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Writing portfolios in a second grade classroom

Cheryl R. Schwery
University of Northern Iowa

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Writing portfolios in a second grade classroom

Abstract

Assessment of a student's writing ability should entail descriptive qualitative techniques. One way to provide a qualitative assessment is through the use of portfolios. In using portfolios, students are actively immersed in their own learning and in establishing goals for future learning. In doing this, instruction is more closely related to assessment. The value of writing portfolios, implementation, and introduction of portfolios within a second grade classroom will be discussed. Focus will be on three second grade students, with varying abilities, as they progress in their writing and instructional needs.

Writing Portfolios in a Second Grade Classroom

A Graduate Project

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by

Cheryl R. Schwery

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Date Approved

Jeanne McLain Harms
Director of Research Project

10/4/99
Date Approved

Jeanne McLain Harms
Graduate Faculty Adviser

10/4/99
Date Approved

Rick C. Traw
Graduate Faculty Reader

10/4/99
Date Approved

Rick C. Traw
Head, Department of Curriculum
and Instruction

Abstract

Assessment of a student's writing ability should entail descriptive qualitative techniques. One way to provide a qualitative assessment is through the use of portfolios. In using portfolios, students are actively immersed in their own learning and in establishing goals for future learning. In doing this, instruction is more closely related to assessment.

The value of writing portfolios, implementation, and introduction of portfolios within a second grade classroom will be discussed. Focus will be on three second grade students, with varying abilities, as they progress in their writing and instructional needs.

Writing is a process to create meaning within the functions of language. Therefore, writing experiences need to be extended across the curriculum where many genuine opportunities to write can be found (Graves, 1994).

Because writing is a process, not a product, qualitative techniques need to be employed to describe students' involvement in the components of writing (Grave, 1994). The portfolio is one assessment technique that provides a meaningful description of a student's writing progress and instructional needs (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991).

Portfolios are a collection of a student's works over a period of time, such as a school year or more. They provide tangible evidence of ongoing accomplishments that are updated to show growth and instructional needs (Tierney et al., 1991). The process of portfolio development can facilitate students' reflections on their involvement in the writing process. These collections are developed by each student in collaboration with the teacher (Frank, 1994).

Value of Writing Portfolios

Portfolios are more authentic assessment tools than standardized tests. Writing exhibits selected by students over time can be viewed as more relevant than standardized tests, for tests emphasize product

rather than the writers' involvement in the process (Sulzby in Morrow & Smith, 1990). Standardized tests may not reflect real improvement in literacy; improved scores do not necessarily demonstrate improved or newly gained abilities. In contrast, portfolio collections involve the gathering of evidence from different types of writing experiences, teacher observations, students' self-evaluations, and student-teacher collaborative selection of exhibits. Portfolio development encourages active decision-making rather than rewarding the search for the right answer (Kieffer & Morrison, 1994).

As portfolios are developed, collaboration of the student and the teacher connect instruction and assessment more closely (Roe & Vukelich, 1998). Such collaboration can strengthen the bond between student and teacher (Valencia, 1990).

Teachers and students are not the only ones who benefit from portfolio assessment. Parents are able to see their child's growth more clearly; therefore, they can have the opportunity to take part in the assessment of their child's progress and instructional needs (Frank, 1994).

Implementation of Portfolios

Portfolios are not a new idea. Commercial artists, models, photographers, and artists have used portfolios to showcase their accomplishments (Tierney et al., 1991).

Several collections of children's writing can be developed. From students' writing folders, selections can be contributed to a working portfolio. At the end of a school year, a showcase portfolio can be created to pass along to the next year as part of a long-term assessment. Such a showcase portfolio can be recorded on a computer. The rest of the working portfolio can be bound or boxed and sent home as a treasured record of that year's accomplishments (Frank, 1994).

