whom you love in testimonial honor. You shall long live both a happy life. Now I pronounce you man and wife.

BABY: Googoo Mama Geegee

(Everyone dances. An Angel flies in.)

ANGEL: Bad news! Bad news! The devil is coming.

(The Devil appears. Everyone screams.)

DEVIL: I come only for your baby to cook and eat.

CAT: No! No! No! (Everyone runs away except the Angel and the Cat who try to protect the Baby. The Devil carries the baby off to his house.)

DEVIL: (After putting baby in pot)

Tani bani
Make this cook as fast as I want
To be ready at dawn time.

(The Devil starts to sprinkle pepper and hot sauce in the pot.)

DEVIL: I better go out and get some more hot pepper.

(He leaves. The King and Queen rush in and save the baby. They take her back to the Palace.)

SCENE THREE-THE PALACE

(Everyone is crying because they think the baby is dying.)

QUEEN: Oh, my poor baby. What can I do?

KING: (Calls) Angel, angel, come and help our baby.

(The Angel flies in and circles around the Baby.)

ANGEL: Sprits of light
Side of bay
I am so depressed
That I must obey

From the Devil's eye
I must save thee
From the Devil's greedy
Mouth and teeth

(The baby wakes up and runs away.)

ANGEL: She's gone.

(Everyone starts looking for her. Finally the Devil comes in again, holding the baby.)

DEVIL: I've found the baby. She was in the woods, all lost and crying and screaming.)

KING AND QUEEN: Oh Angel, turn the Devil into our son. Because he has saved our daughter and he has told the truth of what has happened to her.

(The Angel puts a crown on the Devil's head.)

THE END

by Wanda Lewis Valentina Medina
Trellan Smith Jewell Wade
Jennefer Kardeman Wendy Rojas
Melissa Werbell PS 75 Manhattan

Content is a big obstacle in writing exercises, because for the most part the kids have been trained to love function only, and not content. For instance, it's important to read and write, no matter what they read and write; they get the biggest kick out of math, because the task is so clear and the reward so reliable for the right answer. One of the "pastimes" we fall into easily is arithmetic! Multiplication contests. I've had them do numbers poems, in which they tell a story with street numbers, exaggerated costs, long lives, many limbs,

Holiday describes her great-grandmother's death.

But the important point is that I often refused to hand out ideas. "What should we write?" "I don't know, what do you think? What do you want to write about?" This was no grand plan. Sometimes I didn't have ideas or I was tired of being gimmicky. I scolded myself a lot: if you were a good teacher you'd always have ideas. The fact, is, however, that I wanted them to do their own writing and to catch on to the feeling that writing is an independent activity,

several of them were I thought the most satisfying poems or stories written all year, though often they didn't have that wittiness that results from formulas.

When I asked the question, "what do you want to write about?" they sometimes went away. Certainly they didn't come up with an instant idea, and I made the mistake at first of expecting it. I thought that I was wrong to ask that question, and that they went away because they saw I wasn't supplying any route. But in fact there were some returns. They took the ques-

What Do You Want To Write?

by AARON FOGEL

...writing is an independent activity, which comes from a need to tell what's important.

etc.

In readers and most assignments, including those of "creative" groups like ours (or especially?) the content is in danger of being arbitrary. It's not that there's any lack of content; there's too much, and all ajumble. "Write a story about the stone age." As a result they associate content with boredom.

This doesn't mean they don't want content. It means they've been confused about what it is. I have to go into a class to see what's being taught, what the current of interest in the class is, and then work with that. Some few things I've found are universal and work almost any time. For instance, I've always had listeners for the early passage in Lady Sings The Blues where Billie

whic comes from a need to tell what's important. In retrospect I think the question, "What do you want to write about?" is the central one and the most important one in my teaching last year. Supplying topics and games showed that writing could be a form of plastic play. They loved making poems in the form of pictures, of drawing my face when I made it look angry or suspicious, and then writing some lines next to the picture. But that done the need was to move them gently toward the perception that they can create the written pieces whole cloth -- can provide the original conception as well as the words, the form as well as the incidentals. I did get a certain number of pieces created whole cloth, and

tion for what it meant, and came back after thinking about it. The question is a possibility, not a math question to answer quick as you can.

A number of them said. "I don't understand. Who wants to write at all?" I didn't try to explain the joys of self-expression but decided to let time work. "Fine, do something else." We did enough work writing group poems by dictation or fulfilling assignments that I didn't feel obliged to force anyone to write during these times.

I should emphasize that I was in this one classroom a lot, two afternoons and sometimes three a week, sometimes just hanging around on my own time. By the end of the year I began to be able to work with some of those identified as bad

boys and bad girls, and the teacher complained a few times that the obedient children felt left out. She implied that I was rewarding them for being bad. But they weren't "bad" with me. They were working. If I was rewarding them for anything it was independence.

It may seem puristic but I think the question, whether they want to write at all, and whether they can do it in complete freedom, is the central one. I supply topics only to lead a way in. I don't think filled-in formulas are ever their poems at all, but only duplications of the pleasure of doing multiplication tables. They love the poetry (sometimes) and the arithmetic because of the kinesthesia and the instant reward, both of which are helpful. But I don't think the kid who's good at tables is necessarily moving toward mathematics or that the one who fills in the blanks is learning how to make a poem or why one wants to.

If we take them through a course that has marks set out for them, and they go it well, and elicit our praise, we won't have brought them much closer to wanting to make the posts for themselves. Two different processes. It's even likely that too much praise for their execution of a topic you invented for them may reduce their faith in their own aptitude for communication. The assignment will usually be wittier than their own invented forms, and the discrepancy between producing something called "great" from a formula, and something raw on their own, can often be discouraging (I've seen it), until they learn to respect their own rawness.

First off I came up against the fact that they wanted to write rhyme. I was ready to put a stop to it and forbid rhyming. The kid marked "worst" in the class wrote typically a little adventure poem ending: "He fell in the pot/And the pot made a fot." Then, listening to their rhymes for a while I realized how expressive they were, and remembered that my first interest as a kid was in rhymed poetry. So was I forbidding music?

The simple fact is that rhyme teaches what poetry is in a way that's most universally understood: it teaches delight in words, that words can come together to give pleasure, and perhaps most of all that if one line follows another the two are still a rhythmic whole. Rhyme is a way of holding on to rhythm.

The two peices in the box below were given to me without my providing any subject. Both are by fourth graders.

First Football Day I Ever Played

I saw a football game one day
then my brother ask me to play
he threw a pass to me
I was so excited I couldn't see
But I caught it
and I got hit
so I was happy.
My brother told me he was going to give me a handoff
I thought a handoff was
A pass so I was ready to run and he said
Look at the sun
It'll make you burn
And you'll turn it'll make you spin and we'll win.

by Jose Cotto

Store Man

The store man is stupid because he cheats you all the time. Like if you were buying some milk and you even saw the price that said 59¢ and the store man said 1.49¢. You would really be burning mad. You would scream and say this stuff doesn't cost no 1.49¢! He would say yes it do are you blind. And you would say are you are you? He would say absolutely not! And you would say can you see this 59¢ on the bottle? He'd say yeah but we hire things. Don't you hear that prices are growing high and you would say yes I see how high the prices have gone up. He'd say OK lady I'll give to you for 59¢ because you're on welfare since you can't pay 1.49¢ worth of milk. And you would say I'm not on welfare so you should mind your business. And he'd say listen lady you don't tell me when to shut up or mind my business because I can throw you out of the store. And you'd say you don't tell me what to do either because I'm not your child when you get old enough to have children you tell them what to do. OK is that clear and I don't want to hear you talk, just let me pay the 1.49¢ and I'll get out of here and he said OK poor one.

The End

by Cynthia Wright

Lukacs' book of essays Writer and Critic has made a lot of sense to me and reconfirms some ideas I have about children's writing-- for instance my interest in pieces like Cynthia's Store Man as opposed to more metaphoric exercises. It's not that metaphor has no place or that I want ugliness and bogus "social realism" but because I want to get at making something whole and narrative rather than statically descriptive or metaphoric. X equals Y is one equation to teach with; X becomes Y, another.

