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Teaching Writing to  
Emotionally Disturbed  
Students - By Jeannine Dubbs

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My Group, My Mirror  
- by Dan Cheifetz

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Children's Conceptions of  
Wild Chimpanzees  
- Bill Currier

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# About Teachers and Writers

**T**eachers & Writers Collaborative brings together writers, teachers, and students for the purpose of creating a curriculum that is relevant to the lives of children today and can therefore make the study of language a living process. Together, writer and teacher can encourage children to create their own literature from their own language, experience and imagination. This new approach to the teaching of language assumes that:

-- Children who are allowed to develop their own language naturally, without the imposition of artificial standards of grading, usage, and without arbitrary limits on subject matter, are encouraged to expand the boundaries of their own language;

-- Grammar and spelling develop as a result of an attachment to language and literature, not vice versa. Teaching these skills before a child feels they are relevant stifles his interest in language;

-- Children who write their own literature and read other children's are more likely to view all literature as an effort to deal with experience in creative ways, whatever that experience may be.

Teachers & Writers Collaborative places professional writers in classrooms to work on a regular basis with teachers who are interested in opening their children to new ways of using language. Teachers & Writers also conducts training workshops for teachers. T&W writers maintain detailed diaries of their work. These diaries, along with the works of the students, are the raw materials for Teachers & Writers publications-- newsletters, curriculum materials, anthologies. We hope that other teachers find in our materials some ideas they can use in their classrooms.

# Teachers & Writers

Collaborative Newsletter

Volume 6, Issue 1

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# MY GROUP, MY MIRROR

**I tried to leave my ego out of it  
and think about the kids only.**

## DAN CHEIFETZ

I've had a difficult group of fifth graders in my creative dramatics workshop this year. I asked them to sit in a circle when they came into the room, so we could begin some activity together. Instead, they usually scattered about the room, some to the blackboard, some to the windows. Some, the loners, would just wander around. And when I did get them together, many of them had a hard time listening and following directions. There were constant wisecracks. They were critical of each other, mean even, especially boys vs girls. Some of them were so disruptive, I had to throw them out of the group entirely.

Last year, with a different group of fifth graders in the same school, my experience was quite different. I developed a structure that worked quite well. We began with group "transformation games," in which a "master" or "Simon" would change his classmates into the creature of his choice. We followed up with individual pantomimes, in which each child would try to communicate a feeling or idea, and the others would guess it. Then

group pantomimes and from there, stories and improvisations. Someone would begin a story, and cast his classmates in the various roles as he went along. Then, when I thought a good scene might develop, I had two or more in the cast improvise dialogue. Later, they worked in small groups to create a story together on a given theme, performing it later for the whole group. At the end of the term, based on the material developed during the year, they gave a semi-improvised "show," in the school auditorium. The audience was children in the grades below fifth grade. It was a really fine show, lively and spontaneous. There were a lot of "goofs" but these turned into laughs. The kids showed as much resourcefulness in their performing as they had in their creating. There were discipline problems, as there usually are in open-ended activities like creative dramatics, but generally, things went pretty smoothly.

But my group this year showed little capacity for controlling themselves, leave alone working together. They did well with group games,



Sherryl  
A.  
Noble

---

I saw a thing that had only one eye. He wore glasses but there was only one glass in them. He had two large red ears but the rest of his body was white. He had three fangs coming out of his mouth. On his chest a word was written but I didn't know what it said. This is the word "SYKE".

Sherryl A. Noble

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but that was about it. When I asked them to work out pantomimes individually or develop a story in small groups many would goof off or wander around; often an argument would break out. Some good work was done, but it was all uphill for me. I found myself shouting a lot.

Once, tired of trying to settle them down for an activity, I sat down to see if the chaos would run its course. It did, but by then my time with them was almost up, and I sent them back to their classroom early. I was furious as I watched them leave. They were thwarting me from doing my program. They were making me feel guilty I couldn't reach them.

Their regular teacher told me how difficult they could be in her classroom. A real off-the-wall group, needing strict discipline. The teacher whose class I had worked with so well last year and who had my present group this year in a special program, also told me this was a pretty impossible bunch. I justified my own failure with the thought that no one could work with such kids within an atmosphere of free expression.

It was green and all bumpy and has a smell like a pickle with a psychedelic wig and thirty five toes with twelve fingers with an eye like a pickles and a nose like a cucumber.

Anon.

#### Vegetable Soup

My vegetable looks like a giant green peper with carrots for arms, ovles for eyes, with little onions for legs, his hair was leek roots. In the back round it was like a eating place. The man in the back door was the shief. He had a pot and spoon. Then the vegetable ran and fell. Then all of a sudden this weird thing happened. This big big piece of meat came. It was steak, ribreast, chopped meat. The man ran and all of a sudden came the noodles, white ones, green ones. But that cook he got what he wanted he had a vegetable soup (and made lots of money too).

Alyssa Hill

But I felt unhappy and dissatisfied. Unhappy blaming the kids for my dissatisfaction. Here I was, a shouting, angry authority figure trying to lead a creative, imaginative activity which was incompatible with such a repressive atmosphere. The kids were turning into my victimizers. I tried to leave my ego out of it and think about the kids only. Who were they outside of the present impasse? What were they capable of, and what were they not capable of? They weren't really having any fun wasting time and being disruptive. What did they need from me to have a good experience?

I remembered they had had fun in group games. For instance, we had played a "sentence game" they liked and learned from. In this game, a child says a word that begins a sentence. The next child adds a word, the next, another, and so on, with the last child in the circle finishing the sentence. The only rules were: You could not use the word "and." You could not end the sentence unless you were the last person in the circle. The sentences they made were original, some even witty. They had played the game with a lot of pleasure and played it without criticizing each other.

So it appeared that when there was a clear focus, and rules, a constructive group process began to operate with them. They had a difficult time working either alone or in small groups. They couldn't pay attention to each other's work. But they did seem interested in creating something together as a group. And they allowed each other to contribute to that something. I wasn't interested in more group games. But I did want to try

using their group feeling to help them get in touch with their fantasy lives, and create something out of them.

During the next session, I told them I was going to experiment with them. I said I was about to try something I had never done before with young people. I felt an immediate stir in the room. They sat up -- proud, I thought, to be treated as special, as good as grown-ups. I was not manipulating them. What I had said was true. I had only wanted to tell them that I expected something from them and had confidence that they could follow where I led.

I asked them to gather in a circle, close their eyes and imagine themselves "nowhere." Spooky darkness is all around you, I said. You are somewhere in the middle of the air. Slowly, an object is coming up toward you from below. It is big, oblong, strange-looking. Finally, it is in front of you. It's a mirror. You look inside but you don't see yourself. Instead, you see another creature. What is it? Is it human? What color is it? What shape? Big? Small? Medium? Does it have a head? Eyes? Hair? Is it wearing anything? What? Does it have shoes on? Or maybe it doesn't have any feet? How do you feel about it? Do you like it? Hate it? Scared of it? Is it saying anything? What do you see behind it? Etc. I gave them time to really investigate their own vision, part by part, and as a whole.

I was delighted how well they stayed with it. Only one or two smart-aleck remarks, and those at the beginning. No giggling or kicking each other. They concentrated as I spoke, and seemed to have much interest in their own developing fantasies. Since so much was



In my imagination, I saw the man or Beast. It all started when I went to the moon. He was standing on his feet and had normal toes but finger toes. He had spikey eye out lines and yellow inside. He was sycedelic and his arms were 9 feet long. He was approximately 30 feet or more. His claws were like the claws of an alligator. I gazed at him and the black background. He had a kind of an afro on one side and mopstrings on the other. His nose where is it and his mouth was like a monsters. He had horns on his arms and a furry bottom and a scaley top.



happening, I kept the exercise going a long time.

I had them slowly open their eyes. After a few moments, I asked them to share what they had seen, if they wanted to. What began to come out really excited me. It seemed to me that their visions were original and authentically their own. No one faked it, or made up something to hide what he actually saw, or something that would please me or the group. Most seemed to have gone deeply into the well of their secret selves. And amazingly to me, each one of them -- even the shiest -- was willing to share his or her vision. Just as striking as this was the fact that, as we went around the circle, the group paid concentrated attention to each child's fantasy. (At least, until we were about 80 per cent around, when some of them began to get restless.) No criticism, no sneering.

It seemed like an entirely new group to me. Their imaginations were alive and well -- unusually rich, in fact. Some of the least attentive children of previous sessions turned out to have the liveliest and most original visions. Also, I had the sense that each child had been encouraged in his imaginative work by the total imaginative energy of the group -- a kind of current that passed through them all. And though some of the fantasies were extremely personal no one seemed afraid to share his with others. No matter how bizarre or personal the vision, each child seemed to feel secure that what he had created would be accepted.

I said that those who wanted to could get pencil and paper and write down what they had seen in the mirror. I also suggested they draw a picture

of what they had seen, on the reverse side of the paper. Almost all of them did this -- once more, made confident by the fact that everyone was doing this "funny" work.

A selection of the work that came out of this exercise appears on the following pages.

I believe a class is often a mirror for a teacher. Sometimes he gets a disagreeable image, but it is probably accurate. The indifference and disruption of the children in this group were, at least in part, a reflection of my compulsion to impose my structure on them. That image persisted until I realized I wasn't getting what I wanted from them. I didn't really want to be a shouting authority figure, pitting my will against their resistance. What I wanted was to feel myself to be a facilitator of their imaginations, to be a catalyst in bringing out what was theirs alone and helping them to recognize it, value it and shape it into a creative act. And I wanted to feel connected with them, not apart from and above them.

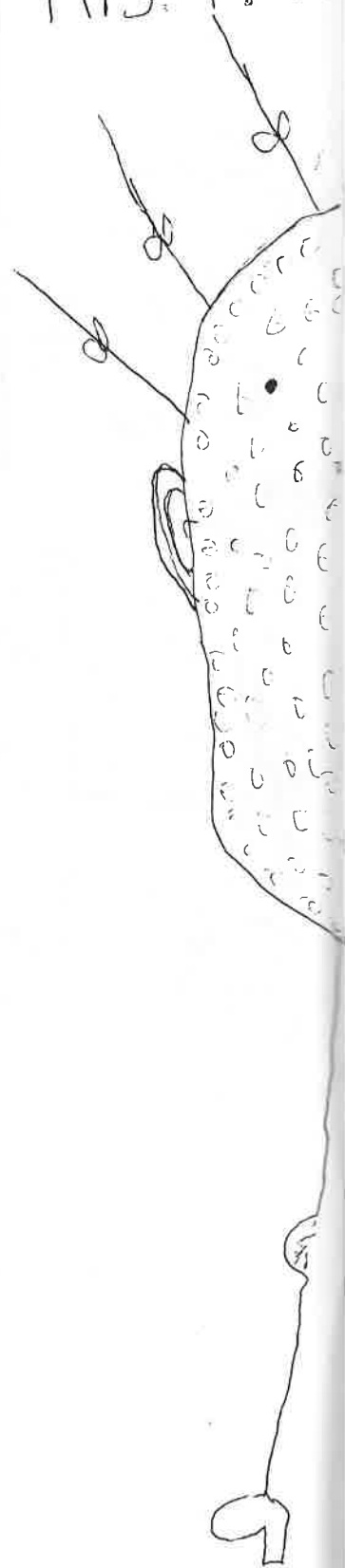
To get what I wanted, I had to figure out what they needed. And also, what they were capable of at that moment in their individual lives and in their group life. Granted they had behavior problems. My goal as a teacher was to find some way to tap into their constructive, creative sides. As long as I insisted on imposing a program not possible for this group of children to carry out, there would be an impasse between us. When I finally utilized what was in that room, at that time, with these children, their creative energies flowed as naturally as their blood. The "image" they re-

flected back to me was much more satisfying because I had found a way to help them express their imaginations in a way satisfying to them.

Of course, there is no "happy ending" in teaching. I've had several frustrating times with these children after our satisfying "mirror" session. But I try to stay in touch with who they are and where they are. I've tried several other fantasy exercises with them, some with great success. For example: I've taken them in fantasy to the top of a mountain and asked what they saw from that height. They saw monster clouds, angels, weird flying objects. Several of them decided to "fall off" the mountain, and most of the others followed. This led to an exciting "resurrection" exercise. I asked those who had been "smashed to death" at the foot of the mountain to come back to life in any form they wanted. I only wish I had had my tape recorder there to capture some of their marvelous "reincarnations."

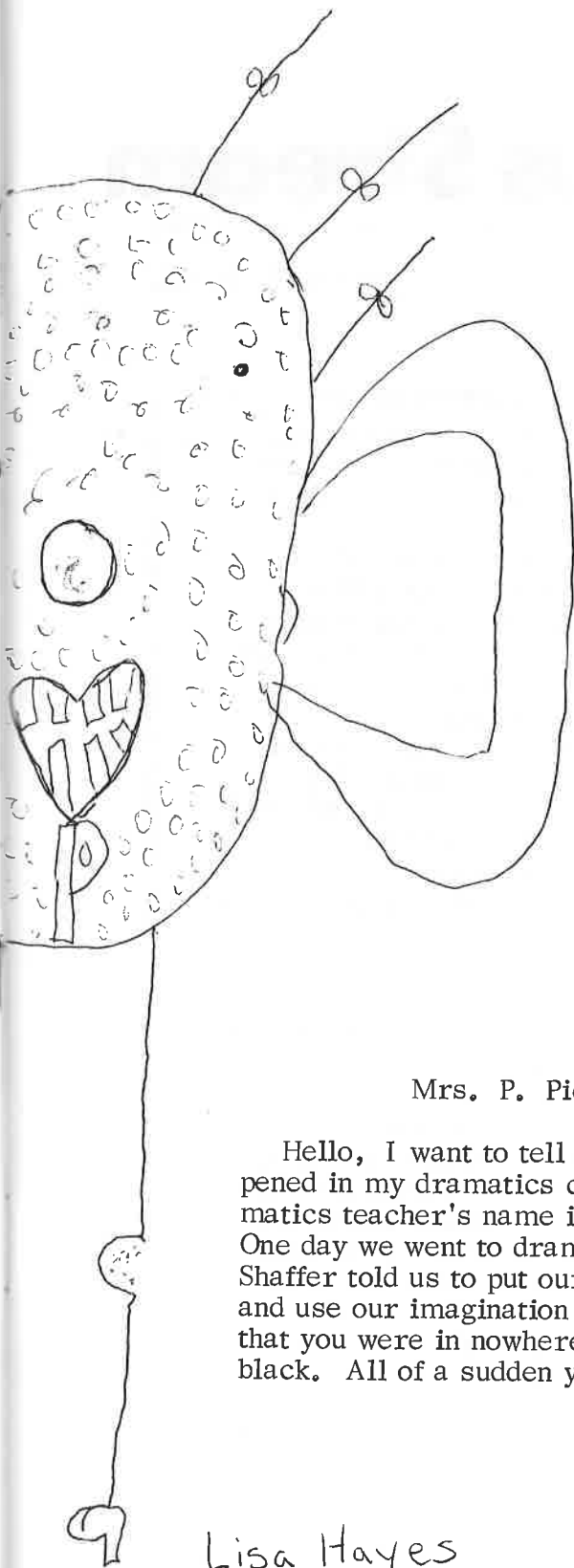
At another session, I put them into a jungle, where they could turn into anything they wanted, from a twig to an alligator to King Kong. What happened was that they all became "natives" and built huts out of the extra tables and chairs in the room. Some structures were simple, some complex. I turned myself into "an interviewer from CBS" and went around asking the "natives" about their families and tribes, what they ate, how big they were, what they did every day, etc. I got some fascinating insights into how these children really wanted to live, given a world of their own creation. ■

