

Perspectives

in Covenant Education

Geography

Essential Learning

U.S. Geography Textbook for PR Schools

Geography Quiz

Volume 34/Number 3/Spring 2009

"The entrance of thy word giveth light" Psalm 119:130

Perspectives Staff

Tom Bergman
Susann Huizinga
Connie DeVries
Susan Van Koevering

Statement of Purpose

Perspectives in Covenant Education is a journal regulated and published quarterly, in November, February, May, and August by the Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute. The purpose of this magazine, in most general terms, is to advance the cause of distinctively Christian education as it is conceived in the Protestant Reformed community. More specifically, the magazine is intended to serve as an encouragement and an inducement toward individual scholarship, and a medium for the development of distinctive principles and methods of teaching. The journal is meant to be a vehicle of communication, not only within the profession, but within the Protestant Reformed community and within the Christian community in general.

Editorial Office

Tom Bergman
7391 Magnolia Drive
Jenison, MI 49428
Phone (616) 669-4652
thomas.bergman@att.net

Business Office

Protestant Ref. Teachers' Institute
1401 Ferndale Avenue, SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49534

Editorial Policy

Perspectives in Covenant Education exists for the purpose of furthering the cause of Protestant Reformed Christian education. This principle therefore regulates the entire contents of the journal. *Perspectives in Covenant Education* will publish any article written by a teacher, parent, or friend of Protestant Reformed education, provided the article is in harmony with the stated purpose of the magazine. The journal will publish articles whether theoretical or practical. All manuscripts must be signed and all authors are solely responsible for the contents of their articles.

Subscription Policy

Subscription price: \$7.00 per year (\$8.00 US foreign). Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the business office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Include your former address and zip code.

Reprint Policy

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided that a) such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) proper acknowledgment is made; c) a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

Contents

Editorial

Geography: Essential Learning *by Tom Bergman* **2**

Feature

Fifth-Grade U.S. Geography Textbook for Protestant Reformed Schools *by Mike Feenstra* **3**

Geography Quiz **7**

Contribution

Joys of Teaching *by Gertrude Hoeksema and Mark Hoeksema* **8**

Top Ten Advice Lists **19**

Learn On *by Shaun Karsemeyer* **21**

Answers to the Geography Quiz **23**

Book Reviews

by Brenda Dykstra **25**

Geography: Essential Learning

by Tom Bergman

Who would argue about the importance of science? Who would deny the need to study history and language? Who would contradict the value of music and art? Certainly no one would dare to say that mathematics is useless. These are all important subjects, and geography belongs on a par with them because geography is inseparably related to other subjects. If any of these related subjects are important, then geography must be, too.

The history of mankind—both the wheat and the tares—God has unfolded on a diverse geographical landscape. The effect that geographical surroundings have on history is much more than merely to provide different scenery for different people to view. God has used the geographical diversity of the earth to affect the course of history. Mountains can be barriers or fortresses. Rivers can be useful waterways or deadly flood zones. The presence of fresh water supports plant life, animal life, and human life; the disappearance of water can ruin a nation. Some people are ocean-going; others are nomadic. All of the history of men and nations is always linked to the geographical character of their surroundings.

In the realm of mathematics, geographical distances and differences can foster or delay development.

For example, explorers and admirals navigating the seas relied on rapid advances in mathematics in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In contrast, the physical and cultural distance between west and east slowed the pace of progress in algebra for a while.

Geography also has ramifications for music. Western music has twelve notes per octave; some eastern music has twenty-two. Or consider J. S. Bach. In God's providence, Bach developed his talents in northern Germany with some influence from elsewhere in Europe. If Bach had grown up in the Caribbean or the Orient, his music would not have been made for organs and choirs in Lutheran churches. Music has even been a useful expression for national and geographical identity. Nobody will mistake Cuban rhythms or reggae beats for an Austrian march. The quintessential example, of course, is bagpipe music. The mere word "bagpipes" is much more than a part of Scottish culture; it is emblematic of Scotland itself.

The clearest connection of all is between geography and science. Geography is so intertwined with science that they can sometimes be barely distinguished. Topics like ocean currents, wind patterns, tides, weather systems, tundra, and deserts fit easily

into a science lesson or geography lesson. Part of the reason why this creation can be rightly called a “most elegant book” in the Belgic Confession of Faith (Art. 2) is because each page of the book is so wonderfully different. Diverse climates make for diverse ecosystems—astoundingly diverse.