If I'm making a distinction between what children offer spontaneously and what they're told to do, it turns out I think that most of what we foist on them is descriptive or comparative, but most of what they offer spontaneously is narrative. The distinction between descriptive and narrative is always tricky, but I think a good way to make it is to say that narrative is heard in one's head and can be brought forth in its necessary sequence like music recalled, while a description doesn't take place so much in the head, as on the page, or within the particular assignment, and doesn't have as much of a necessary sequence.

Lukacs makes the distinction in a different way: he argues that "narrative" literature is superior to "descriptive: because it can show the dialectic operating in society; i.e., it shows conflict and transformation.

This all sounds very theoretical I know and devoid of an application. But I mean it in a very practical sense. When children hand me their

writing I have to respond instantly, and that's probably the biggest problem teaching. One friend of mine who's also doing this work said once, "It's amazing, I look over what they've written at the end of the year and that's when I start seeing which pieces were great." I guess this is unavoidable, but I think a theory helps me to function consistently and productively at the time they show me work.

It's in the narratives that most seems to happen: a circular statement. Rhyme is sound-narrative, i.e. sound changing and being the same. Jose's piece is about initiation and I think the movement of it and the excitement would be less if he didn't rhyme. I don't have any way of knowing whether he means the complex feeling in "I caught it and I got hit so I was happy." But there it is.

A student of mine, who's crippled on one side, laughing and eyes sparkling, tells me about the Robot-man on TV, and about how the robot man can have his arm and leg ripped off or bruised and then have new perfect ones put back on with no pain; he's telling me a fiction he has to explore. In this case, it's clear that he knows what he means. There's no reason to reject TV stories (as I've seen done) just because they're TV; from many of the kids it seems to be that TV supplies for them some narrative and imaginative characterization.

Mostly, narrative is dangerous. It tells what happens, e.g. in the school. "This school would be bet-

ter off if some people in this would leave I'm no saying no name because I don't want to get beat in the head I say this because they treat you wrong. They put rattails in the franks & I drunk spoiled milk twice in this school. Today at lunch time in the lunchroom they was a napken on the table & Mrs*** told me to throw it away & she told Mrs** and Mrs** told me to go to the office. So Mr ***** as me what happened & gave me a note."

Of course the writer here doesn't tell you "what happened," which might be dangerous for him just as much as this story is dangerous for the school administration; i.e., he might have to admit he was in fact doing something called "wrong" and deal with what that means.

I think the reason there are more descriptive than narrative exercises is that it's harder to invent narrative exercises.

It's interesting the split reaction I've had from adults to the above story, "This school would be better off." Some of them laughed--how amusing, a spoiled child's complaints. But I was also advised not to publish it in the class magazine. Which is it? Is it a silly piece by a brat, or one that has to be censored? Can it really be both?

In a simple way, I think the reason there are more descriptive than narrative exercises given is that it's harder to invent narrative exercises. Koch's "I used to be a... but now I am a..." might be a formulaic beginning for showing sequence and talking about change. But I found that the concept--or the

language--of "used to be... now" was a little too mature for many. Many of the children use only two or three connectives implying sequence: So, Then, and And. Also occasionally So Then. I've received loads of stories that go on and on with these so's, and kids also tell their stories aloud with these, looking up in the air with intense concentration on the sequence. Some times I might think, this kid is in his own world, looking up in the air and so-ing. But I don't think actually they're in their own world so much as in the world they're remembering.

I usually proved wrong to try to get the kids to cut out the so's. So implies a connection and sequence, and the removal of it may make for a standard-English polish but it means nothing

to the kids. Of course, So! So is what shows that it's all together, and that it all happened in that order. Also, I found there's no point in pushing other connectives. So and then, repeated a lot, show one of two things about the piece; either the writer was really bored, or he was really interested. In either case, there's no need to rewrite. Throw out the boring piece and take the interesting one for what it's worth. Fancy connectives are too arbitrary for them. When I taught college I had a lot of students who'd been pushed on such things as connectives and alternating sentence-length. It was god-awful, connectives all over the place most of them meaningless. ■

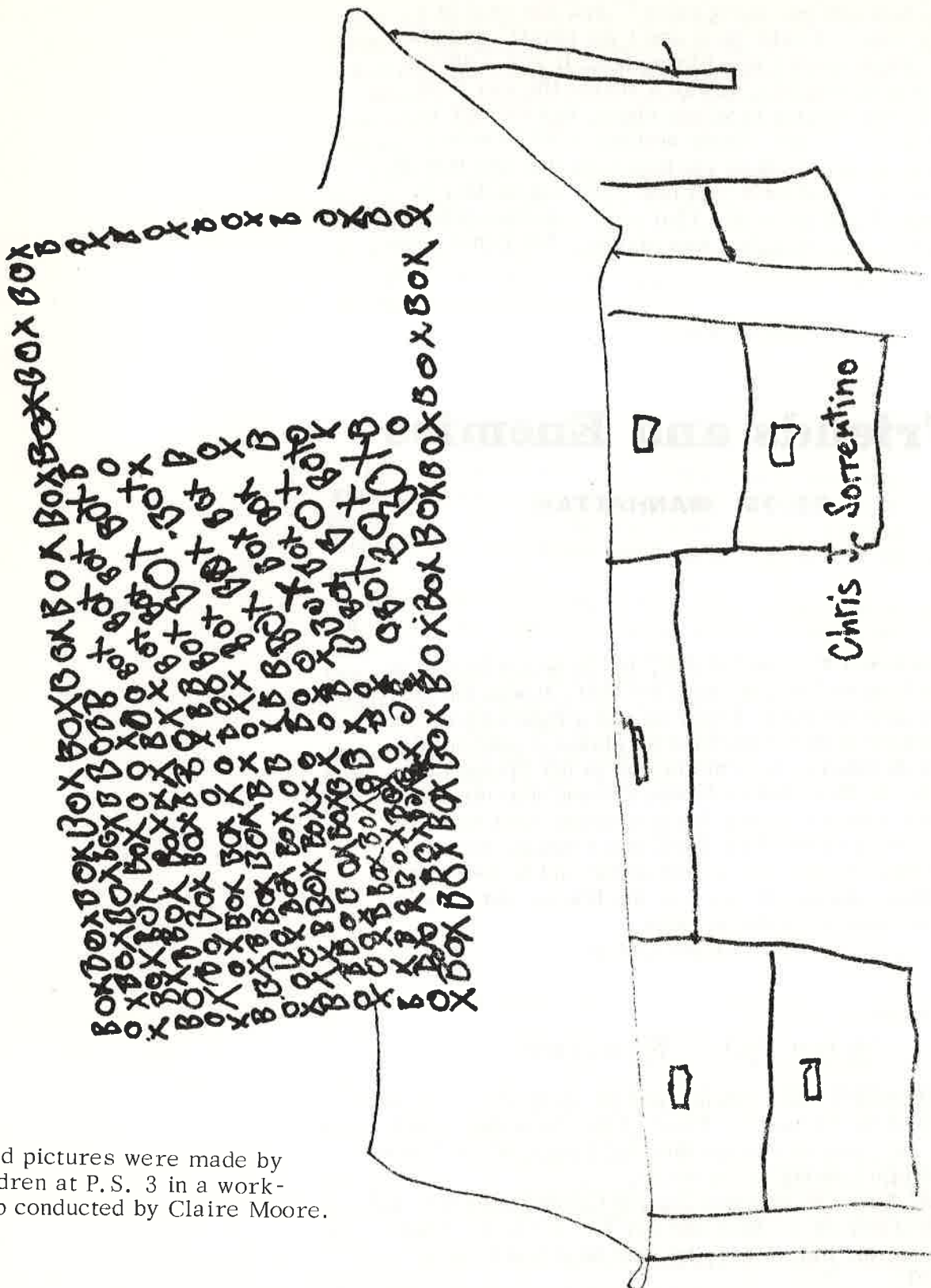
POETRY, POETRY AND OTHER THINGS

Marion Rosenfeld

worlds **can't GUESS** 20th century **POETRY**

Good **People** **SERVE** **this**
Book

do IT yourself!



Word pictures were made by children at P. S. 3 in a workshop conducted by Claire Moore.