Mrs. P. P.





ckle



Mrs. P. Pickle

Hello, I want to tell you what happened in my dramatics class. My dramatics teacher's name is Mr. Shaffer. One day we went to dramatics and Mr. Shaffer told us to put our heads down and use our imagination and imagine that you were in nowhere and it was black. All of a sudden you saw a mirror

Lisa Hayes

coming up to you and in your imagination, imagine that you looked into the mirror and you saw something strange. He said to remember what it was. Well what I saw was a pickle. It was a strange pickle. I suppose it was a lady pickle because it had 6 strands of hair. She had six bows on each strand of hair. She had a big cookie nose. She had a heart shaped mouth with two big teeth and 7 small teeth. She had one big ear and one small ear. She had two dot eyes. She had two bony straight legs with big round knees with scars. This certain pickle I saw had a "P" on it. I started staring at the "P" and all of a sudden it said something, it said, "What are you staring at?" Then I was surprised that the pickle could talk. Then she said, "My name is Pauline Pickle." Then she said, "Would you like to come to my country?" Then I said, "yes". She said, "Could you fit into the mirror. I said, "I don't know." Then I tried and I got in. Oh it was a beautiful country. It had very green grass so green that you can smell a mile away, and oh it had green trees, so green that you can almost smell the greenest. Then I saw so many pickles that I got so hungry that I almost ate a lady's baby pickle. Then Pauline said, "If you do that again we will disappear and you will never see us again. So she took me to her house and I met her husband Paul Pickle and her baby Paulet Pickle. The name of the country was Picklevillage. The people of Picklevillage all had the last name of Pickle. Then again I got very hungry, and I thought about what Pauline had said about if I bit off of some pickle again they would disappear. So I just went on. After a while I asked for some soap because I was really getting hungry. She said, "What's s-soap?" Then I said, "Nevermind." Then I started getting dizzy because I was starving, so I took a bit off of her husband and all of a sudden everything disappeared even the grass and trees disappeared. Then I popped out of the mirror and I was back in the dark and I started thinking about the trip I made. I was wondering was that really happening or was I imagining things.

Lisa Hayes

NAN DAVISON

# A Miraculous Stream

Last September I embarked on a sort of mad undertaking for a 39-year-old beginning teacher: running a "language lab" for about 370 children from first through sixth grades. I worked with 15 small groups every week in a large book room -- three groups per day for about 45 minutes each. By the end of the school year I felt like a vending machine.

It wasn't just the relentless schedule. Trying to meet the expectations of ten different teachers was a problem. My lack of experience both as a teacher and as a writer was another. I made a lot of mistakes (especially the kind where you realize just an instant too late how you should have presented the lesson), experienced several near-mutinies (I'm a lousy grammar teacher), and wasted a lot of time and energy. But through all this chaos ran a miraculous stream of children's writing.

Acrostic poems turned out to be one of the highlights of the year. Our first attempts at poetry produced a pretty depressing collection of jingles. Then one day I wrote Matthew Mandelbaum's poem on the board, and the kids proceeded to explore the form and invent elaborations on it. Starting with acrostics based on their names and various interesting words, some kids went on to write pages of poems based on their classmates' names and short sentences, and some put the acrostic in the middle of their poems. The most complicated one was Kenny Salter's "Time Is Strange," in which each stanza begins with one of the title words.

I'd like to share two of our projects with you. One was this: I had some 2" X 2" glass light-show slides that some kids and I had made a few years ago with transparent inks and glass enamels. (These interact like oil and water on the glass, making fascinating patterns and colors.) I projected the slides, while a group of fourth graders wrote down the images and stories the slides suggested to them. This writing was so vivid that I decided, when working with this group again several months later, to let them make their own slides. A friend had given me a lot of used glass slides from a TV studio, so all I had to buy were the inks and enamels (primary colors plus black) and tape for the edges. Small brushes, Q-Tips and toothpicks were all good for applying the colors. Sometimes we let the slides dry before taping on the second sheet of glass, and sometimes we "smashed" them -- put the glass on while the colors were still wet, which made surprising things happen. The following week I projected the slides while the kids wrote, and later we tape-recorded some of their commentary and presented the whole show -- slides and tape -- for the rest of the class and then for the parents at Open House.

Another project was based on an idea suggested by a dancer-teacher and was done with first and second graders on our last day. I brought a silk scarf, a bean bag, a dry leaf and a "snowflake" made out of rice paper. We dropped each of these and studied their different styles of falling, and we tried falling the same ways. (The boys were awfully good at falling down like bean bags.) We talked about the different movements and sounds, and I wrote their descriptive words on the board. Then they wrote.

**There was a tree in the winter  
That smelled like lemons  
And the snow was orange.**

Lynn Novatt

Richard the Rocket  
Is the fastest  
**Cat-**  
Human in races. He's  
Ahead of everyone. He is a  
Raider in racing. He races to  
Do fast things.

Pedott's the best in football. He  
Enters then he racks them up to  
Destroy and win them  
Out of business.  
Ta  
Ta!

Richard Pedott, third grade

Sun shines  
Up and  
Sun shines  
Around  
Nearly every day

Except when a storm comes up, the  
Lights go out then I  
Light the candles and  
I go  
Out of my room  
Tiptoe  
Tiptoe.

Susan Elliott, third grade

Maynard  
And I run  
Yelling and barking,  
Now slowly tiring  
And now panting hard.  
Rest now and  
Do nothing at all.

Move slowly, jump up  
Yelling loud.

Don't let mommy hear you, tiptoe  
Out, jump and yell,  
Go running down the hill.

Sharon Long, fifth grade

John has a snake,  
Ouch, with a  
Horrible  
Notorious bite.

Three times he bit me,  
Ouch, four.  
Rattlesnakes are venomous.  
Most have rattles.  
Every snake has fangs,  
You have teeth.

John Tormey, fifth grade

SUE WILLIS

# PLAYING

Sue Willis and Children from P. S. 75  
Photographs by Fredi Balzano

When I was about six years old, my best friend and I used to play together up on the hill behind my house; we played we were married to the great cowboys Roy Rogers and Rex Allen. They always got wounded so we would mix poultices for them out of cow manure and grass seed. Then, while they recuperated, we galloped across the plains on their horses and dispatched their enemies. When I was nine, I directed my first play, a melodrama parody for my family starring me, my cousin, and my little sister. From this production I learned three valuable lessons: first, how to tailor the script to the available performers. My sister was three years old, so she had only two words to say, "Oh Tom!" but she said them in many different contexts. Second, I learned that laughter captures audiences; thus my little sister's recurring phrase worked to our advantage. Third I learned that the juiciest acting roles belong to evil characters, and as playwright and director I reserved the villain's part for myself.

I'm twenty-eight now, and I teach creative writing to elementary school children. In all four classes I worked with at P. S. 75 this year the writing at some point seemed to lead naturally into playmaking. As soon as we would try a little improvizing or dramatizing, someone inevitably would say, "Sue, when can we do it in the Auditorium?" Dra-



ma clearly has many uses with children. In his book, Theater in My Head, Dan Cheifetz describes a whole personally-oriented area of drama workshops; some therapists use drama to elicit conflicts and fantasies that could not be verbalized. My particular orientation is that of a theater enthusiast and a fiction writer. As an enthusiast I get chills from lowering house-lights. The magic of the stage is an article of faith with me; I empathize completely with the boy who hid backstage until the performance of "The Last of the Scotts" had begun and it was too late for me to chase him offstage. I am the little girl who says, Please, let me just pull the curtains. Didn't I myself last year, at my busiest season, say to Phillip Lopate, our team director, You're putting on West Side Story, let me have the privilege of giving up my own projects, the classes I teach, let me do make-up, let me shush kids backstage, take me, use me, but let me be part of the show!

As a writer, I see play-making as another form of communication with oneself and strangers. My first year with Teachers & Writers Collaborative, I let the kids do improvisations as a reward, a sugar lump to sweeten the hard work of writing. There was no question that they accepted improvisations as a high form of pleasure. Last year I fell into directing plays

kids had written spontaneously, outside of class or writing workshops. This year I had my small writing groups begin with poems, monologues of characters, personal stories of family life, and then, after I got a feeling for the concerns of the individuals, we would act out, or act on the same themes as, the written pieces. Sometimes we would read the actual piece of writing, sometimes we ignored it, and then wrote again after the deepening experience of trying to be a character. In Robin Rubinger's fourth-fifth grade we began the year with medieval themes because of a corridor middle ages project. Character monologues were of queens and knights, or abstracts personified like Death and the Devil. We worked these into medieval skits, and after these three skits had been presented in the auditorium, I turned with this class to themes I have been working on in my own writing, especially intrafamily politics. In a single session one of the small writing groups would do individual stories of family life and then read them aloud and choose one or two to act out. We improvised a little theater in the writing room and entertained each other on the spot. I loved these little intimate performances. I had also preferred the writing room dress rehearsals of the medieval plays to the performances in the auditorium. Many practi-

cal problems disappeared in the writing room; voices could be heard; small gestures were meaningful; there was a close contact between audience and actors. I wanted to do one more play with Robin's class; I had been hoping that one of these improvised family tales would grow into a full-scale drama. But when I asked one group of six children what sort of play they would like to do, they said, Mystery! Ghosts! and when I had them actually write suggested plot outlines, there was a strong bias toward murder. Malcolm wanted to be a detective in a trenchcoat and pipe; he was typical in that he didn't really care what play we did as long as his talents could be fitted in. Almost every child in the class had had a part in one or another of the three medieval skits; and they had all been bitten by the vampire Stage. It seemed that to have been up there above a sea of clapping was to hunger to be there again.

We wanted a script. I usually avoid falling back on the class stars, but this time I made an executive decision and chose three writers who I knew were solid workers; three girls, Nelly, Ileana and Yvonne. Nelly and Ileana had been in Robin's class last year too; they were part of a clique of mostly Puerto Rican girls who smiled and studied sweetness and sat together at one table, working, and if they finished their assignments they would knit and crochet

## THE LAST OF THE SCOTTS

A play by Nelly Gomez, Yvonne Kingdon  
and Ileana Izquierdo

### Characters:

Howard Scott	Doctor
Bernadette Scott, his first wife	Evalina, the maid
Christina Scott, their daughter	Detective
Olivia Scott, his second wife	Police
Rosaline Scott Rogers,	Preacher
Howard's sister	Neighbors, wedding
Peter Rogers	guests, people in a bar
Katherine	
Peter Junior	

Act I, scene i The Scott living room

(Bernadette and Howard are reading newspapers.)

Bernadette: The world is a dreadful place sometimes--  
a woman, a very nice woman just died and her  
husband swore eternal love to her and then he  
married another woman.

Howard: (Looks at watch) Oh, ah, Bernadette, I have to go  
meet a friend of mine at a bar.

Bernadette: To talk about business? Fine with me.

(Howard goes off, puts on jacket and tie. Something sus-  
picious is going on.)

Bernadette: Why are you getting so dressed up, it's only  
to talk business.

Howard: (Stammers) Whay ah er I'm going to meet an old  
college buddy of mine I haven't seen in a long time.

(He leaves)

Bernadette: (Hears door click, runs to window) Ooh, so  
that's what you've been up to, eh? Oh, I'll show  
you.

Scene ii. In the bar. (Laughing and smoking)

Olivia: Oh darling, I was waiting for you all this time, and  
you didn't come out!

Howard: Oh, I was telling my wife that I had to meet an old  
college buddy.

Olivia: I think we shouldn't go out together anymore.

and whisper constantly like lit-  
tle old widows. This year they  
both seemed physically strong-  
er and freer. The third girl,  
Yvonne, also had the virtues  
of the middle classes: clever-  
ness, responsibility: in her  
case welded by a big sisterly  
quality that tricked me into  
forgetting that she was only  
nine. We went down to the  
auditorium itself to begin writ-  
ing because the writing room  
was overflowing. Composing  
our play in the actual space  
where we would play it proved  
a vital connection between i-  
magination and pragmatic con-  
siderations. But at first the  
auditorium had its usual effect  
on even these Good Little  
Girls. While I fumbled around  
after the lights, Nelly and Il-  
eana began chasing one anoth-  
er up and down in the dark  
vastness shouting "Echo!  
Echo!" Everytime I put on a  
play in the auditorium this  
happens--it is probably one of  
my reasons for delighting in  
intimate classroom theater.  
In the auditorium a Dionysian  
spirit seizes children; the  
ceiling vault, the lingering  
magic of previous performan-  
ces, cause a celebratory mad-  
ness. Tag in aisles, hide and  
seek in the curtains, exhibi-  
tionist dancing on the piano,  
snatches of remembered num-  
bers from West Side Story,  
last year's great schoolwide  
theater experience. I made  
my girls sit down, still vibrat-  
ing with the excitement of pre-  
tending, on the apron of the  
stage, and start dictating.  
They would hop up to play the  
scenes as they made them up.  
That acoustically reprehens-  
ible old auditorium became  
a member of our playwriting  
team.

As soon as they had decided  
on main characters, they be-  
gan debating who gets to play  
whom. Nelly claimed the part

## Passionate women, full of dignity or revenge.

of the evil homebreaker and murderess Olivia. Ileana and Yvonne debated over the other women but had trouble deciding which part to fight over as the play wasn't finished and they didn't know which part was larger. I kept saying things like, "Yes, but how can you show a window on the stage? And why does she kill her? What happens after that?" I felt myself to be a weight pulling them back to the task, out of their freewheeling play of imagining themselves as passionate women, full of dignity or revenge. But after a couple of writing sessions they began to see the shape of their play too; they began to couch their ideas in props and actions. "That means a gun or a knife--these people are rich so they must have a maid--well then after the murder, the maid would be suspected." I was pleased with the developing plot of love-hate family relationships; an extramarital affair, a heart attack, a death-bed vow, a murder, a couple of thwarted murders, and two ghosts who continue the compulsions of their living. Nelly contributed the revenge and family struggle; Ileana gave us the ghosts; Yvonne added plot twists and long speeches in pseudo upper class diction: "My love, you must promise me one thing--never to let any other woman take my place in your heart and life--" The

Howard: Why not? There's nothing wrong between us two!

Olivia: Well, I have a funny feeling that she suspects--I saw her through the window looking at us--she made me feel nervous!

Act I, scene iii Scott living room

(Howard comes back, he opens the door and finds Bernadette lying on the floor.)

Howard: What's wrong with you? You've never been like this before!

(He tries to wake her, he calls the doctor.)

Christina: I've seen you going out with that woman-- that's why you killed my mother!

Doctor: (Comes in) So what happened? (Starts examining her) You did it, Howard, didn't you?

Howard: No, No, I came home and there she was lying down.

Scene iv. Hospital

(Doctor comes out)

Doctor: I'm very sorry--your wife is dying--she wants to speak to you.

Christina: I want to see mother too!

Bernadette: My love, you must promise me one thing-- never let any other woman take my place in your heart and life. Christina, for - give your father... (She dies)

Christina: Mother, mother, don't die!

Howard: I loved her, but now that she's dead, I'll marry Olivia.

