ATTACK OF THE KILLER BABY FACES: GENDER SIMILARITIES IN THIRD-GRADE WRITING

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Many teachers and researchers have noted gender differences in children's writing. But in one classroom, where writing was a social process, interesting gender similarities appeared also.

One day Matt and I went swimming in the pond by my house,” Noah reads one day in February, looking up from his draft and giggling at the class crouching on the rug around him. “Then a Baby Face dropped on me. Matt took out my knife and stabbed it in the head, but it did not die,” he continues, the boys breaking up in laughter and a few girls sneaking glances at each other, as if seeking permission to smile at this extended joke at the expense of their favorite subject: Baby Face Dolls.

Anya, Laurie, and Mei have been bringing their chubby pink friends to class with them for several months. Mei’s Baby Face, Cindy, even gets dismissal notes from the secretary when Mei has to change buses for the day.

“Then my idiot brother came,” Noah reads, “The Baby Face dropped on him and said, ‘Fresh brains!’” The boys have started elbowing each other, alternately looking at the girls to gloat at their horror and at me to see if I’m going to allow this macabre spin-off of “Night of the Living Dead” to continue. I let the girls bring their dolls to school, much to the dismay of some parents who fear I am encouraging stereotypical roles.

Dolls and Collaboration in a Third-Grade Writing Workshop

Anya began the Baby Face process in October with “Meet Shelley,” a spin-off of the American Girl doll collection book, Meet Kirsten (Shaw, 1986). Laurie read the book and introduced her classmates to it a week earlier, and her other writing partner, Hannah, read another selection from Meet Kirsten three days later.

Anya, Laurie, and Mei introduced the more portable Sherrie, Carrie, and Cindy into their writing. The Baby Face dolls came to life as bratty children, as they and their “older sisters” (who closely resembled Anya, Laurie, and Mei) often adopted the voices of characters from published novels.

Freedman (1995) described similar collaborative writing groups in her second- and third-grade classroom. Three girls began the “Mr. and Mrs. Club” by instituting a story framework that others in the class eventually adopted and which included quotation leads, lists, interfacing characters and plots, and character development. The group served as audience, collaborators, and encouragers to its members, who developed longer pieces over longer durations and eventually were imitated by others in the class. The students in Freedman’s class wrote more than 29 stories with the “Mr. and Mrs.” format.

Freedman also noticed gender patterns in the writing of her students. Girls wrote more often about friendship, themselves and their families, and school life; while boys more frequently wrote adventures and factual accounts. Both girls and boys wrote stories about their classmates and joke books. Other teachers have also found gender differences in the writing of students (McAuliffe, 1993–1994; Romatowski, 1987).

My students demonstrated many of these same differences, but I also noticed similarities across gender lines. Boys and girls in the class used popular culture to scaffold their stories, the characters beginning as dolls or action figures and the plots imitating video games or horror films. More noticeably, girls and boys both aimed at audience reaction, often using argument and shock.

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Students of both sexes also incorporated their favorite writers and curricular topics into their pieces. Finally, by the end of the school year, girls and boys merged the talents of both genders into a higher form of literacy.

**Kids, Culture, and the Writing Workshop**

Twenty-three third graders, 15 boys and 8 girls, wrote every day since September about topics of their own choice during 45-minute writing workshops. They sat in groups of 4 or 5 around circular tables. Originally, milk crates filled with hanging writing folders set in the middle of the tables, but the kids couldn’t see each other so they moved the crates to the bookshelves next to the windows. They worked separately or in pairs, meeting as a group with me once a week, each child reading aloud a section of what he or she wrote and responding to what others read.

Similarly, each day we had a 45-minute reading workshop, with students choosing their own books from school, home, or classroom libraries. They collected vocabulary from their reading and generated spelling lists from their editing of written work. Once a week, during table conferences, they read aloud favorite parts of their current books, and I quizzed them on the collected vocabulary words, which they had written along with definitions, book context, and original sentences on 3” × 5” cards and stored on shower curtain rings. I also administered individual spelling tests.