Examples of writing portfolios, the teacher's or other children's, should be shown and discussed as portfolios are presented. Possibilities of writing exhibits need to be presented. The students need to understand that they are largely responsible for the selection of their exhibits for the portfolios and that these exhibits can show their progress in developing writing abilities (Tierney et al., 1991).

Storage of the portfolios needs to be considered. The portfolio container can be a small cardboard box, an accordion file folder, a student-made paper folder, or a stackable bin. When choosing a container, the teacher should keep in mind the space needed to store the

portfolios, the size and sturdiness, and the accessibility to students.

Accessibility is important so students can develop a close identification with their achievements as writers (Frank, 1994; Valencia, 1990).

Children can choose portfolio exhibits from their writing folders, four to six times a year. After a period of writing, students are ready to begin selecting pieces for their portfolios. Students with support from the teacher should include samples that show growth or the meeting of goals that have been established in previous conferences (Frank, 1994). A label should be attached to each exhibit indicating the student's self-reflections. The label should be a standard form with these items: name of student, date of selection, type of piece, reason for choosing the piece, progress made, instructional needs, and further goals (Tierney et al, 1991). Teachers can assist students in their self-reflection and in establishing future goals (Frank, 1994).

Introduction of Portfolios to Grade Two Students

To extend qualitative assessment of writing abilities within my second grade classroom, I implemented portfolio collection. Portfolio collection would allow me to see my student's growth in writing and then connect my instruction with assessment more closely.

At the beginning of the year, the students in my classroom were introduced to the writing process, writer's workshop, and portfolios. The

students were informed that once they had compiled samples in their writing folders they would then be asked to select a piece for their portfolio. The students were also asked to decorate a file folder that would eventually become their portfolio folder.

After six weeks of schooling in the fall, the students were reintroduced to the concept of portfolios. They were told that the portfolio selection sessions would take place at the end of each quarter of the school year. A more in-depth discussion on their purpose was conducted at this time, along with examples of many different kinds of portfolios. For example, the art teacher was asked to show her portfolio with exhibits of her art work to the class. The students were also advised on the selection process for choosing a piece that would be placed within the portfolio.

The teacher had asked the students to keep all of their writing in their writing folders, which included lists of writing ideas, works in progress, and finished pieces. From this folder, students selected the pieces that they wanted to place in their portfolios. Upon selection of a piece, the students were asked to fill out a self-reflection form. The form included: name, date, title of piece, reason for selecting the piece, the strengths that the piece showed, and instructional needs. During the portfolio selection process, the teacher and the students conferred about the piece selected. The teacher tried to do more listening than talking

during the conference. The portfolios were placed in a file box that was housed on a counter in the room so that students could have easy access to them.

Three students out of 18 in my class were chosen for a close analysis of portfolio assessment. A rubric was used to evaluate the writing pieces (see Appendix A). In using the rubric, students were evaluated on five major areas: ideas, organization, word choice, sentence structure, and mechanics. The results will be reported in this paper. The three students selected for the study were of varying academic abilities. A summary of their engagement in the writing process and their growth in writing ability, along with the development of their portfolio, will be reported.

Student A

Student A is a boy of low average achievement. He is well liked by his peers and has a genuine concern for the people around him. He currently attends Title I Reading. When the writing workshop was first introduced to the class, Student A seemed to have a negative attitude toward writing. During the first weeks of school, he had a difficult time deciding on a topic and then engaging in the writing process.

At the end of September, he made the first selection for his portfolio. He chose a nonfiction piece about a football game that he attended with his father (see Appendix B). The piece was five sentences

long with every sentence except the first one beginning with the word “And.” The first sentence was the topic sentence with each following sentence containing one fact that Student A could remember.

During the portfolio conference, Student A stated that he used periods and a question mark correctly. He picked the piece because he enjoyed going to the game with his dad. Furthermore, Student A indicated that he would like to include the apostrophe more in his writing. The teacher and student also discussed the proper use of the word “and” and that he should avoid using it at the beginning of a sentence. Within this selection, Student A correctly spelled 84% of the words. He also had some difficulty with his handwriting. Although the words within his sentences have good spacing between them, Student A was unable to form the appropriate size of letters when considering ones with or without ascenders.