Act II, scene i. Five days later. Wedding of Olivia and Howard.

(Big family reunion)

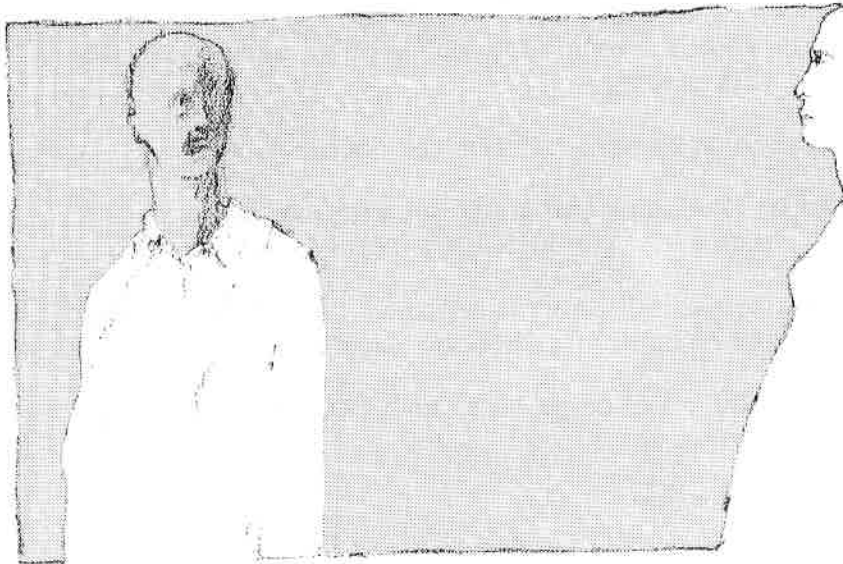
Different people: Oh wasn't it just awful!  
She died so suddenly!  
She was so beautiful, and such a nice woman!  
With a young daughter.

Olivia: (standing by herself, holding a tray, listening. Hears the word 'beautiful', drops the tray.) Oh, I'll get revenge!

Christina: Thank you. (looks at Olivia and rolls her eyes. Christina follows Olivia.) It was your fault my mother died.

(Olivia slaps her)

Christina: Why did you go out of the party--the people were looking and staring at you. My mother never hit me before, why did you have to hit me?



(The wedding)

Different women: Isn't he handsome?  
Why did he have to marry her instead of me?

Scene ii. In Scott house.

(Howard rings for maid.)

Maid: Oui, monsieur.

Howard: Je veux deux thé et un pain et une biere.

(Olivia is drinking. Christina and Olivia are giving each other bad looks. They loathe each other. Olivia keeps looking at Christina and she gets so mad she throws her food, stands and goes out.)

Scene iii. Christina's bedroom, that night.

Christina: Oh I wish my mother hadn't been killed! (Hears door, Olivia comes in.) What are you doing here? I told you never to come in my room. Go away go away!

Olivia: (Has knife.) Isn't it a beautiful knife?

Christina: What is it for?

final result seemed to me to be a blending of gothic novel and channel 47 soap opera. There was no doubt in my mind that we had a playable script, and the girls felt it too. In the beginning they had come to play, and then settled down to write because they do the task set before them, but now they saw the script and began to imagine the performance, just as I did. As I typed up the scripts I thought: So this is what I do with children. I realize. I help them find what excites and moves them, what they want to share out of themselves, and then I offer them means to realize it. I show them how to manipulate words, stage spotlights, and, yes, audiences, to make their ideas concrete.

It was a good thing that I took time out to explain things to myself then, because between the completion of the script of "The Last of the Scotts" and the culminating performances, there was to be a lot of jealousy over who got the best part, a lot of tracking down custodians to get auditorium keys, a lot of little voices fluttering to the edge of the stage and there disintegrating. A lot of Brian and Felix, who do not pride themselves on being good children, practicing tarzan swings on the curtains, and a lot of me wondering, "Who is this bitch-mouth who keeps yelling at the high spirited little children?" A lot of her saying, "The next kid who takes a swing on one of these curtains is out of the play. Do you hear me Brian? Brian? I mean out of the play!"

As we continued into the script, it seemed that the whole process consisted of meeting obstacles, incorporating them as advantages if possible, otherwise avoiding or ignoring. One problem that



Olivia: It's for your own good, my dear.

(Christina screams.)

Act II, scene iv.

(Christina lying on floor covered with ketchup.)

Howard: Christina, Oh oh Christina, why did you scream so loud! You've got blood all over you! You haven't been. . . oh no!

Scene v. Detective comes.

(Howard in living room, walking back and forth.)

Olivia: I can't clean it--I can't stand the sight of blood.

Detective: Now tell me the whole story of what happened.

Howard: (Stutters a little) Well, the maid went up to Christina's bed and when she went up, she went in to take a pearl necklace from Christina and then Christina said, "What are you doing, Evalina?" She said, "Oh, nothing, ma'am."

Evalina: No sir, I didn't do such thing!

Howard: Shut up!

(Olivia is sitting there staring.)

(Detective goes into kitchen.)

Detective: Okay, tell me, is it true that you killed her?

Evalina: No sir, I didn't do such a thing to Miss Christina. She was so beautiful.

Detective: Okay, tell me what you did?

Evalina: I just went upstairs to change the bed and saw Miss Christina reading a book. That's all sir, I don't remember any more. Wait, wait, on the way down, I remember one more thing. I met Miss Olivia and she said not to let anybody go in Miss Christina's room.

Detective: Olivia, what were you doing during the murder of Christina Scott?

Olivia: Why, why, I was reading in the library.

Detective: Hum, ah, by George, I don't know which one of you is telling the truth.

All: I am, I am, sir, I am.

quickly arose was that the main male character was a curiously amorphous role. Howard Scott is the object of all the movement of the play: he bestows the great name of Scott on crazy Olivia; his first wife is jealous of him even after her death; his sister and her impoverished family come to him for succor in their time of need. And yet, he is a buffeted character, a desirable object shoved and tugged here and there by the passions of the women in his life. Perhaps more to the point, there were no boy actors in the class of the caliber of Nelly and Yvonne. My final casting choice committed me to a constant barrage of "James, keep your face to the audience, James try it again louder, please." At the same time shouting, "Brian, get off the curtains!" Brian played a policeman, and he said, "Did you bring my gun today? You promised I could practice with a gun today." Through curled lips he refused to go on without his gun. I never had time to try and find out what was really bothering him because Ileana, for her own unaccountable reasons, had begun carrying a comic book onstage with her, reading it except when she had a line to say. "Don't you understand," I called. "Don't you understand, Ileana, that we have to pretend we're actually giving a performance?" She didn't understand. She giggled. People who weren't in the scene sat on the stage to watch the action. They're not pros, I told myself. They're not experienced in pacing themselves toward a deferred goal. Felix touched my arm. "Hey Sue, today I'm not going to swing on the curtains. This is my brother Reuben. He's visiting me today, can he watch us practice?" Felix

Act II, scene vi.

Howard: Okay, Evalina, you may go.

Olivia: Oh, I don't want to be caught by the police--oh, you have to help me, I love you too much!

Howard: I'll help you, but you must act stupid. But why did you do that to my daughter? She was the only Scott left.

Olivia: But I'm a Scott too!

Howard: But you're not a genuine Scott, you're just a sort of half Scott.

Olivia: But I am a Scott!

Howard: Well, you are, but--you're not a real one. Christina was the only natural true born Scott. Except me of course. And my sister.

Olivia: Who is this sister of yours? Tell me.

Howard: It's a long story, but if you must know --

Olivia: Yes, I must, I must know!

Howard: We were a happy family until Rosaline met Peter Rogers. Peter and I were school friends in 3rd grade and we were the best of friends until one day we agreed upon an all's fair boat race. And he was teasing me that he won--and he did win, that no good scoundrel! She got in love with him and married him, and I said not to step in this house anymore.

scene vii.

(Knock on door.)

Olivia: The police!

Howard: Do you think it's them?

Olivia: Yes, I'm sure. They want to get me. Oh, Howard, I'm scared! They have finally come to take me away to prison!

Howard: How could they? Ooh, that maid!

Voice: Let us in, please let us in!

(Maid goes to door. Peter and Rosaline Rogers come in.)

Maid: Sir! My word! It's your sister and her husband come back!

didn't swing on the curtain but Reuben did. Reuben also got hit by Brian who was in a foul mood, and Felix had to respond by beating Brian. I thought I was beginning to understand why Olivia killed her stepdaughter...

One afternoon about half-way through rehearsals as I was trying to get the kids away from the piano and on-stage, Nicky said, "Listen to the murder chord," and lo and behold he struck a minor that said as clearly as all the conventional TV-movie sound tracks, "What you are about to witness is terrifying and horrible; brace yourself; beware!" An electric light bulb blinked over my head. Nicky had only a small part; he is one of the workers, a talented kid of the sort that reminds classroom teachers why they originally went into the business. Within ten minutes we had Nicky giving the cues that the dialogue should have given, if only all those voices had reached the audience. He chorded for a tray dropped in anger; for a slap; for gun shots; he found a little gray shivery ghost tune. I felt confident then that we had three strong strands holding the play together: the script, Nicky's music, Nelly's powerful evil Olivia.

Less than a week before the performances I experimentally took myself out of the play. Up to that point I had never really stopped talking them through it: "Louder, James, turn your body toward me. That's good. Now this is where Andy and Brian come in--Andy and Brian! Get out here!" My voice constantly wheedling and directing each movement, each step. When I closed my mouth, they all stood like closeted puppets, and after a while turned to appeal to me

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**I remembered that I was the grown-up and teacher.**

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with their eyes. Gradually they whispered their way through a few scenes, forgetting which scene followed which. It's not their play, I thought, horrified. They don't even know the plot. We all stared at one another bleakly until I remembered that I was the grown-up and teacher and committed to drawing lessons even out of wells of despair. "There," I said, "Wasn't it good that we did it now instead of waiting till when we have an audience?" That night I dreamed the whole play, right through the applause and curtain calls. Then woke up and realized it wasn't over at all, that I had to go through it a gain.

We gave one dress rehearsal and two full performances. The dress rehearsal was only for the half of the class not in the play. I had suffered greatly over getting as many kids as possible into the play. The ones finally left out were gracious. Jackie came up and stood beside me for a while, finally saying, "Can I help with the clean-up?" The new boy in the class produced a toy police outfit for Brian, complete with badge, cap and gun holster. There was one tragedy; Yvonne, writer and mainstay, came down with the chicken pox. I was mournful; Rebekah, who had wanted the part and did not want to do make-up instead, told me about Yvonne with an irrepressible smile playing over her

Howard: I can't believe my eyes! Didn't I tell you not to come to this house?

Rosaline: Oh, Howard, I had to!

Peter: Yes, Howard, we had to. We were living fine until my brother came and said all that fortune wasn't left to me, but to him. So since we had no place to live, we had to come here. It's the first place your sister could think of.

Howard: You're lying.

Olivia: (To herself) Now is my chance to wipe them all out --and be the last woman Scott!

(Katherine and Peter Junior come in.)

Kids: We couldn't wait!

Katherine: Oh mama, who is that lady? She isn't Bernadette!

Olivia: You wretched child! Don't you talk to me like that! Bernadette was killed. I'm your aunt Olivia.

Katherine: (runs to Howard) Oh uncle, uncle, you wouldn't do that!

(Howard likes Katherine and Pete.)

Howard: I wish you were my kids. Well, just for one week you can stay. And that is all.

(He puts out his hands and Rosaline kisses them and kneels.)

Olivia: Let them stay a little bit longer. (With a devilish smile.)

Act III, scene i.

Rosaline: (Preparing bed in guest room, sees two white figures.) Who are you--Bernadette and Christina!

Bernadette: We've been trying to haunt the house and take that woman out of here, but there's no where to get in...

Christina: I'm glad you came because Olivia plans to kill you...

Rosaline: I'll leave the window open so you can come in every night and haunt the house and take that awful Olivia away.

(The ghosts go away.)



Rosaline: Oh, I can't wait till we trap that mean old Olivia. I've got to find out why.

Olivia: (Comes in.) I heard you talking to yourself.

Rosaline: (Scared) Yes, I often do...

Olivia: Why are you backing away?

(Rosaline screams and faints)

Peter: (Comes in) I heard her scream and I came in. Olivia, what are you doing to my wife?

Olivia: Nothing, nothing. I was just talking to her and she just fainted.

Peter: What did you say that she fainted?

Olivia: I was just talking about how nice it would be if you could stay longer. She was talking to herself in her dream and when I came in she saw me and she screamed and fainted.

Peter: You said 'she saw you,' that was your slip!

Olivia: Get out of here! This is my own room! (She slams door and goes out.)

Scene ii. At dinner table.

Katherine: Hello, uncle Howard, hello Mommy, hello father.

face. Adults offered their services; the student teachers did make-up, backdrops, helped keep the backstage quiet.

At last, the reality of the performance took our breath away. The actual murmur of Others out there, not just Sue and Felix's little brother, not even Ms. Rubinger and the other kids in the class, but rather, a live, true Audience. What will they think of us? Nervously I counted my props. The food-coloring red tee shirt for Ileana's transformation from stepdaughter to corpse; Nelly's murder weapons, knife and gun; light switches. What none of us was prepared for was not being able to see: "Carlos," I hissed, "Get away from there, they can see you!" They wanted to watch through the curtains, to peep from the sides. I wished I didn't understand so well. Carolyn the curtain puller suddenly decided she couldn't take it, put the ropes in my hand and slipped out front to watch. I realized that I never did the curtains before and I didn't know which rope opened, which closed. James and Felix in a fit of helpfulness took the bed off-stage two scenes too early and we barely got it back in time.

And yet, suddenly I saw that nothing was going really wrong. Some things were even going very right. Ileana had generated a powerful voice from out of her giggling and comic book reading; Cynthia, who missed half the rehearsals, carried off her scenes with aplomb. With the curtains open from backstage we see other members of the production bathed in pink light; we held our breath; something special was happening. Nelly went out and in her loveliness caused a small shock of horror; she was evil beautified;

she lifted the knife, turned it in air. "Isn't it a beautiful knife? It's for your own good, Christina..." The chords, the lights out. The scream, lights up and Ileana lying there bloody. The audience gasps; backstage we sigh; I hug Nelly, herself again. Something had happened to all of us, audience, and stage. We shared a high point. No wonder afterwards Nicky said, "Hey Sue let's do another play before school's out." Nelly said, "Do you think maybe next year?"

We cherish our high points, our moments of fulfillment and ritual excitement. I do not want to suggest that "The Last of the Scotts" was a prodigy; on the contrary what I loved about it was the effort of children who are not innately competent actors. Part of the play was acting the role of actors. We were just good enough on several occasions to enjoin the sympathy and participation of the audience. Our troupe made the best of what it had as a group. More than half the class was involved in some way, making curtain-raiser skits, contributing costumes, making programs. What was important about "The Last of the Scotts" was the power we found to move ourselves and the audience for a brief instant, a ritual moment when what was happening on stage was an expression of feelings mutual to players, crew, and audience. So many children's activities are abstracted; "Learn this it will be good for you when you're thirty." So much of what children do is not real, but practice, childsplay. We, however, conceived, wrote, rehearsed and performed; we created as a group a whole experience, an event, a real play. ■

Howard: Well, darling, why don't you say hello to your aunt?

