

IMAGE-MAKING

by Rosalind Pace and Marcia Simon

AT POUGHKEEPSIE DAY SCHOOL A GROUP OF fourteen students (grades 1–12) and teachers worked all day every day for a week with pens, pencils, scissors, printers' and India inks, rollers, magnifying glasses, shells, leaves, feathers and other found objects, glue, and words. Each student and teacher designed and created an individual book of his or her own poems and visual images, as well as a large communal book. In the process, they realized that inside each of them is an

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The authors' week at Poughkeepsie Day School was made possible by the generosity of Stella Chasteen.

endless source of rich personal imagery that can be articulated, developed, and shared.

In 1976 the two of us had developed Image-Making, a workshop in creative bookmaking based on a series of simple, carefully structured, parallel verbal and visual activities. Our goal is not only to stimulate creativity, but to make workshop participants aware of the sources of their creativity so these sources can be tapped again and again.

During our week at Poughkeepsie Day School, mornings were devoted to these parallel verbal and visual activities, and afternoons were spent working on the communal book.

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On Monday morning we began with an introduction to the book form as a unique format. We talked about what existed before books—Assyrian clay tablets, Egyptian wall paintings, and Hebrew scrolls, for example. By becoming aware of what a book is *not*, students become more aware of what a book *is*. We told the students that inherent in the book form is a beginning, a middle, and an end. The turning of pages creates possibilities for anticipation, memory, surprise, and resolution.

We then gave out the materials for the first visual project: one large sheet of white paper, two smaller sheets of black paper, and white glue. (We use 65 lb. Mohawk cover stock, cool white, 26" x 40"; 19" x 25" black pastel paper; and Elmer's Glue-All. The white paper must be large enough to allow for a range of book sizes, and heavy and opaque enough so that what is glued onto it will not show through.) Students were instructed to fold the white paper in half three times, making books of sixteen pages (counting both sides of each page). At this point we gave no further description of the project.

With the students holding their books, we told them to decide on the size and proportions of the book they would create. This choice was the first of many intuitive decisions they would make. Students then cut their books to size, being careful not to cut off the book's spine. The only rule we imposed regarding size and proportion was that the book must be rectangular. This rule eliminated books shaped like butterflies or hearts, or books with scalloped edges—designs that impose too rigid a content and elicit preconceived ideas.

By this time, students were wondering what their books were going to be about. This is what we said: "The content of your book will be one black rectangle—

or less—per page. The rectangle may be cut, or torn, or both. It may be any size, any proportion, and may be placed anywhere on the page. Begin with the first page (front cover) and work consecutively through the book. Do one page at a time, one rectangle at a time." We said that the centerfold is a special place, and can be treated as one page or two. Students will often ask if they can break the rules. The answer is always yes, as long as the black shape can be recognized as a rectangle. For example, rectangles can get crumpled up and smoothed out again before being glued onto the page. Some students project rectangles over the edges of their pages, fold rectangles so they pop out when the page is turned, or cut or tear rectangles into tiny pieces and reassemble them. We never give examples of what might be done because we don't want to influence the students' impulses. The possibilities within a limited framework are endless, and that is precisely the point.

We did not say how much time students had for this project until they had been at work for about 15 minutes. Then we said that they had about 20 minutes more. (Young children can work more quickly). A time limit does what our other rules do—it encourages quick, intuitive decision-making. We propelled the students through this activity by insisting that they did not have to know what their books were "about." "Just pay attention to what you want the rectangles to do on each page," we said. "This book is only about rectangles." We made sure that students understood that a blank page—a page without a rectangle—is not nothing, but signifies something when viewed in the context of the total book. We also told students to save all their scraps.

The parallel verbal activity, which was done on Monday morning immediately after we "read" the rectangle books as a group (more about this later), was to build poems from "word blocks" drawn at random from a common pile of words. Each student contributed to the common pile by writing ten nouns and ten verbs on small slips of white paper (about 1 1/2" x 3"). We introduced the activity by talking about words as concrete things that not only mean themselves, but also have resonances and implications, just as the black rectangles do. We talked very briefly about what is unique about poetic form, about what a poem is and is not. We emphasized that a poem is not necessarily a preconceived totality, but a discovery—line by line by line. We read a few poems with startling images: "Two athletes/are dancing in the cathedral/of the wind" (James Wright, from "Spring Images") or, "gritty lightning/of their touch" (Mary Oliver, from "Starfish"). We reminded students to use specific verbs (*stroll* instead of *walk*) and nouns (*trout* instead of *fish*). We told them to write down words that they like—that they like the

Participants in the Image-Making Workshop at Poughkeepsie Day School:

Heather Borachok, grade 6
Adrian Brougher, grade 1
Brandon Chaplin, grade 8
Rhody Chasteen, grade 11
Lon Clark, grade 12
Scott Frisco, grade 10
Caroline Glemann, grade 6
Chris MacWilliams, grade 6
Brian Moran, grade 2
Scott Moran, grade 8
Joan Scott, librarian
Maggy Sears, 4th grade teacher
Beth Silber, grade 6
Dorothy Ann Streeter, art teacher

sound of, or that have special personal associations for them. The only rule was that students must use concrete nouns and verbs. The two of us also contributed to the word pile.

The common pile was then mixed up, words face down, and each student drew out ten words, no more than two of which could be ones that he or she had contributed. These words then became the raw material for building a poem. Our instructions were: "Use as many of these words as you can; use as many other words as you need to. You may repeat words if you wish, and you may change the form of the word if you need to (*dream, dreamed, dreamer*, etc.). Write one line at a time, and don't plan ahead. Don't try to rhyme. Resist the temptation to put obvious words together (like *horse* and *gallop*.) Allow for surprise."

Each morning session was about three hours long, divided roughly two-thirds/one-third between the visual and verbal activity.

On Tuesday morning, we began with a brief history of the alphabet, paying particular attention to how the letters A and B evolved from images of concrete things—an ox's head, a house. We showed alphabets in various languages to help students begin to see letters as visual delights. We told students that the most beautiful letters were designed to please the eye, and that the Renaissance efforts to design letters according to mathematical formulas were not entirely successful. Then each student selected a letter from a variety of alphabet styles. (We use *The Alphabet and Elements of Lettering* by Frederic William Goudy as a source book.) Without telling the students what they would be doing with their letter, we asked them to examine it closely, using magnifying glass and mirror, and to measure it carefully with a ruler. When they were familiar with their letter, students were told to draw it in pencil on black paper, making it at least four times larger than the original so it would be big enough to cut out. We told students to pay close attention to proportions, relationships of height to width, and the spaces in or around the letter. We assured students that this was not an activity requiring scientific precision (which is beyond young children) and that they could, in addition to measuring carefully, trust their eyes. The students drew the letters, cut them out, and glued them onto heavy white paper—1/2 sheet of the Mohawk cover stock mentioned earlier—of which students could use as much or as little as they wished, since the relationship between the letter and the space it occupies is another important intuitive choice. We tacked the mounted letters to the wall for viewing.

