A Harlem Journal

Eugenio and I began teaching in Harlem on Friday, October 22. Looking back on that fall, I remember mainly feelings and vivid incidents. Walking into the building for the first time, it was immediately recognizable as a school — the paint colors, the smells of the cafeteria, the white line down the middle of the hall. The strangeness was outside the school, in the surrounding burned-out brownstones and the bottle-and-brick littered playground across the street. We were earlier than Dr. Moody, and found the aide's room for our wait; but soon enough we learned that we were not going to teach together. We would each teach five groups, identical schedules except that when I have a few first and second graders, Eugenio would teach special ed students.

The fifth grade, which was to prove the most difficult group for me through the entire year, was the first class. We came into the room with Dr. Moody, who motioned half the class to follow him and Eugenio to another room. The teacher gathered his papers and departed, and I was left with 10 or 12 boys. I introduced myself and heard their names. The books were passed out. Horace, never one to mince words, said, "You look scared! Why're you scared?" I replied, "Well, this is the first day of school for me here, and isn't everyone a little nervous the first day of school . . . new people . . .?" Silence. "That's okay, isn't it?" He paused a minute, and then made a show of nodding. "Yeah, that's okay." All in all, an appropriate beginning.

This may appear to have little to do with my class journal, which focusses on the sixth grade class in the spring. But clearly, the fall helped shape how I looked at the Harlem students, and how they looked at me. The second week, we ate in the lunchroom for the first time. As we sat across from each other, a boy slammed onto the table as another boy pummeled him, both laughing. Later in the fall, I walked into a stairwell after lunch to find one boy punching another without laughter. I said (without much hope of effect), "Come on, let him get up and go to philosophy," and the victor did. For every nine joking fights, one was serious. Sometimes a student would come suddenly into a classroom after lunch or gym, and the others would explain, "Don't mind her, she got in a fight."

The students supported each other. A boy came into the principal's office, teary and bleeding from his chin, before the beginning of school. When Eugenio was asked what happened, he said, "A girl bit me! And I wasn't doin' nothin'!" His friends clustered around the door, and then more boldly they came into the office to comfort him. Don't worry, one girl assured him, you won't be suspended; that time I bit someone, I was suspended, but she wasn't. But the students were aware of a double standard. When I asked the sixth graders how they thought the disciplinary process should be changed, Hector insisted that girls and boys be punished alike for like offenses, especially fighting. All agreed that that was not the case.

Fighting and respect were year-long themes in every class. Though they were subjects that the students never tired of discussing, they were also perhaps the most difficult for me to understand. They knew that what they said and did were inconsistent; but force was all that remained when, in frustration, words failed them. I hoped that by giving them a better way of talking, we might encourage a *working* model of respect and at least postpone the recourse to "I'm gonna hurt that girl."

My notes from the fall begin very sketchily; as things began to happen in the classroom, I found more to remember. We only came in seven times before the winter break.

October 22

Introductions. Tried to establish what they remembered from last year. Began reading with Chapter 4; pages 15 to 16, line 27. They thought that Harry's essay on thinking was very good, though they weren't clear why.

October 29

Read page 16, line 20 to page 19, line 20. Good! Talking about *assuming*; got them to assume that there were such things as witches. What could we then say about them? Filled the board with what everyone could agree was true about witches. Worked on 'some' logic; did pretty well.

We talked about witches because it was the Friday before Halloween, and virtually everyone was in costume. It was not easy to convince them that wearing a Darth Vader mask and having a discussion are really compatible, if you don't project like James Earl Jones.

November 5

Finished Chapter 4. Very good; though some sulking from a girl whom I have trouble understanding (Yvette). She gave up and put her head down on the desk, thumb in her mouth. *Great* deal of interest in rock-throwing. Dealt briefly with "understanding"; did some of the exercises on "what follows."

November 12

All right. Read half of Chapter 5 (to page 23); talked about who should run the schools; interesting vs. uninteresting classes; and grownups (mysterious creatures). Two interesting conclusions that the class came to: learning to work together is very important *and* it is incompatible with everyone talking all the time (that actually shut them up momentarily). Also, that grownups should treat kids like grownups part of the time — but not *all* the time, because they're *not* grownups. Unclear as to who should decide when which treatment was appropriate, and how the decision should be made. The class didn't think that students should run the school; they thought that in general grownups did a fair job (despite what are seen as sometimes unfair disciplinary practices).