Katherine: She's not my aunt, I've been telling you--she's an imposter!

(She runs up to her room.)

Olivia: Let me go and talk to her.

Howard: That will be fine dear.

Rosaline: Oh, excuse me, I have to go upstairs and get something I forgot.

Act III, scene iii. Katherine's room.

Olivia: You fretful little child, (to herself) I think I shall kill you too!

Katherine: No, no!

(Ghosts are watching)

Olivia: Yes! Yes!

Rosaline: No, don't you dare touch my child!

Katherine: That woman over there tried to kill me!

(Olivia goes for a gun)

Olivia: Don't you dare move or I'll shoot.

Katherine: No! No! You won't hurt my mother!

Christina's ghost: No, you won't!

(Olivia drops gun and faints, Rosaline picks up gun.)

(Howard and Peter come in.)

Howard: You killed Olivia!

Katherine: No! No! She wanted to kill my mother. She's dead! She's dead!

(Then Howard sees the ghosts.)

Howard: It can't be, No, I don't believe it.

Bernadette's ghost: Boy, you better believe it, now!  
Ha ha ha!

Howard: No you wouldn't, you wouldn't!

(Seven shots. He dies.)

## **My Favorite Things Are**

**Noodles**

**Tea**

**Rainbows**

**Chocolate Bars**

**Long Island**

**Flowers and My Grandmother**

**Going Over to Andy's**

**Playing House With My Sister**

**Being Alone**

# **A Book About Rainbows**

### Playing House With My Sister

I like to be with my sister  
Very much  
With my sister I play  
We eat chocolate bars every time  
We go over to Andy's  
And we see the rainbow  
It's up in the sky  
High in the sky  
Then it starts to rain  
The rainbow goes away.

### Let's Talk About My Grandmother

I love my grandmother  
She was so pretty, like a rainbow  
I still remember her  
She was 84 years old when she died  
Before she died someone came up and helped her  
He brought a bottle of whiskey for her  
And my grandmother put it all over her face  
My grandmother always liked it  
It made her feel better

### How To Make A Rainbow

I will make a rainbow on a picture  
I will put it on a film  
Then I will point the film projector up to the sky  
Everybody will look at the rainbow.

### My Sister

My sister jumps on me  
Then I jump on her back  
She jumps on me  
We keep doing it until Mommy calls out  
Stop!  
Then she puts us to bed without dinner  
I go in my mother's bed and go to sleep.

These poems were dictated to me by a third grader, Bernard Shepherd, in a storage closet where we met to get some privacy every Tuesday morning for a month.

I could describe Bernard to you, but I have the feeling my impressions would get in the way, and would finally add nothing to the very beautiful and honest account he gives of himself in these poems.

I began by asking for a simple list of his likes and hates; and then he proceeded to talk, or rather, chant on these subjects. Bernard's mind was like a compass needle that always pointed to the heart of the matter. He knew exactly how to begin, and what he wanted to say, and when to end. There was less and less need for prodding from me -- occasionally I would ask him to take a poem further, but once he felt it had come to a conclusion he would not budge. He even told me where he wanted the line-breaks, so that I was reduced to a mechanical, but happy scribe. I felt privileged to be in on a communication which was so pure and clear.

Later, Bernard was encouraged to write poems on his own, but to be honest, they were not as fresh as the ones dictated, it was as if his vocabulary had shrunk in the transition from dictating to writing -- which often happens with younger children. In any case, the poems in the Rainbow collection all seemed part of a single set, and so I have grouped them together.

- Phillip Lopate

#### I Like To Drink Tea

Tea is tasty  
Tea is good  
Tea is tasty with sugar in it  
Tea is not so tasty when you put pepper in it

Tea is brown  
You put it in the cup  
You put your finger in it  
Then you will get burned.

#### I Hate School

I hate school very much  
I hate when we have to do math  
Every morning and afternoon they call me names  
Dummy, stupid, fatso, creep, jackass  
They call me bad words too  
Don't ask me to say the words  
Because that wouldn't be polite

#### I'm Alone

I like to be alone, alone every day  
I scratch my head when I'm alone  
I scratch my head  
And I play  
I scratch my head and think  
I remember everything  
My grandmother I saw her be buried  
It took a long time  
Then I remember my grandfather  
When I was a little baby he used to diaper me  
And he would always buy me stuffed animals  
Then I remember my father  
He used to murder me every day  
When I told lies.

#### Friends

I only have one friend when we dance  
I only have one friend when we play  
I only have one friend when we go outside  
I only have one friend when we jog  
My friend is named Michael Daniel Green

# Teaching Writing to Emotionally

JEANNINE DOBBS

St. Ann's euphemistically bills itself as "a home for children with problems in living." It is a residential treatment center for some sixty-eight children with varying degrees of emotional and, thus, behavioral difficulties. Located at the end of a cul-de-sac in Methuen, Massachusetts, St. Ann's reflects early twentieth-century, red brick, school building architecture. In its windowless basement is Hilltop School.

Early this year, I taught a writing workshop at Hilltop. My students ranged in number from one to eight, in age from nine to twelve, in ability and interest (on a scale of ten) from zero to ten. Most -- like Mary and Ray, I'll call them, -- were unpleasantly plump, or -- like Kathy and Bobby -- agonizingly thin. At that indeterminate age sexually, girls and boys were almost indistinguishable. Institutional haircuts (long and fashionable for the boys; short and unstylish for the girls) added to their unisex appearance. Some of the children were belligerent, some cruel, some almost totally withdrawn, some hyperactive. Some were so affect-

ionate they were almost dangerous. Mary (4'10", 110 lbs.) swept me (5'4", 110 lbs.) literally off my feet.

I had taught writing workshops before. Last year, as Visiting Poet to New Hampshire schools, I taught three sessions of workshops to a total of approximately 550 sixth-grade students. But unlike those "normal" students (I use the term "normal" reluctantly, for who among us is without "problems in living"?), Hilltop students had not donned the mask of politeness or the mask of indifference, behind which most students of their age group already face teachers. They were free, uninhibited in their response to me, to my teaching methods, and especially to my comments on their work. Emotionally disturbed children have much the same reactions to people, to work projects, and to criticism as other students. The difference is one of freedom of expression and one of degree. I expected emotionally disturbed children to be highly sensitive; I had been warned to use only positive reinforcement as a response to student writing. Still, I was not prepared for

the reaction to my first attempt at responding to a student's paper at Hilltop School.

Lena was finished first. She showed me her paper which consisted of two lines of writing: "Mr. Connie is my English teacher. Miss Debbie is my teacher's aide."

"Good," I said, remembering my instructions. Then I added, in what I thought was a tactfully suggestive manner: "Now why don't you describe what Mr. Connie and Miss Debbie look like?"

"Why should I?" Lena said. "They're standing right over there. You can see for yourself."

"Because," I replied, still confident of the way I was handling the situation, "I want to see what they look like to you."

But instead of returning to her writing, Lena pounced on the only other girl in the classroom that day, pummeling Kathy's head with her fists. Lena was promptly dispatched to the "crisis" room, a room where the children are sent for more personal attention than the classroom with its ratio of two adults to seven students, can afford. Later I was told that Lena had



# Disturbed Children

been confined to the crisis room most of the rest of that day and that night, screaming, "I won't change it. I don't care what she says!"

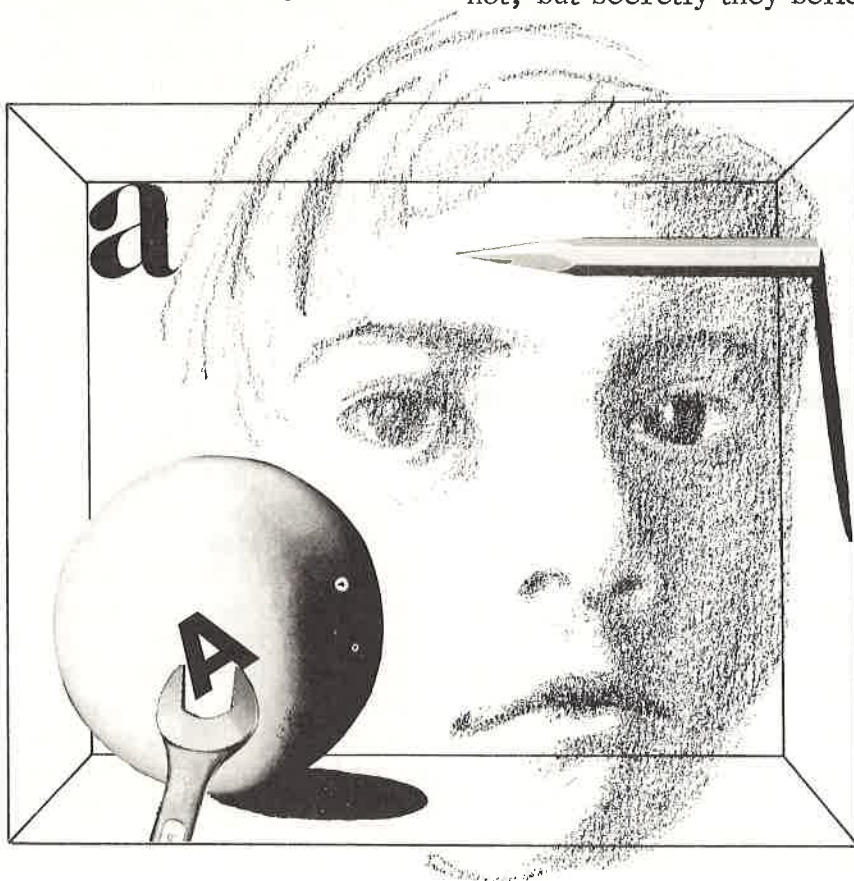
The violence of Lena's reaction is not unusual at Hilltop. Many of these children are there because they've been told all their lives by teachers and by parents that they are dumb or bad or both. Sur-

prisingly, considering their apprehensions, children at Hilltop were often more eager to show their work, to read it aloud, to distribute it to anyone who would pay attention to it, than other students in my experience have been. The Lenas of this world believe that their work is good. They may expect to hear that it is not, but secretly they believe

that it is good and want to hear that it is. Of course, we are all this way. We don't want anyone messing around in our ideas and in our expressions of our ideas.

Thus, I quickly acquired a reputation at Hilltop, a nearly disastrous one. The children who had come eagerly to the first workshop now were reluctant to return. Lena and several of the others went directly to the crisis room instead of coming to our second class. With the remaining few who felt they could handle the threat I seemed to have become, I was very cautious. I was also positive. Oh, yes, I was very positive. But everything is not good, and the students are not dumb. "That's very good," I lied to Alan, an insecure ten-year-old who wore his two Christmas watches on one arm. "It sucks," was his reply, and he was right.

The problem with positive reinforcement is that teachers must take the time, the pains, to find out what is good about a piece of work. It is much easier to be general than specific. And we are so accustomed to looking for faults; faults are easier to find. I



began to give more support to my students during the process of writing and less attention to their product. I began to sit beside them while they were writing and to talk to them in a general way about the subjects they had chosen. I began to write with them and to talk about my own writing -- its pleasures and its frustrations. I began to respond to their work in pleasant sounding but more noncommittal OK's and Mm-Hmms. They began to prefer the classroom to the crisis room. Finally, even Lena came back. She and the others began showing me their writing with pleasure once more rather than with apprehension. The pay-off came when Alan sent word by way of Mr. Connie that he had completed a poem that he would like me to look at in order to help him improve it. I was being granted the privilege of criticizing.

In addition to openly revealing their hostility to criticism, my Hilltop students unreservedly revealed their intolerance to boredom. There was never any doubt as to whether or not a session had flopped. During a reading

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## **I began to give more support to my students during the process of writing and less attention to the product.**

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of Frost's "Witch of Coos" (which I thought had gained rapt, or at least polite, attention from "normal" children), my audience exiled itself, through one means or another, to the crisis room. Finally, feeling silly and embarrassed, I gave up reading to the empty classroom.

Frustration at the blank mind encountering the blank page produced violent reac-

tions. I refrain from assigning subjects to writing students, encouraging them rather to write about what they know and care about. But Hilltop students needed something; so I gave them props -- frameworks, structures. Kenneth Koch's "I used to be.. /But now I am..." device (from his book Wishes, Lies, and Dreams) worked well. I gave them colored paper to write on. I played records for them to write to. I suggested they write a class poem, but on good days we had eight students in our classroom. It was impossible for eight of these children to work together. They liked the idea of group work, however, and begged to be allowed both more space in which to work and one or two people with whom to write. I suspected a ploy to escape from writing altogether; but no -- they gained a sense of security from having space around them safe from the others' stares, jibes, jabs. And they gained a sense of security from working in groups. The "if the work is good, I did it; if not, we did it" defense mechanism at work.

When these and other devices to initiate the writing process worked, the children were greatly relieved. And completing a piece of writing gave them a sense of accomplishment and additional security. For instance, when Nikki, a handsome brown-eyed boy, joined our class around the fifth week of the workshop session, he did not know how to begin. The class and I had solved some of our problems by then, and most of the other students were busy writing. I had, by coincidence, read a poem of Nikki Giovanni's that day; so when my Nikki asked for help I suggested he use the first line of her poem and go on from there with one of his own. It worked. And when at last his own piece was finished, Nikki tipped himself back in his chair and waved his paper in the air. "Oh, my heart," he said, clutching his chest and laughing, "I've just written my very first poem!"

Emotionally disturbed children have a deep need for security in their relationships with others. To establish a secure relationship, a bond of trust, must be their writing teacher's first concern. What

is taught must be secondary, if, in fact, it ever enters into the matter at all. Take, for example, my experience with Ray.

Ray was a young Bartleby the Scrivener, who preferred not to do anything the class was doing. He habitually sat on the outside of our circle or

**To establish a secure relationship, a bond of trust, must be their writing teacher's first concern.**

in a far corner of our classroom stolidly ignoring us. He was not completely withdrawn, however. He would recoil physically if writing paper were offered to him. He would remind us at least once every class that he did not participate. If trouble started in the classroom, he would silently observe and then usually slip away. According to Mr. Connie, this was Ray's usual behavior. I did not know how to deal with Ray. I made polite efforts to involve him, which he rejected. During my final visit to Hilltop, the class made a mimeographed book of their poems so that we would all have a permanent record of our experience. A child approached me, tugged at my sleeve, said, "Will you help me copy Lena's poem onto a ditto for the book?" It was, of course, Ray. He only wanted to copy someone else's work, but for Ray it was quite a breakthrough. And for me? I don't even know what it was that had reached Ray. Perhaps I had done nothing more than happen to be there at the right time. But I consider it my most rewarding experience, even, ironically, as a writing teacher, at Hilltop School. ■

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# They Want to Make Elephants

BOB SIEVERT

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A meeting is held between Steve Schrader, P.S. 84 principal Sid Morison and writer Bill Zavatsky. It is decided that my working at 84 is O.K. I will be given about \$20 a month for supplies by the school, and I will go in on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. First week (Feb. 5, 1974)

I go in two days - mostly roaming around checking out the school, trying to meet people. I write a rexo telling all of the teachers about my coming to work, inviting them to contact me if they are interested. I get about seven replies. I start visiting those who wrote.

This is an extremely interesting school - one of the most interesting things is the variety of classroom styles here. The classes go from very straight rows of tables and chairs to no tables and chairs - sofas - daybeds - cages - looms - aquariums - stacks of books, and every square inch covered with projects.

