
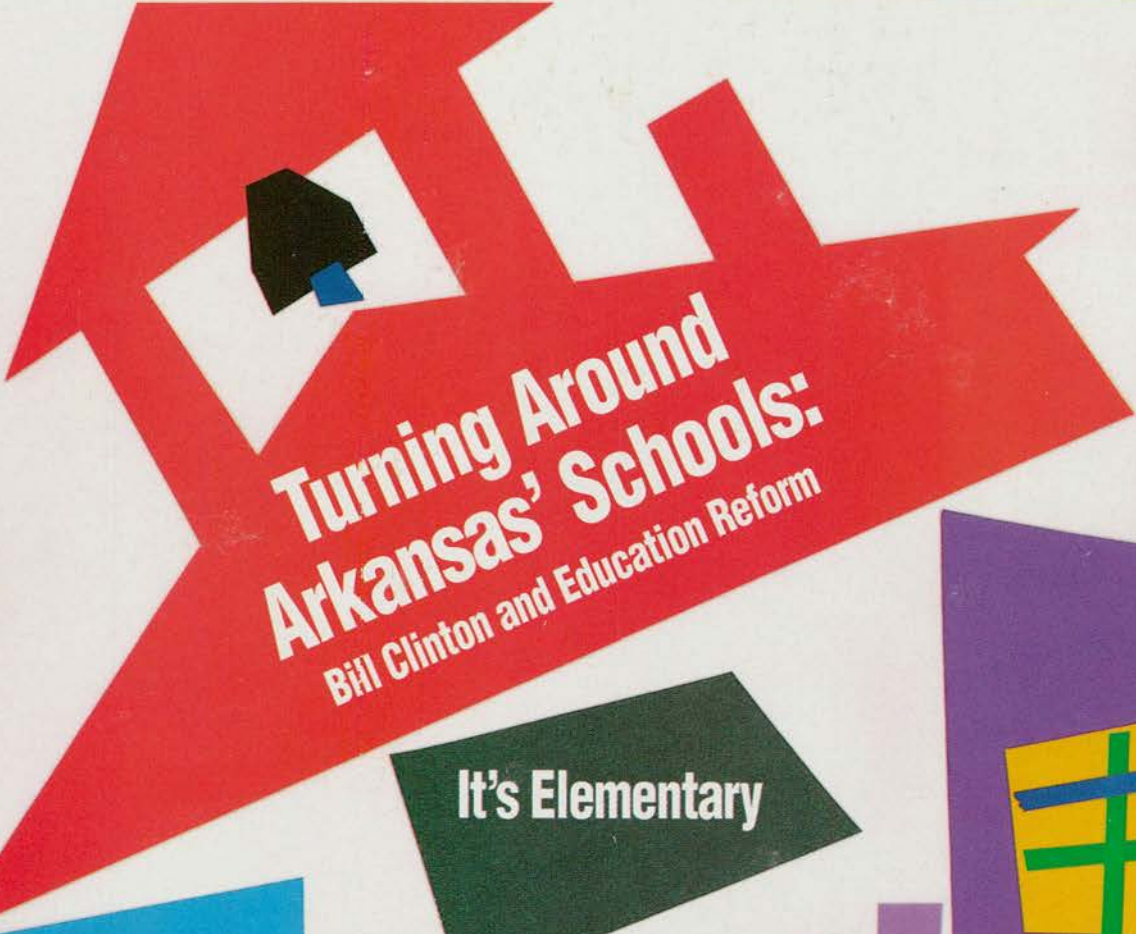


AMERICAN **Educator**

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
FALL 1992



**Turning Around
Arkansas' Schools:**
Bill Clinton and Education Reform

It's Elementary



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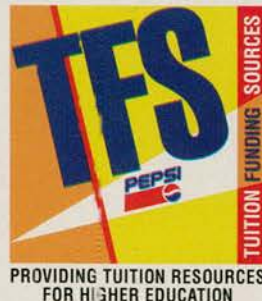
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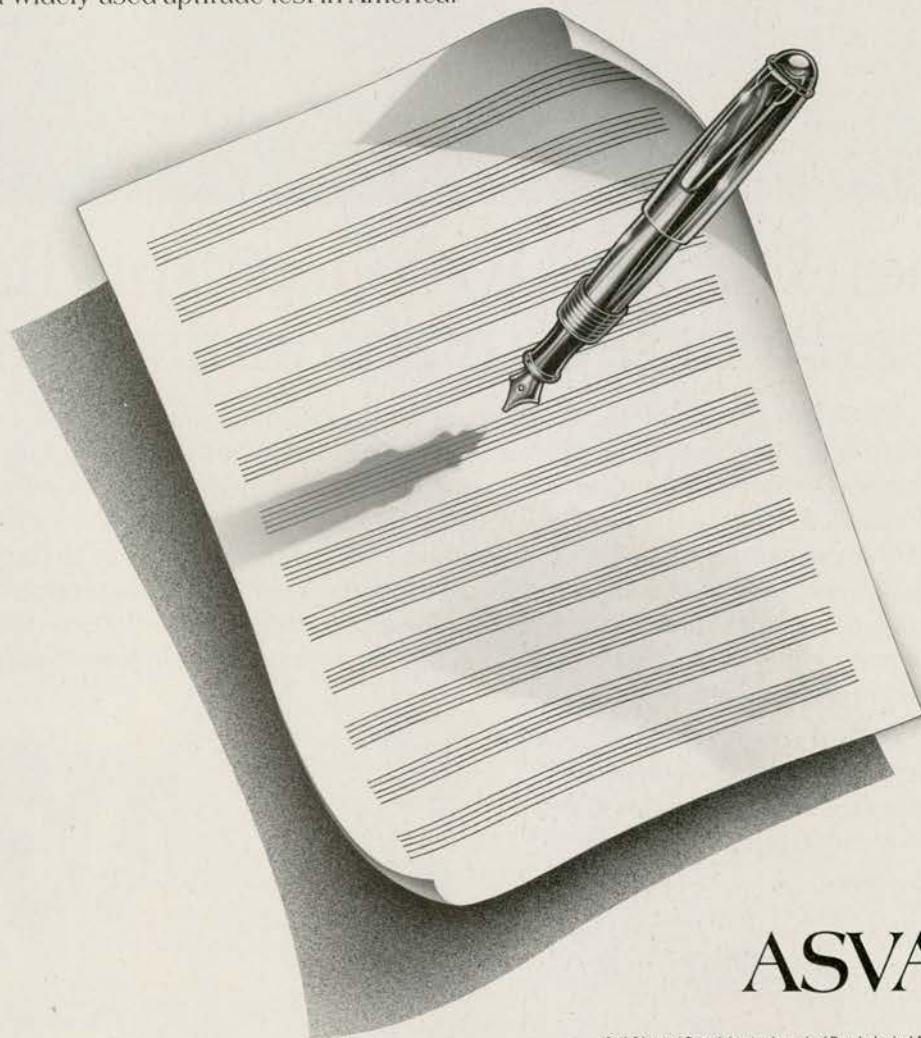


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By David Osborne

The presidential campaign is too important to be decided by 15-second TV soundbites. One serious story that deserves to be entered into the record in some detail is the remarkable turnaround of the Arkansas public school system, which, when Bill Clinton first became governor, was last in the nation in education spending per child, in teacher salaries, and in the percentage of students going on to college.

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LETTERS

WHOSE FAULT?

Your article "The Great Divide" (Summer 1992) details the results of a study that brought to light the widely disparate beliefs of college educators and employers versus students and parents with regard to students' preparedness for college and jobs. The students and parents thought that the students were significantly better prepared than the professors who taught them and the employers who hired them.

The report takes the position that the students are mistaken: "To put it succinctly, the current crop of students and their parents are deluding themselves."

The conclusion that students are ill prepared may well be correct, but the problem illustrated by the report is *not* the supposed self-delusion of the students and parents. The problem is that the students are responding to the signals they are receiving from their professors and employers.

Are these professors failing these students? Are these employers firing them? I submit that they are not: If they were, the students wouldn't think they were doing so well.

It is not the students' fault for imagining themselves qualified when those who make such determinations aren't telling them otherwise.

—JEFFREY R. BERNSTEIN
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

CHILDREN FIRST

I wish to compliment you on your publication of William A. Galston's article "Putting Children First" (Summer 1992). The article is first-rate.

In this area as well as many others, Americans somehow got stupid about twenty-five years ago, believ-

ing that almost anything was preferable to the middle-class style of life. But such a truth would apply to only a very few, and children have suffered heavy penalties for such an irresponsible view.

The increase in divorce has been an unmitigated disaster for children, particularly poor and minority children. The laws in most states should be reformed to make divorce much more difficult to obtain for households with minor children, even if it is uncontested. In addition, in order to minimize the spiritual and economic harm caused by divorce, joint physical custody ought to be a rebuttable presumption in every state. The reason is that divorce seldom separates mothers from their children, but almost always breaks or weakens the bonds between fathers and their children, bonds that are so necessary for the healthy and proper development of children, particularly male children.

I commend Mr. Galston on virtually every sentence of his article and also thank him for what amounts to a series of critical commentaries on a bibliography of recent contributions to the sociology of the family.

—LAWRENCE NANNERY, PH.D.
NEW YORK CITY

MATH MANIPULATIVES

I teach fourth- and fifth-grade learning disabled students, and I agree with Deborah Loewenberg Ball ("Magical Hopes: Manipulatives and the Reform of Math Education," Summer 1992) that simply handing children manipulatives and telling them to solve a problem will not guarantee that students can reach correct mathematical conclusions while using the manipulatives.

Of special interest to me was the use of fraction blocks for teaching addition of fractions. I am trying something different this year in my classroom to prevent visual confusion. Rather than giving the students two drawings that show $1/6$ shaded on each, and telling them to add $1/6 + 1/6$ (for example), I have prepared blank transparencies divided into halves, thirds, sixths, etc., which will be given to pairs of students. One student will choose the fraction pieces to be added, place them side by side, and the other student will place different transparencies on top of the pieces to see on which transparencies the two $1/6$ blocks fit. They will then note that the answer can be $1/3$, $2/6$, $4/12$, etc., but *never* $2/12$.

Also, it may be wiser to introduce the addition-of-fractions concept using fractions whose denominators are prime numbers, so that the concepts of equivalent fractions and lowest terms can be presented in a more orderly fashion.

I thoroughly enjoyed the article, and would like to see more articles on mathematical reform in the elementary schools.

—LESLIE BALDWIN
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA
(CHARTIERS VALLEY FED. OF TEACHERS)

THANKS!

I just had to let you know how much I enjoyed the Spring 1992 issue of *American Educator*. I shared it with several other teachers who have since subscribed. As a first-year teacher, I am thrilled to have such well-written articles to read.

—VIVIAN CUFF
FOREST GROVE, OREGON

Plan Ahead.

No one knows the future. We *do* know the present, and past experience always tells us it's best to plan ahead.

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TURNING AROUND ARKANSAS' SCHOOLS

Bill Clinton and Education Reform

BY DAVID OSBORNE

On almost every measure of educational quality—test scores, class size, teacher salaries, school funding, high school graduation rate, percentage of students going on to college—Arkansas public schools have made a dramatic turnaround. Primary grade classes that once had thirty-five children now have a maximum of twenty-three. Teacher salaries, once fiftieth in the nation, increased more than 77 percent in nine years. Where a decade ago only 5,100 students in the entire state took advanced math in high school, there are now 75,000 students enrolled. Today, 80 percent of the Arkansas state budget is devoted to education.

*Change of such magnitude is never simple; nor does it come without disagreements—sometimes among allies and sometimes vociferous—over the best way to achieve it. The complex story of how Arkansas, a state that had never invested in education, was convinced to alter values and priorities that had prevailed for generations is recounted in a book written several years ago by David Osborne. In 1985, convinced that the most innovative developments in public policy were taking place not at the federal but at the state level, Osborne began a project that would take him the length and breadth of the country. He selected six states to write about, each paired with the public policy area in which it was breaking new ground. The result, three years later, was *Laboratories of Democracy*, published by Harvard Business School Press. For education, Osborne chose Arkansas, and this article is adapted from that chapter of his book.*

A Postscript, which brings things up-to-date, follows the main piece.

—EDITOR

IT IS OCTOBER 1986, two weeks before election day, and Arkansas' favorite form of entertainment is in full swing. Six hundred Washington County Democrats have turned out for barbecued chicken, baked beans, and an

evening of politics in the Springdale Rodeo Association Hall. Television cameras crowd the entryway, which is lined with photos of the Rodeo Association's past chairmen in their western shirts and cowboy hats. But inside there are no cameras. Stepping inside the cavernous hall is like stepping back thirty years, back into a time before television changed American politics. Hundreds of people mill about, their chests covered with campaign buttons. Candidates work the crowd, shaking hands and asking after relatives. The noise is terrific.

After everyone gets their chicken and beans, the speeches begin. The lost art of political oratory is alive and well in the rural South, and here in Washington County the crowd is looking forward to two of the best: Gov. Bill Clinton and Sen. Dale Bumpers. But first they have to listen to the amateurs, the Democratic candidates for sheriff and judge and half a dozen other open slots. They wait patiently, sitting for hours after the chicken gets cold.

Bill Clinton is a large man, two inches over six feet and a solid 200 pounds. The first baby boomer to serve as a governor, he was originally elected in 1978, at the tender age of thirty-two. But tonight he is forty, well seasoned by his four previous campaigns for governor. His hair is flecked with gray, and the wrinkles that crease his eyes when he smiles are beginning to look permanent.

Clinton's topic this night, as it has been throughout the campaign, is economics and education. Arkansas is caught in the midst of a swirl of changes sweeping

*David Osborne is an associate of the National Governors Association's Council of Governors' Policy Advisors, a fellow of the Progressive Policy Institute, and has been a visiting lecturer at Yale University and an advisor to governors of both parties. His writing has appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Atlantic, and The New Republic. He is the co-author, most recently, of *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit Is Transforming the Public Sector* (Addison-Wesley, 1992). This article is adapted with permission from *Laboratories of Democracy*.*



6/11/92

through the international economy, he tells his listeners. In areas where foreign competition is no threat, the state is experiencing dramatic job growth. ("So far the Japanese have not figured out how to import chickens into Arkansas.") But "the people in our state whose livelihoods are subject to foreign competition and who can't compete are really suffering"—those who work in the timber industry, the paper plants, the cut-and-sew shops, and of course the farmers.

"I submit to you that the job of the governor of this state—not me, any governor—would be to try to make those changes which will open up opportunity and beat back those problems," Clinton says. "And I believe there are only two ways to do that. First, we have to create a nationally competitive system of education—and that is what we're trying to do. When you strip away all the controversy and all the people who don't agree with me about teacher testing, and you get everybody down to the lick log and ask everybody what they really think is true, even the people who don't agree with me will have to admit that in the last three years there have been dramatic improvements in education There is a whole new atmosphere about education sweeping this state."

He accelerates now, his voice raised, his fist poised to pound the podium. "Do you think it's an accident that we've got 87 percent of the schools with computer classes? Do you think it's an accident that 85 percent of the schools already offer 38 units? Do you think it's an accident that you've got more foreign language and science and math and music and art than you had before?"

"No! It was because it was required and there was a deadline and we were moving forward!" The crowd roars.

Clinton goes on to talk about the poor, rural school districts that have raised their property taxes and hired more teachers to teach more subjects, to meet his education standards. He talks about the shortage of state revenues caused by economic problems on the farm and in the oil fields, but he promises to find more money next year.

Again his voice picks up: "I have been attacked all over this state because we gave 24 cents on the dollar, 24 cents off the sales tax dollar, to higher education, community colleges, and vo-tech schools! And I plead guilty. I plead guilty!" (Roar.)

"In the 1980 census Arkansas had only 9.7 percent of its people over twenty-five with four-year college degrees." He is riled up now, speaking rapidly, banging the podium. "It was the lowest in the country. The next lowest was Kentucky with 11.1 percent. And the plain evidence in every state in this country is that you must have a higher threshold of people with college degrees if you want low unemployment—not because most of the new jobs in the economy will require college degrees; most of 'em won't. But because most of them will be created by entrepreneurs who have that kind of education.

"So I plead guilty. I want more kids coming to the University of Arkansas! I want more people going to West Arkansas Community College in Fort Smith! I want more people flooding into this vo-tech school in Springdale that's done a brilliant job of training people for the modern economy! That's what I want, and I plead guilty of putting money into it, and the Arkansas economy is ben-

When Clinton came into office, Arkansas was last in the nation in education spending per child, in teacher salaries, and in percentage of college graduates.



efiting because of it! So if you think that we ought to choke the life out of every other kind of education, then you ought to support my opponent. But if you want to keep going like we're going, if you like that engineering school down there in Fayetteville that I've been attacked for funding, if you like this new truck-driving program we put in here at the vo-tech school that's already getting 200 people guaranteed jobs a year from J.B. Hunt alone—one company [bang!]—then support me, and we'll keep 'em goin'!"

The crowd is with him every step of the way, and when he finally finishes, it rewards him with a standing ovation. It is an amazing sight—amazing, not that Bill Clinton can bring a crowd to its feet, but that he can do so by talking about education. This is the stuff of Rotary Club luncheons. It is the kind of material that, in normal times, when spoken by normal politicians, puts people to sleep. But Bill Clinton has pounded the podium and raised his voice and brought the crowd roaring to its feet. Welcome to southern politics in the 1980s.

