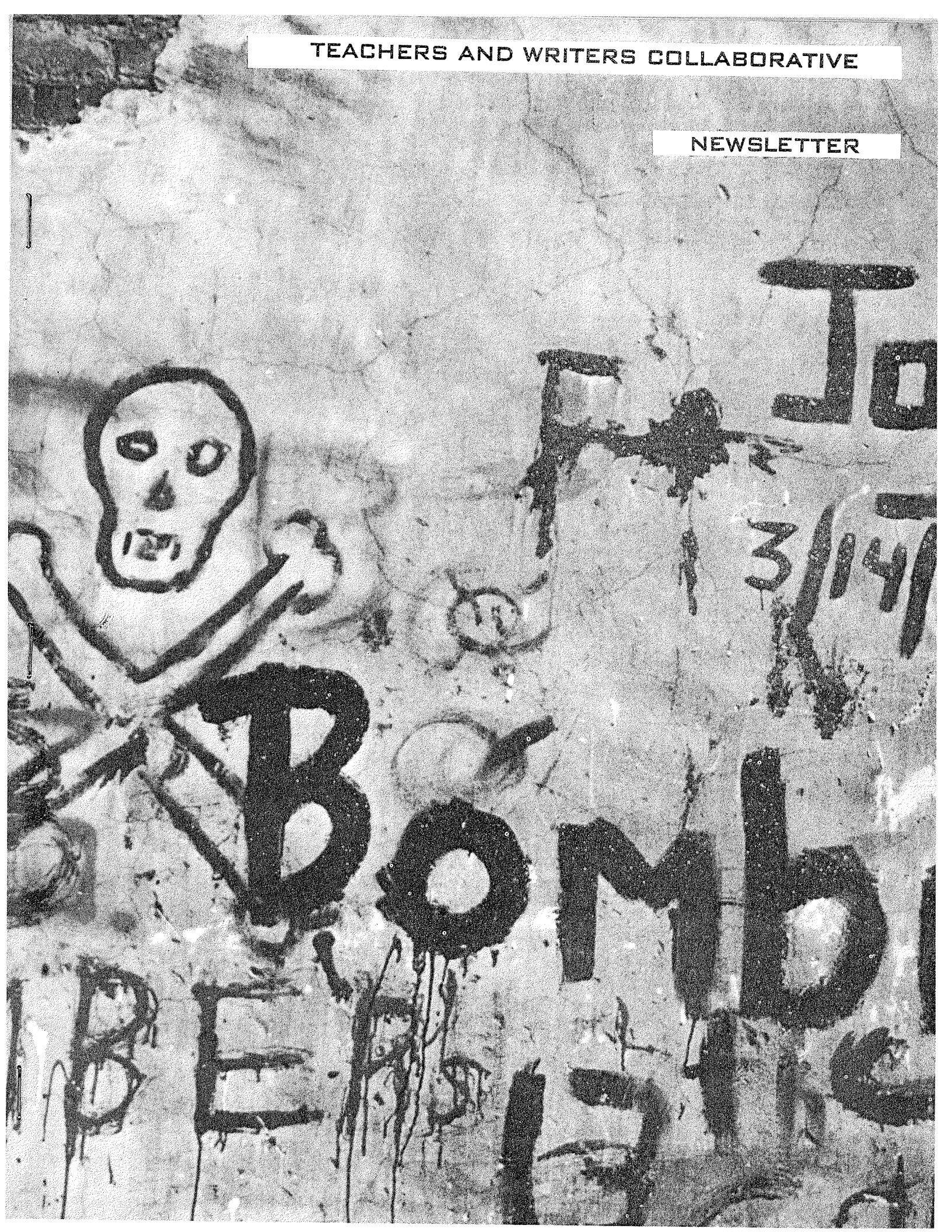


TEACHERS AND WRITERS COLLABORATIVE

NEWSLETTER



# TEACHERS AND WRITERS COLLABORATIVE -NEWSLETTER-

Volume I Issue I  
SEPTEMBER, 1967

ALVIN CURRY:  
"THE MAN OF MANY  
FABLES"



DIRECTOR: Herbert Kohl

RESEARCH ASST: Karen Kennerly

SECRETARY: Dolores Carter

DESIGN: R.G. Jackson, c/o THE SOUL SYNDICATE.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY: TINKA TOPPING

HORACE MANN - LINCOLN INSTITUTE  
TEACHERS COLLEGE,  
Columbia University,  
NEW YORK, N. Y.

## A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

This is the first newsletter of the Teachers and Writers Collaborative. It has been hard to choose a format. We could have tried to convey all of the news of our programs, and dryly recounted names and places and dates. But that would hardly give the flavor of what we are trying to do. We are trying to make the teaching of English come alive in many places and many ways. We have a modest grant from the United States Office of Education, and some subsidiary grants from other people interested in our work. But the money we have is small compared to the enthusiasm the program has evoked and the scope of what we would like to do. There are more schools and writers who would willingly participate in our programs than we can afford to support. This is hopeful in a way, and melancholy too. The government and the foundations are not willing at this moment to invest in programs in the arts in a serious and long term way. At present we have enough funds for six months of programs. We are in the process of seeking additional funds from the Carnegie Foundation, Office of Education, Arts and Humanities Endowment, etc., but it is not yet possible to speculate on whether we will receive financial support to continue beyond March.

There is also another uncertainty with Teachers and Writers Collaborative: we are looking for a permanent base at a university and have been exploring the matter with Teachers College, Columbia, the State University of New York at Stonybrook, Sarah Lawrence College, Antioch College, and other universities. Despite all this, much can be done in the six months we have to work; and the point of this newsletter is not merely to describe what we hope to do, but to give the reader a flavor of the work itself.

The newsletter will include samples of children's writing, excerpts from the diaries of writers involved in our programs, and comments from students and teachers. As director I think I need only summarize what we intend to do and let the work stand for itself. The Teachers and Writers Collaborative hopes to involve writers in the creation of an English curriculum in the elementary and secondary schools that is relevant to the lives of the children in schools today. It hopes to start by bringing a dozen writers--among whom are Mark Mirsky, Jonathan Baumbach, Grace Paley, Donald Barthelme, Jay Wright, Jonathan Kozol--into the schools and having them bring copies of their work to give away to the students they read to. (An anthology is being prepared by the writers at the Collaborative for this purpose.) It hopes that the writers will not merely visit once and read their works, but return to the same classes several times and ask the children for responses to their works, and to write themselves. Hopefully, the writers will also get to know the teachers and induce them to try to teach writing in their classes.

