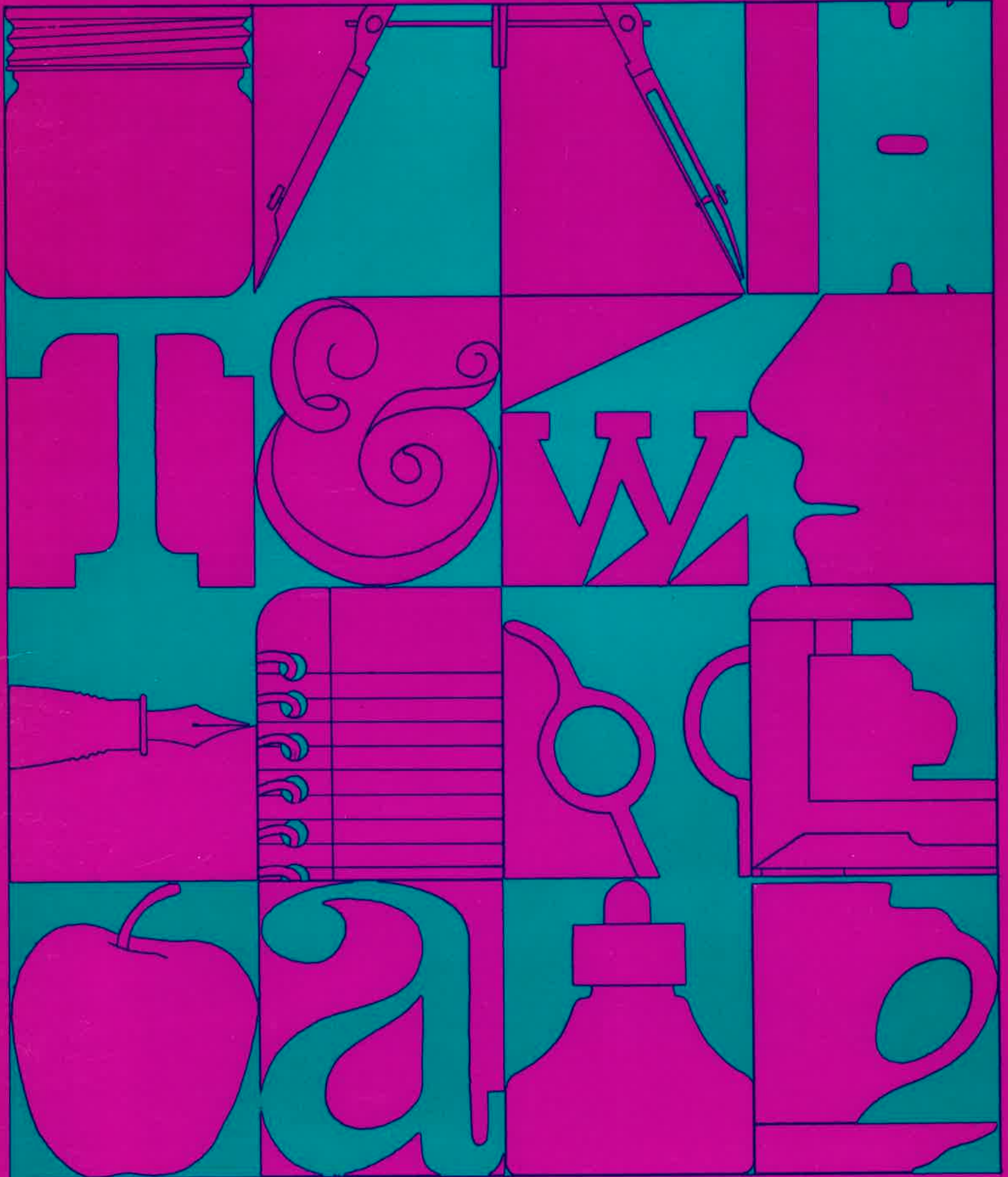


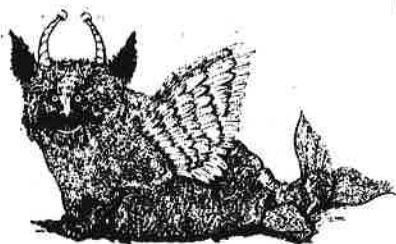
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Archeology of the City

TEACHING ANTHROPOLOGY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by **SIDNEY GOLDFARB**

This piece covers a segment of my work under the auspices of Teachers and Writers Collaborative at P. S. 3 in Manhattan begun in February 1973. The work consisted in meeting twice weekly for a period of twenty weeks with twelve fifth grade students in a 'seminar' we called "From Cavemen to Cities." The original form of the class was a course I taught in as an Instructor in Humanities at M. I. T. called "Archeology of the City." Since my only previous experience with young students was in teaching poetry in the third and fifth grades, my work was obviously of an experimental nature for both me and the students. I had originally applied to Steve Schrader for a job teaching writing. But when I spoke to him about the course I had taught at M. I. T. we were both excited by the possibility of seeing what would happen in trying to transfer some of the conceptual core of the M. I. T. class to a class for a group of ten year olds. We consulted John Melser, head teacher of P. S. 3, and he found us a teacher who was interested in the project, Dan Zulawski. Dan asked his class for volunteers, explaining some-

thing about the class and the amount of time involved. At first we thought about doing it with his whole class, but we decided to limit it to those who showed a particular interest. We found a bare classroom on the top floor of P. S. 3 and, having utterly no idea what would happen, I and twelve kids began traipsing up there every Tuesday and Thursday morning to consider baboon power structure and the discovery of seeds. The dilemma for me would be how to make things like technological and economic revolutions, relation of art to social and economic context, etc., perceivable in very active and simple terms. My aims in the long run were the same as those in teaching the class in college: first, to give the students some sense of the fact that they were not born yesterday, that they are the inheritors of a long history of man's struggle both to adjust to and change his surroundings and, second, to gain an appreciation for ways of life other than our own, both ancient and contemporary, through discussion of the kinds of human activity that have been lost to us through the steady roll of so-called "progress". Rather than simply "study"

ancient man, I had hoped to always have the present contemporary megalopolis as a reference, using the continual juxtaposition, the way African Bushmen court and marry as opposed to the present status of courtship and marriage, for instance, as a way of seeing more deeply into both.

The course was to be divided into three main segments: 1. Cave Men, studying the life of pure hunters, augmented by the study of a contemporary hunting tribe, the Bushmen of South West Africa. 2. The beginning of agriculture and the earliest towns. 3. The first cities. I had hoped that this would lead eventually to the development of tools of examination that we might, toward the end of the class, begin applying to our own surroundings, but a misjudgement in time limited that to happening more or less casually along the way rather than in a summary study. I did not have a fixed plan. I did have ideas about what I hoped could be learned and explored, but most of the assignments evolved more or less spontaneously as I got to know the students and what they would be willing to do and capable of doing. Sometimes I would attempt to do

things that the classroom teacher would have known to be impossible, at least with the particular students I had to work with. And since I worked alone with them most of the time, when things dissolved into chaos, they dissolved completely. For instance, in an attempt to give the students a sense of how a pre-legal system operates, how small groups of independant tribes might develop customary ways of dealing with each other (with the tangential hope that we might be able to identify some of the customary ways we had of dealing with each other), I sketched out a little scenario for the class in which one tribe which was in need of marriageable women sent a party to the headman of another tribe with an excess of women to negotiate for a bride. I hoped to use the occasion to show how the delicate balance of small groups could be easily upset unless they could depend on certain aid from other small groups, although there were no laws, codes or even taboos to assure that this would happen. In this instance the group in need would simply shrivel up and die without outside aid. I divided the class into 2 tribes, and they assigned themselves parts, but once they began they were unable to keep straight faces for any of it and the careful discussion and planning disintegrated into a bedlam I could not break by any re-arrangement. Perhaps if the parts had been written out beforehand disaster would have been avoided, but then that would have removed part of the spontaneity in figuring out what was going to happen themselves. This instance

was simply a loss. Other chance occurrences worked quite well. During our discussion of cave life, in fact when we were building papier mache caves and talking about how we would decorate the insides, I was having a great deal of difficulty explaining to the students what shamans were. At one point we did get off onto an interesting tangent about what psychiatrists were, and from there to considering some of the fearful forces they felt in the world, and from there to imagining some similarity between what we think of as sickness or mental illness and what a stone age man might think of as being inhabited by spirits, but I was unsatisfied with this "parallel" understanding and wanted to find a way to get them to imagine what actually being a shaman was like. The highly secular background of the students I had (most of them had never once been in a church or synagogue) made it almost impossible to refer to experience as a means of stirring interest in religious or even more general "spiritual" feeling. And, of course, there are no 'texts' to refer them to. Or so I thought. By chance I had given one of my students a book called Technicians of the Sacred (ed. Jerome Rothenberg) and asked him to read the section called 'visions and spells' which included an excerpt from Black Elk Speaks, an autobiography of a Sioux medicine man. One day after class I saw him reading one of those comic book form biographies of baseball players, and I asked him if he could make a comic book about a shaman's life complete with illustrations of his visions and other

important events. This he did over the weekend on his own time with spectacular results. I could sense that reading Black Elk's own story, having a chance to contemplate that on his own and outside of class, was much more convincing than any explanation I could have given as to what shamans do. All that was needed was the form of the comic book to give occasion to his imagination. More often than not this was how fruitful means of study emerged: trying to do something one way, failing, adjusting to the failure, or simply taking advantage of the way in which interest developed in and of itself.

This gave me a chance to work in various media. Some students were interested in building and decorating caves rather than in writing biographies of shamans or in reading with me some shamanic poetry. Also, since the class was composed on the basis of interest rather than "intellectual ability," whatever that is, I had to continually adjust to finding out what the students wouldn't or couldn't do. Again, a regular classroom teacher would have saved an enormous amount of wasted time. For instance, I assumed that everyone in the class could write, which everyone could do somewhat. But the pressure of having to write on the spot in class, and then read the results was much more of a burden on those students who had difficulty in writing than on those who did not. So for them the spontaneity of the situation was not only a drawback but an embarrassment. Of course, I couldn't know this until I tried a writing assignment, and by then the damage was

done. And one defeat in a class of this nature and duration was enough to make that student think he had gotten into something he couldn't possibly cope with and react accordingly. During one of the writing assignments one of the students got so frustrated at not being able to express himself or not think of anything to express that he decided to dismantle the piano in the back of the classroom, quietly and carefully. If we had been in a regular classroom, he could have read or played with baseball cards or fed the hamsters. In our classroom there was only a

Two things I quickly learned: Bring alternate assignments. Watch out for pianos.

piano, an old piano silently waiting to be unstrung. He couldn't go back to his regular classroom (which would have meant a kind of defeat), and he couldn't play the piano, etc. Needless to say, M. I. T. had not prepared me for these eventualities, so for most of this period I felt like I was the student and they were constantly the teachers in a course whose subject changed from moment to moment. Two things I quickly learned: Bring alternate assignments. Watch out for pianos.

I would like to explain here how just one section of the class worked in detail as

a model for the way things worked in general. The "neolithic revolution," the term used by archeologist Gordon Childe to describe the period after the discovery of agriculture somewhere in the sixth or seventh millennium B. C., is a pivotal event comparable in import to the industrial revolution in more recent times. I wanted my students to build neolithic towns as a way of understanding the whole life form of that particular change. Periodically we would meet in our classroom (which became known as our cave), and I would briefly sketch out on the board some of the chronology in man's evolution. There was no attempt to impress on anyone dates or even places particularly, though these were mentioned and some students became interested in that literal aspect of things. What I was interested in was trying to show that from the moment the first chip was flaked from a stone human history changed irrevocably because there was an interposing factor between man and nature, his tools. The students were impressed with the fact that men learned to take chips off one side of a stone, and then learned nothing further for something like 600,000 years, at least from what we know from what has been dug up. And they immediately compared that to how quickly things change in the world they live in. After the discovery of tools per se, the domestication of animals and the discovery of agriculture mark, in an economic sense, the next important change in that it now became possible for man to settle, to be free of the whims of the hunt and chance gathering. It also meant, though

there is much speculation as to how this happened, the beginnings of diversification in the division of labor on other than a sexual basis, and the development of political and religious hierarchies. The possibility of storage and accumulation, the fact that one man could have more food than he needed for his own consumption, and that he could preserve it, meant that he could trade his surplus for other goods and services. Settling also meant the beginnings of "urban design," the necessity of some plan for maintenance and protection and an orderly relation to the agricultural process upon which the economy of the town was based. I had hoped that all of this would come clear to the students in the activity of designing their towns, figuring out not only how things were to be shaped, but who executed the plans and under what authority.

The preparation for building the towns took about four sessions. We had been studying the life of the hunters for about eight weeks previously, focusing on the life of a contemporary African hunting tribe through the use of ethnographic films, readings, cave and tool making projects, and discussions. An inordinate amount of time was spent on this section of the class because I was trying to use it to develop a common language that we could apply to later developments. For instance, after viewing the film, The Hunters by John Marshall (available from McGraw-Hill), we spent about three classes discussing the division of roles according to sex that we observed in the movie. Though the

movie is deceptive in the sense that it deals with the subject of giraffe hunting, and less so, only tangentially, with the roles of women, it was quite clear to everyone that among these hunters, at least, there were fixed economic roles for men and women. Grossly simplified, this boils down to the men doing the hunting and the women doing the gathering and householding. The girls in the class were outraged by this, or at least some were. Predictably I had not foreseen that this subject would turn into a consciousness raising session, but it did, and I rode with it until the subject exhausted itself, for the moment. The question I put to them was, why does this division occur and then, why does it persist? The boys in the class, of course, insisted that the men did the hunting because they were naturally stronger, had more endurance, could run faster, etc. than the women. This was encountered immediately by A. saying, "Bullshit, I can run faster than either you or Ricky!" "Oh, Yeah?" "Yeah." I suspected she was right since she looked pretty fast to me and no challenge race was proposed by the boys. "Well, you might be faster, but we're stronger than you are! Besides, you'd get sick cutting up a giraffe!" We decided to have an Indian Wrestling contest to settle the issue. The boys carried the day but only by a score of 6-3, not enough to prove their point: i.e. if strength was the only issue, certainly those women who are stronger than men should be allowed to hunt. Why doesn't this happen? Various answers: how can you tell who's going

to be stronger when they're born? Men are generally stronger than women and it's less confusing to have to choose. I would let all the answers pour out until the name calling stage. Why do women accept this division? One girl answered that she would rather stay at home anyway, let the men be heroes and get themselves killed by elephants for all she cared. Another said that the men had all the weapons and if the women tried anything the men would kill them. Yeah, but we could secretly practice while the men were hunting and take them by surprise! During the first session I was content to let the discussion go where it would, hoping to use a second session to formalize what we had been talking about.

I'm not sure whether it was a matter of age or the way I went about dealing with the subject, but it was difficult, even with a topic in which everyone was interested, to get them to move from the single assertion or single conception stage to anything more general. They liked to talk and argue about things while there was some intensity of argument like a game or contest going on, but calm discussion, as a group, seemed impossible. What I would do was try to remember what their positions were in the arguments, and then, while we were doing something else bring up what they had said and discuss it with them. They were much more open and pliable talking one to one. For instance, hardly anyone was willing to admit they liked anything about Bushman life in class, but one day during lunch one

girl told me that after the Bushman movie she couldn't stop thinking about them, about the fact that their life seemed so completely different from hers. She kept asking me if they were living right now? right now? And I kept telling her that as far as I knew they were still out there in the Kalahari Desert doing the ostrich dance and eating turtles and melons. You mean, well, I always thought that we were the only people in the world. We went into the empty classroom and I turned to the page in the worn atlas that had a map of the world in it, and began telling her off the top of my head about all the different tribes I could think of and where they lived, and then about the differences between different countries. She had seen Nixon and Mao on TV but she hadn't thought about the fact that China was different from the United States except for the fact that there was a Chinatown with 600,000,000 people in it. Once the differences between Bushman and modern American economy had been actually registered, it was interesting to be able to talk about the differences between the Chinese economy and our own. This conversation about how all the different people on the surface of the earth survive, that there is not simply one way of living, that it might even be possible to choose the way you wanted to live, was not what I thought we would be talking about, but it was, till lunchtime ended, and her friends came back.

Reactions and conversations such as this were few and far between, but I think that most of the students understood that the way in which the Bushmen live is

the way man lived till about ten thousand years ago, at least economically. And I think they got a sense that ten thousand years was only a small part of man's history. Before moving on to towns and the discovery of agriculture, I wanted to see what they had absorbed about the way hunting life works. I asked them as a group if they could name for me every single physical element in the bushman world and what these things came from. This would include not just tools, but apparel, food, musical and religious instruments, shelters, i.e., anything other than the flesh and bone of the Bushmen themselves. Under the heading BUSHMAN I put on the blackboard I also put two subheadings, NATURAL and PROCESSED, so they would get some idea not just of the elements themselves, but also of the means of transformation. This immediately led to a discussion of what a "process" is, and whether the making of a compound, transforming an element by a chemical, could be thought of as a 'process' in the same way as chipping a flake from a stone. At last on one side of the board was a list of everything in Bushman material life: bone, wood, melons, animal gut (for bow strings), beetle poison (for tipping arrows), gourds (for utensils and musical instruments), straw (for huts), skin (for clothes), stone, etc. Participation was lively. They seemed to enjoy reaching back into their memory of the films they had seen. Often discussions would be chaotic with much boredom and mind-wandering. I don't know if it was simply the pleasure of show-

ing what they had learned that made this discussion so lively, but in a very short time they were able to name everything I could remember. This surprised me because I thought they had been very bored watching a rather slow documentary about Bushman hunting equipment with a narration intended for college students, but they remembered what they saw. We noted that there was nothing in the 'processed' column except a kind of poison the Bushmen extract from a beetle which is heated, evidently to make it stronger.