TO UNDERSTAND Arkansas politics, it helps to start with the basics. This is a poor, rural state. In per capita income, it bounces around between forty-seventh and forty-ninth, competing with Mississippi and West Virginia. Nearly half of its 2.3 million people live in towns of 2,500 people or less.¹ Over 40 percent of the adult population has never graduated from high school.²

You feel this in Arkansas within hours of arriving. Little Rock, the capital city, has only 180,000 people, yet it is more than double the size of the next-largest city, Fort Smith. To an outsider, Little Rock is a small, sleepy town. It takes five minutes to drive in from the airport, another five to drive across downtown. Although the residents focus on the new construction and bright future, I noticed the vacant lots and old buildings, and felt like I had stepped into the past.

State government gives one the same feeling. The Statehouse is a smaller replica of the Capitol in Washington, but it faces no sweeping vista, just a vacant lot and an old building that evokes the 1930s. State legislators are paid only \$7,500 a year. They meet in regular session only once every two years, for a month or two (though special sessions have become common in between). The governor, who was until 1986 elected to two-year terms, earns only \$35,000 a year. (Before 1975, the figure was \$10,000.) The bureaucracy, too, is a throwback. The Department of Finance and Administration does not even have the capacity to estimate lost revenues from tax breaks, which the legislature hands out like candy.³

DURING CLINTON'S first term, in 1979 and 1980, he was in many ways the epitome of the crusading young liberal. He brought in a team of youthful activists and introduced a blizzard of new legislation.

Clinton's first priority, as in his later terms, was education. In a poor state like Arkansas, the low education levels of the work force are perhaps the biggest stumbling block to economic growth. In the past, when the state was dependent upon agriculture, timber, and manufacturing plants brought in from the North, education was not so important. But in the information age, when innovation is the key to economic growth, quality edu-

cational institutions are critical. As former banking commissioner Marlin Jackson puts it: "You can't have a bunch of uneducated, illiterate people running a bunch of high-tech companies and high-tech farms."

When Clinton came into office, Arkansas was last in the nation in education spending per child, in teacher salaries, and in percentage of college graduates.⁴ This reflected its state and local tax burden, which, per capita, was also the lowest in the nation.⁵ "From an educational standpoint, the average child in Arkansas would be much better off attending the public schools of almost any other state in the country," reported a public education commission established by the legislature.⁶

Clinton pushed through budget increases of 40 percent over two years for elementary and secondary education, the largest in the state's history. (Economic problems forced some cuts in the second year.) He raised teacher salaries by almost \$2,000, required applicants for teacher certification to pass the National Teacher Exam, and created a summer residence school for gifted children, at which he and his wife taught. Finally, he introduced standardized tests to measure the performance of public school students, to see just how bad the problems were.⁷

Clinton and his reform-minded staff also turned the state's economic development strategy away from attracting out-of-state industry—"smokestack chasing"—and toward developing home-grown businesses. They cracked down on welfare cheaters, reformed the food stamp program, and used the money they saved to expand services for children and the elderly. They instituted an aggressive program to encourage energy conservation and the development of renewable resources. They continued to ride herd on utility rates, as Clinton had during his two years as attorney general. And they set up a network of rural health clinics around the state.⁸

Politically, Clinton was too aggressive for his own good. By the end of his first term, he had managed to offend virtually every major business interest in the state. The local Chambers of Commerce were angry about his move away from smokestack chasing. The doctors were angry about his rural health initiative, which largely bypassed them. The trucking and poultry industries were angry about the higher taxes he had imposed on trucking to pay for road repairs. The timber industry was furious about hearings he held on clear-cutting. In the 1980 gubernatorial race, in a bruising campaign, Clinton's Republican opponent, businessman Frank White, used these issues and others to defeat him.

IN 1982, Clinton came back and beat White with 55 percent of the vote. His 1980 defeat had taught him an important lesson: "I learned that if you do a lot of things, and you talk about a lot of different things while you're doing it, the perception may be that you haven't done anything. You have to be able to give a little clearer sense of direction. If you want to get broad, popular support for what you're doing, people have to be able to understand or explain it in a sentence or two. And I think to the folks out there a lot of what I did came across just as a lot of good government things that didn't have any unifying theme that people could really buy into." The second time around, Clinton built his administration around two themes: first, education reform; then, economic development.

Clinton's standardized tests had shown just how bad the schools were. On the first test, fourth graders scored in the 44th percentile, meaning that 56 percent of all students nationwide did better than the average Arkansas student. Eighth graders scored in the 38th percentile.⁹ The longer they had been in school, the worse students did—a devastating comment on Arkansas schools.

The lowest scores came in Arkansas' many small, rural school districts. With the fewest students of any Old South state, Arkansas had twice as many districts as its closest rival. Half of all districts had fewer than 500 students—not in one school, but in the entire district. Ninety districts had fewer than 300 students.¹⁰

With small schools and limited resources, rural districts could not afford to offer many classes. In 1982-83, according to the *Arkansas Gazette*, 217 public high schools (roughly half of those in the state) offered no physics; 265 offered no advanced biology, 177 no foreign language, 126 no chemistry, and 164 no advanced math (beyond algebra II). Fifty-seven districts offered only one of these five subjects; 23 offered none.¹¹ "Typically, in a small, rural school, the boys would be getting two to three hours a day of agriculture, and the girls would be getting home economics," says State Rep. Gloria Cabe.

Consolidation of rural districts is a recurring theme in Arkansas politics. In 1983, it emerged again. Worried about the threat, the administrators of small school districts convinced a legislator to introduce a bill creating a citizens' committee to recommend new standards of accreditation. They saw this as a way to blunt the consolidation drive, and they were successful.

Knowing that he had only one year to pass legislation (with two-year terms, controversial issues are difficult to handle in the second year), Clinton appointed his wife to chair the committee. The Clintons' goal was a fundamental reform bill, which would upgrade accreditation standards, raise teachers' salaries, lengthen the school day, and improve curricula. To build a constituency, Hillary Clinton took her committee on the road, holding hearings in all 75 of Arkansas' counties. By her estimate, 10,000 people showed up to voice their opinions. One issue came through loud and clear: raise teachers' salaries, yes, but first get rid of incompetent teachers.

It is difficult for an outsider to understand how large this problem looms in Arkansas. Hillary Clinton's committee was deluged with horror stories about poor teachers; some parents gave them letters teachers had sent home full of spelling and grammatical errors. Arkansas teachers are of course the product of Arkansas schools, which—in many of the poor, rural sections of the state—is the heart of the problem. Failure rates on National Teacher Exams, taken by teaching applicants, were over 50 percent at some teaching colleges.¹²

This created intense pressure to weed out incompetent teachers by making existing teachers pass a competency test. Clinton decided to introduce a teacher-testing bill to go with the new education standards his wife's committee had recommended. He also introduced three tax increases to pay for more teachers and higher salaries: a one-cent hike in the sales tax, an increase in the severance tax on natural gas (the lowest in the nation), and an increase in the corporate income tax. Here he was stymied by the Arkansas constitution, which requires a three-fourths vote of the legislature to raise any tax other

than the sales tax. Predictably, only the sales tax increase passed.

The final package mandated that 70 percent of the new sales tax revenue be used to raise teachers' salaries. It required that schools offer chemistry, physics, advanced math, computer science, foreign languages, "global studies" (a cross between geography and international affairs), special courses for "gifted and talented" children, fine arts, and instrumental music. It mandated smaller classes, a longer school day and year, tougher requirements for high school graduation, and kindergarten in all districts. It raised the legal dropout age from fifteen to sixteen.

Rather than denying graduation to those who failed a test, as some states have done, Arkansas' package denied promotion to any eighth grader who failed the standardized exam—the first such law in the nation. The idea, according to Hillary Clinton, is to catch problems before students reach high school. If students fail two years in a row, they must be given some form of alternative education. For those who fail the standardized test at any grade level, third, sixth, or eighth, schools must set up an individualized plan to help each student succeed. Any school in which more than 15 percent of the students fail the tests must develop a plan to improve its performance. If its students fail to improve within two years, the state can force changes in school management—another national first.

"We've tried to prod the system, to build expectations, because these schools are going to be judged by how their kids do," says Mrs. Clinton. "What gets kids learning is not a test, but the expectations of their teachers and schools, and the efforts made by their teachers and schools."

The reform legislation also set up a committee to examine teacher education and evaluation. The results included new training programs for evaluators, new standards for teacher colleges, and a requirement that every school district evaluate its teachers once formally and once informally each year. In addition, any college in which more than 20 percent of graduates fail the National Teacher Exam will be put on probation and threatened with the loss of state accreditation if improvements are not made within three years.

The Clintons pulled out all the stops to get the reform package through the legislature. They raised money from the business community for ads in the media. They gave out thousands of blue ribbons, asking people to wear them to broadcast their theme: "Our kids need a blue-ribbon education." And they drummed home the message that education meant jobs. "Do you believe that God meant for us to drag up the rear of the nation's economy forever?" the governor asked in his speeches.¹³

THE TEACHER competency test [which also had to be taken by principals and other education administrators] overshadowed all other issues. The struggle for education reform became a battle between the governor and the state's largest union, the Arkansas Education Association.

AEA President Ed Bullington charged that Clinton used teacher testing "for political popularity, to secure his political base." He argued that the test could not effectively weed out incompetent teachers. In its place, the

The Clintons drummed home the message that education meant jobs. "Do you believe that God meant for us to drag up the rear of the nation's economy forever?" the governor asked in his speeches.

AEA supported a "very extensive evaluation program," by which administrators could pinpoint incompetent teachers and either force them to improve or fire them. "But just to characterize the whole teaching profession in Arkansas as being deficient or being suspect in those areas was wrong," Bullington said. "It has been very demoralizing. We're having good teachers leave the state out of frustration, we're having teachers quit, and we're discouraging students from becoming teachers by giving the profession a negative image."

The Clintons stressed repeatedly that the test was not to evaluate teachers, but simply to find those who could not spell, multiply, divide, and so on. They pointed to the new evaluation program as evidence of their commitment to broader efforts to weed out teachers who might be able to read and write but needed improvement in other areas.

The test itself was quite simple. It measured reading, grammar, basic math, and basic knowledge in each teacher's subject area. To pass, teachers needed to demonstrate only eighth-grade levels of competence. They could take the test repeatedly between March 1985 and June 1987, and the state offered a variety of programs, including classes on educational television, to help them improve. In addition, teachers could get credit for passing the subject area test simply by taking six units of college courses in their area. Some teachers felt the test should have been far tougher. I talked with many teachers who were bitter about the test, but not one felt that those who failed should be allowed to keep teaching.

Despite the eighth-grade level of the exam, 10 percent of those who took it when it was first administered failed. In every subsequent test, roughly 10 percent failed. Overall, 1,315 teachers—3.5 percent of the state's total—had to leave teaching because they could not pass the test.¹⁴ By far the highest proportion of failures came in areas that were heavily black, fueling charges that the test would purge the system of black teachers. Clinton insisted that the test was colorblind; it was checked carefully for racial bias, he noted, by a committee that included twelve blacks. He argued that the black failure rate simply revealed the woeful education provided blacks in Arkansas and promised that his reform package would change that. He also pointed to the state's efforts to help those teachers who failed, to upgrade their skills. "If we can pull this off politically," he said, "it will make a statement to the whole country about the potential for real equality of performance between blacks and whites."

To make his case, Clinton pointed to the experience of the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB), most of whose students are black. In 1980, when a certification exam was first given to college graduates who wanted to teach, only 42 percent of UAPB students taking the test passed. Chancellor Lloyd Hackley used the results to force through a total revision of the curriculum, which required all students to spend two years in a kind of preparatory program to bring them up to speed, called University College. In 1986, 85 percent of UAPB students taking the test passed. Nursing students went from a 20 percent pass rate to 100 percent on their licensing exam.¹⁵ Hackley, who is black, argued passionately that discrimination was no longer the primary barrier holding black students back; instead, he blamed low standards, low expectations, and practices such as automat-



ic promotion from grade to grade.

In 1983, the National Education Association publicly condemned Clinton and called on a wide array of Democratic Party, labor, and civil rights leaders to lean on the governor. Two years later, in an effort to repeal the testing bill, the union brought thousands of teachers to the Statehouse to lobby their legislators—so many that on one lobbying day the Little Rock schools had to shut

down.

The AEA twisted enough arms to push repeal through the House. In response, Clinton went over the politicians' heads. He put an ad on radio asking people to call their legislators. "It was a madhouse," remembers Jodie Mahony, a state legislator from El Dorado, Arkansas. "The telephone switchboard was on from dawn to midnight." The bill died in the Senate.

ARKANSAS HIPPIY: TURNING PARENTS INTO SCHOOL PARTNERS

BY RUTH WATTENBERG

DEBORAH THOMAS had been a daycare worker in Little Rock before becoming a housewife and mother. But she didn't know how to make sure her children were prepared to attend school. In fact, she says, it never occurred to her that they needed preparation. "I was not brought up to know how to prepare children for school. In my upbringing, it wasn't demanded that you do that."

When her second child had already started school and her third was a year shy of kindergarten, she saw a church flyer inviting parents with four-year-old children to enroll in HIPPIY—the Home Instructional Program for Preschool Youngsters. The program promised to make her "her child's first teacher."

She and four-year-old Jimmy signed up. Five years later, Jimmy is in fourth grade, being taught by a teacher Thomas had requested. Thomas works for HIPPIY as a home visitor and is enrolled in college, aiming for a degree in early childhood education. She is active at her school, talks regularly with her children's teachers, and both Jimmy and his younger sister are doing well in school.

Thomas is a HIPPIY success story, though by no means a rare one. According to program coordinators, HIPPIY not only produces children who are better prepared to succeed in school—its original goal—but parents who will remain active in their children's education and who are ready to get their own lives on a better, more productive track.

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Deborah Thomas and her youngest daughter, Sharunda.

In Helena, a town in Arkansas' impoverished Delta region, ten HIPPIY parents are now employed as full-time school aides. *Fortune* magazine reports that in two Arkansas counties, nearly half the enrolled mothers, "all of whom were on welfare, went back to high school, got a job, or applied to enroll in job-training courses."

HIPPIY is an "import" from Israel. Hebrew University developed the program to prepare the young children of Israel's large immigrant population to succeed in school. A longitudinal study that has followed Israeli students through tenth grade shows HIPPIY graduates are retained less often, achieve more, and drop out less frequently than control students who also attended preschool. The program now exists in six countries and sixteen U.S. states. With 32

sites, Arkansas has by far the largest HIPPIY program in the United States.

HIPPIY is fairly unique as an early childhood program because it targets parents, not their children. It hires home visitors—usually drawn from the same community as the parents—to train parents to use a series of highly structured educational activities with their children. The home visitor comes to the parent's house for about an hour once every two weeks during the thirty weeks of the school year.

The home visitor gives the parent a package of materials that includes one week's worth of daily fifteen-minute activities for the parents to use with their children. The materials usually include a short storybook and a variety of follow-up activities—such as trying to imagine how a story ends or counting items in

ONCE THE teacher test had been given, attention finally began to shift to the rest of Clinton's education program. From 1983 through 1985, there was a tremendous surge in education spending, fed by the new sales tax. Average teacher salaries went up by \$4,400, the fastest growth rate in the nation.¹⁶ Arkansas moved up from fiftieth to forty-sixth in teacher salaries and from fiftieth to forty-seventh in per-pupil expenditures,

according to a state-by-state analysis published by the Carnegie Foundation.¹⁷ "Arkansas jumps out at you as the state that has made the greatest gains over the last two years in the variable that matters the most related to teaching," said the report's author, Emily Feistritz.

By 1985, Arkansas was actually above the national average in teacher pay as a percent of per capita income, according to data gathered by Diane Blair, whose book

the pictures. The activities are designed to develop children's language and to build such necessary school skills as sensory and perceptual discrimination and problem-solving abilities.

The home visitor role-plays each lesson, encouraging the parent to act in the parent role. If a parent is reluctant, or is shy or has poor reading skills or none at all, the visitor will act the part of the parent while the parent takes on the role of the child.

One week later, after the parent has used the activities with his child, all the parents in the program area come together with their home visitors and the local coordinator for "story-sharing" and "enrichment." They listen to speakers on topics such as child development and job opportunities. In some cases, the parents have asked that these meetings be devoted to GED training.

Thomas believes these meetings, which "get people out of the house," "out of their routines," and require the mothers to interact with others, are key to the program's success in building the mothers' self-confidence—and preparing them, even inspiring them, to go out and succeed in the world.

Marylène Mitchell, HIPPY-Arkansas' state trainer, says the biweekly meetings for parents typically include information and guidance to help them become effective partners with their children's teachers. "We invite people from the state Department of Ed to talk with the HIPPY mothers about how to relate effectively to the child's school. Parents can be very intimidated by the school and by the professional status of the teachers. We're trying to get parents to see that teachers aren't enemies—that this is an alliance."

THE STORY of how HIPPY came to this state is pure Arkansas. Typically, Bill Clinton imports educational ideas and innovations to this insulated, isolated state. Clinton gathers ideas in his travels to such national education forums as the Education Commission of the States, which he chaired in 1986-87, or the National Governors Association (NGA), which he chaired in 1987-88 and whose education task force he co-chaired in 1989-90. Once the ideas are discovered, he or his wife Hillary personally nurture and promote them.