In December, Student A selected a portfolio exhibit entitled “The Feast” (see Appendix C). This piece consisted of three sentences. None of his sentences began with the word “and.” He was able to write a sentence using a comma within a series correctly.

Student A indicated that he picked this piece because it was about a holiday. He related that he used the comma in a series correctly and that he would like to work on placing periods correctly. The teacher praised

him for the correct use of a comma in a series for one sentence but pointed out that he could have designated a series in the first sentence. The teacher recorded in her notes for further instruction that his ideas in a story needed to be expanded and that his understanding of story structure needed attention. Student A's handwriting had not improved when compared to his previous piece. In this piece, he had 77% of the words spelled correctly.

In March, Student A selected a letter to be placed in his portfolio (see Appendix D). This piece demonstrated Student A's ability to write a letter and address an envelope correctly. He used correct punctuation marks throughout the letter and was able to spell with 93% accuracy. Student A's handwriting showed some improvement. He was able to stay above the lines though he still had difficulty with adjusting the size when writing ascenders. During the portfolio conference, Student A stated that he picked the letter because his handwriting was better and he used question marks correctly. The teacher complimented him on the accuracy of his punctuation marks and that she, too, thought that his handwriting had improved. The teacher and student both agreed that though his handwriting had improved, he still needed to continue working on it.

A piece about a red fox was chosen for his final portfolio selection at the end of April (see Appendix E). This piece was selected because he

liked the topic. Student A shared during the conference that his handwriting had improved and that he had done a nice job using adjectives. He used the correct punctuation throughout the story and was able to spell his words with 95% accuracy. The teacher noted that Student A had greatly improved his handwriting within this piece and on his daily work.

Throughout the year, Student A showed growth in his writing ability. Though the length of his stories was usually the same, Student A showed growth in his organization of stories, word choice, sentence structure, and mechanics. His spelling accuracy improved as well as his handwriting. Student A went from being a reluctant writer who deferred his writing tasks to becoming a continuous writer who enjoyed this daily activity.

Student B

Student B is a high achieving girl. She comes from a very dysfunctional family but is a resilient child, therefore does well in school. She also is well liked by her peers. She was excited about the opportunity to write so consequently needed no encouragement to engage in the process.

At the end of September, Student B selected a piece about her dog (see Appendix F). She chose this piece because she wanted her parents to think that she liked her dogs. She noticed that she was beginning to

write longer sentences. Her goal for future writing was to use more question marks and the apostrophe "s." The teacher recorded in her notes that though Student B had longer pieces in her portfolio, she picked one that contained four sentences. During the portfolio conference, the teacher and student discussed the proper use of commas and periods. Student B had placed commas where she should have put periods. Student B has good handwriting. She is able to use the appropriate size and spacing of her letters and words. She spelled all of her words correctly.

For her selection in December, Student B chose a piece about Christmas (see Appendix G). The teacher noted that the beginning of the story was similar to the beginning of "Twas the Night Before Christmas." The teacher also recorded in her notes that the student continued to run her sentences together using a comma; therefore, she needed further instruction in this element of punctuation. Student B noted that she was successful in sounding out words to spell during her writing and that she would like to continue working on her spelling. The teacher and the student discussed what it means to use another person's words and the punctuation that indicates a quotation. Student B's handwriting was not as legible when compared to her first piece. She incorrectly spelled one word in her piece.

In March, Student B's piece was entitled "How to Catch a Leprechaun" (see Appendix H). She said she selected the piece because it was much longer. She believed the strengths of the piece were its organization: a beginning, middle, and ending to her story. Student B also stated that she would like to include more compound sentences. The teacher noted that Student B's story was more developed than the two previous selections. Her handwriting was legible. Student B had 98% spelling accuracy. The teacher also noted that she is beginning to use quotation marks correctly. The teacher and student discussed the beginning, middle, and ending of her story and the progress she has made in determining the endings of her sentences and noting them with correct punctuation.