In room 224 there is a terrific turtle tank, a very large tank (4' X 2' X 3') with a terrific crawl deck on top, so the turtles can crawl out and climb on a variety of rocks. I'm sure they'll never be bored. The turtles are the kind with flipper feet rather than claws. Their graceful swimming can take up hours of gazing time - very visually

beautiful.

There are also straight traditional classrooms here - the walls covered with projects (similar to classrooms I remember in the parochial school system 10 years ago). The sense of interest and productivity seems the same in both types of rooms. It will be interesting to see how the different classrooms will effect my working with the students. It would be nice if the kids could choose between the two types of structures. It seems a matter of personal need as to who is best served by which style.

Feb. 13

I have made arrangements with Suzan Morton to take some fourth graders from her. She is a corridor teacher and divides her time among classes along a corridor. I bring about ten kids with me back to the T & W C room. I have made a self-portrait with markers and newspaper, cutting out arms, clothes, pasting it all together. I show them the work. I ask if they know what a portrait is. No response. Finally someone ventures it is a picture. I explain that it's a picture of someone. I go on to ask, "What is a self-portrait?" Everyone explains it's a picture of yourself. I show my self-portrait, I dance it around, I make it move, put a

hand on one of the kids' arms. I suggest they do one of their own. I suggest an alternate - "Or make a picture of each other." (big giggle.) Three boys grab markers - they say they will do some great drawings for me. Out come rockets, guns, airplanes, phallic, aggressive stuff.

Two girls run to the blackboard. They start drawing elaborate drawings of girls - very fancy dresses and accessories, ribbons, bows, then the final touch - two breasts with nipples. Upon finishing these they collapse in giggles and feverishly erase the whole thing and start all over again.

One boy, Kenny, asks me to draw an airplane. Eager to please, I do. I give him a super sabre point nose job. This wows the other guys. I

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## I forgot how to draw the sky.

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must draw for everyone. Next, Kenny crumples his paper. Why? I ask. "I forgot how to draw the sky - draw me another." "No," I say (I'm afraid of being monopolized by his needs). He starts a revolt, first crossing his arms, pushing back from the table, then running around, finally standing at the door, looking completely rejected, half in half out, saying he is leaving. I am really upset by him. I start jiving him with "I know you need my attention - you must be responsible for your own work"-type stuff. It

ey for supplies. Her father used to be an artist, but is now a working photographer. She drops about six names, several familiar. She is super social, and her work is sensitive and articulate. She next constructs a chair and a woman to sit in it.

I helped a beautiful boy named Victor make a building, an apartment house. He has stood it up. He has also made a small group of people (very small in size) standing in front of the building. A car is at the curb on a winding road he has drawn on the base paper. One person is saying "Help!" There seems to be a conflict about who is going to get into the car. He is in fantasy, making siren sounds with his voice, enacting a private drama. I don't intrude. Feb. 20

Today I am to work with two fourth grades. I will work in the classrooms with the en-

tire class.

The first is Pat Knott's class. It is a very orderly group. Everyone has a place - everyone knows it - clear.

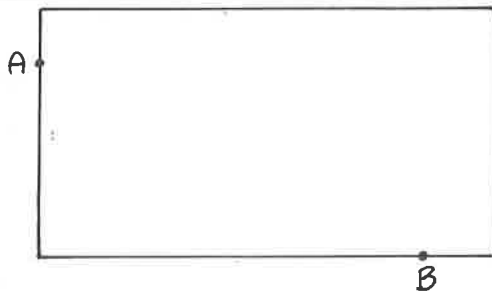
I begin by discussing the difference between designs and pictures. I ask what is the difference. Several people know what pictures are. "They are when you want to show someone what someone looks like." Designs: "They're anything - you know, scribble scabble." I try to refine the statement: "A design is a picture idea - a visual idea - using shape and colors." I next draw a rectangle on the board. I show them the two-line design (see below). The class is immediately responsive. (I think it is the design I have made on the board - it is obviously easy to achieve.) Almost everyone gets a good design - there are several terrific ones.

The other fourth grade I

visit is bilingual, mostly Latin kids. The assistant teacher, who is Puerto Rican, tells me most of the kids are Dominican. The teacher tells me the class has just been organized, and it's still in the forming stages. One of the kids asks if art is work. "Oh, no," volunteers one of the paraprofessionals. My mouth drops open, I don't know how to reply. I am unable to defend artists as working people - what could I say?

I give them the design problem. As I walk around, I notice the level of the work is not on the usual third-fourth grade level. It is clumsy and uncoordinated - there seems to be a lack of experience in using crayons. Few are able to put themselves down on paper. I ask and find out that for many of them, this is their first school experience in New York.

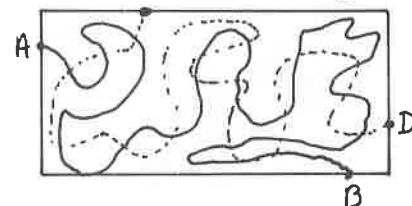
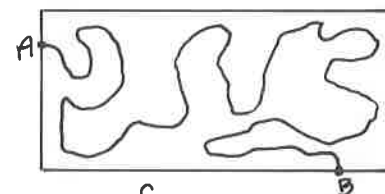
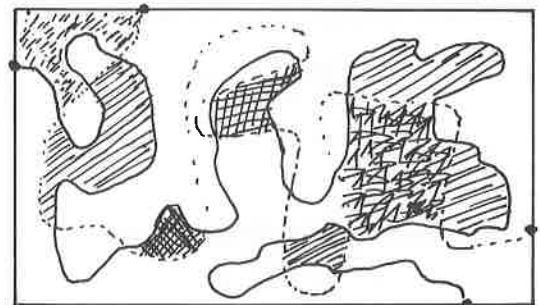
There is an interesting



1. Make two points at the edge of your paper. (A & B)
2. Take a walk with your crayons from one point to the other. Be sure to visit all parts of your paper.
3. Make two more points and again walk from point to point (C to D).

You now have many different shapes.

Show each shape with a different color.



girl, Ramona, who has an undeveloped hand and is very insistent that I see it. She points to sections of her work and asks me questions. She lays her hand across the paper, waiting, looking into my face for a reaction. I am not upset by her deformity, only interested by it. We do not speak about it. As I am telling her the importance of completing ideas in drawings, making them clear, I rest my hand on her arm, not near her hand, but it is enough for her.

Several designs are completed in the group. I hold up most of the work. I am trying to get visual awareness. They show their delight or displeasure with oos and ughs.

This will be an interesting class.

Feb. 26

Today is the first day I have my schedule completely filled in. I have brought with me lots of colored paper, glue,

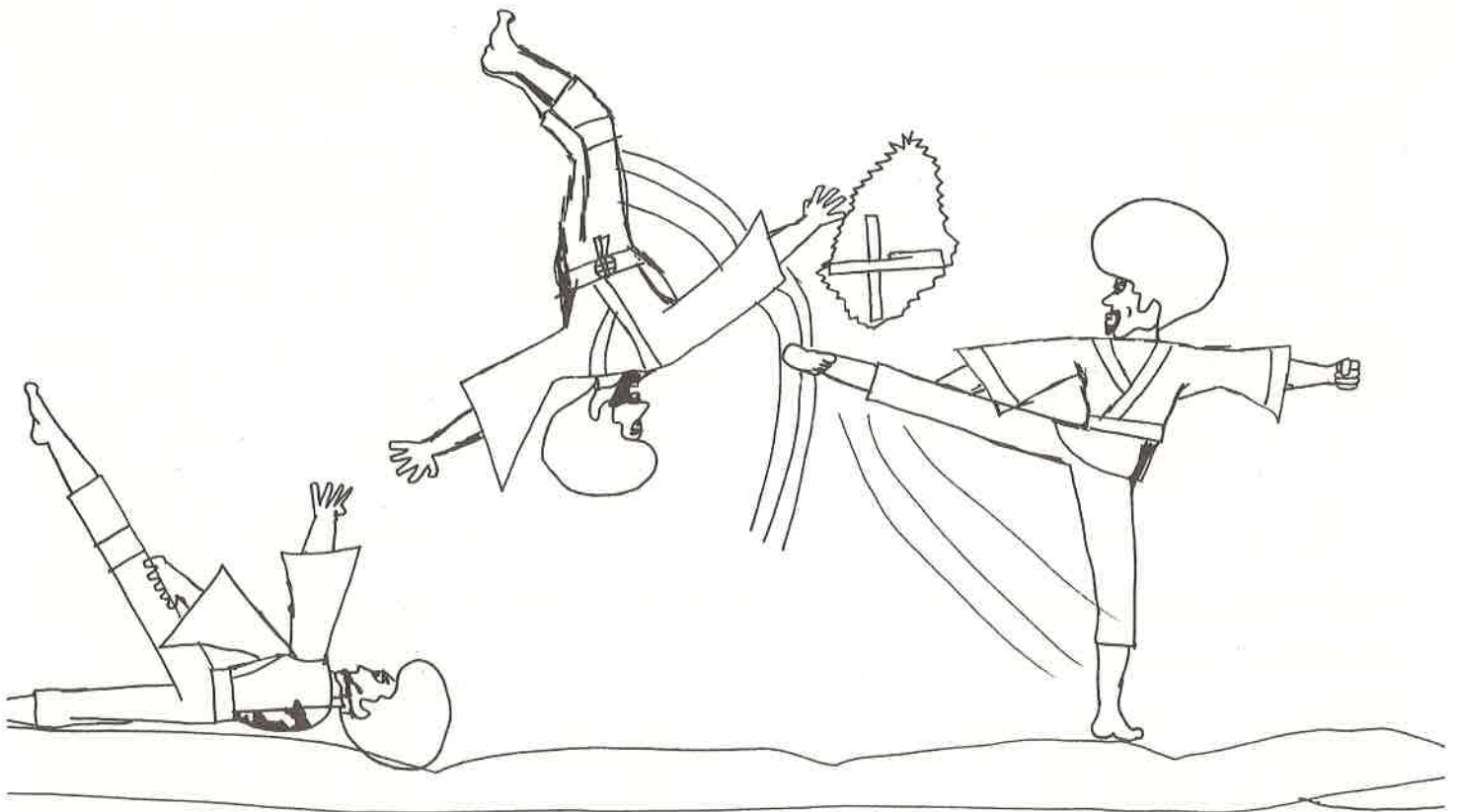
scissors.

The first group I meet with is five fifth graders. Their teacher, Russ Seymour, has chosen them because they are kids who have a hard time expressing themselves - three girls and two boys - Lucy, Darlene and Myra, Freddie and Melvin. The girls are very similar to one another - quiet, shy, nicely done up in curls and ribbons, very embarrassed about being in such a small group. I imagine they always like to disappear in a crowd. Freddie has lots of energy, flashing eyes, he never stops moving for a second. Melvin never does a thing for the whole period but explores every cabinet and drawer in the room.

I suggest, to get to know one another, that we just make drawings. The girls all just softly giggle. Freddie jumps in. He loves to draw cars - he makes several, then a

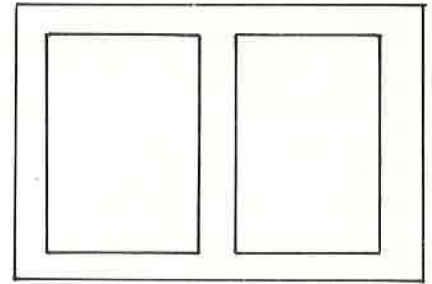
winding road, then a building, a hospital. He makes another drawing - an ambulance, crosses on the side. The girls are less eager to work - Darlene takes the lead - with a ruler she outlines a large, classic house. Myra and Lucy follow her every step - in the end their work is interesting in its infinitesimal variations - slight misplacements of doors and windows.

The next group I work with is the talented bunch Pat Parker has chosen. Most outstanding in his talent is William Lee, an oriental lad with an unerring hand. His work has a sense of completeness. He draws a car (I gave the group the assignment of showing what kind of street they live on), then he draws a lamp post on each side of his paper. Each post has a double fork of two lights. Such symmetry. I am jealous. I work with him, helping him cut apart his draw-





START LIKE THIS:



trees  
cars  
people  
street lights  
buildings  
fences  
trucks  
stores  
other windows

To begin, first draw or trace two rectangles next to each other (covering most of the paper). Next say "these are windows!" Imagine looking out of them - list all the things you'd see out your window - draw some of them - have fun!

ing, done on a piece of blue construction paper, and reglue it on green paper. I say this gives me an idea for making an animated film. I ask him if he has ever worked with animation - he has, in his afternoon community center. The students in this school seem to have a lot of experience. They have been worked with a great deal - groups, special classes, lessons - the sense of "worked with" pervades the social, racial lines. The school itself seems to have an ideal mix of kids from all backgrounds, a full range of people, very varied. Everyone seems to get along O.K. Still, each class seems to break into subgroups that are pretty tight. The black kids hang

out together, the white kids by themselves. And the Latin kids seem to interrelate into each group, but lots of Spanish is spoken to exclude others - people are basically stubborn.

Getting back to the class, I try and get people into making pictures with cut out paper. There's still a strong karate contingent, so I cut some karate action poses - so kids dig it and pick up the ball. I get several good pieces of cut-out action collage. One girl makes a red fist coming out of a yellow sunburst on green paper - two small black figures are demolishing each other in the background. The artist says she will take it to her karate teacher. There are several

other karate pieces.

A girl named Lynda makes a figure standing in the sunset - different colors radiate from out the figure. She writes all over it - I don't like doing this.

Bill Zavatsky has come in today and is trying to get a teacher workshop with teachers going in the room. I try and find alternate space for my next group. The teacher suggests we work in the corridor. We set up a work camp in the corridor. We cut-paper buildings, models of brownstones (which surround the school). It's a simple project - cut out the shape of a building in one color and fit in windows, doors and other fixtures with contrasting colors - everyone

is turned on by the idea and does nice work.

After lunch I go back to the bilingual fourth grade. After last week's design I try to give some work that will engage their picture-making. I give them the window assignment. (See example above) We list on the board all the things they could see out their windows if they were looking out - people, buildings, parks. I also reverse it and list the things they could see looking into their windows - beds, curtains, TV's, etc.

When they draw, pretty nearly every window has curtains. The designs are O.K. For the most part representation of people is pretty minute - many tiny stick figures. They make barely recognizable human forms - is this the lack of experience? There are several excellent exceptions. A wonderfully gifted girl, Lisette does a beautiful piece - bright dotted curtains, beaming faces looking out. I comment on how much I like her work. She tells me her mother says she always brings brightness and light wherever she goes - she's wonderful.

The last group of the day is made up of fifth and sixth graders I have worked with before. A boy named Victor is eager to return to his past week's work. I tell him to go ahead. I don't make a definite assignment. Another boy, Harcourt, who was totally off the wall last week, settles into looking at work that was done during the day. He starts drawing robots and space monsters. The other two can't get into anything. I present several ideas - city streets - they don't respond. One does a big dick drawing - both of them go wild over it. I try to show acceptance of it - this encourages them to break away

from the table and carry on. Everyone gets upset - the working three watch me carefully - they have stopped - I have to get heavy - "Cut it out" - no matter how repressive I get, it seems to excite them more. I throw them out of the room, send them back to their class. Jeanette is making a collage on orange paper - a store window with cactuses. Victor is drawing faces with magic marker, and Harcourt is continuing his creature sketches. As we work Ken, the teacher of the group, comes in to find out what happened. I am very defeated by their negative and disruptive behavior - I can't express it to Ken - but Harcourt and I have this terrific collage going - I am cutting and pasting his space monsters - I don't care about those boys - WE HAVE OUR ART.