In this case it was Hillary who discovered the program while reading a *Miami Herald* story about Dade County's fledgling HIPPY program at an NGA meeting in Florida. "She sent the now legendary newspaper to me," recalls Anne Kamps, a special assistant to the governor. "We researched the program, investigated it, and concluded that it had a lot to offer the state." According to the Israeli research, HIPPY is effective not only in preparing disadvantaged students for school, but in motivating a significant number of parents to continue their own education—not a minor benefit in this state, which had the smallest percentage of adult college graduates in the country.

But there was no money to launch the program. Despite enormous increases in education funding in the early eighties, little money went to early childhood programs, in part because the focus of reform had been on elementary and secondary schools and college scholarships; and in part because Arkansas was still a state where even the idea of kindergarten was still controversial. The idea that the state should spend money on preschool pro-

grams was regarded as "silly," says Kamps, and very little such money was available.

But she continues, "the governor put his prestige and energy behind it." In the spring of 1985, the governor's office sponsored a conference highlighting HIPPY for superintendents, early childhood educators, and staff from the state's education and human services departments. "We are not telling you to adopt this program, we don't even have any money to fund it," is what we told people," says Kamps. "We just wanted them to know about it." If interest was there, funding would be found.

HIPPY is not expensive. It costs between \$500 and \$600 per family, considerably cheaper than the approximately \$2,500 per-child cost of center-based early childhood programs. Nonetheless, a great deal of creativity and hustling were necessary to come up with the funds. "The governor told me I had to find the money to make the program work in the Delta" says Kamps. "Those are the districts that never have the money to do the good things."

Perhaps the most creative solution was drawing on funds from the Job Training Partnership Act, a federal program that provides training and work opportunities to the unemployed. Those funds, plus Headstart and Chapter 1 monies, made it possible for those sites that had first expressed interest to launch programs. By 1991, 4,500 families were being served. That same year, the legislature approved the Arkansas Better Chance bill, which provided funding for early childhood programs. As a result, HIPPY expects 5,000 families to be served in this next year. □

Arkansas Politics and Government: Do the People Rule? includes a chapter on the education reform effort. Per-pupil expenditures as a percentage of per capita income rose to 91.2 percent of the national average.¹⁸

In addition to the new state money, Blair adds, 85 percent of Arkansas school districts increased their property tax rates to fund educational improvements—a move that requires a direct vote of the people. Roughly 65 districts consolidated with other districts between 1983 and 1987, bringing the total number of districts from about 385 to 329.¹⁹ The rest scrambled to hire new teachers, construct new buildings, and offer new courses.

Perhaps the best way to understand the changes taking place is to look at a few of the rural school districts affected by the new standards. Lead Hill is a small town near the Missouri border, on the shores of Bull Shoals Lake. The entire school district has only 350 students, but community life in Lead Hill centers around its school. Its football and basketball games provide the area's major entertainment; its cafeteria is used for community suppers; its school buses do double duty transporting senior citizens. "Our folks did not want to lose the school," says school superintendent William Ernst. "They think a small school is the best method of delivering education to children, plus it's the center of activity for the entire community. So the bottom line was, we meet the standards or we consolidate."

By a 62 percent to 38 percent margin, Lead Hill voted virtually to double its property tax rates, to pay for everything needed to meet the standards. Even the retired population gave the increase a healthy majority.²⁰ "If it weren't for the standards, the taxes probably would not have passed," says Ernst.

Lead Hill has used the money to complete a new elementary facility and library, to add more classroom space, and to modernize other facilities. It has added classes in French, Spanish, art, and instrumental music; created new programs for the gifted and talented; and expanded programs for those with learning disabilities. The high school has hired a new science teacher so it can offer both physics and chemistry every year.

FORDYCE IS a larger town, of about 5,000, in the pine belt of south central Arkansas. Dominated by the timber industry, it is small and dusty, its two-block-long downtown a symbol of better days. Thirty years ago, two of Fordyce's schools were white and two were black. Today they are fully integrated—two elementary schools, one junior high, and one high school.

With 1,480 students, Fordyce already offered most of the classes required under the new standards. Its biggest changes have been the new promotion and retention policies it adopted, which go even further than the state requirements. The school board started talking about stricter promotion policies back in 1981, two years before the statewide debate. But without the state effort, says superintendent Wanda Miles-Bell, it probably would not have gone forward. "We probably would have felt that no one would have stood behind us," she says. "And now we feel the state will stand behind us. Everybody's reading about education reform in the paper and hearing about it, and it's just a good opportunity for us to do what needs to be done."

Miles-Bell and her school board instituted mandatory

'Public opinion changed. People decided, number one, that their schools were inadequate, and number two, that it was worth a commitment to do something about that.'



tests at every grade level. Those who fail at the third, sixth, and eighth grades (after three chances at passing the test) are automatically held back, unless their teacher offers other evidence that they should be promoted. Those who fail at other grades are held back unless their parents insist that they be promoted. For all those who fail, teachers must prepare an individualized remedial program.

In 1986, the first year the new retention policy was put into effect, twenty-seven out of 125 sixth graders failed the test. According to Miles-Bell, that came as a shock to the students. "They've discovered that we really mean business now—that they're not going to get to go on if they don't do the work, and that all that homework and those test assignments do in fact lead to something," she says.

The district held three weeks of summer school for third and sixth graders who failed their tests, the first time it had ever offered summer school. Both parents and students took the summer school seriously, and all but five of the sixth graders finally passed the test and were promoted.

"I cannot tell you how dramatic the change in our achievement scores has been," says Miles-Bell. Fourth graders went from the 42nd and 36th national percentiles in reading and math in 1983-84 to the 59th and 81st in 1985-86, respectively. (This increase came in spite of a shift to a different standardized test, which was predicted to lower scores by seven percentile points.) Fifth graders went from the 32nd and 31st to the 57th and 75th percentiles in reading and math, respectively. Sixth, seventh, and eighth graders made gains that were almost as dramatic.²¹

During the regular year, Fordyce students are tested every week or so on basic skills. Teachers grumble about the paperwork involved in giving and correcting tests. They also explain that they have to cut out more interesting material to make sure they have time to cover the basics. But they generally agree that the tests hold them accountable in a way that was not possible before.

Teachers also complain that the state has gone too far with some of its requirements. In DeQueen, Arkansas, for instance, the junior high school had to drop a speech class and a "how-to-study" class to make room for a "careers" course and additional physical education classes required by the state. In Little Rock the elementary schools had to let their social workers go, to hire the required counselors.

The biggest problem, however, has been financial. In 1985 and 1986, the Arkansas economy, like those of other farm states, went into recession. As a result, the state came up \$25 million to \$30 million a year short in tax revenues budgeted for education. Just as the local districts geared up to meet the standards, their projected state funds were cut sharply. Teacher salary increases slowed, and by 1986 Arkansas was back in forty-eighth place.²² During the 1986 campaign, Clinton promised to come up with enough new revenues to make up for the shortfall, and in 1987 the legislature agreed to a tax-increase and spending-cut package that raised \$50 million to \$60 million over two years.

IT IS easy to quibble with Clinton's program, whether on financial grounds or on questions of paperwork and

curriculum. What is hard to deny, however, is that it has had an enormous impact on how seriously Arkansans take education. Curtis Turner, Jr., the superintendent of schools in Delight, Arkansas, speaks for many when he says, "Education is a conversation piece at most dinner tables now. People all over are talking about it. They want their children to have the best education possible. I'm being asked to talk to civic groups, to be on panels to discuss the standards—how this movement is going to affect our school system, how it's going to affect the quality of education that the students are going to be able to receive."

Diane Blair, who has studied polling data on attitudes toward education, has found a remarkable turnaround. "In some respects," she says, "the major accomplishment of the Clinton education reforms is not in class hours per day and so on, but in the fact that he and his wife hit the road for the better part of a year, essentially preaching educational excellence, the inadequacies of our system, and what needed to be done. And public opinion changed. People decided, number one, that their schools were inadequate, and number two, that it was worth a commitment to do something about that." The 1986 election results support her thesis: Clinton, who sought to turn the election into a referendum on his education program, was the only gubernatorial candidate in either party who refused to consider some form of delay or weakening of the standards. He was reelected (over Frank White) with 64 percent of the vote.

The Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation has launched a three- to five-year study of the effects of the new standards, which will follow individual students in fifteen school districts. Until its results are in, the only scorecard available is test scores—and they reflect more the climate of change than the actual reforms, because school districts did not have to meet the standards until the 1987-88 school year. Between 1980 and 1985, average test scores in the fourth grade increased from the 44th percentile to the 61st. In the tenth grade, they went from the 43rd percentile in 1982 to the 51st in 1985. In 1986, the state switched tests, which makes further comparisons difficult. But between 1986 and 1987, the upward movement continued.²³ In a separate reading test given to eleventh graders by the Southern Regional Education Board in 1986, Arkansas was the only southern state among five tested in which students scored above the national average. The same group, when tested in 1981 as sixth graders, had scored below the national average.²⁴

These scores, of course, reveal a sobering truth: No matter how important they have been, Clinton's education reforms have done little more than bring Arkansas up to the level many other states reached long ago. They are a good beginning, but much more needs to be done—particularly in the state colleges and universities. "They are important because they are the first step, and the first step is often the most difficult to take," says Tom McRae of the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. "My concern is that they're creating a mentality of, 'Whew, now we've done educational reform, what do we do next?' What we have to do is keep it up. This sort of development is a fifteen-year process."

MORE THAN perhaps any other governor of the 1980s, Bill Clinton has demonstrated how to talk

about issues such as education and economic development in ways that not only make sense to voters but move them. Listen to him as he closes his stump speech, at the Washington County Democratic Rally. "The other day I was at the Arkansas Eastman plant, in rural Independence County," he says, the Arkansas twang deep in his voice. "It's a modern, high-tech plant. I went up to this plant and I toured around and looked at all the anti-pollution equipment, and the guy was tellin' me, 'All this is run by computers, and I want you to see the man who's runnin' the computers.'"

Clinton describes thirty minutes of build-up about the computers. "At the end of the thirty minutes," he says, "I'll be honest with you—I didn't want to meet the guy running the computer, because I didn't think I'd have anything in common with him. You know, I thought he'd be some Einstein sitting up there like the Wizard of Oz in some mysterious room, making all of this go. And I really felt like I was going to meet the wizard."

"So we climbed up the steps, and we got to the door of the computer room, and we opened it, and I nearly got knocked down by the sound of country music. And there was the man running the computer, wearin' cowboy boots, Levi jeans, a western shirt, baseball cap, he had a big ol' championship rodeo belt buckle on—you know how big and silver they are, they look like those wedding plates you give people for wedding presents. And he was chewin' Red Man in his jaw. And the first thing he said to me was, 'Boy I'm glad to see you, my wife and I are going to vote for you, because we need more jobs like this.' I was never so glad to hear anything in my life."

"That's the case I have to make to the people of this state. That guy had cattle and horses and he was pure Arkansas, but he was smart enough to know that his future depended on what he knew, not what he could do with his back or his hands. The future of this state depends on what we know. And ultimately that is the fundamental question in this election. I need your help, because tomorrow is waiting for us, if we will seize it. Thank you all and God bless you."

* * *

POSTSCRIPT

BY RUTH WATTENBERG

IT IS five years later. Instead of sending 36 percent of high school graduates to college—the lowest rate in the country—Arkansas now sends more than 50 percent, a rate close to the national average. From 1981 to 1990, Arkansas students moved from the 44th and 46th percentiles in math and reading to 69th and 61st. On the 1990 national assessment (NAEP), they outperformed students from every southern state except Texas, Virginia, and Georgia—and only the Virginia students performed substantially better. The state's high school graduation rate is now the highest in the South and above average for the nation.

Elementary school classes that once had thirty-five children, now have a maximum of twenty-three children for grades one through three and twenty-five chil-

Clinton barnstormed the state with his education message and 'just changed people's values. Arkansans now believe in education.'

dren for grades four through eight. The maximum number of students in a kindergarten class is now twenty, the maximum for secondary schools, thirty, with no teacher having more than a 150-student load. Instead of 5,100 students in the state taking advanced math, 75,000 now take it. Instead of 6,800 taking chemistry, 12,600 now take the course. Enrollment in foreign languages has more than tripled. And, as beneficiaries of a statewide public school choice program, one of only a handful established in the nation, Arkansas students can opt to go to any public school they choose (provided acceptable racial balance is maintained).

Today, 80 percent of the Arkansas state budget is devoted to education, the third highest percentage in the nation. Despite drops in farm prices and oil, teacher salaries—which once were fiftieth in the nation—increased more than 77 percent in nine years, and the 1991-92 salary increase was the largest percentage increase in average teacher salary of any state.

And Bill Clinton is still at it. His 1991 education package (much of which he tried and failed to enact earlier) requires that all schools offer kindergarten. It establishes the Arkansas Better Chance program, which funds early childhood programs such as HIPPO (see page 12) and Headstart, thereby enabling 35 percent of Arkansas children to receive free preschool education. It sets up a grants program for local districts to work with businesses in developing apprenticeship programs that will motivate students to do well in a core academic curriculum, while preparing them for meaningful work after graduation. It establishes a scholarship program that provides a substantial college stipend for every low- and middle-income student who takes a core curriculum, earns a 2.5 grade point average, scores 19 or above on the ACT, and stays off drugs.

And it creates accountability for students. Teenagers who drop out of high school can have their drivers' licenses revoked (although this penalty can be waived if the student would suffer undue hardship without a license). Parents were made more accountable in 1989 when they became liable for fines if they fail to communicate twice a year with teachers about their children's progress or if their children are chronically truant.

Clinton's 1991 education package also puts into place a series of changes that will lead to the restructuring of Arkansas education, changes that Clinton's aides describe as Stage II of education reform. "Our focus in the 1980s," says Gloria Cabe, a state legislator in 1983 and now an aide to Clinton, "was on the basics:

increased funding; tougher minimum standards; more course offerings; basic accountability by students, parents, and teachers; and higher teacher salaries. We were so far behind. We had to address certain basics before we could move on. And we had to do it in a way that allowed people to see and feel the difference. But we never intended to stop there. We're now tackling fundamental structural problems. For example, we need better ways of assessing achievement—and better ways of driving achievement—than standardized tests. We know that. We also need to eliminate a lot of paperwork and middle-level bureaucracy and move more decision making down to the school level."

The 1991 education-reform legislation established a commission that is now defining what Arkansas students should know and be able to do. These standards will be translated into curriculum frameworks and more meaningful performance assessments—which should end reliance on low-level standardized tests. More responsibility for getting students to meet these goals will devolve to individual schools and teachers, and the Arkansas Education Department will be reorganized so that it can shift its emphasis from regulation to assisting those who are trying to remake their schools.

BUT THROUGHOUT Arkansas, people will tell you that Bill Clinton's legacy is not this law or that, but the revolution he has wrought in the state's attitude toward education.

This was a state where no one ever thought much about education, where parents assumed that whatever education they had received was just fine for their children, too. Ernie Dumas, a former editor with the Arkansas Gazette, says Clinton barnstormed the state with his education message and "just changed people's values. Arkansans now believe in education."

Resentment about the teacher test still lingers among some teachers. But they are a tiny minority. The Arkansas Education Association, which had been so opposed to the test, endorsed Clinton for governor in 1990. Both the AEA and its parent body, the NEA, enthusiastically endorsed Clinton for president this year, as did the newly-formed Arkansas Classroom Teachers and its parent body, the American Federation of Teachers. Joyce Elliott, a teacher in Little Rock and president of AFT's Arkansas affiliate, expresses the feelings of many Arkansas teachers when she says, "I didn't like the test, and neither did most of my colleagues. But I'm not going to second-guess Bill Clinton's political judgment. He clearly believed that the test was necessary and that the broader education reforms would not pass the legislature unless a teacher test was part of the package.

"And that package has transformed education in Arkansas. This is now a state where people breathe education; they talk about it at dinner. Parents create castles in the sky for their kids, castles that are reached through education. Teacher morale is way up, parent involvement is up, discipline problems are down."

Arkansas' march out of the education backwaters is far from over. It is still a very poor state. Disputes over the specifics of that journey will undoubtedly continue, but there is a universal feeling that the 1980s were

a watershed decade that changed the way the people of Arkansas think about education, which means the way they think about themselves.

"Before," says teacher Joyce Elliott, "kids were just hostages to where they grew up, to geography. Now, no matter where you are from, you have a chance. The kids don't have to sacrifice anymore because of where they live. That's what Bill Clinton has done for Arkansas." □

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- ¹⁷C. Emily Feistritz, *The Condition of Teaching: A State by State Analysis, 1985* (Princeton, N.J.: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1985).
- ¹⁸Blair, *Arkansas Politics and Government*.
- ¹⁹Arkansas Department of Education.
- ²⁰William Ernst, interview with author, April 1986.
- ²¹Statistics from Wanda Miles-Bell, letter to author, Dec. 17, 1986.
- ²²*Statistical Abstract of the United States 1987* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1986), p. 126, chart 207.
- ²³Test scores from the Arkansas Department of Education. By 1987 fourth graders were at the 62nd percentile in reading and the 68th in math; seventh graders were at the 53rd and 57th percentiles, and tenth graders were at the 49th and 51st percentiles, respectively.
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- ²⁵Guy Reel, "Clinton Calls Northeast Arkansas Victim," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, May 21, 1986.

