

GIFTED EDUCATION NEWS-PAGE

VOLUME 18, NUMBER 5

Published by GIFTED EDUCATION PRESS; 10201 YUMA COURT;

P.O. BOX 1586; MANASSAS, VA 20108; 703-369-5017 www.giftedpress.com

A Camel Is a Walking Hill

R. E. Myers Healdsburg, California

Creative reading can pay off for teachers who want to encourage imaginative expression in their students. In a recent article in *Gifted Education Press Quarterly* (Spring 2009), I pointed out that doing something with what you read can lead to ideas that have happy consequences. A student teacher of mine once proved the truth of that statement by taking one of Mauree Applegate's ideas and using it to evoke original expressions from 24 youngsters in grades 3-5 in a two-room rural school.

After reading Applegate's classic *Winged Writing* (Row, Peterson, 1961), she decided to try one of the author's ideas on the students her supervising teacher had entrusted to her. She asked the children if they knew what a definition was. They didn't. When she asked them what they used their dictionaries for, they couldn't really tell her; but they finally decided that it had definitions for words in it. Then she told them that she was going to give them some definitions which they were never going to find in a dictionary, but which would still give them a clue to the word. For example, she said, what is a "dayshiner"? The youngsters decided it was the sun. They then worked together to make definitions for the word skunk. With the children, she talked about appearance, action, what a skunk is, similes, and finally came up with three definitions for a skunk: an old perfume bottle, a walking pulpmill, and a black and white smellelevision. The last one was everyone's favorite.

She then listed words on the blackboard and told the children that they could define one, two, ten, or all of them or they could choose words of their own to define. She also said that it might be preferable to have one or two well-thought out definitions rather than a lot of definitions that didn't mean very much. The students proceeded to work. Some went right ahead, some just sat, and a few indicated that they needed help. However, they all eventually came up with something. Toward the end of the writing time, when some showed signs of being finished, she suggested that they could draw a picture to go with their definitions or they could comment on the writing as an activity. She assured them that her feelings would not be hurt if they did not care for the work. Either they didn't believe her or they really enjoyed the activity because there were no negative reactions.

At the end of about half an hour of writing, some youngsters still felt they wanted more time, but the majority were finished. They were then anxious to share their writing. Most of them came to the front of the class and read their definitions while the rest of the children tried to guess what was being defined. When the supervising teacher returned, the children repeated their favorite definitions, and she had to do the guessing.

Some of the definitions which everyone seemed to enjoy were:

- A boy is a girl picker. (Age 8, Grade 3)
- A porcupine is like a moving sewing basket. (Age 9, Grade 4)
- A ram is like a grandpa who hasn't shaved for weeks. (Age 9, Grade 4)
- A camel is a walking hill. (Age 9, Grade 4)
- A bumblebee is a honey picker. (Age 9, Grade 4)
- A moon is a sponge soaking up light in the daytime and it's a sun in the nighttime. (Age 10, Grade 5)
- A bumblebee is a black and yellow flying power saw. (Age 10, Grade 5)
- The moon is like a giant banana in orbit. (Age 10, Grade 5)

- A mosquito looks like a flying saucer. (Age 10, Grade 5)
- A beaver is a brown pillow that cuts down trees. (Age 11, Grade 5)

Some of the comments written by the students about this activity were that they liked doing it because:

- It makes you think.
- I enjoy making up my own ideas.
- It's fun.
- We can get away from old sayings and start using new ones.
- It's fun to think up words like smellevision.
- It is different.
- A king (kind?) teacher is teaching it to us.
- It is so exciting.
- You can never get any wrong.
- It helps you to think in your head.

As you can see, humor was inherent in the responses of the youngsters, making the exercise enjoyable for them as well as for the student teacher. It is also interesting to note that the supervising teacher considered the class "rather slow." (Two of the boys had just returned from a remedial class when the lesson was given.) Nonetheless, the students were obviously capable of genuine creative thinking.

We get our creative ideas in many ways, but certainly one of the major ways is in reading. The student teacher who used Maureen Applegate's idea was simply expanding upon it when she administered the definitions lesson. She didn't depart much from Applegate's idea. Nevertheless, she was undoubtedly reading creatively and thinking of how this particular idea could be used with what would seem to be an unlikely group of young thinkers. She took an idea from a book and did something with it which brought out responses that surprised the students and herself.

References

- Applegate, Maureen. *Winged Writing*. Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson, 1961
- Myers, R. E. *Golden Quills*. Manassas, VA: Gifted Education Press, 2008.
- Myers, R. E. You, a Creative Reader. *Gifted Education Press Quarterly*. Spring 2009.

Recommended Poetry Reading for Gifted Students, Teachers and Parents

Robert Pinsky and Maggie Dietz, Editors (2000). **America's Favorite Poems**. New York: W. W. Norton. This is an outstanding anthology of poems that are mainly by American and British poets. What is unusual about this collection is that the poems were selected by the editors based upon recommendations from poetry readers located all over the United States. It is refreshing to read the inspiring comments these individuals make about each one of the selected poems.

Robert Pinsky and Maggie Dietz, Editors (2002). **Poems to Read: A New Favorite Poem Project Anthology**. New York: W. W. Norton. This book continues the work started in the 2000 book by presenting additional poems recommended by readers across the USA. Their comments are also included in this volume.

Robert Pinsky, Editor (2009). **Essential Pleasures: A New Anthology of Poems to Read Aloud**. New York: W. W. Norton. The author provides delightful introductions to each section, explaining the ideas demonstrated by the included poems. As a former Poet Laureate (1997 - 2000) of the United States, he is a knowledgeable and articulate guide to the beauty and inspirational value of great poems. The book also includes a CD of Pinsky reading some of these poems.