CREATIVE POETRY IN THE KINDERGARTEN

HERE'S a 'pearly flow'r' for you," called five-year-old Carl one morning in his enthusiastic baby talk, as he handed the teacher a gay dandelion with the dew sparkling on it. "I was up 'so tip-toe early' too, and our whole garden was pearly," exclaimed Jane. They were experiencing the images of their favorite poem:

"I was up so tip-toe early
That the flowers were all pearly,
As they waited in their places
For the sun to dry their faces."

DOROTHY ALDRIS

Listening to poems and creating verses were among the happiest experiences of our kindergarten children last spring. The keynote to how this interest developed is well expressed by Hughes Mearns in his Creative Youth, "The secret of our results lies in the environment which we as teachers skilfully and knowingly set up day by day and hour by hour."

We read many lovely poems full of rhythm and colorful expressions to the children, and reread over and over their favorite selections until their joy of familiarity was complete. Quite unconsciously they made many expressions their own. Not only at story-telling time but during the lunch period or anytime during the morning, poems were told by the teachers or children as a suggestive occasion arose.

It is strange what a little incident sometimes sways the tide of interest. Last spring it was the appearance of my new scrapbook of poems—a large book of colored pages with a brilliant rainbow across the covers. From the first day the attractiveness of the book made it even more popular than we had anticipated. But it was not alone the charm of the rainbow cover; the poems themselves fulfilled the children's expectations. There were old favorites and equally delightful new poems grouped on the colored pages so that the children were soon able to identify their choices, and would say, "Read the funny poems on the yellow pages," "I like that long one about the little chickens on the purple page," or "Tell us some of the play poems in the front part." We were further assured that the book stood for a real pleasure when one day as the teacher came to the group with it in her hand, the children clapped and called, "Poems!"

We tried to foster their love for poetry by associating lovely pictures with the verses or by writing them in manuscript on the children's own illustrations. Particular effort was made to give the children real and vicarious experiences that would make vivid impressions upon their minds, as, visiting beautiful gardens, listening to the whirr of an airplane from our window, or taking a ride on a train. Then we associated these personal experiences with a poem having a similar thought expressed.

One day after the teacher had finished describing to the children the apple blossom festival which she had seen at Winchester, one little girl said, "That makes me feel like a poem." This is what she gave as she swayed her body and tossed her head to the rhythm of her poem:

"The butterflies are fluttering in the apple orchards every day.
Oh, May-time is a gay time! Oh, May-time is a gay time!"

This was the first complete poem offered by any one child. Immediately other children gave fragments of poems some of which we finished by class suggestion and some we enjoyed in their simple, crude form that no creative pleasure might in any way be marred.

Again Mr. Mearns gives the key to poetry writing, "We do not wait for inspiration; we know that it comes quicker if we go out to meet it." Every individual or group contribution was encouraged and treated with respect, that is, the class listened attentively, commented on what they liked, suggested changes, and often asked to have
certain poems put in our poem box that the teacher might read them from time to time.

Up to this point an outline has been given of our general plan which we knowingly set up for developing a love of poetry and a spirit of creativeness. Perhaps a brief account of one day's literature period, when many poems came spontaneously, will illustrate best how children will respond when poetry has been made a natural, happy experience in their everyday lives, and when the teacher will follow the children's leads, gently guiding their creative efforts and making recording as incidental a matter as possible.

It was a rainy day—and one of those moments in a rainy day when the children could think of little else as the rain dashed against the window pane and flooded the very streets before their eyes. The teacher took her poem book and sat down with the group saying, "I was going to tell you a story this morning, but this storm makes me feel like reading some of our rain poems." Immediately several children said, "Read the one about 'going up to live on the second floor.'" So "Very Lovely" by Rose Fyleman was read, then several others until the collection was exhausted, and the teacher closed the book saying regretfully, "That's all I have." But the interest was still high as the rain continued and no move was made to change the activity. "Let's make up some poems of our own," suggested several children. Very soon Doris, who had been looking intently out of the window, turned and gave the following:

"Green and yellow umbrellas (umbrellas)
Going down the street.
I like to see the pretty colors
Going down the street."

Notice how her imagination or perhaps the euphony of the words determined the colors of the umbrellas, for art always tends to idealize a situation.

Then Mary volunteered a rather wordy description of her experience the night before as she lay in bed listening to the rain.

When reminded by the teacher that we were making up poems, she smiled, waited a moment, then began with the words of one of our songs and summed up her own experience thus:

"Pitter, patter on the roof,
I like to hear the rain go
Pitter, patter on the roof
When I am going to sleep."

Promptly Ruth attempted a more pretentious poem on the same theme. She said the first two lines as given below, then wandered off into an unrhymed version of the rain falling on her mother's new umbrella. The teacher wrote down her beginning and reread it to her saying, "What shall I write now about your 'mother on the street with the rain a-falling down'"? using one of the child's expressions which she had caught. Ruth repeated her first couplet and added the next three lines, then rambled on and on with little coherence and much repetition. The group commented rather disparagingly, "What a long poem!" so the teacher read what she had been able to take down and Ruth with satisfaction ended her poem with the last line as it appears below, except that she wanted to say "red, white and blue umbrella." But the class objected, insisting that people do not carry that kind.