Feb. 27

I have told Suzan Morton that I will go to this class with her. She says that it is a very depressed class. It's a sixth grade - the kids are sullen - they sit about in small groups of three or four, painting nails, telling jokes. Suzan's right. The class has no spirit, no center. The teacher is a polite man - maybe anguished. He leaves.

I try to think of something to do with them. My ideas for the day are meant for a more industrious group. I decide to present the basic design. No one responds. It takes about 10 minutes to gain their attention - it is as if they are in a trance. Slowly they shake themselves and realize someone is talking to them. After a while they begin to respond - about half-way through the session everyone is working. No one has any confidence in what he is doing. As I go up

to several people to reinforce their work, they tell me it is ugly and that they should throw it away - it's very sad. Suzan was right - group depression. In the end there are several nice pieces of work.

Next I go to Pat Knott's fourth grade. I am very prepared. I explain we are going to make pictures of houses. I point out of the window at the brownstones across the street. I cut out a piece of paper roughly the shape of a brownstone. Then with a contrasting color I cut out windows. They get it immediately. Each student has two pieces of colored paper - each student proceeds to turn out beautiful variations - they share the different colors beautifully. Some make elegant doorways, stairs, plants in windows, people, cats. The end result is about twenty-five buildings. Kenny folds a terrific set of bay windows; he makes shutters; he is copying a building across the street. Pat Knott is very excited about their work, too! It's really clicking. Time flies by really fast. Suzan Morton comes in and we decide that after lunch we will put them all together and make a mural.

After lunch I go back to 4B-1. I take about six kids and go out into the corridor. We put down about eight sheets of paper (large) and tape them together. Someone says we should have clouds - we cut cloud shapes out of newspaper and paste clouds and buildings on the long sheet of paper - we have made a city block. We tape the whole thing up on the wall in the corridor. Pat, Suzan and the kids keep shaking their heads. They say someone will tear it down because the lunch lines pass right by it (it has been up four weeks now). ■





## Children's Conceptions of Wild Chimpanzees

BILL CURRIER

The work began in a fourth-grade classroom at an all-black school on the outskirts of New Haven, named Martin Luther King. Craig O'Connell, the teacher in the classroom, had shown Goodall's film, "My Friends the Wild Chimpanzees," the previous year. He knew the children were intrigued by chimps. But neither O'Connell nor any of the others working with him knew if children could conceive of subjects such as chimp communication, social structure, and chimp rearing. It took three months to begin to answer whether they could or not. The children answered it themselves.

This paper reports what children had to say in interviews, discussions, and stories after completing the initial activities in the curriculum. The children's interest in and command of concepts relating to chimps can best be evaluated by reading their own words from discussions and from writing.

## MY CHILDHOOD DREAMS ARE BEING REALIZED

The first activity in the chimp study was a film, "My Friends the Wild Chimpanzees." The film conveys a vivid picture of Jane Goodall, the African setting, and the individual chimps. This film gave the children a common base of knowledge, images, and impressions about chimp life. The facts that attracted children became the subject matter for discussions after the film. However, the film was so evocative that two girls began writing down their observations during the film. O'Connell collected the notes from the girls, Andrea and Lisa. This is what Andrea had to say:

Jane Goodall arrives in Tanzania to study about chimpanzees. It is a bright morning. Jane goes to find chimps. Jane finds hair from chimps. She goes up 150 feet high then sees chimps. The chimps see her and run. The cook makes eggs and beans. As a morning begins Jane goes past fish drying. Chimps groom two hours a day. They eat seven hours a day. The chimpanzees sleep in trees. She said to herself, "My childhood dreams are being realized." The chimpanzees are getting wet so the chimps do a rain dance. When the rain stopped the chimps make sponges to drink with. Miss Goodall makes camouflage. Suddenly the chimps scent something. They spot her. "Should we run away or stay," they thought. Well, as long as she stays hidden now she can approach the chimps without them running away. She feels like her dreams have come true. Now Jane can come close to the chimps. The cook bakes the daily bread. She tries to eat the food they eat. She spits it out. One chimp comes to Jane's camp. Then others come too. They find camp very interesting. In the forest one lonely chimp calls. The call is understood. One day Jane experiments with a play monkey. Jane puts a mirror in the forest. The chimps are puzzled with their reflection. Chimps use grass stems to fish for termites. The chimps have a good meal. Jane Goodall has made contact with wild animals. Five years with chimps was good. Another chimp comes with a baby. She is finally refreshed. Jane Goodall thinks, "I've finally really contacted the chimps. That's what I've really wanted," and she walks away.

Wild Chimpanzees are immensely interesting to children. Unfortunately only one attempt has been made to adapt the existing research on chimps into a form teachers can use in classrooms. The Education Development Center tried to do it in Man: A Course of Study, a curriculum project directed by Jerome Bruner. The course contrasts chimpanzee and baboon adaptation and social organization. But the chimp study is peripheral. Baboons are the main subject matter. A group of teachers in New Haven, Connecticut, decided to develop an upper elementary school curriculum based on Jane Van Lawick Goodall's research on a chimp population in Tanzania.

In class discussions Andrea frequently spoke about how unfair it was that there were so few women scientists and doctors. These spontaneous notes make it clear that Andrea was as interested in Jane's behavior and her motives as she was in the activities of the chimps. She identified with Jane's strongly held desire for a life observing animals in their natural habitats.

The complexity of the chimps' behavior around Jane also intrigues Andrea. The striking comparison between the large "white" primate and the smaller, but stronger chimps is powerful. The irony of intelligent chimps studying Jane before allowing her to study them is not lost on the children.

Lisa was more interested in factual observations of chimp behavior. This is what she said in her spontaneous notes:

Jane Goodall is studying chimpanzees. She brought food for herself. She types about the chimpanzees. Jane Goodall was looking at the chimpanzees. The chimpanzees are shy. She climbed the mountain looking for the chimpanzees. The chimpanzees make their own bed. The people make Jane Goodall's food for her. They caught fish at night and dry them in the sun. The chimpanzees are picking out bugs from their skin. The chimpanzees are climbing trees. Jane Goodall is making her coffee. The chimpanzees eat leaves. Some of the chimpanzees are making their beds and go to sleep. It started to rain. The chimpanzee is doing rain dance. Then it stops raining. The chimpanzees are making tools. Jane Goodall is making camouflage. The chimpanzees come back. The chimpanzees saw Jane Goodall and she saw the baby chimpanzee, Flint. Flint played in the tree. The chimpanzees lay on the ground. The chimpanzees climb trees. Jane Goodall is writing about chimpanzees. The people are making bread. Jane Goodall is climbing a tree. The chimpanzees are in the camp. Jane Goodall is giving the bananas to the chimpanzees. The chimpanzees eat bananas. The chimpanzees are eating the skin from the bananas. Jane Goodall is washing her hair from a stream. The chimpanzee is holding her arm and leg. Jane Goodall is playing with the chimpanzees. Flint is holding on to a branch. Flint is playing with a doll. The chimpanzees eat meat. The chimpanzees make tools. The chimpanzees are eating termites with grass stems. Flint has touched Jane Goodall's nose. Jane Goodall's tickling the chimpanzees. A chimpanzee has a new baby. The chimpanzee is kissing another chimpanzee. Jane Goodall is walking through the jungle.

IT LOOKS LIKE A MONKEY, A LITTLE IT DO

It is clear from these notes that children do make observations about chimps from the film. But what were they

most interested in learning about chimps? Could important concepts about chimp behavior be organized around these interests? To find out, discussions about the film were conducted with small groups of children. These are some comments made during those discussions.

1. Do chimps communicate? Do they have language?

"They touch hands if they are nervous or if they are friends. They have calls. They touch hands if they accept another chimp. Chimps have different vocal calls. They have their own language of hoots and calls but we can't understand them. They can't learn our language."

Kenny

2. What do chimps look like?

"It looks like a monkey, a little it do and they hands look like our hands and their foots look like a hand. They lookin' in they hair for something, insects, and they take it out and eat it. I saw it in the movie yesterday. I think they bugs."

Alpha

3. Do chimps make tools?

"They make a bed. They would take some leaves and make a bed and stay there. But they don't stay two or three days. After awhile, they just leave. To make a sponge they take a leaf off a branch. They put it in their mouth. After a rain they can't get no water (these are the big chimps, now) and they take the sponge in the water and they drink from it.

When they get meat from a baboon they don't take it with their hands. They would take that sponge and take the meat out of the baboon. They like the brain the most. They break the bone to get the brain.

See them grass stems? I guess they lick the stems, to make it sticky. Then they take the stick out and start eatin' them. The big chimps, sometimes Flo will give Flint some of the termites."

Anthony

Following the discussion one girl who had shown particular interest in chimps was asked to dictate all she could remember from the film. She sat down immediately and composed this story:

Jane Goodall, she went to Africa and she wanted to learn about chimpanzees. And every day she used to walk around and see if she could find them. Every day she walked around until she found chimpanzees. Then she knew she was getting close. One day the man that cooked her food put up a sheet to tell Jane Goodall that there were chimpanzees in the camp. Then she saw the sheet and she ran up there. The chimpanzees were Flo and Flint. She got used to the chimpanzees. And the chimpanzees got used to her.

One day she had a stuffed chimpanzee and she tried

to see what Flint would do when he saw the stuffed chimpanzee. She put a mirror out there and Flint went up to it and he was acting all funny and everything. After that she put bananas out for the chimps, Flo and Flint, and Flo took it and all the chimpanzees went over there and wanted bananas. Then all the chimps went to get the bananas out. Fifi opened the banana box and then all the chimps went over there and were trying to pick the bananas out. So Jane went over there and closed the box so they'd have bananas for the next day.

It was rainin' one day and then she went out where the chimpanzees live. She seen the chimps run around and one chimp was doing the rain dance. It was Fifi, Flint's sister I think.

Jane was making a bed like the chimps make beds. After that she sat in it to see how it feels. After that she hid to see what the chimps were going to do. Then another chimp came and sat on her bed. She tasted the chimps' food and she didn't like how the chimps' food tasted so she just shot it away.

One day up in the camp Flint went on top of the tent and then he slide down. Jane was watching him shootin' down. Then all the chimps started sliding down, climbing up and sliding down. Then all the chimps started doing it again. Melissa was there too.

Melissa had a baby chimp. She was hiding the baby from the other chimps and one of the chimps found out and she showed the baby. They all got used to it.

This is how they eat. They get sticky tubes and stick it into a hole and they pull out the termites and brush them off with the hair on their mouths.

Chimps, they groom each other. They go looking through their hair, looking for bugs and they take them out and eat the bugs. They do it to clean each other.

Bridget

## A CHIMP FAMILY STUDY

Most children could not identify the relationships between chimps. Without knowing the relationships behavior was difficult to interpret and conceptualize. For example, most children did not know that the chimp in the film who kept trying to touch the infant was the baby's sister.

However it was not difficult for the children to pick out the infant's mother. They were immediately attracted to the bonding between the mother and her infant. A study of a chimp family was organized to take advantage of this interest.

A family is a comprehensible unit to children. They understand the roles of individuals at some level. Through their own experience children identify with the relationships between mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters. Two benefits resulted from drawing on this identification. First, the children became familiar with the names and habits of individual chimps. Second, by studying the relationship in a family children began to understand the behavior of chimps in general.

Before the family study was begun Alpha was asked if she thought chimps had families. She is struggling with the concept of a family. She seems to have trouble defining what a family is but she knows what she thinks is the purpose of a family:

Q. Do chimps have families, Alpha?

A. I don't know.

Q. Do you know what a family is?

A. No.

Q. Tell me all the different kinds of people at your house.

A. Mother, Daddy, brothers, sisters.

Q. Are they all the same size?

A. No, I'm the littlest.

Q. Do you know people who have babies?

A. Yes.

Q. Do chimps have babies?

A. They do. They teach the babies how to make the sounds. They teach them to go to school. They teach them how to walk. They have to learn how to eat their own food they get. They go to learn how to make tools and take off the leaves to make a stick. They get to learn to jump over from the other branch and learn to climb trees and get into their own bed. They learn how to fight for themselves.

#### CHILDREN'S BOOKLETS ABOUT FLO'S FAMILY

Booklets were written about Flint's birth and development and Flo's care for him. The booklets were adapted from Goodall's, *In the Shadow of Man*. Children were told to read them in preparation for interviews and discussions. By this time interest was high. Two boys began drawing chimps napping in trees and grooming each other in the lilted light under the forest canopy. They wrote a chimp book and illustrated short descriptive passages with drawings. The art teacher began making clay chimps and chimp dolls with the children. During gym they built nests in trees and practiced pant hooting. It was a chimp orgy.

Three booklets were printed, "Flo and Her Family," "Flint's First Steps," and "Flint Grows Up." They were written in simple, periodic sentences. The booklets read like the children's own observation notes. Actual incidents and stories from Goodall's book were included. Flint's and Flo's relationship came alive. Of course chimp and human families are not the same. It is difficult to infer feelings and intentions in wild animals from their behavior. But the information in the booklets helped children understand relationships within what is undeniably a family, Flo's family; Flint, Fifi, Faben, and Figan. After seeing the film and reading the booklets the children became interested in comparisons between human and chimp families, their methods of infant care, their use of tools, and the bonds that develop between members of the family. This is an interview with Andrea after she finished reading the chimp booklets:

- Q. Do chimpanzees have families, Andrea?
- A. No. They really go around in groups with each other.
- Q. What's a family?
- A. It's a group of people who are related to each other; a mother, father, and two children or more. Some are orphans. But a family is when you're related to each other. We kids say, your generation. But we're in a generation 1973.
- Q. Do you think Flo and her babies are a family?
- A. Flo is a mother and she had about five kids. That was considered to be her family more than the others. But there was no original father. Flo is like a human mother because whenever Flint cried she'd go to him. She wouldn't let Fifi hold Flint because she's afraid she'd hurt him. She took care of Flint like a baby but she didn't neglect Fifi. Sometimes Flo would run and play a game with Fifi to get her mind off Flint. As he got older, Fifi didn't want to play with him anymore. Figan and Faben weren't around. Sometimes they'd come over when Fifi was playing with Flint. She'd run over and play with them to get their minds off Flint. And then while they were playing she'd run back and play with Flint.
- Q. Why wouldn't Flo let Figan and Faben play with Flint and she would let Fifi play with the baby?
- A. Maybe they play rougher. Flint is still a baby.