To emphasize the specificity of this technology I put the word US on the other side of the board, again with 'processed' and 'natural' underneath. I then asked them to list every thing they use, eat, are sheltered by, etc., from the time they get up in the morning till the time they go to bed at night. This naturally precipitated a crazy discussion: is toothpaste natural? What is toothpaste anyway? What does the bus run on? Is oil natural? Where does water come from? How is nylon made? What are bricks? Glass? Yoghurt? Paper? What are the streets made out of? Do we have anything that's natural? Yes, wood! Milk! Apples! Applesauce! No! Your applesauce has preservative in it! The board was quickly covered with hundreds of materials and products, many of which required a short discussion of the processes behind them. As often happens there were many more questions that I couldn't answer than I could, a reminder of how little I knew about the world I was trying to explain. Actually, what I didn't know had a good

effect on the discussion in this case: it made me more of a participant in a subject we were exploring mutually. Finally we had a board in front of us with some sort of rough comparison between Bushman technology and our own. They drew the obvious conclusions: that Bushman life was much simpler than our own in a material sense, although they had to know much more about the things that they did have. This seemed attractive to them. They were dismayed from the overbalance of the artificial in their lives. Then one student said he would miss the comfort of his bed and blankets, and another said she didn't want to kill animals. Then someone asked her if she didn't eat meat. Whereupon a debate ensued about whether it was better to be a Bushman or a New Yorker. As the debate was fizzling I asked them to close their eyes and imagine that they were all going to sleep in a Bushman hut. As their eyes were closed I described what the night was like outside in the African veldt. Then I asked them to open their eyes and come over to the window. There from the fifth floor of P. S. 3 the dozen of us stood for a moment in silent contemplation of the view north up Hudson Street to the smoky city rising into the clouds.

We came back to our chairs and, redirecting their attention to what we had on the board, I explained that archeology is the means by which we can see from what we dig out of the earth how ways of living have changed from time to time, and how knowledge is accumulated and spread. Previous experience

showed me that they had about a 30-45 minute tolerance for pure talk or discussion, so I decided to give them a writing assignment of designing a town. Referring to the lists of hunting material on the board, I explained to them that the next big change in history began with the domestication of animals. We discussed what domestication was, and I told them about some of the first domesticated animals. I then asked them to write a short story imagining themselves as a hunter discovering how to make some animal dependant on him. Some students balked at the assignment, and while the others were writing, I took them aside to talk with them and show them some pictures of fossils of early domesticated animals. What some did writing, others did talking. Then we read the stories aloud and speculated on the likelihood of each. Some of the stories were as usual silly or scatological, and some dealt imaginatively with the problem, but they were all fun to listen to.

The second stage of preparation was as follows. In the next class I explained to them that soon after the domestication of animals man first learned how to plant seeds. We discussed how this might have happened, and what the results in living might have been. I wanted them to see how having something to store would increase the possibility of inventing something to store it in, and how the breadbaking process might eventually lead to an understanding of ceramics, etc. I also wanted them to think about the fact that as a village accumulated stores, it would have to be able to protect those stores from

nearby peoples whose harvests had failed or who were not agriculturists. We noted that since hunters consume what is most valuable to them, their meat, on the spot, it would be very hard to steal from them unless you arrived just as they were killing something. But with a settlement, there began to be things to steal that stayed still, and some system would have to be devised to protect those things. I also asked them to think a little (although this was to continue to be a difficult subject) about how what a settled farming people would think of as gods would be different from a hunting tribe. I told them that we were going to

digging up the town revealed level after level and began speculating immediately as to why one town had fallen and another built over it. I asked them to pay special attention to any paintings or statues in the pictures and to compare them with some pictures in a book of cave art (Paleolithic Cave Art, Ucko & Rosenfeld) we had in our "cave" library. I wanted them to be aware not simply of the permanence of the town, but of the peculiarity of the statues of bulls and fertility goddesses that were found in each of the dwellings. Of course, the term 'fertility goddess' would have meant nothing to them, but their attention was certainly a-

Were they rich or poor? How can you tell from the houses? Who did what? How was the village protected and governed? What were these ovens used for, and were they used by the whole town? What did they grow? Where did the water come from? What kind of animals did they have? Who or what did they worship and why? Why are these courtyards arranged like this? etc. Having them think about the life of Catal Huyuk by looking at the projections of the remains was intended to prepare them for answering all these questions when they began planning their towns. This was one of the few instances in which I had pretty thoroughly pre-

...but their attention was certainly aroused by a beautiful photograph of a leopard who seemed to have a man's head coming out of her womb.

build some early farming villages, and that they should pay close attention to the discussion so that they would know what they were doing when it came time to build their towns. Rather than talk to them about the "neolithic revolution" I hoped that the actual content of that revolution would become evident as they planned and built their towns. I showed them a book called Catal Huyuk by James Mellart, a study of an early farming village in Turkey. They gathered around informally passing the book back and forth as I explained to them what was in the pictures. Since this was the first time they had seen pictures of an actual "dig" I spent some time talking to them about who archeologists were and how they worked. They were fascinated by the fact that

roused by a beautiful photograph of a seated leopard who seemed to have a man's head coming out of her womb. The boys thought this was great, though maybe not so great as the cave painting of a man who had a hand where his prick should have been. The girls were more thoughtful in their contemplation. I also showed them a book called Technology in the Ancient World by Henry Hodges, which had pictures of most of the tools related to early agricultural villages and some contemporary photographs of similar tools. In looking at both books I spoke as I could about town design, religion, tools, placing special emphasis, as we looked at the projections of different levels of Catal Huyuk, in getting them to speculate about the people that lived there: How many were there?

pared my questions before hand. I even made myself a list of all the possible implications that looking at the pictures might yield and I tried to cover all of them. If I did this aspect of the class over again, I would make it even more like an archeological mystery game, leaving out all but the barest pre-explanations, and trying to get the most mileage out of the joy the students seemed to take in guessing what things were. Usually they came up eventually with the right answers, and their concentration was much greater and they remembered things much longer than when I explained things myself.

I then divided the class into three work groups and asked them to spend the rest of the class making a plan

for their town and writing me a description of it under the following headings: population, time in history, location, kinds of food, kinds of tools, climate, government (who's boss?), religion. I reminded them that there was no metal, so they would have to figure out how the whole agricultural process took place using only wood or other 'natural' material for tools. The plans themselves caused something of a hitch. In one group, four girls who usually worked together, there was a lot of argument about the design and, although the argument was interesting, it seemed like it might not produce results. So I asked them to make individual plans, so that we could discuss the virtues of each and on that basis try to develop one plan. One of the boys' groups had a different problem. These three boys tended to work well together, but in a kind of fixed one-leader-two-followers arrangement. They had quickly decided and approved of T's plan. The followers could see no point in thinking about designing the town themselves since T had already made a plan which was good enough. I tried to coax them into it, pointing out that they always followed T and it was about time they did something on their own, but nothing could change their minds. I decided to make an arbitrary division of labor: T could design the town, but J would have control over everything relating to farming, designing the stable or corrals and fields, etc., and B would have charge of making models of all art and implements, tools, statues or paintings and ceramics. Though this didn't

involve all of them in the town design per se, it did serve to integrate them somewhat in the planning and give them some say in the overall shape of the place. A third group of three boys were either too bored by the project or too lazy. No amount of help would get them started. This was disappointing since they were among the brightest students verbally. They simply balked at the assignment. Eventually they did begin work on a village that had terraced farming in the mountains above it, but this required a few weeks of peripheral work with them which drew me away from being able to pay as much attention to the other towns as I wanted.

This was one problem I ran into continually with students who are, in the modulated open classroom atmosphere of P.S. 3, often given choices about doing one thing or another. This seems fine in terms of range of things to do, but it also seems to nurture the habit of opting out once one particular choice has been made if a specific assignment doesn't seem like the most interesting thing that's happening at that particular moment. Sometimes I was able to invent alternate assignments, but I often missed the discipline that would force, if I may use that forbidden word, the students into doing what they thought they couldn't do or wouldn't enjoy doing. This was partly a limitation of the "seminar" nature of the class. L, on a certain day, would be willing to involve himself in the class; other days the two hours would be entirely wasted, and he wouldn't go back to the home room for

fear that he would be dropped entirely from the class and thus not be able to come to it when he was in the mood. I think a regular classroom teacher would have an easier time doing these projects more casually and over a longer period of time, getting the projects started and then letting the students work on things when they wanted to. For the three boys who didn't manage to get their plan together, their description was as follows:

Time: 5000 B.C.

Place: Iran

Population: 50

Climate: just like our summer, fall, winter, spring (I allowed this cop out after a fight.)

Animals: dogs, pigs, cattle, sheep

Crops: corn, tomatoes, squash, watermelon

How governed: men vote together

Tools: wooden plows, pottery, wooden yokes, bone drills, bow and arrows, stone axes

Clothing: animal skins and wool

Building materials: mud, straw, wood

They had left out religion, and said they wanted to think about it more. It seemed foolish to insist that they create a religion immediately, so I let it slide. They were able to refer repeatedly to Technology in the Ancient World for ideas. There were many questions and conflicts. For instance, archeologically speaking, there might not have existed any wheels, or wells, or irrigation, etc. for the time and place they chose. In discussion with them I would try to point this out just so they would get the 'idea' of "economic stages," but usually we compromised

and let some unlikely inventions stay unless they were quite obviously from another time like metal spears. I would talk about dates from time to time, but I was not insistent that they remember anything specific. Some students took my mini-lectures seriously and took notes (while others drowsed). The main point in preparation and actual designing of the towns was how life changed with the possibility of preserving food as opposed to what we knew of the instant consumption of the hunters.

For simplicity's sake, I'd like to describe the process

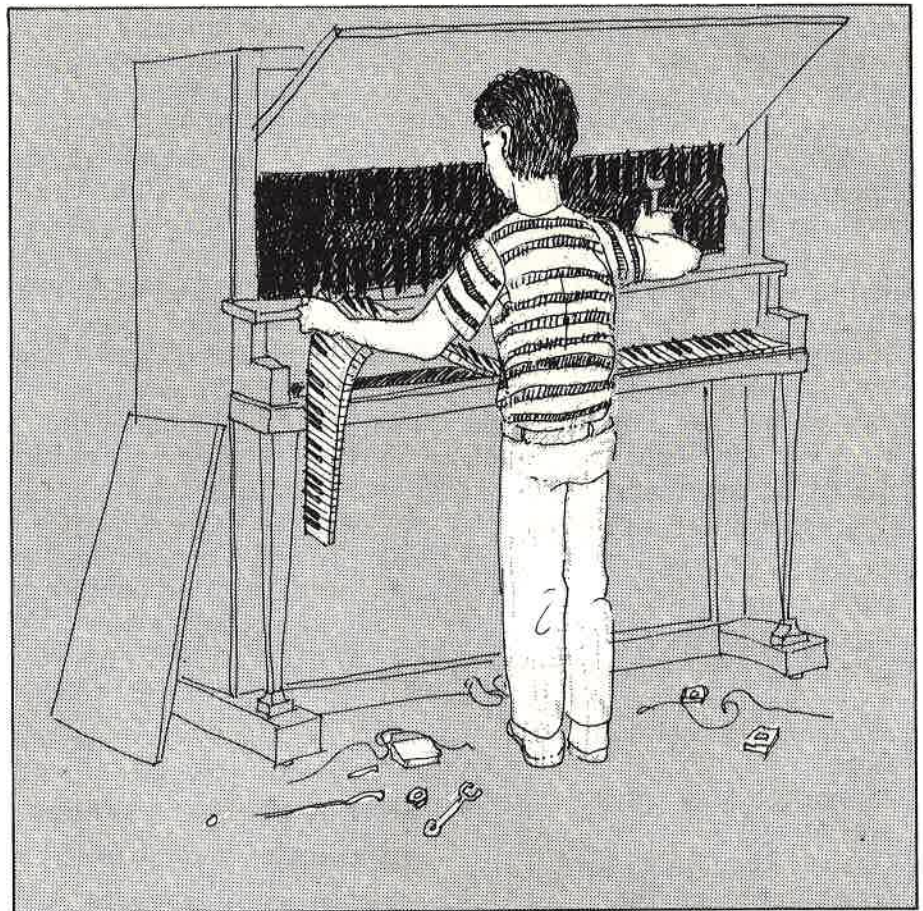
My boy students tended to imagine everything governed by a male dominated egalitarian communism.

of building just one of the towns. Materials and approach could obviously vary. What is important in the building of the towns is to constantly question the student as the town is being built as to every aspect of its nature. If the town starts to go up without protecting walls, you might ask if there aren't other people in the area who might be interested in stealing your stores. Or, if all the houses appear to be absolutely uniform in size, this serves as a basis for asking if everybody is as rich as everybody else, and, if there are differences in wealth, how this happened. This should

also lead to talking about how the place is governed and how that happened. If the houses are also uniform in shape, you might ask if a farmer and a potter would have exactly the same kinds of houses, or if there are any religious buildings or at least some houses with more religious objects than others, the home of a priest, for instance. If the town plan appears too geometrical, ask if it's not more likely if the town shape didn't develop more slowly than at a single blow. If the students insist on sticking to their strict geometrical plan, ask them to explain what the power was behind the possibility of implementing such a plan. The aim would be to see how one focus fits together in all its aspects rather than simply reproducing a model that was archeologically correct. My boy students tended to imagine everything governed by a male dominated egalitarian communism. Rather than questioning the likelihood of this happening, in this instance I tried to get them to describe to me exactly how this worked and then question their description. If only the men govern, why do the women accept it? How do you prevent one man from gaining more wealth than others by trading with outsiders? Do you forbid contact with outsiders, or is trading also communal? Communal trading. Great. How does it work? This incidental questioning is really where imaginations come most into play and where this approach in studying early man most differs from fixed kits like "Man, a Course of Study," and other packages. I think it is the most creative and enjoyable way to ap-

proach things for both teacher and student. I certainly had fun listening to how these twentieth century city dwellers imagined the early neolithic for themselves.

In the actual building of the town, we first constructed a low platform out of wood for the town itself. In their designs they had decided that the fields were to lie outside the town with a river between the town and the fields, so we had also to construct a low platform for the fields, with a gap in the middle for the irrigation ditch. Once the bases for town and field had been built, I had them cut big pieces of paper to the size of the bases and draw in a projection of their earlier plan to the scale of the base. At first we used regular pottery clay to cover the bases, but by the next day the surfaces had dried and cracked, making our uninhabited site look like it had been hit already by a devastating drought. So we decided to cover the boards with heavy construction paper and build the town itself out of plastecene. The gap for the irrigation ditch was filled with chicken wire so that we could papier mache the water, giving it a different surface than the town and the fields. The river was a board nailed to the bottom of both bases and also covered with chicken wire. Before we actually began to put up the walls, there was a long discussion about whether the houses should have roofs or not. I wanted them to at least know what the roofs were made of and how they were constructed, but they thought it was more important that people could see inside the houses. So we decided to just put up the walls of the



houses for the time being. The ideal way to build the town would have been from completely natural materials, i. e., tiny sun-dried bricks, etc., but exigencies of time, materials and concentration made this impossible. I did insist however that the students know what the materials were that they were representing. This would often lead to an alteration in design. For instance, in discussing the possibility that the bricks might have been fired rather than sun baked, it would have been necessary to add some firing or kiln area to the town plan. When controversies such as these came up, the students tended to opt for the simplest plan, but I would encourage them to be free in rearrangement just for the sake of seeing how one change

could lead to many changes.

At first we all worked together on the town; constructing the outer walls. Plastecene proved a perfect material to work in. If something developed we didn't like, or some better alternative became evident, we had only to pick up what we had done and start over. When J, who had been given charge of agriculture, noticed that the stable area was at the opposite end of the town from the fields, he asked if the stable couldn't be on the other end. Somehow taking the animals across the river to graze appealed to him. He then began thinking about how the stable was to be divided and, as we were working on the stable together, we talked about how the animals were cared for. Needless to say, this conversation between two city slickers about the intricacy

cies of sheep shearing was highly speculative. Another instance of instant design came when I noticed that the town had no public space. In typical New York fashion we had all forgotten that some area just for common rest and chatting might be desirable. We talked about the possibility of common courtyards for some of the houses or a square or a park. All building stopped for a while as each student rapped about where he hung out and what he liked or didn't like about it. It was interesting to hear about Bleecker Street, Washington Square Park or Thomkins Park from the point of view of ten year olds. This took us on to a discussion of streets as public space, and also stoops, allies, stores, etc. We were all impressed by the fact that there was hardly any public space in New York except for the parks that you thought of as such. You just take what you can get as you can get it: the street is a ball park until a car comes; the stoop is a park bench till someone throws you off; the newspaper stand is a library until the owner yells, "This ain't no library!" Momentarily we all became fascinated by the fact that in our town, Iran 5000 B. C., we could have things just exactly the way we wanted to have it. We could actually begin thinking about the kind of habitation that was most desirable to us. From all this one of the students suggested that we have a shaded well at the center of the town as a convenient place to hang out. This was immediately incorporated. Later someone decided that we should have a guardian statue near the well facing

the entrance to the town. These kinds of alterations were to occur again and again as more of the town began to be visible, more questions were asked, and more brainstorming happened. For the teacher, being involved in the building is invaluable. In this type of project the students have a tendency, once they get started, to rush on to get the thing done, achieved. The teacher's participation can slow down the process and take advantage of possibilities as they arise. It is also a very good time to fill out the students' knowledge of the people they were imagining. I would constantly ask questions about who lived in each house and how they were related to one another, who else they were related to in the town, what kind of stature they had in the town, in short, I would try and make them see as much as possible what the everyday life was like of the people they were in fact creating. In the case of this town the students themselves thought of many of the alterations, each one of which took them deeper into the nature of the place they were creating. One mistake I made here was in getting so wrapped up in the town planning and tools that I did not place sufficient emphasis on the people themselves. I should have had all of the people named in the planning description according to age, relations, occupations. We had drawn our own family trees previously, and this would have been an excellent chance to explore the nature of kinship and to speculate about individual biographies. Stories could have been written about the town or the people in it. It

would have been useful to have each student write a kind of "Day in the Life" of their favorite person in the town, but I didn't think of any of this until it was too late and we were already studying the Egyptians.

