Second Thoughts About Harry

In our last issue of *Analytic Teaching*, we reported on some of our students' initial views of Harry Stottlemeier. The kids, fifth and sixth graders at the White Lake School in Fort Worth, were asked to prepare a character sketch of Harry after reading chapter one in Matthew Lipman's novel. We thought it would be interesting to ask the kids to write a similar character sketch after a semester's exposure to Harry. As we suspected, children's opinions of Harry change as the novel unfolds.

Fifth grader Blake admits that he knows a lot more about Harry now than he did at the end of chapter one. He writes:

> "At the beginning of the book I didn't know a lot about Harry Stottlemeier, but now I do. Harry likes baseball. He is pretty good in school. Harry likes school, but in class he doesn't always keep to the subject. Harry's mind sometimes wanders off to something else. He isn't very shy and he doesn't like to be told that he is wrong."

Many of the kids seemed to think that Harry Stottlemeier is the kind of student that others turn to for advice. Fifth grader Carrie mentioned this quality in her character sketch.

> "Harry Stottlemeier is a pretty average kid but he likes to think a lot and that makes him seem smart. A lot of Harry's friends come to him for advice, and often times Harry gives them pretty good ideas. Lots of times when someone has the wrong idea about something, Harry will try to help them understand better. Whenever Harry misses a problem, he tries to correct it, even though it may not change his grade. Sometimes when Harry is in class he will interrupt with a completely different subject. His math teacher seems to understand. Harry often says what's on his mind and is very curious about what goes on."

Another fifth grader, Katherine, also believes Harry's friends look to him for advice. She shares Carrie's opinion that Harry seems eager to correct his mistakes, even if corrections don't alter his grades.

> "Harry's mind wanders a lot in class. He's very open and not shy. Harry has a lot of friends that ask him for advice. He has a little bit of a temper. Harry likes to think a lot and he corrects all of his mistakes (not for a better grade, but so that he won't make them again). In the beginning I thought that Harry was very different. I thought that he didn't like sports, but he does. Harry's favorite sport is baseball. I thought Harry would be good at handwriting and every other subject, but I was wrong. Harry's writing is sloppy. I think Harry is neat."

Sixth grader Tracy shares Katherine's view that Harry is neat. She writes:

> "Harry Stottlemeier is a really neat kid. It seems like he never gets mad. Harry hardly ever daydreams, he's just not all with us sometimes. Harry doesn't like math, because if someone says something about it he just changes the subject. I think the only subject that Harry likes is writing because he enjoys writing stories. I would love to meet Harry Stottlemeier in person."

Caroline also believes that mathematics is one of Harry's poorest subjects. According to this sixth grader:

> "Harry Stottlemeier is a nice kid who has a lot of friends. I think he is smart, but a little weird. I also think he's pretty suspicious. He's not really interested in talking about math because he isn't very good in it. He doesn't like science mainly because he hates his science teacher. Harry likes to daydream about things that are out of this world. He likes sports especially baseball, and he's very good in it."

Still another student, Jeff, agrees that Harry is a poor math student. This fifth grader writes:

> "I think Harry is not so good in math, but he enjoys playing baseball. When Harry gets home from school, he likes sitting with a glass of milk and a box of raisins. Harry is very curious and he's not so popular."

At the beginning of the year most of the kids expressed the opinion that Harry was extremely intelligent. Some of the students still contend that Harry is smart. Sixth grader Katy writes:

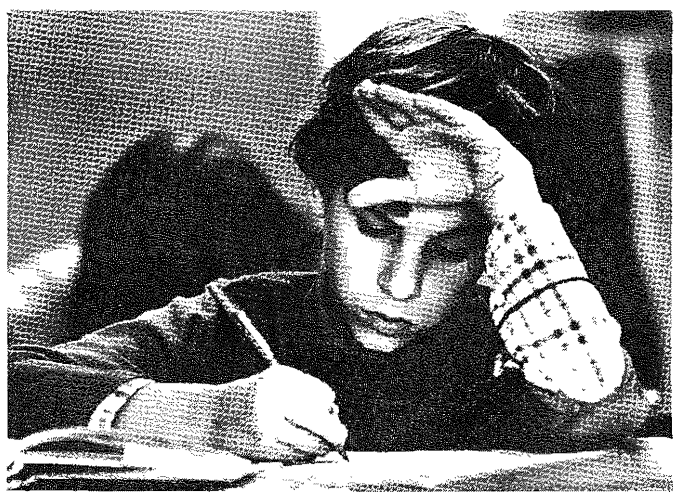
> "Harry Stottlemeier, as I see him, is very intelligent. He's very bright and he likes school. If Harry has a problem, he tries to figure out what it is. He likes to talk about thinking. When his friends are questioning things he helps them out. He daydreams a lot during science class. When I first started reading about Harry, I thought he was a total jerk, but now I think he's different from any one else. He doesn't do very well in math and he has a hard time writing on the lines. Harry makes fair grades in school, but he's highly intelligent when it comes to thinking."

Sixth grader Brad agrees that Harry is smart. He writes:

> "Harry Stottlemeier is a very smart person. At the first of the year, I thought he was sort of stupid, but now I think he's smart. Harry probably reads a lot and plays baseball part of the time. I think Harry is a hot head and is full of energy."

Sixth grader Bart has changed his opinion of the extent of Harry's intelligence.

> "At first I thought Harry was very smart. Now my impression is that Harry is fairly smart and he really doesn't daydream as much as I thought. He doesn't like math and when he writes he can't make his pen stay on the lines. I think Harry is out to lunch sometimes. Harry likes school when he is in the mood for it. His favorite subject is science, but he doesn't get along with his science teacher, Mr. Bradley. He's not shy or afraid to speak out at any time."



Sixth grader Kendel has changed her view of Harry's intelligence since our initial character sketch. She writes:

"At the beginning of the year, I thought that Harry was much smarter than I think he is now. To me, Harry is a very good thinker. He doesn't daydream much except in science class. When Mr. Bradley talks there are other things going on in Harry's mind. Whenever Harry or one of his friends has a problem, Harry tries to figure it out."

Many of the kids viewed Harry as an average student but a superior thinker. Sixth grader John writes:

"I think Harry is a fair student but he has a hard time keeping his mind on his work. Rather than schoolwork, thinking is his favorite subject. He has an unusual way of thinking for a kid. He's very logical. Harry has a pretty good attitude toward school but I don't think he likes school every day."

Sixth grader Heather also sees Harry as a super thinker. She writes:

"Harry is a most unusual child. His brain is much more active than any child I've heard of. I never have heard or read about a child as young as Harry that thought in such detail about a single sentence. He speaks out quite a bit which is also unusual. He has a variety of friends and I think the subject he enjoys the most would be science."

Sixth grader Brad sees Harry as an independent thinker.

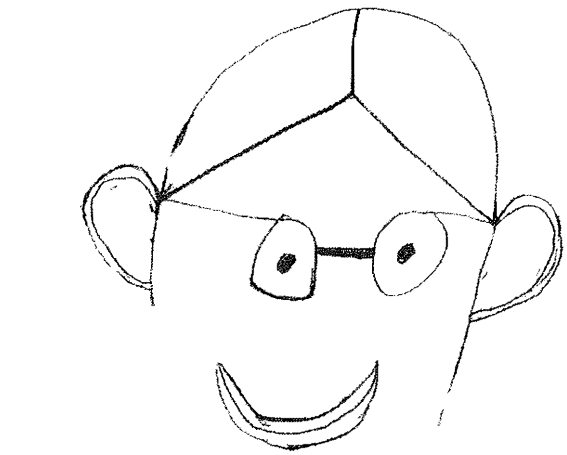
"Harry has a mind of his own. If he's interested in a class he stays in tune, but if he isn't, he thinks about other things. Harry likes sports, especially baseball. He also likes candy like any ordinary kid. Harry has a pretty good attitude about school and his friends call on him for advice. Harry says what is on his mind anywhere or to anyone. He's concerned with grades when he makes a bad score and he's anxious to correct his mistakes. Harry has lots of friends because he's nice and especially because he's so cool."