For those teachers and pupils that are interested, the Teachers and Writers Collaborative will provide Saturday classes at Teachers College and the Community Resources Center in East Harlem in writing, taught by writers. (Some of these will be Ishmael Reed, Peter Sourian, Richard Lewis, Robert Cumming, June Meyer, and others in conjunction with the Academy of American Poets.) The classes will mix teachers, students, parents, and writers in the common enterprise of trying to produce creative writing. They will try to mix individuals from all classes and races in society and provide a paradigm of socially, racially and economically integrated education.

In addition to this the Teachers and Writers Collaborative hopes to provide those teachers who are interested in pursuing the teaching of writing with curriculum materials. The first attempt will be to create a unit on the writing of fables. We hope to involve writers, teachers and students in the development of this unit, and to test and revise it as teachers use it in their classrooms.

There are other components of our programs. We are fortunate to have arranged with the Masters of Fine Arts in Writing program at Columbia University (directed by Franck MacShane) to have students work with us for course credit. We also will use two fifth year writing students from Sarah Lawrence College in our program. These students will keep diaries and biographical accounts of their day to day classroom experiences; read in schools, and work with teachers on the development of writing programs. They will also help Elaine Avidon to produce the student magazine, What's Happening which publishes student writing and has already been used for English classes in various public schools in New York. The Collaborative has also been asked to take over several experimental sections in the pre-baccalaureate program at the City College of New York.

This summer Florence Howe is conducting a teacher training program at the Morgen Community School in Washington D.C., using James Moffett's curriculum material. Also this summer Muriel Rukeyser is working with a group of children at the Community Resources Center in East Harlem, and Herbert Kohl is giving a writing seminar in conjunction with Eric Mann of the Newark Community School.

In the fall, Anne Sexton and Robert Clawson will teach an English class together and keep diaries of their experiences. Mark Mirsky will supervise five sections of freshman English at CCNY that will be based on the same principles as our work in elementary and secondary schools. David Henderson, who began work in the Joan of Arc Junior High School, New York, last June, will return there in the fall for a more extended program.

Other schools and individuals throughout the country have asked about our programs and, though there are not sufficient funds at this moment to create programs in all of these places, hopefully this newsletter will at least keep us all together until we can find a way to do our work on the scale that its importance merits.

Herbert Kohl

# Pickets Back Fired Teacher

JOHN P. CORR

Of The Inquirer Staff

Pickets paraded around Dobbins Vocational School, 22d st. and Lehigh ave., Tuesday to protest the dismissal of a substitute teacher who allowed his students to publish a compilation of their essays on topics including homosexuality, hate, race relations and teenage sex. The teacher is Steven H. Harlem, 29, a graduate psychology student at Temple University. He was fired, he said, and the booklets containing the essays were confiscated within minutes after they were distributed at Dobbins.

Harlem had been teaching 11th grade English there since February.

Besides writing the essays, he said, the students volunteered to do the printing. Harlem said he never assigned topics, but told the students to write about subjects they considered most important.

The essays, which were sign-

ed by the students, were on a wide range of subjects from birth control to the war in Vietnam.

"I encouraged freedom of expression," Harlem said. "I told them, 'when you write, write about what is important to you, what is worth writing about.'"

"There was never a discipline problem in my classes and the kids never cut my classes.

## Excerpts from Students' Essays on Page 20

Some, who had never written anything before, were stopping me in the corridors and asking me to read their stuff. The enthusiasm was remarkable."

Harlem's principal, G. William Donovan, was less than enthusiastic. When he saw the booklets, he demanded that Harlem collect them.

Harlem said, "I told him there was a moral issue. I had told the students it was their magazine. They wrote it and published it and distributed it to the

teachers because they wanted to help the teachers to understand them. I could not betray their confidence."

When Harlem refused to collect the magazines, he was dismissed for insubordination. Donovan and other school officials scoured the school and confiscated most of the books. Students were able to hide some of them, however.

School officials pointed out that Harlem had acted without their knowledge in allowing the booklet to be distributed. The schools must have control over curriculum materials, they pointed out, or instructional programs would deteriorate into chaos.

They said the publication should have been approved before being distributed within the school and, eventually, to the homes of the students—particularly since some of the essays were brutally frank discussions

of topics such as abortion, birth control, sex and race problems.

Harlem said he introduced his classes to a wide range of authors and opinions "to make them see that the written word must be examined and can be challenged."

His classes discussed such works as George Orwell's "1984" and Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf." They used the works of prominent Negro poets to spark examination of the roots and expressions of race hatred.

"Racial understanding was working in my classes," he said. "I think some of the children were able to understand what it must be like to be white instead of Negro or Negro instead of white."

Harlem said he did not know of the picketing on Tuesday.

"A lot of the students came to me and asked me what could be done," he said. "They were genuinely upset and some of them were crying. I told them that this was my responsibility and that I would work it out."

Harlem, even before being dismissed, said he did not intend to continue teaching. When he completes graduate studies in psychology, however, he plans to take a position in which he can assist young people.

## Excerpts of Essays

### What Pupils Said

The book of essays that resulted in the firing of teacher Steven H. Harlem covered a wide range of subjects. Here are some excerpts.

#### School

"People should not down the dropout students. I feel they should give them a chance in life, a chance to prove how much they can do."

"Teachers in Dobbins, some are strict, the others are too lenient. Some of them curse, some of them swear. Some have school spirit. Some don't. Some of them teach and some preach. But most teachers I have are all right."

#### Death

"Most people say that they are afraid to die but I'm not and I feel that if you have been doing the right things and have faith in God there is nothing to worry about."

"What is death? Is it just the stopping of breathing, the opposite of life? Couldn't it be the real beginning of life?"

#### Race

"A baby does not know what color or race is. A baby has to be taught how to hate or love. If they can play together while they are little, why can't they live together and work together in a grown-up world?"

"I live in a world full of prejudice and hate. This world I live in, many changes could be done that maybe someday we can be joined as one."

"I feel this fighting between white and colored is senseless."

"Integration is fine, but I can't see sending people on buses to faraway schools just to integrate the schools."

#### Sex

"It is wonderful if you are mature enough to take the responsibility that go with it."

"Sex should be taught in school. It is a part of life and all facts of life should be taught to everyone."

"Sex is really a very sacred thing which is very beautiful but which can be destroyed into something drastic very easily."

#### Abortion

"The abortion laws should be changed. I think only the people involved in rapes should have this abortion. And people having babies that are going to be deformed and mentally retarded. If this is what they want, then it is O. K."

