

First Impressions of Harry

Harry Stottlemeier

What is Harry like? This is a complex question for those of us who are well acquainted with the main character in Matthew Lipman's novel, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*. The question was presented to the fifth and sixth grade students at the White Lake School after a brief introduction to Harry. Both classes had completed reading the first chapter of the novel, and had discussed some of its main ideas. Their impressions of Harry from this initial meeting proved quite interesting.

The children had many different opinions of Harry, but most of the students agreed that he was of superior intelligence. Katherine, a fifth grader, believed that Harry was so smart that he would find endeavors that were not academic quite dull. Her character sketch began as follows:

"Harry Stottlemeier is a very smart person. He reads encyclopedias, and his favorite subject in school is science. Harry hates sports. He doesn't understand why people play sports and games when they could be learning new and interesting things. When Harry makes a mistake (which he hardly ever does), he tries to figure out what he did wrong. . . . Harry likes to discover and invent things. He says when he's an adult, he wants to be a scientist. Harry Stottlemeier is different from the others, but he sure is smart."

Blake, another fifth grader, agrees that Harry is quite interested in school. Although Blake believes that Harry is a bit unusual, he contends that Harry probably does have a favorite sport. According to Blake:

"Harry Stottlemeier, as I see him, is a person who likes to daydream a lot, and likes to learn about his school work. He thinks a lot about things that happen to him. Harry probably likes stuff that you have to think a lot about. He would like some sports, because, of course, everybody has to like some sports. He would be a little strange to me."

Several of the students made reference to the fact that Harry is a daydreamer. Sixth grader Brad refers to Harry as a dreamer, and he seems to feel that Harry's dreaming has somehow affected his relationship with his science teacher, Mr. Bradley. Brad contends:

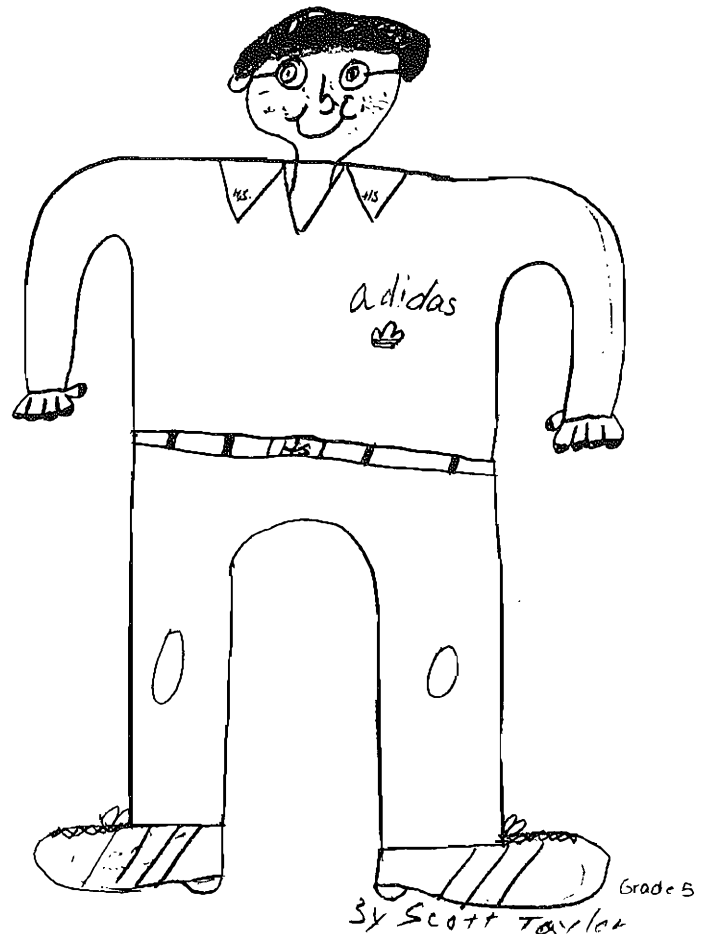
"Harry has an extraordinary imagination. He daydreams most of the time. It is probably in science class that he thinks up his "all" sentences. This is probably the reason that he doesn't get along with his science teacher, Mr. Bradley. I think Harry Stottlemeier is a neat kid. He's my kind of guy because he's the unusual type."

