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Raising cultural awareness in the elementary classroom through African-American children's literature

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Raising cultural awareness in the elementary classroom through African-American children's literature

Abstract

This research project topic was selected because of the need for raised cultural awareness in elementary classrooms, as indicated in current research findings. I chose African-American literature because in this region of the United States, Iowa in particular, the classrooms tend to be largely homogenous. Children who are from African-American descent find themselves to be in the minority in their classroom settings.

These children are not seeing many other children like themselves in their school community. It is therefore important that they see themselves in the literature shared within this community, in order to help them to relate to their learning. At the same time, it is important for students who are not of African-American descent to experience this culture in order to relate to their fellow students and gain understanding and appreciation, not merely tolerance.

**Raising Cultural Awareness in the Elementary
Classroom through African-American
Children's Literature**

A Graduate Project

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

University of Northern Iowa

By

Kirsten Seebeck

December 17th, 2002

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Introduction

This research project topic was selected because of the need for raised cultural awareness in elementary classrooms, as indicated in current research findings (Cai, 1995; Cai & Bishop, 1995; Lempke, 1999; Miller, 2001). I chose African-American literature because in this region of the United States, Iowa in particular, the classrooms tend to be largely homogenous. Children who are from African-American descent find themselves to be in the minority in their classroom settings. This observation is based on my own experience as a student teacher and substitute teacher in the Cedar Rapids and Marion, Iowa school districts. These children are not seeing many other children like themselves in their school community. It is therefore important that they see themselves in the literature shared within this community, in order to help them to relate to their learning. At the same time, it is important for students who are not of African-American descent to experience this culture in order to relate to their fellow students and gain understanding and appreciation, not merely tolerance. Because of state and national curriculum requirements, the study of African-American culture is usually limited to Black History Month. The rigidity of curriculum and standards makes it difficult for teachers to extend the study of African-American literature beyond basal readers and textbooks. This topic was chosen in an effort to bring African-American literature into the elementary classroom, and make it a valid part of the daily reading experience.

Literature Review

Everyone has heard the old adage that the United States is a melting pot of many different cultures. It is true that this country enjoys the influences of many diverse people, however, it may be more accurate to describe the United States as a salad bowl. The melting pot image brings to mind the idea that people are all blended together into some common culture with only mildly distinguishable characteristics. In a salad, the ingredients are tossed together, yet each maintains its individuality and can be appreciated for the specific flavor it brings to the salad. In this manner, the many people whose cultures and beliefs are a part of the United States bring their own unique flavors to this country. Each culture and ethnicity is important and enriching. This is a message that needs to be taught to our children. Multicultural literature can help to carry this message.

Defining Multicultural Literature

The first issue to consider is that of defining multicultural literature. This is a term that continues to change as our society changes. The term has traditionally been used to, “refer to the disenfranchised—i.e., those whose interests were not necessarily represented by the ‘mainstream’ white culture,” (Smith, 1993, p. 340). There is some merit to this definition, as much of the children’s literature published in the United States has been representative of the, “White Anglo-Saxon majority in the United States, whose largely middle-class values are most represented in all American literature,” (Cai &

Bishop, 1995, p. 82). Most American literature has largely featured strong, white, male heroes. The role of a person from any parallel culture has often been a token appearance. Even as the main character, he/she is not the person around whom the culture and values in the story line revolves. Karen Smith (1993) also pointed out in her article that women, the handicapped, and gay and lesbian individuals should also fall into the category of multicultural. This is most likely in direct response to the literature most American adults have grown up reading. Admittedly, a finite definition of multicultural literature is difficult to determine, as it will change from individual to individual. For the purpose of this research project, the definition of multicultural literature is, "about some identifiable 'other'-persons that differ in some way (for example, racially, linguistically, ethnically, culturally) from the dominant white American cultural group" (Cai & Bishop, 1995, p. 58).

Reasons to Use Multicultural Literature

What is wrong with the classic materials that have been used in American classrooms for decades? The answer is nothing and everything. These so-called classics have a valid place in literacy education. However, there are many texts that should be omitted because their "multicultural" representations serve only to further stereotypes. As discussed in an article by Cai and Bishop (1995), some of these stereotypes are ones found in literature with which nearly everyone is familiar. Ten Little Rabbits by V. Grossman (1991) is a glaring example. The rabbits are representative of Native American culture, however, they all look the same. The only difference is the color and pattern of blanket they are wearing. This characterizes Native Americans as being the same person, and as cute little animals, identifiable only by their clothing. Teresa L.

McCarty (1995) stated in her article that the stereotypes contained within the illustrations of this book serve to offend and to trivialize important or sacred aspects of the Native American culture. This is an extremely irresponsible portrayal. Within any culture, there are multiple ethnicities that are often so different from the next as to seem to be an entirely different culture

Due to the ever-rising numbers of inter-racial marriages and the resulting children, there seems to be a rising number of students who are of color (Harris, 1997). Mary Anton-Oldenburg (2000) stated, "Experts predict that by 2020 children of color will make up close to 46 percent of America's school-age population," (p. 46). This is important to note because multicultural literature helps to educate students about their own culture as well as ones with which they are not familiar. Classmates need to feel that their culture and heritage is as valid as that of the person next to them. Admittedly, multicultural literature is for every child (Harris, 1997). A White child, an African American child, and an Asian child can reap the same benefits from one book, as long as that book represents the culture authentically and responsibly. Children need to see themselves in the literature they read; they also need to see the people they share their lives with in that same literature (Harris, 1997). There has been a reduction in ethnic stereotypes and a rise in tolerance in the American school systems. However, not all pre-conceived notions have been eradicated. Including multicultural literature in the classroom and teaching in a multicultural manner (that is, helping every child to be successful) will help to correct the wrong perceptions that do still exist. Howard M. Miller (2001) stated in his article that some of these misconceptions come from the teachers, and include the following:

That minority students are, by their nature, less likely to be successful in school; that all members of a particular minority group will respond in the same way to a given approach to teaching; that there is no need to teach in varied ways if we have nonminority students in our classrooms; and that minority teachers will automatically be more successful than nonminority teachers in working with minority students. (p. 346)

Once teachers admit to their own prejudices and beliefs, they can work on improving the way they instruct their students.

Karen Smith (1993) discusses the issue of “exclusivity”. When an educator is faced with a group of children who are all from the same ethnic background, the question arises of how necessary is the inclusion of literature by and about parallel cultures. Multicultural literature is for everyone. As mentioned previously, children need to see themselves and those around them in the literature that they read in order to relate to and internalize what they are reading. This encourages understanding and tolerance. Furthermore, children are not living in a homogenous society. They can only benefit from the enriching experience of learning about cultures other than their own. Smith (1993) also points out that by gaining a strong appreciation for one’s own culture, one is better prepared to recognize similarities and differences in parallel cultures, thereby gaining a more opened mind.

Preparing Teachers to Use Multicultural Education

Karen Smith (1993) suggests that it first begins with teacher education. The education a person receives in college will shape the way he/she will teach. Most teachers will carry over into their classroom that to which they were previously exposed.

Smith states, "If these individuals have had minimal exposure to non-Western cultures, then they do not enter their chosen professions with a background or knowledge about multicultural interests," (pp. 341-342). This is absolutely true! Prospective educators, be they teachers, administrators, librarians, etc., must have the background knowledge that will allow them to choose quality, authentic literature to share and discuss with their students. Being familiar with the knowledge necessary for choosing appropriate multicultural literature gives educators the key to unlocking stereotypes in literature.

Can someone from outside a culture write authentic literature for and about that culture? Mingshui Cai (1995) best answers this question. He states that a person from outside a culture can certainly produce quality literature about that culture. However, he also warns that great caution must be taken; the author must be familiar with the brute facts about that culture in order to write knowledgably and avoid furthering stereotypes. It is not enough to take a tourist's view. If the author only studies select parts of the culture, and does not immerse him/herself, he/she will lack the ability to write unbiased, authentic literature. Simply studying food, clothing, festivals, and language does not qualify a person to represent a parallel culture in his/her writing.

By the very same token, educators need to take more than the proverbial tourist's view when integrating multicultural literature into their classrooms. Jayne Alexander (1994) states, "one of every four U.S citizens is a person of color," (p. 266). This is important to remember even in classrooms where the student population is largely homogenous. Students should be encouraged to understand the values as well as the stereotypes associated with their own culture and parallel cultures. Multicultural literature is a necessary tool toward breaking down cultural barriers and promoting

appreciation for all cultures and ethnicities through knowledge and discussion.

Unfortunately, “limited budgets and pressure to teach the ‘basics’...hinder the teacher’s efforts to pluralize the study of literature,” (Alexander, 1994, p. 267). Curriculum demands often limit a teacher’s ability to incorporate multicultural literature into the classroom on a regular basis. However, Alexander maintains that teachers should be encouraged to travel and attend conferences, as well as communicate with other educators who are of a culture other than their own. Despite limited resources, educators can find ways of establishing common grounds to promote understanding and acceptance within schools. Certainly, if the teacher has not had any real experiences with other cultures, he/she will not be able to bring that to the classroom and create real connections for his/her students through multicultural literature.

Alexander extends this idea by including a list of criteria to help teachers choose appropriate literature. Among the criteria for selecting appropriate multicultural literature are the accuracy of the book, how well it is written, the author’s qualifications, and the quality of the illustrations, etc. While text is a large factor in determining the authenticity of multicultural literature, just as important are the illustrations. The images that children see in books carry a message that is as strong, if not stronger in some instances than the text itself. Susan Lempke (1999) discusses this in an article where she reviewed 216 books, 86 of which featured white main characters. An additional 30 books showed a person of color, but only in the background. Only 21 of the books she reviewed showed a diverse world.

How can children of different cultural groups possibly be expected to relate to the literature to which they are exposed? These citizens use the libraries, and they are seeing

scores of books that do not reflect their heritage. Even in the books that included characters of parallel cultures, they take a backseat to the white main characters. Lempke sums this up nicely: “Tellingly, main characters in picture books are usually white; second bananas, it seems, can be any color,” (Lempke, 1999, p.142). She attributes this to the rules that she feels publishers follow. The first rule is that, “Classrooms must be shown as diverse,” (Lempke, 1999, p.143). This means that illustrations will typically show the majority of the students as white, while only a few will be of color. This is akin to drawing the same face over and over and painting the skin in different colors.

However, skin color does not denote multiculturalism. The second rule Lempke brings up is, “Only cities, preferably New York City, can be depicted as diverse,” (Lempke, 1999, p.143). There are a large number of children’s books showing diversity only in large cities, not in rural or suburban areas. There are diverse cultures everywhere, not just in large metropolises. Children read the illustrations as much as they do the text, and educators must be aware of that fact when deciding which literature to include in their classrooms.