"I feel that abortion should not be legalized for any reason. Abortion is just plain murder. You don't go to the electric chair. You destroy and punish yourself day by day for what you have done."

David Henderson is one of the first writers sent into the schools to teach under the auspices of the Teachers and Writers Collaborative. The following is taken from his daily journals--a form which writers and teachers working with the Collaborative will adopt to record their experiences and progress in the classroom.

May 15/1967--Class Observation

Met Carol Feinberg who teaches what is called "CORE", a combination of Social Studies and ENGLISH...we went on an informal tour of classrooms, dropping in on several at random.

...The teacher, a young man with a tiny goatee, was leading the 7th graders in a discussion about which was better to travel on a boat or a plane. The kids... were very anxious to talk and often interrupted one another. The young teacher was offended by their lack of manners (or enthusiasm) and would rap his desk sharply with a wooden block. The noise made a harsh sound that reverberated through the room--it did little to contain the children...They clamored to answer the banal question. One boy mentioned that boats were more luxurious and planes faster. A girl answered out of turn that you could get hit by lightning in a plane. The teacher dismissed her remark as silly and said, "Luxury. That's what I mean. Boats were originally made for luxury travel."

The next class was led by a young woman also rounding out her first year. We went to the back of the room and looked at a Negro girl's homework. The first question was vaguely about some separation between religion in the states and in England. We asked her if she knew of any separatist presently in this country. She said no. What about Muhammed Ali? I asked. "Oh yeah" she replied. "They want separate land and for the white man to leave them alone. I think Muhammed Ali has a right not to go in the Army. She seemed to have changed her whole way of thinking to answer our question. ..

After leaving Joan of Arc High School I thought that the topics under study were just as banal as when I went to high school. In the study of American History I wondered if it wouldn't be easier to teach it from an ethnic point of view...

Also a key to what is really on kids' minds would be what they scrawl on their notebooks. Notebook graffiti. One boy had HULK written on his loose leaf. I asked him what hulk meant or who he was. The boy, a studious Puerto Rican, shook his head no. I asked him if he read Marvel comics. He looked like he had never heard of them. I said Hulk is one of the Fantastic Four. He has huge scales and tremendous strength. You don't know what Hulk is? I asked incredulously. He smiled and said yes.

May 19/1967--Class Observation

...A fellow teacher at Joan of Arc, who is also a poet, had read to the class the previous week...He had said that a poet must be able to stand behind every word and line he wrote, and if he didn't feel he could do that, then he should stop writing. A bright girl who was writing poetry herself, didn't know if she could stand behind every word and stanza she wrote. She wondered if that was one of the pre-requisites of being a poet. It was a rule that frightened her. (Late Mrs. O and I talked about it. She confided that she thought he had been rather hard-fisted in his attitude towards an art form, and kind of regretted exposing the kids to such an attitude... Had Mrs. O told them the truth of her feelings it would have clarified things for the kids at the expense of respect for the visiting poet.)

I went to Miss Feinberg's class. She was teaching a well integrated core class. Above the blackboard a poster reads "HOW CAN LATIN AMERICA BECOME A FULL PARTNER WITH THE U.S."

below were printed the questions from the current homework assignment.

- 1) Puerto Rico has (greater, fewer) minerals than Mexico?
  - 2) (More, fewer) people are members of the Catholic religion than of any other religion.
  - 3) The climate of Puerto Rico is (warmer, colder) than that of our Georgia and North and South Carolina?
  - 4) Puerto Rico is (farther, closer) to Florida than it is to Cuba?
- The children were responding in a lackadaisical manner quite in keeping with the vitality of the questions. I was surprised that young adults were asked such simple questions. Mrs. Feinberg introduced me as a 'living poet' and requested I tell the class about some of my activities...I told them that I wrote, published and traveled around. Then in response to the last question Mrs. Feinberg had asked the class about Puerto Rico. I said that there was a strong movement underway in Puerto Rico for Independence, and that to date much of the agitation had taken place around the issue of the Vietnam war and the many Puerto Ricans being sent to fight there. The class, largely Puerto Rican perked up at this. Mrs. Feinberg then asked the class about the status of Puerto Rico and they shouted out that it was not a state. She requested them to answer one at a time.

In Mrs. O class a shy boy who sat in the back of the room and stared down at his desk throughout the entire class had scrawlms on his looseleaf:

There's  
no one  
going  
to  
STOP  
me

then he had a diagram of an explosion

In Mr. Adoph's class a puerto Rican boy had: MR. LEON

SIR  
ANGEL

and then a very well drawn shield with two swords pointing through it.

THE  
1

Also in Mr. Adoph's Career Guidance Class there was a notebook I had a good chance to examine because the owner was out of the room at the time.

David Vasquez 9-4

" Jesus wore long hair  
i'm 100% of P.R.

save water shower with a friend

super girl

sock it to me

you need \$

LIFE TO JOHNSON  
BUT NOT AS PRESIDENT

67

I LOVE YOU 1000 TIMES

LOVE

PUERTO RICAN POWER

3

10- 1000

WAR IS A GOOD BUSINESS INVEST YOUR SON \$10,000

TNT

let's legalize pot for better or for worse

2

T

HOLD MY HEAD

... had drawn a grave plot with the gravestone inscribed: David RIP.  
... with an arrow through it. The heart reading DAVID.

I found the student's individual notebook covers more interesting than the subjects discussed in the classrooms. In Mr. Adolph's class a boy told me of a book passed around from time to time called "the case book". In it, as the boy described, the girls ran down boys: which ones kiss the best, dress, rap (talk) and dance. It is like an "underground book" designed and written by certain girls in the school. All the students recognize it when they see it. It is mostly a Negro and Puerto Rican venture. And of course they are confiscated by the teachers who, as Mr. Adolph admits, enjoys reading them.

I think of letting the children decorate the classrooms themselves, but then this brings up another point. The children view school as a game in which they must do certain things and act certain ways to get by. Some kids have more of a background for playing the "school game" than others. The ones who don't (mainly the ghetto kids) suffer. Ghetto kids are reluctant to bring their daily home experiences to school because they know they are not acceptable. I remember when I was in grade school a girl when asked about her home life told of how her mother and father fussed and fought. The teacher, a nice young man from the Bronx, was shocked. We laughed too. We laughed at his embarrassment and also because we knew that you didn't tell the teacher things like that. We would tell each other about the funny things that went on in our homes and in our neighborhoods, when we were outside or in the lunch room, or 'playing the dozens'. But never to a teacher. It was an unwritten law. And the law still exists today.