Another aspect of town building which was pretty much unsuccessful, at least in this town, had to do with religion. I had hoped that in looking at the photos of Catal Huyuk and discussing them, the students would become aware of the differences between farming and hunting gods and be able to incorporate these differences into the towns they were building. This was one part of the preparation to which I wish I had given more time. How religious or spiritual life changes relative to economic life should have been a fundamental part of the class right up to considerations of contemporary materialism. It should have been obvious after noting the almost exclusive preoccupation of cave art with animals of the hunt that the presence of fertility goddesses and human forms signaled some kind of spiritual change in this emerging urban people. Either I didn't explain this well enough, or the highly secular point of view of the students made them unreceptive to such changes, or maybe that was just something that couldn't be understood at this level and would have to be dealt with with older students. Outside of this one drawback, it seemed to me that the town building experience gave the students a more direct experience of what the early neolithic was actually like than would be possible in an academic surroundings. ■

Gathered around the breakfast table the Senoi families of Malaya tell one another dreams they had the night before. Anthropologists became interested in the Senoi culture when they saw that for over three hundred years there were no wars and that violence is not accepted as a way to resolve conflicts. The Senoi believe that any individual who can master the forces in the spiritual world of dreams and visions can maintain good will toward other human beings and experience cooperation with them. To accomplish this the dreamer faces her or his dream images. If you are attacked in a dream you fight back; if you fall in

give continuity to the writing sessions held for only forty-five or fifty minutes two days a week. The idea to use dreams came from reading the dream events as spoken or acted out by tribal people and transcribed in Shaking The Pumpkin, by Jerome Rothenberg. The dream events might allow kids to work cooperatively, to take the parts in other peoples' lives and become close to that person in a supportive or hostile expression, which would be also a projected story or fantasy of their own selves.

I heard about the Senoi from friends who were taking a dream workshop based on

The Use of Dreams in Poetry Workshops

by KATHLEEN MEAGHER

a dream you fall all the way: you confront your assailant or you meet what awaits you at the end of your fall. The Senoi say it is good to die in dreams. Death leads to rebirth of the dreamer and exhausts the force of the adversary. If painful images from the past are not killed off or understood for who and what they represent in us we will continue to suffer as a result of a perpetualized dream world.

For my five-week poetry workshop with grades five through eight at Sacred Heart School in Bloomfield, Connecticut I had been thinking of possible ways to free the kids in an experience other than the poetry writing exercises or themes and how to

the work of Kilton Stewart, an anthropologist who studied the Senoi culture and later developed a creative psychology based on Senoi dream practices. I asked myself if continuity might be brought to the experiences of the kids at Sacred Heart school during our five weeks together by telling them the story of the Senoi and asking them to bring in each morning their dream from the night before to tell in school, as the Senoi do around the breakfast table. If a dream could not be remembered, the first waking thought could be used. These would be written on a dream scroll when the kids first came into the classroom -- or at any time during the day a dream or first thought was

remembered.

For the dream scrolls I got newsprint ends from the press room of a daily newspaper and cardboard tubes from a yard - goods store, both free -- a deposit of \$2 for the core in the newsprint roll. I stapled the paper onto it and ran a rope through the tube, pulling the two outward ends of the rope away from the tube and fixing these to hooks to enable the scroll to be turned easily. The rope was then hung at the center. I tied magic markers to yarn and thumbtacked these at both sides of the scroll.

On some days we talked about dreams and thoughts written on the scroll. Often a writing exercise was related to or explained in terms of what happens in dreams which led to differentiating between the subjective and objective worlds and what the representations of these worlds are in symbol and metaphor. This occurred in the kids' experiences in writing, not in any abstract definitions. For instance, the repetitive line, "This is why I was born..." and "I am afraid of.../I am not afraid of..." gave kids room to use their dream images. Feeling free to do this, they could also face feelings in their waking lives -- as many of them did: "I am afraid when my father yells at me." "I am afraid if my mother and father get hurt in an accident." "I am afraid of my brother." "Scared of a lion but more scared of wars." "Scared of coming to school and not having friends." Or: "This is why I was born, to be myself." "This is why I was born to play with my little brother, To make my father laugh that was why I

was born, This is why I was born to talk to Pops next door, To pick up apples in the backyard that was why I was born."

On Tuesday I asked everyone to come on Thursday prepared to tell a dream. It could be a dream they had the night before or years ago, but it must be a sleeping dream and one they are willing to tell all the way through. On Thursday we divided into groups, as we usually did. I asked who in the group had a dream to tell, that among them they were to decide on one person, who would be the dreamer. After they conferred and chose a person, I said everyone else in the group was to take part, become someone or something in the dreamer's dream -- an animal, water, a shadow, a person, a field, the wind -- anything each person wanted to be. They were to act with the dreamer in some way, help her or him, go with her or him, be something to or with the dreamer. They would begin writing with the line "I am the _____ in your dream." When they had finished writing each group, beginning with the dreamer, read their dream event aloud.

DREAM EVENT - GRADE 7

Mr. Pastula

I am in a dream and all I do is eat a delicious dinner of steak, potatoes salad bread. Now the steak was nice and crisp and well done, that the way I like it. The potatoes were nice a buttery and the salad was good. Now I that and had delicious chocolate cream pie for desert and then I went to read the paper.

I Am Me

I am me in the dream I ate,

dinner at 8:30 and about 10:00 I went to bed I brushed my teeth and washed and I had a fight with my sister a when I went to bed I saw two shadows in my windows at first I didn't now what to do so I shouted When I did I woke up the whole house when my Father came they were gone.

I was the bed in Davids dream. It was getting late and David wasent in bed yet. Well finally he came brushed his teeth and cralled into bed. He said Aloud, I wont need the heat tonight because this bed is so warm and comfy I was proud at that. It was about 1:00 in the morning and david was jumping and screaming it woke me up and I was trying to make myself as hard as possible and he was still jumping and he seemed to be looking at the windows. I looked and to my horror I saw the shadows.

Peter Gerke

I am a shadow I was looking at David for two minutes. He didn't even see me. When he did see me he screamed.

I am the clock on the Pastula's house they are a nice family and they are having supper david has just got up and gone to his room. There is a scream it's david he's running around screaming his head off hes said he saw a shadow in his window.

I Am The Shadow In

Your Dream.

As I was looking in the window of David Pastula's room, trying not to be seen, I saw David jumping up and down on his bed. He was yelling and screaming but fortunately no one heard him till I left. I was looking for a way to get into his room, but the only way was to go through the kitchen door where David'd parents were talking! If they saw me they would surely shoot me or stab me or anything else that would kill me. Then I remembered that the Pastulas had a cat. So I made myself the cat's shadow and me and the cat walked upstairs without anyone being suspicious! When we got upstairs I went into David's room. I scared him so much that he fainted and fell through the floor! After that I left and never went to David's house again! because after all how many people fall through the floor because of a shadow.

Joanne Crombie

All the kids, from the youngest in the fifth grade to those near adolescence in the eighth grade, understood the Senoi belief that an unmasked demon or a fall to the end may tell us what our fear is and that we may lose the fear in our confidence to meet its disguised image. Our sleeping dreams can then enter our waking lives in the form of songs, designs,

poems, stories and inventions. The consequences of not meeting the fears or joys in dreams is to project them into the waking world making them monsters, enemies and envied people (or situations) we do violence against.

In the dream events there is the chance for the kids to remind adults of the harsh and unreasonable day-to-day occurrences that shock or disturb, and how the resulting images are turned inward, regardless of our efforts to keep this from happening. When adults and kids listen to dreams the kids are impressed that their dreams are taken seriously. In the Senoi culture tracing back shocks, accidents and conflicts of the day before, often modifies behavior of every member of the group. This gives the child a feeling of confidence, she or he is not powerless but a creative, functioning person in the social group. Kids and adults can give and accept from one another. Listening to the dreams we accept the real self of the child: we are not concerned with enforcing our will and receiving back what the child learns from us. I believe kids can realize this, and use dreams, from sleep to lives in the waking world, as the expressions for their inmost selves actualized into full creating persons, claiming for those selves and for all things on this earth a birth right. ■

In one of my classes is a girl named Wanda who was clearly having her difficulties. On my first visit I noticed she had a scowling, puzzled expression, moved about in a disoriented way and clung to Miss Lowy like a baby, whining in a peculiar gruff voice that was hard to decipher. She was the target of certain 'sophisticated' children who made fun of her whenever

royal air. Once the play script had been xeroxed, I took her aside and had her read from it. This was good practice, and showed her that reading had a function aside from embarrassing her. I don't think she was reading, though, so much as taking wild guesses from memory. Some of her guesses were way off the mark, like pronouncing six words where there were only three.

Working With Wanda

by PHILLIP LOPATE

she showed discomfit.

There are children who win you over by their irresistibly charming looks - and Wanda was not one of them, though I later saw she had her share of appeal and cuteness in the right circumstance. Then there are children who attract you by their vulnerability, and this was Wanda.

I decided to work with her in creative writing and discovered, as I suspected, that writing anything longer than three words was a torture for her. Reading was an equally grim business. She was far behind the class in reading, and had learned all the wheedling and distracting devices that a slow reader so often develops to draw attention away from her inadequacy.

The first time we did a play I made sure Wanda was in it. Wanda got to play the King, a very dignified, desirable role which she managed with a surprisingly

I consulted with Fredi Balzano, director of the Reading Clinic, who showed me Wanda's tests. In one section she had been asked to imitate certain shapes with a pen, and her own drawn versions had differed sufficiently from the original to indicate that something was wrong. At the very least a problem with mental focusing. Mrs. Balzano suggested that it might be a perceptual handicap, and did not discount the possibility that it might be something "neurological." In a way, I didn't want to hear this. It depressed me because if it was true I knew I could do nothing about it - but more than that, I did not want to acquire an attitude toward Wanda that would turn her into a "case" and let myself off the hook.

Came the performance. Wanda was excited and nervous but she had more stage presence than many of her classmates, who were so

terrified they had to be boot-
ed onstage. Wanda did well
and I think she was pleased
with herself. There might
be many other areas in the
curriculum where she shied
away from putting herself to
the test, but dramatics was
not one of them. Whatever
the final diagnosis of her
learning difficulties - per-
ceptual, psychological, or
a combination - it was clear
to me that she generally
lacked confidence in herself.
And dramatics is one of the
surest ways of building up
self - confidence.

When we began the mono-
logues video project, I asked
her to pick a character that
she wanted to play. She de-
cided to be a witch. I took

in for an inevitable bump:
when it was announced that
Wanda would play the witch
several smart-alecky boys
doubled over with laughter.
"She's already a witch!"

There were two rabbits
in the class: Snowball and
Gravy. We decided that in-
stead of Wanda making some-
one disappear she would turn
him into a rabbit. That gave
some zip to the scenario.
The children were eager to
launch their beloved rabbits'
acting careers. A few weeks
later we were ready to video-
tape the playlet, as part of
the larger Monologues Pro-
ject.

The Monologues Project
is a strategy for giving every-
one a chance to be on video-

**...when it was announced that Wanda would play
the witch several smart-alecky boys doubled over
with laughter. 'She's already a witch!'**

her aside and asked her to
think of a short speech that a
witch might say. Since she
had trouble writing it, I let
her dictate the speech to me
and then had her recopy it in
her own hand. The speech
went:

I am the witch
And I will make you disappear
Because I don't like people
 laughing at me
And I don't like people making
 fun of me
And if you laugh at me
I will laugh right back
And you better not mess with
 me
Because I will disappear you.

It was clear where this
speech was coming from. I
thought Wanda had chosen
wisely, in taking a role that
would give her power and the
wherewithal to strike back at
those who ridiculed her. Ne-
vertheless, she let herself

tape, and a method of teach-
ing characterizations. I had
discovered in directing child-
ren's plays that a child would
often rush into a role - a kid-
napper, say - without bother-
ing to consider what the per-
son he was playing was really
like: what he thought, what
he dreamt, what his motiva-
tions and past were. They
gave themselves insufficient
preparation for getting inside
the character, and so per-
formances were often one-
dimensional. With the Mono-
logue Project, a child would
talk to himself in front of the
camera for five or even ten
minutes, improvising a med-
itation in the voice of the
character he had chosen to
play. In the process he often
stumbled upon odd "facts"
about the character, deeper
aspects that I was surprised
to find out were in the child-

ren's minds. It was fascinating to watch a ten-year-old girl named Reneta recreate the life story of an eighty-year-old man, year by year, like a patient archeologist, slowly turning into him before our eyes, as if giving in to a previous incarnation.

After each actor had delivered his soliloquy, they would play a scene together (also videotaped). I found that often these scenes were deeper and more satisfying for having followed the monologues, because the actors were still inside the solitary nature of their characters. Each had found his center, and was able to act out of that reserve of identity.

When it came time for Wanda's monologue, I sensed that she could not improvise very much about the past life and secret thoughts of the witch. Witches are fantasy figures, they have no biographies. So I asked her to repeat the speech she had written and continue with anything witchy that came into her mind. We placed her inside the Writing Room Closet, which became the Witches' House, and the shot began with the closet door opening mysteriously and Wanda looking into the camera. She said her lines in a tentative, soft voice I had never heard her use, and that would have been more fitting for a ballerina; then she smiled at me and shrugged. She kept looking for instructions from the people behind the camera. I let her stumble on a bit more, wanting her to try to find the answer inside herself. The second time I told her to ignore the lines, just keep repeating "I am the witch I am the witch!" until she started to feel she was really turning into a witch.

I thought a chant might help her find the proper mood. "Just keep saying it in different ways, until you find the right way." Take two. She opened the closet door, repeating the cry a number of times, getting better and more menacing, then flashed us that charming, apologetic smile. "I don't know what else to say." One of her classmates said, "That was good, Wanda." I assured her that it was too, but that maybe we could even make it better.

It struck me that Wanda did not have a very developed

I was aiming for a ritualistic, gut theater approach to the witch, something that would depend...on vocal timbre and hypnotic movement.

self to begin with, and of course it was not going to be easy for her to get inside someone else's skin when she was largely unaware of her own person. This time I asked her to add hand motions. I was aiming for a ritualistic, gut theater approach to the witch, something that would depend not on verbal definition but on vocal timbre and hypnotic movement. Once more she was put inside the closet. She was extremely good-natured, didn't mind doing it again and again; in fact seemed to enjoy the attention. The camera started; she began

clawing the air in a quite extraordinary way. Added to this was a fierce scary growl. Then she lost it. She shrugged at her classmates appealingly.

For the fourth and final take I sent everyone out of the room, including myself, leaving only Wanda and the cameraman (a boy named Jose) behind. I told Wanda we were all going to stand outside the door for five minutes and she was to roar and growl loud enough so that we could hear her through the door. Remember, I said, it's pretty noisy in the hallway so you'd better be loud.

When we came back and reviewed the tape it was wonderful.

What energy! She had found the demon.

In the next scenes she was relaxed and self-possessed. A proper Bostonian sort of lady (played by a proper Bostonian sort of girl, blonde white middle-class Elizabeth) invites Wanda to tea. Not knowing Wanda is a witch, of course. A nosy neighbor (Lucy) is listening in on their tea party. Wanda discovers the eavesdropper and turns her into a rabbit. (A most uncooperative rabbit, I might add, who kept hiding under the chair). The proper lady, stunned, says to the witch: "D - d - don't you think you'd better be going home now?" Wanda answers: "No! And just for that I'm going to turn you into a rabbit too. Poof." At which point Snowball was released and the Writing Room was turned into a rabbit warren, with the cameraman trying to follow the pandemonium of the two rabbits hopping over extension cords while Wanda sat calmly finishing her tea.

**WORKING WITH WANDA and TWO LESSONS are
excerpts from a book to be published by Doubleday.**

Two Lessons

PHILLIP LOPATE

Lesson One: Stream of Consciousness

I began with a simple device, the Schizophrenic Class Poem, an idea borrowed from Dick Gallup, in which the whole class takes on the personality of one human being. First we did an old woman. I asked each of them to write a line or two in the voice of an old woman talking to herself. Then we collected these scraps of paper and read them aloud, one after another in random order, as a continuous scatterbrained monologue. The idea was to show that the sudden jumps from one concern to another (brought about by the collective authorship) actually mirrored the distracted thought processes of one person.

This proved very popular, I think because it put such minimal writing strains on each child (a line apiece) and brought the whole class together in a fun activity. They insisted it be done twice more. First they elected to be a "dirty old man," then a policeman. They would have continued doing it with different personae but I felt it was wearing thin and I was anxious to move on to the main course.

I asked the class to write for ten minutes everything that came into their heads: everything they thought, saw or were physically aware of, like the chair or sensations in their bodies, everything they noticed around the room. . . I did not want to make it any more specific, I was purposely vague. "I can't tell you what to write because I have no idea what's going on inside your brains. Put down everything you're thinking. Don't censor - whatever comes out, comes out. Your pencil should be moving constantly for ten minutes."