The parallel verbal activity was to make an acrostic poem, using the letters of the student's first and last

name as the spine of the poem. (Students used thin black markers and ordinary white paper without lines.) Our instructions were: "Write your name vertically down the left margin of the paper. Then, in a few seconds, write on another sheet of paper as many words as you can think of that begin with the first letter of your name. Now choose one of those words—any one. This is the first word of your poem. Write it on your first sheet of paper, using the first letter of your name as the first letter of your first word." We told students to be aware of all the white space to the right of each letter of their name, and to use as much of it as they wished. The lines of a poem do not all have to be the same length. We said that the words of the lines can form sentences, but each line doesn't have to be a sentence. If they wished, they could write one sentence running down the whole length of the poem. We also said: "Even though this is a poem held together by your name, it doesn't have to be about yourself; you don't have to consciously think about yourself as you write the poem. Just let the letters of your name—the letters of the spine—propel you through the poem." When the poems were finished, we read them aloud, slowly and clearly, much to the delight of even the shyest students.

Before leaving school on Tuesday, we asked the students to bring in on Wednesday morning a bag of found objects—anything with a surface that could be inked and pressed to paper.

Students always bring in interesting things. This time they brought a wonderful variety of objects, including leaves, shells, flowers, feathers, paper clips, letters carved out of wood, thread spools, cut potatoes and carrot slices, lemon halves, lace, string, and a fly swatter. All of the found objects were placed on pieces of large white paper in a communal pile. Before introducing the day's visual activity, we presented a very brief history of the invention of printing with moveable type, and emphasized that this made commonplace and accessible what was previously considered magical and inaccessible except to monks, priests, and scribes. We pointed out that the printed word, however, can still carry with it a power beyond its literal meaning.

Students were then invited to help themselves to the found objects in the communal pile, and to an assortment of water-soluble printers' inks (black and not more than four colors), and to a variety of papers (black pastel paper, sumi or rice papers, plain white paper, etc.). We then explained that the purpose of the activity is simply to explore the printing process—to experience the magic of the printed image emerging as an object in itself, which may or may not look like the original object. Repetition of an image automatically creates rhythm and pattern. We told students not to create pictures or

“finished” pieces but simply to have a good time printing, and to do at least five sheets of prints, including at least one on black paper. After they had finished, we cleaned up the rollers and inks, spread all the prints out on the floor, like a beautiful carpet, and looked at them.

Then students were told to pick up their own prints and examine them closely, using a variety of picture mats, as well as right angles cut from mat board or heavy white paper (which can easily be moved around to form temporary “frames” for sections of the prints). We asked students to explore their prints until they found a particular section they liked. This can be a hard choice because students usually become very excited about everything they find by “framing” sections of their prints. We told them: “Don’t worry about your choices. Anything you choose will work.” As students looked at their framed “pictures,” we told them to let their minds go and to jot down their thoughts on a separate sheet of paper—what they see, what they are reminded of, what is happening in that space, what it might feel like to enter it.

These jotted notes formed the basis of the repetition poem, which we then introduced. We talked briefly about repetition as an organizing principle of a poem, and we read a few examples: repetition of sound (e.g., “soundless as dots on a disc of snow”—Dickinson), repetition of word (e.g., D. H. Lawrence’s “Bavarian Gentians”), repetition of phrase and syntax (e.g., Whitman), or repetition of image (e.g., Stevens’ “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” or James Wright’s “Spring Images”). Students then wrote poems, looking at their notes and their print “pictures,” open to whatever else came into their heads, and using as many of the above modes of repetition as they wished. We ended Wednesday morning with a group reading.

On Thursday and Friday, students composed and assembled their final books from the mass of material that had been generated during the previous mornings’ activities. We introduced this final project by talking again about the book as a format for designing in time and space, which has inherent in its structure a beginning, middle, and end, and the possibility of anticipation, memory, surprise and resolution. Each page is both complete in itself, and exists in relationship to what comes before and after. We looked at several examples of beautiful books, including Horace Rackham’s *Sleeping Beauty*, Kenneth Patchen’s hand-painted poem-books, and individual pages from *The Complete Graphic Works of William Blake*. We pointed out how graphic images and words relate to each other not only in terms of content, but also in the way they

look. We then told students that their first task was to discover the theme of their own books.

With all of their work (including their collection of scraps) spread out around them, students then began this search. They spent a lot of time looking at everything, rereading their poems, fingering their scraps. Slowly, they began to notice commonalities and echoes, the threads that ran through all of their work. We told the students that what they had before them was raw material, and that nothing they had done so far should be considered either finished or inviolate. Poems could be cut apart and reassembled, copied over. Their rectangle books, enlarged letters, and prints could be cut or torn to make whatever visual image they desired. The point is that the final book is *not* a scrapbook. It is not a container for the previous days’ activities. It is a new invention, made from the raw material already generated. More black paper could be cut or torn as needed, but no drawings or other material could be added. We assured students that once they had discovered their theme, they would be amazed at how everything would become relevant to that theme. We assured them that the titles of their books already existed somewhere in their verbal material—all they had to do was find it.

We told students that by the end of Thursday morning they should have decided on their titles, and on the size and shape of their books, and have folded and cut the blank pages, approximating the number of pages needed to present their material in sequence. Friday morning was devoted to completing the books and viewing them.

During the assembling of the final books, the teacher needs to provide the most encouragement and exhibit the most restraint. The teacher must believe that this process works.

Afternoons at Poughkeepsie Day School were spent working on a collaborative book, *Seasons and Seconds: A Book of Days* (fig. 1). In a mirror image of the mornings’ activities, in which the theme of each book was discovered *after* the poems and visual materials had been produced, the afternoons’ activities *began* with the class’s agreeing on a theme for the communal book, selecting the title, and deciding how the needed verbal and visual materials would be produced. Each participant had a special task, following the division of labor of monks in a medieval scriptorium, in which one person did the illuminated letters, another the minuscule letters, another the animal drawings, another the portrait miniatures, and so on.

We had designed the afternoon activities especially for the Poughkeepsie Day School workshop. The situation at Poughkeepsie Day School was ideal for several reasons.