In another class, the teacher is conferring with a parent in the back of the room. Finally a student bursts out, "Tell them to be quiet! I can't hear!" That sort of thing happened

several times throughout the year; I learned that the only thing more disruptive than a long conversation between two students is a long conversation between two adults.

November 19

Good, though some disputes over who should read. Michael talked to the guy next to him constantly. Troy, alone in the back, was actually paying attention with some interest until the teacher sent him out on an errand. Damn! He looked like he was about to say something . . . Talked some about why/what an education is. "Does an education make you a better person?" "Yes." "Does it get you a better job?" "Yes." "Does having a better job make you a better person?" The quick 'yes' brought immediate objections, as everyone seemed to know good people who didn't have good jobs (or any jobs at all).

Good discussion of 'questions' and 'answers': they decided that knowing more doesn't mean questioning less. Someone pointed out that it gives you more subjects to have questions about. Thinking for yourself: Yvette suggested that it was selfish thinking.

Idea we left with: if school teaches you to think better, how could you tell it was effective? "Thinking" is natural (we're born doing that), and thinking better isn't the same as knowing more; so what is it? They were talking among themselves about it as I left.

I never managed to gain a very clear sense of my position in the classroom. There was so much in the school routine that never became obvious — who went where, and when? Who were the monitors, and what did that entail? When did the assignments or problems written on the blackboard when I came in have to be preserved? What could I do when a classroom teacher, probably reacting to some longer-term aggravation, sent a student to the office on very little immediate provocation — a student who wanted to do philosophy? I would like to have known what went on when I *wasn't* there; but teaching five classes a day did not leave time to sit in on non-philosophy classes.

December 3

Reading very good; and very good participation (including several who had been silent until now). Read all of Chapter 6. Talked about what "mind" is; the difference between mind and brain (fairly general agreement that there was a difference, but not on what it was). Dead people: do they influence the living? There was a feeling in the class that thoughts do come in from the outside; so why not?

Great interest in the difference between man and animals; they agreed we should talk more about it next time.

The fourth graders became very excited about thinking of the stories that things could tell, if they told stories — what would your desk say? What would the school say? One child waved his hand toward the window. "It'd say, 'I'm gonna move! Go to a better neighborhood! This place is no good."

December 10

The period ended with three students commenting on how good the class was (which brought a "thumbs-up" from the teacher, seated as usual in the back of the room). Fair participation. We read the first half of Chapter 7. Started by talking about animals and men; more about inventions than about culture.

Most of the class was spent on differences of degree and differences of kind, which was enormously popular (I left late for the third grade class, and it was still "Do you *have* to go now?"). Went well despite Shaneek's absence; she's been something of a catalyst in the discussions, but I'd hate to think that the class depended so heavily on any one person. At one point, Yvette betook herself to the board to point out exactly what she meant.

Not that the difference is clear. A fuzzy idea of the distinction, but most seem to feel that any difference that's *big* enough is a difference of kind. So the difference between 10° and 20° is degree, but between 10° and 70° is kind (Ruth steadfastly argued for degree). On the other hand, everyone thought that the difference between dark red and light red is a difference of kind. "They're two different colors."

I find in my notes on the fifth grade from a fall class: "fighting, inattention, about 5 minutes of decent conversation. WRITING ON THE BOARD CALMS THEM." Or from a later class: "quiet, but not too keen on talking. Agreed that a class should talk about questions of genuine interest to the students; but *they* had no questions. Insisted that it was the job of the teacher to find the questions to ask." Easier said than done; they certainly helped me get practice.

January 28

Finished Chapter 28. We spent a little more time on minds and invention (still no interest in culture!). To invent, we have to be able to *think* about new ways of doing things; that seemed to the class to be something that people's minds can do and animals' can't.

So is it a difference of degree or kind? Stuck our toes back into that issue — hard stuff! Several people remembered the examples of the differences in height being differences of degree, where the difference between height and weight is kind. But that still doesn't get us anywhere in comparing light red and dark red.

Fortunately, what was found most interesting today in this area was how differences of degree relate to turnaround sentences. We spent most of the class generating sentences that you can and cannot turn around, and sentences that you can't be sure about. If someone is really your friend, does that mean that you must be a friend of him or her. No one seemed to feel that friendship demanded reciprocity; also true of feelings of various kinds.