A common theme that keeps coming up in the literature review is that of the corporate publishers. They seem to be one of the biggest culprits in misrepresenting or ignoring cultures in children’s literature (Horning, 1993, p.542). Admittedly, corporate publishers are going to be concerned about profit first. Because of this, there has been the creation of alternative presses for multicultural children’s literature. These independent publishers are concerned less about profit, and more about filling the void that has been left in quality children’s literature. Alternative press publishers are making a difference in that they, “make important contributions to the field of multicultural

literature by providing children with information and perspectives typically not found in books from corporate presses,” (Horning, 1993, p. 524). These presses are attempting to balance the scales to a degree when it comes to children’s literature. They are also striving to squelch traditional stereotypes seen in so-called “multicultural” literature by publishing literature for and about parallel cultures that reflects the true values of that culture. This includes African Americans, women, the Hmong people of Laos, and many others. The alternative presses cater to one, maybe two cultures, but together they are expanding multicultural literature for children in a way that corporate publishers do not have the desire or ability to achieve. They have one common goal, which is, “to tell their stories from their own perspectives for their own children. Through the literature they create, these alternative presses strive to give children a true picture of the past and a sense of pride in the present,” (Horning, 1993, p. 535). Teachers need to be more aware (and use) these alternative presses in order to successfully obtain quality multicultural materials.

Once an educator has the necessary tools, he/she begins the task of integrating them into her classroom. Mary Anton-Oldenburg (2000) recommends several techniques for representing all cultures in the curriculum. The first is that educators need to become familiar with unfamiliar cultures. The backgrounds of the students in the classroom will play an integral role in the entire educational process. She encourages educators to spend more time on in-depth studies of a few cultures, instead of hurrying through as many as possible. In this way, the potential of understanding and acceptance is greater (p. 47). Rebecca Pirini (2002) stated, “Compiling sets of books with related themes, settings, and author’s notes that complement one another provides a larger picture and more thorough

examination of the cultural group and experience depicted in any one book,” (p. 431).

By devoting more time and a greater selection of materials to the students, a teacher opens the door to a deeper appreciation of the culture being studied. A second way to celebrate diversity in the classroom is by teaching multiple perspectives and celebrating all kinds of stories. In this way, students gain an ownership of their own culture as well as an understanding of others. Anton-Oldenburg (2000) also states that educators must be aware of the types of characters represented in the books they share with the class. If the character demonstrates stereotypes, that book should be excluded from the curriculum. She also encourages educators to teach their students to be critical of the media they encounter. Whether on television or in books, students can learn to spot uncomfortable stereotypes. They can learn to correct misinformation either in their own minds, orally, or on paper. “The student then becomes empowered to view the world with a critical eye,” (Anton-Oldenburg, 2000, p. 50). Above all, educators are encouraged to maintain high expectations. The teacher’s attitude will directly influence the student’s attitude and personal expectations. It all comes down to being sensitive to all of the cultures represented in the classroom, whether they are represented in the student body itself, or in the literature shared.

Rebecca Powell, Susan Chambers Cantrell, and Sandra Adams (2001) agree with the idea of reading with a critical eye. They state that, “critical literacy moves beyond holistic theory in that it confronts societal issues of power and dominance head on,” (p. 773). By challenging the literature that a student reads, they are able to promote understanding and democracy in the classroom. Thinking beyond the book brings the literature to life and creates a palate for questioning and discussion. Powell, Cantrell, and

Adams (2001) suggest that there are three basic underlying assumptions of reading critically:

Critical literacy assumes that the teaching of literacy is never neutral but always embraces a particular ideology or perspective. Critical literacy supports a strong democratic system grounded in equity and shared decision making. Critical literacy assumes that literacy instruction can empower and lead to transformative action. (p. 773)

Literacy instruction requires the educator to make certain decisions about what is taught and how that material will be presented. This will vary from person to person, based on individual ideals and perceptions on what constitutes literate behavior. Therefore, the selection of multicultural literature will also vary among classrooms. The ideal is that whether the literature is authentic or not, the students should be encouraged to read critically by asking questions and challenging stereotypes and/or injustices. In addition, the assumption that critical literacy supports a democratic system empowers students to move beyond what they have read and experienced in literature. They can compare and contrast images in the literature to real life experiences, thereby considering all sides of the issues represented and making decisions as a group (democracy). In doing so, students feel that they have some control over their learning. They know that what they read and see in literature can be questioned, and that they can take action.

Of course, what is taught in the classroom is not entirely up to the teacher.

National and state standards dictate much of what will be taught in schools.

Unfortunately, with the new movement toward standardized assessments, teachers find themselves forced into teaching to the test. It seems that multicultural education stands in

real danger of, “getting shelved as the preoccupation with national and state standards and testing intensifies,” (Bohn & Sleeter, 2000, p.156). Standards operate on the theory that every child deserves an equal education. However, the reality is that with differences in facilities, resources, and socio-economic issues, this becomes a fairy tale for many students. Yes, every student deserves an equal education, yet that is just not a reality. Standards Movement does not take into account the fact that some schools simply do not have the funding and resources to equal the level of other schools. It is these students that end up suffering educationally.

Along with standards in curriculum and testing, there are standards in textbooks. These books, such as those used to teach History and English in classrooms, fall into the ethnocentrism that features mainly white American families and history. Any reference to another country, race, religion, etc. is in passing and becomes a token addition to the Standards curriculum. Supplementary reading about these subjects is recommended in the textbooks, but is only available at an additional cost. In effect, then, the students who are not white Anglo-Saxons are left out of the curriculum. They cannot relate to the material they are required to learn, and, “The more disconnected that textbook knowledge is from students’ own lived reality, the more disconnected school feels in general,” (Bohn & Sleeter, 2000, p.158).

Helpful Resources for Teachers

As a supplement to Standards curriculum, educators have many helpful resources at their disposal. As a teacher learns more about multicultural education and is ready for incorporation into the classroom, he/she can visit helpful web sites on this subject. One site is titled “Teaching Tolerance”. This site has information for teachers, parents and

students. A visitor to this site can explore a variety of current issues involving multicultural education. Current events are updated daily, ranging from educating homeless children to gay and lesbian rights. Students can read about other cultures, and view lists of books that they might find in their own library.

If a multicultural book is unavailable in the library, “BookLink” may be the site to find it. This site is strictly a book distribution site that specializes in ESL and multicultural literature. One can locate ESL books, children’s books, as well as non-book merchandise and links to other ESL sites.

Another great resource on the World Wide Web is “Explorer Trail”. This site contains links to many resources for teachers and students alike. One link takes them to “The Great Adventure”, which is sponsored by the Children’s Museum, Canadian Museum of Civilization. Students can take a virtual tour around the world! Teachers can access current research as well as reviews of multicultural literature. Students can visit many sites to learn about multicultural issues.

They can also visit “KidsCom”, which sets up e-mail exchanges for children around the world (a virtual pen-pal). Finally, there are also links to sites about specific peoples and cultures, such as Martin Luther King Jr., African information, Native American information, and many more. Teachers can use these resources to educate themselves and to encourage their students to explore multicultural literature and issues beyond the classroom.

Yet another helpful resource for teachers is a book titled, Using Multiethnic Literature in the K-8 Classroom (Harris, 1997). This book includes information ranging from definitions of multicultural literature to current issues and trends in multicultural

literature to ideas for integrating multicultural literature into the classroom. Once a teacher has made the decision to integrate multicultural literature into the curriculum, the book, Multicultural Voices in Contemporary Literature: A Resource for Teachers (Day, 1994) becomes a valuable resource. This book highlights authors and illustrators of literature about parallel cultures. Teachers can read about the histories of these authors and illustrators as well as their books and awards. This information aids teachers in making responsible and informed decisions about the multicultural literature chosen for inclusion in the classroom.

The bottom line is that multicultural literature and education is for everyone, not just those viewed as minorities. Educators need to be afforded the opportunity to become knowledgeable about the materials that they are including in their classrooms. If college education, or budget or curriculum constraints are hindering that process, changes need to be made. Students need to be afforded the opportunity to make real connections to their literature and the world in which they are living. Therefore, multicultural literature for young people can and should be included in the classroom on a regular basis, and not just on special occasions.

Methodology

Through this research project, I wanted to introduce authentic African-American literature to an elementary classroom. Authentic means that the literature was written by authors who are thoroughly immersed in the culture and can present the material in a responsible and “real” manner. By starting with previous knowledge, I wanted to help the students to move from what they know to what they don’t know, therefore connecting

the African-American literature to their own experiences. This was also the goal of the individual activities. By pairing new material with discussions, writing, and drawing, the students could create personal connections to the African-American literature, promoting comprehension. I was interested to see how the list of what students knew would compare with what they had learned at the end of this project. I hypothesized that the list would be longer under the category of what was learned. I was also interested to learn whether or not the students grew in reference to their literacy skills through this project. Finally, I was interested to learn if this project would encourage students to seek out African-American literature and authors on their own in the future.

This project focused on three main goals. The first goal was to provide elementary students with reading enjoyment and illuminate the human experience, in both its unity and its diversity. Through the African-American literature shared throughout this project, students were afforded the opportunity to enjoy literature about a parallel culture as well as to make connections to their own lives through the corresponding activities. This opportunity helped the students to understand this culture both by its variations from and its similarities to their own culture. Those students in the class who are African-American could see themselves in the literature being shared and also enjoy the diversity of their own culture and the unity with their classmates (Harris, 1997). The second goal of this project was to help students to change the way they look at their world by offering varying perspectives. The African-American literature shared in this project offered insights into famous African-Americans, family life, and racial hurdles overcome by the characters in the stories. Through the literature and the activities, students could look at their own world through the eyes of the African-

American characters in these stories, thereby seeing that we are as much the same as human beings as we are different. Therefore, the level of cross-cultural competence that was the expected outcome of this project was that at which the individual begins to assimilate some of the symbols and characteristics of the African-American cultural group. That is, the students began to feel that they had gained enough understanding to be able to appreciate and identify with the African-American culture. The third goal was simply to help the students to improve their literacy skills. Through the extension activities that followed every book shared with the class, the students could begin to understand how literature can shape and change their way of looking at the world. These activities also helped the students to look beyond the literature and begin to question and challenge the message of the author, allowing them to take ownership of their literacy learning, which is key to advancing comprehension.

