Teachers&Writers
Collaborative Newsletter
Volume 7, Issue 3

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CORRECTION: In the article "What Happened on Curtis Street" (volume 7, issue 2) we incorrectly named the school at which Annette Hayn was working. The work described in that article was done at P.S. 161.

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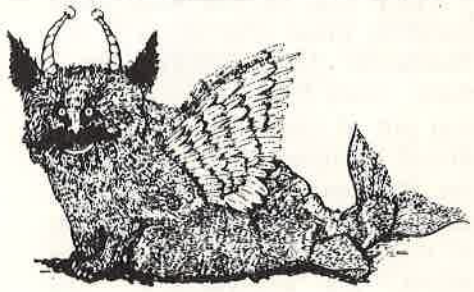


spring '76

Interview with Anna Heininey

Theresa Mack

Off-screen photos by Deidre Boyle.

Anna at seventeen.

The Williams Residence, a formidable sixteen-story building across the street from P.S. 75 in Manhattan, is a Salvation Army hotel for people over sixty-five. Except for a few residents who are active and come over to the school to work as volunteers, there has never been much contact between the Residence guests and the P.S. 75 students. Sometimes, when you look out the windows at school, you'll see an old person sitting in his window watching the children come and go.

Last fall I decided to start visiting the Williams Residence regularly with a group of children to make videotapes with some of the old people living there. I found ten interested kids from a fifth-sixth grade class, and every Tuesday afternoon during the school year we went across the street to visit, lugging the video equipment with us.

Every one of the kids loved spending those afternoons at the Residence. Their delight was, I think, more than pleasure at getting out of class. The quiet, soft, almost smothering atmosphere of the Residence lounge seemed to comfort them. Making videotapes in this setting, they became the strong, the knowledgable, the helpful ones. They were in control, yet were still lovingly babied by the old people simply because they were young and small.

"And all we did was look up at those big buildings, you see?"

"... that thing was movin' around and the keys was movin' like that, you know."

Each afternoon began with hugs and kisses, and usually ended with a treat in the coffee shop. While we were there, though, the kids worked hard. One week they would do some videotaping—interviews in the lounge, or activities in the coffee shop or craft room. The following week they would show the unedited videotape on a large TV in the lounge to an audience of fifteen or twenty people.

After a few months, when we'd taped several residence activities and done lots of two-minute interviews, I began encouraging people to give us more of their time for an interview, to share more about their past. But being interviewed in an in-depth manner didn't appeal to many people. They didn't seem to take to the idea of talking to us in detail about their lives while being videotaped—and who could blame them, really? Many expressed concern that the children would be bored with the past, or upset by hearing the painful experiences they had had during the Depression or World War II. The kids, on the other hand, were eager for stories, especially about what it was like growing up sixty or seventy years ago.

There were a few people who understood what we were asking for, and whose personalities made it easier for them to be interviewed. One of these was Anna Heininey—sixty-six years old, outgoing and very active in cultural and community affairs—who invited us up to her apartment one afternoon in March. She greeted us in her native costume, showed us her feather bed and her naturalization papers, and talked to us about her life. Heather, the interviewer, didn't have to coax anything out of Anna. She showed her sensitivity by listening, and only occasionally asking a question which didn't break the flow of Anna's story.

When we showed the interview the next week in the lounge to an unusually large audience, the room was more emotionally charged than it had been for any other video showing. People laughed and sighed along with Anna on TV, and Anna watched herself with a soft smile and tears in her eyes. One woman, clearly impressed with Anna's life story, kept exclaiming throughout the interview, "And it's *true*. It's all true!"

An Interview with Anna Heininey

H: What is your name?

A: My name is Mrs. Anna Heininey.

H: That's a very nice outfit you have on. Where did you get it?

A: Oh, from my hometown in the Black Forest. That's in the southern part of Germany. You like it?

H: Yes. Did you make it?

A: No, no. There's a lady made it. She's eighty-two years old. But the young people don't wear it any more. It's just the old-timers. They wear it to go to church, or in parades and things like that.

H: Why don't they like to wear it in Germany anymore?

A: Oh, the children there, the young people there are just like here now. They wear shorts and they wear all the kind of clothes you wear, you see. This now is getting so old that they started putting it in the museums you know? And only the old-timers wear it yet—because they wore it all their life, that's why.

H: What was your childhood like in Germany?

A: Well, it wasn't too happy because we lost our father in the First War. He got killed in the first war. And my mother was left with four small children, you see. Had two brothers and two little girls. So, she brought

us two girls to America. But in Germany we lived on a farm way up in the mountains where it was very cold. And we all slept in feather beds (laughs). But I went to school there until I was fifteen years old, and then my mother—she had to wait two years till it was our turn to immigrate to America. Then we came to America. And then we got to New York and there was no one on the boat to get us, you see? And we were left on the boat with some more people. The next morning they took us to Ellis Island on a small boat. And there we stayed for a whole day. And some people that are there, they're from all over the world and they're there and wait till someone comes to get them. And sometimes nobody does. And they're there three four weeks and then they have to go back to their homeland where they come from, see?

But we were lucky—this man, he couldn't come to get us. He was a friend of ours in our hometown and he had to stand up for us, you see, because my mother was a widow and she had two small children—I was fifteen, my sister was twelve. And if anything happens to us in five years he would be responsible—you see? If we would get sick, you know what I mean, he would be responsible for us. So, he could not come on the boat to get us because he had the flu, see? So he sent his son to Ellis Island to come and get us out.

"What is your name?"

"Well, it wasn't too happy because we lost our father in the First War."

And then he brought us over to—Hillside, New Jersey. That's the first place we saw. And in Battery Park, there's the first big buildings we saw. And all we did was look up at those big buildings, you see.

H: It was different, real different. . . .

A: It was—oh yes, how different. And then we stayed at those people's house for about two, three weeks until my mother got a job and I got a job as a domestic, to live in. I got $25 a month and I got my room and board. And also, my mother did the same and she put my little sister in an institution and we paid for her there, until she got to be sixteen years old, see.

But, ohhh the nicest thing when I first came here was the player piano. You put a roll in there and that thing was rollin' around and the keys was movin' like that, you know. That was the happiest thing for me, you know? I sit there for hours—those people had the player piano, that thing was going for hours, you know (laughs). And a rockin' chair they had, which I never saw. And I kept rockin' and rockin'. And also bananas—I had never had bananas.

H: They don't have bananas in Germany?

A: No, not where I was, didn't have any bananas. The first banana I ate was when I was fifteen years old, see. (sigh) So . . . that was happy. That was in 1926 when I came, when we came, see?

H: Did your brothers stay in Germany?

A: Yes, my brothers stayed there. They were bigger. And afterwards they had to go in the Second War, and they both got killed in the Second War. And my mother stayed here ten years until we got on our feet. And then she went back, see? She wanted to die in her own homeland, of course. My father was there in cemetery in the hometown, and she wanted to be with him. So after we got on our feet she went back.

Well, lo and behold, I wasn't here long, and I got married quick! When I was seventeen (laughs) to a man who was born in Beirut, Lebanon. That's in the Holy Land, you know, in the Middle East. And we were married thirty-five happy years. . . . Ohhh, he was a good man. I was so lucky. And we had one child—a little girl—and she died in infancy.

So, during the Depression—we got married in Brooklyn, New York and we were there five years. The depression came and he couldn't get no work nowhere. He used to work in the shipyards. And so he said, I'll go out of town and see if there is anything doing. So he went to Connecticut. He knew somebody there and he got a job in the shipyard which was in Groton, Connecticut—that's by New London, you know, the naval base there. And he got a job three days a week and started to pick up and then he started to get five days and so on.

And we lived up there for forty years. You know where it is, Mystic Seaport and those places up there? You never been there?

H: No.

A: Oh, you should go there some day. Mystic Seaport is great. So we lived there by the Thames River. There was Groton on one side, New London on the other side. And in the meantime, my husband died there and, uh, my sister also died. My sister never married. She was a domestic all her life because she was sickly all her life. And she also died and they both are buried in Connecticut, where I'll also go eventually. That's in Fairfield, Connecticut, see.

And, uh . . . anyway, then I was left alone and it was kind of lonely up there in the country alone, so I says, "Well, now I'll go to 'fun city'. I'll go to New York and I'm going to settle there." Which I did—I made the application here to the Salvation Army, and here I am now two and a half years and I like it here very much.

. . . I have a nice old age. Have a miserable youth, but I got a nice old age.

Why Genre ?

Karen M. Hubert

You believe in the value of student writing. You are committed to providing a large and interesting writing curriculum. You purchase pamphlets and books like this one. You subscribe to magazines in search of ways to help your students write out of personal inclination rather than because they are compelled to. You are trying to find ideas that will work.

A writing assignment works when it fully captures the writer's imagination, when the assignment evokes personal fantasies. Fantasy is the set of stories a person likes to tell herself whenever an occasion arises for escape. But imaginations are as various as the people they inhabit. Usually when we give a writing assignment it works for only some of our students. To reach everyone in a class of thirty-five, we would have to come up with thirty-five different writing exercises. But even if we had the time, how could we determine the predilections of one imagination, let alone thirty-five?

Yet there are clues we can seek to our students' imaginations. Consider the areas in which your students continually express their personalities and tastes: in the games they play, in the books and comics they read, in the television shows and movies they watch. By a very early age, they have well-defined preferences. Their choices are directly related to their imaginations. If we observe the kinds of choices made by students in entertaining themselves, we will discover clear-cut taste patterns. Awareness of these patterns can be very useful to us in devising writing ideas that will work for the great majority of our students.

At the library, one student picks only family sagas, another goes right to the mystery shelf, one inspects all the romances, others congregate in the adventure section, while some pick fantasies, ghost stories, westerns. An occasional student, less fussy, can find her entertainment in nearly any yarn.

Your students watch one television program instead of another. Given a choice between two nearby theaters, one showing a romance that promises lots of kisses and the other a scream-filled horror movie, a student naturally will prefer one to the other. In school or after-school activities, she will choose to play certain roles or games according to her own particular preference for speed, grace, domesticity or violence.

In every instance of self-expression and choice, your student is ruled by an undercurrent of personal fantasy, by the story teller who lives in each one of us. Every student comes to class carrying a volume of stories all her own. She likes to act, read or see many versions of the same story in order to re-experience the particular emotions she most needs or likes to feel. She will view these stories, read them and play them any chance she gets. And she would write them down if she were only given the framework and the opportunity.

Although a child generally recognizes her freedom of choice where entertainment is concerned, she is not conscious that this same choice is available to her in her writing. A child chooses one book over others on the basis of two things: the desire to experience one fantasy as opposed to another and the ease with which she can identify with the voices of the narrator and characters. If she can read the words to herself with feeling, the book comes alive for her. She may actually hear "Golly Mom, do I have to?" better than "Stick 'em up, you fool!" A romance and a mystery, for example, differ widely in voice, language, structure, images and heroic values:

"She felt the love in every line of his frame flow into hers, she

knew he would never again belong to anyone except her."

(*Dark Shore*, p. 217)

"I parked my crate on the street. A hard-eyed Filipino in a white coat curled his lip at me."

(*The High Window*, p. 29)

Among the plagiarisms from encyclopedias and the too-simple sentences of book reports, a teacher occasionally runs across a phrase or statement that is charming and fresh. This is voice: behind the writing one feels the presence of a distinct personality. A child's voice emerges the most clearly when she is writing about something she knows or likes. A student does not see that writing can be a form of self-entertainment because it fails to come up to her favorite experiences. "My Life As a Hamster" is somehow too far removed from Spider-Man comics and *The Towering Inferno*.

Children are familiar, by the remarkably early age of seven or eight, with nearly all the literary forms: poems, diaries, fiction, essays, biographies, interviews, and book reviews. The subject matter of their writings is eclectic, chosen from such topics as "George Washington Carver," "Christmas Vacation," "How Sugar Cane Is Harvested," "I Woke Up One Morning As a Pencil." Despite the great variety we offer them, for the most part our students write to entertain us, not themselves. We tend to lose sight of the variety of literary forms with which they themselves are familiar.

By the time a student has started school she has encountered every major story "family" or genre—adventure, romance, mystery, horror—as well as story types that fall into these categories such as fantasy, science fiction, westerns, and gothics. She knows best of all the hybrid story: romance-adventure, mystery-horror, science fiction-adventure-mystery, etc. These are legitimate forms, and they should be studied in our classrooms. By offering students the same kind of choices available to them in their other entertainment, teachers can begin to turn writing into self-entertainment.

"Popular literature may not touch us as deeply or as profoundly, yet Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca is made of the same basic stuff as Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre."

"But shouldn't we try to introduce good literature, the classics? Don't we want to elevate our students' tastes?" We all have different theories as to how cultural enrichment can be made part of the curriculum. But we need a starting point, and there is no better place to begin than where the children are now, using the taste they have already acquired to encourage their active participation in what they read. Try taking those Hardy boys seriously. Read one of their books as a class project, and discuss it with your students.

There are, of course, differences between classics and works of popular genre. Works of popular genre lack depth; they are born out of current fads and tastes rather than less mortal stuff. Classics reflect larger portions of life. One feels that living has been going on before one opens the book and will continue after one closes it. It gives rise to reflection and a realistic range of emotions and insights. One reads the popular genres to be entertained rather than to be moved and to enjoy a particular satisfaction at the conclusion of a book. In these novels all action moves toward the resolution of a single, limited situation. Will the man and woman get together? Will Philip Marlowe solve the crime? Will Lassie reach the top of the mountain in time to save the young boy?

Popular literature may not touch us as deeply or as profoundly, yet Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* is made of the same basic stuff as Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Jakov Lind once said to me that only twelve basic plots exist. If this is true, then a remarkable amount of literature is repetition. Underneath it all it is the momen-

tum of the *story* that must move us before style, philosophy or wit can take over. There is satisfaction in watching a conventional plot unfold, there is beauty and order in everything falling into place—just as the reader expects and hopes it will, with a few surprises here and there.

You will undoubtedly feel the impact of television, movies, and media in the stories your students write. Certainly that influence is there, as the hundreds of Kung Fu imitations you read every term have proven. But where did the basic plots behind these television stories originate? Certainly story types have been in existence even before stories were written, ever since stories have been *told*. The basic fantasies at the core of love, adventure, horror and mystery are part of man's basic nature. (If there were no TV, no movies or printed media, people of all ages would still tell stories. And the stories they would tell would fall into the same four categories.)

Your students are naturally romantic, angry, adventurous, anxious and frightened. They pick their entertainment accordingly. The realization that they have this same choice in writing can only help them to express themselves more fully. Through writing and reading popular genres, they come to understand that there are many kinds of stories, and that each type is unique and appropriate to particular feelings. When they feel blue or moody, in a yearning mood, they might try a romance. When they feel angry, they might choose a more violent form—a mystery or adventure story.

I began the Genre Project in an attempt to broaden my students' concept of story and to give them a richer choice of writing possibilities. I thought of the various genres as different shaped jello molds into which different flavors and colors might be poured to set. I introduced my students to the various genres and let them write in all of them. This opportunity enabled the students to see what forms they liked best, felt most comfortable with and could most naturally fit their voices and their feelings into. I emphasized that each genre lent itself to particular emotions. Certain of my students gravitated to certain forms. It was always interesting to see who traveled easily among forms and who concentrated on one in exclusion of others.

"I thought of the various genres as different shaped jello molds into which different flavors and colors might be poured to set."

Working with genre is a sure way of tailoring writing ideas to fit individual students' personalities. Imagine Johnny, a chronic fighter, a bully who picks on everyone. Excited by Kung Fu, he performs it whenever he can. He is highly competitive. He is angry. Having formed this rather superficial view of Johnny, what shall we as teachers ask him to write? If we were to design an assignment closest to his heart, it might be to give a blow-by-blow description of a fight he once saw or engaged in. Chances are, Johnny would do some good writing. But this is just the top of the iceberg. If his fight scene is good, imagine how interesting might be his descriptions of the fighters or his attempts to explain how and why they came to fight. Since Johnny understands the combative spirit so well, why not provide him with the framework in which to write about violence and intrigue? Why not introduce him to the adventure story or perhaps the murder mystery? He might enjoy describing hard-boiled, indestructible detectives, suspects and criminals, police line-ups and chases, and he may understand the reason and unreason behind motives and the feelings connected with being pursued and getting caught.

Student writing often lacks a defined shape. Even "felt" writing, so valuable because of its emotional or personal content, might be brought a step further, molded from raw expression into

refined prose.

Students are conscious of form in every story they encounter in movies, books and TV. To be aware of form is to have a sense of what will happen next. The ability to anticipate means we have internalized form; we have absorbed the elements of a genre into our own imaginative selves. Form, or genre, corresponds to our own inner sense of story logic. A thing happens next because it is right, it fits, it satisfies.

All stories share the element of suspense. As we read along, the story all but compels us to hope or want a certain thing to happen. We want the mountain climber to reach his goal, the ship to get through the icy waters, the detective to escape the criminal who holds him captive. In our heart we know that the mountain climber, ship and detective will make it. Our story intuition tells us that the detective will either cleverly trick his captor or physically overwhelm him, or that he will be rescued by help from the outside. The story sets us up; we want a certain thing to happen, and when it does it hits the spot.

But the forms that our students know so well and that are so much a part of their imaginative process do not function for them when they write in the classroom. Instead, "What should I write next?" and "Is this enough?" are the common questions they ask themselves and us. Unawareness of form only confines a young writer. Acquainted with a genre, a student knows the kinds of things that might go next. A wealth of choices and directions is available to her. Genre opens up doors to the young writer; it does not offer formulas. When a student writes an adventure story, she faces the challenge of putting into words courage, fear, and other emotions and feelings associated with risk-taking. A student who writes a mystery must describe suspects, devise motives, detail how the crime was committed. She must learn technique as well, for she has to keep her readers guessing. Rather than restricting students, form opens up possibilities for them.

"Writing fiction is invaluable for young students because it allows them to confront and give shape to their experience."

The following piece of student writing has all the seeds of a mystery or horror story. Its author might have easily developed it into a long story of either genre:

This was in the first grade. With Edith, Jane, Athie and Ellen. Well, Edith was one of the showoff girls. She always wanted to show the girls that she was the best in the class. She always picked on one of the nicest girls named Jackie. Athie was another one also. One day at lunch time Athie was picking on Jackie, the poor nice girl. Then it was Edith. You see, Ellen and Jane always told the girls to pick on me.