Justin seemed to relate Harry's tendencies to daydream to some of his own dreams. This sixth grader writes:

"Harry is a calm, curious, creative person who daydreams a lot like me . . . He dreams of going to Andromeda or M33. He also dreams of seeing a black hole and finding another galaxie with life inhabiting the planets."

Brad, a fifth grader, used the stereotype that is commonly placed on intelligent youngsters to describe Harry. Even with Brad's judgmental view, Harry remains cool.

"Harry is real smart. He thinks a lot. He's real cool . . . All his allowance goes to experiments. Harry loves Albert Einstein's theory of relativity. He thinks that he will invent solar T.V. All he eats is health food. (He loves that trash.) He has a friend. Her name is Lisa. She is uglier than him. (Good Gosh!) He goes to Spot's School of Smart Kids, and it's



expensive. He talks weird, you know. He talks about chemicals all the time, but still, he's very smart. He knows the formula of sugar inside out."

Jeff, one of our sixth graders, pictured Harry quite differently. Jeff assumed that Harry was always in trouble.

"My idea is that Harry Stottlemeier is the second coming of a lazy Dennis the Menace. Whether he is sleeping in school, or accidentally breaking windows playing baseball, he's just plain in trouble. He's got at least one patch on every pair of jeans, but Harry is very creative. Harry's favorite subject is math. When Harry's playing with flash cards, no one stands a chance. . . . Harry acts cool around friends, and like an angel around teachers, all but Mr. Bradley."

Some of the students provided quite a detailed description of Harry's physical characteristics. This is fifth grader Scott's idea of what Harry looks like:

"Harry has brown hair. He's not very big, about 4 feet tall and about 85 pounds. His eyes are blue. He's not very good looking. He's got big red freckles."

Another fifth grader, Shelley, pictures Harry differently. The freckles, which were present in most of these kids' descriptions of Harry, were also a part of Shelley's description.

"Harry has blond hair and blue eyes and freckles. . . . In the mornings, he is always in a good mood because he can't wait for school. When he gets home from school, he works on his computer or reads."

Fifth grader Matt contends that Harry's appearance is unusual. According to his description:

"Harry is a rather strange looking boy. He has lots of freckles and wears very thick glasses. He is about 5 feet tall and has red hair. He wears long, baggy pants, and IZOD shirts."

Sixth grader Heather seemed to be impressed by Harry's discovery that true all sentences become false when reversed. She writes:

"Harry Stottlemeier is kind of smart in a way because he thought of all those sentences that would end in a negative way."

The descriptions that the kids have presented of Harry are based on their initial views. First impressions are sometimes misleading, and seldom allow insight into the deeper aspects of one's character. Many of the opinions that the children have expressed will change, and some will grow stronger as they learn more about Harry Stottlemeier. It will be interesting to see how the children perceive Harry after a year's exposure to him. We will print a report of those reactions in a later issue of this journal.

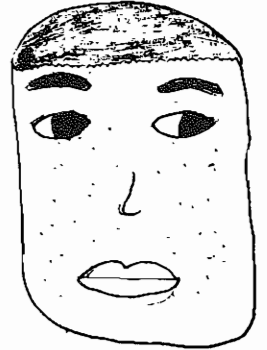
The following are pictures of Harry that the children drew:

Harry
Stottlemeier



Meg
Grade 5

Harry
Stottlemeier



Horry stottlemeier



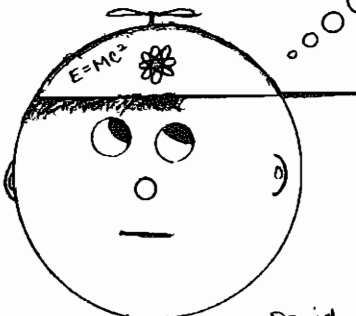
Matt
Grade 5



Spencer,
Grade 6



HARRY STOTTEMEYER

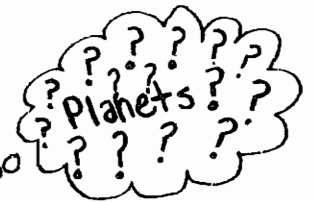


David
Grade 6

Harry



Carrie
Grade 5





Harry Stottlemeier

HARRY Stottlemeier



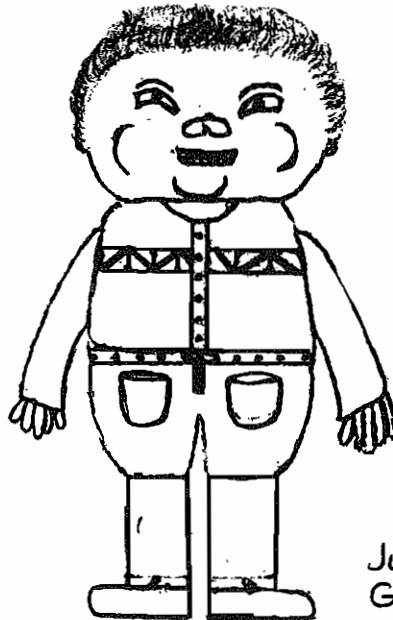
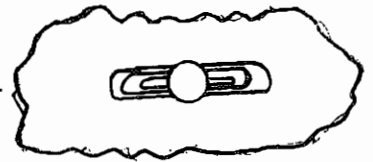
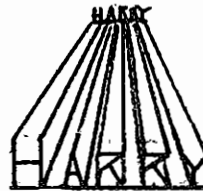
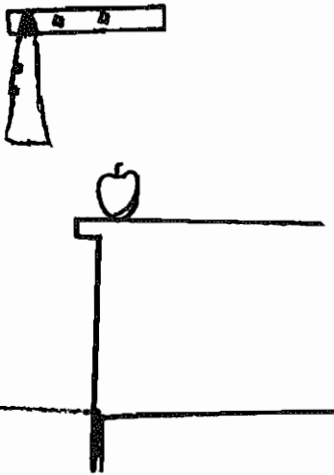
Brod
Grade 6



