DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 039 213 TE 000 570

AUTHOR Hahn, Harry T.
TITLE Elementary Composition--A Humanistic Activity.
INSTITUTION Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English.
PUB DATE Apr 68
NOTE 5p.
JOURNAL CIT Wisconsin English Journal; v10 n3 p15-19 Apr 1968

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Composition (Literary), *Creative Activities, Creative Expression, Creative Writing, Creativity, Descriptive Writing, *Elementary Education, Elementary School Students, Expository Writing, Individualism, Originality, *Self Expression, *Teaching Methods, Verbal Communication

ABSTRACT

Creative writing provides a healthy outlet for childrens' personal problems and feelings, often presents them with satisfying solutions to their psychological needs, and gives the students an important sense of success and personal accomplishment. Factors conducive to self-expression include stimulation of the student through the teacher's reading selections aloud, aiding a child by writing his dictated story, or encouraging his imaginative ideas. Self-expression thrives in a classroom atmosphere where students may experiment with verbal and visual communication without fear of criticism or censure. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document.] (JM)

ELEMENTARY COMPOSITION - - A HUMANISTIC ACTIVITY

HARRY T. HAHN
Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan

The written compositions of boys and girls in the elementary school often reveal the warmth, humor and respect with which they view their world. The freedom to write affords young people an opportunity to reflect in a positive way their regard and affection for people and events which are important to them. Through writing, along with other forms of personal expression, children are able to examine what is going on down deep inside by bringing it outside.

The following examples were taken from second grade compositions posted on the bulletin board. Polly found a solution to what seemed to be a serious problem:

> Yesterday, when I got home from school, my brother was sick. He had the chicken pox. I counted twenty red marks last night. Mommy, get the spider out of his bed!

Dave described his strategy for getting gifts he wanted for Christmas:

> At first you pick something you want and tell your Mom and Dad at about Thanksgiving time. Then you keep bugging them until they buy it for you so that you will not feel bad on Christmas.

Sally made these observations following a trip to the zoo:

> At the zoo, mother camel and father camel kiss while baby camel is sleeping. And sometimes when mother camel and father camel are kissing they don't know that baby camel is awake.

Jane wrote about herself:

> I have brownish red hair that always hangs in my face like curtains on each side of a window. I have blue eyes with white around them. I open my mouth a lot and if you see me open my mouth you will see my crooked teeth. I think some people like me but I'm not sure about everybody else. I am pretty tall for my age which is seven years old,

The catalystic power of writing is very much in evidence.

It isn't always easy to write; some children need considerable assistance. Patty, a tall, sad-eyed girl in first grade, was having a miserable time when I volunteered to be her secretary. "I don't know what to write about!" she exclaimed. It was a breezy day in March as we stared out the window. When another girl had indicated that she liked kites, Patty did the same. That was all we needed! "What would you do if you were a kite, Patty?" Without hesitation she replied, "If I were a kite I would fly!" The words were quickly recorded at the bottom of page one with plenty of space for a picture. "How high?" I asked. "I would fly as high as the sky!" she responded with some feeling. Her answer was recorded at the bottom of page two. The questions which followed brought forth these responses: page three—"I would see the tops of houses.";/ page four —"I would see the tops of trees.";/ page five—"I would feel funny high in the sky!" We stapled the pages together with an additional one on top for the cover. "What will be the title of your story, Patty?" "Let's call it IF I WERE A KITE!" she replied. Patty said she could not read but after I read her story orally

with her two times she read on her own without difficulty. Later, she chose the word *fly* to place in her word file box. She told me that *fly* rhymed with *sky* and *cry*. Patty seemed pleased when she returned to her seat to draw the illustrations for her book. She had started down the writing road to reading.

John was more dour than usual on the day I visited his third-grade classroom. Two weeks earlier we had written about a sore-headed bowling ball which found it had teeth and he had gained some stature among his classmates by developing a humorous story. On this day he had been invited to write an imaginative account of how to make something. He chose HOW TO MAKE A CAKE and had written:

> Buy some cake mix, add water, put it in a pan in an oven. That's it.