If children are to write (as all writers write) about what they know, then the "off limits" of their home life must be lifted. One way is by letting them hear how the blues singers of long ago and present day did it, and succeeded at it. These children hold valuable experiences inside of them which they are prone to downgrade and push out of their consciousness when they are supposed to be learning. This is unfortunate and dangerous. And the same holds when a student is afraid to discuss what is on his note-book cover.

#### June 9/1967--Presentation to the Students

We pushed tables together and made a closed group. I made a brief introduction about who I was and what I was up to. Then I played the Beatles' latest album MR. PEPPERS LONELY HEART CLUB BAND. Some students began moving and gesturing with the music in their seats. Then I read a poem of mine DOWNTOWN BOY UPTOWN. I spoke about when I was a teenager (not so long ago) and how we would walk up and down the streets singing, cracking jokes and talking bad about each other (playing the dozens)...I played a recording by James Brown called MONEY WON'T CHANGE YOU. I requested beforehand that the students listen closely to the words. Afterwards, both teachers present said that they could not understand most of it. I asked the students what the refrain was. Many raised their hands, mostly the black children. A girl said the refrain was: money won't change you/ but time will take you on. I asked the class what that meant. One boy said money bought everything, and that it could buy time too. Some kids violently disagreed and the teacher had to quiet the class. (I wish she hadn't. It's not so important that everyone hears the statements, as the kids work them out in their own minds and with their friends, neighbors and enemies). A girl said that lots of people made a lot of money but if they got sick then their money was no good to them. Another girl said that they could afford better hospitals and doctors and medicines than people who had no money...A boy said that rich people contributed to charity to help less fortunate people and to wipe out disease. Many children were clamoring to speak. ...I asked anyone if they could explain what James Brown meant by the statement. A black girl from the career guidance group said that: James Brown is trying to get this girl; and he offers her a brand new car, new clothes, all his money, but the girl still refused to go with him. So James Brown says, O.K. maybe my money won't change your mind but time will sure take you on.



I read part of Malcom X poem and the time was up. Most of the kids came over to see what kind of records I had. Mrs. Gaines, the principal, was very enthusiastic afterwards. She urged Mrs. Feinberg and me to set another date. She was very surprised at how fast the kids had responded to what was going on. She wished we had more time. I told her it would be great if we could do a presentation for an entire afternoon, maybe a whole day. Have a dance in between I added, becoming carried away.

June 16, 1967 Presentation to the Class

I read a new poem of mine WALKING IN THE PANELS OF THE SUN. The kids got a big kick out of the lines: "blood banks erupt/block by block/as the cops chase/KING KONG/thru the streets/in broad daylight." I played a record by the Crystals called uptown and downtown for her boyfriend... "Uptown he's a man." I asked the students to write out for me something about how they felt about uptown and downtown. I didn't distinguish between the two in hopes that the students would draw their own boundary lines. I played some music as they wrote and held informal conversations with a few--the girl directly in front of me finished what she had to write quickly and began to leaf thru some of the books I had spread out on my desk. She read some of the poems. Paulette Washington read from her "composition:"

downtown- 1) is where the hicks are where the little paddy boys who swear they hip, stay in the village with their dirty feet and their long hair that has dandruff trying to rap to those sweet foxy brown skin girls with afros. 2) is where them young lame little chicks think they fly because they live on the Park (park ave.) smiling with those shiny braces in they mouth at the pretty boys are, the ones that could rap that swine jive down to them sweet foxy girls with all that royal crown or posners making them look fine fly and foxy with no worries that bring them down, just shakin that fine brown frame.

Mrs. Jones, the regular teacher, said that Paulette had picked up on my phrasing from when I read and put it into her composition. One boy in the back, with long mod hair took exception to what Paulette said, especially her putting down the long-haired hippies, but he didn't speak his mind. He tapped his head and said, "it's all here, in here." I went over to him and told him to write because that's what we wanted, his honest opinion. He dictated it to a girl student next to him:

Downtown is wild & cool. Uptown is square. Cause if you have long hair people look at you, cause can't have no long hair. And uptown there's hate on the street, & pregist people on the street. Speacl color people cause they can not have long hair. Not all of them.

Another student, Dennis Sauarg:

The downtown is this could be alot of places the village, 42nd st., the Bowery  
The Uptown could be Up town from down town 103 st, the Bronx

so Uptown & downtown are anywhere you want as long as Up is Up from down town.

I had tried to be as nonchalant as possible. Sometimes I would disc-jockey. introducing records and talking a bit about the artist. While they wrote I looked thru their yearbook and other magazines. I didn't interrupt when they spoke amongst themselves. I tried to be the exact opposite of what a teacher is to them..

Mark Mirsky

Our program is made up of ten writers who will accompany a throw-away text into the schools. The writers will assemble the throw-away themselves from their own work and the work of the other nine authors involved in the project. Since the individual selections by each writer are being printed on loose leaf paper in a binding that can be taken apart we hope to involve writers, teachers and students in the creation of the textbook. Each writer will visit a single classroom at least three times. He can discuss his own work, the work of the others in the collection and whatever student work the classes spark. Both teachers and writers will be writing a page of reaction to the classes. Whatever is scribbled down can be added before or after to the stories.

Grace Paley, Donald Barthelme, Mark Mirsky, Jonathan Kozol, David Henderson, and Seymour Simckes have already promised to participate with their work.

We hope the presence of writers in the classroom will stimulate teachers to develop writing programs of their own. To encourage this, we will offer: teacher seminars in writing and teaching of writing; curriculum material--the fables unit, as well as advice on self-created units; seminars on childrens' writing that results from the teachers' classes.

Florence Howe---Teachers Training

1. I will run a Workshop in poetry for the teachers in the Morgan School;\* first during the three Summer Planning Institute, then through the year one afternoon a week (when Goucher girls come to the school). Part of the purpose of the Workshop will be to introduce teachers to the idea of using Jim Moffet's curriculum--instead of Basal Readers, etc. In other words, the first thing I want to do--this summer--is to work with the teachers and community people to design a curriculum in reading, writing, drama, talk that will take off from Jim's and work into Morgan's own atmosphere and ethos. Reading poetry with teachers, getting them to try their hand at it, is part of my plan.