Jeff,
Grade 6

MR.
BRADLEY

I'M
SAYING!!!
COMETS
GO AROUND
THE SUN!
Harry,
Grade 3

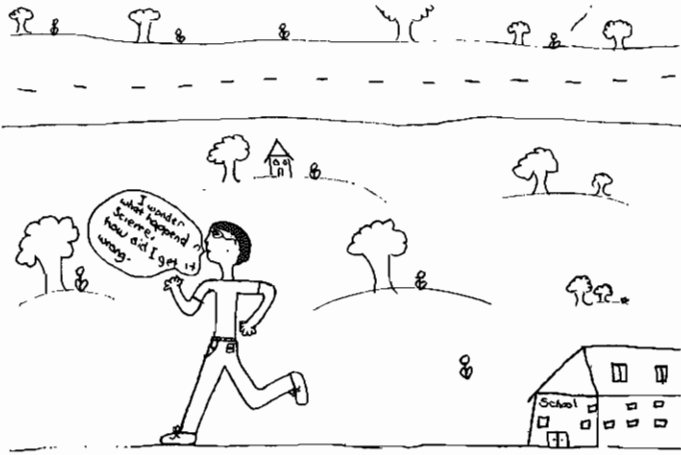


Justin
Grade 6



Harry
Stottlemeier

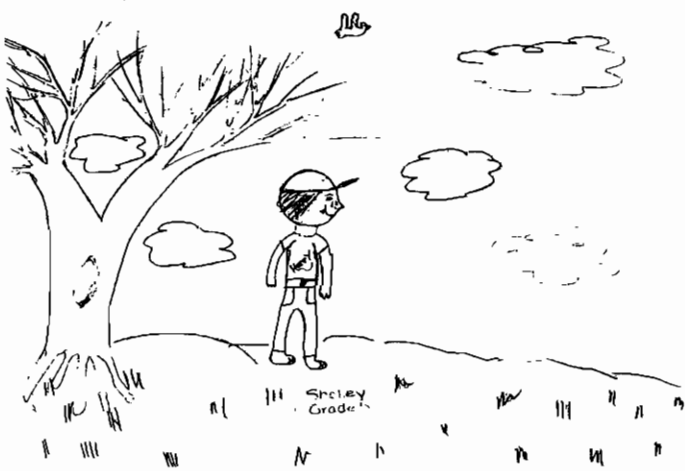
Tracy
Grade 6



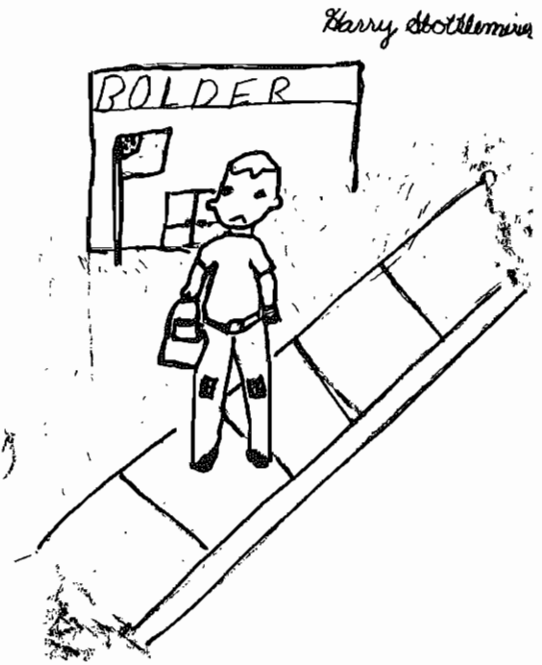
Shelli
Grade 4



Eric
Grade 5



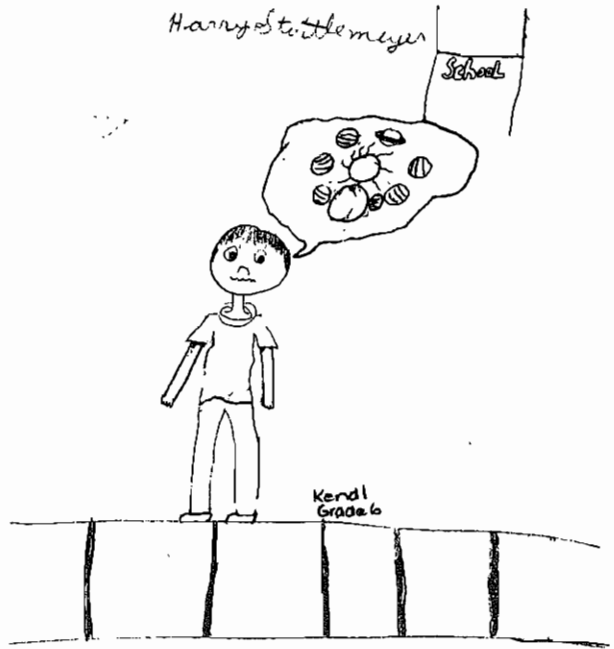
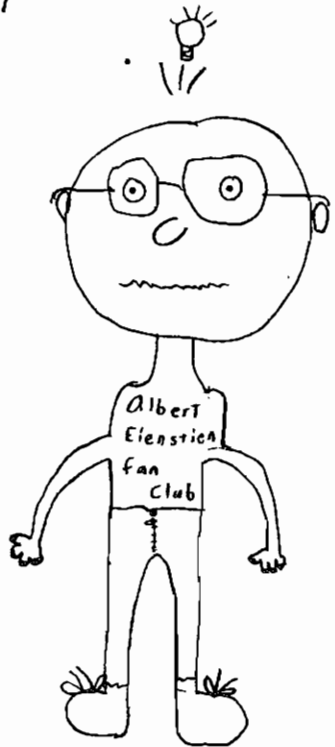
Shelley
Grade 4



Harry Stottlemire

Brand J Lynn grade 6

Harry Stottlemire



Kendi
Grade 6