One day when I was coming to school I saw an enemy of mine. She was so dunb I had to keep on walking. She ran down the street like a fool. When I got in school she was there with a big smile on her face. She was so nice! I said "hi, how are you doing today?" and she said in a smart way "fine". I said "well don't get smart" and she said I did. Right away I was hitting her. It was a shame the way I was hitting her. It was a shame the way I hit her now. I have nothing to worry about, her mother is dead. Her father is too. I have nothing at all to worry about as I went to my class and found out that she was in my class here. I just said "get out!" She ran so fast it wasn't funny. I had to laugh. That was so damndumb that motherfucker. She thought I was playing. Ain't that some shit.

Friends and Enemies

P.S. 75 MANHATTAN

The day I met X I saw his fall. It was weird he had no friends so I started to play with his hair. It was fun but then he chased me away. Later he had a fight with my new friend Michael Montros because he played a joke on him. So then we decided to beat his brains in but Michael disagreed. On the first day of school X came into my class. The teacher asked if anyone knew him and I did so I said I did. I sat next to him in school. Boy I thought he was queer but then the teacher yelled at me and he took the blame. Then I decided to become his friend. But I don't like him because he is too serious.

Victor Greez

My Best Friend - Worst Enemy

In fifth grade I had a friend, and he seemed to be a nice kid, but then he got worse. First of all, he wanted everything his way, and he always insisted I come to his house instead of him coming to my house.

One day I went to Madison Square Garden with him and he said he'd buy us the food and pay for our fare. When it came time for him to pay, he said he'd never made such a deal.

One day in school I got so annoyed with him that I decided I wasn't his friend anymore. And that's how I got rid of him.

Eric Steade

My Enemy

When I was young I had a nice relationship with a girl named Julie. We were such close friends that my mother said we were almost like sisters. We did everything together. We went everywhere together. I liked her and she liked me. But the problem was we never met anyone else.

When I got older I met other friends and I soon realized how ucky she is. She double crossed me and took all my friends.

I got some new friends which I find more mature than her and her friends. In the beginning, everytime we saw each other we'd curse each other out. But now we just don't look at each other. Some of them I hate more than others. I'm glad I'm not friends with them anymore cause I like my new friends better.

Emily Gubert

My first friend was Alexandra. She is very nice. When we were in the same class we used to have alot of fun. Shen I first saw her she was okay, smart, and old fashioned. A year later she bacame my closest and best friend.

Then I met Carol and Karen. They were also my friends but Alexandra didn't like them. I used to live a block away from Carol and we used to write to each other almost twice a week!! Her bedroom would always look messy and disgusting!! Sometimes we would fool around and it would end up in a fight. We were once playing hopscotch when she stepped on the line and she denied it. So she started hitting me and I hit her back and we fought until we were sore.

Irene Pantoja

Well in 3rd grade I had a friend who later turned out to be an enemy, but that's another story.

This so-called friend introduced me to another kid, I'll call him "Big V". I kept on being friends with "fake friend" and began to be friends with Big V. After a little while it was the end of the term.

The next September (4th grade) we were in different classes, me and fake friend in one class and Big V in another. We got to be good friends, all of us and everything went well until...

Fifth grade came and me and Big V were good friends with fake friend. So to make a long story short, we ended the term all half friends and fake friend went to another school. This year both me and Big V are good friends again despite fake friend.

Jesse

A True Story
One day I woke up &
Everything was Blue. The sun,
The house, Even a mouse
Crawling across the sink!
Even my heart feels Blue!

Tabis Rike:

I feel very mad I feel like
hitting someone's nose
When I get mad I take
it out on everybody
I turn very red and
thats why I love red
because I always be red.

To the One I Hate Most

Group poem by Jed, Teddy, Liz, Diane, Sher
Diane, Sherwin, Melissa,
Rhonda, and Jonathan

I love you as I love the crust in my underwear!
I hope the guillotine gets your neck.
I hate somebody who has blue pants.
I would pulverize and demolish you and mix you up in a witches brew.
I wish you'd die and an egg would crack over your head.
I would strip you and throw you into the wet cement.
I hope you get an apple with a razor
Blood gushing out with green polka dots
And worms in your eyes
And flies in your mouth.
And bees in your ears.
And your tongue a fly swatter.
And leeches sucking your neck and on your neck
And eat your buggers
And wig worms on your butt
May a hundred farts come out you every day of the year
I hope you made in your pants and went to the toilet and flushed yourself down.

Cool and Jive

FROM

SCHLESSINGER JR. HIGH, QUEENS

When I'm angry I feel the way
the sky changes when it's getting
ready to rain and when I'm
really mad I turn red as the devil and when
I hit that certain person
they turn green as
the grass, Then when
I show how black I am.

To be cool is to...
be suave (Stevie Wonder)
look together
help someone in trouble
have a neat afro
wear clothes according
to your description
have rhythm
act natural, not phony
express your feelings
to other people
visit a lonely friend
on a rainy day
Be a Poet.

Tracy Irvin 7SP

To be cool is not
to be frigid, that's not
cool at all.
No! Being cool is
your choice . . .

Il fait frais
Kool is where
The flaovor is
cool is really
great! Amen.

Cool
cold
freezing
Eskimo pie cool
feel your feel
do your do
go your go
love your love

Matthew Kane 9SP

I feel mad, I can not cope.
I feel cool like my man Jewel.
I'd be surprised to rise in the air like a ripple on a pond,
Like the sky coming down to meet the ground, a nice thing to see
and the thing about it is I feel good like a man should.

Disaster is coming to school to have to come to English
to listen to a nutty 60 year old muscle bound poet talk
about words, disaster, tired words etc. when every word
he says is a tired word. You can almost fall asleep the
words are so tired but his breath keep you awake.

8FSM

Jive is....having people lie
to you. Having a jive man in the
highest position in the country.
Jive is having kids act real cool
in school just so you'll be
"in" with your friends.

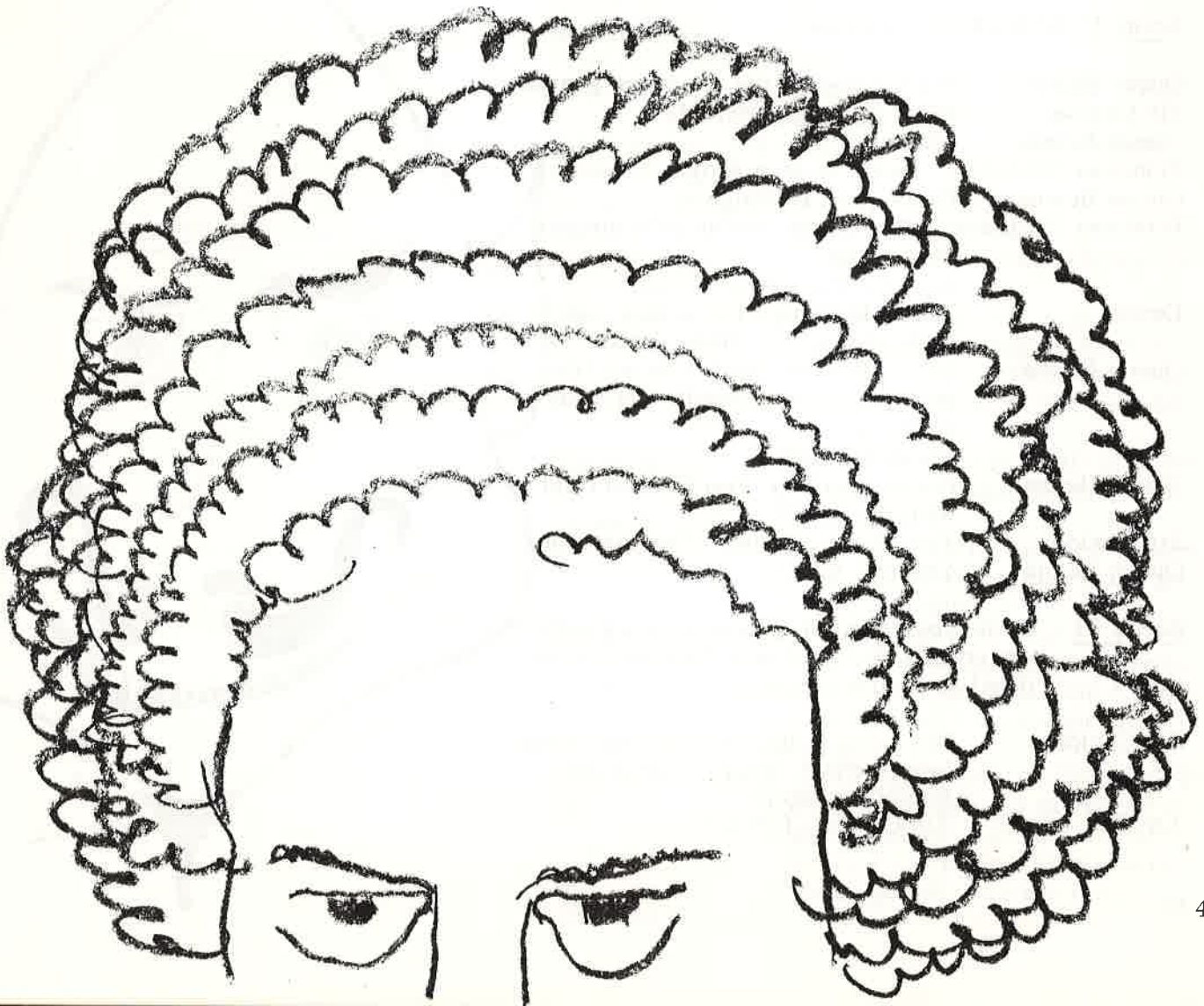
Jive is watching a funeral on TV
with people singing and smiling
for the television cameras.