The authors highlighted in this project are: Eloise Greenfield, Pat Cummings, Patricia C. McKissack, and Faith Ringgold. These authors were chosen because they are all African-American female authors, and therefore have first-hand knowledge of the culture. Their writing is authentic in culture, language, characters, and illustrations. There is not the risk of an author from outside the African-American culture trivializing the culture and creating or perpetuating stereotypes. The books (see Appendix A) chosen are of high literary quality, with many of them being award-winning. The books are readable at the second-grade level and accessible at the majority of libraries and bookstores. This is important because if the students wish to find this literature on their own and cannot, the message could be that this type of literature is rare and exotic instead of something that can and should be read on a regular basis. There are both fiction and

non-fiction books included in this project, further giving validity to the idea that African-American literature exists in many literary genres. Though the authors included in this project are all female, the illustrators are both male and female. The illustrators include: Floyd Cooper, Jerry Pinkney, Rachel Isadora, and Carole Byard. These illustrators are all well-known for illustrations of the African-American culture. Each is fully immersed in the culture, and possesses the brute facts necessary for the accurate and responsible portrayal of African-Americans.

This research project was conducted in a second-grade classroom at an elementary school in Marion, Iowa. The class consisted of 22 students. Three students attended a special education class during the time allotted for my research. Of the remaining 19 students to be included in this project, 17 were European-Americans, and 2 were African-Americans. The research lasted four weeks. I visited the class three times each week, with the exception of the third week, when I visited twice. Each session with the class was approximately 30 minutes in length.

On the first day, my goal was to simply determine the students' present knowledge about the African-American culture, and to introduce the project by asking the students to think about what they wanted to know about the African-American culture. We created a large K-W-L chart as a whole class, with the students volunteering what they knew about African-Americans (see Appendix B). Students were encouraged to discuss anything from the location of Africa to physical attributes to any literature they had read to movies and music. The students dictated while I wrote on a large poster board. The students then brainstormed what they wanted to know about African-

American culture and literature. The K-W-L chart and the books included remained in the classroom throughout the project.

Each day I visited the classroom, I read a story, followed by a specific literacy activity (see Appendix C). This first week was dedicated to author Eloise Greenfield. The literacy activities for this week (see Appendix D) served to make the books come to life for the children, stressing that while we are all different, we are all the same in that we are human beings. The activities also helped the students to look at the world from another perspective, making decisions as to actions they might take in situations involving discrimination. The second week focused on the author and illustrator, Pat Cummings. The literacy activities for this week (see Appendix E) focused on showing the students that an illustrator's eye often tells a personal story in the portrayal of the characters, and promote reading for a purpose, selecting main information from a story and synthesizing this information. The third week was focused on Patricia C. McKissack. The literacy activities for this week (see Appendix F) helped the students to see that stories can be told in different ways and from different cultural perspectives, yet retain some of the same qualities. The activities also helped students to begin to recognize and value the contributions of an historical figure, broadening the students' understanding of a piece of African-American culture and history. The fourth week was dedicated to Faith Ringgold. The literacy activities for this week (see Appendix G) helped the students to realize that they have the power to take action against social injustice, while exploring some of the stereotypes behind limitations that have been placed on people of color (see also Appendix H). Students were also given the opportunity to develop empathy for those who have faced discrimination and social

injustice (see Appendix I). On the final day of this week, the students completed the K-W-L chart by filling in what they had learned about African-American culture and literature.

Throughout this project, I used three assessment tools. First, I completed an observation grid (adapted from Evans, 2001, p. 140) on a daily basis (see Appendix J). I inserted students' names into the appropriate section of the grid as they displayed the behavior described. I theorized that by the end of the project, I would see more students displaying this type of behavior, thereby allowing me to conclude that the exposure to African-American literature and related activities had helped these students to grow in their literacy skills. Second, I provided the students with a self-reflection questionnaire, composed of three questions (see Appendix K). The first question asked which book or author the individual student enjoyed the most. The second question asked what the student enjoyed about this particular book or author and why. The final question asked the student if he/she would like to read more books of this nature or learn more about the author in the future. With this questionnaire, I could analyze whether this project had a positive or negative impact on the individual students' interests in African-American literature or African-American authors (Evans, 2001). This helped me to measure the success of this project. Third, I looked at samples of student work during each of the literacy activities, in order to see the various responses and ideas about the African-American literature and the cultural issues addressed in the activities (see Appendix D-I). This helped me to assess the growth of the students in reference to literacy skills, such as questioning the author, interrogating multiple viewpoints, and relating text to real life experiences for the purpose of increasing comprehension (Tierney & Readence, 2000).

Results and Discussion

The first goal of this project was to provide elementary students with reading enjoyment and illuminate the human experience, in both its unity and diversity. On the second day, as the students discussed Africa Dream by Eloise Greenfield, one student noted that the dream of Africa happened long ago. When I asked why the dream might have happened long ago, one student responded that the clothing of the people in the dream was old. Another student volunteered the idea that maybe the clothing was not old, but that people in Africa might dress that way today. As the discussion moved on to dreams themselves, the students decided that this book was about a bad dream that became good as the main character became less afraid. One student commented that he had bad dreams sometimes that turned out to be good. This was my goal with this particular lesson. That is, to help the students begin to see that while they may not have had dream of Africa, they have all had dreams like this one. At this early stage of the project, I noticed the students were focused more on the subjects of dreams, and were only beginning to recognize the diversity of African-American culture (see Appendix D for examples of student work). I suspect that the dream activity was too far removed from the subject of African-American culture to allow for the students to make direct connections between the literature and the activity.

The first book shared in the second week of this project was Storm in the Night, written by Mary Stolz and illustrated by Pat Cummings. Before I began reading, many students stated that they had already read this book during free time the previous week. I took a brief survey of the group, and found that many of the students had read books from

the collection I had brought into the classroom. They all stated that they enjoyed reading the books. This met this first goal of providing reading enjoyment, as the students seemed to be taking an active interest in the African-American literature I had chosen for this project. The students were taking an active role in their learning by reading these books during free reading time, extending the project beyond the time I actively spent in the classroom.

On the third day of the second week, I read Ananse and the Lizard by Pat Cummings to the class. I began this lesson by asking the students if anyone had ever read a folk tale. One student responded that a folk tale is like a fairy tale, and is not real. I asked the class if a story that is not real could tell us anything about the world in which we live. I gave the example of Cinderella, and asked if the story contained any important messages that we should remember in our own lives. Several students responded by stating that we should remember to be nice to everyone, because Cinderella was poor and dirty, but she was also nice. After reading the story about Ananse, I asked the class if this folk tale contained an important message (see Appendix F for examples of student work). The students offered responses such as, someone who tries to cheat might be tricked anyway, being mean to others means losing what you really want, and honesty is the best policy. The students were actively engaged in making connections to their own lives from the book shared, thus illuminating their own human experiences.

The second goal of this project was to help students to change the way they look at their world by offering varying perspectives. On the third day of week one, I read Mary McLeod Bethune by Eloise Greenfield. I began by giving the class a brief history of the discrimination acts against African-Americans during Mary Bethune's time,

highlighting the fact that people of color were not allowed to learn to read or go to school. After reading the book, I asked the students to decide a course of action they might take if told that they could not go to school. The students took turns writing on the white board. The responses from the students were (responses recorded verbatim, with corrected spelling):

I'll go anyway

It's not fair

I'll stay home

I have the rights as anybody else

What if you had blue eyes and I told you that, how would you feel

There is a lot of people like me

They should have the same chance for school

Why can they go and not me

They should have the same chance for school

Though only nine students out of nineteen responded by writing on the white board, the conversations between students throughout the class seemed to support the general consensus that everyone should have the right to go to school. One student observed that Mary might have helped to make things better for African-American people who live today. Another student commented that if he were Mary, he would have gone to school anyway because it is not fair that she couldn't attend. Several students expressed anger at the fact that Mary could not attend a proper school because of the color of her skin (see Appendix J for examples of student work). The students were challenging the

discrimination faced by African-Americans at this time by looking at their own rights to go to school, and looking at the world through the perspective of an oppressed culture.

On the second day of week two, the students shared drawings from Storm in the Night. The students were asked to pay close attention to the illustrations in this book, especially the features of the characters. They each drew a picture of someone to whom they are very close (see Appendix E for examples of student work). Each student stated that the person in the drawing was drawn from experience. When I asked if the illustrator (Pat Cummings) had likely drawn from personal experience, one student asked if the illustrator was African-American. Another student asked if a White person could draw an African-American person well. I turned this question to the class, eliciting the response from another student that a White person would have to study African-American people in order to draw them realistically. In this activity, the students were able to see the importance of cross-cultural competence in accurate portrayal of a parallel culture.

On the first day of week three, I read Flossie and the Fox by Patricia C. McKissack. The class had no trouble making the connection between this story and the classic story of Little Red Riding Hood. However, the students seemed to appreciate the different perspective of this African-American author. The students expressed admiration for Flossie and her quick wit in out-smarting the fox, and relative disdain for Red Riding Hood's less street-smart personality (see Appendix G for examples of student work). The students were able to see this story from a different cultural perspective, as they commented on the Southern Black dialect used in the story, noting how the language showed how strong and smart Flossie was. One student asked why the language in this

story was so strange. A student who commented that Flossie talks fast and uses different words to fool the fox, so she must be very smart answered him (see Appendix J for examples of student work).

On the second day of week three, I read George Washington Carver: The Peanut Scientist, also by Patricia C. McKissack. After reading the book, I asked the class to talk about some of the contributions made by this historical figure. I made a Comparison Chart on the white board. One side listed the contributions made by George Washington Carver, and the other side listed examples of what the world might be like if he had not worked so hard to achieve his goals. The Comparison Chart contained the following information (responses recorded verbatim, with corrected spelling):

<u>Thank You George</u>	<u>What If...no George</u>
rotated plants for better dirt	veggies couldn't keep growing
peanuts	no peanuts
peanut butter	boll weevils would eat cotton
sweet potatoes could grow	no good science labs
better cotton on the South	went against law for his own rights- might be no rights now
never gave up	African-Americans would not have as much rights
courage	
believed in himself	

The students demonstrated the ability to look at the world in which they currently live from a different perspective—one that does not include the contributions of this important African-American figure.

This ability to look at the world through another perspective was also demonstrated on the first day of week four, when I read the book Tar Beach by Faith Ringgold. As the students wrote letters to the union, they expressed not only outrage, but anger at the fact that the main character's father and grandfather could not join simply because of skin color (see Appendix H for examples of student work). Instead of simply developing empathy, and considering the notion of taking social action against injustice, the students expressed anger at this injustice and actually took social action by writing letters. The students were able to see that it is often not enough to feel indignant toward the discrimination of others. The students were able to act upon their feelings.