"I like to see the birds a-flying
When the rain is falling down.
And when I'm in the bed asleep
I think of mother on the street
With the rain a-falling down
On her red and blue umbrella."

If you have followed the steps in this account you will notice several important points: (1) A child often makes a good beginning, then becomes verbose, and his attention has to be recalled to the main idea. (2) His rhythmic, poetic thoughts must be caught quickly and written down exactly as he says them, or the individuality of his work is lost. (3) Frequent rereading heightens his enjoyment, encourages further effort, and often suggests revision by him-
self or the class. That children may create fearlessly and happily, great care should be taken not to stress revision for the sake of form; that comes gradually. The next poem cited illustrates a rather prosaic little boy’s poem which he made up at home and never changed though he repeated it often for weeks afterward.

“The rain is falling from the sky. You can hear it hitting on my roof, As I can see it falling from the trees, As I can see it hitting on my roof.”

The last poem of this group represents the outburst of an impulsive little girl of five who had an unusual feeling for form. Notice her unconscious adaptation of Stevenson’s “Rain.” The first four lines came almost in one breath; then, when it was read to her, she said quickly, “That doesn’t sound nice. I want ‘drip, drip, drop’ on the end, too.”

“Drip, drip, drop! Raining all the time— On the trees and on the seas, On the flowers and on the vine. Drip, drip, drop!”

With the close of our half-hour period came dismissal, but the children continued to make interesting remarks about the weather, and as they went out the door they took up one little fellow’s exclamation and playfully repeated it almost like a refrain:

“Raining, raining, raining! Still a-raining down!”

Not always will a class create as many poems; in fact, it is the rare exception. The intensity of the storm, the familiarity of the idea, and their habit of expressing themselves freely all combined to stimulate many individual contributions.

Several weeks later when these same children were in the first grade in summer school, a vivid experience resulted in an interesting group composition with poetic qualities. They had been working in their garden where the ground was sun-baked and hard. Hot and prespiring, they trudged back to school but before long their steps lightened to the rhythm of their own jingle,

“Hard, hard ground! Pound, pound, pound!”

How they laughed as they said it over and over and over.

After rest period the teacher remarked, “When you were coming home saying ‘Hard, hard ground! Pound, pound, pound!’ it sounded to me like the beginning of a poem.” Then she waited. Soon one child especially interested in reading said, “If we make up a real poem could one of the student teachers print it so we could read it?” The group took up the idea but the unity of their spontaneous rhyme seemed to inhibit their thinking, so it fell to the teacher as a member of the group to lead on their thoughts. “What did we take to make the ground so soft? Why did we have to get the weeds out?” Many suggestions followed, but those with rhythmic repetition were always chosen. The emphasis given to “hoe, hoe, hoe,” certainly expressed serious labor; then the tempo gradually increased until the last line was always read with lightness indicative of the thought.

**WORKING IN OUR SUNNY GARDEN**

“Hard, hard ground! Pound, pound, pound! Take the hoe And hoe, hoe, hoe. Take the rake And rake, rake, rake. Pull the weeds As fast as you can, And see the radishes get As big as they can.”

The need for a title came after the whole composition was read, and a child reminded the teacher that it was to be printed for reading. This poem was illustrated with crayons or paint over and over again, and was chosen for reading more often during summer school than any other story.

To little children, hearing poetry is a joy and writing poetry is a natural activity if they have the background of ideas, an at-
mosphere that encourages free expression, and a teacher who loves beautiful poems and has confidence in the power of a little child to appreciate and create them.

Nellie L. Walker.

STIMULATION TO GROWTH IN ARITHMETIC

LAST February when I became supervisor of grade 4B in the training school, the children were retarded in many ways, but inability to solve arithmetic examples seemed to be their greatest handicap. They disliked arithmetic because they could not achieve success.

PUPIL GROWTH IN ARITHMETIC

Grade IV B

After carefully examining some of their work, I gave the children examples that they could do. To succeed in doing the thing they attempted was satisfying. As each pupil’s interest and confidence in himself grew, he was gradually encouraged to do more difficult work. Since the fundamental processes must be mastered in the fourth grade, the children were guided in attacking addition and subtraction first because they serve as a foundation for multiplication and division. By the twenty-eighth of March when Form A of the Pittsburgh Arithmetic Scale was given to the class, they had gained considerable confidence in their ability. In the graph the white bar shows the results of this test. The median of the class, falling at 13, showed them to be at the third grade level.

We analyzed each paper to find out the specific needs of the class as well as those of each individual child. Every pupil was shown his difficulty and in turn felt a need for practice. A few of the difficulties were borrowing in subtraction, zeros in the minuend, multiplication combinations, and the process of division. Pride and thorough understanding had awakened the children’s interest—thus the law of readiness operated daily. Our next step was to tell the learners exactly what to do in order to improve. By this method the law of exercise was applied.

Since definite work on multiplication and division was needed by the whole class, we began to work on the multiplication facts. A test including the ninety multiplication combinations was given, the children having only three minutes in which to write the answers. Each child made an individual graph showing his score. The papers were analyzed and each child was told what facts he needed to learn. The child who had the best paper missed the following facts: 6x9, 8x7, 8x8, 4x3, 7x7, 9x2, 8x0, 9x6, 5x7, 8x9, 7x6, and 9x9. The children were divided into five groups according to their specific needs with a student teacher to help each group. After a few days of work another