#### WE DISCUSSED HOW PEOPLE AND CHIMPS LEARN

Craig O'Connell, a master at running class discussions and drawing out children's ideas, talked with the children about the booklets. He did not know what the children's reactions to the material would be, but he wanted to probe their understanding of chimp family relationships. These are his notes from the discussions:

I asked them to tell me what kind of relationship Fifi had with Flint. One child said that Fifi wanted to hold Flint. Kenny said that Fifi was interested in Flint. I then asked why Flo didn't want Fifi to hold Flint. Walter said that Flo was afraid that Fifi would hurt Flint. I asked Walter that if this was so, then why did Flo finally allow Fifi to hold Flint. He said that Fifi had learned how to hold Flint without hurting him. Then we discussed how chimps and people learn. I asked them how their own baby brothers and sisters learn. Someone said that they learn by watching, the same as Fifi learned. Someone else said that Fifi watched Flo take care of Flint. I asked them how little children learn to talk. Kenny said by listening to their parents talk. We subsequently discussed how Flo was a very good mother, how Fifi could learn to take care of Flint by watching Flo, that Fifi would probably be a good mother when she

grew up, and that if Flo died Fifi could take care of Flint. The point had been made by several children that Fifi learned how to care for Flint gradually. I asked them how Flo prevented Fifi from holding Flint at first. Gordon said that Flo would take Flint and walk away from Fifi. Someone said that Flo would push Fifi's hand away. Walter said that Flo would grab Fifi by the ankle and that she would know that she was not supposed to touch Flint. I asked Walter if Flo ever punished Fifi. Walter said no. I asked, why not? Someone said that Flo didn't have to and we concluded that Fifi respected what her mother wanted without having to be punished.

The children grappled with the difficult topic of interpreting intentions and motivations of individual chimp behavior. In many ways they collectively arrived at one of the crucial purposes of primate families; to instruct progeny in the ways of child care to insure the continuation of the species. Some children felt from watching the film and from reading the booklets that Flo was a good mother, that Fifi could learn how to take care of Flint by watching Flo, and that "Fifi would probably be a good mother when she grew up, and that if Flo died Fifi could take care of Flint." Another group of children differed on this interpretation of Flo as a mother:

Julia: Whenever he (Flint) fell and made one little cry he was rescued.

Teacher: Do you think Flint will be spoiled?

Kim: I think he'll be spoiled because everytime anything happens to Flint they let him get anything he wants. They always giving him bananas and stuff.

Alpha: If they don't feed Flint he won't eat nothing... He don't get anything he wants.

Kenny: If you were Mr. Goodall and had a banana and Flint saw you and he was hungry and you gave him your banana that would not be spoiling him because he's hungry.

Alpha: They didn't let Flint do whatever he wanted to do.

Walter: If he falls and if Flo is not there and if he hits his head he could get killed or hurt and she would be sorry if she wasn't in back of him.

Frank: I disagree with Kimberly because if you don't feed Flint he'll die and Kimberly too--she'll die if she doesn't eat. The way you spoil Flint is if you keep on holding him after he learns how to walk himself.

Discussion of chimp rearing also provoked discussion of the problems Flint had as an infant. In the following discussion children discussed how Flo taught Flint to ride on her back--an essential behavior for an infant's survival.

Teacher: What problems did Flint have in learning to ride on his mother's back?

Honda: He kept on sliding off.



Alpha: Yeah, he would slide off her back.  
 Teacher: How did Flo help him?  
 Honda: She grabbed him by his hand.  
 Alpha: She pushed him back on her back.  
 Frank: No, she put him under her stomach.  
 Honda: She grabbed him by the hand and dragged him.  
 Teacher: Did Flo grab Flint by the hand and drag him?  
 All: No!  
 Alpha: She put him under her stomach (reading from booklets)  
 Frank: Honda means that she grabbed him by the hand and put him under her stomach.  
 Teacher: Is that what you meant, Honda?  
 Honda: Yeh.  
 Teacher: Did Flint stand on Flo's back?  
 Walter: No.  
 Julia: I think so.  
 Alpha: He was holding onto a tiny tree.  
 Frank: That's learning to climb. He learned by Flo holding his stomach. Sometimes Flo lifted him off a branch.  
 Alpha: He grabbed a handful of hair on her back and held on.  
 Honda: She held onto his waist.  
 Kenny: Fifi held him up when he took one step.

This discussion led to one of the most interesting results of the chimp case study and one which was not considered when we began developing the unit. While talking about chimps and Flint's upbringing, the children spontaneously began to discuss their own childhoods! Again it was O'Connell who flushed out the childrens' personal identification with Flint.

Teacher: Do human beings ride on other human beings backs?  
 Walter: No, they get a back sack.  
 Julia: Grown-ups walk, they don't ride on other grown-ups backs, only babies.  
 Walter: First they crawl and then they start walking.  
 Teacher: Is that true?  
 Frank: No.  
 Everyone  
 Else: Yes.  
 Walter: My mother said that when I was a little baby I use to try to pull myself up and then start walking.  
 Frank: I never crawled when I was a baby.  
 Alpha  
 (to F.): How do you know, you probably can't remember.  
 Frank  
 (to A.): Cuz my mother, father, and my grandmother told me. My mother held me on the bed and I would fall on the bed when I fell over and I wouldn't get hurt cuz I would fall on the bed and that's how I learned to walk.

Julia: When I was a baby I used to get the wash pan and put it on my head.

Walter  
(to J.): That's not what we're talking about.

Kenny: There's a saying that people gotta crawl before they take the first step.

Teacher: Does everybody agree with that?

Everyone: No.

Frank: I was nine months old when I took my first step.

Honda: I was ten months old.

One of the characteristics of most human families is that they are formalized in cultural ceremonies and affirmed by the society in a public ritual bond. It was natural for the children to inquire whether chimps "married." These are Craig's notes from the discussion:

The discussion became especially lively when Thomas asked if Flo was married. I threw the question back at the kids and especially at Tony who had his hand up immediately. Tony said that Flo could be married and Thomas asserted that she was. Jimmie Lee laughed and yelled out that chimps don't marry. Most children seemed to agree with him. But Thomas and Anthony remained adamant in their position that Flo was married or at least she "could be." I asked them what marriage was. Kenny said it is when two people love each other and show affection to one another. I asked Kenny if I could love somebody and show affection to her without being married to her. Kenny thought for a second and replied that I could. I maintained that his definition then was not sufficient. Again I posed the same question. Someone said that it is when two people live together. I asked them if two adults, a male and a female, could live together without being married. Everyone thought that they could. Again, I asked what marriage was. Gordon said that you must have a priest to get married. Someone else said that you must have a wedding. Anthony said that there must be a ceremony to be married. I didn't force the issue any longer and we all agreed on these definitions. Anthony was especially pleased because it seemed to support his argument. He exclaimed that chimpanzees have ceremonies and that they could be married if they wanted to. Jimmie Lee laughed loudly at this, retorting rather self-assuredly that chimpanzees "don't have ceremonies!" I asked Anthony if he could support his theory that chimps have ceremonies; could he cite an example. Anthony said that in the film the chimps had a rain dance ceremony. "All the chimps sat in the trees and watched this one chimp go wild and act crazy and do a rain dance." I supported Anthony's claim that chimps have ceremonies but explained that as far as scientists knew chimpanzees do not marry.

Having resolved that question we moved on to whether Flint had a father. The children disagreed, but no one seemed especially adamant in their position. I asked them to explain how Flint would get a father if he had

one. Gordon said that it is when two people get together and have a baby, one of them is the father. I agreed but said that when two animals mate and produce a baby, one animal is the father and the other is the mother. I asked the children to use the word "mate." Walter protested that some animals do not have to mate to have babies. I agreed, but said that chimpanzees do have to mate. Thomas asked if chimpanzees have only one baby at a time. I replied that they did. We agreed that if two chimpanzees must mate to have a baby then Flint must have a father. I told them that Flint, Fifi, Faben and Figan could all have different fathers. Sandy said that they must all be step-brothers and step-sisters. I asked them where Flint's father was. Someone said that he could have run away. Someone else said that he could have died. I asked if it was possible that Flint's father was still living with the chimpanzee band. They thought it was possible. This blew Jimmie Lee's mind. The reality of the story he had been reading and the film he saw finally struck home. "You mean Flo is alive today?" I said no, that she had died. "How did she die?" someone demanded. She died of old age, I said.

The similarities between human and chimp families raises the question of the nature of the relationship between humans and chimps. It is a principle of evolutionary theory that two similar species have a more recent common ancestor than two dissimilar species. Man is more similar to chimps than to any other creature. Our common ancestors may have looked something like modern chimps. While she was cutting out a life-sized cardboard chimp skeleton, Andrea discussed her theories about human and chimp ancestry:

Q. Describe a chimpanzee.

A. Well, they look like a man but they're hairier. They climb trees a lot. I guess they're just like a man. They use tools like a man. They fish for termites, they eat meat, they're wild. I think they're wild. I think they're the closest relative to man, except for orang-utangs and monkeys. They probably came... (Walter, be quiet, you're disturbing my mind!)... I think they came from the same place as man. Man used to look like a chimpanzee but they changed. Their backs got straightened and they stood up. From our research, man was a wild animal. He began to change. He was like a chimpanzee.

Q. Can any chimps turn into men?

A. No, because I think the climate was different and man developed more. Maybe a chimp could change but it would take a lot of brain, lose their hair.

Q. What did human relatives look like?

A. He looked like a chimp. Chimps could be on Earth before us. They get their looks and then we get ours. There was a slight difference be-

tween chimps' and man's relatives.

Q. Would a single chimp change in a lifetime?

A. No.

Q. How do we get from a chimp-like creature to man?

A. Our ancestors lived in the forest. But we lived in some different area. And we learned how to use tools. While the other chimps are still animals. I think we were animals in the first place.

#### WHAT CHILDREN LEARNED

The children's first comments after the film were isolated observations about chimps; how chimps made tools, how mothers cared for infants, how chimps groomed each other, and how chimps made beds. The children had no spontaneous conception of chimp development from infancy to adulthood; they had no conceptions of social organization; they had no conceptions of chimp families. However, their observations of mother-infant behavior led them to the concept of chimp family structure. Concepts such as chimp rearing and maturation were based on these observations and on their own experience, not on abstractions. Children understood Flo's family and her relationship with Fifi and Flint in much the same terms as they understood their own families. Yet the distinctive characteristics of human culture, such as marriage and the formalization of relationships clearly differentiate men from animals in some children's minds.

When the case study of Flo's family was completed the children could describe chimps physically. They could describe the relationships between siblings and between mothers and their babies. They knew even grown males occasionally accompany their old mothers. They realized that chimp babies do not know who their fathers are and male chimps do not know who their offspring are. They had a conception of a family unit as an essential element in the structure of a chimp band.

The study of Flo's family was only the beginning. Studies of anatomy, communication and social structure came next. A cardboard chimp skeleton was assembled. Chimp calls and faces were explained. The social structure of the band was examined through a child-made chimp environment complete with clay chimps.

From this preliminary work the group of teachers believes that it is possible for children to empirically arrive at concepts which, if taught "as verbally elaborated concepts," would have no meaning. Lines of inquiry which structure a child's thinking about his observations without doing the thinking for him, moving him to assimilate more information and consider more attributes, encourage relationship thinking about chimp family structure and behavior in concrete terms.

Children are natural scientists and by their nature they learn from empirical observation. The physical world is their natural laboratory. ■

DAVID FLETCHER

# Birth Trauma

The purpose of a minimally structured event is to give the students enough information about a subject to excite them, and then to allow them to "rap" and write about this subject in the manner and style they choose. Any words or forms may be used, misspelling isn't scorned, and grammar becomes the organic way their writing holds together, and not a set of rules.

My events fall into mini-courses that merge academic disciplines with creative writing. Because drug communities are so psychotherapeutic in orientation, the cross between writing and psychology is a natural in this environment. The mini-course in psychology-writing has improvised on Freud's "free association", Reich's "character armor", Laing's "knots", as well as Rank's "birth trauma" notion. They have all proved to be pretty much a two-fold success - the students get an introduction to some of the more interesting concepts and thinkers in psychology and a chance to write creatively.

This event finished with a gestalt treatment of the writing. We all agreed that nobody has an accurate memory of their actual birth. Anyway this didn't really seem to matter much. What became important was how one felt and imagined his or her birth during the present moment. Rather than delving into long past history or analyzing situations, the birth trauma writing became a way of understanding and recreating yourself and your evolution based on your present feelings. When a student chose to role play his or her effort, an extra sense of electricity and drama was added to the nowness of the writing.

During the past four years, I've been a teacher for P. S. 231, which is a special

"Birth Trauma"; also known as "The way out of the tunnel of love"

My mother spent 18 hours in labor with me, and it was as hard on me as it was on her. I could hear the doctors telling her to push harder and harder. I could feel the pressure of the contractions trying to expell me from my warm resting place. I tried to stay still and hide myself in the womb but the pressure kept forcing me thru the tunnel. Soon I could see the light and feel the cold air. A doctor turned me upside down and slapped me. I was dizzy, confused and in pain so I screamed. There was no going back.

Arleen Goldberg

"Birth Trauma Song"  
(sung in West Indian tempo)

When I was born  
I was born  
on a very cold day  
When I came out  
I was smiling  
Oh, it was a glorious day

Once I slid out  
of darkness into light  
and was spanked  
on my black ass  
My mother was told  
she had a "Bontified"  
brown eyed; curly haired  
pretty little baby boy.

Willie Douglas

The day my mother open  
her legs  
and scream  
and all that blood came  
out  
when the doctor  
pull my big head out  
and spank on my  
blackass  
the world heard my big  
loud mouth  
and when I open my eye  
I saw the light

I know my mother was glad  
I came out  
like I was kickin' her  
I knew I was gonna be  
the baddest mother  
on this face of the  
earth

Rosalie Richardson

I almost didn't make the big entrance  
It was a tight squeeze that might  
cause death for both of us. But  
it didn't hurt all that bad till I  
found myself thrown out in the light  
of all this here

Howard Beers

Oh its so warm and comfortable  
I feel so safe and good  
I never want to leave this home  
But what's happening?

I am slipping down, I am falling, oh  
I don't want to leave. I am being squeezed.  
Oh, it's so tight it hurts. What's happen-  
ing to me? Something is grabbing me now.  
It's pulling me. Please leave me alone;  
I don't want to leave. It's so light what  
happened to the darkness. I am scared,  
I am cold, please put me back. Now they  
they're hitting me and I am going to scream  
till they stop. Now there are a lot of  
hands on me doing so many things. Why  
don't they leave me alone. Always these  
fucking changes!

Frank Locastro

I thought I was a raisin  
But I felt like a human being

When I was born, I said, "Mommy  
here I come. This is going to be a big  
one." I try to come out the right way,  
but I came out the wrong way.

Sometimes my mother wish I could  
go back where I came from. So enjoy me  
while I am here. I grew-up to be very  
smart, and not dumb after all. I owe  
this to my mother cause she handle the  
pain very well, and didn't let me go to  
hell.

Pat Spencer

## The day

The day I came into the world was the happiest day in everybody's life. It was a bumpy ride, wet and bloody. It was a noisy moment with this woman screaming and carrying on. Next thing I knew this man slapped the shit out of me. I cried something awful, then they comforted me. I barely opened my eyes, when all of a sudden I was wrapped in a soft blanket and handed to this woman who was screaming. She became "mommy".

If I had to do it again, I don't think I'd make it.

Earlene Martin

### "Birth Trauma Jive"

To my limited knowledge of the day I was born, it was quite hectic. First of all I remember the way I accidentally slipped out of my Mother's love. As I was preparing to enter civilization, I position myself for the "Great Escape". Being that it was so slippery, I instantly felt slick. My Mother always enjoyed winter mornings, therefore I was somewhat cool. And sometimes my Mother use to tell people that she want to have a gossip column in the Daily News, so therefore I talk a lot of shit.

So as I now look back, I used to always lean against things, and even until today I always seem to sit with a gangster lean. Now in after effect, what I am is just a jazzy, jazzy dude.