Grumbles. The formality of the time limit seemed a good structural idea, and they caught hold of it. They wanted to be certain what second to start, exactly when the ten minutes were up. "Do we have to do this?" Yes, you have to. There was so much ambivalence in their urge to try it but resentment against it, that I sensed this was one time it would be better not to give them a choice. I moved around the room checking to see their papers; quiet of an examination. "It's difficult, I know it is, but give it a try," I said aloud. "Shhh!" a boy behind me retaliated. Fredi Balzano came in with a note for Lois; she stood watching the children writing until I invited her to try it. Then she smiled bashfully and slipped away.

"Aren't the ten minutes over yet?" someone whined.

I was cheating. Fourteen minutes had already passed. "Still-- one-and-a-half more minutes," I said precisely, looking at my watch.

"My hand's getting tired!" For all their grumbling, they

wrote a good deal more than they usually did. Their concentration was palpable. I read their papers aloud, starting with this atypically long piece by Xiomara which caught my fancy. It twittered and jumped like a Virginia Wolfe monologue:

What pretty shoes Freddy has. Freddy walks funny. Cheong talks too much. Phifer always has to tell the class the same thing over and over. I wish Phillip would not tell people the project so many times. I wish Lillie and Yolanda would stop talking and Britt and Roberto too. Edith stop playing around with Elisabeth. Roberto laughs funny. Virginia always talking looking but never working. Phillip tells everyone whatever you feel--hear and I write it down. I just heard a funny sound. Phillip just asked Freddy if she wanted to try it. David and David are always talking in this class. Pencil always drops. The class seems it could never be quiet in there. Roberto going Hallua or calling Gene. Yolanda fight with Dolores, Lillie talking or changing sometime. Phillip makes me sick because he makes us write too much. Everyone is always handing in their page and I am still writing. Tammy made a very nice design with her name. Christine has to explain everything to me or Virginia. Britt sometimes acts stupid. Phillip always gets pages without names and Miss Phifer figures out who wrote it because she knows everyone's handwriting. Everyone always asks me what are you doing. They should know that I am doing what I am supposed to be doing. Tammy always shows me her work it is always good work too. This class talks so much. Dolores and Virginia are too much they always fighting. Of course Dolores is a pain in the _____. But besides that the class is good. Not everyone does their homework, I always try to and I usually do. When I ask how you spell something it takes an hour to get my answer. Miss Phifer every five minutes has to say Keep quiet. The thing about the old lady and the old man is a nice experiment.

--Xiomara Romero

Xiomara, self-appointed den mother of the class, shows in this piece how she takes responsibility for everyone's behavior. She is almost entirely "other-directed." If she gives

a thought to herself, it is to assure whoever is listening that she is being good. "They should know that I am doing what I am supposed to be doing. . . . Not everyone does their homework. I always try and usually do." Aside from these dips into self-justification, she contents herself with letting her eye roam objectively and critically over her classmates, stopping momentarily for a sensuous note. "What pretty shoes Freddy has. . . ." The roving process allows her to share subtle and minute observations of an order that did not usually crop up in her compositions: "Phillip always gets pages without names and Miss Phifer figures out who wrote it because she knows everyone's handwriting."

Some children interpreted the assignment as an opportunity to suppress syntax and punctuation. Chrysoula responded in this fashion. I wonder where she got the sophisticated idea that thoughts occur in beeps rather than whole phrases.

anything that your pencil other time help
I won't do it I guess Brain Tempel people
SShSh Go back Oh man look my feet are stiff
notebook is touching my elbow melissa susan
Oh brother Phillip why is it spelled PH not F
seth fernando said F- you doors slam mouse
Bill let me see you get the hell out of here
Karin sat next to me now Charlotte Oh my
Eve talking Karin might be writing a story
chair falls hey mouse take that how do you
get out. Look at maurice My arm Karin bragging
OWCH My hand

time it been so long I am SSh I am Dead
hammer I have to lie down Caryn Maurice
He everyone Richard Help.

Fascinating as some of these freefall visions were, I found them harder to penetrate and in the long run less satisfying to read.

I was struck by the melancholy cast in some of these meditations. Lillie, a new girl from the South, wrote:

I am wonder when is I am going to die. people tell me
that I am going soon and when my aunt died I were
crying and I felt like jumping into the grave. . .

Josephine even felt obliged to entitle her stream-of-consciousness:

My Lousy Days.

My sister is a bully and I'm not so happy about it.
No I'm not a bully but when I have to teach you a
lesson I do. Well you are not teaching me anything.
I'm sorry!
It's all right.
Well my times are lousy my friend Jeannie is a good
friend.
Well I like her to much I wish she could come to my

birthday party but she can't to bad. And anyway my
birthday isn't going to be celebrated.
Well to bad again.....

The most moving composition, for me, was this poem
by Edith:

Five minutes are too long
Everybody thinks of something
Jane reads fast
I'm hungry my stomach is growling
I think Christine should know what to do
Ms. Phifer has a loud voice
I want to fly. If I can't fly, nothing
else should be able to fly.
Phillip talks too much.
Jeannie is a chatterbox.
How does your mouth move?
Phillip looks funny.
Phillip interrupts me.
Nola is stupid.
I hate myself.
I hate this school.
Jeannie cries too easily.
Jeannie is noisy.
Jane draws good.
I can't make up my mind.
I think Phillip is a squashed tomato.

This felt very much like a poem. The movement from
thought to thought was governed by some associative connection,
the statements were crystallized into terse language. Each
thought fell into a natural poetic line, by being presented as
something discreet and isolated. But this alone did not account
for the stripped-bare starkness of the poem, like the X-ray
of a soul.

What seemed to be happening was that each line implicated
the speaker deeper and deeper in a series of value judgements
which eventually turned against herself. For Edith, the act of
thinking is entangled with uneasy comparison to others (Jane
reads fast, Christine always knows what to do). She can es-
cape from this sense of inferiority for a moment, with an odd
speculation like "How does your mouth move?", only to be drawn
back into comparisons. Even the lyrical desire to fly is under-
cut by competitiveness. (If I can't fly, nothing else should be
able to fly.) Finally she looks around for others to criticize.
(Phillip looks funny....Nola is stupid.) But the judgement of
others has an inexorable tendency of reminding you of your own
faults - leading her to point the finger home. "I hate myself."
This statement, coming where it does, is somehow expected. It
awaits her inside her brain like an executioner standing at the
end of a row of elms. She need only start thinking from any one
place and she will come to that familiar figure with the axe.
But she cannot stay there; so she must extend the hate outward,
to the whole school. Then to Jeannie, who cries too easily; all
those self-pitying, "bad" thoughts she wants to get rid of are
projected onto Jeannie. Then a little clearing, an appreciation:

"Jane draws good." And the immediate confession, "I can't make up my mind" - because she really can't make up her mind whether to think the worst or the best of people - plunking down finally on the victoriously malicious side: "I think Phillip is a squashed tomato." This is possibly the happiest line in the poem, and certainly the one that she let me know gave her the most satisfaction in writing. For after all, wasn't she getting revenge on the right one, the one who made her think all these unhappy thoughts in the first place?

If I dwell on this piece by Edith, it is partly because I have come across so many responses like it (maybe none quite as honest) in train-of-thought writing. That same phrase, "I hate myself" turned up often. Or "I want to die" or "I'm dead." This was particularly striking in the case of certain popular, affable children whom I had not suspected of hating themselves. It may seem naive of me to say that, if one believes that everyone goes around hating himself. Deep down I wonder whether Self-hate is that universal. To some degree it must be, which explains why people confess it in their writing. But I also think that the mere act of making their thoughts conscious to themselves aroused an anxiety in the kids that got worded as self-condemnation. (Something like Heisenberg's Principle of physics is at work here, in which the recording agent alters the properties of the thing recorded.) Part of their self-doubt arose from the artificiality of the assignment. "Write down your thoughts for ten minutes," which on the face of it seems a reasonable enough request, is utterly self-contradictory, not to mention exhausting, like a cat trying to catch its own tail. All stream-of-consciousness writing is affected by this epistemological quandariness.

The recurrence of such phrases as I-hate-myself may have been a defense against the puzzling, difficult task, a curtain dropped whenever the writing came to a place where his thoughts were, what? taboo? -- possibly, but not necessarily forbidden, maybe so picayune that it caused pain in tracing them out. The exasperation of tiny steps. The microscope at the child's disposal was not yet fine enough to catch those squiggly nuances, which made him frustrated. And so he offered some thing big, I hate myself, as a sacrificial victim to cover all those uncertainties -- from precisely the same impulse that made other children kill off their fictional characters suddenly or send them off to happiness rather than enlisting them in the labyrinths of narration.

Lesson Two: Going Mad

I was still troubled by some of the raw distress that had surfaced in the children's writings, but for that very reason I could not let it go. We would have to get past that self-consciousness about "negative feelings" sooner or later: one solution was to carry it to extremes. The next week I was reading to Tempel's class a section of Mayakovsky's great poem, A Cloud in Trousers -- the part where he is so nervous waiting for his fiancée that his nerves begin to race around the room and his heart catches fire:

I'll pump barrels of tears from my eyes.

I'll brace myself against my ribs.
I'll leap out! Out! Out!
They've collapsed.
But you can't leap out of the heart!

Mama!
I can't sing.
In the heart's chapel the choir loft catches fire!¹

I doted lovingly over that last metaphor, and then asked them what they thought of the poem. Ricky said he thought the guy was crazy. This good American explanation had been offered many times before, and usually in a smart-aleck spirit that I chose to ignore. But this time I leapt on it. What does that mean exactly, that someone is crazy? I got them together for a discussion about crazy people they saw in the streets and buses. How did crazy people act? They talk to themselves. Don't you talk to yourself sometimes? What made it acceptable for a five-year-old to talk to his toys while a fifty-year-old talking to the lamppost might be put away? Lots of kids freely admitted they still talk to objects. I said that was what writers do. David Chalot - bright little bugger - asked, "Hey, where's all this leading to?", thus forcing my hand. I told them I wanted them to write from the point of view of a person who had gone crazy or was just then losing his mind. How do you think a person "goes crazy."

"We don't know!"

"How do you think it starts? Use your head."

"You don't use your head, dummy, you lose your head."

"All right, we're going to try it. I want everyone to line up against the wall." There was a perceptible gasp. After they had been made to stand up, I gave them these instructions: they were to stroll around the room in a dignified manner, very proper and respectable, like the mayor of a town, and then become seized by a fit of craziness. I demonstrated by choking myself and clawing the air. Then, before anyone could see them having an attack, they were to make the supreme effort and pull themselves back to normal. Then back to strolling through the square. Then... another attack. They could express the craziness in any way they felt like: the hard part was to wait until they actually felt a little craziness stirring inside them; not to force it, but to wait for it to bubble up to the surface.

I put the lights out and gave them the signal to start.

Mike Tempel and I were poised like lawmen to break it up in case anything got out of hand. What transpired was an indescribable mixture of bedlam and canny restraint. Tempel quipped: "The frightening part is that it doesn't look too different from the way this class usually behaves." The routine mode in this class is that someone comes behind another kid, gives him a shove and acts innocent, walking away. Richard and Sammy preyed and pushed as usual. The more mild-mannered kids like Tristan were seen bouncing their bodies against the closets. Eve and Nola were having great fun falling off of chairs. Vernal was howling, Fernando trying to sideswipe his enemies, Debbie

¹ Modern European Poetry, edited Willis Barnstone (Bantam), p. 404.

doing a whirling dervish. . . . I called a halt and stressed that they were to keep to themselves, not bother the others. They tried it again with more of a sense of enforced isolation, estrangement.

I had not known what to expect, and as I watched I was both relieved that no accidents had happened and also, I admit, a little disappointed that it did not feel more abandoned. As a theatrical event it suffered from the same paradoxical stalemate that occurs in all participatory Living Theatre-type overtures, when the audience is invited to "get liberated."

Several kids continued to walk around with puzzled looks, shrugging their shoulders whenever I caught their eye. Others, with more showmanship, threw fits of theatrical nervousness which stopped just short of surrendering themselves to it. These kids knew exactly how far to go.

Then we did it once more, this time with everyone pretending to have just received news of the worst imaginable. The saddest, most terrible thing had happened. They went around "drenched in grief," crying on each other's shoulders and trying to tell a neighbor about their misfortune, only to find that the neighbor was consumed with his own tale of tears.

I got them quiet once again. I asked them to write from any feelings they had just experienced, madness or sadness: not merely write about the feeling, but write from the feeling, from the physical sensations which remained in their bodies. Describe the feeling while it was still alive in them.* I wanted them to be very aware of their extremities and their chests, to make their depiction of dramatic states extend from that internal, physiological perception. My hope was that this linkage with something immediate would lead to a fantasy writing which was less facetious or "made up," and more authentic. In many cases, that immediacy and a new, deeper resonance of feeling came through.

It feels like your whole life means nothing to you.

Sadness fills your heart.

You don't care what happens.

Your eyes fill with tears and your nose runs.

You don't feel like moving from the spot that you
heard about.

That day you will always remember that feeling you
had inside you.

Sometimes you have gone crazy.

Your whole life has changed.

Everywhere you go you won't get away from that feeling.

It just seems that you can't get away from it.

Somehow you will always remember that day.

It seems like it is stuck in your mind.

The mind is like a tape recorder.

Don't forget you can't get away from that feeling.

Mark Mull

* This soliciting of creative writing directly on feelings may seem in conflict with my position in an earlier article: Getting At the Feelings. However, there is a big difference between asking someone to write a composition about that abstract topic, My Emotions, and having him put in touch with the feeling and then asking him to describe that physical state.

The Sadness

One day I knew I was a goner. My eye had nervously
fell out. My head was filled with such grief it slipped
away. My heart has stopped pumping because grief struck
it. My stomach felt as if it didn't want anything to eat and
floated away. My ears closed up as if it didn't want to hear
the bad news. My feet stopped stepping, as if the next step
would be a terrible one. My hands had nothing to touch
and they stopped because anything it would begin to touch
would fade away as I would too.

Jim Auerbach

When Can You...

Talk and not speak....
Hear but not listen....
Touch without feeling....
Rejoice and not be happy....
Despair and not be sad....
When there is no love, no emotion, that is when.
When there is no love, Life becomes a
pendulum, swinging back and forth, back and forth,
so much to learn! A hand, it comes and winds
it, and the pendulum swings harder, and ticks
down to nothing, and is wound again. Nothing,
nothing, it is to destroy, to hate. Find a speck
of happiness in the field of life, dusted with
happiness and there is love.

SADNHAPPY
LOVE

Peri Dwyer

INSANITY

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

Matthew Mandelbaum

Caryn would not abandon her third-person sarcasm, but
even so her story has charm and an undercurrent of something
dark:

Sarah was going to the store. On her way she has

a crazy feeling and she didn't know what it was. All of a sudden she came up to somebody and said "Blah mucka lucka nooka." Then that was when Sarah realized that she was going crazy, Sarah tried her best not to show her craziness. She held it in for five minutes and she made another crazy sound. Sarah got so mad with herself and she went up to an old lady and said "Chula nala sooney fant." The old lady got hysterical and went to call the police. The police said "Look lady stop the obscene phone calls and if you call again you'll get in trouble." Sarah went up to the lady and said "Choo, moo." The old lady again called the police and the police came there and couldn't believe their eyes so they took her to a head doctor and he made her better. The way he made her better was that they had so many talk sessions that she got sick of him and forgot all about her problems.

The End

Caryn Schwartz

I saw a roach fall off the ceiling.

I saw a horse walk up the side of a building.

I saw a miniature man sitting on the top of someone's newspaper. He looked as though he would roll down past the editorial, past the sports section, past the "wanted" ads and off the newspaper only to fall down, down, down.

I saw a stream get up and walk away because no fish lived in it.

And on a lonely path,
I saw an ant going home.

Nola L.

"It makes your head feel so funny to do this!" Eve said to me. I looked over her shoulder at her paper. First the narration was cast in first-person, then she took back her paper and changed every line to "He" because she said it was too scary to leave it as "I." (Every line but the last, where she slipped):

"Help! He's Going Crazy!"

His head is whirring
He feels like a stampede of elephants stampeding
over his head
His stomach is going wild, feeling as if things

inside are complaining moving around
Groaning, groaning
His eyeballs are rolling, feeling as if everything
around him that he looks at is against him
Feeling as if he should tear everything apart
His fingers are out of control about to do anything!
His face is all scarred up
His mouth in such a position I feel like Count Dracula

No no no!

Eve Silverman

Afterwards Eve and I had a long interesting discussion, which I suppose was triggered by the writing session. It was three o'clock, time to go, but she had a few minutes to spare. That day, as on every Tuesday, she was wearing her green girl scout uniform; her pretty blonde hair was pulled back in a pony tail over her delicate, severe face, chiselled like a Cranach miniature.

She said she had a problem: she couldn't stop thinking that, for instance, if she didn't jump over a certain square on the floor something bad would happen. Or she would look at an egg and see spots on it and think it was dirty. Or last night she heard the phrase "Kiss of Death" on television and was afraid to kiss her mother goodnight. Mostly, though, it was making herself do things to avoid bad luck when she knew that was just superstition. "This last year it's gotten much worse. What do you think I should do?" she said with a professional analysand look on her face. This Eve, for all her neurotic obsessing, had a self-possession I could not help admiring, and carried herself with great poise. Her very confession struck me as an index of her openness... which is not to say she isn't in trouble! Since she wanted an answer I told her when she was tired of doing it she would stop. "But I've been doing it for so long, practically a million times!" I told her to watch the spots very carefully, or recall what immediately happened to her before she went through one of these head-games: whether she was angry or frustrated or whatever. "Most problems are improved by paying close attention. It's like the nun who lived in Japan and who was a very good, religious lady. One day she started seeing snakes in her room. So she went to a Zen priest, who's like a psychiatrist, and he told her to describe the snakes. 'Well they're green and kind of slimy...' -- 'That's not good enough. I want you to go back and tell me everything you notice about them. Habits, movements, down to the last detail.' The woman went away and did what he said, and by the end of two weeks the snakes had gone away. Because they were unreal they could not survive that close an observation.