WHAT SHOULD ELEMENTARY STUDENTS BE DOING?

Outlines of a 'Thinking Curriculum'

Recommendations for curriculum reform have been coming from all directions. Professional groups in the various disciplines, national and state commissions, and commercial publishers have all weighed in with their critiques and suggestions. Many good ideas have been put forward, and there is widespread agreement that curriculum reform lies at the heart of education reform.

But for the classroom teacher, the sheer amount and extent of it all can be overwhelming. This is particularly true for the elementary school teacher, who, in a self-contained classroom, is typically responsible for teaching in five or six subject areas. A brief, cohesive overview of the kinds of changes needed in the major disciplines—and what theory of learning, if any, binds them all together—has been missing. Now, a new publication from the California Department of Education helps fill that void.

For the last several years, California has been in the forefront of many of the education reforms now gaining widespread acceptance. Its history-social science curriculum framework, for example, has provided a model for the nation of what a course of study suitable for young citizens of America and the world should be. Its latest report, entitled *It's Elementary!*, from which we have drawn the excerpts that follow, offers a guide to what elementary school students should be learning and doing in seven subject areas: language arts, math, history-social science, science, health and physical education, second languages, and the visual and performing arts, plus—“as a vital strand

running through each of the subject areas”—character education.

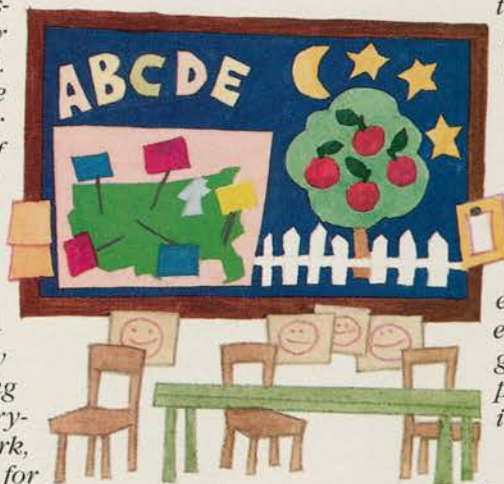
Because of space limitations, we are able to reproduce only the sections covering the first four academic disciplines. We encourage our readers to order the complete 104-page report (see box, p. 21). Noting that curriculum reform cannot succeed if other aspects of the elementary school program are ignored, the report also contains practical classroom strategies for implementing the new curriculum, a description of the kind of professional environment needed to support good teaching, suggestions for creating better assessment instruments, and ideas for building closer bonds to parents and community.

In recommending this report, it is impossible not to take note of the sadly ironic situation that continues to unfold as we go to press: With the massive budget reductions that are cutting deeper and deeper into the California education system, the state that gave us this fine report may be crippling its own ability to implement it.

—EDITOR

THE START of elementary school,” as developmental psychologist Arlene Skolnick has observed, “is in many ways the beginning of the child’s adult career.” Because what happens during the early years lays a foundation for all that follows, the elementary grades may well be the most influential in any individual’s formal educational experience.

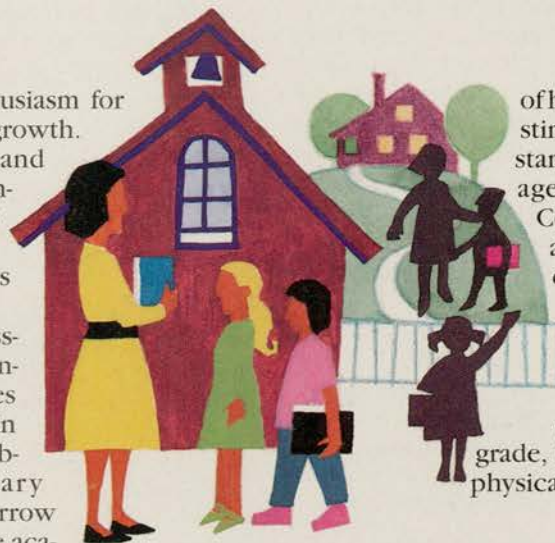
The years from kindergarten through grade six are a



time of uninhibited wonder, enthusiasm for learning, and breathtakingly rapid growth. The social, emotional, physical, and intellectual identities children construct for themselves during this period go a long way toward determining the subsequent trajectories of their lives.

Numerous studies of typical classroom practice suggest that elementary education in the United States could be improved significantly.¹ In particular, the most pervasive problem afflicting much elementary instruction in the past has been a narrow focus on the acquisition of discrete academic skills—the ability to decode a word, punctuate a sentence, do long division, identify the parts of a flower—to the exclusion of more thought-provoking content exploration that taps the child's real-world experiences, feelings, and interests. Too often, children are fed a steady diet of teacher recitation, drill, and rote exercises instead of opportunities to solve problems and creatively express ideas and concepts. And the problem is not limited to elementary schools. In its 1988 report, *Here They Come, Ready or Not*, the California School Readiness Task Force identified the pushing down of such skill-focused academic programs into the kindergarten and preschool years and the inappropriate reliance on passive rote learning as major concerns in need of corrective action.

The original rationale for the basic skills curriculum was rooted in earlier educational theory, which held that students had to learn to crawl intellectually before they could walk or run. But the application of the theory has been disappointing. Singleminded concentration on the mechanics of reading and mathematics, to the exclusion



of how these subjects can inform and stimulate children's everyday understanding of the world, has discouraged students' interest in school. Confronted with a dull, repetitious, and uninspiring curriculum, many children react by withdrawing into a kind of intellectual passive resistance. As recent studies have repeatedly shown, under-achieving children begin to drop out mentally around the fourth grade, many years before they drop out physically.

The Solution: The Thinking Curriculum

Children are seekers of meaning. No sooner do they learn how to talk than they begin asking questions about simple things as well as about the dilemmas of human existence that have perplexed philosophers and theologians from the dawn of time. Children are intensely interested in exploring questions of values, feelings, meaning, and the relationship of self to others. A curriculum that addresses these questions engages a child intellectually more than a skills-based one because it takes advantage of the natural curiosity and sense-making drive that motivate the child toward effortful performance.

The thinking curriculum does *not* call for the end of direct instruction or the learning of facts. Nor does it deny the importance of mastering traditional academic skills. What it does say, however, is that these skills are best acquired in the context of meaningful learning experiences that harness the child's inquisitive nature to the task at hand. Learning how to think and learning subject-

Percent of correct answers by thirteen-year-olds in mathematics testing in the Second International Assessment of Educational Progress



Data provided by the Policy Information Center, Educational Testing Service, 1992.

matter content are not separate processes; rather, they are two facets of the same invaluable intellectual gem.

California's subject-matter frameworks and model curriculum guides were recast in the 1980s to be consistent with current research on how children learn. Organized by subject, the frameworks collectively present a fundamentally new vision of what a model elementary school curriculum should include. Qualitatively, they call for a shift from a skills-based pedagogy in which the teacher serves as the dispenser of knowledge to a hands-on, student-centered, experiential one. Quantitatively, they call for a greater depth of understanding in a wider range of knowledge areas than ever before attempted at the elementary level. The remainder of this chapter includes a brief summary of the critical concepts from each of the main subject areas as they apply at the elementary level.

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LANGUAGE ARTS IN THE ELEMENTARY YEARS

The language arts curriculum should be organized around compelling literary works. A steady diet of literature from the earliest years can provide the child with significant content through which the language competencies of listening, speaking, reading, and writing can be developed in an integrated and meaning-centered fashion.

In the primary grades, one of the key responsibilities of schools is to teach children how to read and write; in the intermediate grades, it is to help children gain fluency and confidence in reading and writing so that they can learn. Each of these responsibilities poses a special

set of challenges.

Initial literacy. In the early grades, the dominant mode of reading instruction in most elementary schools has been phonics. Although phonics is a valuable tool for a beginning reader, this approach sometimes has received so much emphasis that inadequate time has been spent on the essential purpose of reading: making meaning from text. Phonics is an important element in the teaching of reading, but it should never be allowed to become the whole program.

The best approach in the instruction of all novice readers and writers is to create a rich environment, steeped in authentic language and stimulating stories that vitally connect with what the children already know and are curious about. Literature offers children both the vivid language and compelling plots of the time-tested classics and the good contemporary works that they find inherently fascinating.

In general, successful initial literacy programs:



A CURRICULUM FOR ALL

The thinking curriculum is not a course to be added to a crowded program when time permits. It is not a program that begins after the basics have been mastered or the facts memorized. It is not a program reserved for a minority of students, such as the gifted or the college bound. The thinking curriculum calls for recognition that all real learning involves thinking, that thinking ability can be nurtured and cultivated in everyone, and that the entire educational program must be reconceived and revitalized so that thinking pervades students' lives beginning in kindergarten.



Quoted with permission from "Assessing the Thinking Curriculum: New Tools for Educational Reform," by Lauren B. Resnick and Daniel P. Resnick in Changing Assessments: Alternative Views of Aptitude, Achievement and Instruction. Edited by Bernard R. Gifford and Mary Catherine O'Connor. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992, p. 40.

1. Regularly expose students to the best in children's literature.
2. Provide students ample opportunities for developing oral language by encouraging them to discuss their thoughts and ideas about stories they have heard as well as about the world around them.
3. Introduce students to writing by providing them opportunities to dictate individual and group stories, which are written and then read aloud.
4. Recognize each student's level of preparedness for reading and build on that base.
5. Stimulate children's interpretive thought processes by focusing on comprehension with strategic discussions and questioning before, during, and after readings.
6. Include a phonics component that is presented early and kept simple.
7. Stress the connection between what is written and the child's real world experiences.
8. Strike a healthy balance between oral and silent reading practice.
9. Integrate practice in the other language skills of writing, listening, and speaking.
10. Encourage parents to read aloud to their children, take them to the library, and discuss stories and events with them.

Extending reading fluency. Once children have learned to make meaning from the printed word and understand simple, well-written stories, they can begin to build confidence and fluency in their new reading skill. Typically, reading proficiency has been developed in the elementary years by means of basal reading programs, complete packages of commercially produced instructional materials that include graded anthologies of abridged reading selections, workbooks and skill sheets, and teachers' manuals with accompanying instructional strategies and materials. Researchers estimate that basal reading programs account for from 75 percent to 90 percent of what takes place during reading periods in most elementary school classrooms.³

Such an overreliance on a prepackaged curriculum compromises the quality of the reading program in two ways. First, basal textbooks can be bland and vacuous. Governed as they are by rigid readability formulas, most basal reading selections are simply not as interesting as the literature available for children of the same age. Second, the accompanying exercises rarely ask students to think about what they have read. More often the exercises seem designed to mark time with monotonous "circle the M's and P's" work sheets.

Good elementary reading programs recognize that reading is not a subject in itself so much as it is a tool of discovery that students can use to enter enticing new worlds. Skill in reading is acquired and perfected by practicing it across the curriculum—in mathematics, history-social sciences, and science. In those subject areas, the emphasis in reading is kept where it belongs—on reading for meaning—rather than on the mechanics of the operation.

Regular "read aloud" sessions in which the teacher reads to students are indispensable in keeping the focus on reading for meaning. Because the teacher does the code-breaking, reading aloud gives all students in the

SEATWORK VS. SILENT READING

Most students in the elementary grades spend the majority of time allocated to reading instruction doing "seatwork"—filling in the blanks in workbooks that accompany the basal reading program. It is not uncommon for a child to bring home 1,000 workbook pages and skill sheets completed during a reading period in the course of his or her elementary grades career. But the completion of skill sheets does *not* necessarily promote reading proficiency. Research shows that a far more productive use of classroom time is to have regularly scheduled silent reading opportunities in which children practice the whole skill of reading. The National Commission on Reading has recommended that two hours a week should be available for independent reading by the time children reach the third or fourth grade.²



class, even those with poor reading skills, the opportunity to enjoy literature. As the teacher reads, he or she can directly model comprehension strategies for students, taking them on a "walk through the mind"—wondering about characters' motives, figuring out the meaning of a word from its context, making connections to one's own life, predicting what will happen next. Demonstrating how an expert reader approaches a text is also one of the most effective ways that teachers and parents can help children learn successful comprehension strategies.

Of course, it must be remembered that reading is only one of the language arts skills. Language development in terms of listening, speaking, reading, and writing is an integrated process in which gains in any single area contribute to gains in all the rest. Writing activities, in particular, can powerfully contribute to reading proficiency, especially when teachers have children communicate in a variety of ways to real audiences. Reading is crucial to the ability to write, and systematic reading and writing instruction in many different modes of discourse is central to children's intellectual development. Unlike skill-sheet seatwork, writing can involve students in orig-

IT'S ELEMENTARY

Copies of *It's Elementary!* are available for \$5 each, plus sales tax for California residents, from the Bureau of Publications, Sales Unit, California Department of Education, P.O. Box 271, Sacramento, CA 95812-0271. A complete list of other department publications may be obtained by writing to the address above or by calling the Sales Unit at (916) 445-1260.

inal thinking about the material they have just read and, consequently, can stretch their mental processes in beneficial ways. A knowledge of punctuation, spelling, and grammar is important because it facilitates written communication to a broad public; but it is not the first competency a child must master in learning how to write nor should it be treated as an instructional end in itself.

The best elementary language arts programs sustain an atmosphere in which reading is perceived as a joyful experience. Using texts rich with interesting ideas and information, moving through them at an appropriate pace, and arranging for high rates of success can all help attain the ultimate goal: the development of lifelong readers.

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MATHEMATICS IN THE ELEMENTARY YEARS

Mathematics as commonly presented in today's elementary schools has been described as a "curriculum out of balance."⁴ Researchers point to a heavy emphasis on rote mastery of computational skills on the one hand and scant attention to creatively exploring mathematical concepts derived from the child's everyday experiences on the other. In sharp contrast with other countries, a large portion of the elementary mathematics curriculum in the United States every year after kindergarten is little more than a rehash of material covered previously.

In exemplary mathematics programs, students are not sentenced to endlessly repeating procedures that produce single, correct answers; rather, they are given opportunities to construct their own mathematical understandings from open-ended encounters with challenging situations. Students experience mathematics as a way of interpreting the world around them, figuring out how to share fairly a plate of cookies, comparing how much different containers hold, finding the "best buy" at the supermarket, deciding how much food to purchase for a birthday party. Students choose hand calculators, manipulatives, or other tools to use while they work. They frequently work together, sharing numerical estimates and discussing their ideas about how to find answers. Students explain their thinking, orally and in writing, and build their understanding of mathematics over a long period of time.

Most students establish their lifelong attitudes towards mathematics in the elementary grades. All too often, initial positive attitudes plummet by the time students reach sixth grade. This trend represents a loss of talent our state can ill afford. Many scientific and business careers require a solid foundation in mathematics. It is particularly important that females, black, and Hispanic students become comfortable at an early age with the full range of thinking in mathematics so that they will not be excluded later from the many opportunities that mathematical power affords. The key to improvement in this



HOW OLD ARE YOU?

Once students learn to rely on procedures, they tend to give up on common sense. For example, students may initially learn multiplication by understanding it as a series of repeated additions, but then lose that original meaning after being taught the routine procedures for two- and three-digit multiplication and applying them repeatedly. Students can quote the steps about "crossing out and moving over" as well as recite rules, but they no longer have any idea whether their answers are reasonable. This can lead to preposterous answers and does little to prevent rote implementation of computational procedures based on misconceptions. For example, one child systematically excluded zero from all her computations because "zero doesn't count for anything" until she was asked to think about her age, which would one day be 10.



Quoted with approval from The Mathematics Report Card, by John A. Dossey and others. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1988, p. 67.

(Continued on page 42)

COME LOOK WITH ME

Exploring Landscape Art with Children

SPECIAL
CLASSROOM
SECTION

BY GLADYS S. BLIZZARD

MY GRANDCHILD was the stimulus for the *Come Look With Me* series of art appreciation books for children. Wherever I travel, I visit art museums and buy postcards of favorite paintings to send to her with a few questions that can be answered only after thoughtful looking. I want to share with her the pleasure of looking at art and of questioning it in ways that lead us to see and think beyond the obvious.

Exploring Landscape Art with Children is the second in a series of four *Come Look With Me* books. The first volume has children as the subject matter of the paintings selected; the third volume has animals as its theme; and the fourth, to be published in the spring of 1993, features games as its theme. Each volume consists of twelve paintings paired with a set of questions meant to stimulate thoughtful discussion between adults and children. In the pages that follow, four selections from the landscape art book are reproduced. I encourage you to try them out in your classrooms. They are meant to be shared with a single child or a small group. Through years of experience, I have found that open discussions of art with children bring not only new insights but also the joy of shared experience. The aim of this book is to inspire a vigorous exchange of everyone's ideas.



How often in our daily lives do we really look at our surroundings? Unlike most of us, landscape artists take the time not only to look, but also through their paintings to share with others their very special way of seeing the world. Sometimes they paint a scene in a realistic manner, and sometimes they transform what they have seen into something else altogether. Always their visions are as individual as the artists themselves.

Observant youngsters will notice that as the world's landscapes have changed, so have those on canvas. Though some of these changes are evident in *Exploring Landscape Art with Children*, this book is not meant to be a historical survey. Its main purpose is to present boys and girls with a variety of artists and styles and to help them discover for themselves the ageless pleasure great art provides. Perhaps by examining the different ways these artists have portrayed the world around them, young people might also become more sensitive to their own surroundings.