We tried to find what sentences that could *not* be turned around had in common; all the examples were of comparatives, so it wasn't hard for Kim to see (and others to agree) that they all ended in -er. ("Hey, we've wandered into

grammar.") Ended with a hint toward syllogisms (noticed from the text: Fran is taller that Laura and Laura is taller than Jill).

February 4

Read Chapter 8, through page 37, line 27; end of individual thoughts. The class brought out some of the different ways of thinking, by contrasts, but didn't refer much to the examples given in *Harry*. Wishing vs. hoping: which has more to do with what's possible? Imagining/wondering: can you 'imagine at' like you 'wonder at'?

The students most wanted to discuss individual thoughts: the rat; blue being a perfect color for the sky (decided that the sky *wasn't* really blue, anyway). The largest block of time was devoted to Randy's assumption that once he had bought a lottery ticket, he would win and could then buy a Ferrari. Generally agreed to be an unreasonable assumption, but a sensible desire.

Lunchtime. I sit with Eugenio, pulling out the lunch brought from home. We are at a table with the boys from my fourth grade class; the girls are at the next table. Delphine approaches, and proffers an apple (NYC school-lunch apples always look as though they've seen active duty elsewhere). I thank her, and joke with Eugenio about my first apple — Should I bronze it? I notice that she is talking to others at her table. She brings another apple, then another. Rhonda offers hers. At the sixth apple, I ask, laughing, "Delphine, what do you expect me to do with all these? Make applesauce?" She smiles and ducks her head. I thank her again. I eat the apples all week.

February 11

John taught the class; I sat to the side and listened. The kids were surprised to see that when I had a question, I raised my hand and waited; they were even more amazed that John didn't call on me immediately.

Re-read the beginning of Chapter 8. John wrote on the board: "recalling, wondering, figuring something out, imagining, deciding, worrying," and asked them to find examples in the thoughts of the characters in *Harry*. Deciding was different from figuring something out; Timmy Samuels didn't have to figure out going to the bathroom, he only had to decide. What is Dale doing — worrying, wondering, or figuring about the football that his grandfather promised to buy him? They worked patiently at bringing out distinctions. Kim said that you have to worry *about* something, and that's not true of wondering. Someone brought up the idea that imagining could cause worry.

From now on, John will be teaching on Mondays, while I continue to teach on Fridays. Marcia is paired with Eugenio.

February 14

John's day; read up to page 40, line 18. "The class has little idea of the content of this chapter."

February 18

Finished Chapter 8. The rock-throwing incident returns! Not too much interest in it this time, though; we spent almost the entire class working on syllogisms. Lots of suggestions from Shaneek, Kim, Hector and Michael. We worked on the exercises and made up our own syllogisms. The nonsense syllogisms seemed to bring a real breakthrough; it kept anyone from questioning the truth of either of the premises ('assuming' is a perennial problem; maybe the fifth graders are right, and 'assume' means 'make an ass out of you and me').

Some days, things just go right. The third graders are discussing the right and wrong way to argue. What, I ask, is a *good* argument? They agree it is: talking nice (don't yell; say nice things); be serious; listen to others; give good reasons. Good questioning is: curious; serious; trying to find out; conversation; no yelling. "But that's what *this* class is supposed to be like!" They are very sure of what *ought* to be; what would it be like to see them sometime other than the last class (on a Friday)?

February 25

Read Chapter 9. *Very* slow reading. We pulled out quite a few ideas, but only talked about a few. The flag: what does it represent? Is saluting a kind of worship? That was thought to be silly; but no one was very clear on how showing respect to a flag shows respect to a country. It is not a very meaningful symbol for them, and there was puzzlement as to what all the fuss was about.

A rather more lively discussion on whether disagreement was a sign of disrespect. Liking, respect, authority — how do they fit together? Hector was a leader today; very clear that disagreement and disrespect are two different things, but at the same time you still have to be very careful about how you disagree. The act is easily misinterpreted, especially by adults.

We talked a little bit about religion, mentioning freedom of religion (the students knew of individuals who, for religious reasons, did not salute the flag). What does freedom of religion have to do with being free to think for yourself? Religion, according to Ron and Kim, comes from your parents. So it's not the same as thinking for yourself. Unresolved last question: when should kids start thinking for themselves?