2. Once the school year begins, I will be teaching two poetry courses at Goucher College. I want to offer my students the opportunity to teach kids at Morgan instead of writing term papers, etc. This will occur on Wednesdays, when Goucher girls are free and can be transported to Washington for a long afternoon. There will be two kinds of teaching for them to do: elementary school kids before three; and older kids in the afternoon program at the school. Hopefully, their being present will free teachers to continue their seminar with me; and I will be able, therefore, to do the kind of follow-up that Herb was so interested in having as part of anything we do. I shall require that Goucher girls keep journals of their experience in selecting, reading, discussing poetry to Morgan Kids, as well as notebooks of poems they and their students begin to write. They will be free to take kids out of the school on "trips" to set off writing. The Goucher girls will presumably be more interested in poetry and writing than in teaching per se; hence, we should have a pre-poet as teacher.

\* The Morgan Community School is an experimental school under the Washington school system, and is contracted to Antioch on an experimental basis.

Florence Howe

In her workshop for teachers at the Morgan School in Washington D.C.,

Florence Howe intends to use James Moffett's AN INTEGRATED CURRICULUM

IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS, K - 12: A Handbook for Teachers, presently in

manuscript form. The following is from the introduction:

"My main purpose is to conjure a total curriculum in specific but flexible fashion. I would like to propose a way of teaching the native language that requires no textbooks or materials except reading selections and that, indeed, offers an alternative to the installation of a pre-packaged curriculum. Featuring the learner's own production of language, and not incarnated in textbooks, this curriculum adjusts automatically to the students at hand. . . .

"Sharing the view of some other educators that, ultimately, there should be a total program in discourse running laterally across subject fields as well as longitudinally over the years, I have felt severely constrained at times in trying to keep this program contained within a separate subject called English (it is in secondary school, of course, where the problem becomes acute). The reader will undoubtedly feel this strain at those points where I have advocated writing assignments that might well be done in science and social studies classes. The issue harks back to principle Number Two above, that English is not primarily about itself; it is a symbol system for coding all sorts of phenomena and experience, from the most personal to the most scientific. . . .

"Since my focus in this book has been entirely on learning, not on testing--deliberately so; for the two are often in conflict--I suggest a particular way of arriving at marks. A folder of each student's papers is kept and passed on yearly from teacher to teacher. Instead of getting marks by making up tests, putting grades on papers, and doing a lot of bookkeeping, the teacher looks over the folder at the end of the marking period, makes a general assessment of the student's papers, adds in his observations of the student's oral and dramatic work, and either translates this into a letter grade, if the administration insists, or, preferably, writes a two or three sentence assessment. . . .

"For school systems wishing to set up a large, longitudinal experiment, I suggest the following plan.... A wave of students is launched into the program in kindergarten or first grade, at the same time that older students begin it in the later grades in some form that allows for their previous learning background. As the 'wave' group rolls through, the teachers who have them for a given year, and the teachers who are to take them over the following year, are given some time off to meet once a week, review results, make adjustments, and collaborate on the articulation of the two adjacent years. Teachers of all years use this book as a guide and are given some in-service training by specialists in drama, writing, and small-group discussion. A liaison is created with a local school of education, where some faculty member undertakes to give a special course for training student teachers who will enter that system and replace those who leave. An essential part of such a course, which is geared to this program, is to have student teachers themselves do the sorts of assignments recommended in this book. . . ."

Ariel Rukeyser

These were given as responses to the words "I could not tell" said to a summer group and staff. I am going ahead with work in reading and writing related to the unverifiable fact as well as "I could not tell" at the Community Resources Center in East Harlem, and I welcome writing in response to the phrase by readers of these pages-- signed and identified or not.

I, at times, cannot explain the misery and loneliness I feel for the absence of a dear close friend who I will never see again.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I could not reveal the name of my friend who had taken something from another friend.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I could not tell why people act the way they do.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I could not tell  
how ambivalent I feel toward them. . . .  
Today I love, have compassion  
tomorrow I hate, do not trust

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I cannot tell them how I feel about race, love  
and me that it hurts me.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

This evening, someone told me that one of our Negro boys was necking in a dark corner with one of our white girls. I don't think the two of them pay any attention to each other in public.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I could not tell a person about myself or in other words about my ways and actions.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

We were discussing poetry, and the subject of being lonely was brought up. I said, immediately, "Well, isn't everybody?" and then I clapped my hand over my mouth at what I'd said, and started to laugh out of embarrassment. Why I said it I could not tell.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I could not tell how deeply  
this program has moved me.  
How it has given me new eyes  
to replace the one I had before,  
covered with cataracts. Nor could  
I tell what I have avoided.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Why? Oh God, Why?

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

How it felt is hard to say  
it makes me want to fade away  
to hide! Yes that's the thing  
but for her I'll do not a thing  
She is an image, too hard to  
forget,  
God's blessings is what she's  
worth  
to the lovely lady that  
gave me birth  
He will bless you for what  
I'm worth--nothing.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

I could not, and still cannot, tell about a personal  
relationship with a member of the opposite sex, which may  
end disastrously for both of us.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Icing the cake of blackness  
A lightning white frostiness;  
a sense of speckled souls,  
of drab and brilliant  
moving innards  
weaving in lines of agony  
converging

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

There is a girl I know who says she is going to have a baby.  
I don't know whether I should tell anybody or not.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

#### I Cannot Tell

I cannot tell why they have war,  
the bitterness and bloodshed frightens me.  
I don't know why men fight so  
Instead of love.

Men getting killed for foolish things  
When they can all live and love.  
Each other as brothers should.

I do not understand why this should be done  
The world would be happier if men would not fight.  
I can't understand the meaning of war.  
It makes me chill to hear of all  
These deaths from bloody wars.  
Men killing themselves hopelessly.  
Thinking of the love they have at home.

I wonder if these men fear war,  
or if they understand,  
I cannot tell why they have war.

Anne Sexton and Robert Clawson will be teaching a class of 20 seniors at the Wayland High School (Wayland, Mass.) beginning in the fall.

Excerpts from Anne's letter about what she hopes they can accomplish:

"I give you our objectives with the reminder that they are flexible enough to allow for student objectives and student innovation. I feel this is as important an ideal as the ones I will list.

"A group of students of mixed ability and interest in English will gather daily in a classroom where books will be in abundance and the teacher (Bob) and the poet (me) will argue about content, meaning, life, the honesty of literature and in turn encourage all student writing as valuable communication and never give it a mark or hold it up to evaluation that would tend to kill, or block, or "clog."

"Both Bob and I will keep separate journals of our lives with the students. We are going to suggest, perhaps require, the students to keep similar journals...

"If we succeed the students will run the class... They will learn to feel free to bring in any book that interests them. We want to find out what they feel is their literature and not impose ours. However, we will introduce ours and try to communicate our passions and encourage open discussion and argument. We hope this leads to their writing, their reading...