Twice a day, we devoted 20 minutes to sharing. Two students read selections from commercially-published books or from drafts they were composing, or they read final drafts of their own published books that went in the classroom library. Each day after lunch recess, I read aloud for 45 minutes from picturebooks and chapter books chosen by the class or by me. Some of these books related to the current social studies or science unit, such as inclined planes or the American states.

**Crossovers**

“Then one Baby Face came and cracked my brother’s head open. Then they said, ‘No brain!’” Noah concluded, looking up from this section of his emerging draft. “Comments, questions, or suggestions?” he asks, hardly able to contain his own laughter long enough to soak up the class’s attention. Laurie’s hand shoots up.

“All I can say is, ‘How rude!’” she snips, kneeling with arms akimbo.

“No! It’s cool,” insists Matt.

“Yeah,” comes the chorus of male approval. Noah waits, glad to have started a controversy. In doing so, however, he has brought girls and boys together in the construction of stories in this feisty third-grade writing workshop.

Jessie and Noah have actually been crossing gender lines in their writing since October, when Jessie used a Nintendo game in her story about Anya as the President’s daughter. Jessie wrote of her friend Anya, “In her room she had two maids, a brass bed and TV and Nintendo and VCR and a stereo, radio, headphones and CDs, 80 records, and a record player.” Although both the girls and the boys drew heavily on popular culture in their writing, boys were the only ones mentioning video games. Thonglo shared his Mario Brothers story with his group early in October, and two weeks later he and Brian began drawing obstacle courses, paper versions of video games.

Noah followed Jessie’s crossover lead, however, when in late October, he shared his “Happy Birthday” story, complete with drawing and description of the contents of his room, picking up on the technique former used only by girls of listing possessions tied to a holiday or celebration. Juanita began the year with a story of running off to Hawaii with her parents’ gold card. For Juanita, Jessie, Isaac, and Laurie, the lists of popular culture possessions soon became the structure of stories, as Freedman (1995) also noted in her class. Isaac opened the door for the boys with his “Gun Catalogue” in the first week of October, listing all he had learned from his father about various types of guns.

Later in November, Isaac began sharing installments of his version of “Attack of the Killer Tomatoes.” “One day I was shooting my BB gun,” he wrote, “when I saw a giant tomato. I could not believe it.” The tomatoes killed a police officer, then Isaac’s father took out his 20-gauge shotgun, but that didn’t stop the tomatoes, and tanks were soon necessary. The tanks gave way to machine guns, cannons, airplanes, missiles, and ships, the list of increasingly larger weapons generating the need for action to include them.

The same week Laurie read from her “Meet Marie” story, in which a girl is invited to live with a friend for a year and goes to the tailor shop in town.
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He had made a peach jumper with a leaf green blouse and tights, a gold blouse with a bright pink skirt and shoes. Then she saw a dress, a regular sort of dress. It was white with pink and sea green stripes. She decided to get a job. But what? She was good at sewing but there’s so many shops in Williamsburg, who would pay attention to her little stand of folded quilts?

Again, the list of clothes created the occasion for action.

Popular Culture

Howard Gardner (1982) says that boys use superheroes to give them a sense of control over their world; and that by controlling their world, they manipulate it; and in manipulating the world, they develop the ability for abstract thought. In the third-grade class, girls and boys used popular culture at first to list, then to imitate and transform, and finally to manipulate as a medium for story structure and character development.

Early in December, Jessie returned to her girlfriends’ medium, the doll story, to write about her character, Tiffany, joining a tennis school. In the story, Tiffany and her friends navigate settings that include a tennis court, school, and gyms—all facilitated with lists and gadgetry. “‘Hello, Ms. Sipper,’ said Tiffany,” in Jessie’s story.

“Good afternoon, Tiffany. Put your things in your locker and come to the court,” said Ms. Sipper (her tennis teacher). Tiffany took the key to her locker and opened it. She took out her bag, her shorts, extra shirt and sneakers, and tennis racket and went into the bathroom and got dressed.