Jive is saving up your money to go someplace
special, then your mother won't let you go.
Not being allowed to go to a P. G. movie
because your parents don't like the "content".

Nancy Giles 7SP

The way of an eagle
is like the way of me
its feathery wings
which gives him smooth flight
is like a bend
in the elbow of my arm.

Lewis Clarke 8SPE 1



PLAY WITH TWO QUEENS AND A DEVIL

by Yvonne Kingon and Nelly Gomez
with Gretchen, Malcom, Curtis,
Carlos, Gladys, and Ileana
P. S. 75 Manhattan

Scene I: At Windsor Castle

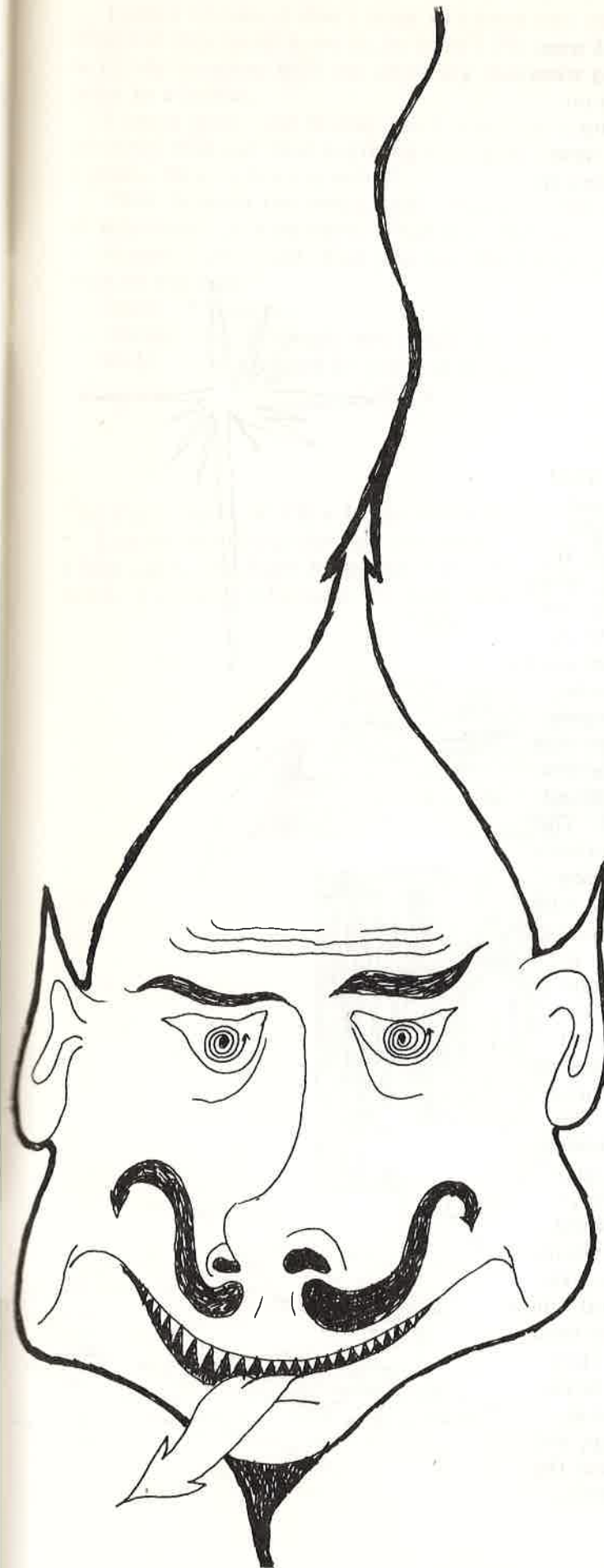
Queen Nelly: Sir Malcom, bring me a glass of water.
Sir Malcom: Here it is My Majesty.
Queen Nelly: That's not enough!
Sir Malcom: Here it is.
Queen Nelly: More! More! More!
(He brings a whole bucket)
Queen Nelly: My lady, bring me my hair brush.
Lady Yvonne: Yes My Majesty.
Queen Nelly: Thanks. (She takes two brushes.)
Take it back.
Lady Yvonne: Yes, your majesty.
(Enter Devil)
Devil: There is going to be a fight today!
Queen Nelly: Out of my house!

Scene II: At Buckingham Palace.

Queen Ileana: Sir Carlos, bring me some grapes.
Sir Carlos: Here it is, my Majesty.
Queen Ileana: Thanks.
Princess Gretchen: I want to be a Knight.
Queen Ileana: Girls can't be Knights.
Princess Gretchen: (Puts sword to Queen's throat)
Wanna bet?
(Devil comes in)
Devil: There is going to be a war today.
It shall last for ninety days.
Queen Ileana: Get away from me! I do not like you, and I am scared! Get away from me!
(Devil leaves)
Queen Ileana: (to Sir Carlos) You have to fight with the devil!
Sir Carlos: Yes, Your Majesty, Do I have to?
Queen Ileana: Yes you must!

Scene III: In the courtyard of Queen Ilean's Castle's courtyard. Sir Carlos is looking for the devil so he can kill him.

Sir Carlos: I'm going to have to fight the devil;
How? Why? What/ I've never fought the devil!
Devil: Sir Carlos, freeze!



Sir Malcom: I'm in Buckingham castle--I've come to fight Sir Carlos because the Queens have suddenly had a disagreement and we must fight. (He sees Devil) What did you do to Sir Carlos?

Devil: The same thing I'm going to do to you! (He points at Sir Malcom and freezes him.)
(To Sir Carlos) Go get Queen Ileana and her lady Gladys.
(To Sir Malcom) Go get Queen Nelly and Lady Yvonne.

Scene IV:

(Carlos comes back with Queen Ileana)

Queen Ileana: Sir Carlos, I shall have you executed for this (She sees the devil)
You again! (She faints)

(EVERYONE FIGHTS EXCEPT DEVIL)

Queen Nelly: Why are we fighting? Queens are not supposed to fight--only knights.

Lady Yvonne: Your Majesty, why don't we have a tournament?

Queen Nelly: That's a fine idea.

Queen Ileana: Let's!

(They dress the knights)

Queens: (to their knights) Be brave--fight him--do the best you can!

(They run at each other but don't hit each other, three times.)

(Devil turns Sir Carlos into a dragon)

Queens: Where is Sir Carlos?

Lady Yvonne: And what is that dragon doing there?
(Everyone screams)

(The dragon goes after his own queen, Queen Ileana)

Sir Malcom: Take that! you dragon! Don't dare take her majesty! Hey, that's not my Queen--oh well, I'll save her anyway.