On the second day of week four, I read Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky, also by Faith Ringgold. The students again looked at the injustice of slavery through the eyes of an African-American who lived this experience. They again took social action against the injustice of slavery by completing the phrase, "If I were a slave, I would..." and plotting a personal course of action (see Appendix I for examples of student work).

The third goal of this project was to help the student improve their literacy skills. Through the literacy activities that followed each book, the students were able to look beyond the literature. This can be seen in the Observation Grids (see Appendix J), as students began to demonstrate more advanced literacy skills such as, using prior knowledge to make meaning, elaborating on others' comments, and relating the literature

to personal experience. However, the Observation Grid does not show the entire extent of the students' advancement of literacy skills. In the first few days of this project, more and more names appeared on the grid as the students explored different aspects of literacy learning, drawing inferences, retelling and summarizing, and asking questions to further understanding. As the project continued, the names on the grid dwindled, as the students moved beyond the confines of the grid, into more advanced thinking.

This goal can also be seen in the Self-Reflection Questionnaire, as well as the work of the students. The students showed various literacy skills in the work accompanying the literacy activities. The students demonstrated connecting the literature to real-life experience, questioning the commonplace, taking main ideas from the text and synthesizing those ideas into another form, and taking social action based on the information from the literature (see Appendixes D-I). In the self-reflection questionnaire, the students demonstrated a preference for certain books and authors as well as the intention to read more on the subject of the African-American culture in the future. This literacy skill is that of reading for pleasure, including motivation to read, and a general positive attitude toward reading.

Another literacy skill can be seen in the final column in the K-W-L chart, filled in on the final day of this project, beginning with a choral reading of the first two columns. I then asked the students what they had learned about the African-American culture through the books and activities shared throughout this project. The students volunteered concepts learned while I wrote on a sheet of poster board. The students filled the poster board, making connections between the various books shared. These connections aided

in overall comprehension, and helped the students to see the African-American culture as a valid and important literary subject.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this project, the students demonstrated knowledge of the African-American culture, depicting the people as tribal and foreign. This was surprising, since there are two African-American students in the classroom. However, those two students volunteered the same views as their peers. I suspect that the term African-American (as well as Black-American) was as foreign to these students as the realities of the African-American culture. Throughout this project, these second-grade students were exposed to authentic African-American literature. African-American authors who are thoroughly immersed in the culture and can present the material in a responsible manner wrote this literature. The students were engaged in activities that connected this literature to their own experiences. By the second week, this class was beginning to demonstrate an interest in the African-American literature included in this project, and an awareness of the injustices suffered by this culture. By the end of the project, the students had begun to develop empathy and to realize the importance of taking action against social injustice. This was one of the goals of this project.

Another goal was that of helping the students to create personal connections to the African-American literature, promoting comprehension. The Observation Grid used for my own purpose of taking notes during each lesson was intended to show the growth of student comprehension (see Appendix J). The expectation in using this grid was that I would see more students demonstrating the literacy skills outlined on the grid as the project progressed (i.e. using prior knowledge to make meaning, placing self in the story,

and drawing inferences). However, I saw the opposite phenomenon. In the beginning, few names appeared on the grid, but as the project progressed, more and more names appeared in different literacy skill areas on the Observation Grid. As the project moved into the final lessons, the names on the grid decreased. This does not mean that the class was less engaged as the project went on. Just the opposite, students became engaged to a degree that could not be accurately recorded on the Observation Grid. The discussions became more detailed, moving beyond the confines of this grid. As the students completed activities, the conversations I observed often turned into debates. The students were no longer asking questions of myself; rather, they were asking and answering questions and concerns amongst each other. The students also began debating action they might take if in a situation involving prejudice and discrimination. This kind of higher-level thinking went beyond my original expectations as to the outcomes of this project. The students in this class began asking detailed questions above and beyond the literature shared, delving into more complex social issues involving the oppression of the African-American culture. I view the decrease in names on the Observation Grid as a symbol of the success of this research project. Instead of remaining within the lines of a critical reading of multicultural literature, these students went to the next level by expanding comprehension into social action. The students grew beyond the confines of my Observation Grid, moving into the next level of critical literacy. They began questioning the commonplace, exploring multiple viewpoints among each other, and taking action to promote social justice (Lewison, Flint & Van Sluys, 2002).

At the conclusion of this project, I provided each student with a self-reflection questionnaire (see Appendix K). Every student involved in this project listed a favorite

book or author. Every student provided an explanation as to why this particular book or author was enjoyable, and every student stated an interest in reading more books written by and/or about African-Americans in the future. This was also indicated in the interest shown by the class in regard to the books chosen for this research project. At the conclusion of the project, each student had independently read and re-read some of the books. I therefore chose not to leave the books in the classroom until the holidays, as was originally intended. For this reason, as well as the advanced literacy and comprehension skills demonstrated by this class, I believe this project was a success. My goals were met and surpassed. The students gained a greater knowledge and understanding of the African-American culture, as well as improved skills in the critical reading of multicultural literature

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Greenfield, E. (1996). Grandpa's Face. New York: The Putnam Publishing Group.

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McKissack, P. (1999). Ma Dear's Aprons. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks.

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Stolz, M. (1988). Storm in the Night. New York: Harper & Row.

Appendix A

**AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURE: A Selected Bibliography of
Multicultural Children's Books**

Cummings, P. (2002). Ananse and the Lizard. New York: Holt, Henry Books for Young Readers.

Summary: Ananse the spider thinks he will marry the daughter of the village chief, but instead he is outsmarted by Lizard. Illustrated by Pat Cummings.

Cummings, P. (1994). Clean Your Room, Harvey Moon!. New York: Simon & Schuster Children's.

Summary: Harvey's unwilling, but Mom is firm: no more TV until he picks up! He tackles quite a large mess, and stuffs it under his rug. Mom is not fooled, but she does have a sense of humor about Harvey's creativity. Illustrated by Pat Cummings.

Greenfield, E. (1977). Africa Dream. New York: John Day (now HarperCollins).

Summary: A black child's dreams are filled with the images of the people and places of Africa. Illustrated by Carole Byard.

Greenfield, E. (1999). GrandMama's Joy. New York: Penguin Putnam Books for Young Readers.

Summary: This story offers a portrait of a relationship between a girl and her "GrandMama". Their love comes shining through in this touching story. Illustrated by Carole Byard.

Greenfield, E. (1996). Grandpa's Face. New York: The Putnam Publishing Group.

Summary: Seeing her beloved grandfather making a mean face while rehearsing for one of his plays, Tamika becomes afraid that someday she will lose his love and he will make that mean face at her. Illustrated by Floyd Cooper.

Greenfield, E. (1994). Mary McLeod Bethune. New York: HarperCollins Children's Books.

Summary: This non-fiction book tells the story of Mary McLeod Bethune, who made numerous contributions to education for African-Americans. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney.

McKissack, P. (1986). Flossie and the Fox. New York: Dial Books, a Member of Penguin Putnam, Inc..

Summary: Big Mama sends Flossie on an egg-gathering errand. In this loose adaptation of "Little Red Riding Hood" set in the Deep South, Flossie emerges as a strong central female character as she outsmarts the Fox. Illustrated by Rachel Isadora.

McKissack, P. (2002). George Washington Carver: The Peanut Scientist. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers.

Summary: This non-fiction book chronicles the life of this famous scientist, highlighting both his hardships and his determination for success. Illustrations are actual photographs.

McKissack, P. (1999). Ma Dear's Aprons. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks.

Summary: Set in rural Alabama in the early 1900's, this is the story of Ma Dear, who is a single parent who makes a living doing housework for other people. Her young son, David Earl, can always tell what day of the week it is by which apron Ma Dear is wearing. Illustrated by Floyd Cooper.

McKissack, P. (1997). Mirandy and Brother Wind. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Books for Young Readers.

Summary: Mirandy wants Brother Wind to be her partner for the upcoming junior cakewalk, believing that nobody could beat them. However, she didn't count on Brother Wind being so hard to catch. When she finally traps him in the barn and calls on him for help at the cakewalk. Their win becomes legendary. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney.

Ringgold, F. (1992). Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky. New York: Crown Publishers.

Summary: Cassie and her younger brother Be Be take a dream flight through the underground railroad in the sky, learning of their great-great-grandparents' long journey from slavery to freedom, guided by the voice of Harriet Tubman. Illustrated by Faith Ringgold.

Ringgold, F. (2002). Cassie's Word Quilt. New York: Random House Books for Young Readers.

Summary: Names of the people and objects that make a girl's New York City apartment, school, and neighborhood special. Illustrated by Faith Ringgold.

Ringgold, F. (1999). If a Bus Could Talk. New York: Simon & Schuster Children's.

Summary: A talking bus tells the story of Rosa Parks, telling how she was not allowed to sit in the same row on the bus as a white person. It tells of the day when Rosa refused to give up her seat to a white man and how that act of courage inspired other to stand up for freedom. The bus tells this story to Marcie, who end up meeting Rosa Parks herself! Illustrated by Faith Ringgold.

Ringgold, F. (1991). Tar Beach. New York: Crown Publishing.

Summary: Cassie dreams that she is flying over the city, claiming all that she has ever admired, and righting wrongs done against those she loves. This story inspires readers to believe in wishes and dreams. Illustrated by Faith Ringgold.

Stolz, M. (1988). Storm in the Night. New York: Harper & Row.

Summary: While a storm rages on outside, Grandfather tells Thomas a very special story about when he was a boy. Illustrated by Pat Cummings.

Appendix B

What Do I Know?

- play different instruments
- dig holes for cooking
- speak different languages
- different clothing
- different foods and animals
- darker skin

What Do I Want To Know?

- what do they do in the fields
- how do they read
- how do we know if they were born in the U.S.
- what do the kids do in their free time

What Did I Learn?

