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Writing for Five-Year-Olds

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M. Brown Writing for Five Year Olds

Very interesting. Though only suggestive in the discussion of some major problems raised.

Could be organized more clearly around :

Writing for Five Year Olds

as a sub-problem of all writing,- creation,- literature

How To Adapt to Writing for Five Year Olds

What are they like?

What can stories do for them?

What are they interested in?

Leads from the children

What do they do with their own creative writing?

What can you get and not get from trying out stories on the children themselves?

B. Bibler
Jan. 1939

Writing for Five-Year-Olds

Five year old is five and all else he has been before five.

Keen. Aware. Power of words. Sensitive enough to be
imaginative and sympathetic in what is not his own.

What is five-year-old's reality and concern?

Good account of 5 yr old feelings, sensitivities, concerns

Delight in patterns

Children's literature is a literature of the speaking voice. Physical. Flowing.

Must have real love and familiarity of things which concern 5 yr olds -
kittens, steam engines, - to write for them.

Five year old may use objects symbolically but must be real anyway, real
kittens and steam engines, etc. Must be real to heighten experience

(Good point)

What are important aspects of reality to a five-year-old? Play?

Laugh? Sad? Want to know?

Why do they ask for certain stories again & again? Span of attention?
Word meanings?

Active quality of listening. Posture. Expressions. Reactions. Reactions.
What stories fail. What stories take. (good)

Good child's story. Must be good literature. Must know
what children understand and want.

heads from children's own stories

"gets a rhythm going in his and says words to it". Sometimes words just found out.

Must note close connection between rhythm and content

Rhyme, sound important. Five year olds sensitive to these elements of any language.

Examples of children's poems

Rhythmic, partially sustained forms, imagery, abstract, accurate significant details.

To get heads from children - must take stories as given - not influence their form or content, in any way - not teach.

hears: 5 yr old grandiosity; ~~sign~~ similes;

valuable, also to let children tell a story, ^(known) back if they want to.

Children recall pictures in story book; mix stories

Writing for children can clarify needs.

Clear up confusions; bring out child's questions

Stimulate curiosity and appetites; explain relationships

Explanations must be concrete. Have significant details

More interested in how things happen than why.

Dwell on adventure of every day

Debatable question as to how ^{for} emotions can be released or gratified by stories.

Fear getting lost - desirable to realize ^{this} fear vicariously - especially if emotion is resolved in a feeling of security.

Child cannot always get real experience - counting, organizing, poor, etc.

Content. Lists subject matter proposed for 5 grades in key by groups of teachers & writes subjects of drawings made in note book, around which to focus stories.

Trying out stories on children is revealing ^{of} ^{the} ^{children's} ^{own} ^{ways} ^{of} ^{finding} ^{out} ^{about} ^a ^{children's} ^{story}.

Trick. No comment. Response comes out weeks later. Go blank. It strikes may like story without any merit to admit.

One group objected to placing children in story, artificially. Sense when stories are written down to them - lack of inevitability.

Trick to check for logical accuracy. Easier to see these things in one's own stories while reading them aloud to the children.

Child's distortion - good little bad little plenguin.

Enjoy soap-sudsing, flattery (policeman knows boy), like catch phrases and dialogue. Play with phrases.

heads from children cannot be complete criticism. Story may be amusing and inadequate (not defined or explained)

Forms: I like - I like -

Introduce. Between a story & a poem. Dwellings are there in words

Stories must originate from experience that is directly significant to author.

*Some excellent writing
and too personal
On the whole this is fine analysis
but reads*

WRITING FOR FIVE-YEAR-OLDS

greater clarity in organization for the general reader

When a child reaches the age of five he is the sum total of all his younger experiences and discoveries in a brand new world. He carries with him the two-year-old's delight in sheer sound and pounding rhythms and the glamor of the two-year-old's own small self; the three-year-old's humor and love of pattern, and his pleasure in the familiar sights of his own world; the four-year-old's further joining of sound and pattern with rhythm and content, and four-year-old's first playful flights into the humor of the incongruous things that he just knows enough to know are not true; and finally the five-year-old's own keen humor and penetrating observation of the world around him, the careful watching of his own eyes and ears, the keenness of his nose and the sensitiveness of his touch, and the fine and vivid imagery of his own language. Here, perhaps, is the stage of rhyme and reason. It is certainly true that a five-year-old has a keenness and awareness that will probably be displaced or blunted later. For the first time, he has the power of words, to use them and to hear them, to describe the things that his five-year-old senses perceive. He has his feet firmly enough on the ground now to go bouncing off on the most hilarious flights of imagination and to sympathize with and be curious about situations not his own.