"When marks are required for school credit we will let them mark themselves. We will discuss their self evaluating marks with them privately, and hopefully prove that we don't care what mark they get...

"After a month or two we might start sending them into lower grades, one through nine, to teach, to spread the word. We want them to choose the material they teach but we will give suggestions if they ask for them... If they want specific "backing up" such as one of us along for a week or two, then they can take one of us while the other remains with the class. Later, the whole class will participate in the "feedback" of each student-teacher's experience... I visualize this working as a kind of "pyramid club," hoping that we may reach two hundred or maybe three hundred students in the lower grades. Further, it is well known that the under achieving student can be taught better by an upper classman than by an adult teacher...

"Of course most of these ideals are what I call "Hunting Conference Ideas"-- an attitude toward the uniqueness of the individual student and to his potential ability to express himself in his own writing and to identify with other writing. What is different about our plan is that there will be two of us, a teacher and a poet working together over an extended period of time who approach "English" from different disciplines but with a mutual goal...

"To unchain, to set on fire, to send forth, to set more fires and unchain others--that's the goal. Yes, it will be a regular credit English class, but what we hope for it is far from regular."

From Bob's letter:

"We'll run a "non-directive" class, in that we'll encourage students to choose their own readings and their subjects for writing. At the same time, however, we'll try to hold them to whatever commitments they claim. We'll seek a nice balance of freedom and discipline..."

"Anne claims...her value in the class, will be of a liberating nature. She'll be just "plain old ordinary Anne" fooling around in class, making stupid statements, so much so that students won't be able to be intimidated by the impossible task of being a writer..."

"We both feel that the likelihood of our arguing about a piece of literature will 'free up' students who have come to feel that works of art are dead set pieces."

The Columbia Masters of Fine Arts in Writing program (headed by Frank MacShane) has offered course credit to those students wishing to participate in the Collaborative's programs. Mr. MacShane wrote to them about it this spring and received responses such as the following:

"As one who received his elementary and high school education in schools such as the one described by Mr. Herbert Kohl in his article in the New York Review of Books, I am pleased to learn that at long last a fresh, creative approach is being applied to the English curriculum of those schools. I agree entirely with Mr. Kohl's and the Huntting Conference's contention that unfettered expression, experimentation, and content in creative writing are far more important than the "arbitrary standards" of grammar and usage which too often result in stifling the creative impulse."

\* \* \* \* \*

". . . I worked in a few similar projects (in nature, not content) in Oakland and Berkeley, both in and out of the ghettos. And if time allows and there is a shortage of people for this program, you can sign me up twice."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Since it seems that some of the readings will be given in predominantly Negro or Puerto Rican classes, it would probably be of great interest to the students to hear contemporary writers from their own ethnic backgrounds. If this is not already being done, perhaps some of us could bring works of this nature to them along with our own."

\* \* \* \* \*

". . . I have been involved with the program peripherally for about two years. . . . Subsequent to a talk [with Denise Levertov, Mitchell Goodman and Robert Creeley] I participated in a project organized by Muriel Rukeyser in conjunction with the Writers' Conference. I read poetry to four year old children attending the Sarah Lawrence Nursery School, and wrote reports concerning their responses. Miss Rukeyser read these reports at the next conference held at Tufts that summer, and was enthusiastic about the results. . . . I feel that as a poet I have a social responsibility which transcends even publication; and this is clearly a way to realize this responsibility by broadening the scope of intelligibility in an area which is generally considered reserved for the intellectual elite of our society."

\* \* \* \* \*

"I have, for the last 2 school years, been participating in the School Program of readings in NYC schools sponsored jointly by the Academy of American Poets and the Board of Education, a program you may be familiar with; it was in conjunction with an in-service course in Poetry for teachers of English. My experience has been too wonderful to say offhand--"



## CURRICULUM UNIT ON THE FABLE

Karen Kennerly

Our objection to standard curriculum units is that they presume to know the teachers and students who will be using them, and assume all classrooms of a given age to be the same. Implicitly they set up a rigid hierarchy as to what is learned and when, irrespective of the child's experience and concerns.

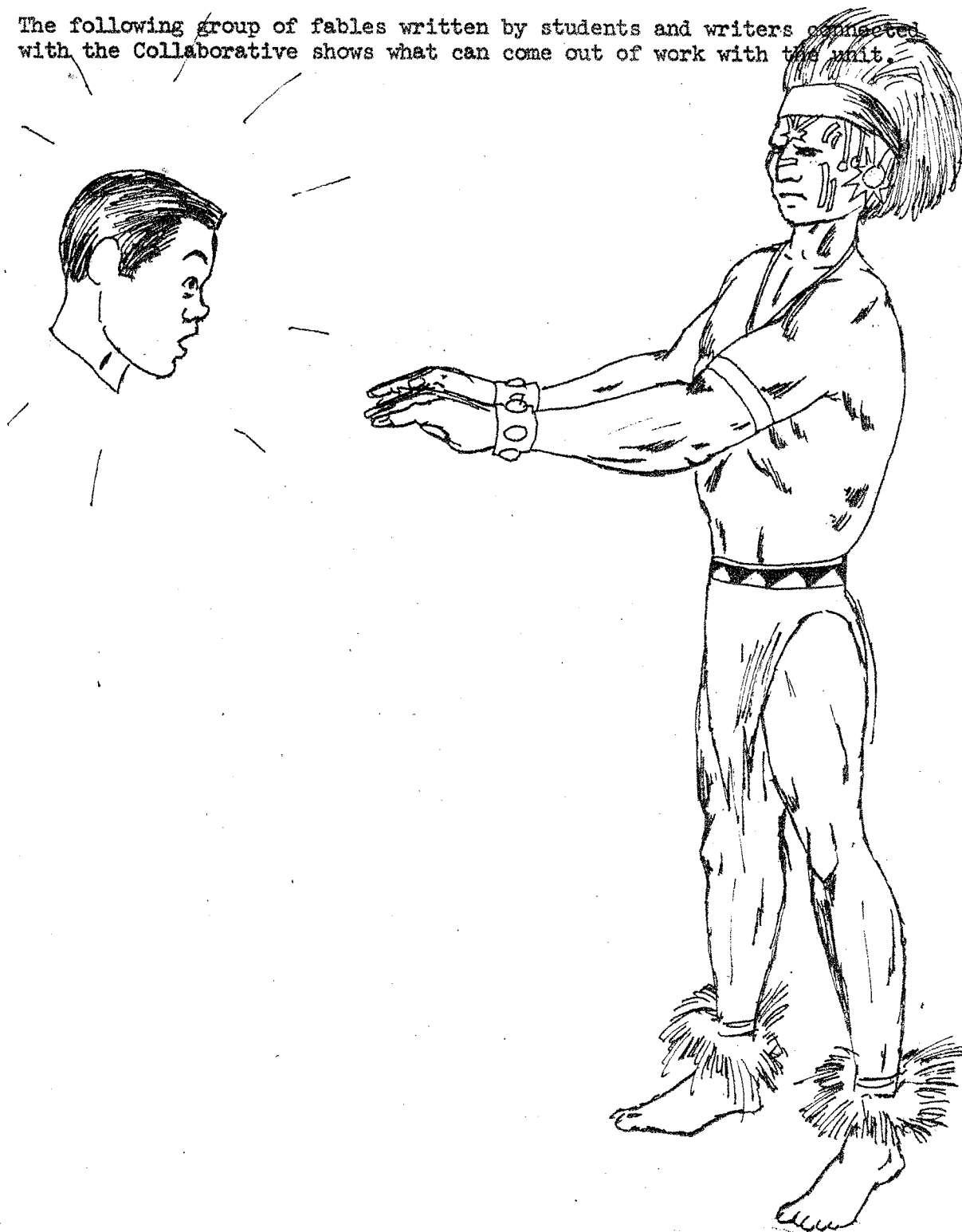
We are abandoning lesson plans and in their place offer a copious body of material from which any teacher can draw for any class. Hopefully it will be presented in such a way that the natural relationship of a given piece to the child, as well as to its genre, will be clearly understood. Rather than build a unit from a theoretical center we work in conjunction with students, writers, teachers, and the results of experimental classes. This summer students have helped us in our research on the fable by reading those we find and telling us what they like. We have also asked writers and children to write fables (some of these will be incorporated into the unit) and conducted a few writing classes where fables and fable ideas were used. The completed unit will have a loose-leaf binder format which will allow each teacher and his class to add or remove material as they wish, and us to give supplementary pages.