Queen Ileana: For saving my life I will give you my daughter's hand in marriage.

Princess Gretchen: Wanna bet?

Malcom: No, my Majesty, I prefer staying in the castle of my queen and go on being a knight.

(Sir Carlos becomes a man again.) What happened to me? I was sitting on my horse, and I think I got killed but I don't know because I never got killed before.

AND BOTH CASTLES LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER.

Devil: My scheme has not worked! I must go to another part of the land to work. I can't concentrate here! These people love too much!

HE WALKS AWAY.

There I was. Oh, excuse me, I am Mickey Mouse. I was very young at the time, but I remember very clearly what happened. It all started when a baby was born, not just any baby, it was a king. Now that is not just any baby. So I went to see the kid. He was really cute. So the next day I went to the barn. But what! It was a party. I went in and what! The kid was dancing! what!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!.

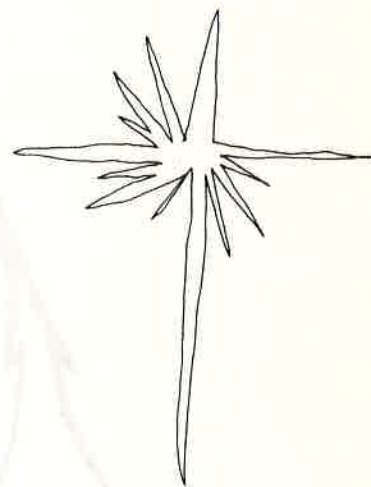
Four years old dancing. What.

It's a miracle.

---Eric Streicher

Once upon a time there lived many animals that lived in a little cottage in Bethlehem. Some were greedy and some were nice and gentle, and understood. One night when they all were sleeping, a bright star appeared, it was that a new baby was born. Then in the morning, when everything was bright and clear, the rooster started crowing, everybody woke up and he kept on. Then he said cu cu cu cu co ool, he said. I can talk, I can talk. Then everybody saw what happened and a bull said, It's a miracle, we can talk, all of us can. Then they all started singing, everybody was happy. The goat was bad with the two pigs because he thought that did not belong with them. He said they belong on the mud. Then the dog went out, he found this mule with his master. He said, What happened. The mule said that he went house from house, and the answer was the same, no, that he could not stay. Then the dog said, Well I have the right place for you. Well come with me, I will show you. They walked and walked until they got to the little cottage everybody said, Look, look, get him out of here. We don't need him, said the cow, and the dog stood still, then the mule and the master went away, and the dog and the bull were sad. The bull said, You should be ashamed of yourself. We got room, we got space, especially love, we could give love if we wanted to. We could give space and room if we wanted to. The cow said, Yes, I am ashamed of myself. We have room and space and love, the only thing we don't want to give it and share it. The bull said to the dog, go get them. And the dog went then, he came back said that he could not find them, the pigeons said We will go look for them. They all went and the cow said, Oh this room looks like a mess. Then they started cleaning and they finished, then the mule came and the master. They were all happy then, they went to sleep. Then the star appeared again. They all woke up and saw it. It was that a new baby was born. They all went to say the good news, then the goat said, A new baby is born. They were all laughing with joy, the goat went bababa and the pigeons went pio pio pio and the dog went rough rough. It was happiness and love again.

--Angelina and Nelly



I am a horse. I don't want to carry any more people. Why did this baby have to be born? Oh yes, now I remember. My mommy told me anything that gets born in the barn is a horse.

I am a goat, and if you don't mind me saying so, my mommy told me that anything that gets born in a barn is a goat. Hey, I hear a voice!

This is what the voice said: You are both right, but in this case, it's neither. That was the owl.

Horse: I am mad. Can you see the kings giving presents to the baby?

Goat: Of course.

Horse: Oh, I thought you could not see.

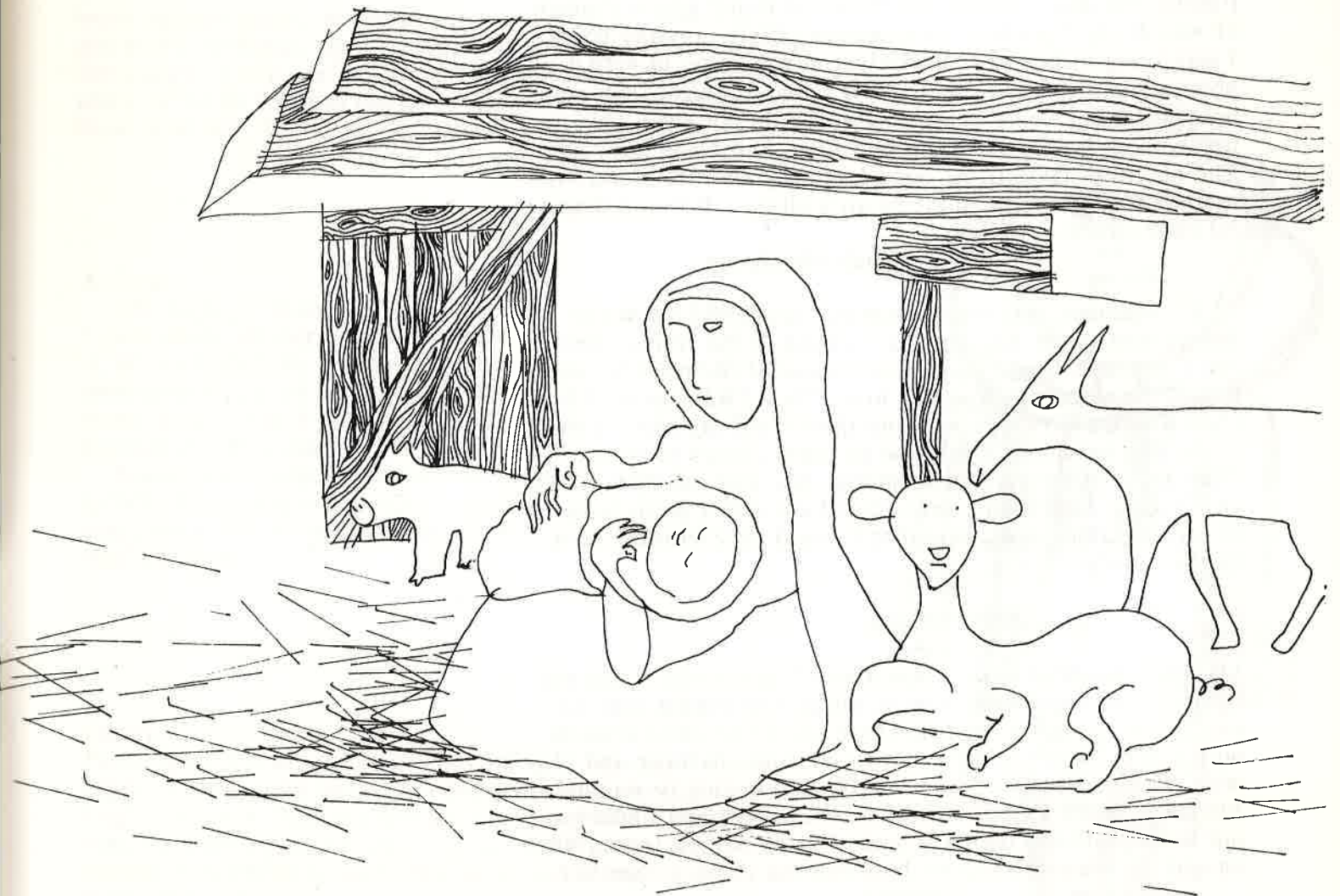
Well, I am as mad as you, said Goat.

--Sara

The Pig's Point of View in the Birth of the Lord

I came strolling through the door. Then, when I saw a big light, the light bulb was invented. No the Lord was born. Frankly, I thought the baby was too clean.

--Alex





There I was, three years old, lying in bed with a very sore throat. All I remember was I was in and out of bed. Finally one day I went to the hospital in my green Peugeot or was it my light blue Volkswagen? Well, anyway here I was lying in bed and suddenly a nurse came in with a shot and said it would feel like a mosquito bite. The most horrible thing was I was small and I did not know too much about how a mosquito bite felt. And I was very angry. The shot was penicillin. Soon I had my operation and my mother was in the hospital room with me. It was a dreadful experience.