So the following day I played a trick on all the girls. I put a rat in their desk and when they took out their books the fake rat fell on the floor. They screamed like hell. They were looking for the snotty girl who did the trick. So they found out it was you know who. So they said, I am sorry Jackie, we learned a lesson.

This tale of revenge has motive, crime, suspects, victims, and a solution: in short, all the elements needed for a mystery. Looked at in psychological terms, it is an example of wish-fulfillment in which a past hurt is relived and then dealt with imaginatively. Writing fiction is invaluable for young students because it allows them to confront and give shape to their experience. For the teacher, working with genre provides viable alternatives and variety in the teaching of creative writing, and gives legitimacy to forms and subjects with which students are already familiar.

This article is excerpted from a book, *Teaching and Writing Popular Fiction*, to be published shortly by Teachers & Writers.

Egyptian Diary

Ron Padgett

This article is excerpted from the *Whole Word Catalogue II*, to be published in the fall by Teachers & Writers.

14 December, 1973

First meeting. Loose and easy. Explained what this "seminar" *wouldn't* be. Kids make a good group. Some special talent: Drew knows about pottery-making and art, Chi Wo speaks and writes Chinese (useful as illustration of picture-languages and hieroglyphics). Kids know random things about Egypt but have little general knowledge. Class period passed quickly. Everyone so happy to be out of classroom situation.

Mr. Bowman would like our group to make some kind of presentation after Xmas vacation. I'd like to, but not just a committee report. Something which would *involve* everyone.

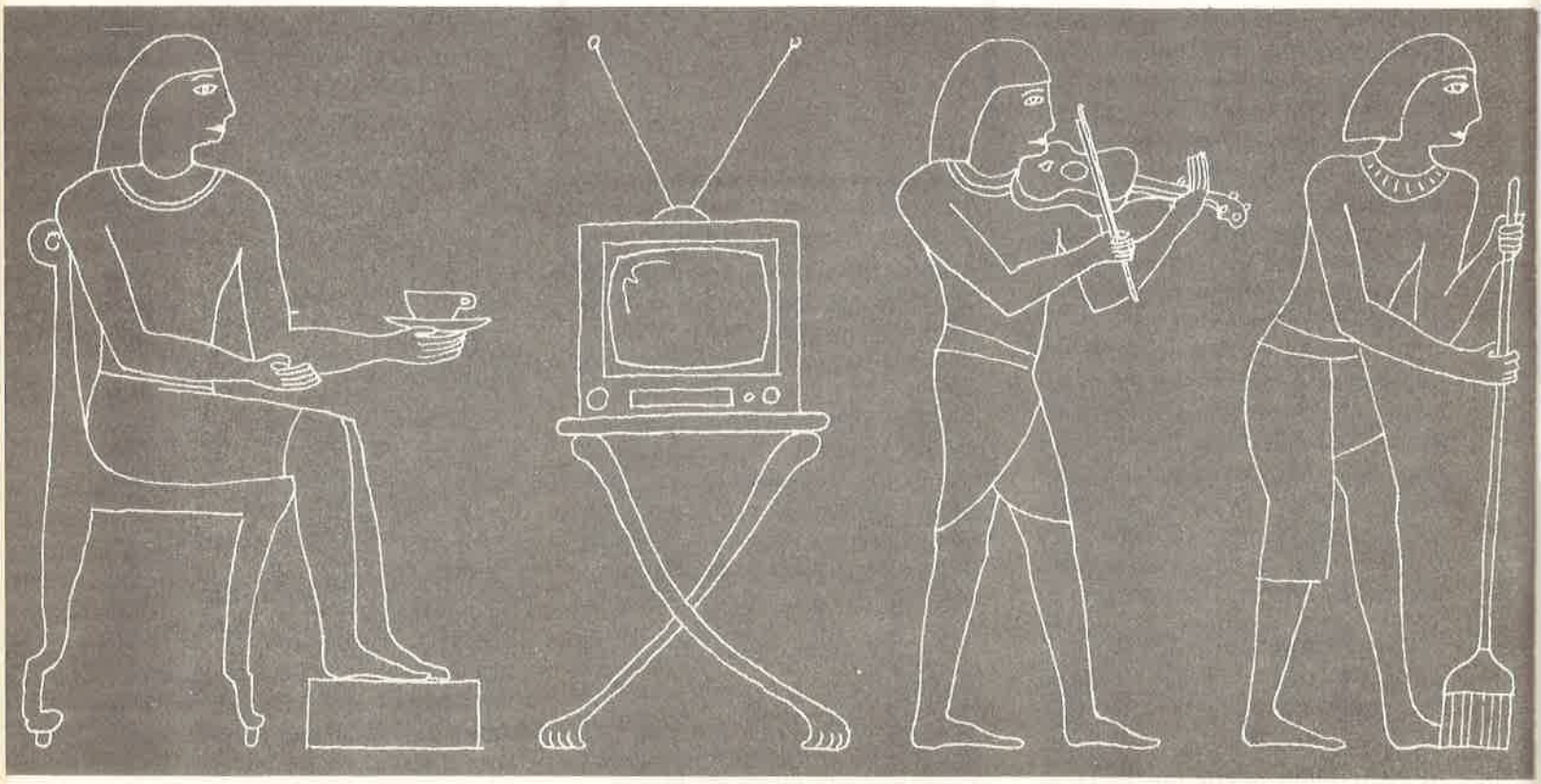
Now I have a lot to do: reading, study, research, big thinking about the group. I told the kids I knew next to nothing about the subject, Egypt, which is one reason I wanted to "teach" it.

Need to get a notebook for each kid, into which they can put anything they want. None of them have ever *taken notes!* They tend to think of knowledge as exterior objects which *others* create.

20 December

Everyone present. I gave kids my phone no. and address and encouraged them to call me if they wanted to talk about Egypt—unlikely, but I want the option to be there.

I started today by explaining that I thought we should start with the basics, and by this I meant the geography and meteorology and flora and fauna—Earth, the Great Mother! The kids took notes in notebooks I had given them. I realized as I talked that while I knew certain things—e.g., that there's a White Nile and a Blue Nile which join to form the Nile—that I knew them only half-way—I didn't know which branch of the Nile was which. What I gave them was some basic geology, using Egypt as my example. It was really interesting talking



about Lower and Upper Egypt, which, to common sense, appear to be reversed on a map. It led to a discussion of how people in the other hemisphere—if we could see through the earth—would be upsidedown to us. This led to concepts of up and down and how its relativity is determined by gravity: where we are at the moment. This interested and slightly perplexed the kids and I could see that in most cases it was the first time they had considered this idea. I also talked about the oases—guessing wrongly that the word oasis was of Arabic origin—it's Greek—and about mirages. We tried to guess how mirages worked: were they mental tricks, natural phenomena or a combination of both. To be discussed further when we find out more.

Finally I got to the Nile Delta and was about to explain the origin of that word, Greek Δ, but got sidetracked, went on to trees and fruit, at which point I took out a large cold orange, a lemon, a lime, some grapes, dates and dried apricots, cut segments and passed them out on paper plates.

The kids were really interested in this and it was nice the way they naturally helped pass things out and see that everyone got their slice.

Two kids had peculiar aversions: Ivory wouldn't touch the apricots nor would Chi Wo—neither had ever tried them.

I wrote other fruits of Egypt on the board: pomegranates, olives, figs, melons, bananas (the banana I brought got smashed in the sack). Soon the room was smelling delicious.

This was the point for me to say that while in Hollywood movies the "average" Egyptian looks tired, thirsty, downtrodden and exhausted by hauling huge blocks of stone and by being lashed by a muscular brute, in fact his life might not have been like that. Then I really socked it to them: "Egyptians weren't storybook characters, they were *real people*, just as real as we are. They laughed, went to the bathroom, had their feelings hurt, were eight years old, got spanked, etc."

I started to say that they went to school, a fact I was utterly unable to corroborate, so I stopped short.

Our time was up. Alas! The period whizzes by.

Some kids kept their notebooks, others gave them to me (I peeked—their notes were quite well-taken).

Once again I didn't have time to show them the books I had brought along.

* * *

Tonight I realized that certain kids in the group were naturally more voluble than others. Bradley, a very bright and very well-informed boy, talks like crazy, frequently (and innocently) interrupts others, while James, also bright, hardly ever opens his mouth. I hope to make them, as well as the others, more aware of their personalities in this situation, to encourage Bradley to listen to what others were saying (and not

merely to use their remarks as a springboard for his), and to encourage James to come out of his shell a little to see the advantages of sociability (he's *not* distant or cold, just very quiet.)

Soon I want to start getting them to write, after I've given them a basic vocabulary to work with.

Also I have to make ancient times more real to them by comparing it with their own lives. Compare the Nile to the East River, for instance.

4 January, 1974

Got a letter a parent had written to us, complaining that his kid wasn't in the Egypt group. A reasonable letter, which I hope I answered reasonably tonight.

Drew Bailey absent.

I picked up in my lecture where I left off last time. Talked more about geography, flora and fauna, and Time—Lillian didn't know about B.C. and A.D. Betty Machel dropped in to visit, while I explained anno domini.

My discussion of specific details led inevitably to generalization—today the main point, I think, was how people had to judge other peoples—either foreign cultures, different races, or peoples distant in time, too much by their own standards: the Chinese are reputed to be inscrutable, the blacks rhythmical, the English "nice," etc. I emphasized how we should explode these "myths" in our study of ancient Egypt—to try to see ancient Egyptian culture on its own terms. It helped me when Lisa mentioned how Mr. Bowman had said that people of the far future will have larger heads, no hair on them, no toes, no nails: these people would look back at pictures of kids at P.S. 61 and say, "How ugly their little heads are, covered with that ugly hair, with hard little things stuck at the end of their fingers," and that this kind of judgment was not only unfair, it was irrelevant and obstructive.

So we did a lot of traveling up and down the time-stick.

I went ahead and discussed pre-dynastic man in Egypt and how anthropologists and historians now tend to think that around 3,200 B.C. an invading race, possibly from Sumer, conquered and unified Lower and Upper Egypt.

We also discussed the possibility of particular kids taking certain aspects of Egyptian life as a specialty to study and research. Brad wants to study hieroglyphics—which he called "hydroglyphics"—don't get me wrong! he's a very bright boy, at ease with terms such as "Java Man" and "Cro-Magnon Man."

Lisa, who to my delight had checked out from the 61 library a book on ancient Egypt, is interested in jewelry, and she's seen the collection at the Met!

I feel a little disappointed that I haven't come up with any writing ideas, but what the hell, this is going well as it is and I see no legitimate reason to try to warp it into a writing class at this stage. It's certainly a pleasure working this way. I look forward to each class.

11 January

Four kids absent today!

I had laid on a table all the books on Egypt I have, and when the kids came in I asked them to take a look. Naturally they loved this haphazard collection of items. Brad brought in two or three library books as well.

Then everyone sat down in our circle of desks and I told them about Herodotus' eye-witness account of later Egypt and his *Histories*, how Greek manuscripts had survived and how I had read the relevant parts (Book 2, mostly) in English.

I then read aloud and commented on those passages in which Herodotus discusses Egyptian customs which he considered odd or peculiar and about which I had similar feelings: women floating down the Nile and *insulting* people on the banks during a certain religious festival . . . how the Egyptians sacrificed the bull (exactly how they flayed it, etc.). . .

All this tied in with my previous discussions of how to relate to the differences of other peoples—cultures—lives—places.

Then I asked each kid to pretend *he* was Herodotus seeing Egypt and to record (i.e., invent) an Egyptian custom which might seem peculiar.

We all wrote some (each in his own notebook) and then read them aloud. They were quite good, some very funny (should copy them out of their notebooks.) I wish all the kids had been there. In fact I must take up the idea again—toward making a little collection of (bogus) *Customs of Ancient Egypt*.

Now here's a "writing idea" which evolved—as they say—out of the material at hand. Perfect example of what I want to do.

In a fit of generosity I told the kids to borrow any of the books they wanted.

In the hall outside the office at 3 Les Bowman asked me how it was going, and I found myself answering him in a manner more free of anxiety than I thought possible.

18 January

School closed by maintenance workers' strike.

Got from Bill Zavatsky and read a terrific "juniors" book, MUMMIES by Georgess McHargue, which the kids would love. Will love.

25 January

I reminded the kids where we had left off—with imitations of Herodotus—and explained what that was (to those kids who had been absent), and I had them

write further imitations. To my surprise:

1. Two kids (Ivory and Chi-Wo) had written some at home.
2. Three kids had misplaced their notebooks (they think they're home).
3. I still have no key to the room.

A further gripe: the kids arrive ten or so minutes late from Bowman's, and if they're behind in their work they sometimes arrive even later—as was the case with Chi Wo today.

But we had a good time writing today and reading the "Herodotus" works—though they tended to be a little yucky and gooey (eating snake's blood mixed with frog's eyes, etc.).

I asked them each to write one more at home and to make it less gory—try to make it sound like a *real custom*: to do a forgery not a parody.

Gave the MUMMIES back to Lisa. Asked kids to think about specific areas of Egyptian life to "study"—how to choose? Well, think about what you like to do yourself (e.g., race-cars) and see how Egyptians did similar things (make toys, or play games, or transport them).

I was impatient when Josh started telling us about his trip to the Met over the weekend, and his seeing the Egyptian things, and impatient when Lillian expressed a desire to copy Egyptian paintings, impatient when Bradley asked if he could borrow my Herodotus, etc. I was also a little bothered by Bradley and Drew's distracting the class by their minor misbehavior: I guess I want them to sit there like James (who, to my great surprise, actually asked a question today and did some talking!) I was also less than deliriously happy when Chi Wo exhibited his inherited shyness about being Chinese. When I started talking about languages that originate in pictures, Chinese among them, and wrote a few examples on the board (drew a stick man, then wrote the character for "man," which Chi Wo later confessed to being written backwards), he sort of disowned his knowledge of Chinese, and only slowly could I pry any info loose from him. I decided to go whole hog and asked him to bring in, Friday, a short list of Chinese characters which resemble the thing they designate. Everyone was present today, though Rupert came in about twenty-five minutes late, and some notebooks had been found but a few still missing: I'll wait until Friday to collect them: I want to copy out their Herodotus imitations, make dittos or something and give them back.

I should have let the class develop more on its own today. I lectured too much (though the matter was interesting).

At the end of the period I opened my giant Oxford U *Egyptian Grammar* and we looked over the hieroglyphics. The one of the spurting penis escaped everyone's attention, but for how long, O Lord?

After school I Xeroxed a section in hieroglyphics from the book, Lesson 2, with glossary attached, to have them translate it first without the glossary and then later with. I also Xeroxed a reduced version of the Rosetta Stone.

*

I feel angry with myself for missing three journal entries, those of Feb. 1, 8 and 15.

As I remember it, Feb. 1 was a good class, during which I handed out Xerox copies of hieroglyphics from the Oxford *Grammar*, second or third lesson, and had the kids guess at translating them. They did very well and wrote some haunting works. It was during this period that, in response to the question of whether or not I would give them grades, I answered that every teacher gives every kid a grade in his head, but that I would give none on paper. I told them that I had written about each of them in my journal. Bradley immediately asked what I had said about him, and I told him. Lisa asked about herself, "What are my strong and weak points?" and I answered her as I had written in my journal. My forthrightness made a tremendous impression on her.

The class of Feb. 8 was, as I remember, a dud. The kids had been given the vocabulary for the hieroglyphics from last class and asked to try to translate it for real at home. I think one kid actually managed to do it and bring it in, and the result was not inspired. They arrived late, showed little concentration, in fact made me lose my interest in even having the class that day. Finally I informed them that it was up to them to make the class good, and that if they went on like this, I would lose interest and dissolve the class, not in anger, but from boredom.

The class of Feb. 15: I started them off with a blank piece of paper and a pencil and I asked them to answer questions: I was giving them a *test*!! A pop test, yet! In a rather dry, professorial way I asked them about twelve questions covering the basic ma-

terial so far. Then I had them translate hieroglyphics which I put on the board. Finally I asked them to offer any suggestions for the class, how it was to be conducted, etc.

Interesting, they took the test in utter silence, very seriously, and this seriousness carried over to the translation and suggestions sections. I gave them the answers and they checked and graded their own papers. They did rather well—their big weak point was in their concept of time. They have a terrible time trying to understand what 3,500 BC means (who doesn't?). But generally they did pretty well. In the suggestions part, interestingly, all who took the test (three were absent and one was too late) asked for more seriousness in class, keeping on the subject, and the assignment of special projects. I think there's a grain of sincerity in this, especially with Chi Wo, who has an aversion to wasted time.

At the end of the period I told them that we would begin to study Egyptian religion, art (and architecture) and history, all of which met in the Egyptian tombs. Which we will. But tonight, typing up their prose poems, I realized how good they were, and want to use them tomorrow, to have the kids perfect them, real poems.

Sidelight: Several weeks ago Les told me that Josh would have to be dropped from the group: his attendance and homework were poor. I asked Les for a reprieve, telling him I'd talk to Josh and see what I could do. I went to Josh and told him, "Mr. Bowman says you will be dropped from the Egypt class because your attendance and homework are poor. I'd like to have you in my group, because I like you, and if you want to stay in it, you'll have to come to school on time and do your homework. OK?" This was on Friday.

When I went back to the school to drop off some papers on Monday Les said, "Josh is out. He didn't do his homework over the weekend." I resigned myself to the situation and selected another kid to replace Josh, come Friday.

But on Friday, Les, to my surprise, to my very pleasant surprise, told me that Josh had suddenly started doing everything required of him, and that he could stay in the group. Then Les added, "I'm jealous." (He also showed me some very good writing the kids had done for him).

22 February

Last night I typed up the hieroglyphics guess-translations in the prose form in which they were written, and today I handed them back to their authors, asking them to consider them carefully: would they like to add or subtract any-

EGYPTIAN CUSTOMS

During the festival of Bugumbala the people float down the river on boats. When they approach crocodiles they snatch a sandpiper off the crocodile clip the wings, replace it and splash it with water and sail away.

—Bradley Torrance

EGYPTIAN CUSTOMS

On New Year's all the women must go out in the desert and look for a cobra's shell. But before she goes she must cover herself with hog mud. She has to bring the cobra shell back home and make it into a coat and turn around three times. That's supposed to bring her good luck.

A sculptor on bad luck Friday must sculpt a special rock into some other form.

To take a bath you have to brush your teeth with ashes and put some bull's blood in the water.