The initial idea of a unit on the fable came from classroom experience: Herbert Kohl used it successfully, and we discovered that many high school teachers tried it independently though some couldn't sustain a project for want of material. The appeal of the fable is the license it gives to talk about the underside of accepted human behavior and circumstances. It is fantastic and amoralistic while detailing character and narration on specific parallels to our mock ethic--the boisterous complement to Christian spirituality. Children like fables because fantasy is not fenced off as a world apart but retains the highly symbolic connotations they inherently bring to it. Curiously enough, the fable is one literary form students seem to prefer to write and to talk about than to read: because it's short and doesn't require a panorama of characters. And the resolution is there, in the necessity of a moral. We also see the fable as a form expansible into others such as the long narrative, satire, dramatic dialogue, allegory. The possible exercise of rewriting traditional modes in contemporary sensibilities can teach the concept of archetype in literature.

We are gathering material of every possible cultural variety and beginning chronologically with Sumer. Compilation will be according to animal type, juxtaposing various animals that represent the same traits to different cultures, etc. We will also have sections on morals and aphorisms without stories; tales fable in meaning but not in form; different fables with the same moral; different versions of the same fable. The unit will be introduced with definitions of the fable drawn from dictionaries, scholarly accounts, children's discussions and from the editors. This is not to be binding but to show the student he can make up his own definition.

Another part of the fables unit will be concerned with how this material can be used in different teaching situations, age levels, and in various areas of the school curriculum. We therefore will include reports from teachers on how their attempts to teach the fable have succeeded or failed.

The following group of fables written by students and writers connected with the Collaborative shows what can come out of work with the unit.



T H E H E A D M A N

---

THIS GUY WAS BORN, BUT HE WAS JUST A HEAD. SO HE WENT TO A WITCHDOCTOR AND HE SAID, "I DON'T WANT TO BE JUST A HEAD." THE WITCHDOCTOR PUT UP HIS HANDS AND WENT PUFF AND TURNED HIM INTO A HAND.

THEN THE GUY RAN AROUND HOLLERING, "I DON'T WANT TO BE A HAND!"

THERE IS A MORAL TO THIS STORY:

"YOU SHOULD HAVE QUIT WHILE YOU WERE A HEAD."

Mark Vecchione

F A B L E

Yes it was prince's kiss  
but the way was prepared for the prince;  
it had to be.

When the attendants carrying Snow White  
dead they thought her lying in the litter  
stumbled over the root of a tree  
the bit of apple deathly in her throat  
jolted free.

She was not strangled, not poisoned.

She could now come alive.

It was an accident they hardly noticed.

The threshold here came when they stumbled.

The jolt.

( A miracle has the deepest roots.

Something here like error

like failure:

one of those roots is a human slip.)

Muriel Rukeyser

THE SAD STORY  
ABOUT THE SIX  
BOYS ABOUT TO  
BE DRAFTED IN  
BROOKLYN



GRACE PALEY

I

were six boys in Brooklyn and none of them wanted to  
afted.

one of them went to college. What could the others do?

shot off his index finger. He had read about this in a  
I War I novel.

wore silk underpants to his physical. His father had done  
or World War II.

One went to a psychiatrist for three years starting three years  
earlier (his mother to save him had thought of it).

One married and had three children.

One enlisted and hoped for immediate preferential treatment.  
This is what happened next:

II

The boy who enlisted was bravely killed. There was a funeral  
for him at home. People sat on boxes and wore new sackcloth  
as it was one of the first of that family's bad griefs. They ate  
and wept.

Then, accidentally, due to a mistake in the filing system, the  
married father of three children was drafted. He lived a long  
time, maybe three months and killed several guerillas, two by  
strangulation, two by being a crack shot, and one in self  
defense. Then he was killed as he slept in the underbrush for  
other people think they ought to act in self defense too.

A couple of years later, the boy who had gone to the psychia-  
trist for three years and the boy in the silk underpants were  
reclassified. Because of their instabilities, they had always been  
against killing. Luckily, they never got further than the middle  
airlane over the very middle of the Pacific Ocean. There, the  
mighty jet exploded, perhaps due to sabotage, distributing 133  
servicemen in a blistery blaze to their watery graves.

As the war went on and on, the college boy became twenty  
six years old. He was now in his eighth year in college. He  
could not remember the name of his high school when he  
applied for his first job. He could not remember his mother's  
maiden name which is essential to applications. Nervousness  
ran in that family and finally reached him. He was taken to  
rest in a comfortable place in pleasant surroundings where he  
remained for twelve years. When he was about thirty-eight,  
he felt better and returned to society.