--Nancy Abrahams

I remember that when I was six years old my whole family was in the kitchen. Then I went to the living room, and I saw this hand, and I was scared of the hand because it told me to come closer to him. Then I went to the kitchen where everybody was and then I told my mother that I saw this hand and it told me to come closer to Him. Then my mother started laughing. She told me that it was God's hand, and then I said, that I am never going to go to a place alone again and that I would stay with the rest of the family

-Nelly Gomez

My story is about when I was about 3 years old. I had the measles and my mothers baby sitter was taking care of me, so we lived on the fifth floor and I had some friends so my baby sitter told me not to go to the hallway and play with my friends, but I was lonely. Just seeing tv was not fun so my baby sitter went to the bathroom and I sneaked out in the hall and then a friend of mine named Irene, she caught the measles and we both had fun playing together.

---Cynthia

Therese Anne Dolan:

I am a Judge who has a whole bunch of crazy cases. Like the one I just had. A lady was on an island. There was a millionaire too. (So they were stranded on a desert island with no pen and paper etc. etc.) She cooked for him etc. etc. so he wrote with a piece of charcoal, I owe you one thousand and when they got to America, he said, If you don't get to my office by tomorrow, the writing won't be worth a penny. So she said, I'll come tomorrow. So the next day she accidentally slept late till 12:00. When she woke up, she was remembering about the island. She forgot about the money, so it took an hour to get dressed and another hour to eat lunch, and she talked to her friends about the island for three hours, then her boyfriend took her to dinner, so it took her two more hours to take a bath and get dressed. They ate and talked for two hours. They went to an hour movie. They went to her house and watched tv. The show was just what happened to her (the Millionaire told the tv studio what happened). So she looked at the clock. It was 11:45. She only had 15 minutes, so she told her boyfriend. He took her in his car. They drove as fast as they could, but all the lights were against them, so they only had 1 minute. When they got to the building, the elevator was broken, so they took the stairs. They ran and ran. They got there one minute after 12:00 so I had to decide whether to say she could have it or not. I said yes because 1 minute won't hurt.

Kelley:

My name is James M. Morrissey. I'm a doctor and I give shots all day and give stitches. I work from 7:30 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. I also deliver babies. I work in the emergency part of the hospital on the week-end and on week days I have 5 patients. In about one year I would have treated 2,000 people.

Sometimes people ask me, do I like my job. I say I LOVE IT! Sometimes people think I'm crazy for saying that, but I like to help people when they need it, that's why I'm here.

Danny:

Peace Man! Oh hi, my name is cool kid. My pop calls me hippy. I'll be right back, I'm going out right here and now! Dig! What now Pop, you wouldn't do that? would yah? But Pop, how am I going to get around? But Pop my motorcycle means everything to me! What da ya think you're doin--by folks gotta go! Poop!



I began the Genre Project as an attempt to broaden children's concepts of genre in order to give them a greater choice of writing possibilities. What I have discovered so far is that children write naturally and instinctively according to the more obvious genres and conventions. But too often these stories seem flat. They rush from event to event without detail or emotional reality. But children can create these missing elements by using material from their own lives and their own experiences.

I worked with four classes from the third, fourth, fifth

experiences of the P.S. 75 team I already knew that kids could and did relate well to such authors as Tolstoy, Flaubert, Kafka, H. G. Wells, Poe, R.D. Laing, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

I read Poe's 'Tell Tale Heart' to the class and then asked them what made it a horror story. Everyone seemed to agree that it was frightening and made you feel 'weird'. Some people, however, thought that a horror story had to be grotesque and disgusting. I asked the class to write a description of a part of their body as though it were part of a horror story. When we read

Teaching Genre

by KAREN HUBERT

and sixth grades in large classes as well as small groups. Each group of children has taught me something new, and in just half a term the project has undergone several interesting changes.

I began the project by asking the children what they thought the particular qualities of each genre were. Basically, they told me that a biography was a how-he-came-to-be-what-he-is-today story, that a mystery begins at the end with a crime but ends at the beginning with who did it and why. An adventure has to be exciting and its characters should have new and frightening experiences. A horror story is terrifying and makes the reader anxious. A romance is 'all about love.'

During this first phase of the project I used classic adult literature to function as genre 'models.' From the shared

these aloud we found that many of them were overloaded with gore, and that these descriptions seemed more silly and funny than horrible. One of my students had some very definite opinions about why this had happened.

THE EAR
by David R.

First of all, the talk about all these shock tactics is wrong. 1. The disgusting thing makes you think of goryness. It takes away from the horror of the story and 2. Sometimes more is less.

A true horror story has tension and fright so I think that the more you add to the ear, the less shocking it will be. First, it should be old and menacing. The light on the ear should be half in light and half in dark with lots of wrinkles. It should be accom-

panied by a heart beat.

Some less disgusting descriptions, however, did seem to work.

HEAD

The bloodie axe

Imagine a chopped head with an axe in it, imagine all the blood falling out. Imagine your brain being chopped in half and you won't be able to think with all your wasted knowledge and all your brains sticking out with blood?!?! And a bloodie axe on your mind and every time you tried to think your mind would bleed.

by Doris J.

And some of them turned into stories.

THE THUMB

How can one live with a thumb which is terrifying to mankind? I'll tell you this story which will give a chill to your spine.

My, how old a woman can be without age. Rain fell upon her head. With tiredness she walked trying to find some shelter. The houses passed her like forgetness leaving her alone in the world.

I'm not going into that house she said when she passed the house of death. Old Mr. Greemish lived there. No one knew how he could live in a house so dark to the eye.

No shelter left to go to, only that forbidden place. She walked toward it with life walking away from her. She knocked once...twice and at last she heard someone.

"Come in," said the dark shaped figure. "I saw you by the house lots of times, I was wondering why you didn't come in." She stared at his left hand. Why didn't he have a

thumb, where had it gone?

She walked through the dark halls. Suddenly he turned around and his thumb grew from its knuckle and she saw him come nearer and nearer and nearer until he had killed her with a shocked experience.

Josephine

After defining the special qualities of each genre we began to consider the separate elements in their plots, taking one or two conventions out of the context of the complete story and examining them. I would read, for instance, to group of girls working on the Romance, one description of Vronsky's sly glances at Anna, and one of Anna's dull husband.

The girls noticed the effects of both passages; in one they were attracted to but distrusted the character while the other passage made them dislike the character altogether. I then asked them to write stories in which they had to choose between something or someone exciting but forbidden and something or someone boring but safe.

But how was I going to present them with the sense of an entire story, a set of conventions? It was impossible for them to read Anna Karenina, so I tried to tell them about the rest of the novel, to give them the story's skeleton. But this was hardly an answer since it was I and not they who had experienced the story and dissected it. I wanted them to discover story patterns. The classics were too long and the children were too dependent on me to interpret them.

Then, in November, I found a book in a second hand book store, Impossible Yet It Hap-

pened by R. De Witt Miller. In it were all varieties of adventure, mystery and horror stories, each about a page long. They were simple stories written in a kind of naive 1940's style. I liked their straightforwardness, their entertainment value.

I tried these out on my classes. The children found them engrossing and understandable. They extracted plots and story patterns around which they wrote stories and invented their own variations. I read them a mysterious story about a tourist who visits an ancient castle in a foreign country, but who finds that he knows his way around its labyrinthian corridors due to some sense that he has "Been There Before".

A TRIP TO ASIA

It was on my trip to Pakistan in my uncle's jeep that I realized it. I had been here before! I remembered it. The sand colored buildings at most three stories high with small windows. I remembered the shopping area with all the salesmen and women yelling to you to buy their products; it was strange. I even remembered a few faces. I had always dreamed of having another life. In my dreams I was a flower girl who slept on the streets. I decided to look up where their flower girls lived. When I found out some of the things I needed to know I went to that section of the town. I spoke to a known flower girl's mother and she said, "She died November 14, 1963" and I replied to her looking astonished, "I was born that same day." She stared at me and told me I had some of her daughter's features. Once I had learned that I was in my second life I told my uncle then wrote my parents about it.