For her final selection, Student B chose a piece that she had written about a principal because it was her favorite piece (see Appendix I). During the portfolio conference, Student B noted that she liked how she neatly wrote the piece, but would still like to work on writing longer stories. The teacher noted the writer's use of adjectives to enhance ideas and that she was beginning to develop story structure. She continues to use nice handwriting and spelled her words with 99% accuracy.

Student B showed an enthusiasm for writing throughout the year.

She continually challenged herself to improve her writing skills. She improved on her use of punctuation and sentence structure.

Student C

Student C is a girl of average achievement. She repeated first grade at which time it was noted that she was very quiet and rarely volunteered little to class discussion or seldom asked for assistance. At the beginning of the year, she was shy about sharing her writing with peers unless she was positive it was correct. As a second grader, she had developed much more self-confidence. She took risks and volunteered in class discussion.

For the first portfolio exhibit in September, Student C selected a piece entitled "My Kittens" because she said she liked kittens (see Appendix J). She stated that she used periods correctly and wanted to learn to use commas in a series. The teacher noted that the endings of three out of the four sentences had been punctuated correctly and that she used capital letters to begin her sentences. During the conference, the teacher and student discussed the use of the homophone "there/their" and topics for further pieces. Though she does seem to stay above the line, Student C has difficulty with ascenders. Her words were spelled with a 92% accuracy.

In December, Student C chose a piece about friends because of the illustration she had drawn to accompany the piece (see Appendix K). She stated that she was satisfied with the improved legibility of her handwriting. She wanted to work on using quotation marks. The teacher noted that her sentences were becoming longer, but she continued to have difficulty punctuating the ends of her sentences. The teacher also noted that even though Student C stated she was satisfied with her handwriting, she continued to need work in this area. Her spelling was 97% accurate. During the portfolio conference, Student C discussed with her teacher that she was becoming more confident in her writing and that she enjoyed illustrating her stories.

For her third portfolio selection in March, Student C chose a piece about Christmas (see Appendix L). She picked this piece because she liked Christmas. Student C stated that she placed periods correctly at the end of her sentences. The teacher noted that she continues to struggle with her handwriting and that she was able to spell 96% of the words correctly. During the portfolio conference, the teacher and student discussed the organization of her stories. The teacher noted that her stories had a few ideas connected but lacked a beginning, middle and an ending.

A piece entitled "Friends" was chosen for Student C's final selection at the end of the school year (see Appendix M). Student C liked the way that she used punctuation marks and said that she would like to work on letter writing in the future. The teacher noted she punctuated her sentences, spelled her words with 94% accuracy, and is beginning to get a sense of story structure but needs to continue to work on handwriting.

Student C continued to grow in her enthusiasm for writing throughout the year. She became more confident and less shy about sharing her writing with peers. She also continued to illustrate each one of her pieces. Student C's greatest growth came in the area of capitalization and punctuation.

Conclusions

The use of writing portfolios within a second grade classroom provided a positive experience for the teacher and her students. Though they ranged in ability, the students were able to set future goals by assessing their own work. The use of mini-lessons and peer conferencing also helped facilitate the writing process. Through this assessment technique, I was able to more closely connect my instruction to the instructional needs of my students.

Portfolios provided an authentic assessment of a student's growth in the writing process that could be shared with parents. The response

from the parents proved to be positive. The growth that their children had made in the writing process was clearer than it would have been on a report card.

To extend this project, I have shared the results with my colleagues. I look forward to implementing portfolios within my classroom next year.