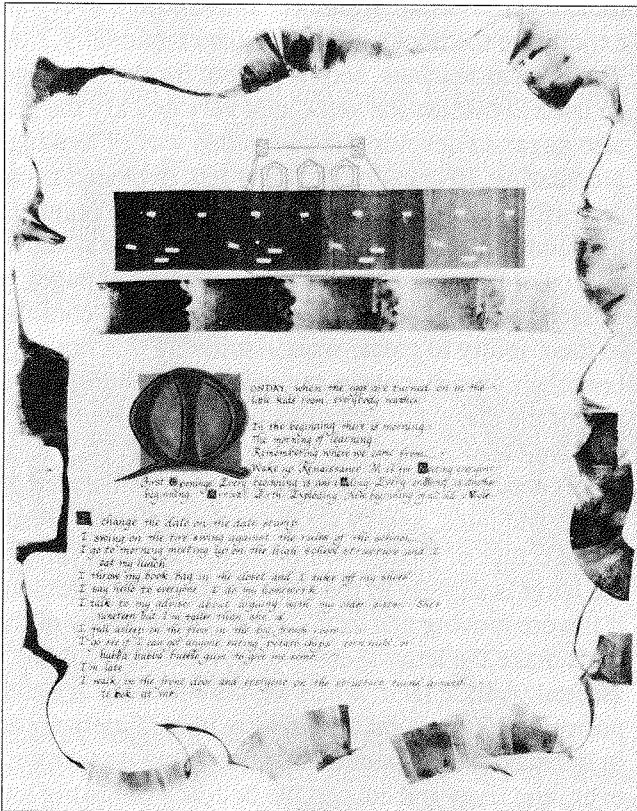


Fig. 1: “Monday” from *Seasons and Seconds*

First, the school had already demonstrated its belief in creativity by freeing teachers and students for an entire week. This helped set the tone for the workshop.

Second, the amount of time allocated was crucial. The continual involvement of the participants, without distraction, allowed time for maximum individual concentration and time for the group to look at work together. The director of the school, Richard E. Hanson, Jr., commented on the high level of concentration that he observed no matter when he entered the classroom. In fact, his presence, as well as that of two newspaper reporters, was largely ignored. Some students needed quiet and solitude in order to maintain the level of concentration that their work demanded. Joan Scott had to hide out in the school’s darkroom to do the calligraphy for *Seasons and Seconds*. However, Adrian, a first grader, was able to concentrate intensely while lying flat on his stomach on the art room floor, with everyone stepping over him as he drew a toucan, a sea monster, a yak, and other marvelous creatures in the medallions of one of the pages. “Students get a lift,” Hanson said, “from seeing someone else totally involved.” It was time that made this level of concentration possible. Forty-five minutes a week, or even forty-five minutes a day for a week, would not have done it.

Third, the diversity of the participants created a wider audience for the work than the usual homogenous class, and thus provided a wider “outside world” to validate each person’s work. Everyone did the same activities in the mornings, using the same materials and approximately the same amount of time. Everyone contributed something different to the communal book. Often a first grader, a sixth grader, and a teacher would be working on the same page at the same time, doing jobs of equal importance. Hanson felt that the age mix was important: “It works, and it emphasizes that one is a learner always, and that learning is a human activity.”

Fourth, the participation of teachers as equals allowed for the possibility of carry-over from the workshop into regular classroom activities. Teachers can hardly be expected to foster student creativity unless they know how to foster it within themselves. Maggy Sears, the fourth grade teacher, said that it was important, as a teacher, to be in the position of the student. She was already doing many creative things in her classroom, especially with poetry, but she said, “If you experience it yourself, it makes you *sure* it’s the right thing to do.”

Establishing the conviction within a student that he or she *is* creative is the critical first step in nurturing creativity, just as making students realize that they *can* master a given task is at the heart of all effective teaching. In the Image-Making workshop, this belief in one’s creativity emerges in two ways: when the student sees his or her own personal style or “signature” emerge in the verbal *and* the visual work, and when the student sees that the work has meaning and significance to others.

The student’s signature emerges when work is produced intuitively, that is, without a preconceived idea. Therefore, the first activities of the week are designed to circumvent the preconceived idea. In both the rectangle book and the word-block poem, students are forced to deal with the materials themselves, the papers and the words, rather than with any conscious plan.

For intuition to operate effectively so that the individual signature can emerge, the students must begin with the act of choosing: choosing the size of each rectangle, choosing where to place it on the page, quickly writing down any five nouns on the five pieces of paper. If choices are made for the sake of choice, rather than for a specific “goal,” the choice will automatically be intuitive. And no intuitive choice can be a mistake, because it automatically is a reflection of the chooser.

A student’s artistic signature will manifest itself in a characteristic use of space, patterning, repeated images,

and quality of line or edge. It can be seen in the way the words look on the page or the relationship of the rectangles to the edges of the page. When verbal and visual activities are presented back to back, as parallel activities, and the same characteristics appear in both, the students cannot escape themselves and call what they did an accident.

The two of us teach, as it were, *after* the fact, as opposed to the conventional practice that begins with the goal (or the rationale) followed by examples. In the Image-Making activities, the students work *first*, so intuition can operate freely, and learn the why afterwards. We give simple instructions that allow students to work directly with the materials—e.g., use one black rectangle (or less) per page. Then, only *after* the work is done, do we respond to it.

Our responses are always based on finding the uniqueness in each work—not on what we think it ought to be, but on what is there. Students learn that everything counts, that every tear, wrinkle, and cut matters, whether they meant it or not.

And it is because everything has significance that we insist the students keep all their scraps—their leftover cuttings, their first drafts, everything. By the end of the week, they learn that what they ignore can be as important as what they pay attention to.

The conviction that one *can* do unique creative work began to be established on Monday morning when we “read” the rectangle books of the group. First, everyone

looked at the books in silence. This allowed everyone to experience the books intuitively, or emotionally, first. Then we, as teachers, set the pattern for the language to be used to discuss the work, and very quickly the group also began to develop fluency in this way of looking and articulating. Rectangles flew and fell, exploded from centerfolds, or slid off pages into space. We pointed out the sequential nature of each unfolding drama—how particular pages anticipated or recalled other pages.

Each morning, we reinforced the students’ confidence in their ability to create work intuitively that not only bore their own signature, but also had meaning to the rest of the class. For example, on Tuesday morning, we observed how Scott Frisco’s big letter “M” (fig. 2, center letter) was impressive in its grace, with its balance of thicks and thins, and its serifs waving gallantly. Placed in the center of a large white space, the actual center of the letter is slightly to the right, making the letter look as if it were moving across the page. The delicacy of the thins make the letter seem fragile, more brave than assured. A little later, when we were looking at Scott’s poem (box 2), several things were immediately apparent. In his handwritten poem, his tiny writing was strung out over long lines and echoed the delicacy of his big letter M. His poem was surrounded by a lot of white space. And the subject of his poem—moving through space, reaching, yearning—the soft echoes of sound, and the precise and sophisticated use of emjambment and internal rhyme, echoed the shape, movement, and