When a king has a party at the end he goes around and puts a piece of cooked bull's meat in each person's mouth.

On New Year's Eve they sacrifice a bull and clean it out. And the king has to do a special dance with the bull's skin.

—Lisa Covington

Translations of Hieroglyphics

THE SNAKE

One day the moon was still in the sky, a bird came and talked to the sky god. Then the sky god gave him a dish made of gold. Then the moon went away and so did the god. Then the bird was left alone.

THE SMART BIRD

Bird stepped on water at sunrise. This pea was on his arm and in his eye. Then a lady came with a bird. Then a snake came and sat on the pea and told the lady about the moon. She took her hand and put it on the bird and the bird went in the water.

—Lillian Mesen

STRANGENESS OF A SCRIBE AND LIGHTNING

Lightning strikes two birds one at a time. An eye sees it, the eye of a scribe without his glasses. A bird flies over the sky in a half moon. Scribe fights the bird with a shield. And walks in a circle.

—Lisa Covington

thing? Would the pieces be better as "poetry", i.e., in lines? I took one of my own translations, read it aloud as prose, then demonstrated on the board various ways in which the words could be arranged, discussing the implications of each arrangement.

The kids spent about twenty minutes rewriting their pieces. Reading them over later, I noticed that some pieces were improved, some worsened, and that some kids showed purpose to their rearrangements, others seemed too random. I typed up the various works, some in both their prose and poetry forms, with the idea of making them into a booklet, along with their descriptions of Strange Egyptian Customs. (Some of these, unfortunately, were lost by the kids.)

Then I mentioned various topics the kids could consider as possible subjects for reports. There was some battling over that perennially favorite topic, mummies, but I tried to straighten things out. Here is how the topics were doled out during this period: Drew (Egyptian writing); Bradley (pyramids & tombs); Lisa (clothes, jewelry & cosmetics); Ivory (religion or mythology—I had to press this on her); Lillian and Rupert (mummies: Rupert wants to build a life-size mummy, and I suggested he also learn how to wrap up a live person to resemble a mummy). James and Chi Wo were absent, and Josh has been barred from the group due to poor performance again at homework.

28 February

Les let me have the kids today as well as tomorrow when I asked him for more time with them.

Since last Friday I have scouted out various bookstores and bought a number of books on Egypt which I hope will help the kids with their research—to supplement whatever reading they do at home or in the school or public library. (Ivory had done a lot of work since last time, and she was ready for further material.)

We went from person to person finding out what they had done on their topic (ugh, which Bradley called a "term paper"), and I made suggestions as to how they might discover new information and how they should read with a pencil in their hand, and what kind of information might help them gather as much material as possible. It was interesting to me that the only person who had started to organize his material in an outline was Drew. I have the feeling that children are not taught well in this respect: they are taught how to make an outline, but it's just another subject to them, without intrinsic merit or use. Like the Dewey decimal system seems to be when you're first required to learn it. I wonder if I can make them see the usefulness of actually organizing data.

In my mind this lack of a sense of organization is related to the difficulty kids have in learning to write expository prose, exposition based on a linear and logical progression from point to point in relation to the whole of a subject. In fact, one attack on writing which I hope to make is on expository prose. It occurs to me that if poetry is not taught as well as it might be, generally in our schools, then Expository Writing might be taught even less well—and it has none of the attractive selling points of Poetry (Imagination, Creativity, Free Expression, all those Holy of Holies). I don't know how I will go about teaching good straight expository prose writing—it's hard enough to write, let alone teach.

Anyway, I informed Rupert that styrofoam in huge chunks is hard to find, and that foam rubber is too expensive, and I suggested that he make a scale model of a mummy, perhaps a foot long; and also do a series of drawings of the mummy, the mummy wrapped, the mummy case, the outer case, etc., sort of a step-by-step diagram of what the whole arrangement looks like (like peeling the skins off an onion). We voted to elect the Live Mummy: Lillian was elected, and then we realized that mummies is her topic: I then had the great idea of having her deliver her oral report on Mummies, dressed as a mummy! She balked at this at first, then daylight hit her and she liked the idea. She refused to run up and down the hall, however, *en momie*.

Bradley decided he'd like to change his topic slightly to Pyramids and Pharaohs, which I said was fine.

At this point we took all our Egypt books and made a library: with a card for each book, and then I suggested which book might be useful for each person's topic, and they signed for them.

Tomorrow, hopefully, we'll have topics for Chi Wo and James: none of the topics I suggested today (Art; Government; Sports, Games and Fun; Learning and School) appealed to them.

There's been some horsing around these last two sessions: I kept the kids after school a little more until I finished.

1 March

Before classtime I wrote one of James' Strange Egyptian Customs on the board, and on another board the words:

EXPOSITORY WRITING:
to show, demonstrate
(World's Exposition, 1899).

When the kids arrived I handed out typed copies of the Customs writings they had done. (Josh and James absent, Rupert late). I also gave Bradley a copy of the old test for James, and I gave Chi Wo a copy for himself.

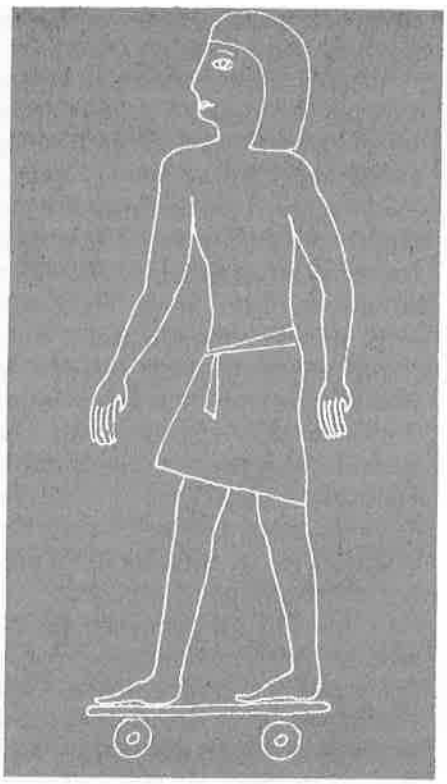
A copy of James' piece is appended to this diary installment, as is the piece in its revised form—Bradley took the paper home accidentally. Anyway, I pointed out how good the ideas were in the piece, but how the writing wasn't so sharp as it might be. It had a lot

of loose and rattling words which didn't do anything but get in the way, like extra doorknobs that don't help you open the door. Or like excess fat on an overweight person. I pointed to the first sentence and its "you". . . who is this you? Isn't the piece supposed to be about Egyptians? Drew suggested we replace "you" with "they," and we were off and running. Both Drew and Bradley understand concision in writing, and they understand (and know they understand) the benefit of sharpening or focusing abstractions until they are so specific that they mean exactly what they say. As we went through the piece, dropping out unnecessary words and sharpening others, and rectifying tenses, it was clear to me that the kids in the group were catching on quickly—they had been drilled in this, I'm sure.

After we got through and it seemed as good as it could be, Drew pointed out that it was still too unlikely: the Egyptians wouldn't chop up a cat if the cat were a sacred animal, and he suggested we change it to "bull." He then suggested a title change, and together the class made the title really apply to the work.

I took this opportunity to write the word "then" on the board and point out that they used this word too much and when it wasn't necessary. They tend to start each sentence with *then*, especially when the sentences are sequentially describing a process or action. I suggested that they drop it, for the most part, because the order of the sentences indicate the sequence already. You wouldn't count "one, then two, then three, then four . . . ," would you? No. It's the same with sentences. The logic of their sequence is just like the logic of numbers, two systems we have developed to help us be civilized.

At this point I asked them to rewrite their Strange Customs works: to read them carefully and to reconsider them the same way



we had rewritten James' piece (too bad he was absent).

I went around from kid to kid, seeing how they were doing, making some suggestions. I felt they did a very good job, and that teaching them the basics of expository prose might not be so hard as I had imagined.

I collected the papers and now will type them, perhaps in both their original and revised form.

At this point I launched into a little lecture on expository prose, giving its root meaning, and really got the kids interested by telling them that learning this was important for them because if they learned how to do this kind of writing well, they would have a tremendous advantage over other kids in school for the next ten years. They loved the idea of this! I went on to point out that there was a more basic benefit, one to their mentality, that it would be more organized and yet more flexible, capable of nuance, and that their lives would change for the better. Or some such: I was better in class than I am now home at the typewriter.

I compared sloppy logic and lack of form and precision in writing to the class of mongoloid children at PS 19. These children are, in some cases, unable to identify a triangle, even after lengthy repetitions and identification exercises. This was the far extreme (at first my kids had laughed when I said "mongoloid" but as I continued they grew more sober). I suggested, gently, that there was a little of this chaos in their own writing, and they should try to be more conscious of what they were doing.

"But I like imaginative thinking," said Bradley.

"So do I," I replied, "but when I buy a newspaper with a dollar and get a dime in change, I don't think that's imaginative. I think I'm being short-changed. I think it's wrong. Or incorrect. It is certainly interesting to give someone ninety cents for the *Post*, and I could dig it, but not unless I were aware of what was going on. In fact you can't appreciate the situation unless you know it's wrong and you just let it go."

I wrote four sentences on the board:

1. I woke up.
2. I put on my clothes.
3. I had breakfast.
4. I went to school.

Boring, but "correct," and in sequence. Now, poetry might state things differently, because poetry offers endless options to the ennui of everyday reality, or what is called everyday reality—I mean the humdrum. For instance, we could make this more "poetic" by scrambling the lines:

I had breakfast.
I went to school.
I put on my clothes.
I woke up.

A case of a sleepwalking kid who went to school in his pyjamas!

So these sentences can be used as examples of "straight prose" or

as "poetry." Both kinds are equally "good", but one is sometimes more appropriate for a given situation than another. In some instances they are mixed, in the journalism of Addison and Steele, for instance; or in the prose of Francis Ponge (wherein the poetry has a strong discursive underpinning).

But in the writing of themes, term papers, articles and essays, it is useful to know the rules and regulations of expository prose, and when the kids present their written reports, I want them to have their material, facts, data, information organized so that all the triangles are in the triangle group, the circles in the circle group, etc. and that everything is in logical sequence.

From 1 March class

James' Strange Egyptian Custom, original version and revised (by class)

THE WAY TO GET BAPTIZED

First you have to go to an Egyptian priest. He will go kill a perfect cat, take the foot or hind leg and burn it to a crisp, then put it under the baby and the smoke is supposed to be some blessing. The smoke rises under the baby and blesses it.

THE WAY EGYPTIANS BAPTIZE THEIR BABIES

First they go to an Egyptian priest. He kills a perfect bull, takes the foot or hind leg and burns it to a crisp, then puts it under the baby. The smoke rises under the baby and blesses it.

Today's class was so much better than this written account of it. I felt tremendously exhilarated, because of how good and how relevant and meaningful the class had been, and how it added another dimension to the writing we're doing around our subject, Egypt.

"...I realized that I didn't really know why I was having them do it; it seemed like the thing to do."

5 March

Today, Tuesday, I found my room taken by the (I think) school psychologist, with the librarian, Mrs. Brown, out (jury duty) and Mr. Bowman absent: it was a clean sweep.

I had wanted to relocate our Egypt library in the regular school library, as a sort of Reserve Shelf for my kids, with the books more accessible than they are locked up in the Art Room all week; but with Mrs. Brown gone, I thought I'd set up such a shelf in Les' room, and I did so, only to have my regular kids advise me that the books would just disappear if I left them there. Mr. Bowman's substitute, a patient and friendly-looking fellow, had his hands full: it was a nice warm day and the kids were going wild with that Lower East Side explosive brat energy that starts to surge this time of year.

Anyway, I took my kids out onto the stairs and set up a brief session with them there, during which time I discussed the library idea, told them how good Jon White's *Everyday Life in Ancient Egypt* was and how useful it would be for all of them in their special studies; returned Rupert's Customs works to him and suggested ways in which he might improve them; gave *Ancient Egyptian Mythology* to Ivory after picking it up at the bookstore today; assigned Art to Chi Wo (since he had come up with nothing himself), and asked the kids to see that James please be present sometime! I told them that I would give deadlines for their research on Friday, that I hadn't decided yet. (In fact I have only the haziest notions of what they're doing in this area, and I realized that I didn't really know why I was having them do it: it had seemed like a thing to do. I had hoped they would have by now shown more spontaneous interest in a particular aspect of our class, but I'm afraid it's turning out to be just another "assignment" to them. Maybe not. Still, I don't feel right about the thing.) In the meantime I took the Egypt books across the hall and left them with Jean Calandra, who agreed to serve as temporary Egypt Librarian. Now it's time for me to start to think about how to introduce Egyptian literature into what I'm doing. That is, poems and stories in translation. *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* ed. Wm. Kelly Simpson is a nice book with some good things and will be useful. What I'd really like to find is *The Love Poems of Ancient Egypt* by Noel Stock and Ezra Pound, a pretty little paperback that used to be in every bookstore and now is in none. Everyone says the only "great" Egyptian literature is in the love poems and I think there might be grist for our mill in them.

I'm also thinking of the way the Egyptians were addicted to invocations, especially at the beginning of their religious texts, and how we might teach the kids the rhe-

toric of invocation through this, having them write invocations applicable to their own lives. One way to do this is, obviously, through comedy (e.g., "O lamp that shines on my desk, with your 100 watts. . . ."). Beyond comedy? Or as Step 2? The idea of sixth graders writing big heavy serious invocations is mind-boggling! Therefore I must do it!

8 March

This was a class period from which I expected something good which did not materialize. The ever-unpopular idea of teaching Love Poems to kids, yep, I gave it the old college try again and sure enough it flopped.

I began by pointing out how boys tend to pick on Lillian, and how this is the way boys at age eleven or twelve express their affection, or at least attention. If you can't be tender toward someone you like, then you tend to attack them. The boys in the group agreed reluctantly. I called to their attention the idea that tenderness is not an acceptable public emotion in USA.

Then I passed on to them the idea, which I got reading, that the most interesting Egyptian literature is in the love poems, and I read selections from them in *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* ed. Wm. Kelly Simpson and from *The Love Poems of Ancient Egypt* trans. Pound and Stock. These poems, which I had been reading at home (where they seemed not only OK in themselves but useful as teaching vehicles or models) sounded really stale or irrelevant in the classroom, and the wave of ennui that swept over the kids intensified my dismay. Added to this was the way two of the girls (Lillian was absent) took offense at my reading the words "breast" and "breasts." They didn't go nuts, but they did seem a little huffy.

Only James seemed to find any merit in the whole thing, and who knows what he was really thinking. I finished the class feeling disappointed and a little bit embarrassed.

"First we went to the mummy, which is of course the star piece in the collection, and the kids didn't laugh, either. Mummies turn out to be unfunny. They're all dirty and falling apart. People! Fingernails!"

13 March

Today I set out various materials in the Art Room (where we meet) and asked the kids to start working on pictures (drawings or whatever) which could enhance their reports oral and/or written, and I asked Chi Wo to design a cover for our collected Egyptian writings, named EGYPT CLASS GREATS by Bradley. There was a mixed reaction to this art-illustration direction, and Ivory stated flatly, "I can't draw." The same old story. So she helped tear strips from the white sheet which will be wound around Lillian to make her a mummy. Rupert was supposed to help bind her, but he couldn't really, it was too intimate, physically, for him to help.

So I set him to drawing mummies, which he did without much real interest: he does the ink drawings very quickly, with his left hand: one drawing was as good as Dubuffet, really an exquisite piece of work. The rest was so-so, perhaps too tossed-off.

Josh has been banned from the group again. It's not possible to work with him effectively this way, never knowing if he'll be there or not. Also, James was absent again! It's incredible! Les says he seems to alternate being absent with his twin (?) sister. When he's in my group he seems sincere and interested, but he misses school too much!

Chi Wo, given the cover design assignment, set to work assiduously for the entire period.

Today's class was affected by the handing out of Report Cards: each kid came in with his envelope, which he opened and peeked to see, first, how many U's he had gotten. No U's was considered great. Apparently Les is a tough marker, but not excessively so.

Lillian became very interesting as she was being wrapped up. Her face became rather bemused or preoccupied or dreamy and she said, "My legs and arms are stiff" (from the binding). "It feels awful, I can't bend my arms or legs." I should have had her dictate a poem (perhaps next time) from the mummy's point of view.

14 March

We (Les and his entire class) set out for a half-day field trip to the Met for a guided tour in the Greek and Roman collections. Walk to subway, change trains, walk to Museum, register, leave coats, check lunches, meet tour guide, all very regimented and (I might add) very efficient (too efficient, though I doubt if there's any other way to do it). The tour guide lady was very good: clear, with a good grasp of what the kids would find interesting and how far they could be taken in that interest, with a give-and-take, and she was tough. I mean tough. And firm. No messing around with her. She took us through the Greek vases and to the chariot (Etruscan)

pointing out things that were beautifully easy and obvious once you saw them. Nothing arcane or unnecessary. After she dropped us off in the children's section of the basement, some kids bought souvenirs, some came with me for a quick run-through of the Egyptian collections.

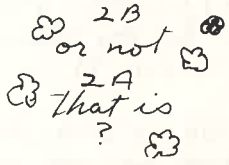
It's a good thing I had checked out the collection before; it enabled me to skip the redundant or second-rate. I took a cue from the tour guide and, rather than trying to show the kids everything, I keyed on major works. (The group of kids was mixed, some from my Egyptian class, others from the regular class—a couple of my kids (Ivory and Lisa) got cut off from me and I couldn't invite them to go to the Egyptian wing). First we went to the mummy, which is of course the star piece in the collection, and the kids didn't laugh, either. Mummies turn out to be unfunny. They're all dirty and falling apart. People! Fingernails! From there we went to the jewelry and small household articles room, where I turned them loose and let them roam about (which counterbalanced the utter efficiency of the rest of the visit), then on to the scale models of scenes of everyday life, found in tombs, and into the big statuary room at the end (Sekmet et al) and the exhibition on writing (carved hieroglyphics, Rosetta Stone copy!, papyrus plants, paper, quill and reed pens, sarcophogi covered with inscriptions) and, returning, the entryway to a tomb. I would have liked to have allowed the kids time to be a little more meditative, but on the other hand I was pleased by their interest, even those kids not in my group.

We rushed down to the basement to rendezvous with Les and the rest and to buy quickly some souvenirs, have lunch in the lunchroom, and head back downtown. I enjoyed myself enormously and Les seemed to be in a good humor. At one point on the sub-

way he commented on the Test on Egypt I had given my kids. "How'd they do?" he asked. "That test was like one in college, it was hard."