- slaves worked all day
- Iowa was a free state
- Underground Railroad led them to the North
- fought against slavery
- dangerous to escape
- Carver grew peanuts to kill boll weevils
- Carver made us rotate crops to save cotton, invented a use for peanuts
- Carver had to hide, struggled to learn
- could not use White hospitals or schools, couldn't learn to read, had to sit in the back of the bus
- Carver lived in a shack so he could go to school
- could be punished for helping slaves escape
- bounty hunters caught slaves for money
- Bethune made a school for African-Americans
- Bethune welcomed everyone to her school, worked hard to grow school
- Flossie outsmarted the Fox
- couldn't learn to write
- Lincoln was white, freed slaves
- didn't get equal pay or safety

Appendix C

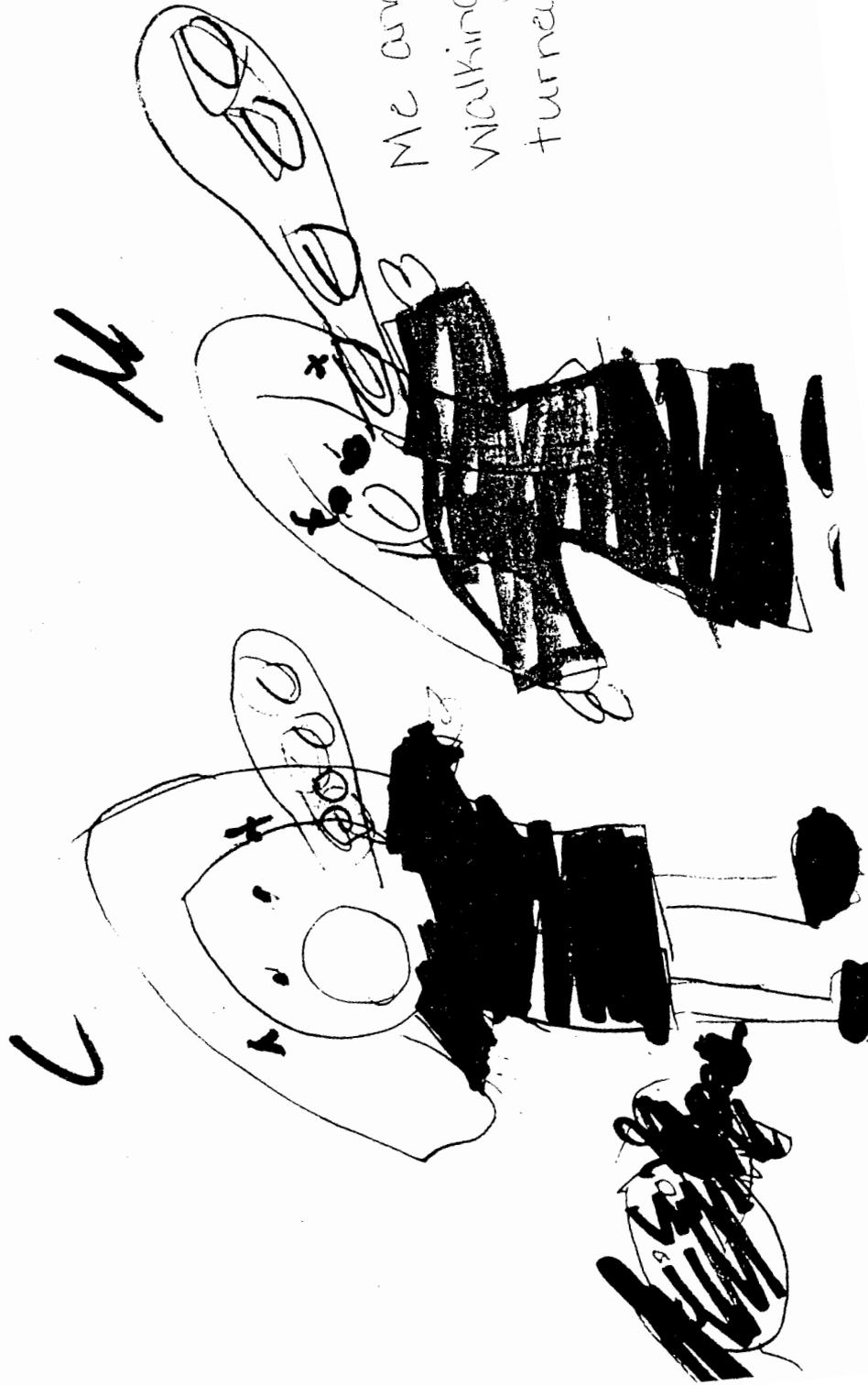
Week	Author	Books	Literacy Activities	Purpose
1	Eloise Greenfield	<u>Africa Dream</u>	Retell story in own words Write about a personal dream an illustrate	Makes the story come to life, stresses that we are all different, but the same in that we all dream
		<u>Mary McLeod Bethune</u>	Students discuss how they would feel if they could not go to school because of skin color, and what they might do to learn to read and write	Fosters empathy and a sense of taking action against social injustice by challenging stereotypes
2	Mary Stolz	<u>Storm in the Night</u> illustrated by Pat Cummings	Students draw pictures of a person to whom they are close	Shows that an illustrator's eye can tell a personal story, just as their pictures told one
		<u>Ananse and the Lizard</u>	Students draw a "Wanted Poster" for Ananse or Lizard, noting the physical description, examples of trickery, and reward	Promotes reading for a purpose, and selecting main information and synthesizing the information

Week	Author	Books	Literacy Activities	Purpose
3	Patricia C. McKissack	<u>Flossie and the Fox</u>	Students compare this adaptation of Red Riding Hood to the original story	Allows students to see that stories can be told in different ways and from different cultural perspectives, yet retain some of the same qualities
		<u>George Washington Carver: The Peanut Scientist</u>	Comparison Chart including contributions made by this historical figure, and what our world might be like if he had not achieved his goals	Students can begin to recognize and value the contributions of George Washington Carver, broadening understanding of a piece of African-American and American history
4	Faith Ringgold	<u>Tar Beach</u>	Discussion on racial injustice, focusing on the exclusion of African-Americans from the Union. Students write letters to the Union, stating why or why not Cassie's father and grandfather should be allowed to join the Union	Student can begin to realize the power to take action against social injustice, seeing that one voice counts, and raise their own consciousness while exploring some of the stereotypes behind limitations placed on people because of skin color
		<u>Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky</u>	Prefaced with an explanation of slavery, students complete the phrase, "If I were a slave, I would...", by stating how they might feel or an action they might take in this situation	Students develop empathy for those who lived as slaves, and begin to challenge the social injustice those individuals faced throughout their lives

Appendix D

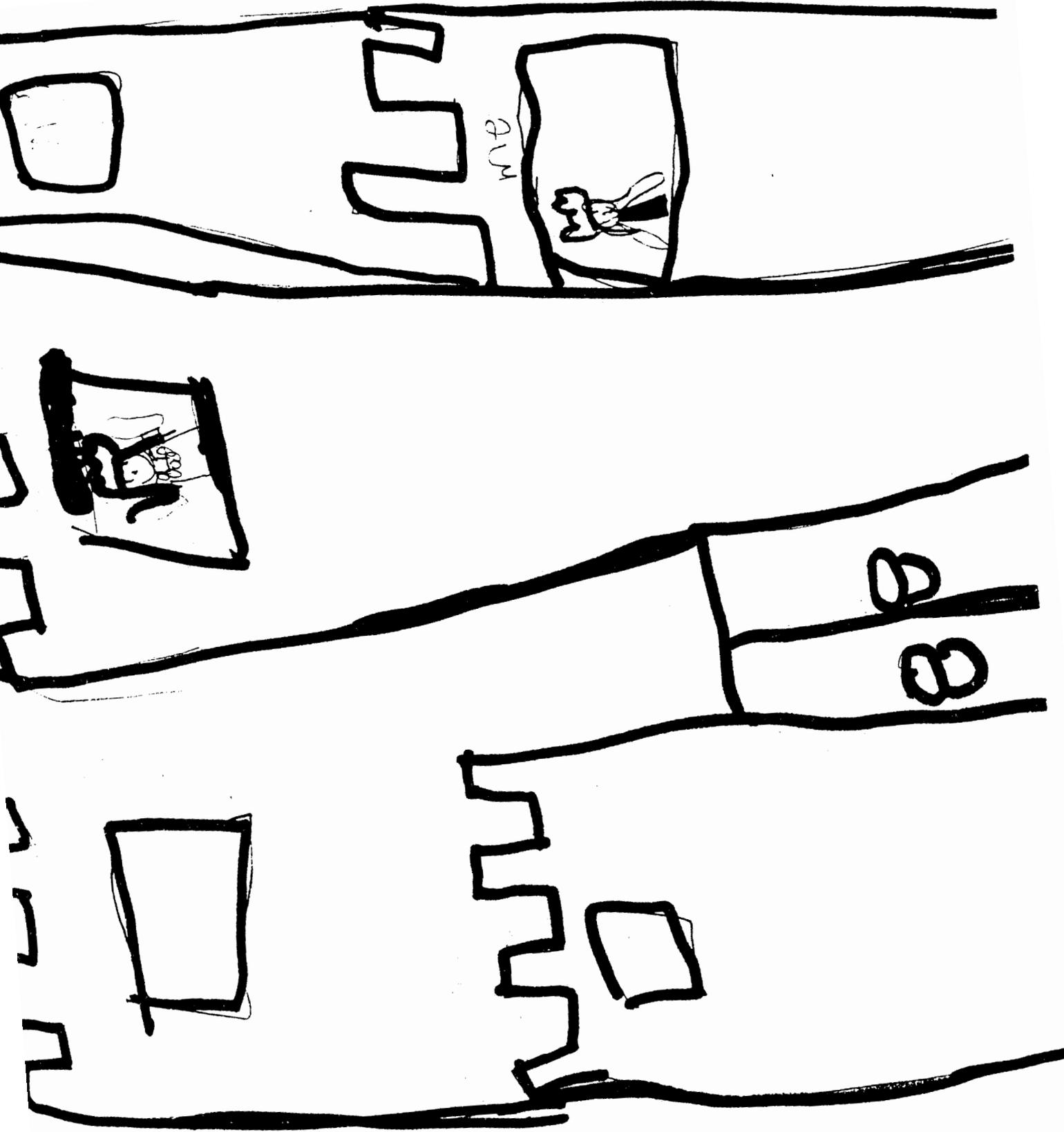
This appendix contains examples of student work, when asked to respond to Africa Dream by Eloise Greenfield. This is a sampling of a few dream illustrations and captions.