I recount this story not because I'm sure at all that it was the right answer to give, but simply by way of saying that I'm not really certain what kids are or aren't supposed to know, and when a child asks you a question you have to give him an answer. ■

We know from working in the schools that the most popular serious issue for the children to write about is "pollution." Essays on it decorate the halls. When a child thinks you are a serious type who wants to hear about reality, he coughs up a diatribe on dirty air. For writing teachers the result is sometimes a tendency to discourage the choice of that theme.

A paragraph in Phillip Lopate's diaries, published in the Fall 1973 issue of the Newsletter, raises certain critical issues about abstraction in children's writing, and about the diction we impose on them sometimes in the name of concreteness.

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

This scene, deftly and honestly presented, kept bothering me. Behind it seems to lie Phillip's assumption that words like "nature" are abstract or vague, while words like "wheatfields" are specific. The sentence, "I told

Abstractions in Children's Writing

by AARON FOGEL

her I understand words like wheatfields but had a little trouble knowing what is meant by Nature" is printed in bold letters in the margin, indicating that the editor took it to be an exemplary thought.

On the basis of a set of assumptions, or principles, Phillip asks the girl to reconstruct her sentence and alter her diction. It's a characteristic moment in our teaching, and I think it deserves some analysis.

My first, petulant response on reading the bold-face statement was joking opposition. "I know what the word nature means," I thought, "but I have trouble with that word wheatfield." This was just what the kids call "snap," but gradually it seemed to me to be true.

I asked a student of mine, who is brain-damaged, what nature is. He was puzzled, but he said, "Things you do, you like. Things about the country. Nature is the sea. It's a nice sea. The sea is like...blue. Some seas are dark blue. Black! A black sea..."

I asked him what a wheatfield is. He was com-

pletely stumped. He tried: "I dunno. A field of food."

I think I also have a better sense of the word "nature" than the word "wheatfields." I've been a city person most of my life. When I used the word "wheatfields" -- and I remember one awful poem in which I did -- it is trying to say something more than I know or mean, i. e., trying to turn the thing into a symbol. Now if I were a farmer it might be different. "Look at that old boring wheatfield. Wish I was in town."

It's possible then that the word "wheatfield" and others like it often do what the word "nature" used to do - say in Wordsworth imitators. That is, it argues. It has a rhetorical bias.

Where does this preference for supposedly "concrete" terms over supposedly "abstract" terms come from?

Here is a line from one of Kenneth Koch's poems, "Locks":

"The lock on the second hump of a camel while I was/running out of water in the desert"

At the root of the judgment that Phillip makes about the two words is, I think, the set of values handed to us by what is sometimes called the New York School of poets, though there are many people who reject that label on the grounds that there are thousands of people who write poems in New York City, and most of them aren't affiliated with that school.

Though neither Koch, O'Hara nor Ashbery ever followed the credo, they handed down in some way a distrust of "seriousness", and a taste for a certain kind of silly concretizing which in their era seemed pleasurable

to them. Since Koch has done a great deal to popularize teaching poetry to children, some of these values have seeped down willy-nilly.

One of the more interesting and productive doctrines of the New York School was that it's fruitful to fill a poem with whatever you know verbally (e. g. "Alaska"), whether you know it by experience or not. This was seen as an antidote to ponderousness, and a way of opening possibilities.

The opposite and destructive tendency in the school is a fear of being too serious. This goes along with a set of implicit dictional prohibitions that can be very inhibiting. For example in his college classes Koch used to provide a list of forbidden words--words like "aspect, basic, specifics, intense, essentially"--you get the idea. It was very clever, typical college stuff, but it was also harmful, because it implied that if one expressed oneself feelingly, but happened to use those words, one would be ridiculous. It was too early to lay down such fussy prohibitions. And the result was a slew of imitators of Koch, who used a whole other set of all-too-familiar-type words: "blue, orange, giraffe, popeye, elephant, Alaska, soup," and so forth. This dictional preference for slightly silly words, which are not so much concrete or derived from experience, as they are harmless and pleasing, has drifted down into kids' poetry. To someone with an alert ear, it is as painful and embarrassing to hear children sounding like a New York School poet, as it was for Koch to hear children sounding like moronic Wordsworths.

Now to look at the scene between Phillip and Tammy. First of all, we see the children painting and writing. They are painting and writing a scene of heaven and hell. The best art teacher I've known takes children outside, asks them to draw exactly what they see--not the preconception--not the stereotyped farms, oceans, wheatfields, houses and silos that they've learned from picture books. He says, if the tree is crooked, draw it crooked. If it doesn't look like what you think a tree looks like, draw it the way it is. This is exactly what Phillip does in his many assignments in writing--takes the students around the neighborhood and has them observe and write.

But here, because of the interposition of the painting, Phillip for some reason overlooks, forgets; takes for granted that the wheatfields, pigs, silos, are all what he calls "specifics"; and insists that the verbal assertion was only a dull abstraction of those specifics.

But in fact the wheatfields, silos, and pigs are all the kind of meaningless coloring elements that one finds in a New York School poem. Their rhetoric is "we are substantial and real," but in fact they are just daubs. In fact what was happening in this scene was that the student was being far more accurate in words than in her picture, and was reporting to some extent on a) the lie involved in that type of imagery, and b) the fact that what the drawing really was, was not a picture of wheatfields, but rather a picture of the very current idea of Nature--an idea as current as pollution.

The children were being

asked to do a picture of their longing for the thing which people who live in New York City sometimes call nature, and she knew

No wonder she was puzzled! Look at the contradiction: She was being 1) asked to paint and write about an abstraction called Heaven, and 2) forbidden to talk about an abstraction called nature.

And she sensed that this was just another adult handing down an ideological prescription: you may use this word, you may believe in this abstraction, you may not believe in the other, you may not feel the other way.

The original words she said, if they were anything like what Phillip estimates, were more meaningful than the substitute ones he wanted to implant.

She said approximately: "Nature is nice and I think everyone should be nice and live together."

He wanted her to say: "In heaven there are wheatfields."

Now, nobody's going to deny that all our aesthetic niceness and training tells us to prefer the second sentence. We can hear so much in that first sentence that threatens us, especially the child's boredom. Phillip--meaning to give her something very important, and without any destructive intention, or NY School silliness--responded to the obvious fact that she was bored as sin. She would have to be to write that sentence. And he wanted to show her that it can be done another way: that it can be pleasurable and interesting.

And all of this would be correct, if the child said, Wow! picked up the pencil, and began writing a gorgeous solo in that style. But she just

kept on being bored. Why?

She had no sense that it was more meaningful for her to write the word wheatfields --a word she knows herself pretty well, according to the context--than the word nature. Unlike a student who didn't really know the word, she was making her own dictional preference. She was right for herself at the moment, and Phillip, sensing that, recorded the stalemate between them.

If we look closely at the difference between her approximated actual statement, and the one Phillip says he wanted her to make, we get worried about them both. Her sentence is a sort of bored logical conjunction of two current and fashionable ways of thinking. People talk about "nice" nature, and have a longing for peace in "nature." There's also talk about social peace--a nice world--and how it would be better than all these conflicts, etc. These are perhaps the two biggest ideas floating around among adults. The cliché that "nature" is "nice", that pollution is the bad guy who has attacked nice nature; and the cliché that people should get along together. If one can try for a moment to imagine a child hearing these large abstractions and trying to deal with them, one begins to get a grasp of how large the problem is. These are not "just" clichés. They are the two most important things in the world as we have it, which is comprised of the natural world and the human world. Of course, whenever I go into a classroom and ask them to draw, they start drawing what they call "nature." If I ask them what it is, they say "it's the country." But isn't it also

true that leaving the city is a thrill--getting outside the bleary dump? Likewise, human conflict is everywhere. And, if Phillip is reporting accurately, what his student said wasn't, "Nature is nice and people are nice," but "Nature is nice and people should be nice," a tension which on the face of it is appalling.

Now people will probably say that I long ago stepped over the boundary of common sense in reading meanings into a child's remark. I don't think I have. What I am trying to say is that a child is coming up with ideas, thoughts, which are pre-fed but which are also full of contradictions. To me the most serious problem in reading children's writing is obviously, How the hell do I know what he intended? There is no way of knowing, for example, when a child fills out the formulae and provides us with "swan of bees," or "I used to be a rocket but now I am a dancer", what is being thought or intended. It pleases the adults. And it pleases the children that the adults are pleased. And that's about all we know. I think we know a little more when we hear "Nature is nice and people should be nice." The problem is not lack of expression, but that we don't like what is being expressed.

Now for Phillip's sentence. "Heaven is a place with wheatfields, cows, etc." My own feeling is that this sentence says less than the one he found too abstract. The first thing we want to know is this: Is that true? Is heaven a place with cows? Well, maybe Hindu heaven. But on the whole, no. Now, if we want to get dialectical, we

could say that we are training the child to realize that the word "heaven" is complex, and that when it is described as containing things in the real world, we get a tension, etc etc. But that justification already takes us far beyond my explanation of the abstract statement in its degree of intellectualization. That is, "Heaven is a place with wheatfields," is a far more intellectual and stylish remark than "Nature is nice and people should be nice." It pleases adults because it resolves the things that they cannot resolve. It in fact goes a very long way on the road to narcosis and forced escape. "In heaven there are wheatfields." No: there aren't. But it feels so nice to say so. And in fact--and this is the point--"Heaven is a place with cows" is a far "nicer" statement--in all the appalling connotation of that word "nice"--than is the disconcerting and saccharine tone of the statement, "Nature is nice and people should be nice."

Tentatively, I'd derive the following "rules" from this kind of example, always acknowledging that rules can have little meaning in action.

1. Don't alter a child's diction.
2. Respect boredom where it appears. Leave it be until its roots are apparent. Then address yourself to those roots.
3. Try to understand the diction you don't like.
4. With problems of abstract vs. concrete, consider what the word means to the child, as well as what it might mean to you.

In regard to rule 2. The roots of the boredom Tammy feels are, first of all, the situation itself (the contra-

dictory demands), and secondly, her response to the wistful, sad wishes about nature and society that she hears from adults around her. To put it more simply: By accepting her diction in all its force, one might get into a discussion with her of the following question. Is nature nice? What about plagues?

Not, "I don't know what the word nature means." We do know what the word means. But, "Nature! Nice! Not always."

There's a Yoruba proverb that goes, "The worm isn't dancing, that's just the way he walks." That's just the way we talk. The proverb refers to the god of lightning, who kills people indiscriminately, and it means, that though the forces of nature may do you harm, it's not directed personally at you.

What this comes down to is that in teaching one should probably--and I always emphasize the probably--address oneself to the thought rather than to the style of the child. In my own teaching I've probably put any number of frames around the children at times--being the psychologist (thinking against their character, rather than just reacting to it), or the stylistic dictator. But I found that when I simply address myself to the thought of the child--often the abstract thought--in a serious way, and try to engage in discussion, that's when the touch starts between us. Everyone knows that transition: one moment you are both looking away, talking about this and that, somehow not in touch. Then somehow, through some honesty, the level of attention between the two rises. It's no longer painful to look in each other's eyes. One talks

directly, and it feels as if you're beginning to talk to each other, instead of at. For myself this has happened most often when I address the child's thought, taking it seriously, rather than the manner. This could of course be something about me, and not about teaching in general. Yet it seems to me that the whole drift of school as such is to negate serious thought in any number of ways, and replace it with functioning, with manners, with styles, trends, habits, niceties.

There's a paragraph from Martin Heidegger that tells absolutely nothing about how to teach and that seems to me in key: "Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn. The real teacher, in fact, lets nothing else be learned than--learning. His conduct, therefore, often produces the impression that we properly learn nothing from him, if by "learning" we now suddenly understand merely the procurement of useful information."

For us to deny the influence of the New York School would be simply immodest and historically ignorant. We don't get our ideas from Shakespeare, or from William Carlos Williams, but pretty much from the filtering of the atmosphere around us. When a New York School poet teaches children Shakespeare, he doesn't teach them at all the same version of Shakespeare that, for example, someone thinking himself as a Black Mountain poet would teach.

There are some people who are more, and some who are less, happy with that trend and that influence. I'm

one of those who is less at home with it. And I think it is both fair to offer criticism of adult's poetry, in its relation to the children's, and extremely helpful. One knows one's own limitation when one writes; but going in to teach children, for some reason one starts to imagine that Shakespeare, Blake and Herrick are being taught. They aren't; only one version of them; and a version that has to be scrutinized and criticized if we're to be honest with ourselves and to protect the students from what is merely fashionable. In most cases, I think, dictional finickiness is a matter of fashion and elitism, and at its most dangerous a way we all have of hiding from what is said. ■

Haiku

Walking down the hallway of Harlem Road Elementary School in Amherst, N. Y., late fall of 1973, I noticed a bulletin board decorated with Haiku, and a cursory glance confirmed my prejudice - and a confirmation was all I really wanted - that this poetic form has become so badly used by poets and teachers that we'll never be able to get the sugar off it. The monopolization of the Haiku by the miniaturized and excessively adorable world of Nature has taken all the snap out of the form and left it with its rather sticky content.

This is the kind of highfalutin generalizations which were going through my mind as I entered my next class to do a poetry session with the kids. Before the session proper I began to tell the kids what I thought about Haiku: they had all written Haiku themselves and it was in my mind to tell them what I thought. I concluded by saying that I have avoided teaching Haiku like the plague, but, bingo! my contrary self added, "So let's do some now." The kids seemed to appreciate the challenge I had just given myself.

I explained that there were Haiku I liked, and what I liked about them was the way they surprised you sometimes at the end. There would be two lines, usually about nature, and then a final line which at first didn't seem to have anything much to do with the first two lines (I suggested that everyone forget about the syllable count, unless they could write Japanese and were feeling traditional about it) (I added, smart-aleck that I am, that I figured we could all count to 5 or 7 so we could forget that).

I drew two parallel lines across the board: these were the first two lines of the poem. Make them about nature, make them pretty or nice things about nature. Under these I drew a third line. Make this last line a complete surprise, something that has nothing to do with the first two lines.

My extemporaneous examples doubtless gave the kids a strong slant down which they slid into their own poems, and I think that a variety of examples at this point would lend a greater variousness to the results.

Here are some selections from the Haiku written during that class period.

—RON PADGETT

Silent are the trees
blowing in the wind
Donald Duck drowning in Lake Erie

Flowers in the garden
They are beautiful
Time for bed

It's raining out
the rivers overflow,
and I'm listening to the radio

Poinsettias in the snow;
Raindrops in the courtyard,
And where is the UFO?

Little red roses
popping out of the ground
a car blowing up

Fluffy clouds in the sky
a soft breeze blowing
Daffy is dead

It is summer
The river is flowing
My friend has blond hair.

The sun shines
My mother weeds the garden
I hate school

The bees are acting up
They're stinging
Merry Christmas

Rainy days are here
It's ten feet deep
Tarzan's in the jungle

Bird playing songs in the park
Sun laying on the grass
3 kids in school

The sun shines over the shingled roof,
The river laughs with pleasure,
Mother Nature hates me.

'Twas the night before Christmas
And all through the house
The teenagers were having a wild party.

(I think this one is
plagiarized--or a "found"
poem, if you will)

It's snowing outside
It's also raining
Meanwhile Winnie the Pooh's stomping on cookies

The shimmering sun looking over the brown shady green woods
Flowers dancing in the cooling breeze
I have a piano lesson

Sunshine across the street.
Rain across the street.
Boy my house is so big

It's raining at the beach
It's snowing in the parking lot
Donald Duck is crying

Tiny drops of dew
Landing in tulips
Mom is cooking turkey

Big orange oranges
With blossoms gay
I like chocolate covered doughnuts

Rain is falling down
Slowly and clear
A frog goes "ribit"

Birds are in the park
Foxes making dens
Children spilling apple sauce

Sunshine in the courtyard
Snow in the garden
Don't miss the bus!

Rabbit's hopping in the grass,
He went in a hole,
You're washing your hair!

Butterflies in the air,
floating in the breeze,
The plane went down instead of up.

Trees swaying in the breeze
Beautiful birds floating in the sky
Popcorn's great

The flowers are blooming
Spring is here
Santa Claus got stuck in the chimney

Flowers in the yard
Berries on the bush
Batman and Robin just killed a pig

Birds chirping
A rabbit squeaking
Bugs Bunny getting a polio shot

POETRY, POETRY AND OTHER THINGS

Sweater, eres tan fea
que me da asco ponermela
Por tan fea que eres to voy a votar.

* * * *

Pajarito tan chiquito
tan duro que pica
es un mosquito

LUIS TORRES
P. S. 75, Manhattan

El Perro de mi Amiga

Una vez mi amiga tenia un perro
Se llamaba Tuck.
Le pegó un camion.

Él era un buen perro
Él era tan bueno que
no le tenia miedo a los ratones.

Él era tan bonito
Que lo quiera mucho.
Y un día yo sone de eso
Yo estaba gritando
Wow! Yo estaba gritando.

YVONNE VENTURA
P. S. 75, Manhattan

Yo tuve un sueño.
El sueño mio fue que yo
me habia tirado do la ventana
y que estabamos en el invierno
y me habia frizado en el aire
y cai frizado
y mi mama me despertó. Este es el
Fin de mi sueño.