15 March

The idea of today's class was to finish and/or improve upon the art work started previously. This included Chi Wo doing the cover for our collection of writings and the other kids making what I called Egyptian good luck message-drawing charms. I had read that mummies were sometimes wrapped with charms in their bandages, charms which would promote the well-being of the deceased in the Other World. I had wanted to have the kids do charms to wrap up with Lillian, but when they got started the charms got bigger and started turning out very nicely, which surprised me. Generally they consisted of words and drawings, some funny, others not. Chi Wo's cover design for the writings booklet was well-done, and once again I saw that Chinese ability to buckle down and do the job: he sat down and worked straight through with perfect seriousness. The other kids tended to let their attention wander when they finished what they were doing, and at one point I got rather pissed off at Bradley and Rupert and I asked them to return to Les' room: Bradley was visibly upset, partly because it was more Rupert's fault than his. I relented quickly. I didn't want to alienate Bradley completely. He and I get along OK, but there's something unresolved between us. That I dared to criticize him openly? I don't know. Anyway, I don't believe it's a serious rift. As he worked on a paper model of a mastaba (Egyptian tomb, like a pyramid with its top shaved off) which I had bought at the Met yesterday, he read the instructions aloud and mused to himself, "Step A. . . Step 1 B, Step 2 B. . ." and then he recited, "Two B or not Two A, that is the question mark." I thought this rather funny and asked him to write it on the board. Here is what he wrote there:



The blobs are splat-marks made by hurled tomatoes.

This was also the day for the kids to hand in their written reports, most of which, at first glance, I found uninspired and disappointing. Drew apologized for his as he handed it in. Lisa had taken ill during the day (because the report was due and she hadn't finished it?) and gone home: she was supposed to have brought extra sheets for making the mummy. Josh has been kicked out again! And even more incredible, James was absent again!! Impossible to work with them.

I'll read the reports carefully soon. I can't face them yet. I feel that I've really let myself down on this one. I can tell they thought of it as a "school report" and noth-

THE HOT-TEMPERED MAN

The hot-tempered man is like a piece of furniture. It shines like the sun and in the night it twinkles like the stars above. Then soon it gets scratched and has no more use. And is then used for firewood. The cool-tempered man is like a piece of furniture that flickers at the firelight. Its beauty is everlasting. And when its job is done it will die a fabulous death. But its beauty will not die, it will live on forever.

—Lisa Covington

A MAN WHO TALKS WITHOUT REASON

A man who talks without reason is like a planet taking its unyielding path around the sun, cold and uncomfortable.

A man who talks with reason is a planet, revolving quietly, slowly, peacefully, warm and comfortable.

—Drew Bailey

THE IMPATIENT MAN AND THE THIEF

The impatient man is like a cloud. It releases its rain and withers away. But the patient man is like a cloud, snow white and flourishing in the sky.

The thief is like a raven. He will fly in the sky. Someone will come camping. He will watch their every move. The raven will take a shiny object and replace it with a dead bug. But the honest man is like a raven. He will fly in the sky. Someone will come camping. He will be honest and produce much beauty.

—Bradley Torrance

ing else, not a compilation of ideas which might interest them, not an organized system of their knowledge of a subject, not, in short, a sharing. More like a mechanical presentation of facts whose inner life they did not explore in the least. So: does subject matter have to be *fun*, always, for kids to be interested in it? No. Stamp collecting isn't fun. When it's real it's passionate. But this passion I did not communicate to the kids. I flunked.

Still, there was some compensation in how well the message-charms came out. And I stayed after school thirty-five minutes cleaning up the room, just to punish myself!

The pressures of my personal life have kept me from my Egypt class journal, so today'll make up for four lost sessions (one of which was today's).

The session of 20 March is a blank. I can't remember what happened!

22 March: the crystal ball forms an image. During this period I talked about Egyptian Instructional literature. The Egyptians were strong moralists and some of their literature consists of the instructions of various officials, instructions on how to conduct one's moral and social-moral life. We talked about how the conduct of high officials influences a country's morals and morale—the comparisons are blindingly evident.

Then I focused on a particular text, *The Instructions of Amenemope*, and summarized the content and tone of the piece. I read them a chapter from Simpson's *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*. Here is the entire chapter:

The hot-headed man in the temple/Is like a tree grown in a garden;/Suddenly it bears fruit./It reaches its end in the carpentry shop;/It is floated away far from its place,/Or fire is its funeral pyre./The truly temperate man sets himself apart,/He is like a tree grown in a sunlit field,/But it flourishes, it doubles its yield,/It stands before its owner;/Its fruit is something sweet, its shade is pleasant,/And it reaches its end in a garden.

Not terribly exciting poetry, but it does use an interesting device of comparing opposite men to the same object (which has various fates).

I asked the kids to pick a moral fault and describe a person with this fault as being comparable to an object, and to pick the opposite quality and compare it to the same object, but with different results. I know this explanation is confusing; the procedure is simple.

Example:

A liar is like a radiator/That hisses and knocks/And wakes you up in the middle of the night/But never gives off heat./The truthful man is like a radiator/That you never notice:/It comes on automatically/And fills your house with warmth.

The kids wrote some very nice pieces with this structure. These pieces show, I think, how moral the kids really are, or at least their morality or moral firmness is suggested. It's probably the first time I've ever given writing assignments which had this latitude or went specifically into this area. Why? I don't know. Perhaps it's too close to home: our morals are so much a part of us that we do not distinguish them from simple everyday life.

26 March

Today's class was a sort of carry-over from last time. I had intended to read aloud another

The Afterlife

When I die my spirit would go to another person and use its body to figure out my death. I know my death will have to be unusual. I wouldn't die from any usual thing. I would die from something like a disease that has no cure. After I've solved it I would return to my body. And the other body would return to its spirit. And I would rest there until Judgement Day.

—Lisa Covington

I have just died. My spirit has gone to where they weigh good deeds with bad deeds. I wait tensely as they weigh the deeds. I have done many good deeds and few bad deeds. My spirit will flourish in heaven. I will enjoy eternal life in heaven.

—Bradley Torrance

When I die my soul or spirit would be sent to a place where you get a ticket and they would tell me to go to a hotel called the Dead Ringer. I would have to wait there until they called me. I would get a note saying, "You, James Rao, will be named and go in the body of Paul Zigger. There you will live out your life and return here."

—James Rao

piece from Simpson, *The Man Who Was Tired Of Life*, because it contains a very good rhetorical section beginning "Behold . . . ," in which a disillusioned young man converses with his soul. To lead up to this I had written on the board the hieroglyphics for *ka* (double, image, picture) and *ba* (soul), as well as their transliterations and translations. And I launched into a discussion of how we have various aspects to our "selves." For instance, we have a physical body. Yes, and in that body a special muscle, the heart. But we understand "heart" to mean more than that. A person has a "good heart." Or he is "hard-hearted." This refers to emotions, or a sense of generosity with the emotions.

We also have a brain, in which we locate our intelligence. But intelligence is not the brain. Drew suggested another such area, the Conscience. Which led to definitions of "spirit" and "soul" (laughter here) and "feelings" and "memory". It was a wonderful discussion.

It led to my holding up reproductions from the English Jackdaw portfolio series, *Tutankhaman*, in which King Tut is portrayed going through the experiences of the after-life. I also held up a reproduction of a part of the Papyrus of Ani (from which we derive the so-called *Book Of The Dead*), in which Ani's heart is being weighed. Our discussion had been so interesting that I felt it would be a real come-down to ask the kids to follow the literary model I had intended to give them (the "Behold. . ." section), and so I came up with the idea that each kid write down what they thought would happen to their spirits or souls (*not* their bodies) immediately after they died. The kids set to work and wrote some interesting pieces on what was a difficult subject.

It was a type of educational situation I like, in which the writing emerges from a wider context.

We took a few minutes to discuss the oral reports which the kids are to give in Bowman's room. I made some useful suggestions.

29 March

Today I started by continuing our discussion of the orals. I spoke with each kid individually, suggesting what each one might do with his material. (Bowman asked us to present them on Wednesday at 2, each report to be limited to three minutes). Each subject has its own possibilities. You shouldn't be so lazy as to present a report on cosmetics in the same way you present one on, say, pyramids (no matter how they are related). You can wear the cosmetics, life-size, you cannot build the Pyramid of Cheops, alas, life-size in the classroom.

After I had done this I turned the class loose. For weeks they have been wanting to rush to the blackboard and write like crazy on it, and I've promised them this chance. (In the regular class-room, almost all blackboard writing has to be purposeful.) So I said, "OK kids, today you can attack the board." With a great rush and roar they grabbed the chalk and ran to the board, where, with glee and abandon they wrote this and that.

Oddly enough, I was surprised to notice that I felt as much a sense of relief as did they: perhaps my sérieux in this class has been a bit burdensome to me too.

Outside the snow (a total surprise today) was swirling and blowing. Drew put a chair on top of a desk, sat in it and stared out the window at the swirling snow. Lisa stayed with me to talk, first about how her apartment had been robbed, and then of other things. I can tell that she really

THE STYNX

The Stynx is made of a brown wooden block head with diamond eyes. His body is made of a huge closet, his feet are made of garbage can covers and his legs are made of toilet paper rolls. It has a machine gun for a tail. Its riddle is: what has a blue cover, a black belt and smells?

—James Rao

likes and respects me, without adulation.

The other kids were kidding each other with things such as "Lillian loves Frankenstein." Then I noticed they were writing something whose procedure I didn't understand, and they were cracking up. They explained how it worked. First you write someone's first name, such as "Lillian," beneath which you write the first name of someone of the opposite sex, to see, by a special calculation, if they are compatible. They picked "Adolph" (Hitler). (The names must be connected by 'n'). You draw a line, beneath which you list the vowels A E I O U, beneath which you write the numbers 1 2 3 4 5 and draw another line. At this point here's how it looks:

```
L i l l i a n
    'n'
A d o l p h
-----------
A E I O U
1 2 3 4 5
-----------
```

Now you count the number of A's in the two names and inscribe the total beneath the number 1. Then the E's and inscribe the total beneath the number 2, etc. for all the vowels. After this you draw a line and total the two rows of numbers, and if the totals have any numbers (such as 1 and 1) side by side, it attests to the compatibility of the two people. Our example will look like this:

```
L i l l i a n
    'n'
A d o l p h
-----------
A E I O U
1 2 3 4 5
-----------
+ 2 0 2 1 0
-----------
3 2 5 6 5
```

No matches! Lillian 'n' Adolph do not match.

How about Ivory 'n' Lester? (Les Bowman).

```
I v o r y
    'n'
L e s t e r
-----------
A E I O U
1 2 3 4 5
-----------
+ 0 2 1 1 0
-----------
1 4 4 5 5
```

A double match! (44 and 55). The ultimate is of course to have all the numbers add up to the same figure. Bradley found that he and Raquel would not hit it off, but he and Elizabeth (Taylor) had a great future before them.

Before long I was at the board working out various possibilities.

Then, before class was over, I announced that we would meet on Tuesday, and then the orals would be on Wednesday, after which was Easter Vacation—perhaps we should end the class there. Cries of No! No! I said I would continue the class so long as it seemed worthwhile, and if anyone had any ideas for extending the class, I'd gladly listen.

(Some of the other kids in Les' room are still complaining about how they weren't picked for the Egypt class.)

19 April

When I arrived last week, or last time, for orals, Lillian (the key to the orals) was absent, so I had to postpone things until today. It was after Easter vacation and I feared that the kids would have forgotten everything. To my surprise they were sharper than I thought they would be.

James was of course absent! He

THE GRIFFIN

It has the head of an eagle, a body of a lion, eagle's talons, wings of a condor. It always asks strangers this riddle:

What is as smart as a fox
Red like blood
Black like darkness
Dangerous to some
Some are dangerous to it.

—Chi Wo Lui

has the worst attendance record of any kid I've ever taught. And Ivory couldn't give her oral unless she read the report she had given me (and which was at my place)—obviously she does not understand what a report is. Not that she can't learn. Her written report was copied straight out of books, and her oral was to have been simply a reading of that paper. (Her "creative" work is quite good, though).

First we went to our room and wrapped Lillian *en momie*. She seemed a little nervous, it was so strange to be wrapped up like that. Then we staggered down the hall, where various kids gaped at us in amazement—who was this mummy?? And Why??

Of course our entrance to Mr. Bowman's classroom was sensational. Les cracked a corny joke which somehow was extremely funny, and the class was in an uproar. When we calmed down Lillian delivered her oral, which described mummification, and then reported on what the Other World was like. I was impressed by her aplomb and her failure to remember several basic facts (namely, that all classes of ancient Egyptians were mummified—not simply the pharaohs and queens and upper crust). But she acquitted herself with honor. I was quite nervous—memories of Oral Report Nerves from my past.

Then Brad and Chi Wo delivered their joint report on the pyramids, and did a wonderful job. Brad has the gift of gab (and can bullshit when he needs to give himself time to think), but he, too, surprised me by telling the class that the pyramids were built by "slaves," a common misconception which I thought we had cleared up. I guess when the chips are down we tend to revert to what we feel we know best, even though it's incorrect. Chi Wo had done some beautiful drawings of the pyramids and tomb structures. Their report was quite proficient—it consisted mostly of what they had learned, and they had learned it, it was now theirs, and they showed little hesitation about sharing it with the others.

Next, Drew reported on Egyptian language. He had written his oral—he read it aloud. Why? He read nothing which he didn't know already, but he gave the impression that he was simply reading from a piece of paper. He lacks confidence in orals. I wanted Les and the other kids in the class to know that Drew really knew what he was talking about, so I asked Drew some questions which would draw out his natural knowledge of his subject. He showed no hesitation in answering, and answering correctly.

Lisa, whose topic was dress, makeup, style, etc. in A.E., gave her talk totally impromptu: she wasn't really ready, but simply charged into her subject with a measure of confidence. I thought her presentation could have been more organized and therefore comprehensible, but she cannot be faulted for lack of courage or for not knowing something about her subject. (Like the others, though, she surprised me by getting at least one basic fact wrong: she said that Egyptian children and common people wore white linen, when in fact it was well-established in our group that these people went naked quite often.)

As for James, who was absent, and Ivory, who wants to read her report, and Rupert, who was supposed to have helped Lillian (and I doubt if he did), I think it best that these not be worried about. There was something about the whole Oral Report form that bothered me, and we did it mostly because Les asked us to, and we did it OK. Still, we could have done much better. We could have been more thoughtful about our presentation: we should have had more daring and flair, we should have rehabilitated the art of the Oral Report. Maybe next time.

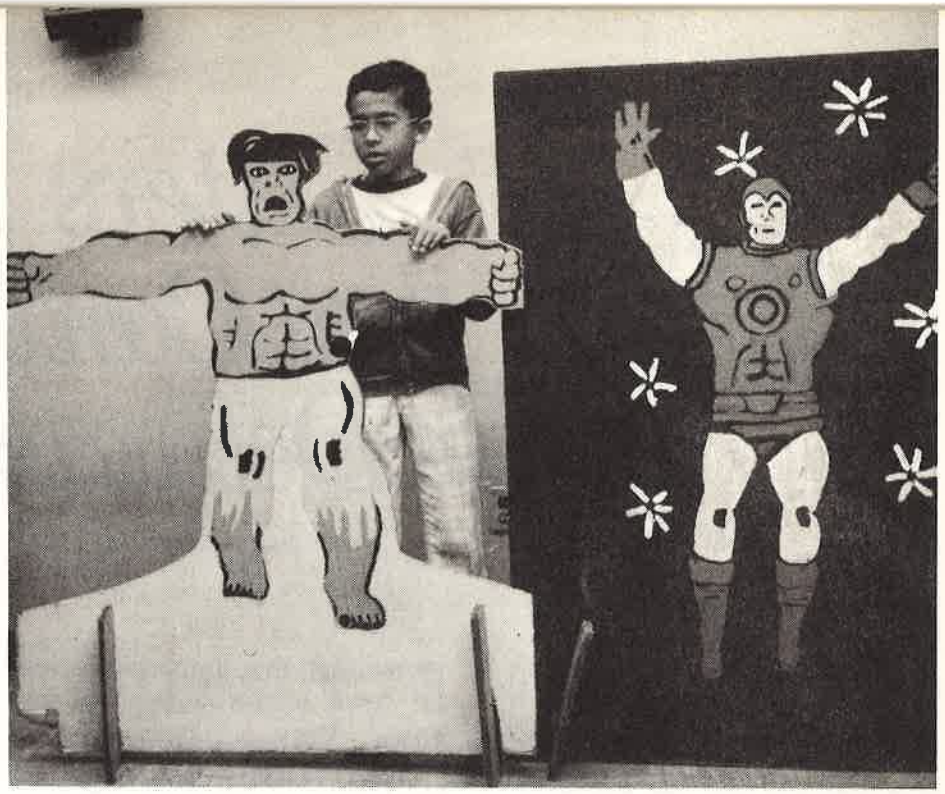
SUPER HEROES

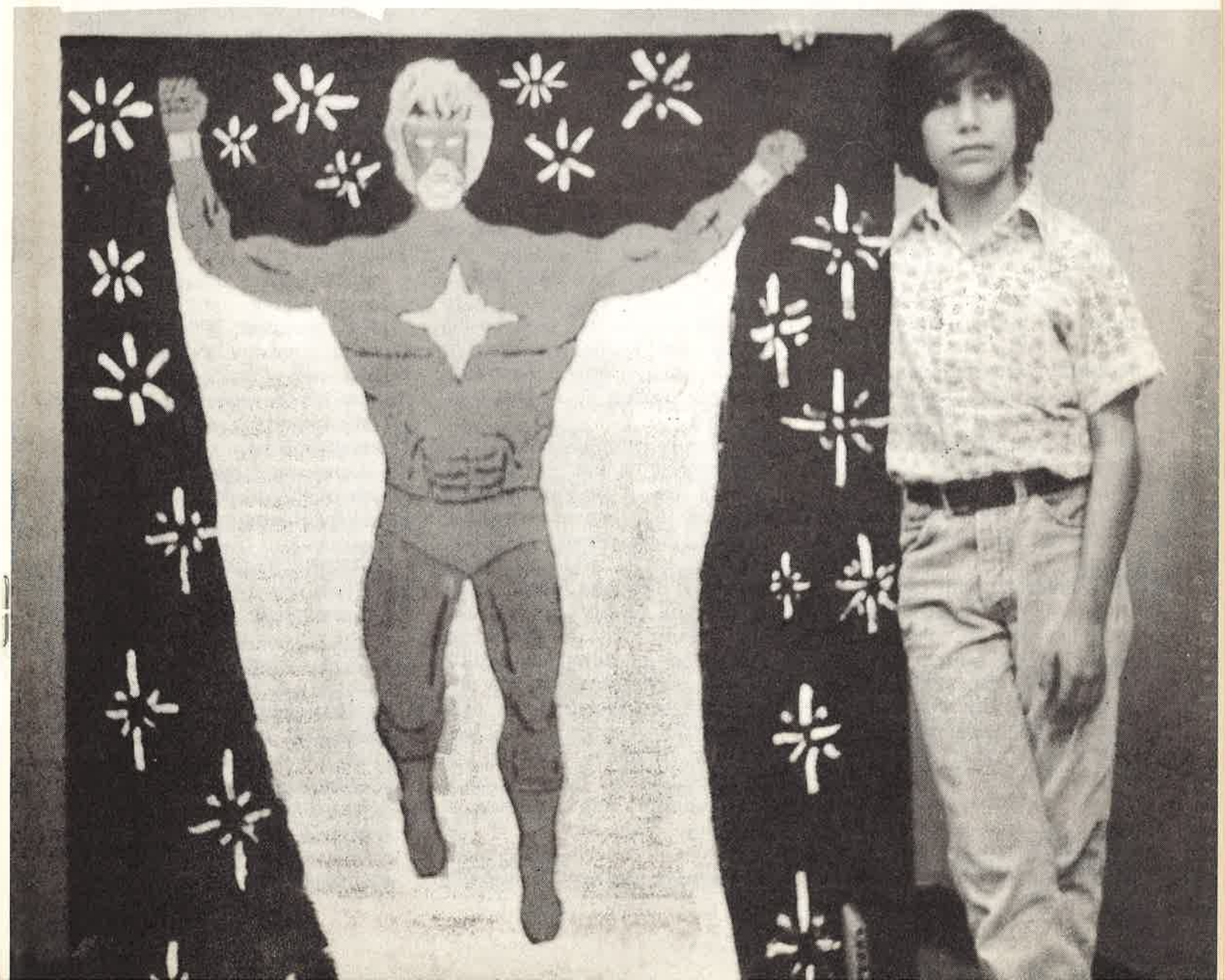
Bob Sievert

I was very impressed by Louis Paller, a sixth grader, when he first approached me in the bunker-like halls of C.S. 232 in the Bronx. He had seen a mural I had done with a "problem student" that consisted of a darkened city with many super-heroes cavorting through the night.