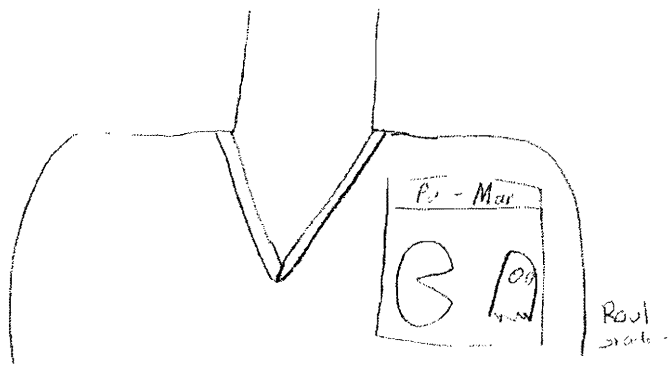
Another of our sixth graders Scott agrees that Harry is an exceptional thinker but doesn't consider Harry to be cool. Scott writes:

"At the beginning of the year, I thought Harry Stottlemeier was a real bum or jerk and/or outcast. This idea was probably based on my dislike and lack of information of what analytical thinking is. Now I'm very interested in this class. I believe Harry is a great thinker, but apparently he jumps before he looks. For instance, in Chapter 4 Mr. Spence had been taking time out again to help Harry. Mickey had his hand up and was explaining about the 'some and all sentences.' Harry denied Mickey's statement immediately. Tony pointed out a problem and Harry muttered that Tony always sees problems. Harry often speaks out about his problems. He apparently likes help, but when he is getting his troubles almost solved and other people helping by vocalizing their view of the problem, Harry becomes mad and frustrated because he can't do it by himself. I believe Harry needs to exercise more self control and to be a little bit 'more with the gang.' I'm not saying he's exactly a square peg, but he needs to be a bit "cooler." Otherwise, he is a very well-mannered boy."

David, a sixth grader, views Harry as an average kid who works hard for good grades. According to David:

"Harry is a typical average kid. He enjoys playing baseball and he has a pretty good attitude toward school, unlike his friend Mark. Harry probably makes A's in school, but he's not of superior intelligence, he's just a hard worker. Harry's on the debate team. He is basically a talkative guy who's fun to be around. Harry is an excellent thinker with a vast imagination. His favorite subject





in school is Analytical Thinking, of course. Matthew Lipman is Harry's idol. He wants to be just like him when he grows up."

Many of the kids related Harry's interests to interests of their own. Sixth grader Jeff writes:

"Harry loves to think and he also loves baseball. He reads a lot and he reads very fast too. Harry could go through *Gone with the Wind* in one day. Harry likes to try new things. He tells jokes occasionally. Harry loves video games (but then, who doesn't). His favorite one is Tron. He likes to watch movies and T.V. Harry is very patient and very considerate. He gets along well with his parents and his friends and most of his teachers. Harry has an IBM personal computer and an Atari. He's very logical. On his computer, Harry programs games that involve logic. Harry is a terrible singer (and he knows it) but still, he loves music. When Matthew Lipman wrote *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, he made Harry think a lot. When Harry Stottlemeier thinks, people listen."

My students' views of Harry have changed in many ways. As they've come to know and understand him better, Harry Stottlemeier has become less of an enigmatic storybook character and more of a regular kid. Although Harry may not have maintained the genius status which he first presented to these kids, he has grown more credible, more likable, and more of the kind of boy to which fifth and sixth graders can relate. The students at the White Lake School like Harry Stottlemeier and they seem to enjoy improving their own thinking skills by studying his.

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