The background information that accompanies each illustration can be read silently, read aloud, or paraphrased while the children look at the reproductions. To keep things lively, it's probably most effective to discuss only two or three works at a time. Ask each child to point to a part of the painting while he or she talks about it. If you are sharing with a group, be sure to ask if anyone has a different opinion. Because answers to questions about art are found in the art itself and in our perceptions of it, a number of responses are possible, and very few of them will ever be "wrong."

All the pictures in *Come Look With Me* are by artists whose work can be found in many books as well as in museums around the world. Although there is no substitute for seeing the colors, brush strokes, and scale of an original painting, this book and others in the series can help children learn how to look at original works of art with greater understanding.

Together, children and adults can become involved in paintings through investigative looking and thinking. This helps art come alive so that it lives in our memories. My hope is that when the children who enjoy this book encounter other works by the same artists, it will be with the happy recognition of meeting old friends.

Gladys S. Blizzard, the author of the Come Look With Me series, has been an art teacher and also has served as curator of education at the Bayly Art Museum at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. We are grateful to Thomasson-Grant, Inc., the publisher of the Come Look With Me series, and to the museums in whose collections the works of art are held, for permission to reproduce the pictures and text that follow. By reminding us that no child is ever too young to start looking at, learning about, and talking about our extraordinary arts heritage, the Come Look With Me series enriches us all.



GEORGE INNESS. *The Lackawanna Valley*. 1855. Oil on canvas, 33 7/8" x 50 1/4".
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Gift of Mrs. Huttleston Rogers, 1945.



If you hiked from where the boy is resting to the mountains, would it take long to get there? What route would you choose? Why? What sounds do you think you might hear along the way?

Would the painting be just as interesting without the boy? To help make up your mind, block him out with your finger. How does that change the way the painting looks?

Find an area where all the trees have been cut down and only the stumps remain. Why do you think the trees were cut? What clues does the artist give to help you decide?

As a boy growing up in New York State, George Inness once saw a man painting in a field. From that day, he knew he wanted to be an artist. Though he had some training, he was mainly self-taught and traveled through the countryside painting peaceful scenes, which included cleared fields, new buildings, and other signs of settlement.

This painting was commissioned by the president of the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western Railroad in 1855 as an advertisement for a new railway that ran through Pennsylvania. Inness was asked to paint the train, the tracks, the repair shop, and the roundhouse—a circular building where steam engines were housed and turned around.

The artist rode a stagecoach to the site, sketched it in watercolor, and returned to his studio to work in oils. In the finished painting, Inness combines accurate details and his own strong impression of the scene. The soft, even light across the landscape shows as much attention to the atmosphere and the land as to the progress represented by the railway. The rising smoke from the chimneys in the town foretells the industrialization of the country.



HENRI ROUSSEAU. *The Repast of the Lion*. c. 1907. Oil on canvas, 44 3/4" x 63".
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Sam A. Lewisohn, 1951.



Do you think it would be difficult to walk in this jungle? Why? What would you need to take with you?

Point to the lightest green. Point to the darkest green. How many different shades of green can you find? Why do you think the artist used so many?

The flowers and bananas in this painting are larger than they'd be in real life. Why do you think the artist painted them this way?

This painting shows things that are beautiful and a little scary at the same time. Can you think of some other things that have both of these qualities?

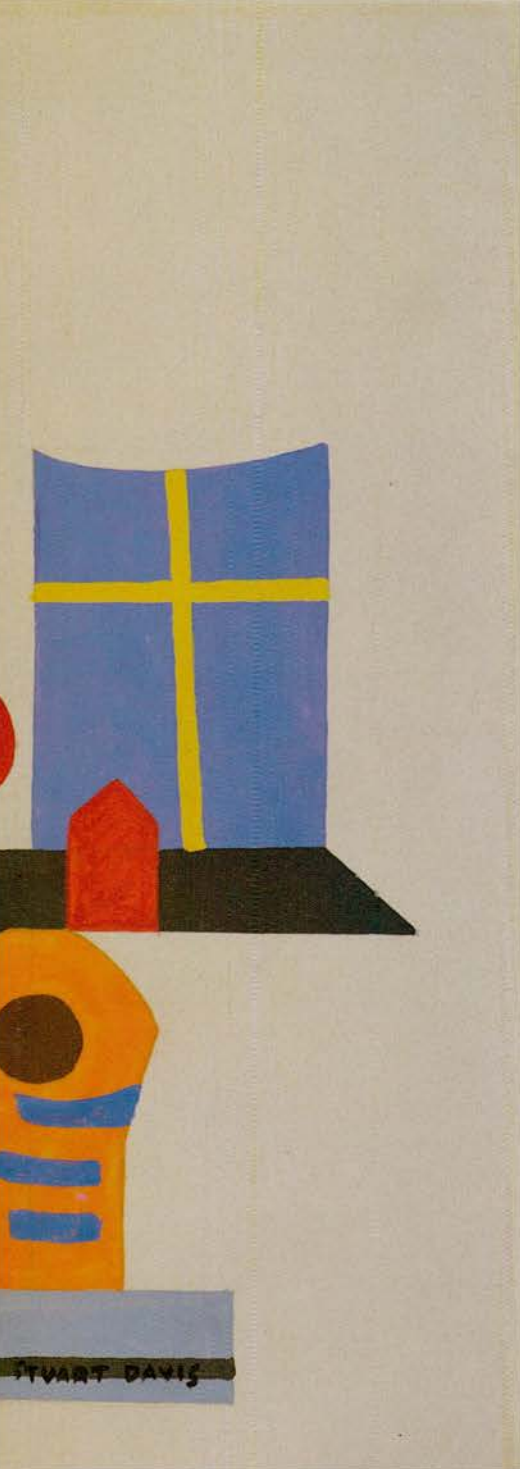
When he was forty years old, Henri Rousseau decided to quit his job as a toll collector in Paris and spend all of his time painting. At first, people didn't like his work and made fun of it, calling it childlike and primitive, but Rousseau had a style of his own and stayed with it. He wrote plays, tried to start an art school, and took a number of different jobs to support his painting. Eventually, other artists recognized his distinctive style and its place in twentieth-century art.

Rousseau frequently visited the zoo and botanical gardens in Paris to study exotic plants and animals. After gaining a basic knowledge of the wildlife, he used his imagination to create his own jungle landscapes.

This jungle scene is more orderly than a real jungle would be. The animals are framed by tidy plants and grasses and carefully spaced trees. The bright yellow bananas and boldly colored flowers are larger than life, lending a mysterious and lively feeling to the painting.



STUART DAVIS. *New York Waterfront*. 1938. Gouache on paper, 12" x 15 7/8".
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Given anonymously.



This is a different kind of landscape painting, called abstract. In it, the artist puts together parts of what you would see along the waterfront, both in the water and on the land. What would it be like to walk in this place?

How many colors can you find in this painting? What are they? How many circles, squares, and rectangles can you find?

Look at the various colored shapes. Point to the ones that remind you of something and tell what they remind you of.

Waterfronts are busy places. Does this place seem busy to you? Why?

Stuart Davis' career covered every major period in the development of modern American art. His parents, both artists, encouraged his interest from the beginning. At sixteen, he left school to study art full-time.

Davis began his career as a cartoonist and illustrator. His early art was realistic, but gradually he focused on just the parts of objects he found most intriguing. Like other abstract artists, he was more interested in color and composition than in painting something exactly the way it appears.

In *New York Waterfront*, Davis doesn't give us a factual depiction of the place. Instead, many of his shapes suggest objects that might be seen along a city harbor. The forms and colors and their organization give us the artist's impression of the scene. Davis was very interested in music, especially jazz. His paintings have been compared to jazz because of the bright colors and the broken rhythms of his playful and lively compositions.



EDWARD HOPPER. *Route 6, Eastham*. 1941. Oil on canvas, 27 1/2" x 38 1/4".
Sheldon Swope Art Museum, Terre Haute, Indiana.



What time of day do you think this painting shows? What clues does the artist give to help you decide?

Is anything moving in this painting? If so, what? How can you tell?

Do you think that someone lives in this house, or is it empty? Why?

How does this painting make you feel? Why?

Edward Hopper lived most of his life in New York City. For years he supported himself working as a commercial artist and illustrator until he could afford to paint full-time. Today he is recognized as the most important realist painter of the mid-twentieth century.

Some of the artist's favorite subjects were highways, railroads, gas stations, streets, bridges, houses, and city buildings. Many of the ideas for his paintings came from his surroundings in New York; he also liked to drive along country roads in New England for inspiration.

Hopper looked closely at a scene he wanted to paint, decided what was most important, then divided his composition into simple areas void of details. Fascinated with light and shadow, he drew them as geometric shapes. These abstract effects give a feeling of stillness and loneliness to his work. The scenes he painted remind us of places we have seen—giving ordinary settings new meaning for all who look at them.

THE NEW FR

Nike's profits jump on

By JEFFREY BALLINGER

Her only name is Sadisah, and it's safe to say that she's never heard of Michael Jordan. Nor is she spending her evenings watching him and his Olympic teammates gliding and dunking in prime time from Barcelona. But she *has* heard of the shoe company he endorses—Nike, whose logo could be seen on the shoes and uniforms of many American Olympic athletes this summer. Like Jordan, Sadisah works on behalf of Nike. You won't see her, however, in the flashy TV images of freedom and individuality that smugly command us to JUST DO IT!—just spend upward of \$130 for a pair of basketball shoes. Yet Sadisah is, in fact, one of the people who *is* doing it—making the actual shoes, that is, and earning paychecks such as this one in a factory in Indonesia.

STARMON	
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NAMA	: SADISAH
R-NO	: 8045
BAGIAN	: L. PMTGAN
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BASIC
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In the 1980s, Oregon-based Nike closed its last U.S. footwear factory, in Saco, Maine, while establishing most of its new factories in South Korea, where Sung Hwa Corp. is based. Sung Hwa is among many independent producers Nike has contracted with. Nike's actions were part of the broader "globalization" trend that saw the United States lose 65,300 footwear jobs between 1982 and 1989 as shoe companies sought non-unionized Third World workers who didn't require the U.S. rubber-shoe industry average of \$6.94 an hour. But in the late 1980s, South Korean laborers gained the right to form independent unions and to strike. Higher wages ate into Nike's profits. The company shifted new factories to poorer countries such as Indonesia, where labor rights are generally ignored and wages are but one-seventh of South Korea's. (The Sung Hwa factory and others like it are located in Tangerang, a squalid industrial boomtown just outside Jakarta.) Today, to make 80 million pairs of shoes annually, Nike contracts with several dozen factories globally, including six in Indonesia. Others are in China, Malaysia, Thailand, and Taiwan. By shifting factories to cheaper labor pools, Nike has posted year after year of growth; in 1991 the company grossed more than \$3 billion in sales—\$200 million of which Nike attributes to Jordan's endorsement—and reported a net profit of \$287 million, its highest ever.

Jeffrey Ballinger is a workers' rights advocate who spent three and a half years in Indonesia working for the AFL-CIO's Asian Institute. Copyright © 1992 by Harper's Magazine. All rights reserved. Reprinted from the August issue by special permission.

FREE-TRADE HEEL

the backs of Asian workers

SUNG HWA CORP.
INDONESIA OPERATIONS

PENDAPATAN	POTONGAN	
50,400	PAJAK	0
0	ASTEK	525
0	SPSI	500
4,200	MAKAN	3,600
6,300		
19,845		
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80,745	TOTAL	4,625
	DITERIMA	76,120

"Pendapatan" is the earnings column, and five lines below the base pay figure for the month (50,400 rupiah) is one for overtime. Sadisah and the other workers in this factory are compelled to put in extra hours, both by economic necessity and by employer fiat. Each production line of 115 workers is expected to produce about 1,600 pairs of Nikes a day. According to the column at left, next to "OT (JAM)," Sadisah worked 63 hours of overtime during this pay period, for which she received an extra 2 cents per hour. At this factory, which makes mid-priced Nikes, each pair of shoes requires .84 man-hours to produce; working on an assembly line, Sadisah assembled the equivalent of 13.9 pairs every day. The profit margin on each pair is enormous. The labor costs to manufacture a pair of Nikes that sells for \$80 in the United States is approximately 12 cents.

Here are Sadisah's net earnings for a month of labor. She put in six days a week, ten and a half hours per day, for a paycheck equivalent to \$37.46—about half the retail price of one pair of the sneakers she makes. Boosters of the global economy and "free markets" claim that creating employment around the world promotes free trade between industrializing and developing countries. But how many Western products can people in Indonesia buy when they can't earn enough to eat? The answer can't be found in Nike's TV ads showing Michael Jordan sailing above the earth for his reported multiyear endorsement fee of \$20 million—an amount, incidentally, that at the pay rate shown here would take Sadisah 44,492 years to earn.

The words printed on the pay stub are in Bahasa Indonesia, a language created by fusing Roman characters with a dominant Malay dialect. The message, however, is bottom-line capitalism. "Per hari" is the daily wage for seven and a half hours of work, which in Sadisah's case is 2,100 Indonesian rupiah—at the current rate of exchange, \$1.03 *per day*. That amount, which works out to just under 14 cents per hour, is less than the Indonesian government's figure for "minimum physical need." A recent International Labor Organization survey found that 88 percent of Indonesian women working at Sadisah's wage rates are malnourished. And most workers in this factory—over 80 percent—are women. With seldom more than elementary-school educations, they are generally in their teens or early twenties, and have come from outlying agricultural areas in search of city jobs and a better life. Sadisah's wages allow her to rent a shanty without electricity or running water.

LIBERATING LAUGHTER

BY MICHELE LANDSBERG

"How's that new baby brother of yours?" said Grandpa.

"Willy?" said Louie. "No fun."

"Not cute," said Mary Ann.

"All he can do is eat and sleep," said Louie.

"Or cry," said Mary Ann.

"That bad, eh?" said Grandpa. "Your parents must feel awful."

James Stevenson, *Worse than Willy!*

One morning there was a moose in Mr. Breton's yard. It was a blue moose. When Mr. Breton went out his back door, the moose was there, looking at him. After a while, Mr. Breton went back in, closed the door, and made a pot of coffee while he waited for the moose to go away. It didn't go away; it just stood in Mr. Breton's yard, looking at his back door. Mr. Breton drank a cup of coffee. The moose stood in the yard. Mr. Breton opened the door again. "Shoo! Go away!" "Do you mind if I come in and get warm?" the moose said. "I'm just about frozen."

Manus Pinkwater, *Blue Moose*

CHILDREN'S BOOKS are, of course, drenched in humor. It could hardly be otherwise, since any sane adult tries to raise children in an atmosphere of opti-

mism—and hope, even of the most rueful kind, is the expression on comedy's face. Children, like all the powerless, find their best release and choicest weapon in humor; they are always ready to drop an armload of tension or anger to indulge in a liberating shout of laughter. And, as teachers are well aware, laughter is the reward that lures the most reluctant reader.

Writers for older children, especially mediocre writers, may pick away gloomily at the sores of the pubescent soul the way their adolescent subjects pick at their complexions, but the characteristic mood of the writer for younger children is one of a summoner to glee: Hilarity, slyness, and the chuckle lie on every hand. But humor, as well as being the richest vein of invention in children's literature, is also the form most open to abuse, exploitation, and even, as I shall try to show later, to some rather sinister manipulation.

Some of the finest humorous writing for children is in the tone of James Stevenson's *Grandpa*, quoted above. The wit is deadpan and droll, but the underlying sensibility is one of tender acceptance of the child's foibles. Stevenson, a celebrated cartoonist for *The New Yorker* magazine, gives his young readers some credit for sophistication: Though the unstated theme of *Worse than Willy!* is the children's resentment of a new baby brother, he never stoops to glib reassurances or the usual head-patting condescension. Instead, a poker-faced Grandpa,



his straw hat sitting on the end table beside his wicker chair on the porch, treats Louie and Mary Ann to a wild story about the antics of his own "awful" brother Wainey. And, most delicious of all, in the cartoonlike, irresistibly funny panel illustrations of Grandpa and Wainey in their infancy, we see them exactly as the listening children visualize them: junior editions of their grown selves, complete with a brush mustache tucked under the infant Grandpa's button nose.

That tenderness is what makes Arnold Lobel's *Frog and Toad Together* so winning a comedy. An I-Can-Read beginner book, it is a model of simplicity. Little Toad and the more mature Frog are best friends. In five short stories, Toad exhibits all the impatience, self-indulgence, and self-aggrandizement of a typical preschooler. "Toad will now dance and he will be wonderful," announces a master of ceremonies in Toad's dream, while Frog, in the audience, shrinks smaller and smaller. The dream turns

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into a nightmare as Frog seems to vanish entirely. Waking, Toad is intensely relieved to find a normal-size Frog at his bedside. "Frog, I am so glad that you came over." "I always do," says Frog. No matter how laughably Toad behaves—and every child will laugh at his all-too-recognizable impetuosity and conceit—the kindly friendship of Frog endures.