Here then is a challenging age to write for.

In any writing, however, whether it be metaphysics or poetry or political economy or children's stories, there is one common touchstone around which the value of the writing revolves, there is one final determiner or common denominator that gives the writing truth

or falseness, and that is the reality in which the writing is concerned.

What, then, is a five-year-old child's reality and concern? As adults we have forgotten, so we return to the child himself for our leads and to what is left in us that is five-year-old, that in contact with children revives and responds to their interests and feelings. Like a five-year-old we feel superior when Epaminondas gets mixed up and puts butter in his hat instead of in the cold stream, because we are just old enough to be a little smarter. We are excited over the facts and principles of how workmen build the house. We are sad when the little puppy dog gets lost, we laugh when the butterfly stamps his foot, we breathe more deeply and relax when the little puppy dog's mother finds him and carries him by the scruff of his neck to his warm home. We curl up inside when kittens purr, and we laugh with cruel glee when the mother bird pecks the same kitten right on the nose. We feel big and strong like a steam shovel, we feel timid and helpless as a baby squirrel, we feel heroic as the captain of the Queen Mary. We delight in the sound play of words in James James Morrison Morrison Wetherby George Dupree, in the exclamation points in the form of a story like JUNKET IS NICE ("Wrong," said the old man, and he went on eating his junket. Two more paragraphs and then again, "Wrong," said the old man, and he went on eating his junket.)

And above all we delight in the pattern and rounded timing of the story that is not too long or too short, the story that is begun and ended with the precision of a poem--inevitable in its own length, in the melodious rhythms of the spoken word. For children's literature is a literature of the speaking voice, like the Bible. It is a distinct

form of prose writing, more rhymthical in its pounding, flowing lines than the words that are written for the eye.

If we are writing for these delights and interests of five-year-olds we must remember them and experience them in our stories. And another thing. No matter how important we know little kittens and steam engines to be to a five-year-old, noone can ever write about them without a real love for them and familiarity with them in some form-- actual or remembered.

To the five-year-old the little steam engine "who thought he could" may be a real steam engine or he may be the five-year-old listener himself; and those four little kittens who lost their mittens may be four bad little children. But they must in some suggestive way be real steam engines or kittens too. A real animal will forever touch a child's sympathy and imagination more quickly than will a false likeness of that same animal. And here both in illustration and in writing comes the advantage of the heightening quality of sincere art. "No recall of experience is valuable unless that recall has the quality to heighten the experience." (L.S.M.)

But what are the important aspects of reality to a five-year-old? What do they play when they are alone? What do they laugh at? What makes them sad? And what do they want to know? These are the things to find out. These and any number of others are the leads to get from five-year-olds themselves.

Watch them as they listen day after day to different stories. Why do they ask for certain stories again and again? How long is the usual span of attention that they give to a story before they start interrupting with irrelevancies and shifting in their seats? What

questions do they ask about the stories? What words do they want to know the meaning of, and what words do they accept that they couldn't possibly know the meaning of, and why do they accept these words--is the sound of them enough to convey a meaning, or is the child merely not listening at that point of the story.

But above all the thing to watch is the quality of listening that they give to a story. Watch the very physical postures they take and the expressions on their faces, the tenseness in them or the relaxation or the restlessness. These are the signs that tell you more about a story than what a child can tell you in words. Sometimes they are well able to tell you what they think of a story, but more often they are not prone to the more detached processes of criticism. Either they give themselves up to the story or they don't. It is not for them to say why. Sometimes the reason ^{for inattention} is no more than that the story is read at the wrong time. They are hungry, or too excited over something to submit to the world of the story. Sometimes the story does not create a real world of its own. The story teller has failed. Sometimes the story is too obvious for them, too young. It has not enough to satisfy their healthy appetites. Or it is too old and involves ways of thinking about things that they are not ready for yet. And then there is forever the common-sense element in the reading of any story, which is suitability at the time it is read. On the first day of snow in the winter, it is a story about snow that the children want and not a story about the beach. When they are excited they want a strong story in which to resolve their excitement, providing the story resolves its own excitement through that process which in drama we call

or listening
merely to the sound?

catharsis. A quieter story, if it is strong enough, will do the same thing, perhaps. This is a question no one knows much about. Perhaps sometime someone will find a way to find out.