After Tiffany practices the overhand hit, the teacher tells her and her partner Anna that they have been chosen for the Olympic Games. They go to the Olympic site and have a talent show, then break for lunch. “Everyone ran for the shower house and got their lunch boxes. She had a salami sandwich and Juicy Juice and cheese curls.”

After lunch the coach took them to the gym. “She saw a runner machine. She got on it. She turned it to 8.5. She ran fast, then in 15 minutes she lifted weights, 30 pounds, then did the rowing machine.”

In touring the facility, the girls see computers and the coach lets them use them to print up tickets.

First they put what the tickets said on the copier. Then it made tickets (like a copying machine) and they put it in the cutting machine. They printed in 3 x 5 size, and they put the tickets in boxes. The boxes were shipped to the ticket stand, and they made 500 tickets and shipped 50 boxes.

Tiffany, the story character, reminded me of Jessie who frequently organized teams or clubs or plays and printed tickets on the office copier. Lunch at the Olympic Village smacked suspiciously of lunch in our multipurpose room, and I wondered who belonged to the fitness club. But Jessie negotiated the multiple terrains, as will her male and female peers later in the year, aided by the heuristics embedded in popular culture.

Humor, Shock, and Audience Reaction

“He’s just doing that to be funny!” Anya insists, when Noah calls on her to react to “Return of the Brain Eaters” in April.

“Right, and it IS!” rejoins Matt.

“But it’s SICK!” Hannah complains, to a chorus of nods from the girls around her. “Noah and the girls show the Baby Faces getting in trouble, but boys always do it sicker.”

“Girls do sick things in their stories, too!” objects Angel. “Remember Sherrie in Laurie’s story playing in the toilet?” There is a momentary pause.

“But that’s funny,” Hannah insists, “Brains are just sick.”

“I’ll let you all decide what’s funnier, brains or toilets,” I say, “but it seems to me you’re all doing what writers do—trying to get a reaction from your audience.”

“Well, Noah sure did that!” Laurie concludes.

In fact, both the boys and the girls tried to use shock value for audience appeal. Mei, one of our quietest students, introduced this strategy when she shared “Meet Amy and Her Sister” in December, making a joke on the phrase “dead meat.” In January, Mei’s character Cindy had to use the bathroom for the first time in print. By February, Cindy karate-chopped the Christmas tree, one of a series of misbehaviors that Mei offset with an innocent attitude for effect.

Noah, of course, raised the shock stakes with “Attack of the Killer Baby Faces” in February, but both boys and girls used plays on words beginning with David’s comic book about babies, “How the West was Weaned,” in January. Soon afterward, Laurie read “Sherri’s Tea
try to mix the groups but realized that students’ work and behavior suffered from their resistance. After running a sociogram and learning that boys and girls alike preferred single-sex groups, I capitulated. In the twice-daily shares, however, boys and girls continued to interact, and eventually began to appear as characters in each other’s stories.

A week after Mei introduced Cindy’s string of misbehaviors, Jessie brought boys and girls together in one story, “The Rad and the Doll,” a travel story in which the characters stick together when abandoned by their father. The next day Anya used a brother and sister to introduce arguments as the class’s next mania.

Only a day later, Sean introduced his 81-page opus, “Attack of the Killer Onions.” It starts out with him, Thonglo, and Isaac shooting BB guns in the backyard when they are attacked by killer onions. A long chase ensues in which the third graders hijack a bomber, destroy 21 onions, and exchange high fives.

When Sean asks Thonglo why the onions are chasing them and not the neighbors, he replies:

“I don’t know, so be quiet!”

“O.K., make me,” I said.

“Why, I oughta pop you right in the mouth!” said Thonglo.

The argument among the friends is on, soon drawing in Isaac (Three Stooges-style) and only stopping when the onions return.