Louis began by saying, "Excuse me, sir," and I was immediately hooked. He went on to explain that he and several other friends had a comic book club and wanted to work with me on a mural. I agreed to meet with them on my lunch hour (and theirs).

At first the work went rather routinely. We sketched super-heroes and talked a lot. Then Susan Opotow, a guidance teacher and photographer who worked in the school, gave us ten sheets of tri-wall she had used in an exhibit. On these sheets, approximately 3' x 4', they sketched and painted their super-heroes, using acrylic "vivid" enamels. When the painting was done, we cut about half of the figures into three-quarter silhouette using a power sabre saw.





Letters that Can't Be Delivered

Alan Ziegler

For most people, the receipt of an important personal letter is more anxiously anticipated than the latest best-seller. The best-seller is generally read and discarded, the letter usually re-read and carefully put away. How many people walk into bookstores with the same look of hopeful expectation they give to the mailman slowly knitting his way down the street?

"Non-writers" will more likely have a meaningful experience with language in the process of writing a letter than by setting down a few lines of verse. Even for "writers," letters are often crucial—many use letter-writing to explore ideas and images, or as a cure for writer's block, and collections of letters by writers contain some of the strongest personal writing.

"Letter-poetry" is a form that combines the compelling appeal of letters with poetry.

Letter-poems take some ambiguity from writing by providing an "audience" on which to focus. Knowing who (or what) you are communicating with can help unearth writing material. There is much in our day-to-day experience with the objects around us that goes uncommunicated, and there are feelings that never get expressed to people who died.

In these "Letters That Cannot Be Delivered," the "recipient" chosen establishes the poem's environment. The recipient can be anything or anyone who couldn't in reality receive the letter; I've found that this limitation makes for more interesting writing (although there are cases when a strong letter-poem can be written to a relative or friend one has been separated from).

I've had successful letter-writing sessions with groups ranging from third grade to adult. Once a group gets the general idea from hearing a few samples and (in some cases) is convinced that it is not too "silly" to write a letter to a car, tree, or dead person, almost everyone finds that they have something to say to the world around them and /or the people who lived before. One of poetry's functions is to provide a connection between the writer and his/her environment and/or feelings; letter-poems facilitate this process by making a direct link.

I classify letter-poems into four "audience-groupings"—Letters to objects (cars, windows, garbage cans, etc.); Letters to non-human organic things (trees, volcanoes, animals, etc.); Letters to people who have died; and Letters to figures from history or literature (Columbus, Adam and Eve, Hunchback of Notre Dame, etc.).

It is usually important that students select a recipient they have strong feelings about, be they feelings of attraction, repulsion, or curiosity. This is their chance to communicate with anybody or anything. They can ask all the questions they want, and actually get answers—because the next step is for them to write replies to their letters. A variation is to pass the letters around and have others write the answers (except for those who wrote to dead relatives or friends). An exciting frill would be actually to mail the reply-poems when they are written by others.

With young kids, I've found it helpful to ask them to imagine that they have a "magic postage stamp" which can send letters to anything, even back in time. Many love to draw their version of the stamp.

Letter-poems provide outlets of communication and expression when the post office and telephone company are inadequate. Even with "real" letters, sometimes it's the writing of the letter that's important, even if it is not actually mailed.

Here are some comments on each of the categories, and an anthology of letter-poems.

LETTERS TO OBJECTS

These are the most accessible, and the possibilities are as varied as the objects in the universe. Inanimate objects evoke "human" qualities, especially in our relationships with them. The writers reveal a lot, particularly in the replies: the window that says, "The only time I move is when someone breaks me," or the car that complains, "What bothers me is when people push on my pedals to make me go faster. Then before you

know it they're pressing me to stop."

Theater improvisations can grow out of these letters (or vice versa), consisting of dialogues between students and objects.

LETTERS TO NON-HUMAN ORGANIC THINGS

This is an offshoot of the letters to objects. Both these and the object letters can be connected with studies in other areas. For example, an ecology lesson can be combined with letters to and responses from various ecosystems or endangered species.

LETTERS TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE DIED

Children are able to write about death with insight, feeling, and sometimes humor. The older we get, the more uncomfortable a subject death becomes; one reason is that it tends to get hushed up around us when we are young. An important aspect of psychotherapy is opening up feelings that went unexpressed, often feelings of loss. Giving children an opportunity to write these letters affords them a chance to express such feelings while they are still close to them. It is certainly not the teacher's job to offer therapeutic interpretations, but we should provide a space for feelings to go. One student of mine had always put on a tough demeanor, never letting me near the tender side of his personality, until he got the chance to write a letter to his grandmother.

The reply letters can include memories the "recipient" had of the writer; this can turn out to be an exercise in memory and self-perception.

(I provide an alternative to children who do not want to write to dead people.)

LETTERS TO FIGURES FROM HISTORY

If students write to people like Columbus, you might suggest that they describe what America and the world are like now, what has happened in the intervening years. The writers would have to keep in mind that Columbus didn't know about T.V. and cars, so they would have to exercise their descriptive powers. The reply letters could include their perceptions of what life was like in the past. Another alternative would be to have the figures from history or literature write each other, for example—Columbus to the Indians, and a reply; or the hunchback of Notre Dame to Frankenstein, and a reply.

I've not done too much work in this area, but these letter-poems could be used in conjunction with history or literature lessons. Did I hear someone say something about a series of "Bicentennial Letter-Poems"?

POSTSCRIPT

Once I was scurrying around the room while fifth graders were doing letter-poems, and I came across a girl on the rack of writer's block. She just couldn't come up with a letter. I reminded her that every previous time I had been to the class, she had started out with the blank piece of paper and had ended the period with a poem filling that paper. I asked her where the poems had come from. She pointed to her head. I pointed out that we had reason to believe that right at that moment there was another poem hiding out. She nodded, perked up, and started writing:

DEAR POEM,

Where are you?
I've been looking
for you all day long
why won't you come
out? What is wrong
with you.
Now what am I
going to do?

LYNETT

(the poem replies)
DEAR LYNETT,

Here I am inside your head.
I won't come out because
you're thinking too hard
try not to think hard
and then I may come
out.

(By Lynett Sandio,
Atlantic Ave. School,
Lynbrook)

LETTERS TO OBJECTS

DEAR CANDY BAR,

I like the way you taste, and love to hear you crunch. I like the way you melt in my mouth, not in my hands. I admire your looks, so nice and neat, but when I get through you're all over my mouth and on my hands, you look terrible. I love you with nuts, mostly almonds. Most of your admirers are children, they gobble you up so fast you can't see who's going to eat you!!

DEAR TRACEY,

When I read your letter I cried because now I know I am loved. It is true that they gobble me up. But now I know I am loved. I AM FINALLY, REALLY LOVED!

by Tracey

TO THE YO-YO,

If you can do skin the
cat how come you don't look
like a razor, or rock the
baby can you still
do rock the baby, boy
you don't look like
a rocking chair, there
is something strange.
Last year the butterfly
said to me to stop spinning
me and the butterfly
is even stranger than
I thought and my stomach
spins around like you.
Next year write me a
letter back please.

(the yo-yo answers)

Next year if you buy me please
do not do walk the dog that is the
worst trick. It puts scratches in
me, or drop me.

your friend,
the yo-yo

—William Lewis 4th grade
Atlantic Avenue School

DEAR BLACKBOARD,

I can't stand you. Everyday I come to school and I have to wash all the chalk dust off you. You repay me by having homework assignments waiting for me. Don't you care about anybody? Do you know how much ink I waste everynight I go home? You have no consideration for anybody. But you know what, you must be very lonely watching all the kids pass you by year after year. So I apologize for all the things I said.

Your friend,
Reuben

DEAR REUBEN,

I'm sorry I show you no consideration. I'm sorry I give you homework and make you waste ink. You see it's my only way to communicate with you. If there was any other way with you I would use it. I'm very lonely. Do you know how it feels to just sit and watch people grow into maturity and you can't participate? It's happening now. Just think how you were in 7th grade. You were just a child. For three years I watched you grow into a man. All that time I wanted to lead you and guide you the right way. The only way was to give you homework. I hope you will forgive me. See you in school.

Write soon,
Blackboard.

P.S. Don't use so much water tomorrow, because it gives me the snuffles.

By Reuben Jenkins, 9th grade
Wagner Jr. High

DEAR MR. NUMBER

Sometimes I feel sorry for you.
When people write you on the
blackboard, they erase you, and you
die. You must really feel bad. But
sometimes you're lucky like when
you're on a clock or a football shirt,
you stay there forever. But when
people erase you, I'd like to erase
them. Please write back to me.

P.S. Do the big numbers boss you around?

Valerie

DEAR VALERIE,

Thank you for having some feeling
for me. It does feel bad to be
erased, especially when the people
do it hard. Yes, the bigger numbers
always boss us around. One time
a ten was acting like a big shot to me
and I ripped his zero in half.

From
Mr. Number

By Valerie Briguglio
5th grade

LETTERS TO NON-HUMAN ORGANIC THINGS

DEAR VOLCANO,

Why do you blow your boiler like my mother when she has it up to nowhere but in the air. When my mother is like a volcano her lava is made of throwing shoes, getting hit with a belt. I am asking for advice to avoid my mother's volcanic eruption.

Arnold

DEAR ARNOLD,

Tell the truth to her if she asks questions and if you like, then run and run to avoid your mom's volcanic eruption.

Sincerely yours,
Mt. Vesuvius

By Arnold Sparrock
5th Grade
P.S. 11, Brooklyn

DEAR TOBACCO,

O tobacco, you destroyed my mother
You ruined her life, & now she's gone
She'll never be back, all because of you
You drove her into smoking you
but not of her own free will
I want you destroyed
stop bringing death to all.

Michele

DEAR MICHELE,

It's not my fault believe me.
Man has made me into a cigarette.
I'd like to grow free
but man takes over me.
I hate death and want to eliminate it.
They saw me off & add chemicals too
They set me on fire & let me burn
Do you think I like being smoked?
I try hard not to be made into a cigarette
I want to grow as free as I please
But I can't, forgive me. Yours truly

Tobacco

By Michele Ondey
7th Grade
Wagner Jr. High

DEAR BIRD,

I can't touch you, but I can feel you.
When I watch you soaring through
the sky, my heart goes with you
and my feelings, but not myself.
I wish I could do the same
but I can't, so I let my insides
go instead.

Love, Rina

DEAR RINA,

It's a beautiful feeling to
soar. But sometimes I wish I could
walk and run, jump and learn.
You should be happy as you are.
And I will continue to love what
you do and you can continue
to love what I do.
And then we will always be content.

Love, Seagull

by Rina Rich, 7th grade
Wagner Jr. High

Dear Danny Boy,

I wonder how
it was being a dog it must
have been good. How
in the world did you
get hit by a train
why didn't you
move out of the
way of the train I felt really bad
when the fruitcake cop had
to shoot you but that was
only to put
you out of agony

Bye Bye!!!

by Robert Dreste—5
Atlantic Ave School

LETTERS TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE DIED

DEAR GRANDFATHER,

I am just writing a few lines to tell you how everything is. I am so sad you died that I am disguised. I remember the toys you brought me but they are too small for me to play with and I remember the red Easter suit you bought for me but I had to give it to my little brother. Everytime I think of you it looks like I turn pale with fear. I feel like I am a ghost or I sometimes feel like I am in the grave. I will pray that I will not fear death because you told me before you died, "Titus, don't fear me."

Love, Titus

DEAR GRANDSON,

I like the letter you gave me. It was fine. I remember how you would go to stores and carry my bags, and you would come when I called you and bring me water in a glass. Please write back to tell me how things are. How big are you? Tell my son (your father) to write me, OK? I feel like I am alive in this patch of dirt grave. I hope you don't fear me. OK, please.

Love, Grandfather

By Titus Dixon, 5th Grade
P.S. 11, Brooklyn

DEAR GRANDFATHER,

I am very sorry that you died. You were very nice and you used to buy franks, ice tea, hamburgers, cookies, toys. You were mean when you beat me with an ironing cord. The ironing cord was bad but the slipper was worse because when you wind up and throw it hurts. You did that because I did bad. I feel very sorry that you're not around. Sometimes you bought me a lot of seven forty seven. Readers, if you'd of lived around here you'd have known him. Or if you lived on Nostrand, because he went to all the clubs.

By Lionel Brown, 5th Grade
P.S. 11, Brooklyn

DEAR UNCLE CHARLIE,

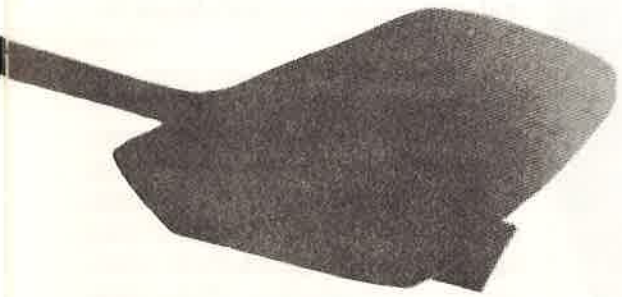
I wish we could play cards like we used to, and play with my barbie town house. And go to Manhattan in the summer, and buy me some cotton candy. I can still remember when it melted in my mouth. And we went to Coney Island and rode the ferris wheel. And you liked the smell of the fresh flowers. Remember the time you liked to tuck me in and kiss me good night. And on school days you would get me up and give me my breakfast and take me to school and get good reports on my reading. Well I can't say more, goodbye and good luck in the heavenly sky.

Your Niece Jewel Humphrey, 5th Grade
P.S. 11, Brooklyn

DEAR GRANDMA,

I should have written you
a year from now, so I could
tell you what was happening.
Things are just terrible
because everybody is
crying,
why did you have to die
NOW!
I am really mad because everybody is crying
and I'm not.
You can't blame me for that
can you?
I guess I wasn't crying
because you really don't
have to cry you just have
to think how it feels
without you.

Love, Elizabeth



DEAR ELIZABETH,

It's not my fault
that I died,
I didn't want to
you know.

Lots of love,
Grandma

By Elizabeth O'Leary,
4th Grade
Atlantic Avenue School

TO HERMAN PAT CINGISER,

I remember when we played cards.
And when I pushed you on the swing
with a back and front seat.
Herman Pat Cingiser is my grandfather.
He died in 1974 at 3:00 o'clock in June.
My mon and grandmother were five minutes late
to the hospital. We all cried.
My mother called my cousins and Karen answered.
My mother was crying,
and she hung up quietly.
And was the first one to find out.

By Lauren Treistman
3rd Grade
Atlantic Ave. School

DEAR UNCLE ARTHUR,
Everyone was quiet after you went away.
I know you only from stories.
I can imagine that day in 1917
When you left Pittsburgh
and the cool clean grass
Only to die from poisonous gas
To keep the world safe for democracy
In World War One.

By Edward Doubek, 7th Grade
Wagner Jr. High

LETTERS TO PEOPLE FROM HISTORY

A POEM ABOUT THE MAGIC STAMP

I wanted to send a letter to George Washington but Abe Lincoln got it instead. When I got the letter back the stamp said, "When am I going to get a vacation?" Then I wrote to George Washington again and he got it. When he wrote back he told me that the life in 1776 is terrible. Then he said that he can't write anymore because he has to fight the British for the hundredth time and the magic stamp is on his vacation.

—Jeanine—3rd grade
P. S. 197, Brooklyn

RECHANNELING NEGATIVE ENERGY

Dan Cheifetz

I had explained the concept of "brainstorming" to my class of sixth graders at P. S. 86 in Jamaica, Queens. I had talked about how corporations and government agencies sometimes generated new ideas by putting a group of people in a room together, giving them a problem and encouraging them to shoot out ideas as fast as they occurred to them. I now assigned the class the task of coming up with as many alternate uses as they could for the metal paper clip I was holding up. They began slowly:

"You mean, like a hair pin?" a girl said tentatively.