Of course children will listen to almost anything. They are being read to--exciting event in itself. The human voice pays them attention. But how differently they listen when the story itself takes possession. Between these two ways of listening lies all the difference between a pleasant buzz of words and a true experience. For the adult, too, there is a difference in the reading. For a good story usually has some pleasure for any age, and certainly the adult's own enjoyment of the story creeps into his reading of it and gives a definite heightening and flavor. And why should not a child's story submit to the same standards of good honest writing as any real literature? But in the case of children's literature, these standards must be born of the knowledge both of what children understand and want at different ages and what is good writing. But most of all this knowledge will be born of a deep sympathy and amusement for the things that children love: bugs and germs and policemen and the newest machines in the streamlined world, and always and forever to the deeper gamut of emotions to which all people on the earth are subject whatever age.

There is another way to get leads from the five-year-olds, and that is through their own stories. Sometimes the five-year-old will include in his play the desire not merely to play with words with his mouth and with his enjoyment of them through his ears, but the desire to create something with words, the desire to write a story himself. He cannot write so the adult writes it down. Sometimes he calls it a

song, sometimes a story. Sometimes he calls it a word song. He gets a rhythm going in him and says words to it. Sometimes these words combine with the rhythm in the way of true poetry.

Click Clack
 Goes the big streamlined train
 It never stops
 Clickety Clack
 Such a racket
 Clickety Clack
 Clickety Clack Clacket

Sometimes the words just come pounding and pouncing out. Perhaps even the mature writer has this dual experience.

When the ocean is blue
 And when ships go sailing on it
 The waves go fast or slow or high
 And the whistle is up very high
 And the water goes dashing
 And the fishes go swimming
 And the sharks have the pointiest nose
 And up and down
 And down and round
 And down
 And down came the whistles of the sea
 And when it came down
 And up and down
 When the waves go dashing by
 When to the waves so quick and down they go and
 (sheer pounding rhythm at this point, a lot of
 it in nonsense syllables)

The flamingos were best,
 They run to the rest (he explained--to the rest of the
 flamingo family)
 So when they get sleepy they lie on a boat
 And come to the waves and the boat
 And the boat tips over and lies on the sea and down
 and down
 And when it comes down it goes to the ground and up
 goes the smoke of the chimney.

of their own making?
 In writing for five-year-olds what is there to understand from these poems? The "train word song", as the five-year-old boy called it as he sang it out sitting on his bed before nap time, is about a train. But perhaps the onomatopoeic rhythm of the words tells us more about the rhythm of the train than the content of the song although

in this case they both say the same thing in a different way. In writing for children, this is the challenge of one craftsman to another. This close connection between rhythm and content is the same thing, perhaps, that makes THE LITTLE ENGINE WHO TRIED such a popular story with a child--the little engine climbing the hill who "thought he could, he thought he could, he thought he could," all in train rhythm.

In Philip's song about the ocean he has made a greater attempt towards poetry and succeeded more in the direction of poetry and less in the realization of a poem. Such lines as "And down came the whistles of the sea," such simple images as

"When the ocean is blue,
And when ships go sailing on it"

and

"And the water goes dashing
And the fishes go swimming
And the sharks have the pointiest nose."

There is enough rhythm of rough water in this song to get seasick on. There was enough rhythm to send the little boy into nonsense syllables at one point to get it out. Rhythm is important to him. Images are important, and even the abstract sound of words. That is what is so exciting about writing for fives. Here is an audience sensitive to the sheer elements of the English language. Here is the playful audience of James Joyce and Edith Sitwell and Gertrude Stein, the audience of Virginia Woolf and Swinburne and the King James version of the Bible. Translate their playfulness and serious use of the sheer elements of language into the terms and understandings of a five-year-old and you have as intelligent an audience in rhythm and sound as the

maddest poet's heart could desire. This is the discovery Lewis Carroll made and the anonymous authors of the old nursery rhymes. Hey diddle diddle the cat and the fiddle...A rose is a rose is a rose...