Two weeks later Noah improved on the argument motif in his “Mini-bike, Dirt-bike, 4-wheeler Adventure” by adding name markers to the dialogue to make it clear who is speaking. Everyone laughed when the camper came out naked and at the extended argument over who gets the heart, liver, and other organs of the gutted deer.

In the first week of March, Noah argued indirectly with the girls by including Baby Face body parts in “Attack of the Killer Baby Faces II.” Mei, still working on “Xmas for Cynthia,” picked up the theme, having the dolls argue at a party straight out of TV’s “Full House.” In the second week of March, Laurie struck back more directly for the girls in class, including Noah and Matt in her story “Sherrie in Middle School.” She shocked her listeners when Sherrie plays in the toilet and later kicks Noah in the butt. Anya included Aaron in “Heidi in Middle School.”

Finally, the boys’ stories began to be less violent. Sean shared the beginning of “Adventure Island V,” where a broken down car provides the tension for the story. He is halfway into his story before the first attack occurs: Mr. Simmons on steroids.

Party,” where one of the dolls confuses “popsicle chorus” with “obstacle course.” Soon Anya continued the practice in “Heidi Goes Shopping,” and Laurie perfected it in “Sherrie Camps Out,” when the dolls literally “pitched a tent” and found “sleeping bags.” The girls were mimicking Fudge’s word confusions in Judy Blume’s (1990) Fudge-a-Mania.

By March, Juanita, Laurie, Anya, and Mei re-created their dolls as bratty younger sisters, and the boys incorporated their friends into dangerous adventures. Matt, who had a propensity for breaking playground rules, started attacking me in print. Sean quickly followed suit. Aaron, who had written little all year, jumped in with “The Terror Gang.” In “The Trolls vs. Mr. Simmons,” Noah wrote, “All guys are trolls except Mr. Simmons; he’s evil and he’s human.” In the story, my wife is a Baby Face doll, and at one point gives birth to 71 little Baby Faces. He brought his trolls to illustrate his story, just as the girls read their stories with their chubby dolls nearby. Weapons didn’t appear until later in the adventure.

Interestingly enough, Noah and Jessie were the leading bridges between the males and females all year. Jessie wrote the original “Kids of Moharimet School, Book 1: Mr. Simmons’ Class” in January, in which the students played themselves but were recognized by name only. No one continued the trend until Matt and Noah transformed the genre for its shock value.

Anya got the final word, however, in April with “The Simmons Nursery.” The whole class appears as babies, all doing characteristic things, which demonstrated Anya’s growth in developing characters. Most strikingly, however, Anya had Isaac, our gun expert, blow his head off to avoid doing homework. The girls giggled madly as Isaac chases his rolling head across the floor. Anya used a cartoon version of violence, a male technique, to get a laugh at the expense of the class’s main male “hunter.”

Arguing with Stories

Teachers should allow popular culture into their classrooms, despite the goal of breeding good taste and the dicta of such writers as Nancie Atwell (1987) who would have us banish comics. As the descriptions above show, students use their culture to script and scaffold their stories, much as Howard Gardner (1982) said boys use superheroes to control their world. My third graders transformed argument, violence, and shock into a classroom dialogue that became less violent and more literate over time. However, boys and girls remained in single-gender groups throughout the year. Initially
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Isaac started his version of “Attack of the Killer Onions” with friends arguing but eventually adopted a Baby Face format where the problems of the argument supplant all killing and violence in his story. Not coincidentally, in this story Isaac included name markers and the word said to mark who is speaking, mixed talk with exposition, and added weapon information as part of the talk, not as the centerpiece of his narrative. Therefore, as Isaac moved to a more verbal conflict typical of the girls’ stories, he also developed mastery of conventions and narrative devices.

Reading Like Writers

Both boys and girls began to read in order to find better ways to write. Through daily share sessions, they demonstrated their reading preferences and their inclusion of the voices of their distant teachers (John-Steiner, 1985) in their own writing. Although students of both genders found models in their reading, boys and girls chose different teachers in order to learn the same lessons.