The night I came home my mother and father took me to dinner at a fine restaurant.

written by
Susan W.

After this, I collected all sorts of short, accessible literature, and used these as my genre models rather than classics. Three weeks after having found the Impossible book, I was working with a group of girls on romance stories. I read to them from a Harlequin Romance Book. This book is sold in five and dimes and is full of adolescent crushes and hand holding. I chose a story about a young girl who awakes blissful and

These girls had all the love stories that have existed or will ever exist right in their own hearts and minds.

dreamy on her wedding day only to receive a telegram from her betrothed breaking their engagement.

This time the girls were very impatient for me to finish up. They were also critical of the story, claiming that it was not romantic enough! They suggested things to spice up the story. So, I put the book down and asked them to write what they thought would be a romance story. The project had taken another new turn.

Literary models were hardly necessary. These girls had all the love stories that have existed or will ever exist right in their own hearts and minds. A well of mush a

and gush was stored up in those little souls. Unrequited love, love at first sight, Obstacles in the path of love, etc. They already seemed quite familiar with the conventions of the Romance.

HEART BROKE
by Stephanie

One day Martha was walking out of the Riverside Theatre. She met a boy named Bob. They talked like it was love at first sight. Everything went well until Martha had cancer.

Bob was seeing her a lot. She had to stay in the hospital for four months. She lasted for one year in the hospital.

Bob gave up on waiting, so he left her. One month later her cancer was cured.

When she left she asked where her boyfriend was. The nurse said he left. So she went home. He wasn't there. She checked the parks and he wasn't there. She went home. He wasn't there. She went home. And to her surprise he was home all right, but with another girl. Right then and there she had a heart attack.

Bob didn't even go to her funeral.

Stephanie seemed to be following all the standard conventions of an I Loved Him But He Betrayed Me romance. Love at first sight, Martha's illness, Bob's betrayal, Martha's hope that she is cured and that Bob is waiting, her lonely search for Bob ending with her realization that Bob has betrayed her which leads to her final heart break and death.

But here again the story goes from event to event. The character never feels anything throughout the piece, although there is really ample reason and opportunity. The

character has no inner life and the writing is curiously devoid of any emotional reality.

I wondered why. Was it just a question of age and experience? I didn't think so. Stephanie may have never had a boyfriend, or cancer, but she had gone through feelings of illness, loneliness, self pity. And how many times had Stephanie felt betrayed by friends and family? Thirty? Forty? A hundred times? What child has not had such common experiences? Could she not write from the knowledge of her own experience in order to enrich her story?

So although I had discovered that yes, children do write according to the conventions of genre, I also discovered that what was missing in their writing was a sense of detail and emotional reality, the material for which, I believed, could be found in their own lives and experiences.

Soon after this I was working with a group of three boys all of whom were problem learners, readers and writers. They were telling me, vividly, about murders, rapes and stabbings they had witnessed in their neighborhood. I listened as they argued with one another over the fine points: So and so's cousin, no, aunt from such and such street got stabbed on the elevator, no, the stairwell, no, the street because she was stealing, no, she had been unfaithful... and so on.

When I suggested that they might write a story together they grew animated, but then they seemed uncertain about their abilities to write. To make things easier, I offered to take dictation.

At first their story rushed from one event to the next. "A man was walking down the street then another man came

up to him and then he ran away..." How much less alive this was from the story they had just been telling me! No real characters, no real surroundings, no real motives. But behind the rushed quality of their prose there seemed to be a strong urge to tell their story, to exorcise themselves of it.

So I decided to ask the questions that any involved, curious reader or listener would. How did the murderer kill the man? Why did he kill him? Where did the murderer go when he ran away? They needed no time to think. I was shocked at how quickly they answered. Each one of them had already considered motive, already pictured where the murder had taken place, and how. Of course they all had different answers, but this was discussed and the 'best' weapon, the 'best' motive, etc. were chosen.

Their story began to grow. There were many opportunities to explore the horror-mystery together. They wanted to know, for instance, how many murders were too much? How is a mystery continued when the reader already knows who the murderer is? Their feeling for 'what comes next' ran true to form. After the character commits murder he undergoes the horrors of fear, paranoia, hunger, then flight to hiding place.

While they were writing their story there were many opportunities to slow them down, ask questions, help them expand their sense of genre, and detail by calling on what they could invent out of their own experience.

At one point the boys couldn't decide how the murderer would be 'found out'. I suggested, that they go back to the beginning of their story and see if there were any loose ends

that might now be used.

"Well, he disguised himself as a news reporter," said David, a chubby Puerto Rican boy who is quick and enthusiastic.

"Oh yeah," Walter chimed in, "We forgot all about that."

"Okay so what does a news reporter look like?" I asked.

Rafael, who sometimes seems as though he is mildly retarded said, slowly, "He is wearing a lot of cameras."

"How many?"

Rafael took his time smiling. "Ten or Twenty."

No, argued David that was unrealistic. He could only wear six cameras at one time. "...and after he kills Carmen he puts the cameras on the bureau and when he hears the siren he grabs the cameras to take off but one of them falls and takes his picture."

"How does it do that?"

Rafael wanted to know.

They thought for a while, then Walter, who seems to have a limited vocabulary and is insecure about his English, came up with the idea of an automatic timing device controlled by a black button that goes off when the camera hits the floor. So we backtracked and doctored up the story, adding a little insert here and there.

They put Walter the murderer on a train. I asked them to describe how it felt to be on a moving train.

"Everything starts to shake."

"Like what?"

"His cameras! His cameras!" shouted Rafael. "And then he thinks about his wife and then he gets scared, you know real paranoid."

"And what does that feel like?"

"Well, like he thinks people

are looking at him funny like he was the killer," added Walter.

"But how does Walter feel when the conductor looks at him?"

Here they were at a loss. David suggested that we act it out. That I play the conductor, first the way it really was, and then the way Walter thought it was. The boys would all play Walter.

So first I pretended to be a normal conductor just doing my job. For my second performance I moved very slowly, squinted at the boys and generally scrutinized them. I spoke in a low voice. They looked uncomfortable. This led to some of the most sophisticated writing in the story.

"But he has to get off the train, somewhere."

"Where?"

"In another country." The three of them went through a bunch of made up names and finally they came up with Springfield.

I explained that Springfield was usually the name of a town. Did they mean it was in the country? Yes. So I asked for a description of that. David suggested that there were mountains with, he circled his hands in the air. "You know that stuff dripping on top... snow but it looks like.. cream and sugar."

We discussed briefly how things look like other things and that this is a part of writing.

How did they think Walter would react to being in such a beautiful, clean place? They thought it would disorient him, "make him not know where he was," said Walter.

And so we continued writing.

THE DAY OF THE DEAD

One day there was a man named Rafael who was going by the street walking and Walter, an insane murderer grabbed him by the neck and choked him and before Rafael died he said, "I will come back."

And Walter disguised himself as a news reporter. He wore six cameras around his neck. They hung around his stomach. He looked fatter than he really was with all those cameras. A few cameras had automatic timing devices which turned on by pushing a black button. He said, "Now I'm going to kill my wife to marry another girl." His wife was a teacher in room 323. She was thin, cute, lovely and lovable and helpful around the house. He felt that she was good but that she was playing him dirty with Rafael.

Rafael had a big scar on the side near his eye. He had black kinky hair, black eyes, and was very rich. He discovered an oil well in Texas, and he worked as a lawyer.

Before Walter went insane he was a carpenter. He used to make chairs, bats, and the best tables. He was the fastest carpenter in Eastern America. He was tall, good looking, strong enough to kill a man or a woman with his bare hands. And he was very intelligent.

After he killed Rafael in a dark alley, he took the body and threw it straight into the lake. Then he ran home. As he was running he felt that the world was against him. As

if the world was getting closer and closer, and his heart beat too fast, his feet were getting asleep, and then he wanted water and was very hungry.

He went up the stairs to his fifth floor apartment. He knocked on the door 5B. His wife Carmen didn't answer the door. He opened the door with his hands. He went into the bedroom and found her sleeping. He choked her and broke her neck. He put his cameras down on the bureau. Before Carmen died she said, "I will come back for you."