Now, the man with the shot-off index finger:

III

Even after four years, he didn't miss that finger. He had used  
it to point accusingly at guilty persons, for target shooting, for  
filing alphabetically. None of these actions concerned him any-  
more. To help him make general love, he still had his whole  
hand and for delicate love, his middle finger.

Therefore he joyfully married and fathered several children.  
All of them had shot-off index fingers, as did their children.

That family became a peaceful race apart. Sickness and famine  
didn't devastate them. Out of human curiosity they traveled  
and they were stubborn and tough like the feathery seeds of  
trees that float over mountain barriers and railroad valleys.  
In far places the children of the children of the man with the  
shot-off index finger gathered into settlements and cities and  
of course, they grew and multiplied.

And that's how at last, if you can believe it, after the dead  
loss of a million dead generations, on the round, river-streaked  
face of the earth, war ended.

## Three Little Men

One day long ago and far away three little men went walking. They walked up and down, near and far, here and there. If they came upon a little dog they would kick it, and if they came upon little children they would bite them. These little men were not very popular, and had very few really good friends. This upset them a great deal because they couldn't understand why people didn't like them, trust them, and invite them into their houses.

Well the first little man after much thinking propounded a theory to explain this unusual situation. He claimed that it was impossible for any two people to know each other anyway, and that the general unpopularity of the three was due to this unfortunate existential state of man. He wrote a very fine and long book about this, and to his surprise so many people agreed with him and bought his book, that he now had many pupils and disciples as well as friends.

The second little man was no intellectual though, and he couldn't agree with his friend. But he had in his long and difficult travels decided that his unpopularity was due to his blond hair, and so he wrote a book about the necessity of blonde reunion to reinstate friendship and love of man for little men. Well all of a sudden he too became very popular and never lacked friends or subordinates the rest of his life.

And we needn't worry about the third little man, for he had not lack of friends the rest of his life either. Everyone knew that he was the intimate of two very influential persons and loved to listen to him relate tales of their travels.

Moral: The three blind mice weren't hurt very much by the loss of their tails after all.

Moral: Where there's a will there's usually a fool.

Moral: Why not pave the road to hell if you can?

Moral: Seek and you shall be sought.

Herbert Kohl

# ~~Wolf~~ Alvin's FABLE

## The Wolf who cried "Boy"

There once was a lovely deserted place on the outskirts of town, where a pack of wolves carried on their ~~day~~ daily tasks, of scrounging, killing, eating, and loving, the part of their task that was the hardest was loving. This was so because of the Boy <sup>who lived</sup> inside a town ~~who~~ was always snooping around to find the wolves making love or something similar to that. Well anyway the wolves set up a warning signal which happened to be <sup>another</sup> a wolfe who didn't have a chance of ~~making~~ making love with the girl wolves, because of his bad breath, you see he was a outcast because while the other wolves liked to eat deer, rabbit, and all that kind of wildlife he always stuck to eating sheep and lambs, I guess that's why his breath had that awfull smell. The wolfe would ~~was~~ cry "Boy" every time he saw the "two-lesed party paper" from inside of town. So the wolf who was the warning signal got kind of jealous because he wasn't hip or to put it in milder terms he got mad because he didn't know what was happening. Because of this he kept on crying "Boy", "Boy", and more "Boys" until all the wolves jumped on him ~~in the~~ ~~and~~ and broke his collar bone. The wolf getting up from the ground exclaiming "DARN They got scope and all that other kind of junk to make your breath smell sweet, why did ya hafta so AN give me more problems by breaking my collar bone and with the the wolfe lived sadly ever after

By His self

MORAL: Love is a hurting thing

Get "Scope" OR  
Be A SIGNAL WOLF.

## The Girl Who Wanted

### A Fable

There was a girl who lived in our city who had a great many possessions but nothing that she wanted. Nothing that she had gave her pleasure. She was unhappy because she wanted a horse to live with her in her room and her father, who could hardly bear to deny her anything, had denied her the horse. So the girl, whose name was Anita, said no one loved her and lay down on the floor and screamed and kicked her feet and banged her head. Oh my God, her father thought, she'll kill herself if I don't get her a horse for her room so he went out and bought her a colt and arranged quarters for it in his daughter's room. Anita was happy with the colt for two days, but then decided that a horse was not something she wanted in her room. "Take it away," she told her father. "Take it out of my sight. Why did you put that smelly horse in my room?" The father knew better than to tell her why. He gave the horse to a friend in the country and said he was sorry he had burdened her with it. When the horse was gone Anita was more unhappy than before. "You give a person a gift," she said to her father, "and then you take it away and give it to someone else. How's that supposed to make a kid feel?" So Anita lay down on the ground and banged her head and screamed. "I'll bring back the horse," the father said to stop the screaming, but the screaming didn't stop. "Tell me what you want, precious, and I'll get it for you. Only stop banging your head against the ground and stop that screaming."

More screaming and banging of head.



"What do you want?"

"If I told you, you wouldn't get it for me. You never give me anything I want."

"I promise to get it for you if you stop banging your head. What do you want?"

"Promise."

"I promise."

"Okay. I want a tiger to live in my room."

"That's out of the question," the father said. "Tigers are dangerous."

Anita banged her head on the floor and screamed. When it seemed she was about to do herself serious damage, the father said he would keep his promise and buy her a tiger if she would only for God's sake stop banging her head.

The tiger, a small one, was installed in a cage in Anita's room. After a day she got bored playing with the beast through the bars and though she had been instructed not to, let him out. She pulled the tiger's ears and his tail which the tiger, trained by a circus to be tame, endured with a minimum of snarling. Annoyed at the tiger's docility, she kicked the beast in the behind and screamed insults at it. "You're chifken," she said to the beast, and prying its jaws open, she stuck her head in its mouth. "Only a father like mine would get me a dumb tiger like you." In a fit of instinct, the tiger ate the unhappy girl. And when the father, hearing the beast roar, came in to see what the rumpus was about, he was eaten as well.

His last words were: "What have you done to my little girl? They told me you were tame." The tiger, tigers not being able to talk, said nothing.

Moral 1. If you want something badly enough, you usually get it.

Moral 2. The ways of authority are devious.

---Jonathan Baumbach

**THE TEACHERS**

AND

*Writers*

**COLLABORATIVE**

**INVITES YOU**



**TO WRITE FABLES**

**FOR OUR ANTHOLOGY**