Appendix A

Evaluating Writing Pieces

Ideas	Organization	Word Choice	*Sentence Structure	*Mechanics
Fresh, original Focuses on topic Supporting details	Ideas connected Strong beginning, middle, end Sequenced and logical	Wide variety used Consistent and appropriate usage Words "enhance" ideas	Clearly written Complete sentences Variety of sentence length	*Appropriate or acceptable: - spelling - capitalization - punctuation
Some original ideas General focus on topic Most supporting details included	Most ideas connected Good beginning, middle, end Most ideas sequenced & logical	Some variety Mostly consistent and appropriate Words generally support ideas	Most sentences clearly written Simple sentences Some variety of length	Some errors in - spelling - capitalization - punctuation
Few original ideas Moves away from focus Few supporting details	Some ideas connected Attempts beginning, middle, end Not always sequenced & logical	Common word choice Some appropriate word choices Little use of descriptive words	Some unclear sentences Run-on, fragmented, sentences Little variety	Several errors in - spelling - capitalization - punctuation
Incomplete ideas Unfocused Lacks details	Few ideas connected Lacks beginning, middle, end Little sequence & logic	Limited word choice Inappropriate word choices No attempt at descriptive words	Sentences not clear Frequent fragmented sentences No variety	Many errors in - spelling - capitalization - punctuation
No attempt	No attempt	No attempt	No attempt	No attempt

ary depending upon which draft it is of the child's writing

oric adapted from Batzel, J. (1992). Portfolio assessment and evaluation. Cypress, CA:
tive Teaching Press, 53.)

Appendix A

Evaluating Writing Pieces

	Ideas	Organization	Word Choice	*Sentence Structure	*Mechanics
4	Fresh, original Focuses on topic Supporting details	Ideas connected Strong beginning, middle, end Sequenced and logical	Wide variety used Consistent and appropriate usage Words "enhance" ideas	Clearly written Complete sentences Variety of sentence length	*Appropriate or acceptable: - spelling - capitalization - punctuation
3	Some original ideas General focus on topic Most supporting details included	Most ideas connected Good beginning, middle, end Most ideas sequenced & logical	Some variety Mostly consistent and appropriate Words generally support ideas	Most sentences clearly written Simple sentences Some variety of length	Some errors in - spelling - capitalization - punctuation
2	Few original ideas Moves away from focus Few supporting details	Some ideas connected Attempts beginning, middle, end Not always sequenced & logical	Common word choice Some appropriate word choices Little use of descriptive words	Some unclear sentences Run-on, fragmented, sentences Little variety	Several errors in - spelling - capitalization - punctuation
1	Incomplete ideas Unfocused Lacks details	Few ideas connected Lacks beginning, middle, end Little sequence & logic	Limited word choice Inappropriate word choices No attempt at descriptive words	Sentences not clear Frequent fragmented sentences No variety	Many errors in - spelling - capitalization - punctuation
0	No attempt	No attempt	No attempt	No attempt	No attempt

may vary depending upon which draft it is of the child's writing

rubric adapted from Batzel, J. (1992). Portfolio assessment and evaluation. Cypress, CA: Creative Teaching Press, 53.)

Appendix A

Evaluating Writing Pieces

	Ideas	Organization	Word Choice	*Sentence Structure	*Mechanics
4	Fresh, original Focuses on topic Supporting details	Ideas connected Strong beginning, middle, end Sequenced and logical	Wide variety used Consistent and appropriate usage Words "enhance" ideas	Clearly written Complete sentences Variety of sentence length	*Appropriate or acceptable: - spelling - capitalization - punctuation
3	Some original ideas General focus on topic Most supporting details included	Most ideas connected Good beginning, middle, end Most ideas sequenced & logical	Some variety Mostly consistent and appropriate Words generally support ideas	Most sentences clearly written Simple sentences Some variety of length	Some errors in - spelling - capitalization - punctuation
2	Few original ideas Moves away from focus Few supporting details	Some ideas connected Attempts beginning, middle, end Not always sequenced & logical	Common word choice Some appropriate word choices Little use of descriptive words	Some unclear sentences Run-on, fragmented, sentences Little variety	Several errors in - spelling - capitalization - punctuation
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0	No attempt	No attempt	No attempt	No attempt	No attempt

May vary depending upon which draft it is of the child's writing

Rubric adapted from Batzel, J. (1992). Portfolio assessment and evaluation. Cypress, CA: Creative Teaching Press, 53.)