THE BOY WITH THE LITTLE BARE TOES

He ran all down the meadow, that he did,
The boy with the little bare toes.
The flowers they smelled so sweet, so sweet,
And the grass it felt so funny and wet
And the birds sang just like this -- "chereep!"
And the willow trees stood in rows.
"Ho! ho!"
Laughed the boy with the little bare toes.

Now the trees had no insides -- "How funny!"
Laughed the boy with the little bare toes.
And he put in his hand to find some money
Or honey -- yes, that would be best -- oh best!
But what do you think he found, found, found?
Why, six little eggs all round, round, round,
And a mother-bird on the nest,
Oh, yes!
The mother-bird on her nest.

He laughed "Ha, ha!" and he laughed "He, he!"
The boy with the little bare toes.
But the little mother bird got up from her place
And flew right into his face Ho ho!
And pecked him on the nose, Oh, oh!
Yes, pecked him right on the nose.
"Boo hoo!"
Cried the boy with the little bare toes.

William Harvey

In the five-year-olds' own stories one finds this same delight in the rhythm and sounds of the spoken word. And one finds with it such freshness and keen accuracy of observation and such vivid imagery as is not found in literature this side of good poetry.

Here is a story told by a little boy who is a most intelligent person, more so than most people at any age. This child has an older brother of eight who probably is constantly dragging his little brother beyond his five-year-old depths in stories and leaving the little boy in

a general strain of the younger child to keep up. All these things and many others go into any evaluation of a story, Perhaps in this story the elder influence shows only in the finishing flourishes of "The black and white cows, my friends," and "Brown are the coats of the goats." But the observation that keeps springing out about the white hard horns of the goat and the donkey who "spreads his seat and gallops away" and the birds who "spread their wings and fly over the fields" are the observation of little boys' own eyes.

HORSES AND THE BIRDS AND THE COWS

The friendly horse and the friendly cow and the tweet tweet birds. The cows graze nicely in the field, the black and white cows, my friend. And the grass grows high in the fields. There is a grey donkey in the barnyard too--near the barn.

And the grey donkey he just puts his ears down near the fence the wire fence. The donkey folds his feet and lays down.

And then the birds spread their wings and the hawks spread their wings and they fly over the fields.

One little girl and one little boy. The boy's name was Jerry. And the others name was Jack.

Green of trees

Red of apples

And orange of tomatoes

And golden as your hair.

THE FLOWER STORY, THEN A COLOR STORY

The lambs eat grass all day long

Sometimes, but going in their shed of course

all one story from one child?
Comparing

And then brown are the coats of the goats
 Their horns are white and hard too. And sharp.
 They have two of them one on each side.
 Black and white are their eyes.
 And the donkey in the fields
 Just spreads his seat and gallops away to the
 far ends of the field to eat and nibble some grass.
 The brook from the grass
 The grass is wet from the brook
 The rabbits go flippety flippity flop
 Peter Rabbit when are you going to stop.

His idea of writing "The Flower Story; then a color story" was his own
 and a good one, too, (a good lead for the writer of children's stories)
 even though he did not follow the idea up but went on to tell a story of
 lambs and goats and donkeys and green grass, that got nowhere except that
 it dwelled like a painting on the things the little boy loved. And then
 with the artistic flourish of a five year old, he finishes his story
 with

"Flippity flop, flippity flop.

Peter Rabbit when are you going to stop."

What is there to wonder about in this story? It is incomplete.
 It has a form in parts suggested, but not sustained or realized. It
 is not a story a whole group of five-year-olds would like to listen to.
 And yet it has delight in the rhythm of words and sentences.

It has imagery

and fresh observation, and the significant details are accurate.

Here is a fragment from another boy's story that has more form and is much more subjective in the pressures, that push it out of him. This story was dictated so fast that the last part was lost.

PHILIP'S STORY

Once there was a little boy who ran away and the first morning he wanted to run away be.....(too fast)
So he ran far away, far far away climbing up mountains and climbing all over the country till he came to a river. The water was swishing cold. So he put this hand in it. Then he heard a noise squeish-----
It was a fish gobbling up water.

So many noises. Then he saw a bird a crow. All kinds of animals coming to meet him. And all the animals were coming near to see the little boy. And then when he got through all of the country he came to a little house. And a very cross woman stood very cross in the doorway. And then the woman looked so mad. And the cross old lady stood there and she was so cross that she didn't know the little boy wanted to come in. And the next morning she was cross. And the next morning she wasn't..... He saw a cross kettle.....
He heard that roar and a fish came gobbling up. But the fish couldn't and the next morning he never ran away again.