February 28

John's day. They talked about religion; he suggested that I have them discuss belief; why people believe in God. I wouldn't *initiate* a discussion on that if I were being paid for it.

March 4

Read Chapter 10, pages 48 to 50, line 25. They brought up all the reasons except Bill's appeal to fear. Short class; all we had a chance to talk about was "rules are rules" and "rules are made to be broken."

Intense interest in rules, laws and our relation to them. What's the difference between a rule and a law? Are laws made to be broken? (Yes, if it's an emergency, several students insisted).

March 21

John's class. Read to page 55, line 14. Topics: fair/unfair; death.

March 25

Read from page 55, line 15 to 57, line 23. We started by talking about "you can't tell a book by its cover"; frustratingly little was said, though. Wasn't thought to have anything to do with mirrors lying, or even (who brought this up?) with minorities. Can judging a book by its cover be a kind of stereotyping? I think that sometimes these expressions are picked out as 'worth talking about' just because they sound familiar.

Rather more interest (and success) in talking about shame vs. embarrassment. Lisa says that they all feel ashamed—does that mean that they're all embarrassed? A good deal of cooperative effort went into trying to differentiate the two. Is one worse than the other? Does one, and not the other, demand that others be present? The only thing that we all could agree on was that embarrassment seems to be more closely connected to laughter; we could think of shameful things that didn't make anyone want to laugh, but the examples of embarrassment kept provoking laughter (though not necessarily from the embarrassee). There seemed to be a tendency (in my terms, not theirs) to be shamed by embarrassment, which is part of the reason why the two were so hard to pull apart. Maybe if I thought of myself as dealing with a Homeric shame-culture, some of the interactions here would be less mysterious.

From shame, we started talking about conscience, and Dale's refusing to stand during the salute for reasons of conscience. I spent the last minutes of class trying to explain the difference between 'conscience' and 'conscious'; 'consciousness,' 'unconscious,' and 'conscientious' (for good measure). It seemed to be ear training, as much as clarification of concepts. Only 'conscientious' was unfamiliar. We started to talk about where your consciousness goes when you're unconscious. Kim may have a point, that you lose your conscience as well; only it's hard to be sure that she's thinking of a word with an extension different from 'conscious.'

In April and May, John and I taught together, concentrating on the grades with which we felt most comfortable while continuing to switch off. It made a tremendous difference to have someone in the room who knew what was *supposed* to be going on, even when it was not happening. Also, whoever was sitting among the students could provide a model of listening and responding; it seemed to work. It brought home to the students that in an important sense, we inquire *together*.

April 8

Read page 57, line 24 to page 60, line 17.

The entire class was spent on contradiction: Ron, Troy and Shaneek really seemed to begin to see what we were talking about. We worked on the exercise on page 307; very good participation ("No coins are made of wood" seemed to be a pivotal sentence, probably because no one *wanted* to say "*All* coins are made of wood"; some had heard about wooden nickels). Hammering at the idea that a contradiction isn't the opposite, but the least work that you can do to make the statement untrue. Several students laughed at the idea of working too hard. ("Are you going to check every single sleigh to contradict 'All sleighs are pulled by reindeer' when all you *have* to do is find one?")

We tried to go to more examples on p. 309 (Kim kept saying, "Read us some more questions from the book!"), but Shaneek repeatedly brought up more questions. If "No p are q" isn't the contradiction of "All p are q," then what is it? Also, she wanted to know if "Some p are q" and "Some p are not q" don't say just about the same thing. I got some help from Michael in talking with her about it, but most of the class wasn't interested. I think she'd happily do logic all day.

A noisy class, but good; it was frustrating to stop when we seemed so close to nailing down the idea of contradiction. Dr. Moody was sitting in, and thought that the class lacked closure.

April 12

Aaugh! Reread (mistake!) and went over contradiction: *regression*. How could they be so determinedly confused when the last class was so encouraging? Real problems with assuming things to be true; the 'Martian broadcast' exercise was a disaster. Everyone kept insisting that Martians are green . . . ("But what can you tell me *from the statements on the board*?")

Arguing about the reading was a bad way to start off. One of the problems is that if everyone who wants to read reads enough to satisfy themselves on one day, then we have to go over some of the same material the next time. From now on, we'll try overlapping so at least some of the reading is new. The reasonable places to break do not always come at convenient times.

Next time, I'll have to try to get somewhere with assuming. Too bad it's not Halloween.