Appendix B

September Sample for Student A

August 25, 1998

Daniel MCP

I went to a football game last year. And they'll win the game. And they tackled a bunch of people. And I sat in row 40. And I eat pizza pepperoni.

Appendix C

December Sample for Student A

The Feast

Mom and dad come and grapas and
gramas and my brother and my
cousins. We ate and then we ate turkey,
cranberry, mash potatoes, and corn.
We had a feast.

Appendix D

March Sample for Student A

Feb. 17, 99

Dear Mrs. Schwery,

How are you? I like how you
write. Do you like Spanish? Do
you have daddy ever 'wreck'?

Your student
Daniel McPhillips

Appendix E

April Sample for Student A

The Red Fox April 29, 99

The fox was red and his tail was white. He lived in the green forest. His pray was a rabbit that lived in the green meadow in a brown hole that was a circle.

Appendix F

September Sample for Student B

My dogs are good one of thier names are Tasha and the other one is Bitts, they are a Rotwhiler and Boston Terrier, Tasha gaurds the house whenever she sees somebody she barks.

September 17, 1998

Appendix G

December Sample for Student B

A Christmas Story

It was' the night before Christmas and all through the house not a creature was stirring not even a mouse, there were presents under the tree from old Saint Nick, and all was safe in that little old house!

December 1, 1998

Appendix H

March Sample for Student B

March 29 How to Catch a Leprechaun
It all started when I was four years old. I was in the woods petting some fawns. I looked up and before my eyes was a Leprechaun. I asked him what he was looking for, and he said, "I'm looking for the end of the rainbow so I can have my pot of gold!" So I put up a secret trap in the forest at midnight. He probably had a trick up his sleeve. The trap had a rope fastened to it. The rope had knots in it. I will be ready with my rope when the time comes. Before I knew it it was St. Patrick's Day. In the morning I went into the field. I caught the the leprechaun, and put him in the garage. Now, I have a collection of gold.

The End!