He went to the kitchen. He made pancakes, and then he ate them. He took milk, and then he heard a siren. It was the cops. He said "Uh-oh, the cops." He was in such a hurry that he grabbed his cameras off the bureau and he dragged them across the floor. He was in such a hurry that he left one on the floor. He didn't look for nothing so he didn't know it..

He ran as fast as he could to the T. V. news station to give them the news of a dead lady who someone strangled. The T. V. reporter, Ronald Rakefield, asked Walter, "how do you know about this strangled lady? Nobody else has reported this except you."

Walter felt scared. He took out his knife and stabbed Ronald Rakefield. He felt shaky and nervous. He searched through Ronald Rakefield's pockets, then in the last pocket he found fifty dollars. He left

for the train station. The train arrived. He got on the train in the front car.

He saw an empty seat and he went to sit in it. The train started to move and so the seat began to shake. The cameras he was wearing began to shake too and then he remember his wife who he had killed. Then he said to himself, "Maybe they are right about coming back! Carmen and Rafael!"

The conductor came by collecting tickets. He passed by Walter. The conductor said, "You got your ticket?"

He saw the conductor and wondered if he was a policeman. He felt as though he was in another world in which everyone was against him. He felt like the conductor knew that he had murdered his wife. He looked as though he knew more about Walter than he did himself.

Walter got off in Springfield. There were a lot of beautiful trees and grass, mountains with melted snow that looked like cream and sugar.

There were a lot of bike riders because they wouldn't pollute the air because it was such a beautiful town. No cars were allowed in the town.

Walter stepped into the middle of the bicycle path. He didn't know what he was doing. He was crazy. He got hit by a bicycle. He thought nothing could hurt him.

(UNFINISHED)

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Contributors' Notes

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BETTE DISTLER is poet-in-residence in Project MOPPET, Woodbridge, N. J. MA Poetry from Goddard College; field faculty David Ignatow. Published: children's book Timothy Tuneful Crowel Collier. Poetry published 1973: The Literary Review, Fairleigh Dickinson University; Hanging Loose; The William Carlos Williams Poetry Contest Anthology (to be published early 1974).

First book of poetry the death of lottie shapiro currently being considered.

Lives in West Orange, N. J. with husband Donald and four sons.

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She teaches courses at Staten Island Community College. For teachers interested in teaching writing, Ms. Hubert conducts a series of weekly workshops at the learning center, P. S. 163, New York.

MARC KAMINSKY is the author of Birthday Poems (Horizon Press, 1972), A New House (Inwood Press, 1974), and a forthcoming book called What's Inside You It Shines Out of You: Poetry Groups with Old People, to be published this spring by Horizon Press. He is a member of the Association for Poetry Therapy and of The Inwood Press Collective.

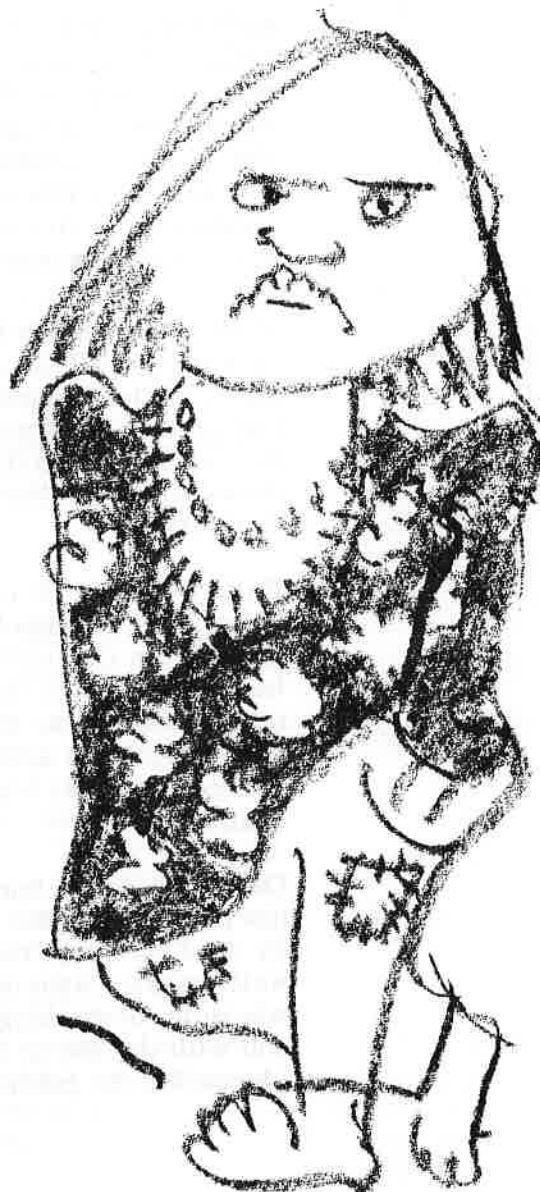
PHILLIP LOPATE is the author of a volume of poems, The Eyes Don't Always Want to Stay Open (SUN Books) and a novella, In Coyoacan (Swollen Magpie Press). His works have appeared in the anthologies A Cinch, Equal Time, and other magazines. He is coordinator of Teachers & Writers Collaborative's special program at P. S. 75 in New York City. A book about his teaching experiences will be published by Doubleday.

DICK LOURIE'S fourth book, Stumbling, a selection of his poetry over the last ten years, has just been published by the Crossing Press. An editor of Hanging Loose, a well-known magazine of poetry, he now lives in Ithaca NY, where he is working with the Poets in the Schools program, and with the Ithaca City School district, as a poet in residence for the public schools in that area.

ADALBERTO ORTIZ was born in Bayamon, Puerto Rico in 1947. He is a graduate of The City College. He was first-prize winner of the 125th anniversary CCNY art contest, and received the James K. Jackett medal for distinction in theatrical design. Mr. Ortiz has also designed several covers for the poetry quarterly, Hanging Loose. His paintings are included in the permanent collection of City College.

RON PADGETT is the author of Great Balls of Fire (1969, Holt, Rinehart) a book of poetry, and Antlers in the Tree Tops (Coach House Press, Toronto), a novel written in collaboration with Tom Veitch. He also co-edited The Anthology of New York Poets with David Shapiro.

SUE WILLIS's stories have been published in Epoch and The Minnesota Review. She has a MFA in writing from the Columbia School of the Arts. She teaches writing, drama and videotape for Teachers & Writers Collaborative at P.S. 75.



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Teachers & Writers Collaborative's basic program is supported by a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, our publications by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Our 1973-74 program is also receiving funding from Poets & Writers, Inc., Title I funds from District 3 (Manhattan), and from the many subscribers to this Newsletter.

A special thank you to John Melser, Head Teacher, and the community school board of P. S. 3 for providing office space for the Collaborative.

TEACHERS & WRITERS COLLABORATIVE PUBLICATIONS

POSTER cover of the Fall 1973 issue of the Newsletter
Full size (17 by 22).

THE WHOLE WORD CATALOGUE (128 pages) is a practical collection of assignments for stimulating student writing, designed for both elementary and secondary students. Activities designed as catalysts for classroom exercises include: personal writing, collective novels, diagram stories, fables, spoof and parodies, and language games. It also contains an annotated bibliography.

IMAGINARY WORLDS (120 pages) originated from Richard Murphy's desire to find themes of sufficient breadth and interest to allow sustained, independent writing by students. Children invented their own Utopias of time and place, invented their own religions, new ways of fighting wars, different schools. They produced a great deal of extraordinary writing, much of it reprinted in the book.

A DAY DREAM I HAD AT NIGHT (124 pages) is a collection of oral literature from children who were not learning to read well or write competently or feel any real sense of satisfaction in school. The author, Roger Landrum, working in collaboration with two elementary school teachers, made class readers out of the children's own work, recorded the readers in a tape library, and designed a set of language exercises based on the readers.

SPRING 1973 NEWSLETTER (159 pages) can be ordered as a separate book. Of unusual interest in this issue are two articles, one by Anne Martin on the teaching of writing to first graders, the other by Phillip Lopate on making videotapes with elementary school children (from writing and producing a script through to editing and screening).

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