We may think that we come into New York; but to the kids, Harlem is its own city, not 'the' city. Several times I've heard one ask another, "You goin into New York tonight?" It could be dismissed as an intriguing but meaningless figure of speech (e.g., does a suburbanite go uptown or go downtown when the town is surrounded by the suburb?). Of course they know where they are; they know better than we ever will. For us, the expression is a salutary shock.

April 15

We started with a *Pixie* reasoning exercise, p. 381 in the manual; unlike the 'Martian broadcast,' they did quite well,

especially when the key to an answer could be found in the passage (e.g., that Harry couldn't have forgotten to wash after he got up, because it says that he was *late* getting washed). The hard part came in weighing opposing arguments, both of which have some plausibility. For example, there is some evidence that "Harry likes his dog, King"; but could he have petted the dog for reasons other than affection? When Marcia gave a forceful argument on one side, all were convinced; when she then argued the other side, the former position was abandoned. Need more work here.

Going back to Harry, we read page 60, line 18 to page 62, line 17. No interest in gift-giving, or in Dale's departure; the points raised were: Why did the car run the stop sign? "It only takes one." Why doesn't Luther want his mother fussing over him?

We talked only about the last. Possibly, Ron suggested, he was ashamed. Maybe he felt he was too old for that kind of attention. Possibly, he was embarrassed because his shirt was off. But Hector pointed out that you're never too old for your mother to take care of you; and who would want to disagree with that?

April 22

Read pages 62 to 63; finished Chapter 13. We started talking about running stop signs / red lights and "it only takes one." Everyone was familiar with cars that run red lights; a couple of students related their close calls. But what relation does "it only takes one" have to "rules are made to be broken," or "that's the exception that proves the rule"? They already had a good handle on contradicting all-statements ("it only takes one"), and seemed to see quite clearly that something else was going on here. Luther *thought* he had a universal, "All cars are vehicles that stop at stop signs (or red lights)"; that can be contradicted by one instance. But what he really had was a rule along the lines of "All cars are vehicles that ought to stop"; and they all knew that Luther shouldn't have expected that 'ought' to hold much weight.

We spent a lot of time discussing why Bill threw the rock, and why Harry didn't want to fight. Talk centered around who was more afraid of what, either afraid of the other boy or of unpleasant consequences from the adult world (e.g., Harry's mother might hit him if he fought). Again, more speculation about reasonable possibilities than inference from the text. We reviewed a bit that had been suggested earlier (end of Chapter 8).

I asked if inviting someone to your house would indicate real friendship, or the desire to establish friendship. Mary (a rare comment!) suggested that Harry just wanted to get Bill on his own ground; Michael suggested that he might have a big brother who could take care of Bill.

They were full of suggestions and illustrations of how one could tell (without Bill saying anything) that Bill wasn't really interested in fighting: facial expression, body language. They are very keen observers of each other and their teachers; I was relieved that no one illustrated how to interpret *my* unspoken thoughts. But no one was very clear on how that kind of judgment could be *sure*. They find it hard to trace a connection between their assurance and any state of affairs — whatever they say, they are sure of it.

The children are intrigued by our relations with one another. One asked, in the fall, if Eugenio and I are married, since we looked alike; he told them that he was my father. We stuck to the story all year, and though they didn't believe it, they could not quite disbelieve it. Months later, at lunch someone would come up and demand, "He your father?" I'd say, "That's what he said, isn't it? What do *you* think?" and the questioner would go away ill-satisfied.

The arrival of John and Marcia complicated matters immensely. Because we taught together, the children were sure that John and I lived together. "In school together" was a sufficient but not convincing explanation. They were always amazed to be reminded that we came in from New Jersey, and the infrequency of our appearance made our lives seem extraordinarily mysterious. They knew that their world was strange to us, as well; but that was our problem.

April 29

Read pages 64 to 66, line 6. A good class, despite the jackhammer outside the open window (why is it that noise can produce wildness in the class, just as wildness can produce noise?) We spent much time talking about the details of Harry's previous sleepover — the cat, bleeding on the rug, the Frankenstein doll. Every incident was very distinct; when asked why a particular event was interesting or important ("What exactly do you want to say about that?"), they seemed most interested in imagining the details. But then gradually a few started saying, "And then this happened." "He wouldn't have cut his foot if Randy hadn't fallen on his glasses." "Harry probably started hitting Randy with the pillows because he was mad about the Frankenstein breaking." "He must have broken it, because models don't just fall apart."