This wasn't bad for John. It was brief and to the point. He recalled the bowling ball incident, however, and was eager to dictate a story which was more satisfying. Later, he illustrated it and produced a book. The contents were as follows:

HOW TO MAKE A CAKE

Page one — I like chocolate and vanilla cakes.
Page two — My favorite is chocolate cake.
Page three — To make a really delicious chocolate cake, first you have to dream.
Page four — You dream about sugar, chocolate, flour and icing.
Page five — You dream about it's size.
Page six — I would like to bake a cake as big as the whole school.
Page seven — I would need a pan as large as a giant swimming pool.
Page eight — and an oven as big as an airplane hangar.
Page nine — I would mix the cake with a giant's spoon.
Page ten — and pour it into a pan with a steam shovel.
Page eleven — It would take a day to bake and a day to cool off.
Page twelve — I would sell pieces of my cake for ten cents.
Page thirteen — Come to my cake sale!

A smile appeared on John's face when he read his story aloud and his classmates heartily applauded. It was wonderful to be an author and to be appreciated by fellow authors.

Children of all ages are eager to write including pre-school youngsters. The latter dictate excitedly when they have a secretary. Providing secretaries for children is not an impractical idea.

There are no expressions of disgust on the faces of boys and girls when asked to write in a classroom atmosphere which is ripe for personal expression. Mrs. Rich, a third-grade teacher, recognized this when she launched her program last September. She started the year with an individualized reading program having established a classroom library. She knew it was important early in the fall to confer with each child to discuss a book he enjoyed and with which he had experienced some success. She had planned art and writing centers, a science table, a listening area for stories and music and had informed the class that the stories and books they wrote would also go into the class library. Book-making had been started in grade two. Mrs. Rich made it a point to record what children said on many occasions so that they could see how their ideas looked in print. She also read to them daily, calling their attention to the strategies used by authors in writing books. Children were encouraged to write freely whatever they wished and to use as many pieces of paper as they needed for their stories and illustrations. They also were told that they could consult with one another in proof-reading or that the teacher would provide this service.

It was in this climate that the talents of Mel, a shy, young man who had

repeated second grade, became evident. Mel was one of six children in a family which had a history of school failures. Like his sisters and brothers, he had not learned to read with appreciable success in the first and second grades and he demonstrated his belligerency towards those who did not understand his problem by getting into trouble frequently. Mrs. Rich discovered his ability in art and encouraged children who could not draw to collaborate with him in preparing their books. Mel became a popular illustrator and a highly regarded classroom member. He wrote his own stories, too. However, throughout the fall, he found it simpler to dictate his ideas to Mrs. Rich or into the tape-recorder. These were typed or printed so that he could illustrate them with drawings or paintings. The books he wrote were placed on the library table and read with great interest by classmates. At the close of the year he was one of those chosen by his peers to represent the school at Oakland University's first Young Authors' Conference. Mel's prize story, not complete without his own vivid illustrations, may serve to show the kinds of insight writing provided this young man. He wrote this story early in October.

BAD BOY BEAVER

One day Beaver was walking down the road. He saw his girl friend. "I'll walk to school with you," exclaimed Beaver. She said, "OK!" and away they went.

They went past the cornfield and finally they were at school.

The teacher said to Beaver and his girl friend, "Do you know how to spell your names? They told her, "Of course we do."

Beaver went to his seat. The bell rang then the teacher asked Beaver something. What did it mean. Beaver screamed at the teacher, "Big Nose!" and the teacher got a board and spanked him.

The teacher wrote a story and Beaver had to read it to the class for punishment.

When Beaver went home he cried to his mother, "I have a grouchy teacher and she doesn't let me go out for recess."

The next day he went to school and the teacher said to him, "Are you going to behave now?"

Beaver didn't listen to his teacher because he was worrying about the day.

So he was in the biggest trouble he was ever into. The teacher sent Beaver to the office and he wouldn't go. But the trouble was she couldn't get him there.

Then the teacher sent a girl to get the principal. The principal came and dragged him to the office. The teacher explained to the principal what Beaver said.

Finally the parents put Beaver into a different school.

The principal, the teacher and all of the children said that was good riddance because he was such a Bad Boy Beaver.

Mel understood Beaver's school problems and, fortunately, had an opportunity to discuss his feelings with someone who listened.

In the same class was Richard, a sensitive boy with an age-old problem. Just before school started, a baby sister had arrived to share the attention of his parents, and he felt neglected. Richard brooded about this injustice but refused to discuss it with anyone. Writing and illustrating his thoughts provided him with a healthy outlet to his feelings. Mrs. Rich was delighted with the way

in which Richard examined his ego-centered problems. He wrote and illustrated the following story which provided a twenty-four page book. His friend, Bruce, was his proof reader. This was his story—

AWAY FROM HOME

Once upon a time there was a boy who had a new baby brother. The boy got jealous. The boy's name was Irving.