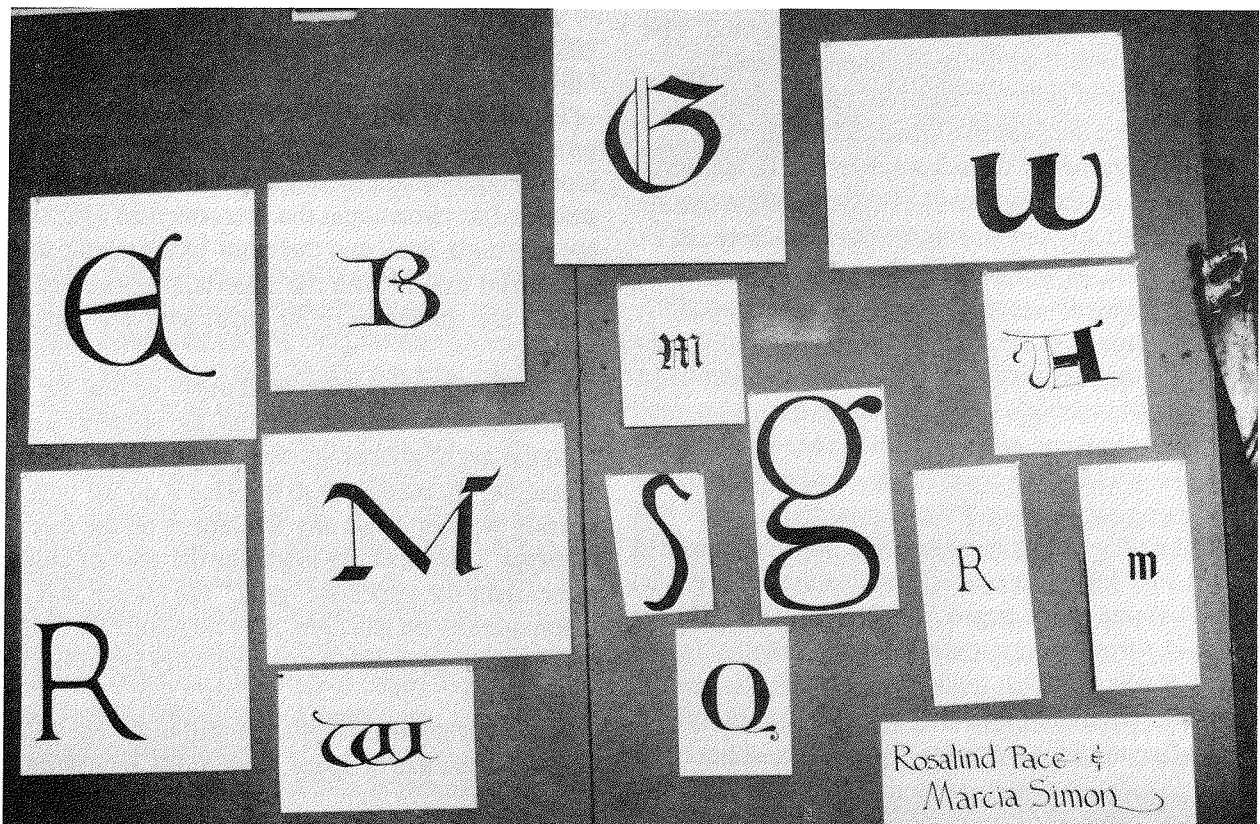


Fig. 2: Initial letters

Acrostic Poem

S o there are green, red and maybe blue, people will
cry all over this place.
C ome with me. I am going to more than just the
moon.
O n this, from here, I will go, places, people, I see
them all.
T he end is near, not very far, yes, we'll go to the
moon just
T he two of us.
F or if we don't we're sure to go to a place of
R easons where you'll never return. We must get away
I fear soon, we'll go away to the moon.
S o come with me I can't go alone just us two and the
C hrome-plated place where nomads dwell, where the
O cean is red and the sky is green, come with me to the
moon we'll go to the moon.

Box 2: Poem by Scott Frisco

intricate design of his letter. M for motion. M for melody. M for moon. The first and last lines of the poem repeated the colors of red and green in the same way that the top serif was repeated by the bottom serif of the letter. Turned sideways, the shape of the poem itself echoed the shape of the letter. Scott made none of these correspondences consciously—we had presented the verbal and visual exercises as distinct rather than illustrative of each other. All of these correspondences served to make Scott and the others in the group aware of the coherent, rich personal imagery that informed his work every step of the way.

When Scott saw that he wasn't the only one who was convinced—that his work also had significance for others—his belief in his creative power took root and began to grow. It is interesting to note that Scott is a high school student receiving special attention for dyslexia. In spite of his initial fear of writing, and his shame about his penmanship and spelling, he revealed himself as a natural poet with a gift for musical language and startling images. In his final book, there was more text than in any of the other books in the group. It was very helpful for Scott to hear his poem read aloud, so he could hear its music. It was even better for him to experience the group's favorable response to his work because he had always believed that this kind of work was beyond him.

There are always two parts to the creative act: the artist's creation of the work, and another person's re-experiencing of the work. Until this communication takes place, the creative act is incomplete. This is why it was important to allow enough time for group viewing and public response to each activity.

Because there are two of us teaching, the process of convincing students that their work has meaning to others was accelerated. The two of us created an atmosphere of a community of artists, working together without a single authority figure, sharing our visions, insights, and also our frustrations, and stimulating each other. When both of us, as individuals whom the students knew to have different personalities, responded in a similar way to a student's work, the student saw that it was the work that had elicited this response.

Nowhere was this more important than in the case of Brandon, an eighth grader and self-proclaimed anarchist, who wore the long, black gloves of the political assassin and put up considerable resistance to completing his book. When he finally took off his gloves and finished his book, he showed it to one of us. Everything he had secretly hoped would be seen *was* seen—all kinds of reverberations and transformations that expanded his theme. He could hardly believe the excitement he had generated or the praise that was heaped upon him and, though he blushed for a moment, he pretended not to care. But he insisted that the other of us look at his book immediately. When it elicited the same response from the second viewer, with the same subtleties noticed and admired, he then permitted himself to believe that he had not betrayed his defiant, anarchistic self, but had actually advanced his cause, by making a coherent and meaningful book *about* anarchy—and peace. His immediate response was to seek out another student, to check the accuracy of the French he had used in his text.

Throughout the week, we were able to demonstrate, during the relatively generous amount of time allocated for the group viewing, that each student's work had a content beyond that which was expected. And thus, each student became convinced that his or her work, as well as the work of others, was successful and had distinction and meaning, vitality and character, and because the work arose from each individual's imagery and bore each person's artistic signature, was unlike any other. Thus, we accomplished our first goal as teachers, which was to provide activities that convinced the students that they *could* do it, that they do have within them the power to create.

Our second goal, as artists who also teach, is to be sure that the work the students do is good—that the work itself is convincing as art. A convincing work of art is a work in which the form and content are one. The exercises we use and the way in which we discuss them are all geared toward this fusion.