They made me see the first paragraph of Chapter 13 as a long causal chain; it had never really seemed that important to me before. I don't think, though, that anyone else was amused by Mr. Stottlemeier's comment, "You mean, the cat didn't throw up *too*?" followed by the cat's throwing up on the rug, once everything was quiet. We talked about the expectations behind his remark; but I suppose it was an unfamiliar kind of sarcasm.

We talked about the possible beginnings of the universe. Hector was full of information about the big-bang theory; he also offered a Biblical interpretation. Several students agreed with him on the Bible, but had a hard time seeing anything else as *possible*. Hector, Michael and Kim all tended to switch the grounds of discussion to the beginnings of people; I tried to steer away from the question of evolution vs. creation. Perhaps I should have let it go on; but they acceded when I said, "We haven't even gotten a clear idea yet of what you think about the beginning of everything, the universe, and I think we should get a better hold on that first."

Kim felt slighted because the class ended before she had a chance to get in the last words; I promised that she could be first to give reasons for the argument that the universe *has* to have a beginning. In the few minutes that the class spent getting back into their usual seats, their teacher talked to me about talking around the Bible. He felt it was quite delicate and difficult an issue.

May 3

Read page 65, line 12 to 66, line 6.

We talked more about the beginning of the universe. The focus was on what it could possibly be like before the beginning of the universe, and whether the universe could possibly come to end. And if it could come to an end, did that make it seem more likely that it somehow had a beginning?

Some talk about the possible causes of the universe, but there was general agreement that God was the cause.

Ron had suggested that we talk about the tea kettle. That was quickly connected back to the discussion of the universe. *Does* everything have a cause, as Luther claims? In that case, it seems that the universe would have to have a cause. But what about this business with parts and wholes? We went through some of the discussion and exercise on part-whole confusion. Not much trouble with that, but not much interest, either.

The class ended by going back to the idea of cause. I held my hand out and wiggled my fingers, and asked what was causing it. "You're just shaky," Michael suggested; but I held my hand steady, and they agreed that that wasn't it. "Nerves," someone suggested, "and muscles," came another suggestion. Everyone agreed that it was some message from my brain that went down to my fingers to make them wiggle. "But what if I said that my fingers are wiggling because I want to make a point to the class? Isn't that a very different idea of cause?" At that, most of the class looked thoughtful, and rather pleasantly surprised. "Hey, yeah! But which were we talking about just now?" Unfortunately, at that point we had to stop; I could only say that that was for them to decide.

May 6

Read page 65, line 22 to 68, line 19. Most of the class was spent discussing the four possibilities, which brought out a good deal of participation. Shaneek became especially interested, but was quite good-natured about giving other students a chance to fill in some of the possibilities. They came up with some possibilities; e.g., the combinations of eating chalk and eating crayons. They had no trouble seeing them all as possible (and in fact reported that the principal had eaten chalk in front of them; I was afraid to ask why). But no one was quite sure *why* we were talking about this business of 'the four possibilities'; when we went back to look at the book and Tony's explanation of the four ways to combine "the world had a beginning" and "the world was created by God," only a few could accept them all as possible. The class isn't at all uncomfortable with discussions about God, but I feel like I'm walking on eggshells.

Kim insisted that we talk about the tea kettle.

Several students were interested in the dream, though we didn't have time to talk about it.

It is finally starting to warm up; on sunny days I sometimes stroll outside at recess, on the girls' side of the blacktop playground. I talk a bit to some of the kids, but mostly bask before the day's last two classes. Once, Marcia and I were talked into jumping double-dutch. Instead of rope, the girls were turning heavy electrical cable; mistakes were very painful. I was overly fearful of being smacked on the head. We laughed at ourselves, and they (with much justification) laughed at us; in the end, we settled on turning (difficult enough, given the 8" difference in our heights), while everyone else had a chance to jump. Most of them are good, but some are dazzling. Now I jump at night, practicing, hoping that the downstairs neighbors don't hear me through the rug.

May 10

Finally, we finished Chapter 13; re-read from page 67, line 14. The beginning of the class was largely tying up loose ends, which never seems to work very well. I should know enough to let subjects drop unless the kids bring them up. Actually, they *did* bring them up, but lost interest after stating them.