Manus Pinkwater's gourmandizing *Blue Moose* is a more urbane kind of friend for a slightly older reader; he makes us laugh out loud by the sheer incongruity of his sophistication in the north woods of Maine. Children's humor thrives on role reversal, and here a shy and insecure restaurateur, the good-hearted little Mr. Breton, blooms into prosperity after the moose moves in and takes on the job of headwaiter, bullying the customers with time-honored headwaiter hauteur. (The way the townsfolk brag about being on good terms with the moose is a typically sly Pinkwater joke, this time about competitive dining out.) The style may be terse and jaunty in the best modern manner, but the solid base of the story, what touches and engages us, is the mutual kindness of man and moose and their odd but richly reverberant friendship.

WHEN YOU stop to analyze why a funny book provokes laughter from many children of very different tastes, you almost always find that there's an unstated theme in the book that is common to the deepest experience of childhood. *Mary Alice, Operator Number Nine* is the heroine of

the popular picture book by Jeffrey Allen and illustrator James Marshall. Mary Alice, a duck with a head cold, has to take a few days off from her job as a local telephone operator who gives the exact time to the public.

"Don't worry," says Boss Chicken, "I'll find someone to take your place. It's an easy job." This, naturally, makes Mary Alice feel even worse. What kindergarten child hasn't been made to feel that someone else could set the table, make beds, or wash the car faster and better than he? And so we rejoice as Mary Alice's series of substitutes all prove comically inept. That's the obvious message. But there's a subtler one, too. Consider that the five- or six-year-old reader at whom this book is aimed often has a new baby brother or sister at home, and the dread of being superseded becomes sharply relevant. Or think about the time and all the anxieties of clock watching and schedules that drop on the shoulders of the first-grade child, who has lived in a timeless dream world until the first day of school.

Anxiety, as the author Selma Lane has astutely pointed out (in *Down the Rabbit Hole*), is the engine that powers *The Cat in the Hat*, possibly the best-known beginner book in North America. As the mysterious Cat visitor wreaks mayhem and chaos in the children's house, their horror mounts: Mother will soon come back and find "this big mess." Uncontrollable mess is a source of panic to more people than just schoolchildren; I confess that when I first read *The Cat in the Hat*, I could find very little jollity in the spectacle of an uninvited demon-cat and a house knee-deep in smashed cake, broken lamps,

and spilled milk. Even the ugly drawings are nervous, edgy, and tense: The children are bug-eyed with consternation, walls seem to tilt, tables teeter, and the horizon line wobbles, upends itself, and disappears in the whirlwind of activity. The laughter that accompanies the end of this book is, I



would wager, the laughter of semihysterical relief.

There is a place for that, certainly. And since funny-bones are as individual as fingerprints, some children will find *Cat in the Hat* humor worth revisiting many times. Others may find a subtler, and funnier, recognition of child realities in a book like *The Judge*, by Harve and Margot Zemach. Every child alive has had the wormwood-and-gall experience of telling the truth and not being believed. In this book, a boorishly peremptory judge refuses to give a moment's credence to a series of hapless witnesses who are dragged before the bench.

The verse, with its internal assonance and urgency, is perfectly pitched to the mounting suspense and hilarity. "Please let me go, Judge / I didn't know, Judge, / That what I said was against the law / I just said what I saw / A horrible thing is coming this way, creeping closer day by day / Its eyes are scary, its tail is hairy / I tell you, Judge, we all better pray." And each defendant—beribboned simperer, cringing boy, woebegone cripple—adds to the litany of description in a perfect cumulative tale. How delicious, how surprising, how perfectly *deserved* it is when a horrible monster face appears in the window behind the back of the spluttering ("Ninnyhammer! Dimwit! Dunce! To jail at once!") Judge. How mild and deeply satisfying are the smiles of the freed prisoners as they stroll away, vindicated.

Clumsy adults gets their comeuppance in scores of humorous children's books. The success of *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*, Mordecai Richler's best-seller, is testament to the allure of this theme. The book has real liabilities—an overload of belabored jokes, cliché, and sagging plotlines. Worse, it has moments of embarrassing sentimentality and falseness. The villains of Slimers' Island, we are told, shroud the place in fog because they can't stand sunshine. Why? Because "any big person who cannot stand little ones also fears the sun" (also pets, flowers, and laughter). The ending is a bit of a cheat, too. After all the hoopla and the uproariously gothic plot, Jacob awakens on a park bench, and we are left to decide whether the entire story wasn't just

a dream. Still, in addition to occasional flights of inspired verbal tomfoolery, the book has another basic strength, and that is the accurate perception of how it feels to be the youngest in the family, the one who always gets teased, tricked, put-down, left out, and drowned out by ebullient older siblings. If Jacob Two-Two cannot ride a bike or cut a straight slice of bread, he can nevertheless enjoy a comic

triumph by seeing clearly through the hypocrisies of adults, judge and jailer alike.

Humor is as intensely individual a taste in children as it is in adults, I know a little girl who sat stonyfaced through all the boisterous shenanigans of Jacob Two-Two, but burst into peals of delighted laughter at the mere sight of the squirrel in the hat, in M.B. Goffstein's *A Little Squirrel Went Walking*. That minute animal, smaller on the page than a baby's fingernail, a mere laconic squiggle of ink, with two dot eyes and an incongruous brimmed hat, is somehow the essence of affection—the sprightly way it walks (on two legs), the way it snuggles in the shelter of a girl's arms, its jaunty pose on the tree branch. All this could be dangerously, sickeningly cute. That it succeeds in being touchingly funny instead is due to the wit, restraint, and accuracy of the drawings.

A very different author, Beverly Cleary, evokes a similar outburst of affectionate recognition with her series of shrewd, loving portraits of *Ramona the Pest*. The books are such a sympathetic evocation of a child's inmost feelings that both parent and child, reading them, laugh out loud in surprised recognition. There are dozens of such piercingly observed moments in each Ramona book: the way four-year-old Ramona tells an adult questioner that her eyes "are brown and white"; her agonizing introduction to kindergarten, when the teacher tells her to "sit here for the present" and she proudly refuses to budge all morning, waiting for the "present" to be given to her alone; the moment when Ramona savors the first bite of every apple in the basket and, when caught, quickly uses a nursery school catch phrase to excuse herself: "I want to share the apples"; the keen disappointment of discovering that there is no tricycle license plate that says "Ramona," though there are Jimmys and Joans aplenty.

LINGUISTIC INVENTION is another form of humor that wears equally well. Indeed, the earliest forms of humor in children's literature are nursery rhymes, with their absurd juxtapositions and delight in patterns of rhythm, sound, and rhyme.

For young children, folk tales are another good source of strong, repetitive, and oddly resonant language. *Tikki Tikki Tembo*, the well-loved Chinese folk tale, retold by Arlene Mosel with subtle Blair Lent illustrations that add a third dimension, is a story of sibling rivalry. The mother has lavished the fanciest possible name, Tikki tikki tembo-no sa rembo-chari bari ruchi-pip peri pembo, on her older son, and bestowed a negligent monosyllable, Chang, on the younger. And just because of this unfairness, the older nearly drowns in the well. But the reason the story has lasted so well is its wonderfully memorable mouthful of nonsense syllables. The comic punch of the story comes at the moment when a breathless, frantic little Chang garbles the message—"Chari bari rembo tikki tikki pip pip has fallen in the well!"

The Viganabee and the Tree Toad, by Verna Aardema, uses onomatopoeia, a familiar device of African folk tales. The effects are almost magical if read boldly aloud: The story leaps into auditory life when the tree toad sits in a deep starry window to sing her friends to sleep, taw-aw-awt, or when the bushy monster comes up the walk, pusu pusu pusu, and rudely gulps the savory stew, yatua yatua yatua. Rat, who is sweeping the walk, fras fras fras, hits him with the broom—ZAK!



The purest verbal comedy for older children is *The Phantom Tollbooth*, written in 1961 by Norton Juster, and still going strong. You would think that an entire novel based on wordplay would become as tiresome as a birthday party that goes on too long—nothing is more exhausting than forced jollity. But because the story is so elemental (the boy Milo goes on a life-or-death quest through a strange wonderland), the narrative urges us along through showers, fountains, and ambushes of verbal play.

Even better than the triumphant climax when Milo rescues the “fair” princesses, Rhyme and Reason, is the banquet in Dictionopolis when, it turns out, everyone has to eat his words. Since Milo had neglected to bellow out the names of some favorite foods before the meal, King Azaz the Unabridged consoles him with some scraps—rigamarole, somersault, and ragamuffin—while they all wait for their just desserts. Though readers of nine and ten may miss some of the endless, dizzying wordplay, there are jokes enough, broad and narrow, to keep everyone amused right to the end.

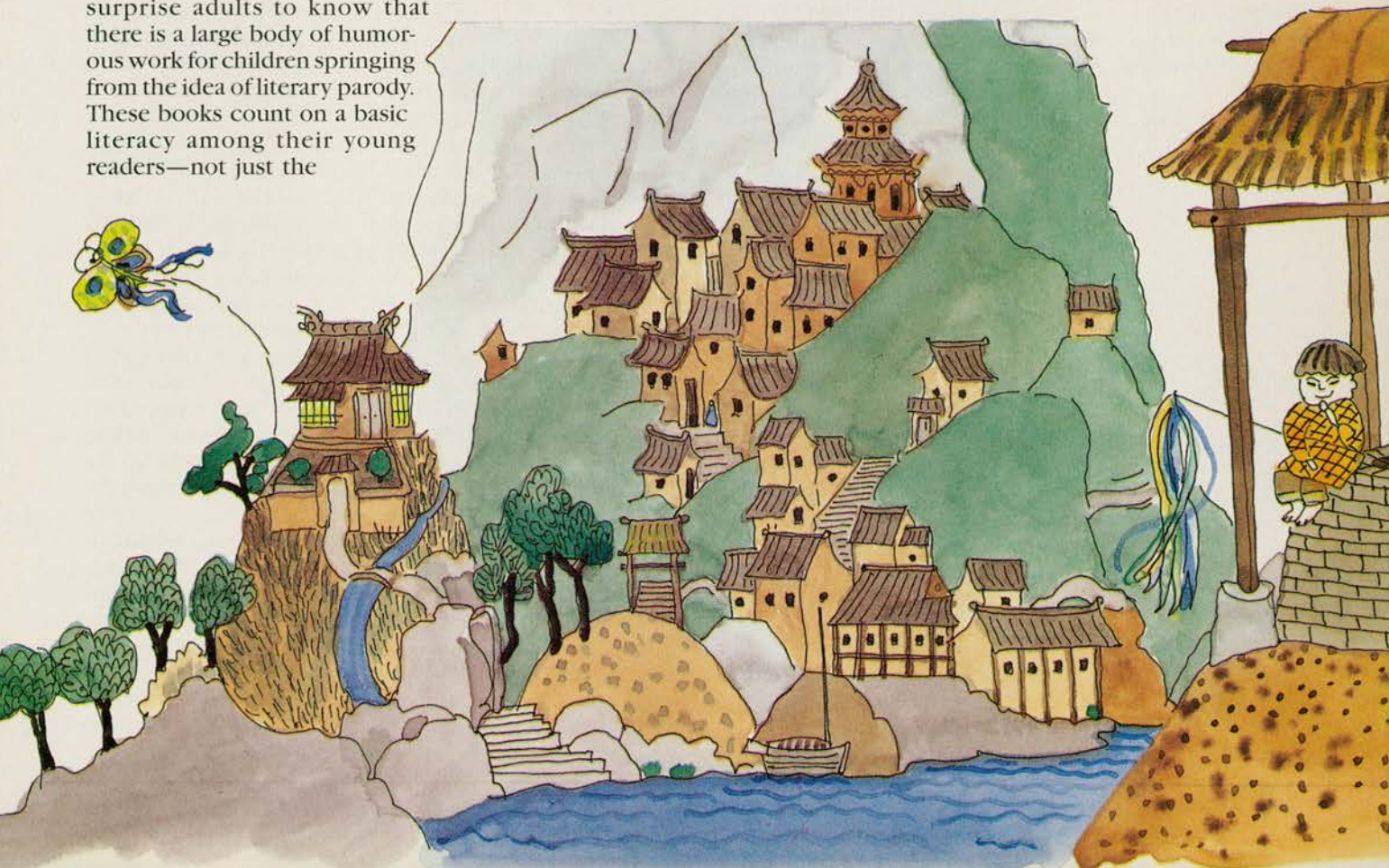
Inspired wordplay, of course, accounts for the spectacular success of *Alligator Pie* by Dennis Lee, the first poetry for children to adapt the rhythms of nursery rhymes to a Canadian context. Though everyone knows the compulsively chantable “Alligator pie, alligator pie / If I don’t get some, / I think I’m gonna die,” equally memorable are the Seussian tongue twisters like the Sitter and the Butter and the Better Batter Fritter, or the cumulative rhymes that contain chaos within a tight frame (“My dad got snarky and barked at the shark”) as well as poems that simply peel a word and make a child see its insides (“Skyscraper, skyscraper, scrape me some sky”).

Alligator Pie works so well because it plays off a literary form that is familiar to even the youngest child. It may surprise adults to know that there is a large body of humorous work for children springing from the idea of literary parody. These books count on a basic literacy among their young readers—not just the

ability to decode letters, but an easy familiarity with the enduring literary forms of our culture. *The Paperbag Princess* by Robert Munsch is a running gag that depends on the child recognizing the anachronisms, tricks, and discordancies that are slipped into the basic fairy tale. The prince and princess have modern names, Elizabeth and Ronald, and are shown in 1980s preppy style with tennis rackets and “expensive” clothes—a deliberately jarring word in the fairy tale context, since kings may have ordered costly clothes for their daughters, but nothing was ever expensive for them. The emancipated ending, in which Elizabeth carries the day without Ronald’s help, is a twist on the familiar pattern. So basic is the fairy tale structure to our civilization, so ingrained is its accustomed tone and style, that there can hardly be a child in the country who doesn’t get the joke.

Readers in the middle age-range can be remarkably sophisticated in their capacity to enjoy an adult form, such as the thriller or detective story, when it has been tailored to their interests. One example that seems to have universal appeal is Ellen Raskin’s *The Mysterious Disappearance of Leon (I Mean Noel)*. While it lay open on my desk for the writing of this piece, each of my three teenagers—all with widely differing tastes in books—wandered in at different times, noticed the book and lit up with enthusiastic nostalgia: “Oh, I loved that book!”

Raskin has surgically dissected the adult detective novel and used the parts to make up a highly original kit: Assemble and solve your own mystery, clues and instructions included. She does it with wit and hectic invention, and somehow keeps the whole concoction both coherent and appealing. The mystery revolves around the obsessive search by Mrs. Caroline Carillon, née Little Dumpling Fish, for her missing husband Leon, who vanished after their

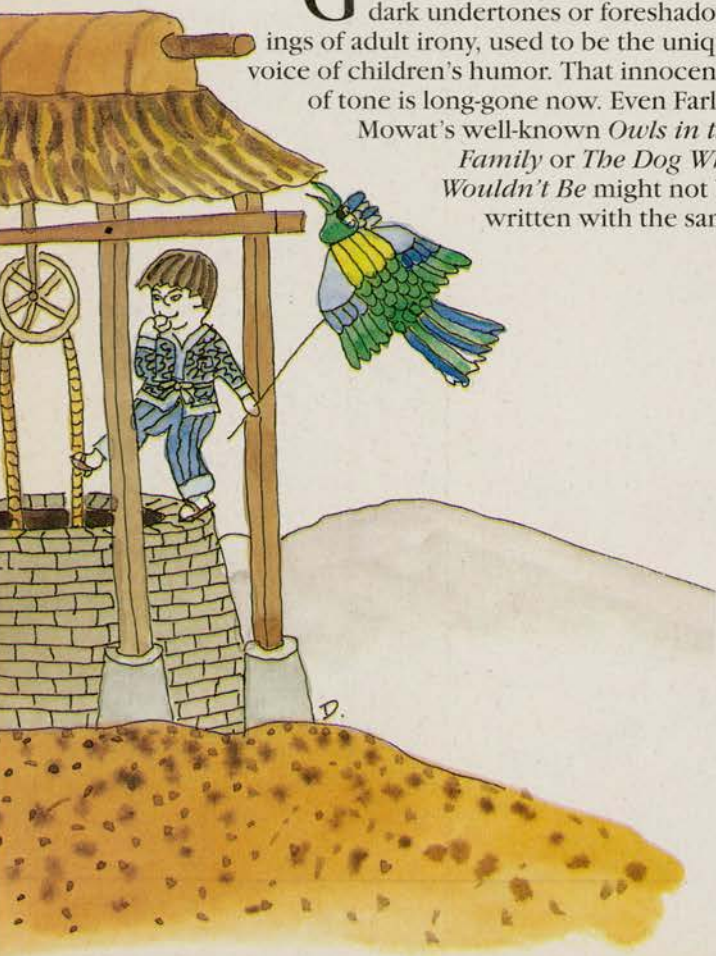


childhood marriage of convenience. Her two adopted children, Tony and Tina, help solve the puzzle, which requires them to decipher an obscure message delivered by a drowning man: "Noel glub C blub all . . . I glub new. . ."

What helps to knit together the zany plot, with its clever black-and-white drawings that serve as clues, is a firm underlying message: All mysteries are solved when the names of things are made clear and true. By the end of the story, everyone comes into his or her own true name, and everyone is freed from the prison of false identity. But the reader need barely be aware of this unstated message to enjoy the comedy of errors and detection.