Therefore, how we talk about the students' work becomes an important part of our teaching. This articulation contains two elements: first, the intuitive response ("The 'A' looks like it's dancing"), which is a statement about the *content*. Students see that their work

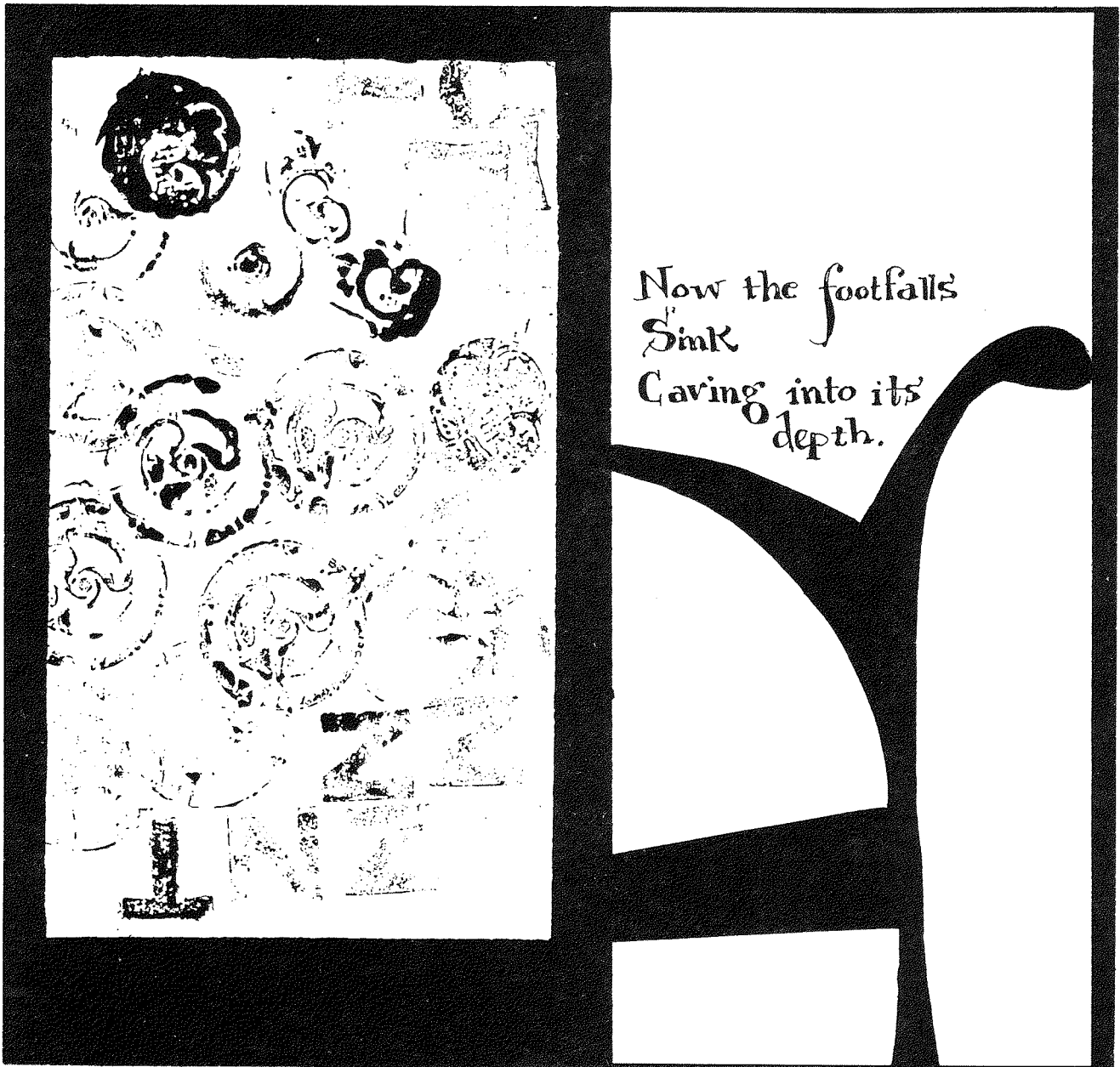


Fig. 3: A page from Joan Scott's book

has an effect. Then we tell why their work has that effect (“because of the way it is placed at an angle and, therefore, freed from the horizontal and vertical edges of the paper, and because of the way this serif points delicately into the corner”)—this becomes a statement about the *form*.

This two-part articulation helps the students see the work more fully. It goes a long way toward dispelling the myth about creativity that says that it's whatever I want it to be and whatever I see in it and my guess is as good as yours, an altogether too typical response to art, poetry, or anything else that is not immediately understood.

By teaching verbal and visual art together, not as one kind of art simply illustrating the other, we further encourage the fusion of form and content. We “read” the

visual material as well as look at it, and we “see” the verbal material as well as read it. If a work's form and content are only loosely related, the work will be weaker and less satisfying. When one looks only at form, one can then say, “If it rhymes, it's poetry”—no matter how trite the message. When one looks only at the content, one can then say, “It has mountains and a rainbow, therefore it must be art”—no matter how badly it is painted. Mere illustration, as in drawing a picture to illustrate a poem, can allow content to take over. Similarly, mere decoration can allow form to take over. Both can be nice to look at and fun to do, but they should not be confused with deeper creative activity, which results in self-revelation and which expresses the voice and vision of a unique individual.

If a student understands the relationship between form and content, even intuitively, then that student can allow the materials to have their own life. Being able to do this comes from the belief in oneself: "I will play with these things. Something exciting is bound to happen." As teachers, of course, we never tell the students that they are going to do exciting work, that it will be a lot of fun, and that they will learn important things about themselves. Nothing would be more intimidating. Instead, we focus their attention simply on the task at hand, and the possibilities that they *must* consider in order to do it. The excitement comes afterwards, when we help them to see what they have done. When students begin, on their own, to see possibilities in the material that they had not seen before, they cross the line from being doers to becoming makers.

Perhaps one of the most dramatic examples of this is when someone dares to cut up the big letter (from Tuesday morning) for use in his or her final book. When Joan decided to put her carefully copied, meticulously cut 14th-century Lombardic "E" in the paper cutter (fig. 2, upper left), everyone gathered around to watch. Joan had become convinced that her book needed a certain shape, which cutting the letter would produce. She sliced it with understanding and enjoyment, sacrificing a beautiful form in order to create other forms that the content of her book (*Shadows from the Moon*, fig. 3) demanded.

With less fanfare, but with the same understanding, six-year-old Adrian incorporated the form of his "S" into his final book as new, startling, and thoroughly convincing content: an elephant's trunk twisting right off the page (fig. 4).

The ability of the maker to allow the material to have a life of its own, and to integrate this newly created material into the work as a whole, varies from person to person. What Joan and Adrian did, when they saw how their material could be transformed into new material, describes one level of this process. A further stage is reached when the maker is able to use that new material to discover even more new material. This stage can incorporate the use of "accident" as a means of discovery.