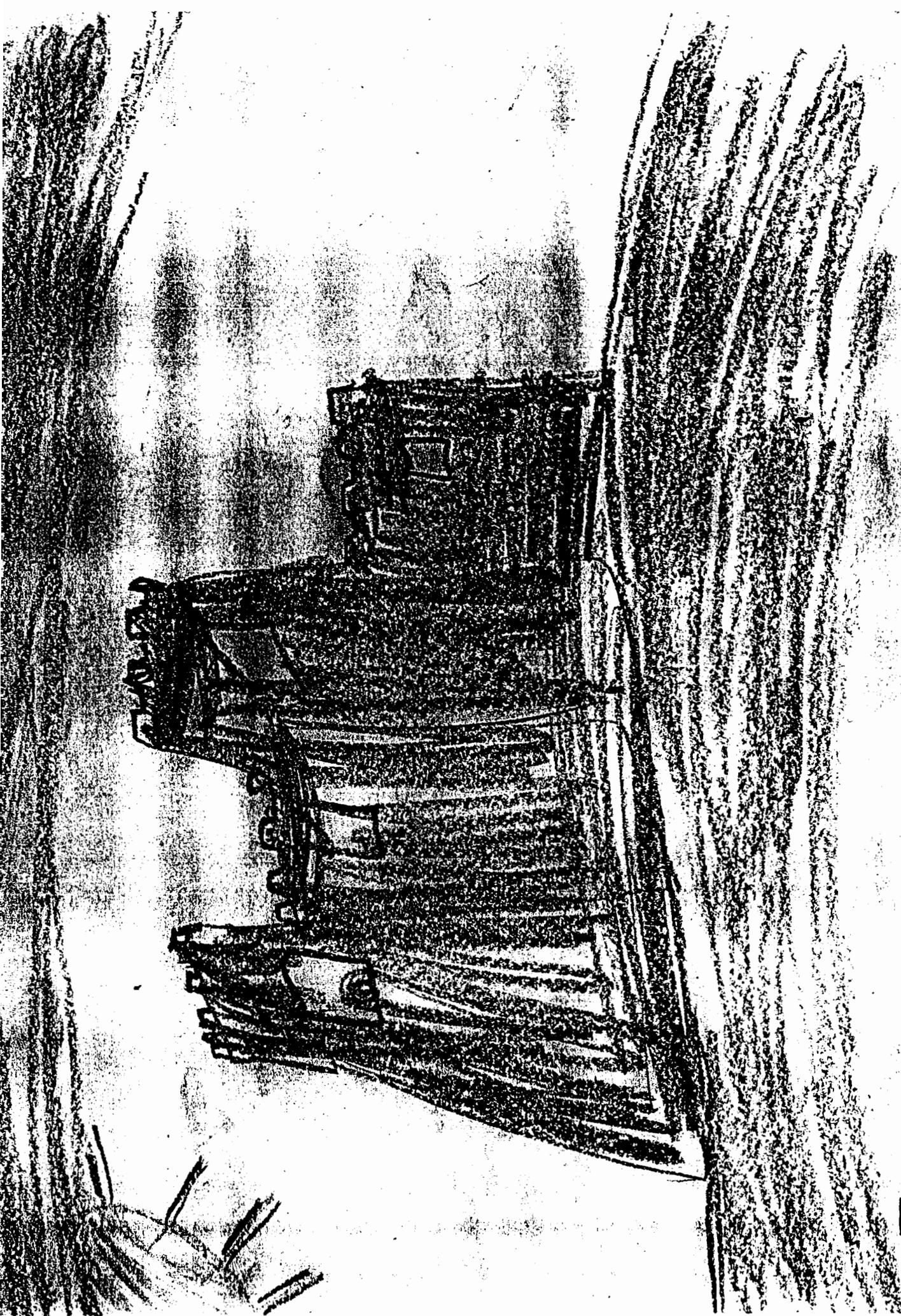
Me and Cheyenne were walking and our moms turned into mean dogs.



Me and Cheyenne were walking and our moms turned into mean dogs.

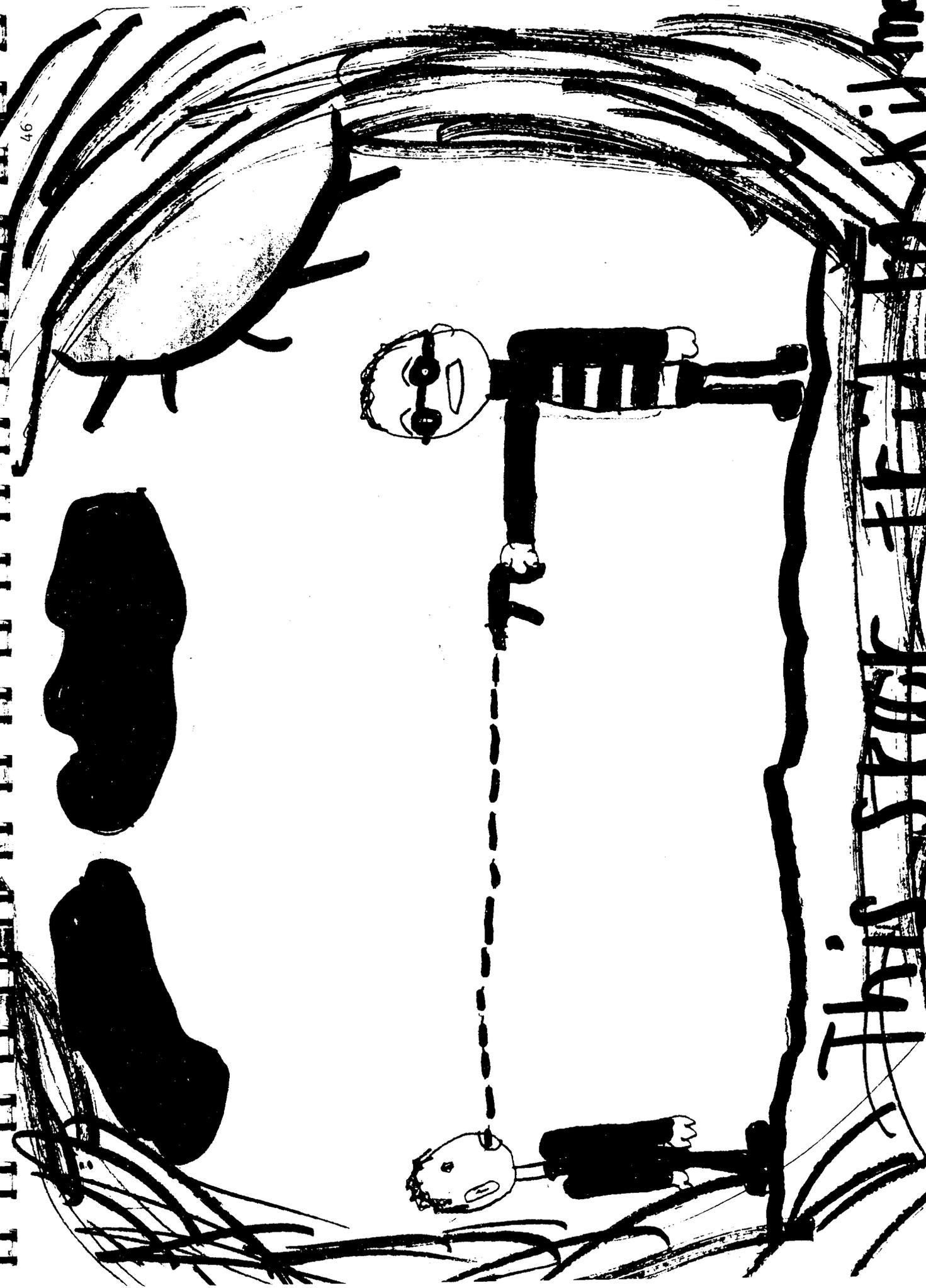
me and my mom
in a Gestel
she was the
queen and I
was the pris
es.





I lived in a castle, with
1911

This Secret

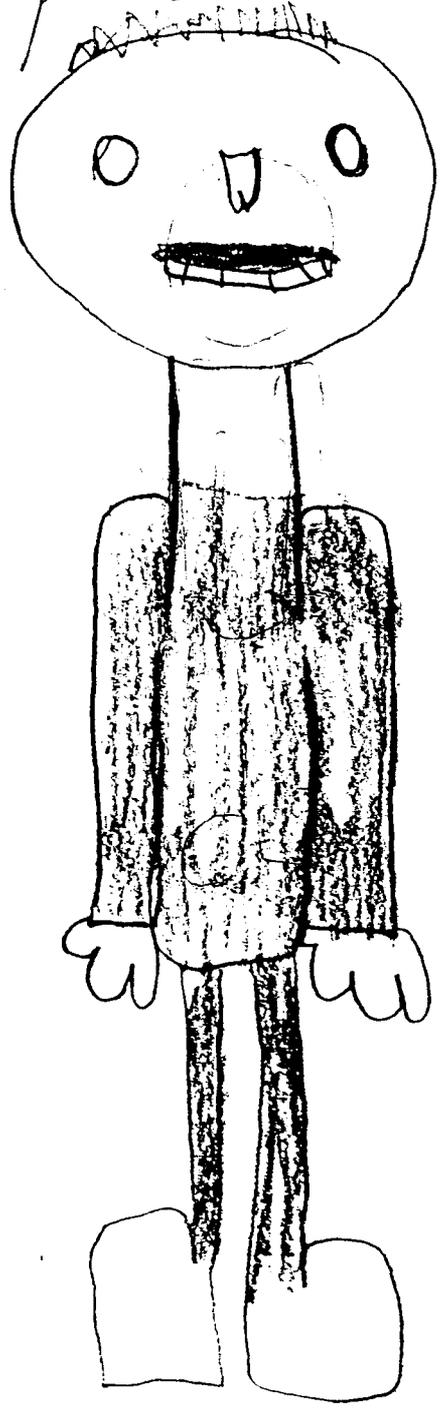


Appendix E

This appendix contains examples of student work, when asked to respond to Storm in the Night by Mary Stolz. This is a sampling of illustrations depicting a person close to the student.