One English cops-and-robbers story for children that stays closer to the traditional chase pattern, along with some of the "caper" elements that remind one of *The Lavender Hill Mob*, is *Me and My Million* by Clive King. It's hard to think of a more engaging hero than Ringo, the undersized Cockney waif, illiterate, naive, and cynical, who is an unwitting participant in a major art heist. Ringo, who has never seen a painting before, is suddenly on the lam in London with a "Pestalotsy" painting of "a mum and a kid" stuffed in a laundry bag. The fast-paced plot has humor of its own, with Ringo keeping one step ahead of rich but venal art dealers, pretentious art experts, decent cops, hippies, lunatic terrorists who turn out to be animal liberationists, and even his own big stepbrother, Elvis, the original thief of the painting. The subtler humor lies in the way clear-eyed Ringo begins to love and value the painting. He and a genial art forger, who gives him refuge on a canal boat, may be the only true art lovers in the book. I can't think of a children's thriller with a more gripping plot or more sympathetic humor.

GAIETY AND high spirits, with no dark undertones or foreshadowings of adult irony, used to be the unique voice of children's humor. That innocence of tone is long-gone now. Even Farley Mowat's well-known *Owls in the Family* or *The Dog Who Wouldn't Be* might not be written with the same



carefree openness today, when animal rights activists are on the alert for every transgression against nature wild and free. But children still enjoy the lovable antics of Wol and Weeps, the two Mowat owls, and the clownish clumsiness of Mutt the dog. These two family stories are still masterpieces of sharp observation and droll, good-hearted comedy.

Examples of that kind of humor are far more common among the picture books; one that springs to mind is *Three Strong Women*, a Japanese folk tale that probably predates women's liberation by a few thousand years. It is a tall tale, an imaginative stretching of reality that has no ulterior motive, no barb in its tail, no moral to press home but the pleasure of laughter.

We catch the mood at once as the story begins, with lovely, delicately funny drawings by Kazue Mizumura. A famous wrestler strolls along toward the capital, where he will wrestle before the Emperor. He is strong, healthy, pleased with himself—just a little too pleased with himself—and we are invited to smile at the way he enjoys the sound of his own voice as he saunters and hums. Then he is distracted by the sight of "a round little girl with red cheeks and nose like a friendly button. Her eyes looked as though she were thinking of ten thousand funny stories at once." He longs to tickle her (kochokochokocho) to hear her giggle. But no sooner does he try, than this cheerful girl casually traps him in an armhold.

Maru-me, the girl, takes the wrestler along to Forever Mountain, where her mother and wizened little grandmother turn out to be as chucklingly, self-deprecatingly strong as she is. The lessons he learns from them stand him in good stead in the capital, but in even better stead in his life, which takes a new, more serene, and fulfilling path.

Those life-affirming comedies, very much like those well-loved early Hollywood movies that had no quarrel with the world, are rare nowadays. It would be hard to write one without falling into a sickeningly sweet Norman Rockwell tone of voice. Nevertheless, there are a few humanistic gems that veer toward slapstick to avoid sentimentality and succeed with a flourish. *Freaky Friday* by Mary Rodgers is a comedy of transformation: Thirteen-year-old Annabel Andrews, unhappy possessor of a mouthful of braces, a knobby figure, a perfect little brother, a messy room, and failing grades, wakes up one morning in the curvaceous body of her mother.

Annabel is overjoyed to be an adult, with all the supposed pleasures and freedoms of adulthood at her command. Although her exhausting, tense, and hilarious day disabuses her of those dreams, it does bring her an almost endless supply of balm for her soul. By the next morning, Annabel has turned into a pretty teenager with her braces off. She has learned that her secret crush, Boris, now thinks she is "some beautiful chick," that her teachers believe she is highly gifted ("I admire and love your little girl," says one teacher somewhat wildly to Annabel-disguised-as-mother), and that even her kid brother, the maligned Ape Face, adores her so much that he hopes one day to have braces just like hers. Blatant teenage wish fulfillment combines delectably with the sardonic Manhattan wisecrack.

THE BEST English writers for children seem to have a matchless verbal brilliance at their command. Joan Aiken, one of the funniest authors alive, dazzles us in *Arabel's Raven*, a sort of working class, surrealist *Owls in the Family*. "Oh my stars, look at that creature's toenails, if nails they can be called," remarks Arabel's mother, when she finds Mortimer, the raven, sitting in her fridge surrounded by the remains of the family's food supply. Aiken is the complete master of throwaway lines: In the midst of Mortimer's squalid mayhem at the dinner table the narrator dryly observes: "Mortimer enjoyed the baked beans, but his table manners were very lighthearted."

Physical chaos, of *The Cat in the Hat* variety, is the hallmark of this kind of humor. But Aiken doesn't leave it there. Like a pianist playing riffs, she spoofs the speech patterns of her characters, pushing the dour, the official, the laconic, the crazed, and the Cockney to their comic extremes. "If birds had fingerprints, I wouldn't mind taking the dabs of that shifty-looking fowl," observes a disgruntled policeman, called to the site of one Mortimer-inspired shambles. "Thoughtless our Mortimer may be," retorts Mrs. Jones at her most haughty, "untidy at times, but honest as a Bath bun, I'll have you know." And there are wonderful spoofs of flower-child song lyrics, mad modern technology (viz. the vending machines for olive oil, foot massage, or cheerful poems), and even of tough-talking American gangster films. "You'd better cooperate, Coal-face," snarls a thug to Mortimer, "this is a fly-jack." A parent who dares to try a few different voices and accents could enjoy doing a star turn when reading this book aloud.

ONE FORM of humor that doesn't seem to have survived the Victorian era, luckily, is the ghoulish admonitory tale, such as *Struwwelpeter*, in which cruel mutilations and other assorted punishments are visited upon naughty children. The only two contemporary examples that come to mind are both transmogrified into

something curiously satisfactory. "Pierre," one of the tiny tales in Maurice Sendak's *Nutshell Library*, is a gem. It is a virtuoso use of the miniature size; not only do the blue and yellow pictures perfectly exploit the space available in terse expressiveness, but the typography and the use of white space also make a comic statement. Pierre, who doesn't care—not about anything—is taught a sharp lesson at last by a placid lion. Along the way, there are some memorable lines. I'm particularly fond of the father's coaxing blandishment, "I'll let you fold the folding chair," because it pinpoints so adroitly the kind of excitement small children find in the most ordinary actions.

The other example of admonitory literature in which the children emerge unscathed is the series of books about *Nurse Matilda* by Christianna Brand, illustrated by her famous artist cousin Edward Ardizzone. To capture the Victorian flavor of the stories, the books are richly produced, small in size, with gold-tooled green leatherette bindings, and even a red ribbon to mark the reader's place. *Nurse Matilda* deserves such attention to detail, because it is a bizarrely original story of a huge, almost numberless, and certainly ungovernable Victorian family of children and their unusual nanny, Nurse Matilda, who has eyes like black beads and a nose "like two potatoes." Nurse Matilda has unsuspected magical powers. She was apparently not inspired by the earlier Mary Poppins; the author tells us that Nurse Matilda is based on a family story handed down through several generations. I find her a more humane and amusing invention than the egomaniacal and emotionally icy Poppins. The magical adventures she creates are not for herself, as Mary Poppins' almost always are, but for the children, to teach them the seven lessons they must learn before Nurse Matilda moves on.

This book has its cake and eats it, too: The children's inventive cussedness becomes its own punishment, but what wayward fun it can be while it lasts! On Matilda's day off, the children are warned to do *precisely* what they are told. Ordered to put on their hated best clothes for

a surprise visit from an auntie (and there is a marvelous description of Victorian children's newly laundered clothes, all starched so that the sleeves and legs come apart with a lovely tearing-apart noise) the children obey to the letter. They put them on, all right—on the piano, on the pig, on the donkey, and on the chickens. The chaos that ensues when a dim-sighted great aunt arrives to adopt one of the children is as wild as

(Continued on page 45)



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ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

(Continued from page 22)

area lies in changing the elementary mathematics curriculum—from one that emphasizes correctly following procedures to arrive at the “right” answer to one that presents mathematics as a way to explore and gain control over situations in the real world.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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HISTORY-SOCIAL SCIENCE IN THE ELEMENTARY YEARS

A strong history-social science program at the elementary level helps all students to develop their full potential for personal, civic, and professional life. The elementary curriculum is centered in a core of historical and geographical knowledge, integrating the social sciences and humanities, with an emphasis on ethics and democratic values. It helps students to better understand themselves and others and to develop judgment, perception, civic pride, and responsibility.

A variety of materials, resources, primary sources, strategies, and technologies are used to engage students. This variety fosters enjoyment of history, cultivating historical empathy for and a knowledge of men, women, and children of different times, places, and cultures. Much of the literature used to enhance history studies in kindergarten through grade six should emphasize heroes, adventure, moral challenges, faraway places, and distant times so that students’ imaginations are captivated, broadening the perspective they have on their nation and the world and inspiring them through examples of ethical behavior.

The curriculum in the primary grades follows what has been called a “here-there-then” approach. Each year of instruction begins in the child’s immediate present and then moves outward in space and back in time to enrich his or her geographical and historical understanding. For instance, second graders might begin by studying people in the local community who produce, process, and distribute food. Next, they might learn how trade and transportation link the local community with other food-producing communities in Central America or Africa. Finally, they might study the ways people

of long ago ground grain, baked bread, and refrigerated foods. The study is enriched by the use of such books as *Bananas*

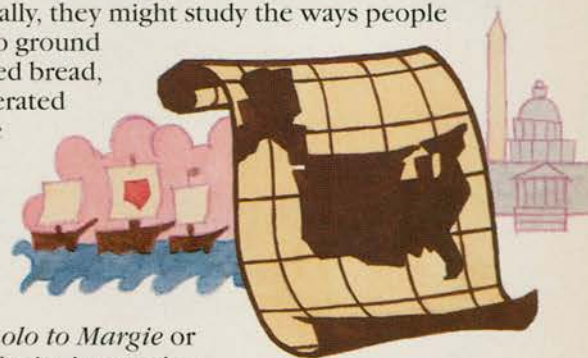
from *Manolo to Margie* or *Fannie’s Fruits*, integrating geography and economics with history. Specific units of study described in the *History-Social Science Frame-*



TIME AND SPACE

Dates are not meaningful concepts for primary grade children who lack the mathematical concepts to understand them. But young children *can* think historically—particularly when they are helped to develop a spatial sense of time’s passage through such visual aids as time lines. Such devices need not be elaborate. One California teacher makes creative use of a clothesline and clothespins. Children first tie a knot near one end of the clothesline to represent “today” and clip on a recent photo of themselves. They move back a few inches to attach a baby picture. After the teacher reads a biography of Martin Luther King, Jr. to the class, the children make drawings illustrating the Reverend King’s life and clip them to the line farther back in time. Other famous historical figures are placed at appropriate intervals. Inevitably, the subject of dinosaurs comes up. Children decide these precursors of the human story should occupy a place on the time line long, long, long ago.

Adapted from “History Is for Children,” by Charlotte Crabtree. Reprinted with permission from the Winter 1989 issue of *American Educator*, the quarterly journal of the American Federation of Teachers, p. 38.



FORTY BIRDS: A LESSON FROM THE BOY SCOUTS

If we are serious about our current discussions of school change, we need to think about curricula that promote good teaching and real learning instead of continuing with practices that encourage our students to associate mastery of a subject with the recognition of little bits of information. As I look around for curriculum models that illustrate such a shift in perspective, an experience I had as a youngster in the Boy Scouts comes to mind.

Boy Scouts of America, after all, is an educational institution. It has a curriculum, and it promotes kids who follow the curriculum from Tenderfoot to Second Class, and on up to Eagle Scout. But its curriculum and testing practices are very different from those found in schools. Take my experience with the bird-study merit badge, the experience of a city kid who wasn't very interested in birds.

If I had learned about birds in school, my teacher probably would have had flashcards and pictures of birds all over the room. She would have assigned us chapters in a textbook to read, and eventually, she would have given us a test for which we would have had to match up bird names with bird pictures and fill in the blanks in some kind of chart. I know I would have forgotten the birds within three weeks of taking the test—and that would have been no loss because I would probably have learned to hate birds.

But in the Boy Scouts, you actually have to see forty different kinds of birds, see them. And you don't do it by looking out your window or taking a walk through the park. You've got to get up at five o'clock in the morning so you can be in a swamp as the sun is about to come up. Or you have to go at sunset to a hill or a mountain. And,



of course, since you probably don't want to go all by yourself, you invite a couple of your best friends.

When you look through your binoculars at a bird in flight, it doesn't look like a stuffed bird in a museum. What is it?

To find out, you look through the field guide with your buddies. You say, "There it is; that's the one." And one of your friends says, "No! That says Texas; we're in New York." So you keep looking until you find a bird that fits all the things you saw. And you do that for forty birds.

The final test is simple: You take a walk with one or two people who really know birds, and you spot every bird. That's the kind of knowledge that doesn't leave you because you've actively participated in gaining it. It's become part of you. I don't know anyone who got a *bird-study merit badge* who *hasn't maintained an interest in birds for years to come.*

In real learning, the students are workers. And this learning needs to be measured by what students know and can do—by how well they can write or speak or calculate—not by how adept they are at picking out answers in a multiple-choice test. Understanding these facts about learning and assessment are the first steps to achieving the kind of curricula we need in restructured schools.

Quoted from "Forty Birds: Curriculum in the Restructured School," by Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO. Reprinted with permission from Cogitare: Newsletter of the ASCD Network on Teaching Thinking, Vol. V (Fall 1990), 1, 3. Copyright by Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

work ensure that youngsters receive a sequential program, which progresses over the span from kindergarten through grade three.

In the intermediate grades, specific content and time periods are identified for study. In grade four students build on what they learned during the primary grades about California history, including not only the more traditional topics but also California's recent past and current circumstances. A formal study of United States history and geography is begun in fifth grade, with special emphasis given to people and events up to circa 1850, including not only chronological topics but also major themes of national identity and democratic heritage and ideas.

The world history program at sixth grade emphasizes people and events in ancient civilizations, both Western and non-Western. It is particularly important that fifth

and sixth grade teachers understand how the curriculum they teach relates to seventh- and eighth-grade courses. The sixth and seventh grades' focus on world history, for example, is intended to give entering eighth graders a broader understanding of the global context from which the United States grew. Some coordination with middle schools is therefore necessary to achieve the necessary focus and continuity.

The elementary program contains opportunities for interdisciplinary studies, enriched with primary sources, varied genres of literature—both of the period and about the period—and the visual and performing arts. Throughout the grades, the program engenders those "habits of mind" unique to history-social science. Among these are an understanding of events over time, providing students with examples from human experience; a deeper understanding of change and continuity, includ-

ing the values and problems inherent in both; a keener examination of human action, beliefs, ideas, issues, and ways of life; a firmer grasp of the democratic heritage on which our multiethnic nation is founded; and a beginning understanding of the common ideas embodied in rights, responsibilities, and the historic struggle to achieve equality and freedom for all.

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CHILDREN AND SCIENCE: A PERFECT FIT

Nobel laureate Rosalyn Yalow made the case for early science education for all children in a 1988 commencement address at Mt. Sinai Medical School in New York. "Taught properly, science can be part of the curriculum of the preschool- as well as the elementary-school child," she said.

"The teaching of science at this level does not require complicated, expensive apparatus. It does require a teacher imbued with a love for logical thinking and the imagination to design simple experimentation that permits the child to think of himself or herself as an investigator."⁶



SCIENCE IN THE ELEMENTARY YEARS

Science is more than a collection of facts about the natural world; it is a way of thinking, of approaching problems objectively by theorizing about what might be from careful observation of what is, and then testing the hypothesis. Science in the elementary grades should help all students learn how to think as scientists think, even as they become familiar with the laws and principles that govern the natural world.

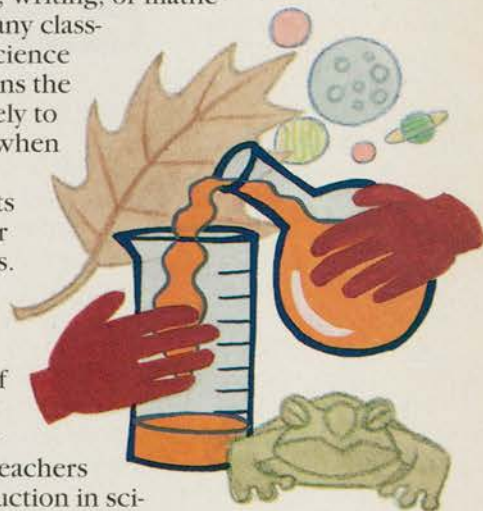
In the elementary grades, a basic problem facing science instruction is the need to achieve curricular parity with reading, writing, or mathematics.

In many classrooms, the science period remains the one most likely to be dropped when lessons in other subjects run past their allotted times.

Time constraints come along with a lack of confidence among many elementary teachers to limit instruction in science.

According to a survey by the National Science Teachers Association, 82 percent of elementary teachers feel qualified to teach reading, but only 27 percent feel qualified to teach either physical or earth/space science.⁵ Assigning instruction in science a secondary role also reflects a conviction that elementary students are too young to understand scientific reasoning. But nothing could be further from the truth. From the time they can walk and talk, children ask questions about cause and effect; about what makes things happen. In that respect they are the original natural scientists, constantly engaged in sense-making activity.