A little more on the four possibilities; I used as examples "possible/believable" and "imaginable/possible." We had never talked about the relationship between imagining and reality, when it came up in Chapter 11; I thought that it was both interesting and important. No trouble in finding the four (good participation); I asked for an example of each. The problem came with 'possible and unimaginable.' I asked if they could really imagine being dead, and no one seemed to have any trouble doing that. So I said that they had better imaginations than I, and we went on.

Kim insisted that we talk more about the tea kettle. I said, "Okay. Why does it come up in all the chapters?" Ron said, "Because everything has a cause." We then traced it back. What made the kettle whistle? The steam. What made the steam? The gas on the stove. What made the gas on the stove? Someone turned it on. Why? Because they wanted some tea. Why? They were thirsty and hot. Why? Because of the weather. Why is there weather? The air moves around. What makes the air move around? The sun. What made the sun? By then, everybody was excited. We'd gotten right back to where we'd been for the last couple of classes, wondering if everything has to have a beginning, and if you could assume that it had to have a beginning if you could never know what that was.

Arthur had wanted to talk about the dream, but there wasn't much to say about it. No one had any idea what was going on (except for the inn's sign, "The Four Possibilities"). I asked them if they'd ever dreamt that they were asleep, woken up in the dream, and then *really* woken up. Many of them had. So I asked how they could tell that they were

awake right now (this was getting interesting). Kim said, "You wouldn't dream about us." I said, "Sure, I do it all the time." Hector said that there was too much in it, and it all fit together too well. At that point we had to leave for the third grade class, but as students moved back to their seats they clustered about us and their teacher, still discussing how dreams are different from the 'real world.'

May 13

I went to a job interview; John led the class. They read the beginning of Chapter 14, and talked more about the four possibilities; discussed Suki's poem about gardeners.

May 17

We read pages 71 to 73, line 7. The class was very restive; Dr. Moody suggested that it was because their teacher had been absent the day before. The first comments were simply reactions to bits of the text; several students were amused by the unfamiliar word "philodendron," and they were interested in the mechanics of pinning butterflies. "You mean they pin them *alive*?" "Not for long."

We kicked around the idea of friendship, and whether or not Suki and Anne were friends. They thought that the girls were, but they reviewed friendship as being very volatile. Sometimes one liked one's friends, at other times one fought. They had a hard time seeing in what way Anne was very cruel, but very readily picked up on the idea of persons being treated like things. The class thought that this was especially common between siblings, and at school. Several suggestions on how to *avoid* dehumanizing persons: listen to what the other has to say; don't order anyone around without asking what they think and want.

I asked about treating things as people. Do things have feelings? Kim insisted her dolls have feelings. What about a piece of paper with a sentence written on it ("I love my cat")? Kim thought that the paper had feelings, and that it was happy when someone wrote on it. Hector and Michael reacted rather derisively; she insisted that everything had feelings, and therefore was alive. Even a chair? Conrad said no, but mentioned that *trees* are living things. Kim said yes.

I asked her to hold on for a minute, and let the people who thought that some things weren't alive give their reasons. I asked Michael again about the paper; I gave it to him to read and asked if he could think about what it said. How did the thought get from my head to his if the paper wasn't alive? "It stored it, like money." I asked, "So a book is like a bank that stores thoughts?" "Yes." Several heads nodded.

May 20

We read pages 73, line 9 to 75, line 19.

I was surprised at how little interest the class showed in this passage. A few comments about the movie, about savages, and about Tony's being afraid to fail. Nothing about college, or lawyers, or the idea of helping one's people.

I worked (roughly) from the exercise on p. 381, setting differences between two imaginary societies and asking which was more backward. There was a general feeling that the more like our society it was, the less backward. Initially, several students argued that a society that had some very rich people and some very poor was more advanced than one in which all had an equal, but lesser, amount; someone asked if it wasn't *better* if no one starved. As this seemed reasonable, the students began to wonder if 'better' was the same as 'more advanced.'