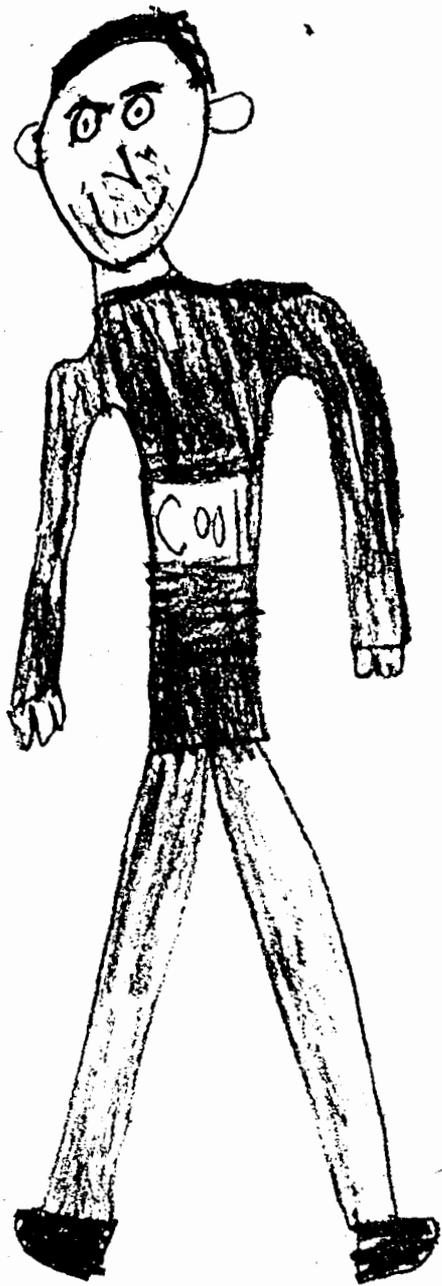
I like to sbian whet
my Dad he make the
baast danr.

my Dad

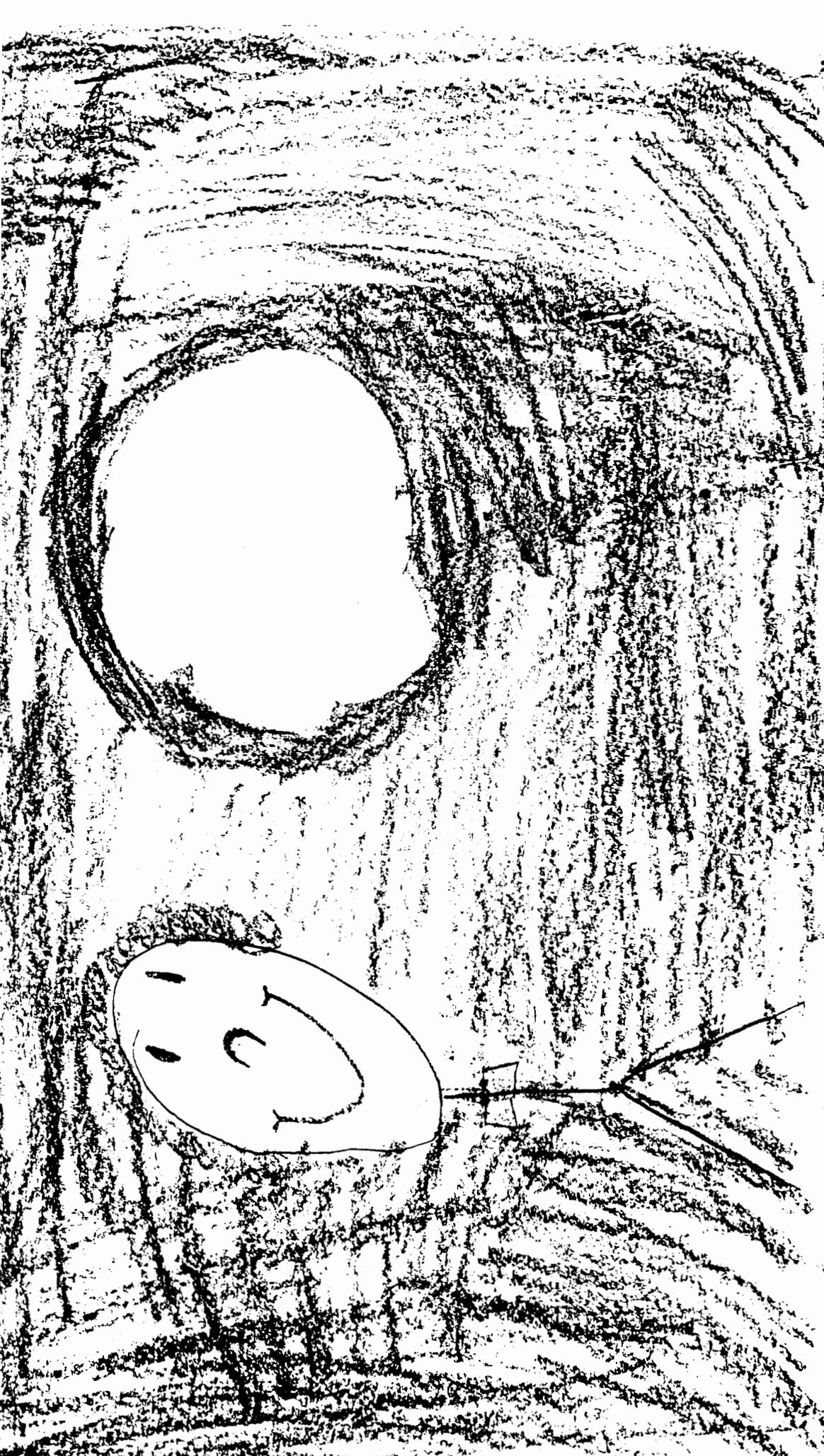


me

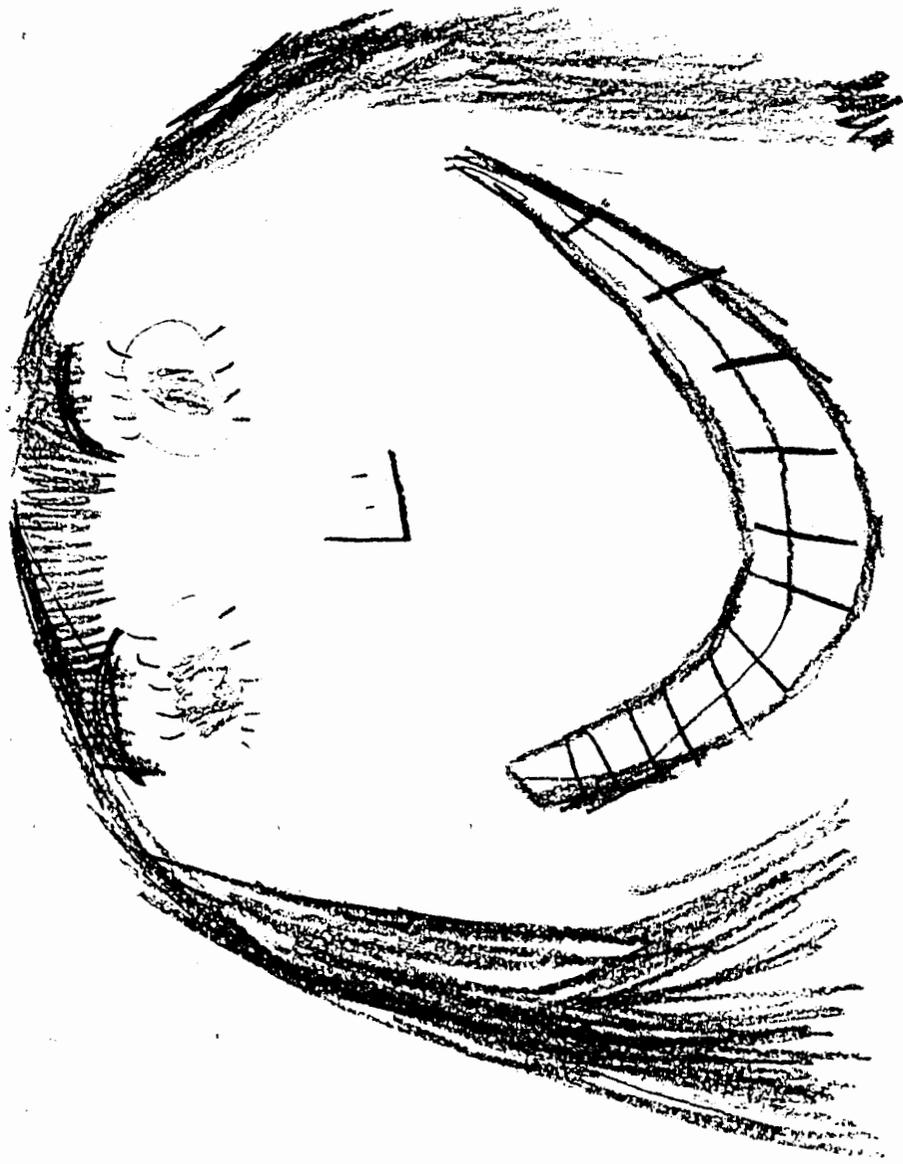




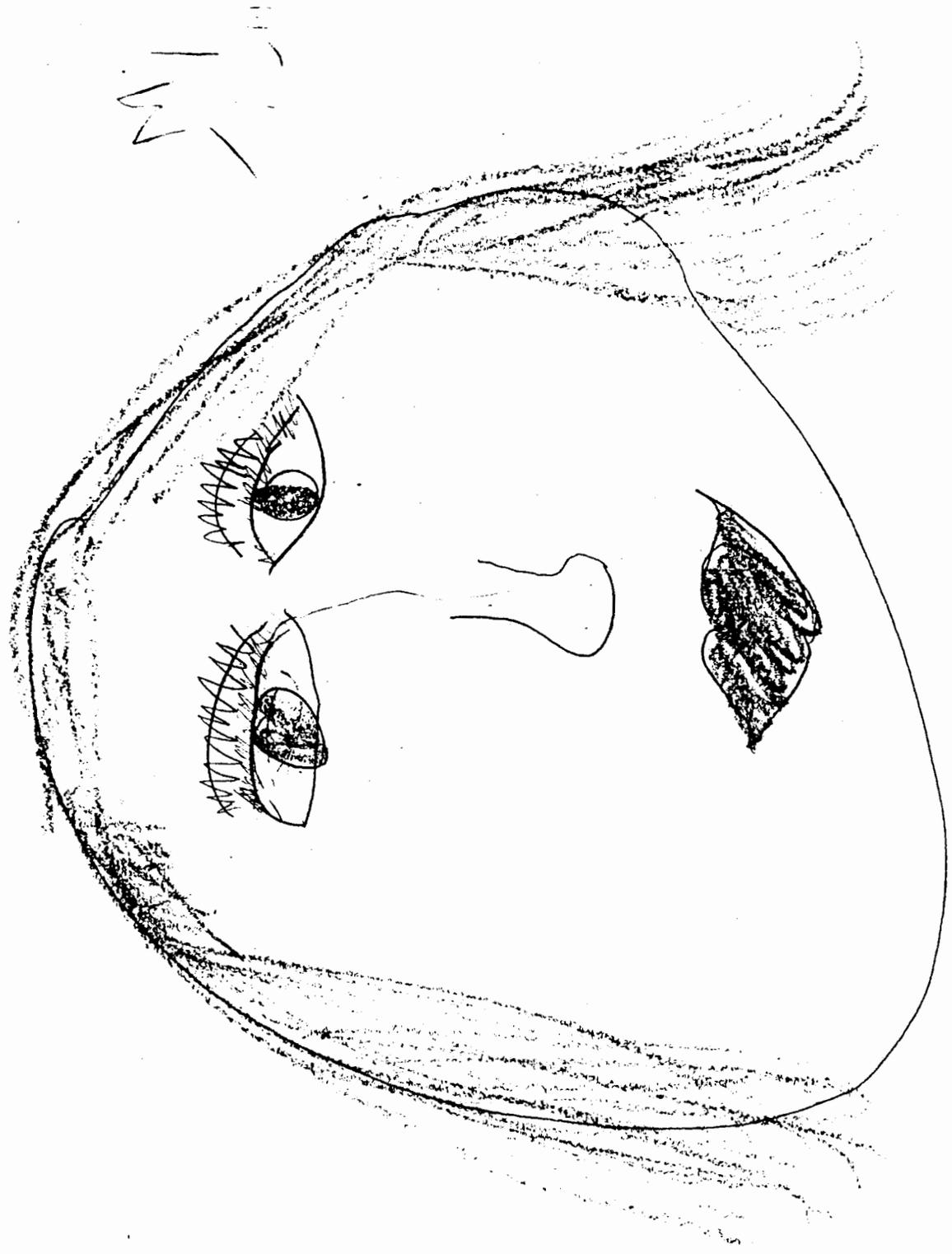
My dad is special -
because we watch
football together,
and play baseball. And
go to box kar haps
together.