Heather's experience demonstrates the second stage. She had finished her book, except for the title. The book had coherence and theme, but up to this point she had sensed these only intuitively. "I know what my book is about," she kept saying, "but I can't find the words to say it." We insisted that she come up with a title, and kept asking her questions until she did. It is important to note that we never gave her suggestions, we only asked her questions, so that both the insight and the language to express it came from her. It was simply a matter of getting her to say out loud what had been floating around

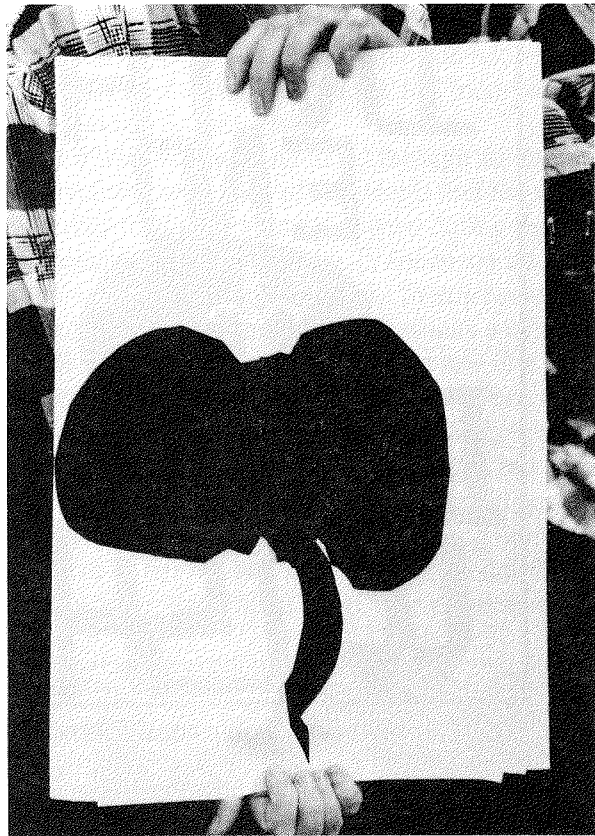


Fig. 4: Adrian Brougher's S-trunked elephant

in her head as feeling. "It's about wishing," she said. She then looked at her cover with the big "B" in the middle. "What is the 'B' for?" we asked. "Beginning." "Then what is the title of your book?" "*Wishing and Beginning*." But she was not satisfied. Then, because she had not abandoned her pursuit, the title came to her in a flash: "*In the Beginning, I Wish*." She was thrilled. So were we.

Heather then decided to cut out the large letters of her title. She asked if she could make the small letters with ink and white-out instead, since it would be too hard to cut them. We said yes. However, after she had cut and pasted the big letters, it was her own decision to cut out the small letters as well. She spent agonizing, intense minutes cutting out very small letters with a large pair of scissors. After her discovery about the rightness of the shape produced by a scissors rather than a brush or pen, Heather made a further discovery. Notice how the "I" in "Beginning" (fig. 5, right) is half black and half white. This was not planned, but discovered as an exciting possibility when the "I" landed on the edge of the black border as the cut-out black letters were being glued down, one by one. And it was the invention of the "I" made of positive and negative, black and white, one half the reverse of the other, that led Heather to the concept of the back cover (fig. 5, left). Here, the negative space of the "B" is used in the center and becomes a new positive space, and the reverse of the title becomes the

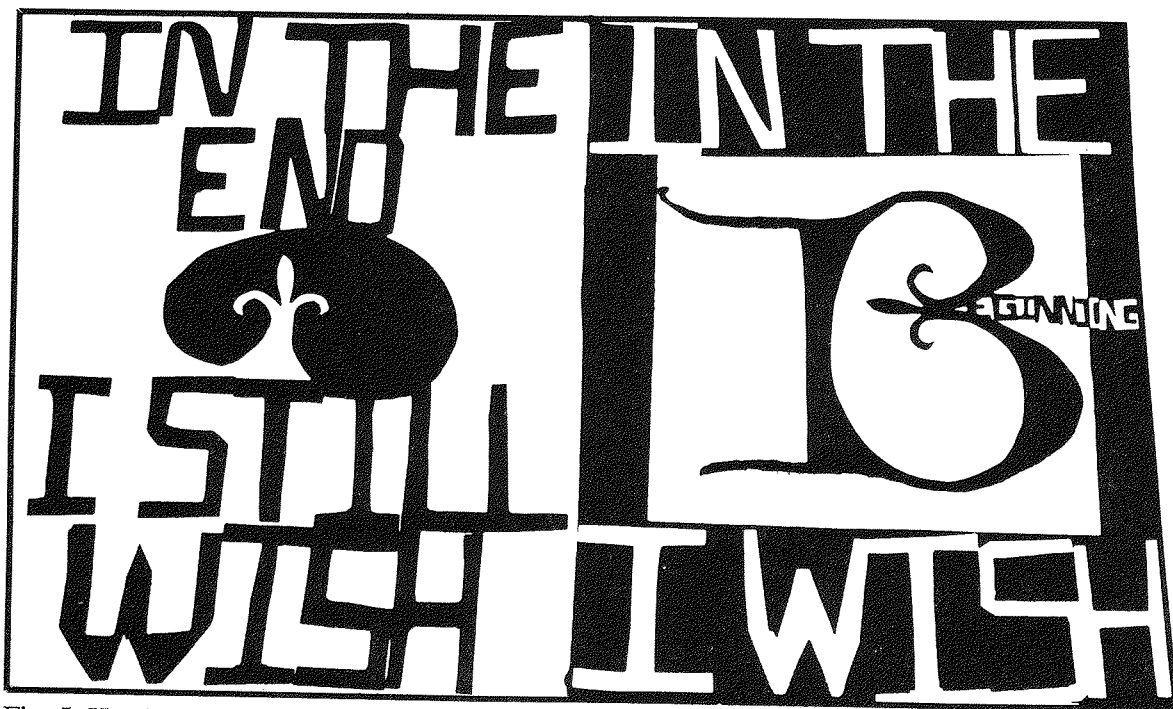


Fig. 5: Heather Borachok's book covers, front (right) and back (left)

conclusion. Heather discovered how these pages could be designed; we see how "Beginning" is born out of the belly of the "B" like an invitation to turn the page into the future. And we see how, in the end, there is no end but rather a flourishing seed that has taken root and is growing. Heather was fully in control of her materials to the extent that she had allowed herself to be led by them. She worked with utter intensity for about an hour and a half. She had become a maker.

Similarly, when Joan came to the last page of her book, she related the following experience. "I had it all planned, but when I turned the page, the pieces of black paper fell onto the facing page, ruining my plan. But I saw immediately that the new position was right, more right than I ever could have planned. This realization was the most important thing that happened to me. It was the realization that I had the freedom to take risks." She, too, had become a maker.