"Good!" I said. "Like this." I shaped the paper clip into a jagged hair pin, then wrote the word on the blackboard. "What else?" Nothing came.

"Remember what I said about 'piggy-backing'—playing off someone else's idea? What does a hair pin make you think of?"

"A hair clip," another girl volunteered.

"Right!" I said, writing. "What else?"

"You could make an ear-ring with it."

"You sure could."

"A key ring too."

"A tie pin."

The ideas now began to come so fast, I had trouble keeping up with them on the blackboard.

"Fish hook."

"You could make an animal shape with it."

"Let's call that a . . . a shape-maker," I said, writing it down.

"A tweezer."

"Terrific!" I was delighted with their momentum. "Keep going, and remember, you can be as far out as you want."

"A tire popper."

The class laughed. The contributor was a freckled twelve-year-old boy, with a wide-mouthed clown face, like Raggedy Andy's. He was often a ring-leader in disrupting the class with flash witticisms. I hesitated. The class watched to see if I would put this on the list. So did their teacher,

Mrs. Gruber.

"You said, anything we could think of," the boy said innocently.

"Sure," I said. "Why not? It's a use." I wrote it on the blackboard.

"Football popper," immediately added one of the boy's cronies.

"Balloon popper," said another boy. I said with irony that they had certainly grasped the piggyback concept, and added the words to the list. Now the flood gates opened:

"Pillow ripper."

"A tongue torturer."

"You can pick a lock with it."

"Sure are a lot of crooks in this room," I said, writing as fast as I could. The class enjoyed that. Now their entire attention was riveted on the growing list. Some of the girls got into the anti-social mode:

"A people pincher."

"Voodoo doll pin." This contributor was a tiny, dark-faced, quite shy Italian girl with intense eyes. She had rarely spoken before.

The excitement in the room grew. There was a sense of liberation and, a touch of hysteria. The list swung back and forth between useful ideas and outlaw implements: And, "good" vs "bad" distinctions to one side, their ideas grew increasingly complex and rich:

"A nose ring."

"Sling shot."

"Eye putter-outer."

"Holder upper of my daddy's underpants."

"Grenade pin puller outer."

"Antenna for my putt-putt mobile."

"Bubble gum machine penny stealer."

I told them I was amazed at how imaginative they were. They were impressed with themselves, too. I had done this same paper clip exercise with adults, with good results. But in variety and sheer playful resourcefulness, the kids had far outdone them. I had wanted to open them up to the idea that infinite possibilities could spring from even mundane starting points, and I was surprised and happy at the result.

I had been transplanted to P. S. 86 this year from P. S. 129 in Harlem. The Harlem school had had a large, many-windowed "TV room" which was turned over to my use, and I had worked in creative dramatics and related arts with small groups of twelve to fourteen children, selected from two classes. But P. S. 86 was overcrowded and had no free rooms I could use. So I had to work with entire classes—thirty-five to forty kids in a room—and had to redesign my program accordingly.

The class of fourth graders to which I was assigned at P.S. 86 presented no problem at all. They were lively children, but also disciplined and responsive enough so that I could involve them smoothly in movement activities and creative dramatics games. But my other class, of sixth graders, was another matter, with a substantial group of disrupters that I knew would make life difficult. Not chronic troublemakers with bad behavior problems, just kids who couldn't handle the freer, more open-ended atmosphere my work introduced.

I began with a game in which they were to move around the room and respond physically to a word or phrase I would throw out—"Giant!" . . . "Angry!" . . . "Circus parade!", etc. After they got the idea, I tapped some of the children on the shoulder as they passed me as a signal to call out their own transformation word or phrase to the class. Knowing they were unused to such activity in the classroom, and aware of their number, I carefully set certain rules in advance, such as: no touching each other, move in one direction, stay in your place and don't crowd the person ahead of you.

But immediately, some of the children began to make fun of the exercise, giggling and shouting to each other, pushing and punching and generally sabotaging the game. I stopped them, warned that we couldn't do this kind of activity unless they obeyed the rules, and tried again. It was better, but not much. For the ringleaders, it was too good a chance to play class anti-hero, showing how much they disdained this "little kid" stuff, and how "hip" and defiant they could be. For others, it was a chance to win some extra attention. They encouraged each other to act up and the disruptive mood escalated until it was impossible to continue. Blocked in this, I tried other, less active exercises and was more successful. But the disrupters continued to generate static and made it difficult to keep the class focused on anything for very long.

Reflecting on these kids, I realized that underneath their resistant behavior was a lot of anger and frustration. Anger and frustration at the schoolroom regimentation, the often droning, rote work they had to do, the compartmentalizing of their lives into "work" and "play." Often, indeed, angry at life in general. I suspected that many were from homes where discipline was harsh and the parent-child relationship distant and designed mostly to keep the child "in his place." Their immature behavior stemmed from their not being allowed to be kids often enough, with the freedom kids need to develop responsibility for their own actions. It seems paradoxical that when I offered them more of a chance to be kids, they used the opportunity to disrupt. But of course what I wanted them to do required a structure, and what *they* wanted was complete freedom, a chance to go all the way to anarchy. Removing the strict controls from above threw them into conflict. Having few inner controls, they felt compelled to rebel and disrupt.

In any case, I had a practical problem. Working with small groups, I could always threaten to

send an unruly child back to his class—and did so if he or she persisted. But not in this situation. And I didn't want to throw out the disrupters even if I could: some of them were among the most imaginative children in the class. Their resourcefulness and wit shone through many of the very things they thought up to cause problems.

The results of our "brainstorming" project showed me a good direction to follow. The disrupters in the class were the ones who had contributed the anti-social uses of the paper clip. When they saw I would accept their responses, they were encouraged to express their usually forbidden aggressive impulses—but this time in ideas, not in misbehavior. When we made their ideas part of the creative enterprise we were all engaged in, they could experience the role of contributor and creator, rather than outsider and disrupter. It was a way for them to move into the mainstream, yet preserve their prized status of rebel. It was also a new way for them to get attention, and more satisfying than being disruptive because they didn't have to feel guilty.

The following week was Hallowe'en and I followed up our "brainstorming" with a similar activity. I suggested we make a "witch's brew" together, with everyone throwing ideas for ingredients into the pot. I drew the outline of a big cauldron on the blackboard.

"What might you want to put into this yucky, poisonous witch's brew?" I asked them. "Maybe a dead rat." I wrote "dead rat" inside the pot outline. "What else?" As a way of having them take more responsibility for their ideas, I asked that each contributor come up, state his idea, then write the words inside the pot as I had.

I had some apprehensions about this project. The school is strictly run and located in a conservative middle class area that included many families holding strong religious convictions. I was afraid some of the kids would come up with "bad" words, especially ones describing elimination functions that kids are so interested in. These might be reported to the front office of the school and to parents as well. But beyond this practical problem, I thought it better in any case to impose some limits, so no one would have to worry about getting carried away.

"Have fun," I said, "But stay away from words that would really embarrass anybody—okay?"

It started out mildly with "chocolate covered spider eggs" . . . "a fly's eyes" . . . "Prestone Anti-Freeze" then got stronger with "my brother's dumb head" . . . "snot" . . . "finger-nail dirt." Then the most self confident of the disrupters, a handsome, curly headed Greek boy raised his hand, came to the front and took the chalk. Before facing the board to write his idea, he turned on his fullest, slyest smile. He flashed the smile at his best friend sitting in the front row, at the class in general, then at me. The smile said, "Watch *this* one, folks!"

The teacher in me quailed: Oh, oh, here it comes. I'm an idiot to have set this up. But the kid still in me was excited by the prospect of the forbidden almost to be publicly revealed.

The boy waited, savoring the attention and the suspense.

"Okay," I said to him. "Get it over with."

"He turned and wrote in the pot: *Waste products*. He looked around in triumph. The class giggled. I felt relieved.

While the pot was being further filled (including "rusty nails" . . . "my report card" . . . "Frankenstein's hair"), their teacher, Mrs. Gruber, had been rummaging among the books in the rear of the room. She found the book she wanted, came forward and pointed out to me the boiling cauldron witches' scene in "MacBeth." It was a real inspiration. I thanked her and talked to the class about how great writers like Shakespeare used "nasty" elements such as those we had been playing with to portray the dark, mysterious, forbidden side of life.

"Let's see what Shakespeare put in *his* witch's brew," I said, and read them some of the passage:

"Fillet of a fenny snake
In the cauldron boil
and bake
Eye of newt and toe
of frog
Wool of bat and tongue
of dog
Adder's fork and
blind-worm's sting
Lizard's leg and
howlet's wing
For a charm of powerful
trouble
Like a hell broth
boil and bubble. . ."

The class was lucky in having a dedicated, empathic teacher like Mrs. Gruber. As time went on, I could see she was making a lot of progress in generating a spirit of class pride and cohesion, a spirit that helped pacify and involve her disruptive kids. She used a combination of strict controls (including a form of at-desk calisthenics when restlessness rose), flexibility and providing outlets for both their energy and their dissatisfaction. For example, every week or so, she set aside a period in which the children could freely complain about what bothered them in the school. The children felt her caring and dedication, I think. I found them progressively easier to work with, and was encouraged to do bolder projects with them.

At one session, I taught them how to "communicate" in gibberish; then how to use it expressively, to ask a question, for example, like "Frotgas witoglio mystat wibstudio?" I asked them to find a partner and talk to him or her in

gibberish—not just making funny noises but pretending to have a real conversation, or mock-real conversation, in which they would try to communicate feeling without words. They did fairly well at this, some of them keeping it going for several minutes. Then I suggested they have a real conversation with their partners—I gave them some topics—and pretend to have the conversation turn into an argument. This was to be followed by making up and being friends again.

They did quite well, with the usual disrupters as involved as anyone else. The volume of noise rose when the pretend arguments got into high gear, and I signaled that it was time to make up again.

Next, I wanted them to have a pretend fight with their partners, in slow motion and without touching. They could choose what kind of fight they would have—karate, with clubs or spears, boxing, whatever. I underscored that there was to be absolutely no physical contact, and to keep it in slow motion, "as if they were in a slow motion movie."

This exercise was taking something of a chance but with the built-in controls, and with Mrs. Gruber and I monitoring the action, I thought they could handle it. A pair of boy combatants got carried away and began wrestling, but I quickly stopped them and asked them to follow the rules, which they did. After a time, many of them were able to work out reciprocal movements with each other so that their fight could change and develop, with first one winning, then the other. Some of them, much more accustomed to play-acting the violent, abrupt actions of TV and movie heroes, had a hard time at first with the slow motion and the sustained, stylized movements it demanded. But most of them seemed absorbed in trying it, and they got better as they went along. None of them seemed interested in making fun of what we were doing, or trying to break it up.

The subject was combat, but the experience for me was more like being in the center of a boisterous, somewhat awkward mass ballet.

Ego psychologists say that it takes energy to keep from expressing aggressive impulses. When a person becomes conscious of his hostile impulse through verbalizing it, or expressing it through movement, the impulse is "neutralized", in Freud's term. With neutralization, energy is released and can be directed to other ends.

The kind of activities I've described have both an atmosphere of acceptance of the usually forbidden thought, yet also have a reassuring structure, with definite objectives and definite limits. Within this atmosphere and structure, the child can dare to express aggressive feelings without believing he's "bad" for having them—after all, he sees that others have them too. And without feeling he must "act out" destructively. It helps him grow when he understands that his thoughts are not actions, and that he can control and limit his hostile impulses. (For example, adding "waste products" to our witch's brew helped the Greek boy express a forbidden impulse, yet he didn't feel compelled to use the four-letter-word equivalent.)

The child who holds back his hostile thoughts is also holding in his creative ones. If you allow him to express the one, within reassuring limits, you open up the possibility that he will be able to express the other. My work with the sixth graders excited me with the possibilities of helping kids rechannel their 'negative' energies into creative uses.

Linguistics and Creative Writing

Meredith Sue Willis

The 1975-76 school year in New York began with a teachers' strike, loss of funds and personnel, and enormous reorganization and relocation of teachers. At P.S. 75 on Manhattan's Upper West Side, where I am a member of the Teachers & Writers Collaborative arts team, one result was an influx of teachers new to the school. One of the new teachers, Mrs. Hampton, expressed an interest in having a writer in her classroom. My usual method is either to do work with the whole class or to take out small heterogeneous groups to do writing, make plays or movies, etc. But this teacher had a very specific slot in mind for me; she ran a tightly organized traditional classroom, and her most advanced reading group had finished all its basic materials already. I was faintly insulted because I think of writing as something that should be a part of all children's lives rather than a sugary dessert for the kids who finish their real work too quickly. On the other hand, this was an opportunity to try my language history mini-course on some third and fourth graders. I was a little afraid this group might be too young, but they were presented to me as intellectual prodigies by school standards, and I thought, a little belligerently, All right, let's see what they can do with some honest-to-goodness intellectual content.

My very first meeting with the group included an assignment of some "free" writing—whatever comes into your head. One boy, Stefan, went into a terrible panic because he didn't know the rules for succeeding in this kind of assignment: "What do you mean? What do you want? I can't do that, what do you want me to *do*?" Rachelle, on the other hand, smiling silkily, said, "I can write pages and pages any time I want to." I tried to reassure Stefan; I suggested to Rachelle that she prove it; I was very eager to get on to imparting all the knowledge I had outlined in my mind.

The first lesson was on the difference between thinking and talking, talking and writing. My colleague Karen Hubert uses these processes as a basis for college composition courses. I asked the children to think for thirty seconds with their eyes closed. Did they think in words, pictures, something else? Did they hear voices? We discussed the three processes; which is fastest, which slowest, which does a baby do first? Which would they rather do? This was about evenly divided between thinking and talking; writing had no takers. I wasn't surprised, because writing is a consciously, sometimes painfully acquired skill whose exercising is strenuous at least. We had another thirty seconds of thinking, but this time the assignment was to hear a voice. Some talked to themselves, some heard their mothers giving instructions, some heard their own voices giving orders to their little sisters or brothers. Next we took turns talking nonstop for a minute, and then discussed the differences in people's styles of talking: some spoke rapidly, some repeated themselves, Michael talked exclusively about his girlfriend from camp. I introduced a game—to see how much we could remember of what someone else said and write it down. There were groans of course—being a success in school didn't seem to have any correlation to a love of writing. I tried to do the assignment, too, and found it harder than I had expected; another person's train of thought is highly idiosyncratic and personal, but one object of the exercise is to try and capture on paper something of a personality and speaking style.

The final assignment of the day was the free or automatic writing that terrified Stefan so much. This time the pattern and tone to be captured are the writer's own. The assignment is to write for a period of time, say five minutes, whatever pops into your head: words, sentences, fragments, names, voices, whether they seem to make sense or not. The only rule is to keep your pencil moving, even if you are only writing the last word over and over. I made this kind of writing a regular feature of our language group, and later, as the children became more comfortable with the whole idea, they wrote some interesting pieces. But that first day Ari made a simple list of words: "Together pickle ice cream thinking gone leave boat song music instrument electricity lesson sue." A good-boy effort to produce the "thoughts" requested by the teacher without exposing himself. Jennifer's piece on the other hand ressembled more closely the activity of a wandering classroom mind. Everyone laughed when she read aloud: "So what. Big deal. Marylin's going to kill me. I took her pencil. Brother. Help. Today is October 3, 1975. On Friday my aunt from Ireland is coming. I hate writing my heading."

This kind of loose, freely associative writing style is not actually the same thing as thinking; writing is writing, thinking is thinking, and sounds are sounds. "Meow" is not what the cat says truly, nor is James

Joyce's wonderful cat imitation in *Ulysses*, "Mrkgnao!" This is one of many particular effects possible in writing, and one of the main points I wanted to get across to my group was how many things you can do with written words. Jennifer's stream of consciousness makes plenty of sense even when her sentences don't seem complete or sequential. I wanted to slip into writing and avoid the "Once upon a time" narrative style that so many children use when they write. This style characterizes both some excellent fairy tales and a lot of inferior books for children; naturally children employ it when they write themselves, but I wanted from the outset to offer various options, a selection of the many kinds of things writing can do. Children as well as adults can learn different levels of style in their writing just as they already know to speak in one way to adults, one way to other children. They can learn to try different styles on paper, to observe and write down the way people talk, the way the images flow through their own minds. Kimberly wrote, "Cat. I can't do this. What I Why What Ha I can't. This is terrible, terrible, terrible. Dog. Poppy is my dog. Why not. Period. When is this over? What!!!"

The second week I sent the children out in the halls of P.S. 75 to spy, to write down the exact words said by people in their natural habitat. This was a very popular exercise in which they listened at classroom doors and looked special to other children who would demand, "What are you doing? Did you write down what I said? Hey, she wrote down what I said!" The object is simply to write down how people talk, mostly to one another, as opposed to our writing down what we remembered from the one-minute monologues. They trickled back to my room by ones and twos, full of their experience at spying. I had those who wanted to (and most did) rewrite the conversations, which had been scribbled hastily. Half of them were to use quotation marks and half the colons of dramatic dialogue. My diary notes for that day say, "Everyone got the *play dialogue* convention at once; it is apparently more diagrammatic and clean than quotation mark writing. Stefan was the only one of eight who didn't do the whole thing perfectly. He's such a grave kid—seems to lack the courage to say he doesn't understand something, but his observation (not the rewrite of it) was one of the best, most *whole*, a real slice of life. "Move the paper up the wall," wrote Stefan as he spied on some children working in the corridor. "Do you like the painting? It's okay. Youre ennishalls is KK right? Right. You forgot to close the door. Oh man, how many lolypops you got? Gimme some. Ill paint your face. Leave us alone!" Jennifer and Diana spied on the Parents Association room, and Jennifer wrote, "I think this is a great one. How about double transfer? It's the double transfer. Um, now if I think that way—all right? Get everybody out. Which is easier? I really can't afford—You come to help us? You'll sort of keep the thing going." These scraps of conversation were interesting to me simply as answers to the question "What do children hear?" The half understood snatches from the Parents Room, for example, and also the things children do when adults aren't watching. Margaret wrote in part:

Kaye: (wiping off the kiss) That
was a fake kiss!
Tom: Right on!!!
John: YAHOOOO!
Hall: Echo
echo
echo

On the back of Jenny's spying dialogue I found some old homework copied:

English
There are three kinds of sentences. They are a statement, a question, and a command. Each type of sentence begins with a capital letter. A statement ends with a period (.) A question ends with a question mark (?) A command ends with a period or an exclamation mark (!)