Take this person because she
spends time with me.



I like to spend
time with my
cousin because she



I like my mom because she
 close my mom's smiling with me.

Appendix F

This appendix contains examples of student work, when asked to respond to Ananse and the Lizard by Pat Cummings. This is a sampling of "Wanted" posters.

А
В
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Warpings

Warping

Warping

Warping

Warping



Warping
3000 years

Antique

REVIEW OF A COOK AND A
HEALTHY SELFISH LOOK



It is small and green
He has a small green tail. And is

Spoken. With a short red tongue.
Two branches only. WANTED FOR TR
ing Arasey.

Reisee





Ananse
 foolish, curious, mad, friendly
 tricky sneaky

~~blake selfish, eas~~
~~Pat~~
~~was~~
~~born~~
~~in~~
~~the~~
~~year~~
~~1700~~
~~or~~
~~thereabouts~~

↑
 Ananse wanted because
 he told the lizard the
 name of the princess

Princess

30 Gold's

Appendix G

This appendix contains examples of student work, when asked to respond to Flossie and the Fox by Patricia K. McKissack. This is a sampling of Comparison Charts, determining the similarities and differences between this story and Little Red Riding Hood.

Same

different ⁶¹

they both had
out ~~the~~ ^{smoked} the Wolf
and fox.

there were
two grandmas
in the story.

Red writing
had had white
skin. Flossie
a different ^{friend} ^{absent}
In Flossie
there was a
Fox and in
red writing with

Same

differin- 62

they both had had white
out + smoted
the Wolf
and fox.

there were
two grandmas
in the story.

Red writing
had had white
Skin. Flossie
In Flossie
there was a
Fox and in
red writing well.

same

different

They both
out smarted
the f.

They talk
different

They both

They talk
different

~~the grandpas~~

They acted
differently

The grandpa's
are both old

The grandpa's
are different

<p>little red</p>	<p>loss ⁶⁴</p>
<p>fox smart</p>	<p>fox gullab</p>
<p>grana English</p>	<p>grana diffre + a k s e</p>
<p>out smarted</p>	<p>not out smart - e</p>
<p>ted jacket</p>	<p>white vest</p>
<p>mix food</p>	<p>eggs</p>
<p>fox meat</p>	<p>fox sard</p>
<p>got it food</p>	<p>didn't get food</p>
<p>white skin</p>	<p>black skin</p>
<p>red shirt</p>	<p>yellow shirt</p>

out Smrted

uv

r
red ddfit
diff erted naem

he's a ^{Fox} Daby taht wans

r
F gos to grandmas
hous

r
Grils
Cering a bas kt

r
Fox
folols

Different

Same

Corlery. skin

both old people

talk Different

live in Different places

Flossy out smarted Fox)

'and red did not

have different life stiiils

Appendix H

This appendix contains examples of student work, when asked to respond to Tar Beach by Faith Ringgold. This is a sampling of letters written to the union on the behalf of Cassie's father and grandfather.

Dear Union

How would you feel
 if you had darker skin
 I think you should let
 Cassie's dad join the Union

You would feel bad if you had
 to build buildings and not get
 any money from it.

It is not safe for him
 and you have no reason
 not to help him!!

Dear Union,

How would you feel if you had darker skin?
 I think you should let Cassie's dad join the
 Union.

You would feel bad if you had to build
 buildings and not get any money from it.
 It is not safe for him and you have no
 reason not to help him!!

Dear Brian,

Cassie's dad is the
same as you people. Cassie's
dad needs more money
to buy food. He'd like to
be the same as you.

They are human beings.

They are the same

as you "insad threr body."

They are diffrrent on

the out side but they

are the same in
the inside.

He has the same rights
as you people.

Dear Union,

Cassie's dad is the same as you people.

Cassie's dad needs more money to buy food.

He deserves the same as you.

They are human beings.

They are the same as you inside their body.

They are different on the outside but they are the same in the inside.

He has the same rights as you people.

Dear Union

The darkest scined people are still
people that need to be safe.

And they still have riots two,

get paid as much as
light colored people.

73
even if they're black people

they should work with

white people. They should

be safe so they would

not die from. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The dark skinned people are still people that need to be safe. And they still have rights to get paid as much as light colored people even if they're black people they should work with white people. They should be safe so they would not die.

~~Casy's~~ needs to be in

the union. Casy's Dad

should be able to be

payed. The union should

let Casy's Dad in the

union. The dark's

fire.

76
pep ls scin should be

in the union and be

~~Save.~~

Dear Union,

Cassie's dad needs to be in the union.

Cassie's dad should be able to be paid.

The union should let Cassie's Dad in the union.

The dark peoples skin should be in the union and be safe.

Appendix I

This appendix contains examples of student work, when asked to respond to Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky by Faith Ringgold. This is a sampling of student responses to being a slave.

If I were a slave I would...

Pick some grass and tape it all
over me. And escape.

If I were a slave I would...

Pick some grass and tape it all
over me. And escape.

If I were a slave I would ⁷⁹ ~~teach~~

everybody to not work for the

~~people~~ who you work for.

So everybody can be free.

If I were a slave I would tell everybody
to not work for the people who you work for.
So everybody can be free.

80
If I was a slave I would

would exist. And I would

go under ground and would

and I would go to a free

care and would make money.

If I was a slave I would I would

escape. And I would go under ground
railroad road and I would go to a free

car and would make money.

If I were a slave
I would stay because
I would see if they
would finally see how
bad it is to have
people work for

you when you don't
pay them.

If I were a slave I would stay because I

would see if they would finally see how bad it is

to have people work for you when you don't pay them.

If I were a slave I would yell to the

other slaves that we shud fiyt back

even if it cosd sum peuple shud die.

If I were a slave I would yell to the other

slaves that we should fight back even if

it cosd sum peuple shud die

If I were a slave I would

put paint on my face

and I would walk all the

way to knada and then

I would wash my face.

If I were a slave I would put paint on my face and I

would walk all the way to Canada and then I would



If I were a slave I would

ste because so a bin ham linckin

will let me go and the

people hob ond slaves will find
someone els.

If I were a slave I would stay because so

Abraham Lincoln will let me go and the people

who owned slaves will find someone else.

Appendix J

Comprehension Areas	9/10/2002	9/11/2002	9/12/2002	9/17/2002	9/18/2002
Uses prior knowledge to make meaning	Aubry-saw something about Africa on TV Brian-mom told him about slavery				
Relates to personal experience	Jacob-has "real" dreams often	Stephen-talks about bad dreams	Cheyenne-is mad if she can't do things	Jacob-grandpa tells him stories too	
Makes predictions				Aubry-boy is not as brave as he says	
Personally identifies with a character			Stephen-if he were Mary, he would go to school anyway	Stephen-he pretends to be brave in storms	
Places self in story		Kiersten-wishes she could fly above Africa		Brian-he would miss TV during the storm	
Asks questions to further understanding	Stephen-asks if someone told the character of Africa				Michael-white person could not draw these pictures as well
Draws inferences			Jacob-Mary is strong because of parents		
Elaborates on others' comments		Brian-says that not all dreams are bad	Emily R.-is angry that Mary can't go to school	Cheyenne-black illustrator drew this	Kiersten-they would have to study
Retells/Summarizes		Aubry-says that the story is not strange to Africans			

Comprehension Areas	9/19/2002	9/23/2002	9/26/2002	10/1/2002	10/2/2002
Uses prior knowledge to make meaning	Logan-a folk tale is like a fairy tale	Tanisha-story is like Red Riding Hood			Cheyenne-the railroad is a subway and secret
Makes predictions	Michael-there will be a good and bad guy				
Personally identifies with a character		Stephen-says he is smart like Flossie			
Questions the author	Brenden-why is Ananse fooled, when he is so smart	Brian-why is the language so strange		Tanisha-why is it called Tar Beach	
Connects to other texts		Aubry-Red Riding Hood is not as smart	Brian-George is like Mary because they fought for school		Sam-the people escaping are like George and Mary
Asks questions to further understanding					
Elaborates on others' comments	Ashtyn-Ananse deserved to be fooled because he was selfish	Jacob-strong language helps Flossie fool Fox		Emily R.-tar on the roof is her beach	

Appendix K

(17 Students responded; 2 students absent)

1. Which book or author did you enjoy learning about the most?

Pat Cummings - Flossie and the Fox; Ananse and the Lizard

Patricia McKissack - George Washington Carver: The Peanut Scientist

Faith Ringgold - Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky; Tar Beach

2. What did you enjoy about this book or author? Why?

Pat Cummings - The pictures looked clear.
 The pictures fit the story.
 We got to do an activity with the story.
 It was kind of funny.
 It is fun.
 They are nice pictures.
 Flossie outsmarted the Fox.
 I wanted to hear that book.
 I like her words.
 It was kind of an adventure story.
 It's kind of like a cartoon.

Patricia McKissack - I liked learning how he lived.
 The story was true.

Faith Ringgold - I liked the colors.
 She wrote good stories.
 The bounty hunters, because they were spying.
 The pictures were colorful.

3. Would you like to read more books about the African-American culture?

Yes = 17 Responses

No = 0 Responses