RICO CORNIEL
P. S. 75, Manhattan

Ugly sweater -- too ugly
That I feel disgusted to put you on!
Cause you're too ugly
I'm going to throw you away.

* * * *

A small little bird
How hard he bites!
It's a mosquito.

translated by
LUIS TORRES

My friend's Pet

Once my friend had a Pet dog.
His name was Tuck.
He got hit by a truck.

He was a nice dog. He was nice.
He was not afraid of mice.

He was so cute, I like him so much
And then one day I was dreaming
About it. I was screaming Wow
And how I was screaming.

traducido por
YVONNE VENTURA

I had a dream
My dream was that I
jumped out the window
and it was in the winter
and in the air I freeze
and I was all ice
And when I fell, I didn't feel it.
Because I was all ice.
And my mother wakes me up
That's the end of my dream.

translated by
RICO CORNIEL

LOS TRES PRISIONEROS

A Video Play by Víctor Arias,
Armando Roman and Julio Garcia
P. S. 75, Manhattan
Traducido por Julio Garcia y
Armando Roman

Nosotros robamos y somos amigos. Nosotros robamos bancos, y gente rica. Nosotros matamos alguna gente buena como comisarios y disputados. Nosotros robamos caballos. Nosotros nos gusta tomar whiskey. Nosotros les tenemos odio a los comisarios y diputados, porque nos quieren ponernos en la cárcel. Nosotros encontramos una muchacha en San Francisco. Ella quisás nos cambiará al fin.

Johnny Ringo: Cuando yo era muchacho, yo peleaba con mis amigos y el comisario cada vez paraba la pelea. Por eso, yo odio comisarios.

Comisario: Cuando me amarraron, me dió coraje. Los quiera matar. Cuando me pusieron rabioso, yo commence a ser bravo. Yo tenia miedo porque ellos son buenos tiradores, shora yo soy un comisario bravo.

ESCENA I:

Hay mucha gente en la barra. Ellos estan bebiendo y peleando. Johnny Ringo, Billy the Kid, and Jesse James vienen, los tres bandidos, y todo el mundo se esconden debajo de las mesas. Nosotros comenzamos a tirar tiros de chiste, y el comisario vino y nos apunta con la pistola. El estaba temblando con miedo. El tiró arriba y le dió a la lampara y la cual nos cayó encima.

Toda la gente: Llevelos a la cárcel!
El comisario los lleva a la carcel.

ESCENA II:

Susana vino y les dió algo para comer. Hay una pistola en el pan.

Billy: Tu viniste aqui do lejo para darme un pan?

Susana: Si.

Ella le da el pan. El comisario la lleve afuera. Cuando él viene para atras, nosotros cogimos la pistola y la apuntamos al comisario. El nos da le lleve. Nosotros lo amarramos y lo fugamos.

El comisario del oeste: Aucilio! Aucilio!
La gente viene lo sueltan.

Comisario: Los prisioneros se fugaron.
Necesito algunas hombres para ir atras

We are robbers and friends. We rob banks, rich people. We kill some good guys like sheriffs and deputies. We steal horses. We like to drink. We hate the people we kill. We hate all sheriffs and deputies because they try to lock us up. We met a girl in San Francisco. She will probably change us in the end.

Johnny Ringo: When I was a kid I used to fight with my friends and the sheriff always used to stop it. That's why I hate sheriffs.

Sheriff: When they tied the rope around me, I got mad. I felt like I wanted to kill them. When they got me mad I began to be brave. I had been scared because they were good shooters, but now I am a brave sheriff.

SCENE I:

It takes place in a bar kind of like a lot of people are drunk, fighting. Johnny Ringo, Jesse James, and Billy the Kid come in and everyone hides under the table. We start shooting just for fun. The sheriff comes; he points the gun at us. He is shaking with fear. He shoots, and by chance hits the rope and the light falls on us three.

All the People: Take them to jail! Take them to jail!

The sheriff takes them to jail.

SCENE II: In the jail.

Susana comes in to give us something to eat. There's a gun in the loaf of bread.

Billy: You came all the way over here just to give us bread?

Susana: Yes.

She gives us the bread. The sheriff takes her out. When he comes back in, we point the gun at him and he gives us the key. We tie him up and escape.

Sheriff of the West: Help! Help!
People come, take the rope off him.

Sheriff: The prisoners escaped! I need some men to go after them!

Men: No, they're dangerous.

de ellos.

Hombres: No, ellos son muy peligrosos.

ESCENA III: Al hotel.

Nosotros subimos arriba a buscar Susana.

El dueño del hotel va a buscar al comisario, Después el comisario viene con mucha gente y los lleva presos.

ESCENA IV: En la carcel

El comisario va a la barra a tomar.

Todavía tenemos la llave. Nosotros vamos a San Francisco. El comisario los sigue para matarlos.

ESCENA V:

Cuando nosotros vamos para San Fran-

SCENE III: At the Hotel.

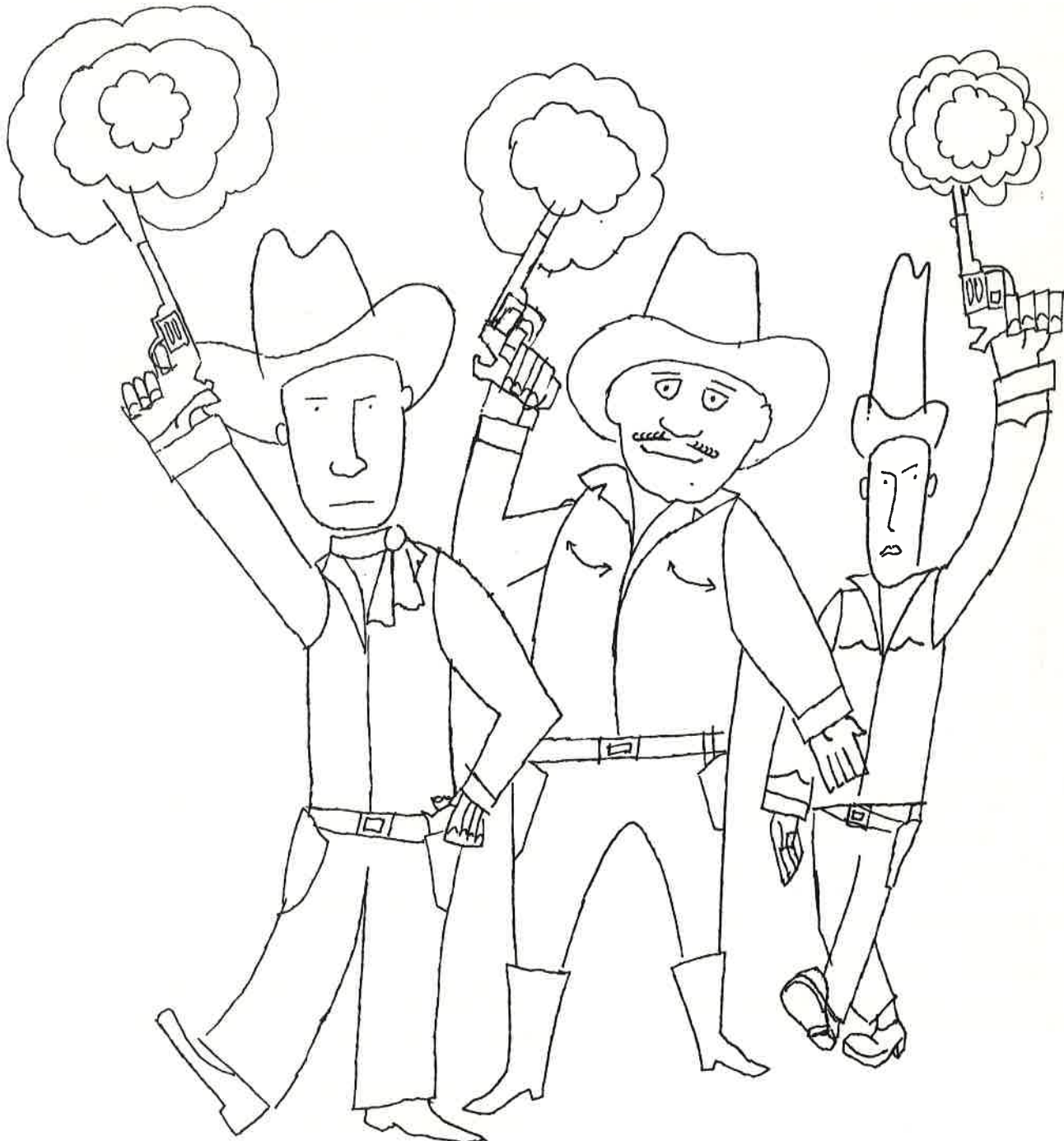
We go up to get Susana. The hotel owner goes to the sheriff. Then the sheriff comes with a lot of people and arrests all of us. The sheriff forgot we had the key.

SCENE IV: Jail.

The sheriff leaves to get a drink. We open the jail and get guns. We go to San Francisco. The Sheriff goes after Billy the Kid, Jesse James, and Johnny Ringo.

SCENE V:

When we go to San Francisco, we go through Indian Territory. The sheriff is



cisco, nosotros vamos por la Tierra de los Indios. El comisario nos sigue. Un indio nos va. Después él llama a los otros indios. Ellos nos tiran a flecha. El comisario nos tira con pistola. Un indio ve al comisario. El indio le tira. Los indios nos agarran y después nos ataran a una estaca. Después la noche viene. Billy the Kid se recordó que tenía un cuchillo en su bota. Él puso el pie para arriba. Él está hablando con Johnny Ringo. Billy pone el cuchillo en manos de Johnny Ringo. Él lo coge y se desmarrá. Después nosotros nos fuimos. Y después regresamos a donde mataron al comisario para ver el estaba todavía allí.

ESCENA VI:
Y después Johnny Ringo, y Billy the Kid trajeron el cuerpo del comisario a Texas con una flecha en el corazón. Nosotros lo tiramos al piso y después la gente lo llevan al cementerio. La gente nos bota de la ciudad. Ellos no quieren más problemas. No más gente muerta.

Jesse James: Nosotros trajimos el cuerpo para atrás porque él fue bravo. Él era el mejor comisario que ellos tenían.

ESCENA VII:
Él diputado fue a México a decirle al hermano del comisario que le mataron su hermano.

El hermano, Juan Gonzalez: Yo me siento triste y bravo. Yo voy a matar a quienes mataron a mi hermano.

ESCENA VIII:
Los indios nos agarraron otra vez, y a Juan Gonzalez también. Cuando ellos amarraron a Juan Gonzalez, nosotros le dijimos que fueron los indios quien le mataron a su hermano. Él no creía que fueron los indios. Geronimo viene y les da con un fuste. Y después se pone obscuro y él se acuerda del cuchillo otra vez. Y después cortamos la soga. Ayudamos al hermano del comisario a escapar. Y después él creyó que no fuimos nosotros. Después regresamos a Texas y buscamos algunos hombres para que nos ayuden a pelear con los indios. Después que le ganamos a los indios, ellos nos llevan a la cárcel.

Decidimos no robar. Mucha gente murieron a cuenta de nosotros.

following us. And then one Indian spots us. And then he makes a call -- and all the Indians come. They are shooting arrows at us. The sheriff comes shooting at us. An Indian spots the sheriff. He turns around and shoots the bow and arrow at the sheriff. The Indians catch us, and then they tie us up to stakes. They whip us. One Indian takes all three of our guns and then he puts two down and he's looking at one of them and by mistake he drops it and shoots Jesse James in the leg. Then night comes. The wounded one, Jesse James, is sleeping somewhere else. Billy the Kid remembers that he has the knife in his sock. He puts his leg up. He's talking to Johnny Ringo. He puts the knife in his hands. He gets it and breaks the rope. Then we go in the tepee and get Jesse James and put him on the horse and ride out. Then we get out of the Indian Territory. Then we go back to where the sheriff got killed and see if he's still there.

SCENE VI:
And then Johnny Ringo and Billy the Kid bring the sheriff's body back to Texas with an arrow in his heart. We drop him on the floor and then people carry him to the cemetery to bury him. The people told us to get out of town. They didn't want any more trouble. No more killing.

Jesse James: We brought the body because he became a brave sheriff. He was one of the best sheriffs they had.

SCENE VII:
The deputy goes to Mexico to tell the sheriff's brother that they killed his brother.

Brother: I felt sad and mad. I told some people to come with me to kill the three.

SCENE VIII:
The Indians capture us again, also the sheriff's brother, Juan Gonzalez. When they tie Juan Gonzalez up, we told him that the Indians killed his brother. He didn't believe us. Geronimo comes and whips us, and then it turns dark and he remembers the knife again, and we cut the rope. We help the sheriff's brother escape and then he believes us because we help him escape. We go back to Texas and get some men to help us fight the Indians. After we beat the Indians, they take us to jail.

We decided not to be robbers. A lot of people got killed because of us.

HIT POEM

Una vez habia un niño que se llamaba Billy, y él dijo "Yo to voy a dar." "Crees ser el padre. Tu crees ser el papa de todo el mundo." Una vez le dió a un nene que se llamaba Johnny y él lloró, y después yo le dije a Billy, "Tu siempre le das a todo el mundo." Después él me dió y leugo yo le dí a él para atrás porque él cree que yo me voy a dejar que él me va a dar. Pero yo le dí para atras. Y después un día la hermana de Billy me quería darme. Pero yo le dije, "Tu crees que tu eres mi mamá." Y ella me dió jugando pero ella me dijo que no le diera porque ella me daria en retorno. Pero yo le dí a ella porque ella creía que yo me iba dejar pegar por nada. Pero no le pegé, y después ella me dió otra vez. Después ella fue y llamó a Billy porque Billy es hermano de ella. Y él me dio y yo le dí para atrás, y después ella me dijo que yo creía ser la mamá de ella. Y le dije, "Mira, yo no quiero ser tu mamá o la mamá de tu hermano porque tu y tu hermano son feos y malos y estúpidos." Y después yo le dí a ella y luego ella me dió para atrás pero yo le di a otra vez porque ella fue la primera que empezó. Y entonces su hermano me dijo, "Porque tu le diste a mi hermana? Yo le dije a él, Porque ella me dijo a mi que le de a ella para ver que te va a pasar. Y por eso le dí a ella. Y despues Billy le dio a su hermana porque ella no me dio para atrás, solamente porque Billy estaba alli, ella creía que yo no le iba a darle. Pero yo le dí, y ella se quedó asi. Luego Billy vino hacia mi, y me dijo: Porque tu le diste a mi hermana y no me diste a mi? Después yo le di a él y él me dio para atrás, y yo le di para atrás. Y él se quedó sin darme.

Once upon a time there was a boy named Billy. Once he told me I am going to hit you and I told him, You think you are everybody's father. And once he hit a boy named Johnny, and he was crying, and then I told Billy, You always hit everybody. And then he hit me, and then I hit him back because he thinks I was going to stay hit from him, but I hit him back. And then one day his sister was going to hit me, so I told her, You think you are my mother. And then she hit me playing. So she said, Do not hit me or else I will hit you back. So I hit her. And then I hit her back because she thought I was going to stay hit from her, but I didn't. And then she hit me again, so I hit her back, and then she looked for Billy because Billy is her brother. So he hit me, and I hit him back, and then she told me that I think that I am her mother so I told her, Look, I do not want to be your mother or your brother's mother because you and your brother are ugly and bad and stupid, and you and your brother is much too stupid. And then I hit her. And then she hit me back so I hit her again because she was the one that started. So then her brother told me, Why you hit my sister? and I told him, Because she told me to hit her to see what is going to happen. So I hit her. And then Billy hit her because she did not hit me back. So then just because Billy was there, she thought that I was not going to hit her, but I did and she stood hit of me, and then her brother Billy came up to me and told me, Why do you hit my sister and not me? So I hit him and he said, I do not want to hit you, and then I said, No, because you said that you was going to hit me.

MYRNA SOTO
P. S. 75, Manhattan

traducido por
YVONNE VENTURA y
MYRNA SOTO

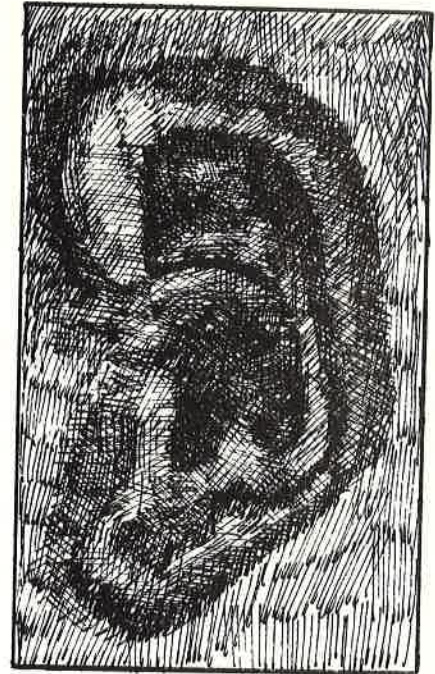
Ear: It is green, it has hair over it, it has 500 little warts with orange junk coming out, with blue roaches coming in and out. It had one big ear ring with blood dripping down, about 5 tons of blood. Spit up comes gushing out.

Orange junk: It comes out of the ear. It looks like orange paint with thousand of pea spit up. It is black and white and red and green and striped stuff coming out.

Green ear: It glows in the dark.

Blood: The color is green blue, little warts. It has 500 warts. The warts are red.

Hair: The hair is purple, red, blue.