In October, Anya, Laurie, and Hannah began sharing sections of the American doll stories with their group, and Laurie wrote her own spin-offs, “Meet Kerry,” and “Kerry Wins the Contest.”

Anya, Laurie, Jessie, Hannah, and even quiet Millie, shared their reading of Blume’s novels, Freckle Juice (1978), Fudge-a-Mania (1990), Superfudge (1980), and Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing (1972). In fact, Freckle Juice was shared by all of them during the year, beginning with Anya in September. Millie brought in Fudge-a-Mania in November, and Laurie and Anya read aloud sections of Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing in December. Hannah picked up on Tales in January, when Anya introduced Superfudge to the class, picking out the baby talk sections.

At the end of January, Anya used her Baby Face, Heidi, to re-write Tales, in “Heidi Goes to the Hospital.” Three days later Mei showed us Baby Face Cindy acting very Fudge-like, karate-chopping the Christmas tree while adopting an innocent attitude. Two days later, Laurie wrote about Sherrie “pitching the tent” and looking for a “sleeping bag.”

After Anya spun “Heidi Camps Out” off of Laurie’s story, the two collaborated on a nonfiction essay, “Heidi and Sherri Same and Different.” One of their similarities was that they each have older sisters, Laurie and Anya. Gardner (1982) says children reach new levels of cognitive development when they combine familiar elements from various subjects to create new stories. These girls combined a female distant teacher’s male characters (Blume’s Fudge and Peter Hatcher) with female Baby Face dolls (Sherri and Heidi), who speak with the voice of Fudge and then added themselves in the role of Peter, the exasperated older sibling. Later, Hannah and Mei contributed Cindy and Susie as cousins, and all four girls became aunts and found voices for themselves in the narratives.

The boys also developed voices and plots for themselves but followed different teachers, most frequently choosing Jon Scieszka’s (1991) time travelers in Knights of the Kitchen Table. David read a section of the book in October, the same day he shared the opening sections of his “Time Warp Trio.” Scieszka’s argumentative, bumbling adventurers lent their voices to Thonglo, Isaac, Brian, and Sean throughout the year.

Boys also frequently shared comic books. Isaac read passages from Garfield strips the same day David began the Scieszka shares; Noah brought in Spiderman stories; and Ethan and Noah chose Calvin and Hobbes adventures to share. Thonglo read monster jokes in November and included a Garfield joke in his “Adventure Island” in December.

Once again, Noah and Mei took the risk of crossing gender lines in reading. Noah shared his reading of Freckle Juice (Blume, 1978) in November, while Mei read to the class from Garfield episodes in November and the Knights of the Kitchen Table (Scieszka, 1991) in December.

In the end, Hannah, Anya, and Laurie brought both boys and girls together in a reading club, The Nancy Drew Club, in which they read Nancy Drew stories and kept response notebooks. Prudence, Jessie, Jeff, Mei, Bart, Ethan, Elliot, Aaron, Noah, Angel, Francisco, and Juanita joined the club. The group met weekly the last month of the year to trade books they had finished reading and to read each other’s notebooks.

Anya and Hannah immediately shared pickpocket spin-off stories, and Bart, who had begun the year unable to read aloud in class or write more than a labeled drawing, read aloud his “Officer Bart, Officer Isaac” story, written in collaboration with Isaac.

Integrating the Curriculum

Boys and girls integrated topics from the curriculum into their writing, again in characteristic ways. While both groups used books from my read-aloud selections, their choices broke along gender lines. As Freedman (1995) found, girls tended to focus on social relationships, while boys opted for adventure tales.

In September, I read The Ordinary Princess (Kaye, 1984) to the class, and at the beginning of October, Anya wrote “The Birthday Princess,” injecting a similar lead character into one of the girls’ favorite genres, the
party story. In order to demonstrate foreshadowing and
the addition of problems to be solved during a “road
trip” book, I read all of Baum’s (1986) Road to Oz to
the class. We began each read-aloud session with a reca-
pitulation of problems still to be solved, a list which ini-
tially grew but eventually diminished as the story
continued, providing a nice demonstration of develop-
ment for the class. David included his own version of
the “Scoodlers” in his “Time Warp” story in November.
After I read an abridgment of The Adventures of Tom
Sawyer (Twain, 1922), Brian included a cave episode in
his “Obstacle Course Adventure” in January.