In the elementary grades, young students should be *doing* science in their classrooms, not merely reading about it. California's *Science Framework* recommends that 40 percent of the total time spent learning science should be in activity-based lessons. At the same time, however, the best "hands-on" activities must also be "minds-on." Simply having students do science—by having them follow an experiment in cookbook fashion—will not lead them to new understandings if their interests and intellects are not also engaged. For example, researchers assessed students' conceptual understandings of photosynthesis after an eight-week unit of 24 lessons in which students made predictions, mapped patterns of plant growth, and offered explanations for what they were seeing. At the end of the unit, nine out of ten students failed to grasp the central concept; that plants get their food by manufacturing it internally out of carbon dioxide, water, and light energy.⁷ They had gone through the motions of doing science but hadn't made the connection between their experiments and their understanding of the real world.



Children come to the classroom with many intuitive, everyday ways of explaining natural phenomena. Although these explanations may appear to be based on credible evidence, they are often wrong, as in the previous example, in which the students continued to conclude that plants draw their food up out of the ground. In such cases, students need to think about the purpose behind their "hands on" activities, to compare the actual results of their experiments with the predicted outcome. If there is a difference, what explains it? Experimental science succeeds when it causes students to abandon misconceptions and embrace scientifically valid principles. Consistent with modern learning theory, research shows that students who have the power to control some aspect of an experiment are much more likely to become fully engaged in interpreting the outcome than those who are simply asked to follow a protocol.

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6. Reprinted with permission from *Science for Children: Resources for Teaching CCCC 1988*, National Academy of Sciences. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1988, frontispiece.
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LIBERATING LAUGHTER

(Continued from page 40)

anything invented by Helen Cresswell, but with an added charm of merriment at a distance of time.

This book, although it would seem on the surface to be stuffily preoccupied with children's naughtiness and how to cure it, actually responds to something rooted in children's nature. A universal experience of childhood is that fevered, itchy desperation of being in a foul mood, being very very bad, and *not being able to stop*. Nurse Matilda's "lessons" evoke that feeling with horrid clarity. Her comforts and consolations, too, have all the soft coolness of mother's forgiving hand on the throbbing post-tantrum brow.

This is comedy of a fairly demanding kind, despite its occasional slapstick. It asks the young reader to identify both with the naughty children and with their governess and to picture a world that has long vanished. Does it make children laugh? Not all of them; not all children are sophisticated enough in their literary tastes to enjoy a spoof of Victorian family stories, though Ardizzone's lively drawings do make the story more accessible. Still, it has an eccentrically memorable flavor.

PERHAPS THIS is a good place to look at another, wildly popular school of recent humor which I believe should be approached with some caution. There is no other name for it: "anal humor" it is and must be called. Most parents are familiar enough with Freudian cliché to recognize, and be tolerant of, that phase in a child's life when a mere shout of "Poopy!" is enough to send a preschooler into fits of wild giggles and hysterical silliness. The shrillness and obsessiveness of the jokes ought to alert us that terrible anxiety—*anxiety about losing control*—lies just beneath the surface.

Nothing could be easier for an author with matching obsessions and an eye for commercial gain, than to exploit that vein of bathroom compulsiveness that is universal in early childhood. What surprises me is that adults condone it so eagerly, as though unwilling to be thought prudish or unhip. Raymond Briggs, the English artist, is in my view one of the worst offenders. An extravagant anality and a snidely derogatory portrayal of women are present in many of his books, most disturbingly in the well-received *When the Winds Blow*, a horrific comic-style admonitory book about nuclear war. Crude, music-hall misogyny is also evident in his popular *Fungus the Bogeyman* books, though here it is anality that takes pride (if you can call it that) of place. Unlike its elaborately, even laboriously, witty hardback predecessor, *Fungus the Bogeyman*, the pop-up version, *Fungus the Bogeyman's Pop-up Book*, has little redeeming satirical merit. In shades of bilious green, puce, and magenta, it goes about as far as humanly possible in wallowing in bodily disgust. It revels in slime, stinking feet, and reeking underwear, rotten socks, pop-up strings of snot, mouths full of toads, people sniffing at the crotch of dirty trousers—and, *pièce de résistance*, the Bogey Umbilical Cord, a weird appendage through which Bogeys "discharge noxious stomach gases" into the bedrooms of sleeping people.

Is there any harm in all this? It certainly panders to the child's most primitive instincts. I don't know many par-

ents who would think it helpful to join in, with shrieks of "poo-poo!" and "tinkle!" when the toddlers get manic. But giving them this sort of book amounts to the same thing. Far from being supportive or life affirming, as its authors probably think, the adult approval implicit in writing, buying, and giving the book may ultimately disturb and unsettle the very children to whom it appeals. My instinct is to let children discover and enjoy such illicit, rebellious pleasures on their own, with neither encouragement nor censorship.

Dennis Lee seems to have sensed this dilemma, though perhaps not followed it through, when he told *Books in Canada* (December 1983) that his poem about Georgie, the one with smelly ears, is "morally corrupt . . . you can be an absolute slob, a real pig, and tell Georgie off while feeling you're on the side of the angels." Lee admits, in the course of the same interview, that "Sometimes I feel like the Jack the Ripper of poetry, enticing kids to take off their pants. With their parents, well, it's as if the kids and I are looking at dirty pictures together."

Lee is probably referring to his poems in *Jelly Belly* and *Garbage Delight*, an astounding number of which dwell on ruddy bums, muddy bums, bloody crud, smelly snouts, smelly bellies, nose-picking, and various other forms of grossness. I think Lee is right to feel a little uneasy. These are cheap laughs; he's playing to the pit with a vengeance. Body dirt and anal aggression are legitimate preoccupations of childhood, but simple repetition does not an affirmation make.

While uncontrollable laughter is no great disaster, most parents recognize it as a symptom of uncomfortable tension, rather than literary appreciation or even liberation from repression. Children will discover and celebrate flatulence and excretion all by themselves, among themselves, without any need for adult cheerleaders. While we have their attention with a book in our hands, why strike a Jack the Ripper posture?

IT COULD be argued that humane subversion, in this case the rebellion of the child against adult authority, is a worthy function of literature. Certainly, one of the most enduring themes of children's books is the celebration of the humanity of children, and the dignity of their own concerns, not just "enticing them to take off their pants." One laid-back rebel who deserves immortality, especially among the ranks of six- and seven-year-old boys, is Tom, the fooling-around artist and hero of *How Tom Beat Captain Najork and His Hired Sportsmen* by Russell Hoban.

Patrick Blake, who can't draw a picture that doesn't brim with edgy wit and loopy humor, helps immortalize this slouchy boy with the amiable smile who is somehow unfazed by his bustle-bottomed Aunt Fidget Wonkam-Strong, she with the dreadfully vivid name and the iron hat. When Tom simply won't stop his fooling around and messing around and playing around with bits of string and mud and alley rubbish, Aunt calls in her perennial threat: the mustachioed, debonair Captain Najork, a knee-jerk hearty jock if ever there was one. Tom's triumph at wumble, muck, and sneedball against all the unfair odds stacked against him is a comic hymn of praise to the ingenuity and resilience of kids. Part of the fun, of course, is that Tom gets to chug away in his newly won pedal boat to a new town, where he promptly advertis-

es for, and hires, a new aunt, Bundlejoy Cosysweet.

It is no accident that Tom's new aunt sounds something like a cross between a burlesque queen, a flower child, and a soft-porn star; he even lays down "his terms" to her in the fine high-handed style of the most old-fashioned chauvinist husband: "No greasy bloaters, no mut-ton . . . And I do lots of fooling around. Those are my conditions." We are not told what's in it for Bundlejoy, but that hardly matters in the story, which is Tom's. And in Tom's world, there are two kinds of female figures, those in authority, like Aunt Wonkam-Strong who withers nature ("Where she walked the flowers drooped, and when she sang the trees all shivered") and those not in authority, who are as sensually alluring as Bundlejoy.

Tom's story is poetically true; like it or not, this is how young males, at some point and with some parts of their psyche, see the women who bear, raise, and teach them. The innate misogyny is well within acceptable limits. Besides, though the aunt is stern and demanding beyond all reason, she is not malicious, and she gets her own happy ending within the story—marriage to Captain Najork, who is smitten by her opaque charms.

The same is generally true of another classic boy's story, the strongly written *Soup* by Robert Newton Peck. The mother, the aunt, the school nurse, and the teacher are all the kind of narrow, sex-hating, repressed, prudish, religion-prating dominatrixes made into a national American stereotype by Philip Wylie in the 1950s. Woman is the implacable Other in Peck's work; though the female reader may find this disturbing, the writing is good enough to convince us that this is an honest account of reality as perceived by at least one small-town boy. "The wind was as ripe as apples, so full of fall that you could almost bite every breath," Peck writes, and the atmosphere of tough, small-town boyhood, with its poverty and exhilaration, its cruelties and bigotries, has moments of high farce and moral insight that are relished by generation after generation of schoolchildren.

While Oedipal conflict is a main wellspring of humor for male authors, I can't think of a single example that works back in the other direction, with daughters humorously exposing fathers as laughable or despicable characters. Of course, it is mothers who still do most of the intimate, daily work of child rearing and who are therefore still fated, alas, to take the brunt of children's rebellious anger.

SINCE EVERY child's needs are different, I would hesitate to say that these books have no place on the shelf. One author's books that I would definitely not recommend, however, are those of Roald Dahl. The children who so eagerly read these stories of spite, vengeance, and unbridled aggression must sometimes pause for an astonished moment to wonder why adults press Dahl's books into their hands. His huge popularity among children, however, is not perplexing; the prose is swift and lively and the plots are incredibly violent, of a style much encouraged by our culture. But why have adult purchasers made Dahl an international best seller? Perhaps they are seduced by the sugar coating of his themes, so familiar from the movie version of Dahl's most popular book, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Those vats of bubbling chocolate almost guarantee annual Christmas reruns (and book sales). Adults assume that candy and

children have a powerful affinity, and Christmas is an indulgent time. (A convincing alternate reading of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, by Hamida Bosmajian in the periodical, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, suggests that it is an extended "excremental vision" of an inferno, with the factory as a giant digestive system.)

Perhaps the immense adult acceptance of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* also owes something to the voguish adult taste for sadism and black humor, tinged by an unadmitted animosity toward modern children. For though the book seems to sympathize with children as underdogs, it is really a *Struwwelpeter* in disguise; one of those gleefully punitive nineteenth-century diatribes written to scare little children into better behavior. Charlie, the hero and the only worthy child in the book, is, like all of Dahl's heroes, an extraordinarily passive, obedient, and compliant little boy. His impoverished family is starving, right in the shadow of Willy Wonka's huge chocolate factory, but Charlie—fading away into a ghostly thin little presence—wearily, uncomplainingly, meekly, the very model of the deserving poor, prepares to starve to death without protest, without struggle, and without any effort to save himself.

When Charlie's grandfather helps him to win a contest that will admit him to the mysterious chocolate factory, Charlie's life is saved. At the factory, though, he meets four other children who are to be severely, even gruesomely, punished during the course of the factory tour. Veruca Salt, for example, ("She needs a good kick in the pants," says Grandpa Joe—an example of the book's linguistic fineness) is the spoiled-brat daughter of a rich American-sounding capitalist. Her father smokes cigars, tries to buy everything he sees, and her mother is gross-

ly fat. To my ears, this characterization comes uncomfortably close to a common anti-Jewish stereotype.

The humor of the book consists of the ghastly punishment inflicted on the four children by the Oompa Loompas, the little jungle pygmies who work virtually as slaves in Wonka's factory. In the original edition, these pygmies were fuzzy-headed Africans; Dahl had to change this detail after protest.

Willy Wonka, the factory owner, is presented as a weirdly capering, shrill, hyperactive little leprechaun, a malign dwarf who seems to be the modern opposite of a fairy tale pixie. At one point, he threatens to make a beard and mustache grow on Veruca—a vengeance on girls that is strangely echoed in a Dennis Lee poem. Finally, Veruca Salt is dropped down a garbage chute, where she will now, as the Oompa Loompas gloat, have to associate with garbage like herself, instead of her fancy friends. But where will she go?

"Why, to the furnace," Mr. Wonka said. "To the incinerator." The scene in itself is distasteful enough, with its approving images of punishment by fire. But parents may be even more disconcerted when they learn of Roald Dahl's anti-Semitic comments to the British weekly newspaper, the *New Statesman*: "... there is a trait in the Jewish character that does provoke animosity . . . I mean Hitler, I mean there's always a reason why anti-anything crops up anywhere; even a stinker like Hitler didn't just pick on them for no reason." The *New Statesman* had interviewed Dahl after he published an article in a literary magazine in which he speculated that "the American president and Senate and the Congress [are] utterly dominated by the great Jewish financial institutions . . ."

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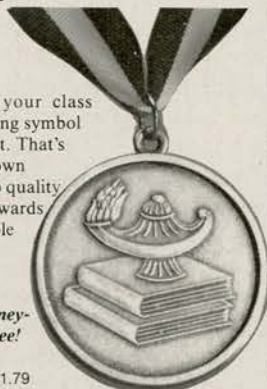
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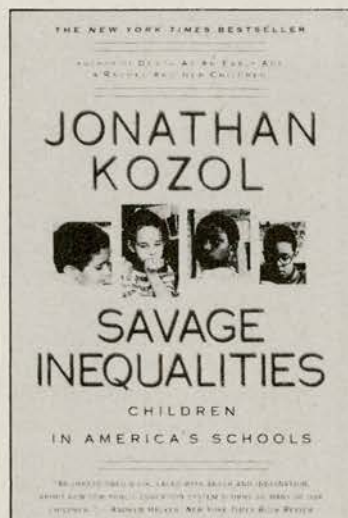
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chief among them the sinister factory itself, with its "huge iron gates . . . and smoke belching from its chimneys," a factory sealed to the townspeople. Willie Wonka's chief competitor, Dahl tells us, is Fickelgruber—unmistakably reminiscent of Hitler's birth name, Schickelgruber.

When the Oompa Loompas watch Veruca's parents follow her down the garbage chute "to the furnace," they chant victoriously: "... we very rightly thought / That in a case like this we ought / To see the thing completely through / We've polished off her parents, too." The Final Solution, so to speak—though these characters do reappear at the end of the book, not dead but covered in garbage. Surely we must question the appropriateness of a children's story in which scenes of "justified" violence have a parallel with the Holocaust.

MISOGYNY IS another distressing motif in Dahl's work. Many of his numerous books rehash the same tired plot: A meek small boy finally turns on his adult female tormentors and kills them. In *James and the Giant Peach*, the noble small boy is tormented by his wicked aunts; he squashes them flat with the giant peach. In *George's Marvelous Medicine*, "the noble small boy is tormented by his old hag . . . grizzly old grunion . . . miserable old pig" of a grandmother. She is a "filthy old woman"; she has "a small puckered-up mouth like a dog's bottom." One of her worst crimes is that she is a castrator: She tells George that it is a crime to grow. "Daddy says it's fine for a man to be tall," George bravely defies her. (Fathers are usually wonderful, as self-servingly portrayed by Dahl, and one is reminded that when *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* was criticized in *The Horn Book* magazine, Dahl angrily defended the book on the grounds that he wrote it for his injured son, to whom he was a devoted father.)

George gets his own back: He mixes a potion of liquids scrounged from kitchen, bathroom, and barn (some of the details are explosive with explicit sexual disgust and rage) and detonates his grandmother. Her ghastly physical sufferings, which include an electric shock goosing, go on for a day or two ("There's squigglers in my belly! There's bangers in

my bottom!" she shrieks, in a parody of a rape) until she finally is destroyed utterly. "George . . . felt quite trembly," the narrator says as the book ends. "He knew something tremendous had taken place that morning. For a few brief moments he had touched with the very tips of his fingers the edge of a magic world." This tremulous orgasmic moment of pleasure seems obscene, to say the least, in light of what has gone before.

The depiction of woman as evil is even more explicit in *The Witches*, which is presented as children's humor but which, to an adult reader, seems shot through with a chilling vein of hatred and fear. This time, the kindly adult figure is, for once, a woman, the boy's grandmother. An introductory note starts off the book. "Listen very carefully. Never forget what is coming next. REAL WITCHES dress in ordinary clothes and look very much like ordinary women. They live in ordinary houses and work in ORDINARY JOBS . . . a REAL WITCH hates children with a red-hot sizzling hatred . . ." (emphasis is Dahl's). Witches, it turns out, hate children and plot to kill them all because, to witchy nostrils, children smell like fresh dog excrement. Dahl creates a very real atmosphere of horror and fear in this book; the witches are genuinely loathsome. At the end of the book, they have managed to transform the hero into a mouse. Still, he has learned the secret of how to destroy them, and we leave the mouse and his grandmother at a peak of excitement: They have just vowed to spend the rest of their lives crisscrossing the globe, seeking out and exterminating witches.

Children's literature is so rich in humor of the genuine, humane, affirmative kind. There are so many books for every age level that do not reek of dog excrement or "red-hot sizzling hatred." It is a shame that commercial exploitation has spread this ugly form of comedy so widely across the English-speaking world. An informed parent or teacher, however, who is alerted to some of the more destructive content of Dahl's writing, does not need to buy it or promote it to children. Humor can splutter with indignation and rage, and often does, but hatred is not funny. □

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