Irving got so jealous that he decided to run away from home. He got five candy bars for food, his blanket which he stole from his brother's crib, a picture of his Mom and Dad, his tent and sleeping bag, and finally his Monkey album.

He opened up the window and jumped out.

He went to his secret tunnel in the park which not even his mother or father knew about.

He put up his tent and rolled out the sleeping bag. He set up everything. By that time, it was two o'clock in the morning so he got in his sleeping bag and started to sleep.

During the night his father went to check up on Irving. Well, you can imagine the look on his face when the bed was empty. The window was open and there was a note that said:

Dear Mommy and Daddy,

I am running away from home because I know you won't miss me because of the baby.

Irving.

Well, when he told his wife she broke out in tears .

But his father knew that if anybody knew, Irving's best friend would know where he was. But Jeff was sworn to secrecy and he was a very good Christian.

Jeff went to the hiding place. He made sure no one was following him. Jeff and Irving played in the hiding place all day until dark.

At night for better security he got in his sleeping bag and started to sleep. But when he woke up he was in his bed tucked in, and a warm breakfast was waiting for him.

A fine ending, indeed. The opportunity to write and react to what was important to Richard gave him the chance he needed to find a satisfying solution.

Reading to young people and guiding them to discover the strategy of authors is an excellent catalyst for encouraging free expression. Linda, a pupil in Mrs. Bleakley's second grade classroom, was delighted with the story of *Midas And The Golden Touch* read by her teacher. In fact, she could not resist the opportunity to write a fable of her own. It, too, had a message which other children in the class appreciated.

THE CANDY TOUCH

One day I wished everything I touched would turn into candy but that I wouldn't get rotten teeth.

A fairy came into my room and said, "I hear you want the candy touch."

"If you really want it, when you wake up you will have the candy touch."

The next morning I touched the table of my bed.

It turned into candy!

I said good morning to my sister. Then, I touched her .

She turned into candy.

I would have done anything to make my sister turn back.

I tried pouring water on her.

I wished the candy spell would go away.

The fairy came back and said, "The spell is broken."

I was very happy. I never wished for the candy touch again!!!

Linda had taken time to think through the consequences of being too greedy.

In the spring of 1967, Oakland University sponsored its first Young Authors' Conference to honor and recognize the writing achievements of boys and girls in the elementary schools. Four hundred and fifty young authors, ages six to Twelve, representing more than one hundred schools participated in an exciting day-long program. In the morning, they met in small groups to read and discuss their manuscripts. After lunch they gathered to hear Leland Jacobs of Columbia University talk with them about the craft of writing. He told them to become: 1. *active sightseers,* paying attention to the details of what they saw; 2. *spies,* listening in on conversations for interesting expressions; 3. *word magicians,* taking time to discover the best word to express a thought; and 4. *story architects,* designing the story plot so that one idea supports and extends the one which follows. At the close of this conference, one fifth-grade girl wrote the following evaluation:

REFLECTIONS IN THE WATER WHEN I PASSED BY

I didn't see the same thing I usually see, I saw something different. Yes, I saw the same girl but she looked much older, walking around such a beautiful university. I felt older, too, talking and listening to a real author. He called us young authors and that is how I felt. I didn't see the same old tomboy in the water I usually see. I saw a young lady, a young author.

When is the classroom climate most conducive to creative writing? When is a young person apt to show himself and be himself? There are no pat or prescriptive answers to these questions. It is evident, however, that the freedom and willingness to write finds ferment in the total classroom atmosphere and cannot be treated as a subject relegated to a small period of time in the school day. It is apparent, too, that boys and girls must have the right to experiment with language patterns, no matter how awkward, and to feel free to choose words which they cannot always spell correctly without fear of criticism or censure. Individual achievement must be recognized and personal initiative respected. Thoughtful responses to exciting questions must be prized above mechanical perfection and archaic grading systems. Children must be given ample time for writing along with other forms of creative expression—drawing, painting, dramatizing, experimenting, speaking and interacting with events and ideas which stimulate their concern.

It is always exciting to visit classrooms in which boys and girls find many opportunities to write. In these rooms teachers have no difficulty engaging children in purposeful learning activities of a highly independent and personal nature. Among their children, the warm glow of success and personal accomplishment provides a common bond. When writing is important it is not uncommon for classmates to prize books written by one another above those of well-known authors. It is in these rooms that young people readily share the treasures stored in their minds knowing that they can trust others with their gems of thought and wisdom.