We started every day with a reading of news articles
from the newspaper and magazines, or we summarized
news stories we heard on the radio or TV. By the end of
the year all students, regardless of initial reading ability,
read aloud at least a brief news story related to some
part of the curriculum. Girls and boys later included
news topics in their writing, the boys choosing the tech-
nological subjects and the girls focusing on more do-
mestic activity.

Early in the year, we read a story of a local girl who
was to race in the national Soap Box Derby finals. I cre-
ated a physics unit from the story, with students and
parents collaborating to build race cars from shoe boxes
or blocks of wood, or bringing in manufactured cars.
Led by Laurie and Juanita, the class developed a model
for testing whether the length of the ramp or the height
of the starting point predicted faster speeds when our
cars were released on the playground slides.

Later, we did a unit on inclined planes and technolo-
dy, during which I read and showed video versions of
In January, Noah included a Cathedral spin-off in his
“Space Car” story, and Jeff wrote his version of Castle.

Afraid that women’s work was not being represent-
ed, Anya’s mother suggested a unit on quilting, and
Anya brought in two news clippings related to quilts,
one about a quilt of the pictures and names of victims of
drunk drivers and a second about quilts being donated
to AIDS babies. I read aloud Lyddie (Paterson, 1991),
the librarian set aside all the quilt-related picturebooks
in the library, we viewed portions of a television special
on the history of quilting, and Anya’s mother brought in
materials for the class to make their own quilt. We mea-
sured and cut squares and made and signed hand prints.
She sewed them together and donated the products to
the AIDS babies.

Quilt stories began appearing in the girls’ stories
beginning with Jessie’s “The Family Quilt” (illustrated
by Mei) in the third week of March. Jessie wrote a story
of a young girl making a quilt for her soldier father.

Hannah followed with “The Christmas Quilt,” includ-
ing family members in the quilt. Hannah also wrote
a second quilt story, “The Patchwork Quilt and the
Masterpiece,” in April.

Anya, with “Begin at the Beginning,” in April created
a multigenerational quilt story in which a mother
 teachings her daughter how to make quilts. The daughter
makes one for her doll, then when her mother dies she
makes one commemorating her mother’s death. As a
96-year-old grandmother, she tells the quilt stories to
her grandchildren and challenges them to write their
own stories.

Finally, Laurie included the mischievous character, Sherri, in “Sherri’s Secret Quilt.” Sherri decides to
make a quilt and cuts out pieces of everyone’s clothes.
The quilt became an occasion for a funny Fudge-like
story: She cuts a hole in Mom’s pink dress, and the kids
can see her panty hose through it; Brian has a hole in his
lunch box, and Aunt Ellen has to patch her wallet.
Sherri stays up so late sewing that she uses a flashlight
under the covers, and when her mom calls, “Sherri, are
you sleeping?” Sherri answers, “Yes, Mummy.”

As one of our last units of the year, we did research
on the United States, with each student writing to the
travel bureaus of two states for information. States be-
gan to appear in the girls’ stories, as the dolls’ families
traveled cross-country. Jessie, naturally, inaugurated the
trend with “Trip to St. Louis,” in which she and Anya
travel with their younger “sisters,” Dee Dee and Heidi.
She included Missouri information and toilet jokes
along the way.

A week later Jessie managed to incorporate shocking
humor, curricular topics, and an argumentative slam on
the boys’ topics, when she read her “Trip to Illinois.” In
this story, Dee Dee fishes in the toilet for her lost ring
and hides in the cupboard of the camper to read at night.
Her choice of books? “Attack of the Killer Spuds,”
which starts: “From around the Western plain came
their dark shadows. The Spuds! Curly, twisty, French
fried!” Eventually, Hannah, Juanita, and Laurie man-
aged to work state research information into their favor-
te genre, the Baby Face family trip, but no one crossed
as many gender lines as Jessie.