Appendix I

April Sample for Student B

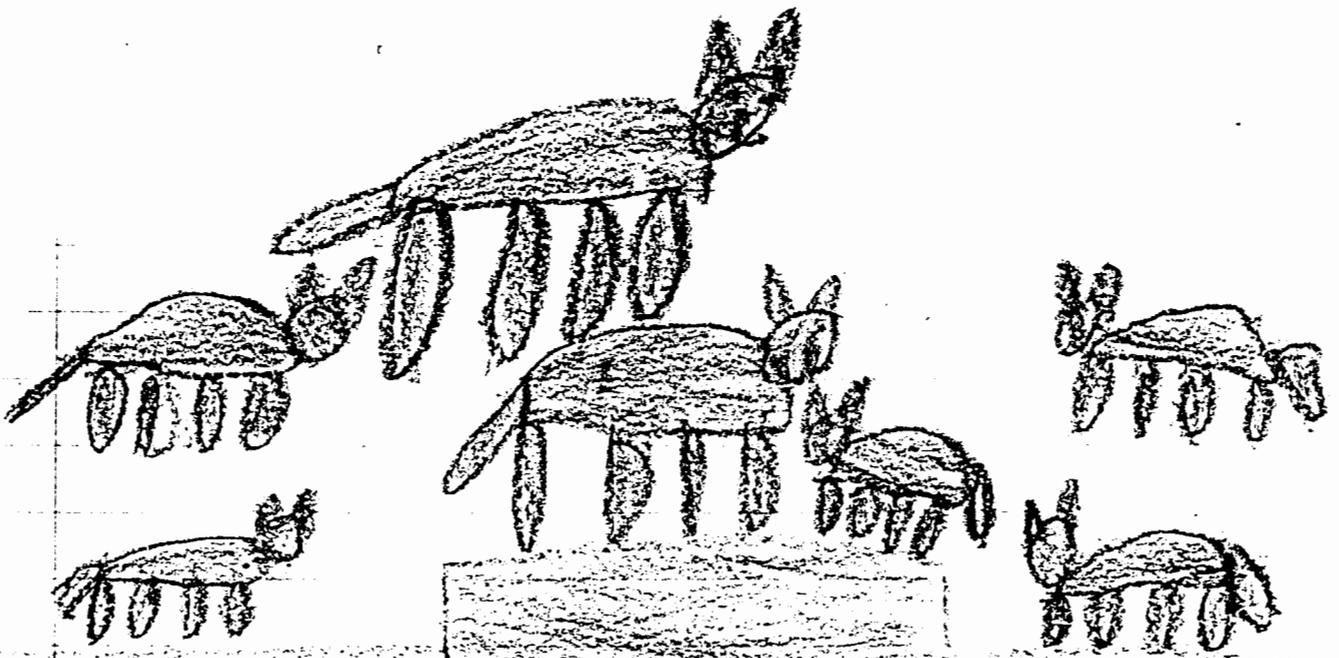
THE MEAN OLD principal
Once there was a mean old principal who wouldn't I mean wouldn't let anybody go home from school. His name was Mr. Meanmyer. I use to go to that junky school, and at recess all the equipment was rusted, the merry-go-round was brown and black and the bolts on the monkey bars were loose. It was 3:00 we were leaving from school to get on the bus when Mr. Meanmyer turned into Mr. Niceamyer.

Appendix J

September Sample for Student C

9/9/98 Cassie

We had new kittins. There eyes
are open they are nice to us
and I am nice to them. I like
them very much.