Some help from the recorder might have focused the story, but that was not the purpose of the story nor the little boy's need in telling the story. To get leads from children one has to disappear in silence and listen. Teaching is something else.

But for any writer there is much to learn from this story. "Climbing up mountains and climbing all over the country"--typical five-year-old grandiosity. "Big as the whole world", "Deep as a giant",

"Quiet as electricity rushing about the world", "Quiet as mud". All these are five-year-old similes. Let the grown-up writer for children equal or better them if he can. To come back to this story--"a fish gobbling up water", "And a very cross woman stood very cross in the doorway."

There is another way to see in perspective a story written for children, and that is to let them tell it back to you if they want to. Here is the story of Ferdinand told by a little five-year-old Japanese girl. It is interesting to note in this case how much of the story she told by the pictures in the book.

FERDINAND

"Once upon a time in Spain, before the war was dere, dere was a bull. He had a little spot under the tree where he smelled the flowers. I don't know the next. Den dere were five man who had funny hats on. The veriest big one dey take to the bull fight. He get on a bumble bee by mistake. He wasn't looking where he went. What would you do-- a bumble bee would sting you. So dat's what Ferdinand did. Ferdinand jumped. The five men saw him dey shouted it was just the one for the bull fight. So dey took him to the bull fight in a wagon. Bands--bull fight bands, ladies had flowers in deir hair. The man who stick the bulls to make them mad had ribbons on and the people to make him madder with long sticks. Then Ferdinand came and Ferdinand came but set down and smelled the flowers.

"I forgot something--and the man who wanted to show off, he got so angry so he couldn't show off, so he cried. So dey took Ferdinand back and he sat under the tree and smelled the flowers." (She seemed to be continually recalling the pictures in the book.)

Here is the beginning of THE SHIRE COLT told by a little boy. But he couldn't tell just one story, and the following lines echo several stories.

THE SHIRE COLT

Eric's Story

Juno was a big horse and no one knew that farm as good as Juno. She had ploughed the fields in the Springs. (Eric: "That's nice, isn't it?") She ploughed the gardens, the corns in the Spring. She worked for Penny's Farm. The squirrels jumped up the tree and jumped down and the blue jay made a fuss on the top with the squirrel and the boy didn't know what he was doing because the blue jay jumped in the squirrels kettle of soup that was a fuss pot.

Eric's Song

Oh the shy little horse
Went to town
With a shy little boy on his back
And he jumped all the fences
And he went so far away
He met a black ant
And it was so far away
That the ant said
There is nothing you can play.

(Here Eric goes too fast)

A hundred miles or more
Until you come to shore
(Goes too fast again)

The cowboys jump fiercely in the air with their
great horses hoofs pounding, pounding, pounding,
over the hollow red brick road

(Too fast)

And the grapes fall down on the birds hollow heads
And here's the kind of birds I mean:
Robin red-breasts and green and yellow white heads
And red breast birds with yellow ostrich heads
And white and black feathers--
They're the reepee birds that live far far away
in Lafayette county
And there are red ants and green ants and black ants.

K
But to go on from the aesthetics of writing for chil-
dren and from the leads one might get from their own writings,
there are certain needs that might be to some extent satisfied
by children's stories. There are many needs that might be
satisfied, informational and emotional, through the clarifi-
cation of confusions, either by a clear statement of some-
thing in a story or by the bringing out of the child's ques-
tions, which is the first step towards clarifying them. There
are any number of curiosities and appetites that a story can
stimulate, as well as any number of relationships the infor-
mation in a story can explain, always providing this is done
on the same level of maturity that a child can understand it.
The explanation with fives must be concrete. They love all
the significant details. And they prefer to receive their
information in a good story, such as Tim the Tadpole. It
is the concrete description of How things happen that they
are more interested in rather than in the Why. The Why ^{of} things
that happen comes at an older maturity level. And there are
the child's own imaginings to stimulate and the adventure

not a sentence

of every day to dwell on.