The group developed the phrase "doing a Matisse" to acknowledge the incorporation of a mistake or accident into the work. We had looked at Matisse's book *Jazz*, in which he makes "mistakes" in his hand-written text and crosses them out. These cross-outs actually expand the jazz theme to include the concept of improvisation. Tenth grader Scott Frisco was upset when the letters of his first poem bled through the paper onto his cover, but he quickly saw how the new blots could add to the visual design of the cover. He, too, had become a maker, in full control of his materials, because he saw a "mistake" as a sudden increase in the raw materials he could use.

What we look for in our students' work is evidence that a discovery has been made, that they have gone

beyond the expected and the previously known, and that both their language and their vision have taken them to a new place. We facilitate this by insisting that they stick as closely as possible to both the materials and the task at hand. If the focus is narrowed, the vision expands. The more precisely we look at a big letter, the more we see. The more we look at fewer words, the more resonance those words will have. In Brian's poem, for example (box 3), the slant rhymes of *can/rain/down/one* are

Repetition Poem

I can smell the rain, I can
feel the rain, it comes down
one by one.

Box 3: Poem by Brian Moran

happy poetic moments, but the real discovery takes place in the last line when we are suddenly thrown into a new awareness of rain by the way in which the repetition of the language itself becomes rain. In Caroline's acrostic poem (box 4), discovery occurs when unexpected words are linked together:

I magination that curls like a ribbon woven into a
N est of hidden secrets, around a newly hatched
E gg.

Occasionally, the materials will declare themselves to such a degree that a strong self-revelation takes place.

Acrostic Poem

C olorful patchwork quilt of many feelings and
A bstract thoughts changing at
R andom, like an
O vercast sky melting into a bright blue.
L ittle, and shy, with an
I magination that curls like a ribbon woven into a
N est of hidden secrets, around a newly hatched
E gg.

G entle, yet angry like thunder,
L over of an autumn day, singer of songs that
E cho
M elodies of wind chimes
A nd shepherd's wooden flutes.
N ature lover, dreamer of roses that
N ever bloomed.

Box 4: Poem by Caroline Glemann

The force of the fusion between the form and content of the materials produces a stunning emotional response in the viewer/reader, as well as the maker, because the fusion is articulated so clearly.

Of all the group, Maggy, the fourth grade teacher, was probably the most affected by the self-discovery that occurred in her final book, and the one most deeply aware of what she had done by allowing her materials such a strong voice. Maggy's rectangle book had as its centerfold a black rectangle that unfolded by itself to become a three-dimensional black box. Some people reacted to this as a comic image; others found it frightening. Her word-block poem had as its central image a basket full of eggs. As the week progressed, Maggy's work continued to present contradictory, unrelated images, both verbal and visual. She wrote a terrifying poem, with images of rattling bones and a witch doctor, about the recent death of a friend. When it was time to put together the final book, Maggy came to class intending to make the book a memorial to her dead friend. She even brought a photograph of the friend to include in the book. However, through our persistent efforts to have Maggy try to include *all* of her materials in the final book, not just the material that obviously related to the death, she was able to make an enormous leap into unknown territory. Once she saw that her black box, which opened by itself, was both basket *and* casket, and that her eggs were not only symbols of shame for her public display of grief (she used the phrase "egg on the face") but also stood as symbols of rebirth, she was able to relate the previously unrelated and, ultimately, to reconcile herself to the previously unreconcilable. As

she commented to us later, "I was finally able to accept what had happened." It wasn't that she had blotted out her rage and despair, but that she had incorporated them into a wider, healing vision.

All of this was accomplished through an intense involvement with each of the poems and the visual materials that Maggy had produced during the week. For the centerfold of her final book, she made a second black box that opened by itself (fig. 6). In this basket/casket she arranged prints made from seashells and vegetables. Small sunbursts printed from the cut end of a carrot looked like rosary beads. Other common objects, printed, evoked images of relics and the bones of saints. This was all material we had seen before, but here it was used in a new way. However, it was on the next page that the great leap took place. By playing with the negative of her big black "R," Maggy suddenly created an explosive, light-filled page. Using darkness, she

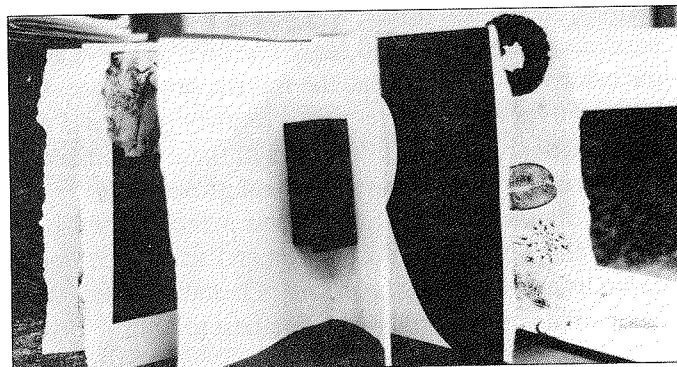


Fig. 6: Maggy Sears's book

created light. This transformation had the power of an epiphany. On this light-filled page, the white half-"R" shape points toward the resolution of forms and images on the final page. There the objects inside the centerfold casket reappear, arranged in rhythmic patterns of organic forms. This last page has at its top a black circle that partially extends beyond the upper edge of the page and is visible even when the book is closed. This ominous black circle, which now for the first time is seen to contain a radiant inner circle of white, seems to be rising off the page, out of the book itself, transformed into an image of resurrection. Maggy saw that she did not need to include the photo of her friend. The book itself is not only a memorial to the friend, but also a testament to Maggy's own struggle toward faith, which repeats itself every time the book is opened.

Maggy told us that in college she had been intimidated when required to write. "Reveal myself? Impossible. But in this class, because we were given a structure to work within—specific tasks and clear rules—I had something to hold onto. I could work without thinking about whether I was revealing myself or not. The anxiety was

gone.” And because the fusion of form and content was so complete, Maggy’s book was intensely moving as a work of art both to its maker and to its wider audience.

When all of the books were finished, we took them to an empty room that had carpeted risers built into the floor, and we displayed them on the risers on large pieces of black or white paper. For about half an hour, the fourteen members of what we should now call the Poughkeepsie Scriptorium read each other’s books. There was absolute silence. Often the most comfortable way to look at the books was to kneel before them on the bottom riser. It was an appropriate posture for the atmosphere in the room—the awe, the rapt attention, the amazement. We didn’t give any directions for looking at the books; it just happened.

When everyone had read all the books, we sat in a circle and discussed them briefly, this time with specific references not only to the works themselves, but also to the works of well-known artists and writers whose themes, structures, forms, and genres were related to our handmade books. We had made our own journeys into the unknown—the jungles, the forests, outer space. We had our own three-part night/sea journey book, and our own political manifesto. Yet each of these handmade books was unique because each had grown from intuitively produced material. Their makers, whether first graders or experienced teachers, had entered into the community of artists who create rich and complex work from whatever materials they like best to hold.