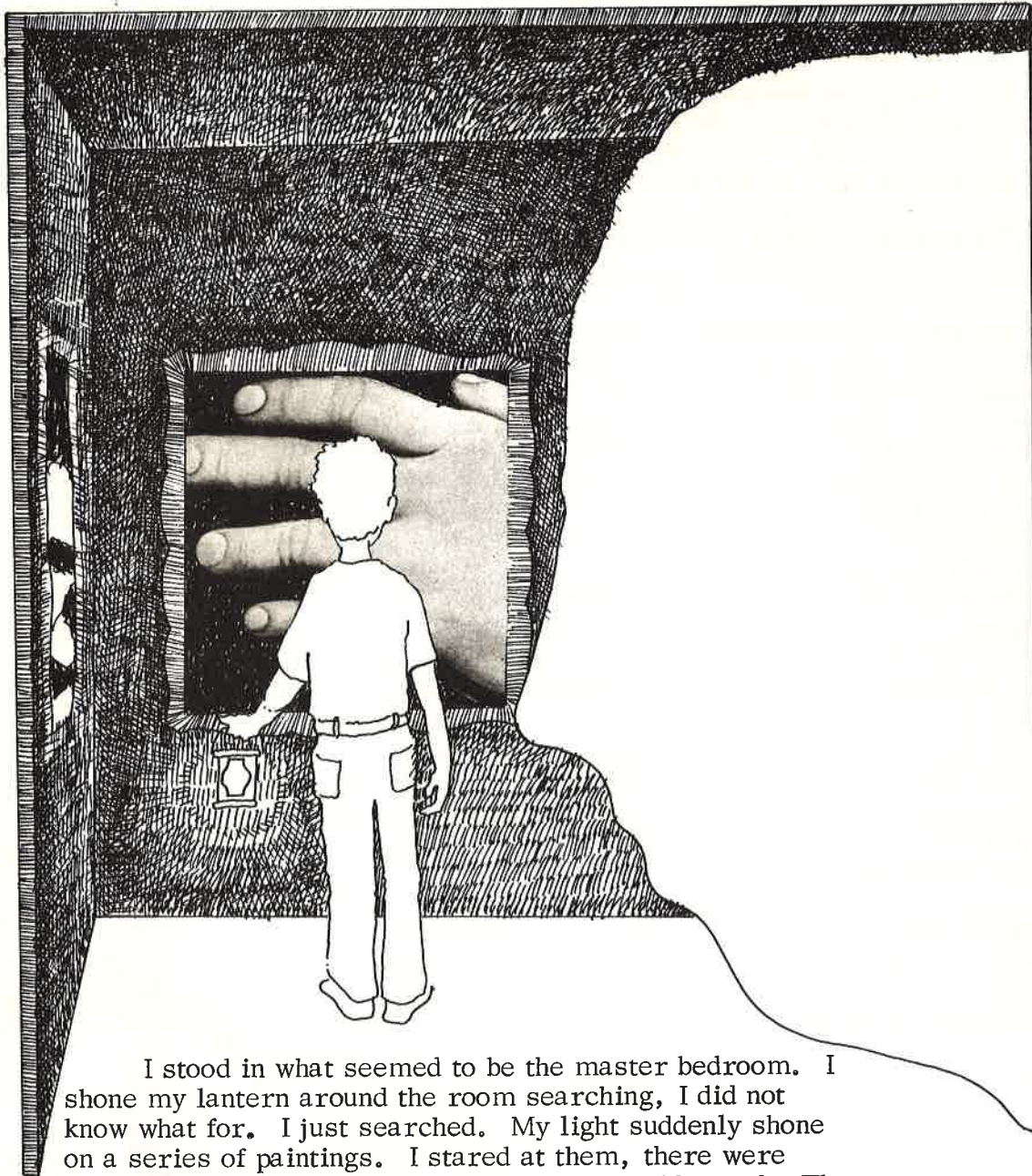
ALLISON L.
P.S. 75, Manhattan

MY FAMILY IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE

One day all my family moved to a haunted house. I saw a witch cutting somebody's head and the witch was trying to cut mine off too. When I went to sleep a horrible wind opened the window and the most scary thing happened! The head of the man-witch was saying, "I will get you! I will get you!" I screamed and then the ghost came and was saying, "Don't let me catch you!" Suddenly I heard a black cat. I screamed and threw the black cat out of the window. I killed the witch and then I burned the ghost and we went back to the city and we lived happily ever after forever.

The End.

LUIS R.
P.S. 75, Manhattan



I stood in what seemed to be the master bedroom. I shone my lantern around the room searching, I did not know what for. I just searched. My light suddenly shone on a series of paintings. I stared at them, there were about seven of them. They made me stare wide eyed. The first one was a picture of a hand reaching for a face, the second was a picture of the hand upon the face, the third was hand grasping the eye, the fourth was the hand moving away from the face, the fifth was a hand reaching out, the sixth was a picture of a head with no eye, the seventh was the picture of a hand with a ball within it in a liquidy substance. I turned away quickly, but I had to look again. My first reaction was to smash the lantern to the ground, but the pictures were in my mind. God damn I couldn't help to scream. I couldn't get it out of my mind, it haunted me, so eerie, damn leave me alone! I ran to the stairs, at the foot of the stairs was the eye. Why do you haunt me? I'll show you, I jumped toward it!

The End.

MATTHEW
P.S. 75, Manhattan

HOW DID COLORS BEGIN

One day everything was purple because when the world started the moon was purple and everything else was too. And the sun too. There was one tiny speck of purple dust and a man, he saw it and watered it every day and it grew up the color purple and then it spread all around the world and finally it covered the whole world. The first person on earth was purple and everyone turned purple after he touched them. He was on a farm and the first person he touched was a bird and the bird touched a tree, and the tree touched the grass and a lot of people walked on the grass. They turned purple after a few weeks. Before, they were white.

A woman found an earring, and a pearl and she put the pearl on the earring and tied it with a piece of orange hair that was laying around. When she put it around her neck then she turned orange. She found it was so beautiful that she looked for other people to try it on. Their ears started to get orange and then their whole bodies turned orange. They threw the necklace into the ocean and the boats and the whole ocean turned orange.

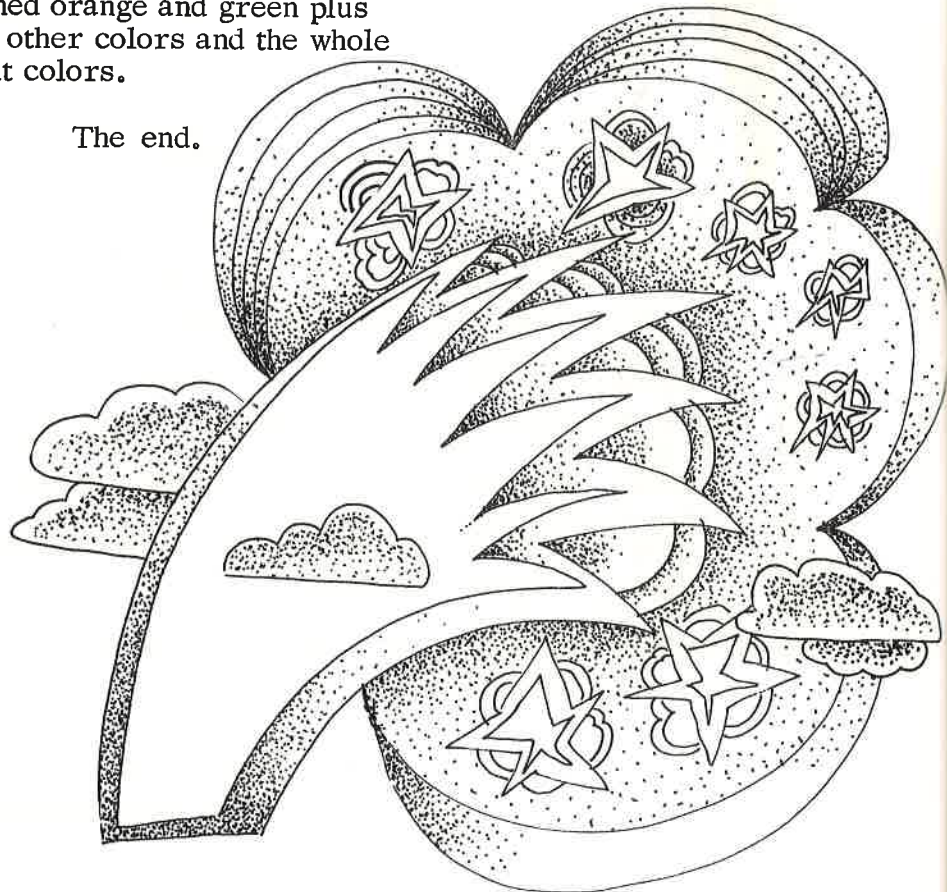
And the orange and purple people shook hands and then another group of people came around who were green.

There was a green eraser and some people started using it on the paper to erase their mistakes in their orange writing and when they pressed their arm against it they turned green and then they started shaking hands and turned other people green.

One thing wasn't green -- about this much _____ of the sidewalk and it was orange and the person who saw it touched it and that person turned orange and green plus purple, and then a man invented other colors and the whole world was happy and all different colors.

The end.

RACHEL
ADAM
JOHANNA
BRIAN
TOM
ELIZABETH
3rd Grade
P. S. 75, Manhattan



HAUNTED HOUSE

There were footsteps heard by the door. Footsteps that were very unhuman. My wife and I went to the garage, from where we heard the noises. There we found a dusty old wheelchair. There was one wheel missing. My wife wanted to get rid of the thing. "It's nothing but garbage!" she cried. But I stopped her. We had lived here for two weeks so far. Robert, our son, never knew about the strange happenings. But, it was the only house we could find that was for sale - no price. The land lord died and no one even wanted to sell the house to us, so we got it free.

There were rumors about this house. Some said there were even ghosts that haunted the house. Some said even the devil owned it. My wife, Clara, and I never believed it. But then, I did some research about the strange household and I wasn't pleased. I was actually horrified.

The book said that this house had been owned by an old man. They called him a scrooge. But he was not only a scrooge, he was said to be Satan's brother. He would be very friendly to all children, and then chop them up. They said then he would drain their blood and pour it in the fire.

That night my wife went to tuck Robert into bed, then we heard screams. Clara ran to Robert's room, and he was in bed, unharmed.

"What happened?" my wife cried.

"I was talking to an old man," Robert replied. I began to tremble.

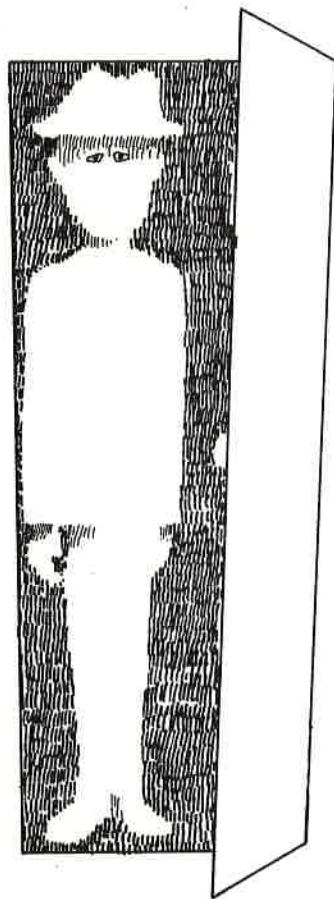
I didn't want to take any chances the next night so Robert went to sleep with us. But the next day, when I awoke, Clara screamed and yelled. I, too, screamed. Roberto had been cut to shreds. His blood had been drained. I knew what had happened.

I took a torch and burned the house down. And it was strange because the only thing that wasn't burned was the WHEELCHAIR.

The End.

?

by CECE
P.S. 75, Manhattan



One day when I was taking my dog on a walk I met a very old lady sitting on a bench. I sat on the same bench the old lady was sitting on. I was patting my dog when I heard something falling down. I looked up and saw that the old lady had dropped her umbrella and couldn't bend over to get it. I left my dog and picked up the old lady's umbrella.

She thanked me. In a little while the old lady and I became very acquainted.

We began to talk about each other. She told me she was 86 years old. That she had no one in the world. And that her name was Ms. Grimwell. I felt very sad when I heard Ms. Grimwell say that she had no one in the world. I told Ms. Grimwell about myself.

After I finished telling her about my life she told me what had happened to her when she was my age. She said, "When I was your age I was very beautiful. As you know I was born in England. My family was very wealthy.

"One day I was walking by the streets in London, England, and two men came and grabbed me by the arm and closed my mouth with his hand. They did this so fast I didn't have time to scream. The two men grabbed me and pushed me into a black automobile. They stopped and took me out and pushed me toward a small dusty house. The man took his hand off my face and said, 'Now you can talk because nobody will hear you. There is not one bloody soul around here.

"When I heard this I almost fainted. 'You know what we're going to do to you, we're going to take you to another country,' said one of the men. I answered, "W...hy?" "Because your father is very rich and we don't want him to be rich. He is going to have to pay a lot of money for you because I've spent a lot of money for kidnapping you,' another man answered. 'Now we have to lock you up till tomorrow when we will be leaving for the United States,' he continued.

"They grabbed me by the arm and threw me in a room. They locked the room with a key and walked away. In the room there was a gas lamp, a bed and a small window with bars over it. I got in the bed and started to cry.

"The next thing I knew I heard the two men coming in the door. I guess I must have fallen asleep. I got in the car again. They told me if I said anything they would kill me. We left England and landed in the U.S.A. There the two men left me all alone. A lot of people helped me as the years passed until I got old and began to work so I could live. I never knew what had happened to my family." Tears were coming out of the old lady's eyes. She left the bench. I never saw her again.

The end.

INGRID
P.S. 75, Manhattan

I was at the park and someone was kidnapped. I called the policemen and they came. They kidnapped a boy. I said to the policemen, about the two men who kidnapped the boy, that they were tall. When I told them they looked for the men.

The two men got in a car and went somewhere with the boy. One got out of the car. He went to buy a gun. He saw the police. The police went after the man. Now they got him. The police went after the man in the car. He jumped out of the car and the boy tried to stop the car and he did.

The police got the man. The boy went with the police and he went home.

The end.

MICHAEL
P. S. 75, Manhattan

One day I was walking down the street in the night. A lady was behind me. She was a bad, bad, bad, old lady. She was mean. She followed me everywhere I went. And then when I got home I looked behind me but she wasn't there.

That is strange. Well, I'll go to bed now. And tomorrow morning I'll go to the store.

The End.

JOSE R.
P. S. 75, Manhattan

One day on Friday the 13th I was in my house. I heard footsteps and it was a man with a black hat. The man was old and he was close to me. He was saying, "Luis? Luis? Come to me." The man disappeared. After that at 12 o'clock he came back to the house. I wasn't sure what it was. Only you could see the eyes. He came closer and closer saying, "Luis! Come to me!" and I ran out of the house. I went to a telephone and I called the police. They went inside the house and the man was laying in my bed. The police couldn't see him, only me. The ghost chopped the police in half. I screamed and ran for help at the police station. And then after that when the police came to the house he wasn't there. I cried. I went to jail because I didn't know where else to go.

LUIS D.
P. S. 75, Manhattan

The class sizes have gone up this year. I have thirty in one class and nearly that many in my other class. On the first day as I began to talk to a class of twenty, it was already several minutes after the hour class should have begun, I said it would be great if there were only twenty of us. With that number we might make some progress, I told them, because writing, it seemed to me and still does, is the kind of subject, like reading cir-

where the sun was coming in through the tall windows. I feel that probably has been his perpetual seat in the long classroom he has been in since the age of five; be there at the door on the first day to get his seat. But I feel an obligation to stop all anonymity without laying on the pressure of incessant participation. I want to make it clear to everyone that though you may sit and not talk, sit and listen only, if that is your way, you may not sit and vege-

Open Admissions Journal

by **ALLAN APPEL**

cles we all were in so long ago, that you can handle effectively (if at all) in groups of really no more than ten or twelve. I was disappointed but not surprised that while I talked more and more straggled in until our little squad turned into a whole vast audience, thirty-one faces. That is when education for a while seems like not the hunt for truth but the hunt for the extra chair.

The kids assume that with a large number, anonymity is guaranteed them, that anonymity which they cherished through years of bad schooling and being type-cast each semester as writer or non-writer, as good speller or grammarian or bad, throughout the NYC school system. And here I could see that was going on right before my eyes. One boy was sitting in the back row in the corner of the room

tate and have on your face that look which has sent so many teachers bitterly out of the room. There is no back row, I feel like telling him, and I do. I tell the whole class. There is no back row in any of my classes, though people of course sit in the back row. I feel like going up to the boy in the corner, but I don't and I talk on, leaving him with the September landscape, the parking lot full of cars and hedges separating it from the street. I feel like asking him questions, but his response to me is not a response, one human being to another, I feel, but a kind of cranking of his head to me teacher, an academic tropism. Perhaps I should not talk to him, but water him daily. I like him very much. The hair falls over his forehead and across his pallid eyes as if he were some extra specially sad bartleby. I don't intend

to make his life in the class miserable but somehow he is a challenge for me, my mark for the semester. My barometer. As he goes so goes the semester. A mistake, but a mistake I make each semester, God will forgive us teachers. We are, I am, of course, no source of nourishment and light for him and the others, no not in that old sense. But put it another way, with the archaism cleaned up, I do want to be a source of something for the kids, I want to, if I am any good, create a kind of gravitational system in the room everyday, a kind of place where orbiting can take place, the students all going at their own velocity, their own angles and momentum, and I wouldn't say it out loud to the students, but in a word I want them to be eccentric.

I outline the course I talk I try to set their minds at ease, to some extent. Because I know for myself how much a source of anxiety writing is. I tell them that it is okay to make mistakes as long as they are good mistakes. I tell them that they must realize that the province of the paper is different from the province of speech and talk and real life, that the kind of language that they may use on the paper is not better but different, more formal, and they have to reach with in themselves to get at the dormant vocabulary so that when they reread the passages they write for a passing second it might occur to them that they do know who the person is who wrote it, who used those words in just that way!