James Landrum

Suddenly my head came out and the rest of me came along with it. I felt nasty. I had all this blood and other substance on my body. I felt a little embarrassed. I had no clothes on and men were in my presents. But it was a beautiful day. Everyone was happy and dancing around. "It's a girl! It's a girl." My mother cried with joy tears ran down her cheeks. The feeling of being born is beautiful, but frightening.

Pat Sanders

cluster school operating inside drug rehabilitation communities. I work with the residents of the Hart Island, Phoenix Houses located near City Island in the Bronx. Our educational goals are to prepare students for the high school equivalency exam and to do remedial work in math and English. Since we are an ungraded and highly experimental school, the teachers have vast freedom in selecting methods, styles, and curricula to meet these goals. The school is run along Dewey's educational laboratory model where students, teachers and clinical staff members experiment together to discover productive and enjoyable ways to learn and grow. This past year I've specialized in creative writing. My classes have focused around writing by utilizing minimally structured events. One such event involved Otto Rank's concept of the birth trauma.

The event began with my explaining about birth in Rank's opinion as a shocking transition from a snug, protected and secure environment into a world of demands, compromises and self support. The students grasped immediately, and began free relating from Rank's theory. When they first left home, when they broke off with a lover, and when they quit drugs became later versions or analogies to the birth transition. Traumatic transition was familiar turf to them; they term it "changes".

Since nearly all the students are poor and grew up in a ghetto, they are rooted in an oral, not a written, tradition. Middle class expertise is reading and writing; my student's long suit is "rapping". Hence, much of this lesson was spent in discussion, and a tape recorder was used liberally. Many of the ideas and much of the writing were first "rapped" out into the tape recorder, and later set down into writing. Since all my students talk with a high degree of fluidity, readers and non-readers are not placed in separate classes. Students with more advanced skills act as "scribes" for the non-readers. A scribe's job is to transcribe the non-reader's spoken efforts into written form. They sit next to the non-reader and act as a secretary for the voice. Frequently the most powerful writing comes from the non-writers!■

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# West Virginia Poetry In The Schools

NORMAN WEINSTEIN

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**I think someday I am as mad as  
any South Sea missionary...**

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Nov 30, '73:

Nothing less is at stake than the discovery of the individual, inner voice of the child. How easily that simple truth can be lost sight of in the maze of language games, imagination exercises and the other sundry cargo I carry into the classroom to protect myself from that naked fact. Too much of the Endowment literature depicts these projects as harmless, humanitarian ventures in educating mass sensibilities to the arts. I find risk, danger, excitement, bitter failure and occasional ecstatic breakthrough. But, initially, I find passivity among students, a psychic deadness that frightens me. Or am I confusing their hostility to me as a stranger in their classroom with their disinterest in writing? Half their parents in this county never attained literacy. The only book likely to be found in the majority of my students homes is the King James version of the Bible - a book read with utter literality by those who can read. Standing in a supermarket checkout counter watching the embarrassment of a sixty-year-old man explaining to the cashier why he can't sign his name on the food stamp booklet because he never learned how. He might be the father or grandfather of any number of my students. Into this specific context I bring the poetry of Ed Dorn or Kenneth Patchen or Gary Snyder. I think someday I am as mad as any South Sea missionary, and fear I am mistaken for the same reason. What if that most ethereal product of literate societies, the poetic utterance, has no PLACE in this culture? Why impose the artist and his art on a people who need assur-



ance about the values of their own native arts: weaving, fiddle music, survival.

Dec 4, '73:

How wonderful to discover this soon in my work that all my preconceived projects will be doomed to failure! Now I can explore further my own intuitions knowing that my intuitions have at least as much a chance as Koch's or Holt's or Herndon's. I had grown critical of Koch's approach long before arriving in these remote mountain districts. My experiences here confirmed my fears about his method. Fill-in-the-blank games are not poetry and can rarely generate student poetry of any order of individual power. The greatest lesson I can teach a student is how the form of any particular piece of writing emerges from himself, from his very mind and blood and marrow at the moment of composition (as Olson so movingly writes in the opening of Maximus Poems). Unless the student learns to trust and test his own language structures from the very start of his work how much mere passionless dross is produced.

The problem of teaching children to write poetry is the problem of getting the child to delve far enough into his interior and emerge with something that must be uttered. Only at this point can the poet truly earn his presence in the classroom by bringing to the child's awareness those resources of language that can bring into being the poem. This process is antithetical to the mentality of an Arts administrator who wants product. I wish I didn't have to concern myself with the sheer quantity of writing churned out, and could (without distraction) concentrate on helping students probe their inner voices.

Dec 16, '73:

There is a completely remarkable girl at the B--- School. She writes with a maturity, a range of vision, and an original voice. She can't wait to start writing and she finishes her writing long before most of the class even begins their work. She is no more than eleven years old and yet is more individuated than several of the adult teachers in this school. I wish this project were designed so that I could spend several hours

weekly working with her. I am enough of an unabashed elitist to say that she is singular among the thousand students I have seen with regard to her potential as an accomplished writer. For this very reason I fear for her most deeply. Several months from now, after I pack up to go home, she will be plodding through simplistic readers replete with Longfellow and Rupert Brooke. Nothing is more laughable than to hear an adult proclaim how carefree and romantic childhood is. A--'s poems have a quality of darkness about them that reminded me of the sense of nearby danger in Lorca's Spanish ballads. That's the term for her sight: duende. No government sends an artist into a public school classroom to evoke that pain! How safer to write odes on the joy of what one would do if one could be transformed into a favorite comic book character. How rewarding for me to see in this girl's writing an escape from that tawdry and trash-ridden adult world imposed from without and above.

Jan 3, '74

I have been creating methods derived largely from Ge-

stalt Therapy with some success. I have suggested that students write about the difference between the public face they show to the world and their face(s) as they perceive them. To give them an example of a poem illustrating the tension between public/private selves I read Dianne Wakoski's "I've Had To Learn To Live With My Face." I hoped her directness of statement, her honesty, her urgency, would bring about a willingness on the part of some students to share their secret faces. I asked them to imagine a cosmetic mirror with a dial somewhat like a television channel selection knob. In the "1" position they would see their face as it appeared in a conventional mirror to themselves. In the "2" position they would see their face as they imagined their mother did. In the "3" position the mirror would reveal their face as their best friend saw them, and so on. One day I pushed the exercise further: one position on the mirror represented the image of their face just after birth and one position their facial image just prior to death. I was needlessly worried about whe-

ther seventh-grade students could handle this material. Three quarters of the students responded to the birth/death faces with glee and fear. Some wrote that for the first time in their lives they realized the potential expressiveness of their faces. Now to aid them in realizing the potential fire of their words.

Feb 5, '74

The true Appalachian talk is great -- when you can hear it. The kids talk like that at home and then are taught not to talk or write like that in school. A pity. A pity also that the only living adult poet native to the State writes in that dialect with ghastly sentimentality and to my ear misses the real flavor of the tongue. My problem is compounded since I'm a native Philadelphian and it takes time for the kids to get used to hearing my accent and inflections. I brought in my tape recorder (shades of the cargo-cult) and tried to encourage the students into talking stories (often nonsensical) that I would transcribe into poetry (when possible). Their talk was so rich and their writing so impoverished I (naively)

believed the tape recorder would span the gap between talking and writing.

I also recommended David Antin's book Talking. I've got to remember that a kid would have to travel seven hundred miles to reach a bookstore or library that might have such a book. Must remember I'm not working at C. C. N. Y. ! The Antin poem is boring as hell anyway -- being merely a verbatim transcription in different print types with novel typology of conversations between the poet and his wife. Which would mean NOTHING to a kid from Appalachia who likes hunting, fast motorbikes, and not going to school.

The tape failed. I STILL don't know why. The kids were more self-conscious in front of the mike than I anticipated and rushed whatever they had to say with an absolute lack of conscious control. Most interesting was how MUCH of what they said was given to them: by parents, T. V., recording industry, comic books. How can poetry break through the wall between people talking and writing third-generation pap and believing it original material? I want to keep in-

sisting that one writes about experiences that no one else in the history of the earth might ever have.

---Like What? they ask.

How can I tell them: making an art is so isolating and lonely an activity that a school is an unlikely locus for such work. The athletic games bring the kids together. The writing throws them completely back on their own resources. And most group poems are more game than artistic creation.

I tell them an artist tries to articulate the essential truth of life as he or she sees and hears it.

But I don't blame them for wanting to have fun. We do. But when the fun stops their eyes grow disinterested. Koch is wrong in letting them believe only in the imaginative fun. Let the struggle be declared for them also. Don't make writing any easier or any harder than it is: a life commitment to the force of a single voice saying its piece, peace.

March 30

In presenting an imaginative possibility ("Imagine the place on earth you would most like to be") the danger is constantly present that kids will merely accept the limited terms presented in the exercise. For example: if I say: "Picture in your mind as clearly as you can the qualities of light in the sky" they will literally parrot my words back at me in their own poems.

Always the wish to please authority.

Sometimes delicately and at other times tactlessly I introduce the historical condition of the poet (and of myself as writer) as outsider, outcast, and defend the powers of imaginative creation that drive a man or woman far

from the conventionally stated version of social reality.

So students test my sincerity by writing trivially about drugs and sex, hoping for my tacit approval of their imaginative advance. The phrases and ideas are stolen from underground media. There is a total lack of experiential foundation for their writing of this order and the failure is most strikingly revealed in their language. Such bone-chilling superficiality: like Nixon giving the Panther salute. But I want to keep responsive to the human needs declared. There IS a real Pandora's box to be sorted out in the unconsciousness of these kids and the language is the key. These kids are like the characters of William's Paterson: their language fails them so they perish.

April 6, '74

One of the local highschool teachers asks me to read my own poetry in front of her class of seniors. I choose sections from an intensely personal long poem called "Meshes" concerning my feeling toward my mother as a child. I strain to get the lines out into the room, my poor, fragile narrative hangs in the air --- a gift? an embarrassment? When I finish the teacher says that she can't see any form in my work. Since my poetry doesn't rhyme she believed she would hear a definite rhythmic figuration.

"Where is your RHYTHM?" she asked me. The class attentive, waiting for the confrontation.

"I write with the rhythms of my body. Listen to your own breath and pulse."

She appeared puzzled. I hoped one of the young faces in the room wouldn't be.

And that hope sustains my work in these mysterious mountains. ■

# PLUGS

**ART RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS** is an organization of artists working in the public schools of the Chinatown area of New York City. Its storefront offers free materials, advice, and help with projects. Children have written and illustrated many lovely books, some of which are on sale for 50¢ each, 10 for \$3. Available titles are:

Arriving N. Y. C.

Chinese Folk Songs

Christmas in Puerto Rico

Chinese New Year Customs

Chinese Children's Games

Write to A. R. T. S., 98 Madison St., NYC 10002.

**WHAT'S INSIDE YOU IT SHINES OUT OF YOU: POETRY GROUPS WITH OLD PEOPLE**, a book by Marc Kaminsky, is now available from Horizon Press, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York City, 10010. Price: \$7.95

**MATH AND WRITING GAMES IN THE OPEN CLASSROOM** by Herbert R. Kohl, a New York Review Book distributed by Vintage Books. Full of practical suggestions and techniques, a first rate book. New York Review, 250 West 57th Street, New York City 10019.

**DREAMS AND INNER SPACE** is a newsletter aimed at helping people get in touch with their dreams and teachers become more sensitive to this aspect of themselves and of the students they work with. Published 10 times yearly, September through June. Subscription \$5. Sample copy free. Dreams and Inner Space, Box 26556, Edendale P. O., Los Angeles, Calif., 90026.

**THE TEACHER PAPER** "The only magazine to print only teachers." Sample copies 75¢. Subscriptions \$4 for four issues. The Teacher Paper, 2221 NE 23rd Street, Portland, Oregon 97212.

**STONE SOUP** The most beautiful magazine of children's writing that we have seen. Published three times a year. Single copies \$1.50; Subscriptions \$4.50. Write to Stone Soup, Box 83, Santa Cruz, California 95063.

**A DIRECTORY OF AMERICAN POETS.** The new 1975 edition updates and expands the 1973 edition. An exhaustive, state-by-state list of poets interested in working in writing programs in the schools. An invaluable resource for administrators and teachers interested in finding out who's available in their area. Paperback copies \$6. Hardcover \$12. All available back issues of Coda, the supplemental newsletter, are sent with every copy, plus the new Codas to be published. Copies available from Publishing Center for Cultural Resources, 27 West 53rd Street, New York City 10019.

Zephyros, a group based in San Francisco, is trying to set up a forum in which teachers can share and create new teaching ways and topics. They publish textbooks and other materials full of great ideas and practical suggestions. Check them out at: Zephyros, 1201 Stanyan Street, San Francisco, California 94117.

# Contributors' Notes

DAN CHEIFETZ is the author of a children's picture book, Washer in the Woods, and Theatre in My Head, about children's workshop theatre. He teaches labs at the City College of New York on the use of improvisatory drama in the classroom.

BILL CURRIER has been a public school teacher in New York City. For the past year he has been working at developing and testing an elementary school curriculum at the Center for the Study of Education at Yale University.

NAN DAVISON teaches at Brentwood Elementary School in Los Angeles, where she has been a resource teacher in the gifted program for the past two years. Last year she ran a writing workshop there, and this year she has been exploring, with her students, some periods of art history.

JEANNINE DOBBS is currently an assistant to the chairman and part-time lecturer in the English department at the University of New Hampshire. In the fall she will teach in the expository writing program at Harvard University, and in the spring will again teach writing at UNH. She has published poetry, short fiction and literary criticism. She has a Ph.D. in English Lit. from UNH.

DAVID FLETCHER graduated from the University of Notre Dame and received a M.A. from C. C. N. Y. in education for the emotionally disturbed. He has worked with drug addicts during the past four years in P. S. 231, and has taught "the social-psychology of drug addiction" at the New School for Social Research. He writes songs, studies T'ai Chi Chu'an and runs for distance. Currently he is working on a series of autobiographical poems that fit into novel form.

PHILLIP LOPATE is the author of a volume of poems, The Eyes Don't Always Want To Stay Open, (SUN Books) and a novella, In Coyoacan (Swollen Magpie Press). His works have appeared in the anthologies A Cinch, Equal Time and other magazines, including The Paris Review. He is coordinator of Teachers & Writers Collaborative's special

program at P. S. 75 in New York City. A book about his teaching experiences will be published by Doubleday.

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

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

BOB SIEVERT is currently working at P. S. 84 in Manhattan and at C. S. 232 in the Bronx. He is having an exhibit of his paintings this season at the Green Mt. Gallery. He has been a "street artist" (murals - street theatre). His theatre dance "Wolf Girl of London" was produced two years ago at the Intermedia Foundation.

NORMAN WEINSTEIN is the author of Gertrude Stein & the Literature of the Modern Consciousness (Frederick Ungar 1970). Poetry & essays published in America, England & Japan in Caterpillar, Io, Tree, Truck, Second Aeon, & Vort. Educated at Bard College (B. A.) under inspiration and knowledge of Robert Kelly. Graduate work and later teaching at SUNY at New Paltz. 1973-74, poet-in-residence for West Virginia Poetry-in-the-Schools. Seeking publisher for Ta'Wail, selected poems from the last five years.

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

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