The value of nurturing creativity in a school setting is enormous. Attitudes toward self, toward school, toward work, toward others often take a great leap forward. Beth, an extremely shy sixth grader, clung to one of the other students at the start of the workshop. Later, her teacher told us that during the week of the workshop she walked in the door every morning and lit up. “She was thrilled each day because she was doing something that was hers.” During the afternoons, when we were working on the communal book, she contributed more than anyone else to the group acrostic poem (box 5). She stood up while most of the others remained seated, and moved closer and closer to us. Her enthusiasm and her imaginative, often funny contributions inspired the rest of the group.

The afternoon’s work on *Seasons and Seconds* demonstrated the effectiveness of each morning’s work. In the afternoons, each individual functioned as part of a community of artists working toward a common goal. The students brought with them, from their experiences each morning, a sense of themselves as artists.

Our assignment on Monday afternoon was for the class to make a contemporary Book of Hours based on some

Group Acrostic Poem

P oughkeepsie Day School is made
O f pools of people who look at pictures
U nder tables and beams while
G argling Himalayan
H omework. This has
K ept capable kids kinky
E ach and
E very day for fifty years.
P erpendicular pogo sticks
S idewind
I ntelligently toward the library
E ndlessly searching for edible books and

D imes for the public phone.
A nchored to a stick in the mud
Y akety yakety youth

S quirms and hatches.
C olorful change erupts and catapults.
H oorah!
O n and on
O ver and over
L ight-footed learners leap!

Box 5: Poem for title page of *Seasons and Seconds*:
A Book of Days

theme as common to them as Christian prayer was to the makers of the original Books of Hours. The common theme they decided upon was life at Poughkeepsie Day School. The form they decided upon was to have one page for an introductory acrostic poem, followed by one page for each day of the school week. We discussed various measurements of time—years, hours, seconds, seasons, and so on. Because the students had looked, that morning, at rectangles as more than just rectangles, as shapes that imply an emotional and dramatic content, they were immediately able to look at Monday as more than just Monday. The first page grew to encompass many kinds of beginnings—September, primary grades, the founding of the school, the individual’s first moments in the morning. Students were quick to grasp the relationship between the page as a complex space and the sequence of pages as a metaphor for time. Every detail in the final book participates in this overall metaphoric structure. The wide margins signify the psychological wide margins allowed to the students at Poughkeepsie Day School. Even the progression of illuminated letters has significance: the Monday letter is medieval in style, while the Friday letter looks like airbrushed graffiti (fig. 1).

We were surprised and gratified to see everyone, including the youngest students, use the Book of Hours we had looked at in the morning as a reference for the communal book. The students checked to see how illuminated letters were done, what kinds of animals were drawn, what range of colors was used. They looked not because they were told to (we didn't tell them), but because they were curious.

It should be noted that one of the advantages of working with the book form is that the dramatic and emotional content are inherent in the form itself. The book has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and deals with anticipation, surprise, memory, and resolution. Just by turning a page, one is inescapably caught up in a particular structuring of time and space. And since our individual and collective lives are the stories we construct from the time and space we inhabit, the book form can automatically become a metaphor for life.

When the workshop was finished, and everyone was still basking in the splendor of the books that had been created, Director Hanson made this comment: "The book," he said, "is the least important part. The workshop could be done with science activities or in social studies. It is a workshop in creative thinking." And this is the whole point.

The purpose of teaching creativity in the schools is not to train book designers or poets, or even to improve reading scores, although these may happen, but to develop people who can think creatively, who can find solutions to problems, who can go beyond the boundaries of the expected, who trust their instincts, who dare to make connections between seemingly unconnected things, and who see the infinite data of the world as raw material that increases rather than decreases the more it is used. The purpose is to develop people who can act as purposefully as Joan, slicing her big letter; as tenaciously as Heather cutting her little letters; as energetically as Adrian inventing a plastic lizard to tape to the back of his book; as intuitively as Scott, dancing his ink roller around the border of the Monday page; and as hopefully as Maggy, daring to confront the darkest questions. The purpose of teaching creativity is to influence the students' attitude toward learning. They learn that they matter, that what they look at matters, that other people matter, that everything matters. In the structure of true education, in schools such as Poughkeepsie Day School, creativity is the foundation, and not the ornament.

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by Max Picard

Gateway Editions, \$8.95 paperback, 231 pp.

Max Picard was a Swiss philosopher whose work is known in this country only by professors of philosophy and aesthetics and by a handful of poets. Among the English translations of his work, *The World of Silence* is his best. For years I have recommended this book to friends and colleagues, but because it was out of print for so long and very difficult to find, and perhaps because of the messianic look on my face as I spoke about it, no one ever seemed to take my advice. Every once in a while, though, the response would be explosive: "You know about *The World of Silence*? Isn't it the most amazing

book you've ever read?" It is an amazing book, hypnotic and almost crazy, partly because the word *silence* appears in 95% of the sentences in the book. After a while you realize you don't quite know what the author is saying, but by then you have been floated into the mysterious dreamy mental space he has created, and it's wonderful to be there. How can you use this book in the classroom? I don't know. All I can do is urge you to get this strange and beautiful book before it goes out of print again.

—Ron Padgett

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The work of Teachers & Writers Collaborative is made possible in part by grants from the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Teachers & Writers Collaborative is particularly grateful for support from the following foundations and corporations: Aaron Diamond Foundation, American Stock Exchange, Mr. Bingham's Trust for Charity, Chemical Bank, Consolidated Edison, DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, Joelson Foundation, Louis Calder Foundation, Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company, Morgan Stanley Foundation, New York Rotary Foundation, New York Telephone, New York Times Company Foundation, Henry Nias Foundation, Helena Rubinstein Foundation, the Scherman Foundation, and Steele-Reese Foundation.

Our program also receives funding from Districts 3, 4, and 5, PS 75, PS 84 PA, and PS 146, Manhattan; Districts 7, 8, 11, and 12, PS 49, PS 50, PS 75, PS 96, CS 152, and Grace Dodge Vocational HS, Bronx; Districts 13, 18, 19, 20, and 32, PS 346, Brooklyn; District 28, PS 165, and PS 30, Queens; Freeport School District; Port Jefferson Elementary School; New Rochelle School District; ArtsConnection-Arts Exposure Program; the New York Foundation for the Arts Artists-in-Residence Program, administered by the Foundation on behalf of the New York State Council on the Arts and in cooperation with the New York State Education Department with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Council; Heckscher Museum; Arts and Cultural Education Network; Educational Alliance; Park Avenue School; the Deerfield School; the Dinkelmeyer School; and the Webster School.

Editor: Ron Padgett. Assistant editor: Chris Edgar. Printer: Philmark Lithographics, New York, N.Y.

ISSN 0739-0084. This publication is available on microfilm from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106.



Teachers & Writers Collaborative

5 Union Square West, New York, NY 10003-3306

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