So it is all right to make good mistakes, to overwrite in reaching to overcome the patterns of conversational speech. One kid wrote on the

opening essay that he was going to "check out" Watergate Investigation. But he had the vocabulary; he knew that you can investigate, inquire, examine. You make a list and you show them these words are like musical notes half a pitch apart, or a quarter of a pitch apart, that they all could sound the same if you did not listen carefully, but that nobody would be any good as a musician if he didn't listen, and that these differences are real and not imagined in the mind of the teacher. Leroy realized that you check out platform shoes, that you check out a new record but that you investigate crimes. Who was more serious about getting a new place to live? I asked another hold out who felt there was no difference between colloquial and non-colloquial words. A person who was inquiring into apartments, or a person who was checking them out? The cops might check out crimes in the detective thrillers, but you better believe they're down on their hands and knees examining the shoe prints on the bloodied floor. And then the kid nods his head and agrees and there is a silence in the room.

I have been, it seems to me, clear and insistent about the point. But has he or the rest of the class learned? Hard to say now. Easy to feel that their silence is that they have just given up the fight. Problem is that the kids don't see the differences enough because they don't read as much as they should and the differences, even if pointed out, are not always "heard." But instead of acknowledging there is a fight and an insistence on the most minimal functionalism: I know what foxy lady means, you know what it

means, so what's the big deal. But what, I tell them, if your essay is turned up two hundred years from now in a time capsule, are the readers then going to understand what foxy lady means? I think my argument from immortality has made some sense.

Yet there is over and over again an effort to justify cliches and slang in writing. And another thing is there is a lack of understanding of so many cliches and accepted formulas. You can write your own ticket was something about the airlines or something, I forgot exactly what, about scalped tickets at a Knick game. And in every cloud there is a silver lining, most of the students, including some older women in the class, all saw a cloud with a little zipper in it and some needle work. But even once these cliches are explained, they insist if it is the case that everybody knows what they mean, and we are back on the merry go round of the majority rules type thinking. I get mad and in succeeding examples of cliches I think I show it on my face. This is a big mistake to show exasperation. The class takes it personally--as I said writing is often an embarrassing thing--and thinks I am pointing up vast unfillable gaps in their background and experience. I can feel the resistance rising--and I don't blame them for it. I say don't worry about it, that their speech is alive and well and fresh, etc, just that writing is different, but I had lost it, made a tactical error twenty minutes back. So I told them at the end of the class that they would have to put their shoulders to the grindstone. I tried to chuckle a little, but they walked out of the room.

After the first "diagnostic" composition I came in with a sheet to be mimeographed; it was a sheet of some of their writing errors, characteristic ones I wanted to point out for the first and last time. But the mimeo machine broke down when I



arrived in the morning and I couldn't use the lesson. I had to improvise and I came up, in the emergency, with an idea for a writing clinic, in which we all talked about the kinds of things going through our minds, their minds, as they sat down to write. All people have perceptions, ideas, I told them. We all see things and know what we want to say usually before we start to write it down. Trouble is, I went on, that we all have it here in the head, but when it comes out here, at the fingers,

through our little Bic pens, it just is not the same as when it got started in the brain. What happens in transit, I say, pointing to the length of my arm, what happens here, what words are lost, what ideas truncated and what travelers lost on the trip to the paper is what the clinic is all about, and ultimately what the course is supposed to find out. Another way, perhaps, to talk about habits.

When I ask them what their experience was the previous day in writing the diagnostic essay, to describe the mood they were in, or the temperature of their bodies, whether their faces twitched or were impassive, hands dry or clammy, there was naturally no one who was right off the bat willing to answer. One young man finally said that he was worried I would think him dumb. An articulate older woman said she was concerned that she, an older woman, not be embarrassed. How so, I asked because her paper had been particularly terrific and full of not only good ideas but inventive phrases. Her name is Lillian. I'm older than these kids, Lillian says. I'm twenty years older. I feel I have to do twenty times as well.

How do the rest of you feel about what Lillian just said, but there was no response to the unexpected and overwhelming honesty. It would have been good if the class had another middle aged woman in it, like Lillian, so she would not feel so much alone with all the "children." I have taught classes before where there were two middle aged women, some Viet Nam veterans and the rest eighteen or twenty year olds from local highschools, and in these classes, full of different

groups and different ages, there is the stuff of the best talk, the most revealing personal glances and the best writing. But in this class Lillian is alone and I go out of my way to compliment because she needs it but also, mainly, she deserves it for calling the Watergate hearings on TV a "verbal tic tac toe."

After we read some descriptive essays by Camus and Steinbeck, I ask the class to write its first formal essay. I ask them either to describe the first moment after their death or their pre-natal experience. I did this because I wanted to hike them out, in the writing, of ordinary experience and force upon them an imagined construction, although it would, of course, have to be based on real feelings. I cautioned them not to use their normal language but to try to reach for the hidden words and appeal to my hearing, smelling and seeing when they wrote.

It is a delicate matter, you see, and I have to over and over again emphasize that they must write not better but different from how they speak. I have seen many other teachers here alienate entire classes in the name of correctness. And what other response would you expect from healthy kids? To lie down and say I have sinned, teacher, I am wrong! Fact is I like the way the boys and girls -- I call them men and women and call them Mr. and Ms., but in fact they are boys and girls -- I like the way they communicate with each other. But it is different from how we do it, those of us who teach and write and are prejudiced to words. Reality is that the parents of the students, and therefore the students too, are cops and sanitation men,

construction workers and plumbers. They are people who cannot always find the words to express the nuance of how they feel about one another and that is why, I think, there is a lot of touching, physical touching among them--a pat on the ass, the shoulder, the grabbing of the arm by the elbow and the step toward the face, in order to communicate in gestures what another man who has more words can express in an earnest verbal formulation. These people will say it with actions. And that is why the classroom always seems such a strained place too, I think. Out on the campus where the girls and boys are lolling around, sitting in close quarters on the benches, and sometimes in the early morning in the hall outside the classroom door, they are touching, standing, gesturing, and doing the communicating with a few words and a lot of gestures. The class is an alien place to start with, where a different language, formal written English, is spoken, or so it sometimes seems. And I must be careful and I sometimes feel like a foreign language teacher.

Of the essays I get, John's is poetic and floating; it is about the oceanic feeling spiked with fear and located at the moment after death and before a kind of secular resurrection. Jack's is about birth and full of haunting questions, dramatically placed at the ends of paragraphs; I think he is a "natural." What is going on? he asks. Why this pressure on my chest, why does my head feel crushed, why are my feet tied to my buttocks? Everything is moving, and why is this water all over my eyes? Pretty good. Pretty darn good. ■

After Magritte: notes on writing from paintings

by BILL ZAVATSKY

Though I was happy working with the quietly off-beat photographs of Bill Binzen to elicit some interesting writing from children (see the Newsletter, Vol. 4, No. 4, Spring 1973), I was anxious to move into an area that depended less on "trick" photography. I cut up and brought in a copy of The Americans, a splendid book of photographs by Robert Frank (Aperture/Grossman, \$5.95, paperback). But when I showed them around, the children in my 5th-6th grade and 6th grade classes at P.S. 84 flipped through them speedily, without apparent interest. The photographs were either too subtle for the children, too close to their own lives, or I had not found a way to present them properly. Frank's penetrating revelations of the American psyche require some information for their irony to become operative. If you are ten years old and don't really know who General Eisenhower was, or if you can't figure out that the guy hypnotized by the immense luminous jukebox in some western bar somewhere is an American Indian, Frank's work seems a trifle distant. (Later this year I intend to take some of those splendid photographs and go into them with the children, talking of what I see there, hoping the kids



The Therapist
from Magritte, ed. by David Larkin,
Ballantine Books.

will catch fire.)

Since I couldn't make the more traditional photographs work, I decided to continue working with "pure" visual texts that needed no historical and sociological data to illuminate them. Balantine Books had just published a full-color selection of the work of one of my favorite artists, the Belgian surrealist Rene Magritte (\$3.95, paperback). I had been saving it, cut up and ready to go, when my experiment with The Americans flopped.

Without preamble I took out the reproductions (which were glossy and large) and the students, from the classes of Mr. Philip Seymour and Mr. James Daggess, immediately began to discuss them. Magritte once wrote that his interest as an artist "lay entirely in provoking an emotional shock."¹ I have made it a principle to put something in front of my students that they have probably never seen before, to provoke them. Magritte was forever intent on supplying such occasions. "I painted pictures," he wrote, "in which objects were represented with the appearance they have in reality, in a style objective enough to ensure that their upsetting effect--which they would reveal themselves capable of provoking owing to certain means utilized--would be experienced in the real world whence the objects had been borrowed."² The provocation is to see, and to go on seeing once one has looked up from the picture, and as I and my students dis-

cussed the paintings preparatory to writing from them, I constantly urged them to examine carefully what appeared to be there. This would be the key to what they would write. Why does the man have an apple attached to his nose? Is it that the beautiful red rose is a giant, or that the room it is in is tiny as a hand? How can these men be made of rock; how could that happen? Why does this man have a birdcage for a body? Who are the tiny men in black coats and bowler hats falling in formation out of the sky?

As with the Binzen photographs I had used earlier, I asked the children to "write the story or poem" of the painting they had chosen. Some chose two or three paintings and skipped back and forth between their images. They had recognized motifs in Magritte's work; people and objects of stone; a constant blue sky; doves; and of course the famous man in the black coat and bowler hat--Magritte himself, whom some of the children identified with Charlie Chaplin. Thus a number of the poems and stories published below reflect more than one of Magritte's paintings. I did not supply their titles, often startlingly beautiful, to the children, but this might prove an exciting experiment. Why did the picture come to have this name? (The huge rose in the room is called "The Wrestlers' Tomb," for example.)

All the Magritte paintings I chose to use were popular with the exception of his overly trompe-l'oeil crea-

¹ Lifeline, by Rene Magritte, in Surrealists on Art, edited by Lucy R. Lippard (Prentice-Hall Spectrum paperback, 1972), p. 158

² Ibid., p. 159

Once I dreamt I was walking through a flat field with mountains in the background but the road just kept on going. Then I came to a big tall bunch of leaves. I stood and looked at them for a while and then they started to form into bird shapes. Just then it started to rain and the leaf birds started to grow more and more. Suddenly they burst from the leaves and flew away. I was so shocked that I woke up.

NADIA LAZANSKY
P.S. 84, Manhattan

I dreamed that I was on a long terrace. There was a man looking over the rail. Behind him a lady was weaving. She had a lot woven. The part she was working on had me, the man and the terrace. I thought she was weaving a picture of his life. I started to ask but then I was on this mountain that had an eagle's head carved. It was 3-D. Then the sickle moon came and hooked me like a fish. It carried me to where a lot of sheep were and dropped me and I woke up on the floor.

JANE SHUFER
P. S. 84, Manhattan

tions. Paintings of views from windows in front of which are placed easels with paintings of the same views on them included the children as much as Robert Frank's photographs did. As the previous sentence illustrates, these paintings nearly defy description! There are always pleasant and exciting exceptions, however, and Guy Marlowe's piece proved to be one of them. The two or three other children who were attracted to this theme in Magritte included one talented sixth-grade artist, Francois Monereau.

I encouraged the kids to choose more than one painting if it helped them to write.

When a student stalled, I often pointed out incongruities Magritte had woven into the work of art: "How come the sky up there is bright, but near the house and under the trees it's dark and the streetlamp is shining?" He or she would think a moment, and look again. "Why is that happening, humm?" "Oh, yeah! See, it's because in the house there's... .." "Write it down!" I'd shout, before the thought vanished in the air. By directing the young writer back to the visual text until he or she had exhausted it, until all the associations had proliferated and turned into words on paper, I think we were able to write some u-

DREAM

One day I had a dream that I was getting up for school. I was putting my sneakers on and my clothes on. I was looking at the mirror. My eyes were bothered by the light. I was all done for school. Then I said to myself, "Let me look in the mirror." And I saw my back in the mirror and not my face. I was scared. I thought it was another person and I touched the mirror to see if it was real, and I said "But it's impossible! It's impossible!"

When my brother saw me looking at the mirror in front of him, he saw my face. I did! I did! But my brother said I was crazy. When my brother went, I saw my back in the mirror again.

FRANCOIS MONEREAU
P. S. 84, Manhattan

There was a man that every time he looked at something he would see a bird. So he looked at an icy mountain. He saw a bird like an eagle of snow. Then he looked at a mountain without any ice, but he still saw a bird; he saw a window painted. He cracked the window but he saw the same thing. He looked at some leaves, so he saw some birds. But when he looked at some birds he saw a dime. So the rest of his life he saw just money.

GUY MARLOWE
P. S. 84, Manhattan

nique poems and stories which exist independently of the paintings. (And for this reason I told the children not to mention anywhere that they were looking at a picture; if a picture existed in the painting they were using, then it could be mentioned, but only then.)

"In my pictures I showed objects situated where we never find them," wrote Magritte.³ Like dreams. And so when some of my students complained that they hadn't had any good dreams lately to write down (we have been doing a dream workshop-- writing down our dreams and

discussing dreams), I handed them Magritte's paintings and asked them to write about them as if they were dreams they remembered from the night before. Jane Shufer's and Nadia Lazansky's writings were composed in this fashion.

In 1961 Andre Breton quoted Magritte as saying: "My pictures are images. No image can be described validly unless one's thoughts are directed toward its liberation."⁴ What we attempted to do by entering the self-referential universe of Rene Magritte's art was to free those painted images—as words. ■

³ *Ibid.*, p. 159

⁴ Rene Magritte, by Andre Breton, in *Surrealism and Painting* (Harper & Row Icon paperback, 1972), p. 269.

POEM

There was a man
with no body
but a hat
and a bag
and a cane.
His body was a cage.
Birds came in
to build a nest.
Then the man
made men fall
from the sky
like Charlie Chaplin.
When the men fell
there was a big mountain
in the sky
with a castle on top.
That castle had a big eye
on top of the sky
looking at the tower
where the men were falling down.
They were invading the town
like Charlie Chaplin
and the leader
was looking down
with his big eye.
The men brought
the little tiny people
in a round ball.
They were going
to drop them
down the sky
from a window.
It started
to get dark.
A magic window
was creating sunlight.
The clouds
were circling around.

WILLIAM MALDONADO
P.S. 84, Manhattan

There is a haunted house by a little stream. In the stream you can see nothing but the reflection. In the reflection you can see the shutters clapping and leaves falling off the tree. It feels like you're in another world, the world of horror. Two lights were on in the house. The witch was eating spider web soup and fried octopus for dinner. The sky was light and the cloud was white. But in the wood it was dark. One of the lamp poles came on by the witch's power. But it was still dark. And the leaves are still falling off the tree.

GREGORY BERRIOS
P.S. 84, Manhattan

STONE PEOPLE

The stone people walk around
and pick up rocks to eat.
They speak stone language
stone, stone, stone, stone.
They live all around stone.
Their lives are stiff,
they can only move
their feet and hands
like us.
The stone people are ugly
like statues of monsters
yelling out mad.

LUCY ROSA
P.S. 84, Manhattan

The emptiness of the man
appears once in the years.
Why do you leave and return?
The room has none to offer.

The room knows what it
has to offer
but the man
who is from the faraway years.

ELIZABETH SOLAI
P.S. 84, Manhattan

THE MAN IN BLACK

I fled.
Fled from
him.
Help!
Confused,
that's what I am.
Everywhere I go,
he's there.
On television
he's there.
On the Dean Martin Show.
A sandwich,
just what I want!
Salami and mustard.
Yum!
But he's there,
instead of the salami.
AGH!
A walk,
yes,
a walk,
where,
to everywhere,
but it's raining.
On goes my
raincoat.
The rain is different.
It's HIM!
raining him!
Above the rooftops
against the blue sky,
the pale sky,
dressed in black
from head
to toe.
The sky
gets gray.
A flash of
light.
Blinding me,
but just for a second.
When I open
he's gone,
gone, only for
NOW.

MELISSA BALKIN
P. S. 84, Manhattan

THE DEATH DOVES

Inside a cage, in a man's heart
live the 2 Death Doves.

On the sand dunes they sit,
all four of them,
the fourth is Nothingness.
A bowling ball in his hand.

The 2 Death Doves are ready to chirp and kill.
Death is upon us all.

MARY RYAN
P. S. 84, Manhattan

THE STEAMING TRAIN

It was dark very dark
I knew that train
was coming to get me.

He got my husband
and children
and had to get me.
I went to
the cemetery to see
them and there was
the train. I was
there till 12:00
Then every ghost came out
to haunt me even
my family they wanted
me dead. I said NO! NO!
please go away. We come
to get you. NO! NO!
She knew that death
could not kill her but
she did not believe in that
and when somebody does not believe
in that they die the steaming train
came and got her. She's dead
dead
dead

ELIZABETH SERRANO
P. S. 84, Manhattan

Plugs

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In other states the National Endowment For The Arts sponsors Poet in the Schools programs through the local arts councils. Inquiries should be directed to the arts councils in your state. A complete listing will be published in a future issue of the Newsletter.

Contributors' Notes

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KATHLEEN MEAGHER's first book of poems, Going Outside, was published by Sunbury Press. Other works have appeared in Women, Orion's Dolphin and Connection. She is a graduate of Goddard College and is now doing workshops for the Poets in the Schools program in Connecticut.

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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.

BILL ZAVATSKY edits two poetry magazines, Sun and Roy Rogers. His poetry has appeared in several magazines, including The World and Juilliard. His first collection of poems is scheduled for publication soon.

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