There are emotional needs. How far these can be released or satisfied by stories is a debatable question. But logically this should be no more a debatable question ⁷ for a child than for an adult if you can furnish him with a literature in terms of his own reality. Take the common instance of a small child in a large world. For most children the fear of getting lost is an important emotion, and to realize this fear vicariously may be a desirable experience for them, especially if the emotion is resolved in a feeling of security. Isn't this the same release we get after seeing a good play? On the other hand some say, let children go to the real thing and not to stories for the satisfaction of their needs. But that is not always practical for the child whose mother is sick, or the child who has never seen the country, or the millionaire child who is overprotected by nurses and detectives, or the child whose parents are so poor and so engrossed in the struggle for existence that the child is left to the powers of his own resources to survive. And what is the purpose of literature anyway?

Then there is the big question of content. Here are some of the things that a group of teachers and writers listed as the important things to write about for five-year-olds in New York City.

Tugs, liners, tractors, steam shovels, policemen, engineers and trains, cats, tigers, things to eat, airplanes, workmen, the fireman, the postman, the airpilot, the milkman

all right
Belongs w/b 14

and the milkhorse, anything streamlined, and all the biggest and the smallest things in the world, animals, transportation, sleeping, eating and being taken care of, home patterns, fish, growing things, Easter and Christmas and Halloween, bugs, the seasons, time, and clocks, something that is lost, loneliness, and humor, Punch and Judy, aggression, nonsense that they can recognize, sounds and smells and the touch and taste of things, color, dialogue phrases they can remember or patterns they can remember and play with in stories, speaking in funny voices, running away, a secret, dreams, security, shyness, animal lore, how to do something that a child could do, the appeal of lovable mischief, life, death and ceremony, being good and being bad, wonder, and the sheer joy of living, and their own world that they know with all its colors and sounds, the feel of rough bark, the smell of horses, the little sound the snow makes when it falls, the taste of lemons, and the feeling of the wind on their faces.

Here is a list of pictures that one group of fives painted or drew in a note book and told stories about. This, by the way, is good way to focus a story. The result is quite different from the recorded story where the recorder just records if it is possible to catch the quick flow of their stories without interrupting.

Here are the subjects the city children chose to paint with crayons and words: Christmas tree decoration, house, trees and tulips, three horses in a stall, an engine-- it works every single day--(train), boat- sun and two blue

*larger to
pictures*

clouds, boat, dinosaur, jail, subway track, the coal car, trains, horse and blacksmith, Christmas story--Santa Claus at North Pole, rowboat, house, house, moving truck and house,

Trying stories out on children is ^a most revealing and at the same time tenuous way of finding out something about a children's story.

It is tenuous because a story or more likely a poem can be read to a group of five-year-olds. They are tired from long play outdoors. They listen passively to the story or poem. They make no comment. And what do you know about what that poem or story meant to them? Then two weeks later you find them playing the story on the roof or lines from the poem or story are echoed back to you in one of their own stories that they are telling you. Or you don't ever hear of it again. Another time after reading a poem beginning, "Why did they spank little Joe, little Joe?" I asked, "Well, what do you think of that?" "James James Morrison Morrison, that's what I think of that!" said a little five-year-old boy, and the other children giggled. Did they mean that the rhythm was stronger than the sense of the words and all they heard was the rhythm, did they mean what we mean when we say a thing is just Too Too A.A. Milne, or did they mean that it had a good swing and they liked it? I think in this case it meant the first. This group was a very difficult group of fives to handle, but they were the quickest group I have ever seen to give themselves up to a story completely or to quietly say, "That story stinks," or, "Oh what an icky story, I'm not going to listen." Or just to react so blankly as to out-express any five-year-old invective or expression of boredom they might have uttered. And

*spelt
infinitive*

then again they would like some long-winded story about a little cat that had no merit that an adult could see except that they liked it. But this was a rare case in this particular group of fives. Other groups of fives do not react so violently.

Another time I tried out a story about a little rowboat that floated away and was found by a little boy and a little girl on the other side of the ocean. "Why do little boys and girls always have to find it?" said one five-year-old boy. "Why can't a fisherman find it and tie it to his big boat and use it?" He was right. All this planned plot where little children figure gets a little forced after the tenth story. But more important than that, I think his remark showed the five-year-old's real interest in people like fishermen and sailors and captains who really do something on the sea, and not in other little children planted conveniently on the shore. Of course another child might have had just the opposite reaction; but in this story, I doubt it. There must have been something forced or written down to children that he detected--the lack of inevitability.