We got back to living and dead things again. I said something like, "What are the possibilities here?" and Yvette said, "Not *those* again!" Not the four possibilities, I assured them. We quickly got clear the idea that 'dead' implies 'was once alive,' and there was a variety of things that they wanted to place in a third category, 'never alive' (e.g., the blackboard, stone, metal, air). Not too much discussion about marginal cases; for example, no one argued when Hector said that hair is alive in your head but not at the ends. 'Thoughts' were put under '?'; Michael thought that sometimes they acted like they were alive, because they seemed to put themselves together as if they had a life of their own. I asked about music, and everyone seemed to think it was 'never alive.' I asked how something not alive could make you do things like dance and have feelings. "That doesn't matter," Shaneek said. "So something can express feelings and not be alive?" "Sure!" she answered. "It can be not alive and express feelings, be alive and not express feelings, be alive and express feelings—" she put her hand over her mouth and started to laugh. "*You* said it!" I shook my finger at her. "I didn't bring up the four possibilities, you did!"

May 24

A perfectly dreadful class. There was a substitute; we were late getting started. The class was reluctant to split in half for philosophy, as we had been doing all year. One girl said she didn't want to go to Eugenio, that she was tired of him. "But he'll miss you," I said. "I won't miss him," was the answer. Eventually, she departed.

We read from page 74, line 25 to the end of 77; instead of asking for volunteers, I had the reading go around the room (with the option to pass; only Winston did). But because her position made Kim second instead of first, she threw her book to the floor and sulked for the remainder of the class. Only in the last 10 minutes did she try to join in again (though rather unsuccessfully; as Shaneek pointed out, "If you'd been paying attention before, you'd know what was going on.").

Shaneek, who loves the logic, was for large portions of the class the only one paying attention as we worked through correct and incorrect reasoning patterns. At one point she complained because I held her off while asking for other comments. "You're always bugging me to participate, and now you won't let me." I assured her that I *did* want her to participate, but also wanted others to try the problems. "Do

you want to have a private tutorial?" "Yeah!" she said, smiling broadly. Ruth offered a few comments and Eric (unusually) answered a few times, correctly. By the end of the period, Shaneek gave a perfectly lucid explanation of why the man on the bus was reasoning badly about radicals and lawyers. Finally, I wrote an example using nonsense words; that always seems to get everyone's attention (and criticism: "That doesn't mean anything!"). I said that they shouldn't worry about the meaning, that I knew it; but what could you tell from the way it was written? Shaneek was very clear that it wasn't true, because it was just like the example in the book about minnows and sharks. *She* enjoyed the class hugely.

May 27

The last class. I began disappointed, because Shaneek was absent; she had promised that she would read today. She had been teasing me all year; it was a game. I'd see her in the hall and ask, "Are you going to read today," or she would volunteer, "I'm going to read today!" but always change her mind when she got to class. She had read a bit on Tuesday; this time I think she really was going to do it (and Lucy will someday hold the football for Charlie Brown . . .). The most interesting thing was that she had initially said, "I'll read if I can read first," to which I agreed. Then, a few minutes later, I said as I was leaving, "So you'll read first next time?!" She replied, "I'll read second. Let Kim read first." It was very diplomatic, but said without any fuss or emphasis.

We read all of Chapter 15. There was a good deal of interest in smoking; everyone was sure that it was bad and you should not do it. On the other hand, they were quite clear that it isn't easy not to do something that everyone else is doing. "That doesn't make it right," Michael said. We talked about habits, and it was much easier to come up with bad habits ("like sucking my thumb," said Yvette; or fighting) than good habits (saying 'please' and 'thank you'). 'Habit' was defined as "something you do without thinking about it."

They were intrigued by 'the rock you could see through,' though I'm not sure there was a great deal of belief in its existence. 'Transparent' was a vocabulary problem; the discussion in the book lost some of its force because they didn't already know that it had the same meaning as 'able to be seen through.' I used instead 'dormitive,' telling them that it meant 'able to cause sleepiness.' They seemed suspicious of that, too; I insisted that it was a real word, related to others having to do with sleep (dormant, dormitory), and asked, "Would I lie to you?" "What about those words last time!" someone shouted back. "Now, I *admitted* those were nonsense . . ." But they let me get on. They saw immediately that saying that sleeping pills work because of their dormitive quality doesn't really tell you anything. There was no problem with the other examples in the chapter (hurricane, racist). We finished by doing a few of the sentences from an exercise on explanation and description.

It was not easy to leave. Some of the fourth graders were angry that we would not be back next week, next fall; some of the sixth graders said, "You hafta go? You can stay. You hafta go?" And we were gone.

I cannot help but miss them.

Alice Falk