Only three kinds of sentences in wonderful, flexible, rich English? What about sentences of excitement when you just can't stand the way grammar books distort grammar! What about when people are writing meditatively, neither stating nor commanding nor asking nor exclaiming? Some writers choose to indicate this mood with little strings of dots. In one of her free writings Margaret carried this mood-indicating-through-punctuation to an extreme, creating a total experience on her sheet of paper. Margaret (who wrote the stairstepped "echo" down her dialogue page above) with great satisfaction piled words on tops of words, some wispy and pale, others heavy and black. Lots of I HATES and Me Me Me in capitals and whole lines of exclamation points. It was unreadable, but I showed it to the group, and everyone was duly impressed by the energy, the visual expression of mood. Margaret's ethnic background is Chinese, and her work reminded me of the traditional calligraphy which requires the finest poem to be written in the most beautiful handwriting on a scroll that will often also include an exquisite ink painting behind or below the poem. Even in our alphabet style of writing the way a poem falls on a page is basic to its meaning, and in prose, too, there are important visual effects in lengths of paragraphs and frequency and intrusiveness of punctuation. How does the writer present his thoughts, broken by lots of stops? Are his sentences simple or convoluted?

I brought in an envelope full of colored slips of paper. On them were large punctuation symbols: ? ! ' ' . . . I asked first for a silly group poem made up

only of commands (Go suck an egg!/ Sit on it!) and then I had them draw punctuation symbols out of the envelope and write poems in which each line ends with the particular punctuation mark chosen. We talked a little about the moods represented by the marks, and the way questions indicate that there is probably a second party involved. Stefan wrote:

I wish I could fly . . .
If only I could fly . . .
Maybe I can . . .
I wonder a lot . . .
Maybe if I tried . . .

Margaret wrote a whole story in conversation, writing as usual certain words heavy and black for emphasis: "I don't ever want to see you again," said Amy. "Neither do I," said me. "I hate you," said Amy. "I hate you too!" said me. "Get out of here," said Mom. "*Both* of YOU!"

Working further with mood and style, I organized a sort of follow-the-leader game. One child acts the part of a tough guy, a snob, a teacher, etc. and then the others imitate the angry voice, the swagger. I had typed paragraphs from various sources which I asked them to imitate in writing. There was an advertisement for a furniture sale from the *Daily News*, a strongly conversational piece from Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, something from Virginia Woolf, part of a sports article. Not anything I would expect them to have read, and I asked them to continue or finish these stories just as we had done in the acting exercise. Their first reaction was that they would rather imitate with their bodies and voices than write with heads and pencils. After a grumbling start, though, several of them took the imitations quite seriously, and others did parodies. Some caught the actual vocabulary of the pieces while others used my excerpts as starters for stories of their own. I called the exercise "Writing the end of a story someone else started."

"She was wearing pink gauze —was that
possible? . . ."
. . . And was it possible was she dead . . .
Who is she is she who we think she is . . .
Wait a minute she is dead. It isn't
possible, the dress proves she isn't,
but she doesn't talk, but she's dead,
she's a ghost.

—Rachelle

". . . The One Who causes things, Whoever
he may be, I have now had my fill of
life . . ."
. . . At least, I think I did. Maybe not.
Maybe it will go on and on until I am
one hundred and fifty six. I am
worried.

—Jennifer

"This elegant suite features
a richly quilted sofa, love-seat
and chair . . ."
. . . It also has a coffee table
and a free china teaset. And it
also has a rocking chair with a
wicker seat. It also has a
chair and under one of the seats
has a hundred dollars. Whoever gets
it gets to keep it.

—Jenny

At the next meeting I read a section of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and asked the children to write down some of what they remembered and then to form their own poems out of this raw material. There wasn't much discussion—I wasn't concerned with having them analyze the poem. I wanted them to mull over some of the powerful imagery. They wrote:

A heap of snow piled high.
A rat crept through a tiny hole.
My shadow under a rock.

—Ari

A rat crept into the room.
Testimony
What did you say about the testimony?

—Diana

The Rock is dry the dead
tree gives no shade the Red
Rock gives shade of none.
The cricket gives no
Relaxation the rock
is gone and everything
is too.

—Margaret

The rat sliming on his belly into the
Vegetation. Come under the rock with
me. I will show you something better
than your shadow in the morning.

—Jenny

The rat drags his slimy tail
beside me while I fish.

The sea nymphs have gone
away sleepy, so has the rat
all is quiet.

—Rachelle

*

The children seemed able to write in any style I suggested; they liked the experience of free writing—of putting their own personalities down in writing. At

the same time, what they liked even more was the "game" I tried to include in each week's lesson—the follow-the-leader imitation, the spying in the hall. I was feeling a restlessness in them, and I was a little restless myself. I had become so involved in styles and moods that I had let go all of my interesting business about language families and how languages change, so I changed gears, began talking about language from this other perspective. I began by asking them how language might have been invented, would cave men need language? At the mention of Cave Men there was a buzz: mammoths! *woolly* mammoths! saber-toothed tigers—but not dinosaurs! In my diary I wrote, "On to diachronic studies. Cave men and whether or not they could talk. First words—'clothes' 'tarpit' 'look!' 'fire'. Then we did some improvizations, trying to express something without words. We killed a mammoth and needed help bringing it back. Then added 'big' 'danger' 'hunt' and made up cave-man talk for these things, with lots of grunts, groans (Uga uga). I caused them to break into two groups, a fight around the campfire, then the two groups worked separately on new words, plans, etc. One group to capture the other. When they came together again, they couldn't talk anymore—they had different languages."

That was my big pedagogic point of the day, that when for one reason or another groups of people speaking the same language part company, over the years the languages change until they are mutually unintelligible. The children accepted my enthusiastic lecture with mild interest (the importance of it had stunned *me* when I first comprehended it), but they were much more involved in the improvisation, in which group was going to beat the other when the tribes had their war. We decided to show the rest of the class our play. Everyone noted down the new language and wrote secret messages to one another using the language as a code.

Meanwhile I handed out pages of a mystery language to send home to see if they could figure out what it was before I saw them again.

> Mag ic be me selfum soth-geiedd wrecan,
> sithas secgan, hu ic geswinc-dagum
> earfoth-hwile oft throwode,
> bitere breost-care gebiden hae be. . . .

I wrote in my diary, "Stefan, the young one, in a panic: I don't know how! I don't want to. Such a burdened kid, he seems to carry the whole world on his shoulders. . . ." Rachelle, on the other hand, appeared the next week with a suggested translation:

> Magic be myself
> with this second
> hearforth awhile
> bitter breast care,
> ground on ceiling
> a tall youth walks
> near night watch
> thin he be
> wearing my food
> seldom.

I revealed that the language wasn't German or Russian, but English, as it used to be before 1066 when the Norman-French conquered England. Rachelle had indeed picked up a number of words ("bitter breast-care") translated them correctly. I then read this one, which Michael guessed correctly:

> Faeder ure thu the eart on heofonum, si thin nama gehalgod. Tobecume thin rice. Gewurthe in willa on eorthan swa on heofonum. Ure geda-eghwamlican hlaf syle us to daeg. And forgyf us urne gyltas, swa swa we forgyath urum gyltendum. And ne gelaedthu us on costnunge, ac alys us of yfele. Sothlice.

"It's the Lord's Prayer!" he said. Rachelle informed me that since she is Jewish I shouldn't expect her to know that, and besides her family is moving to Israel. She did insist on writing a page of Hebrew letters for me. At this point I inquired and discovered that in this little group there were parents or grandparents represented speaking Greek, Swedish, Romanian, German, Gaelic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Hebrew. The first five of these languages, I told them, share a common ancestor with English (and Spanish and Italian and Latin) called Indo-European. Chinese has its own family, as does Hebrew. Hoping for some connection to the immigrant experience, I asked them to write something as if they had just come to this country, were just learning English. "Me looost," wrote Diana. "Mee want goo home. Find noo home. Want goo home! Cross borderrr, findd conntry of birth." Rachelle wrote, "Zeh dis is a vook. Dis vook es my diary. zl sveak such terrible englas vecause zl come vrom Zermany zhere zl live is veautiful. zl vike Zermany. Dis es me diary. So zoo ya vike me diary?"

Meanwhile we finished working out our caveman play, and presented it to the class. I don't know if the class grasped the didactic purpose; they laughed at the children sitting around the campfire saying "Zeh oo za er" and they liked the fight and capture scenes. Particularly popular was the invented insult word "Zuk" meaning stupid. The last thing I heard as I left the class and Mrs. Hampton was quieting them all down was "Zuk!" and "Zuk you!"

At this point Christmas vacation loomed before us, and Mrs. Hampton finally obtained a transfer back to her old school. The class was in turmoil: who would their new teacher be? What did it mean, that they were being deserted? My language history felt at a stalemate. For the two final sessions before the holidays I decided to finish a couple of ideas I had. The

lessons were rough; the children were quarrelsome and intolerant of one another, but individuals went into themselves for some interesting writing. I read "Jabberwocky" to them and discussed whether or not Lewis Carroll's famous poem was really English or not. It aroused quite a controversy. The vocabulary doesn't seem to be English, but yet you understand the narrative, the action is brilliantly clear:

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

What is vorpal? How do you galumph? From the context you think you know, at least. One of Carroll's invented words from this poem, "chortle," has actually entered the language and can be found in most dictionaries now. The words sound convincing, but more importantly, all the connecting words that hold English together are present: and, the, went, its, he.

Gyre and gimble I had an Alice!
Beware my friend of the borogoves!
I found my self in a coffin and I was
as dead as dead as can be as my ghost
appeared, I screamed and yelled and
yelled, My life is gone but I awoke
and I was safe. I am Alive. I look
at myself and I was old. It was hard to
believe, but I was Alive. What do
you think about that I was Alive!
Would you like to be old or young?
—Kim

My nose is dripping
like a runny stream that
is scared of the fish.

My foot hurts
like a hammer
that has been working
too hard.

My head feels like a
bowling ball that just
knocked down three hundred
pin.
—Jenny

Come to never ever land. And see the
beautiful pied piper. See beautiful
witches and ugly fairies. Fly in
water and swim in the damp air.
Charlie Brown is me and I am a comix
strip! Where parents are babies and
children are grown-ups. Where you come
out of the grave and die in being a baby
in graves stomach!
—Diana

I saw the Jabberwocky too . . .
His head was slain . . .
What an ugly sight. . . .
His head was dirty. . . .
His eyes poked out . . .
I was afraid of him, too . . .
I ran away so far away . . .
I couldn't come back . . .

I was lost in the woods . . . .
I was cold and hungry . . .
I didn't know which way to turn . . .
I didn't know which way to turn . . .
I was so scared to move. . . .
I froze to death and
that was that.
that was that
that was that.
that was that
that was that.
—Rachelle

The final week we did a translation. Translation combines many of the themes about how languages differ and what is truly good English. I provided the group with a word-under-word translation of a Federico Garcia Lorca poem called "El Niño Mudo." My version had lines like "Not it I want in order to speak; / me I will make with it a ring . . ." My assignment to the children was first one of grammar; put the poem in genuine English, with all the little words in the right places. Secondly they were to change the poem, to make it suit them, making big or little changes. Michael's version rivals a professional's closeness to the original in mood and meaning. Others like Kim and Diana found in it the kernel of their own personal poems.

The Mute Boy
The Boy searches for his voice.
He, the king of the crickets has it.
In a drop of water.
The boy looked for his voice.
I will make a ring
that will wear my silence
on its little finger.
The boy was looking for his voice
in a drop of water.
—Michael

The boy searched for his voice.
The boy searched for his voice in a
drop of water.
"I want to speak" said the boy.

The water echoed back, "I want to speak"
The boy has the power to speak
If he wants to speak he will speak.
The boy spoke

—Rachelle

The boy is searching for speech.
The king of crickets
has it in a can that is in a
drop of water. He looked and
looked for that drop of water.
My silence is my imagination.
My little fingers are my speech
language.

In a drop of water
the boy was looking for his
voice.

—Diana

The Boy without a Voice.
The boy searches for his voice he cannot find it. He has the power to be a king. In a drop of water he lost his voice. The boy says that he does not want it to speak of bad but of good. "All I want to do is to speak." The boy finds his voice. And lost and can not find his way home. The king of the crickets captured him. "I can speak!"
"I can speak!"

—Kim

*

My little language course ended arbitrarily. I had not been able to formulate all the connections as clearly as I wanted; I had not organized all the strands of grammar and history and style in one comprehensive system the way I intuitively perceive it. Still, the children did explore several ways of writing, and they experienced some complex poetry. For all of our fumbling and experimenting, I was heartened about my work when I came across another of the homework assignments on the back of a poem: "English. A noun is a word that names a person, a place, or thing. A verb is a word that tells what a person or thing does, did, or will do. Adjectives are words that describe something."

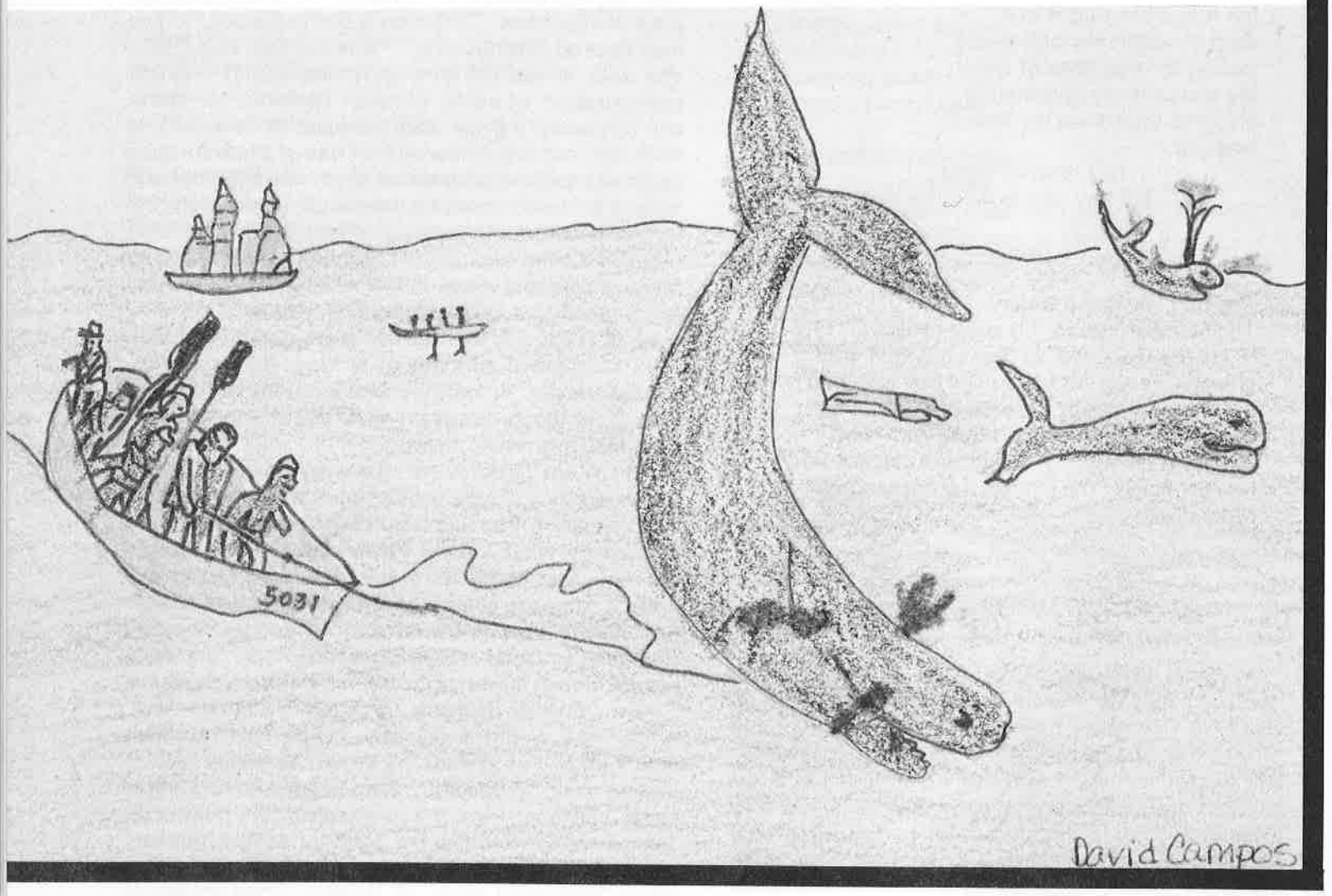
The more I think about it, the more convinced I become that the naming of parts of speech, the memorizing of grammatical definitions, is the wrong point of departure for the elementary study of language. This naming and defining appears seductively to correspond to the beginning of many disciplines; medical students for instance learn the names of the parts of the body before they can study diseases and their cures. But the analogy is false; all of us who speak English, whether we speak Standard English or one of the many dialects of English, have the basic rules of grammar internalized and at our disposal, *or else we could not speak*. Whether we can state the rules or not, we use them at all times. By the time we are four years old we know very well that "Dog bites man" is a distinct proposition from "Man bites dog." We use our knowledge of this distinction in our most petty dealings with one another. This is so basic we don't even think about it. We learn to use the shades of meaning represented by different verb forms to express precise ideas: "The man is biting the dog," "The man does so bite the dog," "Bite the dog, man!" But this skill is learned through practice, not through memorization of rules. Children certainly can speak and can easily transfer their language skills to writing skills without ever knowing that one of those forms is called the present progressive tense, one the emphatic form, the third the imperative mood. I believe strongly that knowing the parts of speech is not a building block in a child's education. Children perhaps need to practice speaking aloud in formal situations; they certainly need the skills of reading and writing; they need to read good literature in great variety; and they need to practice all kinds of writing, stories, poems, reports, letters. When they ask questions about their writing is the moment to give them any grammar rules that might help them.

This is not to imply that grammar is not important and interesting. I have lately begun to read and study a little about the function of grammar, and I am amazed by what I don't know—but then neither do the linguists. Linguists are in fact involved at the present time in some enormous controversies over just exactly how "parts of speech" do function. My example sentence "Man bites dog," by the way, would almost never occur in natural conversational English. English demands in certain situations "the" or "a". We would always say "some man" or "this man I know" or at least "A man." We have a need to particularize, to specify. "Man bites dog" is a newspaper headline. How the newspapers, the billboards, and television commercials have influenced our language, spoken and written and perhaps thought, is a whole fascinating study of its own. These topics, or the "how language was invented" idea would work in so well in the context of a classroom unit on prehistoric man, or newspapers, or advertising and product and environment. What children don't need is an abstract series of lessons about something they can already use in speech and need mostly to practice using in writing.