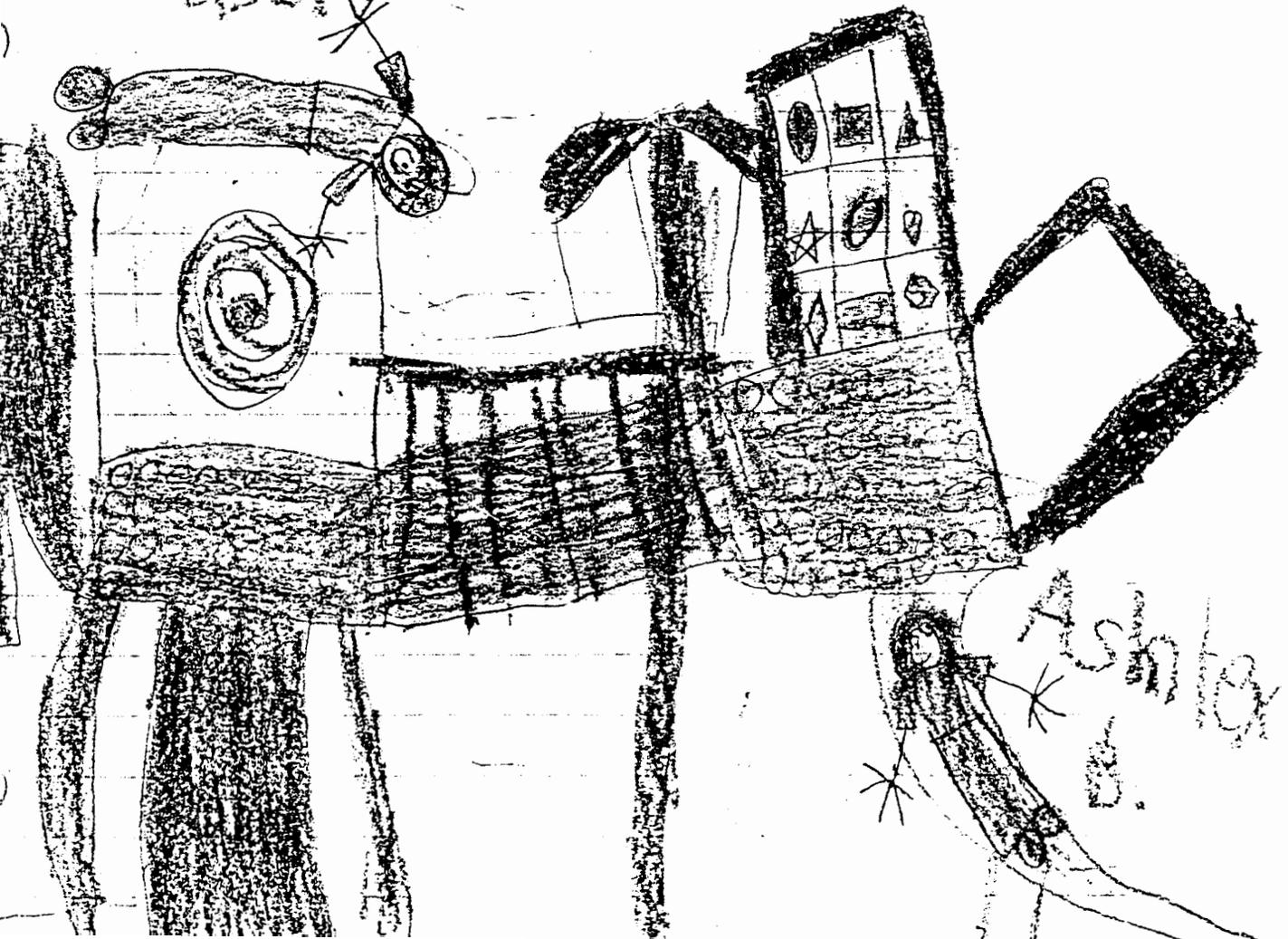
Appendix K

December Sample for Student C

Octubre 26, 1998

Hi my name is Cassie I like to play out side at recess with my friends Ashley, Kyle C. We like to play tag together a lot. Sometime we want to find Jessica to play with her to a lot.

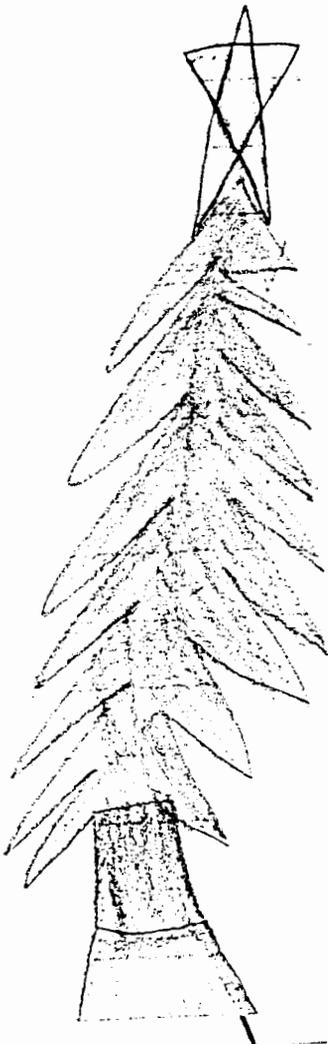
Cassie



Appendix L

March Sample for Student C

Hi my name is Gassie. I like Christmas
Do you like Christmas a lot? Do
you really want to know why I
like Christmas? Ok I will tell you why
I like Christmas. I like Christmas
because I like to get presents to
open in the morning.



Appendix M

April Sample for Student C

friends

Once there was a person named Ashley. She was very nice when we went to Kalar on Friday. Then she had a problem seeing so we went to the eye doctor.