Third-Grade Writing Workshop: Composition
Class Based on Gender Research

Nancy Mellin McCracken (1992) outlined what a com-
position class based on recent gender research would
look like. Students would have the opportunity to:

• do work useful to society at large,
• read a variety of material prior to conversation,
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- take time to listen,
- dialogue with texts,
- operate within a social context,
- collaborate,
- have teachers who practice women’s ways of listening, and
- hear other voices like their own.

My students had these opportunities. Their work on the quilts proved useful to babies born with AIDS. Prior to our common share sessions, they read a variety of material, including news articles, library research material, each other’s stories, their own self-selected books, and my read-aloud choices. In a larger sense, they “read” television shows, movies, action figures, and dolls.

Each morning they listened to each other present the news. They listened in small single-gender groups and as a large mixed-gender class to classmates present their drafts and favorite readings, and they listened to me read more challenging material aloud. Students created dialogues with texts through reading-response journals but also had the freedom to re-create their favorite authors’ work and to act as responders to their peers’ texts.

The class became the social context of their discourse in that they knew the habits, preferences, and judgments of their audience and they wrote with the purpose of pleasing or shocking that audience. Soon, the audience came to inhabit their stories, as characters from one writer appeared in the stories of another, as the students themselves became characters in the tales, and as the writing became a transaction itself, with students practicing one-upmanship, transforming a genre such as the adventure to the argument, or combining moves as a schoolyard basketball player might, by piggy-backing the party story with a bratty younger sibling, or by combining a quilt plot with state information.

While small groups became same gender units, at the students’ request, the large-group shares remained mixed gender and focused on collaboration. Jeff, for instance, commented on how Jessie worked a quilt into the soldier’s story. Isaac, Sean, and Aaron were quick to add hospital anecdotes in response to Jessie’s bike accident story.

The rules of writer’s workshop are based on what McCracken (1992) calls women’s ways of listening: supportive utterances, questions intended to develop the conversation, while avoiding the appropriation of another writer’s text or the silencing of her or his voice. Jeff, on the first day of the workshop, wrote a draft and sat on my lap to read it. When he finished, he asked, “Comments, questions, or suggestions?” Obviously, he had learned this from previous teachers. Student responses throughout the year indicated they learned the practices of writer’s workshop well.

Finally, students heard other voices like their own throughout the year. They wrote and spoke in the voices of Home Alone or the Three Stooges, of Judy Blume and “Full House,” of Garfield and Katherine Paterson, of their same-gender groups and their opposite gender counterparts. By the end of the year, as in Ruth Ann Freedman’s class, the less able readers and writers in our class were invited into the dialogue and writers began to develop believable characters and logical plots. Moreover, the stories of families and friends became as shocking or as funny or as valid as the gruesome adventures of the superhero, and the students brought their sometimes silly, sometimes rude, third-grade popular culture to bear on the task of creating a higher, more inclusive literacy.

References


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**THE NEWBERY TURNS 75—MARK THE OCCASION WITH CBC’S NEWBERY MEDAL 75TH ANNIVERSARY POSTER**

In this 75th anniversary year of the Newbery Medal award, the Children’s Book Council created the *Newbery Medal 75th Anniversary Poster*, depicted on the reverse side of this page, to introduce kids to quality literature and give them a sense of history. The full-color, 17” × 22” poster commemorates the award and its winners over the past 75 years. Each of the 75 covers is depicted, from Van Loon’s *The Story of Mankind* to the current winner, Karen Cushman’s *The Midwife’s Apprentice*. CBC’s 1996 Newbery Medal Bookmarks make a good accompanying teaching tool, as they list all past medalists and current recipients and Honor Books. Also available are the 1996 Caldecott Medal Bookmarks.


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