This is my basic premise: that the urge to speak on paper must come first, and then comes the eagerness to get the right word, the necessary form. In the course of writing something important to him, the child will ask for what he needs. Many children have no felt need of written grammar in their lives because they have not yet even experienced that incredible moment of realization: I can talk to myself and strangers through the written word.

Would You Kill a Porpoise for a Tuna Fish Sandwich?

Christine Smith



"Oh splendid, a writer in our class!" said Saul Rosenfeld, the fifth-grade teacher whose class I was to work with this year in P.S. 86. Was it my imagination, or were those forced smile-lines playing about his lips? "I was sort of hoping we'd get that funding for Environmental Studies." Realizing I might interpret this as a slight, Rosenfeld apologized. "No need, really, I understand," I said, "And I'd *rather* work with you and the class on something you could all get into and carry over into your other studies. Besides, writing can't come out of a vacuum. . . ."

It was true that I'd been thinking about animals all summer. . . . Two projects had even come to mind. One, a *Roach Ballet*. I'd already designed the costumes—corrugated cardboard strapped to the children's backs, pro-Keds on all their little feet. The other was to be a radio play, *The Mingled Destinies of Crocodiles and Men*, based on the fate of the nineteenth-century Austrian explorer Ludwig Ritter Von Hohnel at the jaws of killer crocodiles while in search of Africa's Last Great Lake. When I learned, however, we were to be confined to the classroom for our workshops, I settled on endangered sea mammals—something else that had been swimming around in my head.

Awhile back, I had received in the mail an assortment of educational materials from Zephyros, a learning exchange in San Francisco. Included with these were a booklet from Project Jonah designed to heighten children's whale and dolphin awareness and a comic explaining the slaughter of porpoises by the tuna industry. Also a full-sized wall poster of a baleen

whale. Underneath his stream-lined hull were printed statistics on the continued whaling and manufacture of whale goods around the world. The poster has remained on my wall. The horrifying statistics have never left my mind.

I visited the fifth-grade class again, devoted some time to warm-up writing exercises, and showed the booklets to Rosenfeld, who agreed to reproduce the material for the class. The project was launched.

I prepared myself with some notetaking in the sea mammals section of the Museum of Natural History and the reading of two books: *Whales and Dolphins* by Bernard Rockett and *Mind in the Waters* edited by Joan McIntyre of Project Jonah. The latter, which includes everyone from Homer to John Lilly, approaches the subject in much the same way Melville catalogued "everything you wanted to know about whales but were afraid to ask" in the preface and certain chapters of *Moby Dick*, infusing the reader with a sort of whale gestalt. Similarly, I wanted to examine with the class these awesome creatures from a number of angles—mythical and legendary as well as physiologically and ecologically.

I had meant what I said to Rosenfeld about new and different jumping-off points for writing. As a subject unto itself, "Creative Writing" is often of questionable worth, particularly to children whose home or academic needs staggeringly outweigh their need to comprehend the structural workings of a cinquain. Sure, I've pulled an arbitrary writing idea out of nowhere now and again, relevant to nothing in particular, but, as a writer, I crave a diet of new information and real live people's experiences and perspectives (even if they just come off the six o'clock news) to inspire me. Somehow, I often feel that if I'm asking kids to jump into imaginative writing after sitting in a classroom all day, I am somewhat obligated to bring the outside world in with me, to supplement their stash of ideas. Always with the hope, of course, that when I'm not there, they will have learned to be on guard for potential "material." Writer as perpetual student of life. . .

Anytime a teacher of writing takes into the classroom an idea that he would sit down and write about himself, he is that much more alive and worth listening to . . . a better salesman for his craft. . . .

Whales were first. An attentive group with cleared desks and folded hands received my opening address. I filled the blackboard with diagrams of different whales—humpbacks, fins, belugas and bottlenoses, rattling off the characteristics of each one. The children came to life with a barrage of questions. On blubber, blowholes, baleen instead of teeth, why whales don't get the bends at 4,000 feet . . . and testimonies of all their personal and vicarious whale adventures. Most of them from T.V. Let's face it. Whales are neat. Nearly every aspect of their existence comes right out of *Ripley's Believe It Or Not* or *Wrigley's Fun Facts*. But what I hoped to wow them with was the data on the slaughter and possible extinction of these highly evolved, intelligent and gentle beings. And how man is discovering ways to put us on their wavelength again. And most of all, how I really believed that saving them was connected to saving ourselves and the rest of the earth. Thirty pairs of wide eyes told me they were sufficiently wowed. . . .

I had chosen to read aloud a number of selections on whales including an Eskimo poem translated by Edward Field dealing with human beings' primeval and magic connections to animals, and naturalist Farley Mowat's tragic account of a fin whale trapped in a Newfoundland cove. The children were amazed that townspeople had felt the right to shoot this creature who did not threaten them in its struggle to return to the ocean.

Then I asked the class to try writing one of two things:

A piece taking the point of view of the whale in her attempts to communicate with her kind outside the cove or with these humans, intent but divided in their efforts to save or destroy her.

or:

A letter protesting the killing and manufacturing of whale products to be passed along to the businessmen connected with whaling companies.

Certain members of the class attempted both, and later we included in our mailing to the Children's Crusade, poems, stories and drawings along with the letters.

I had looked forward all week to playing for the class a tape of Judy Collins' arrangement of "Farewell to Tarwathie," an old whaling ditty she sings as a duet with a school of humpback whales. They reacted as I thought they might to the eerie, lonely sounds of the whales calling to one another. As if they, too, were being called. They begged me to play the tape again and again, while they drew pictures to illustrate our "Save The Whales" display for the hall bulletin board.

But this session really belonged to Flipper—the dolphin and the porpoise with minds as large and complex as any man's. I told them of the close kinship between man and dolphin portrayed in Greek mythology and Mediterranean and Polynesian legend, of Apollo turning himself into a dolphin to rule the sea. I recounted the Greek fable of Arion, a rich poet and musician returning to Corinth (after a concert-read-

ing), who, in order to escape his ship's mutineers, jumped on the back of a friendly porpoise and swam away. I briefly explained John Lilly's discoveries of the dolphin's ability to mimic human speech, how porpoises and dolphins "see" with sound, and how, when their group is spread out, they can hear and locate one another from as far as six miles away. Then, finally, the tale of their plight. On hearing that the Navy has applied its knowledge of dolphin sonar to developing underwater torpedos using dolphins as homing devices, and that, in an effort to catch the tuna that follow them, fishing companies are drowning and strangling in their nets almost 100,000 porpoises a year, a few children insisted on writing more protest letters. The others wrote stories, imagining they were porpoises with fins and flukes, sonar clicks, and X-ray vision—water powers we might have if we had not evolved in a different direction, walked on the earth, and used our hands to take up more of our share of it. While the boys and girls wrote, I played for them another tape—Fred Neil's song "The Dolphins":

I've been searching
for the dolphins in the sea
Sometimes I wonder
do they ever think of me?

One little boy, Regi, seemed extraordinarily moved by our discussions, and was still writing odes to sea mammals weeks later when the rest of the class had moved on to Christmas memories.

In my heart I feel I could have a dolphin of my own.
I would care for him, but I know that when the sailors
would come, they would try to kill him, and I would
run to him and try to save him.

Then the dolphin would like me, and I would try to explain
to the sailors, "He is not yours to touch," but if they
would not listen to me, I would tell my dolphin and his
friends to take care of themselves.

And I would go back home and think of the sailors not killing my dolphin and his friends.

Reginald Gardere

He was not alone in his craving for more of the marine, however, and the inevitable connection to whales and dolphins surfaced a few weeks later from the deep—sharks. These fifth graders could listen for hours to one bloody account after another from the quickly reprinted *Shark!* by Thomas Helm, and, of course, *Jaws*, whose committee-written, thrill-a-minute prose I figured was worth trying to imitate just once. If only to gain insight into the "literary" world of millions of copies, twenty-seven printings, movie rights, sequels, and official T-shirts, all stemming from man's hair-trigger fear of what he cannot somehow control.

ADDRESSES

To send protest letters and to receive information on why whales are being killed and how to help them:

International Children's Campaign to Save the Whales
& PROJECT JONAH
Box 476
Bolinas, California 94924

For information on Saving the Porpoise Campaign:

FRIENDS OF ANIMALS, INC.
11 West 60th Street
New York, N.Y. 10023

(Send them the unused portion of your tuna fish money and they'll send you a button of the porpoise you're saving)

BOOKS AND TEACHING MATERIALS

A MIND IN THE WATERS, edited by Joan McIntyre, Sierra Club/Scribner Library, paperback 6.95 (all profits to Project Jonah)

WHALES AND DOLPHINS by Bernard Rockett, Puffin Books, paperback 1.75

NET PROFIT, a comic by Michael Becker and Shelby Simpson, ECOMIX for Project Jonah, address above, $1.00

"Mammals at Home in the Sea," a fact sheet prepared by Dr. Sarah Flanders, distributed by the American Museum of Natural History's Dept. of Education, New York, N.Y. 10024

A WHALE FOR THE KILLING by Farley Mowat, Penguin Books, paperback.

SHARK! by Thomas Helm, Collier Books, paperback $1.95

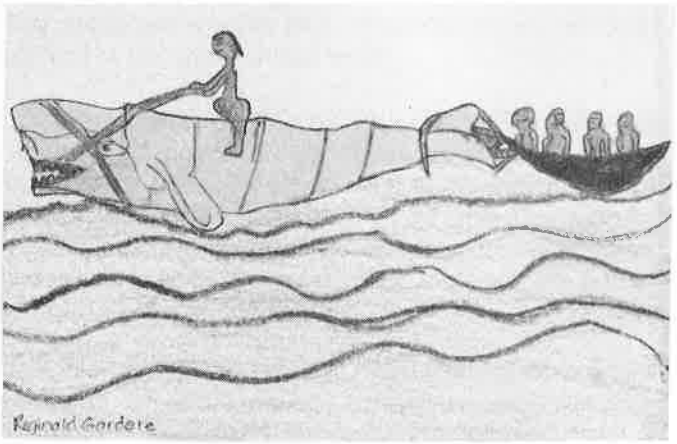
DEAR BUSINESSMEN:

Please don't kill dolphin when you go fish for tuna because they act so much like people. When you get some tuna and dolphin in the net, please go down to the net and get all of them out without cutting any of them.

Because they are getting extinct, and if you keep on killing them, they will all be dead. And if they die, more people will die too, because dolphin save people from drowning.

All you people care about is money. But if you keep killing dolphin, people will not buy your tuna and you will not get any money.

Yours truly,
Diego Mieles



DEAR BUSINESSMEN:

You kill a lot of fish, especially whales. I know that you use them and don't throw them away, but how would you like it if people did that to you, Mack? You and your friends should stop killing so many whales and porpoises, especially the Blue Whale and the Sperm Whale.

I know how many things we can buy like my favorite perfume, my favorite soap, my dog's favorite dog-food, and jewelry (the best thing), but it is not worth it. Please don't kill any more whales. We aren't going to have any more, and it is going to be that whales only exist 'til 1977.

Yours truly,
Betsy Vasilakoppulos

Once I was minding my own business when some man started shooting these pointy things at me and my family. A man shot my youngest son and pulled him in. Then boy, did I turn blue. I started to swim closer to the boat, then, went straight into it. It started to sink. I picked up my son and started home. My wife was disappointed when I told her he was dead. We moved to the Atlantic ocean. When I got there, I started a new life. I never was happy. I always thought about my dead son. Every time I see that boat beneath the sea, I cry. My new baby son uses the bodies for cops and robbers. He picks them up and stands them on the sides of the boat. For a bullet, I use my nose and kill them. Many men have died because they killed my son.

And that's why they call me the blue whale.

Hope Simmons

MY NEIGHBORHOOD DOLPHIN

I'm a whale. I just moved in the neighborhood. A dolphin lives next to me. He is playful.

I don't like him. I think he is looney. But one time I was swimming and I heard shots. I said to myself, "I wonder what's happening?" I went to the top to see what was happening. They shot at me. "Humans!" I screamed. They fired at me again. Something grabbed me. It was the dolphin. He saved my life. The bullet had just missed me by an inch. From that day, whales and dolphin have been friends.

Carlton McCollough

There used to be a whale, but he was a strange whale. When he saw people he would attack by the stomach and open it and eat all the meat inside the stomach, and when finished, he would just leave and walk away.

He would keep on doing it. He would try to destroy the life of mankind and make his own world. For a drink, he would see if people were swimming on the beach, and he would kill them, cut their head open, and drink the blood.

But there was this other whale who was kind, and when he heard of this beast, he went and called his friends and destroyed him. Mankind was saved by this nice whale whose name was Willy the Whale.

Reginald Gardere

PLUGS

The Radical Teacher: A Newsjournal of Socialist Literary Theory and Practice has just published its first issue, featuring articles on retrenchment, socialist journalism, teaching literature and technology, two working class novelists, and part-time employment and graduate work. *The Radical Teacher*, while having its initial focus on a radical perspective on literary practice in the classroom and on out of classroom struggles, is interested in broadening its scope to include articles from other disciplines. *The Radical Teacher* is committed to an independent socialist viewpoint and is published quarterly by the Radical Caucus in English and the Modern Languages. Subscriptions are $10/year, employed; $5 part-time employed; $3 unemployed. Single issues are $2.50. Subscriptions and articles should be sent to Reamy Jansen, Editorial Chairperson, 316 West 107th St., # 3A, N.Y.C., N.Y. 10025.

Several interesting pamphlets on nature study written and published by Edith F. Bondi have come to our attention. They include *Bayou Bound, Nature Study Course*, and *Nature Fair*. For further information on these and other materials relating to nature study write to: Mrs. Edith F. Bondi, 3534 Sunvalley Road, Houston, Texas 77025.

The Center for Open Learning, a group dedicated to curriculum development and raising the political awareness of teachers, offers material relating to third world students and open classroom technique. Some of their titles include: *Your Move*, non-western games for the elementary classroom; and *El Frijol Magico*, a bi-lingual reader for Chicano children. For a complete brochure write to: Center for Open Learning and Teaching, P.O. Box 9434, Berkeley, California 94709.

Poemmaking, a book edited by Ruth Whitman and Harriet Feinberg, describes some of the experiences and teaching ideas of poets working in Massachusetts schools. Copies may be obtained for $3.50 from the Massachusetts Council of Teachers of English, 205 Hampshire Street, Lawrence, Massachusetts 01841.

The Women's History Research Center, Inc. publishes microfilms which contain much hard to find material on current history of women. They have collected over a million documents relating to the role of women in our society. For a complete description of available microfilms write to: Women's History Research Center, Inc. 2325 Oak Street, Berkeley, California 94708.

TEACHERS & WRITERS COLLABORATIVE PUBLICATIONS

THE WHOLE WORD CATALOGUE (72 pages) is a practical collection of assignments for stimulating student writing, designed for both elementary and secondary students. Activities designed as catalysts for classroom exercises include: personal writing, collective novels, diagram stories, fables, spoof and parodies, and language games. It also contains an annotated bibliography.

IMAGINARY WORLDS (110 pages) originated from Richard Murphy's desire to find themes of sufficient breadth and interest to allow sustained, independent writing by students. Children invented their own Utopias of time and place, invented their own religions, new ways of fighting wars, different schools. They produced a great deal of extraordinary writing, much of it reprinted in the book.

A DAY DREAM I HAD AT NIGHT (120 pages) is a collection of oral literature from children who were not learning to read well or write competently or feel any real sense of satisfaction in school. The author, Roger Landrum, working in collaboration with two elementary school teachers, made class readers out of the children's own work.

FIVE TALES OF ADVENTURE (119 pages) is a new collection of short novels written by children at a Manhattan elementary school. The stories cover a wide range of styles and interests—a family mystery, an urban satire, a Himalayan adventure, a sci-fi spoof, and a tale of murder and retribution.

BEING WITH CHILDREN a book by Phillip Lopate, whose articles have appeared regularly in our magazine, is based on his work as project coordinator for Teachers & Writers Collaborative at P.S. 75 in Manhattan. Herb Kohl writes: "There is no other book that I know that combines the personal and the practical so well. . . ." *Being With Children* is published by Doubleday at $7.95. It is available through Teachers & Writers Collaborative for $7.00.

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

Back issues of *The Newsletter* are still available. Items of interest include: Sue Willis on teaching the Middle Ages with a slant on writing and pageantry, Karen Hubert on literary genre in elementary school (Winter '73/'74); Bill Zavatsky on writing from paintings, Kathleen Meagher on the use of dreams in poetry (Spring '74); Jeannine Dobbs on teaching writing to the emotionally disturbed, Bob Sievert on visual arts (Fall '74); Aaron Fogel with notes on a health class, Bill Bernhardt's short course in writing (Winter '74/'75); special issue on film and video with articles by Phillip Lopate, Theresa Mack and Sue Willis (Spring '75).

☐ Being With Children @ $7.00
☐ Five Tales of Adventure @ $3.00 (10 copies or more @ $2.00)
☐ The Whole Word Catalogue @ $4.00
☐ Imaginary Worlds @ $3.00
☐ A Day Dream I had at Night @ $3.00
☐ Subscription(s) to **T&W Newsletter**, three issues $5.00, six issues $9.00, nine issues $12.00

Back issues:
☐ Winter '73/'74 @ $2.00
☐ Spring '74 @ $2.00
☐ Fall '74 @ $2.00
☐ Winter '74/'75 @ $2.00
☐ Spring '75 @ $2.00
☐ Fall '75 @ $2.00
☐ Winter '75/'76 @ $2.00

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Please make checks payable to Teachers & Writers Collaborative, and send to:

Teachers & Writers
186 West 4th Street
New York City 10014

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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.

KAREN HUBERT has an MFA in writing from the Columbia School of the Arts. She has won several short story contests and is at work on a novel. She teaches writing, animation and videotape for Teachers & Writers at P.S. 75. She is the author of *Teaching and Writing Popular Fiction*, to be published soon by Teachers & Writers.

THERESA MACK teaches video and film at P.S. 75. She has produced several videotapes and films, run community media centers, and presently teaches video for the Graduate Program Center for Understanding Media.

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