Another check that children give a story very quickly is a check for logical accuracy. In THE GOOD LITTLE BAD LITTLE PIG when the pig had a bath the soapsuds were not all washed off the last soaping. The children were quick to notice that. And there was a discussion as to how they could wash the pig where they were holding him. It is easier for an author to see those things when they are read out loud to a circle of alert young faces ready to believe the story entirely, while it is being read. The title and the impulse behind this story

ending

*than what
not a sentence*

was the idea of a five-year-old. He had a little penguin doll that he said "was not a good little penguin and it was not a bad little penguin." Then he beamed with amusement, and perhaps with a well grounded satisfaction in his discovery, and said, "He is a good little bad little penguin." He played with the idea in words several times. Of course he was right, as right as Chaucer, and as tragically right as Shakespeare's tragedies. Perhaps this is the basis of all true character realization. Why then confuse children in the beginnings of literature? The pig story is a playful and superficial attempt to follow this lead. But that is not enough. There is much more to be followed in it.

not clear

Other leads included in this story were the deliberate and engrossing pleasure children seem to have in washing with soapsuds and getting the soapsuds from grey to white. They take five times as much time as is necessary to do this even when they are in a hurry. It must be important to them. There is the idea in the story that the pig is not really a dirty animal. And there is flattery in the story. What child does not glory in his acquaintance with a milkman or a policeman or one of those heroes in uniform. Therefore the policeman in the story knows the little boy well and holds up the traffic for his pig to cross the road. The telegram:

"Farmer Farmer
I want a pig
Not too little
And not too big
Not too good
And not too bad
The very best pig
That the mother pig had.

is something that a child could learn and repeat easily. There is never

enough of easy catch phrases and dialogue and even nonsense syllables in five-year-old stories. "Run for your life, child" says Black Belinda in PLEASE PETER IT'S PANCAKES. "Out you little dickens," says the father in MITTENS. And the children are quick to make the phrase their own and to play with it. "Fə Fi Fo Fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman."

But for all these leads from children themselves, that is never enough in a story. The leads were good leads in the THE GOOD LITTLE BAD LITTLE PIG. But the story itself is merely amusing. That is enough and not enough. Maybe it is because the pig was not a real pig even though he is photographically true. He lacks character development. The children seemed to enjoy the story as they listened to it, but then they forgot about it. The theme of the story is more important than that.

Form is another interesting aspect of a story or poem for which we can go to children for leads. There is still much to discover in new forms. For instance, take the poem, "I Like Bugs" followed by "I Like Fish" in my book. That was originally written for a reader and got into a folder that was being tried on a five-year-old at home by mistake. The five-year-old and his three-year-old brother took up the pattern and went all over the house applying it to the things they liked-- I like chairs, I like dessert, I like chewing gum, etc. So I put it in my book. Mrs. Mitchell has analysed and used a great many such leads in the ^{first} (FIRST) HERE AND NOW.

There is another form I wonder about for five-year-olds. I call it an interlude, it is not a story with a plot, it isn't very long. It is ^S somewhere between a story and a poem, a dwelling on some theme in words, a recreation of some experience. It is the thing some five-year-olds

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do in their own writings. I have tried to do it in "The Wonderful Day", "The Dead Bird", "The Pale Blue Flower"; and perhaps the "Children's Clock" and "Christmas Eve" are only long interludes rather than real stories. Whether this is a good form for children's writings I am not sure. I think, because it is a quiet and simple form it might be, if it is read to a child at the right time.

But in all of this writing for five-year-olds it is not only the leads from the children and literary hunches and content needs that prompt a story. When I look at stories and wonder what started them I find that it was not always some big idea but more often merely some small thing I saw that amused me or touched me-- a kitten by ^{its} ~~himself~~ for the first time with all the wonder and surprise in the world in its bright little eyes, or I start thinking of the small animal dignity that children and puppies and shy little horses struggle so hard to maintain at times. I wonder what the world looks like from the little space above the ground where children and small animals live. Or I just remember all the silly things that make them laugh. Sometimes I have dreamed a phrase and a half formed situation that has started a story. I suppose what really happens is that all of a sudden you see or hear something that seems significant. And by writing it out in a story form that significance becomes crystalized for whoever reads the story and for yourself.