As a case in point regarding these connections, think about Chicago. The history of Chicago cannot be well studied apart from the geography of the Midwest. The forests and plains of the Midwest are inseparably linked to the railroad, grain, lumber, and meat-packing industries. The laborers for these industries were often immigrants from a stagnant European economy. And financial investments in Chicago’s enterprises often came from New York City. Geography, geography everywhere!

If any of these other subjects have significance for the students in our

schools, then geography must have significance, too. Geography is relevant for understanding our surroundings. Geography makes a difference in how we view other people and work alongside them. Knowledge of geography is essential for the regenerated man serving as steward in God’s creation. Geography will matter until the very last days when unbelievers will call on the hills and mountains to cover them while the elect will meet the Lord Jesus in the air. Beyond that, we can scarcely imagine the beauty of the new creation!

There is no room then for a Reformed Christian to skimp on geography. Read and learn of it while in school. Read and learn of it outside of school. Read and learn and know the sovereign God who created and governs all things.

P

Feature

Fifth-Grade United States Geography Textbook for Protestant Reformed Schools

by Mike Feenstra

The distinctive worldview of the Protestant Reformed Churches is a treasure. As teachers, we are called to

teach all subjects, including geography, according to our worldview. One way that we can do this is to

have a textbook that has a Protestant Reformed worldview. This is the purpose of a current project of the Teacher Education Development Committee (TED Committee) of the Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools. At present, we are producing a 5th grade geography textbook on the regions of the United States.

The need for a geography textbook for 5th grade U.S. geography is great. First, there is no major textbook publisher that prints a solid geography textbook in this area. Second, the Protestant Reformed Christian Schools are ready to produce a textbook from a Protestant Reformed worldview.

Mr. Jon Huisken's course entitled "Principles and Practices of Reformed Education" was the inspiration for this textbook. In that course, we teachers talked about the need for our own textbooks. Various points were made in the discussion. However, one important point stuck with me—our schools are very small. While major publishers have scores of editors, writers, and typesetters, our schools have far fewer people who can do these tasks. However, the major publishers have not produced an acceptable 5th grade geography textbook because the state schools emphasize social studies over geography. The result is that the public schools have poor scores in geography.

Academic Debate on Social Studies vs. Geography

In recent years, educators in aca-

demia have discussed the abysmal geography scores of American students. One interesting book I found in my research is *Why Did Social Studies Go Wrong?* published by the Fordham Foundation, Washington, D.C. In the foreword of this book, Chester Finn states that he has fought to keep history and geography in the curriculum for years because, "evidence kept accumulating that American kids were emerging from K-12 education—and then, alas, from college—with ridiculously little knowledge or understanding of their country's history, their planet's geography, their government's functioning, or the economy's essential workings" (p. 1). Finn states that he worked with the National Geographic Society to get geography back in the curriculum. He also wants students to have a more rigorous course of study in history and geography.

This book follows with a number of articles contending for a rigorous training in geography and history. The first article is by Diane Ravitch entitled, "A Brief History of Social Studies." In this article she wrestles with the elusive term, "social studies":

Is it history with attention to current events? Is it a merger of history, geography, civics, economics, sociology, and all other social sciences? Is it a mishmash of courses such as career education, ethnic studies, gender studies, consumer education, environmental studies, peace education, character education, and drug education? Is it a field that defines its goals in terms of cultivating skills

like decision making, interpersonal relations, and critical thinking, as well as the development of “critical” attitudes like global awareness, environmental consciousness, multiculturalism, and gender equity? Over time, it has been all of the above, and the leaders of the field have frequently wrestled with their goals and purposes and self-definition. While some social studies teachers continue to teach traditional history, the leaders of the field tend to see it as a broad umbrella that covers a range of subjects, disciplines, and skills (Ravitch, p. 1).

As you can see, the discipline “social studies” is difficult to define. Even Ravitch’s opponents agree (see Ross and Marker, p. 139). However, “social studies” has replaced the courses of geography and history so that in some schools you do not hear of “geography” and “history” courses. The same is true for textbooks.

The arguments in *Why Did Social Studies Go Wrong?* have met opposition. This is not surprising since social studies is well entrenched as I have explained above. Barbara Stern counters the Fordham report in an article called, “Debunking the Myth: the Social Studies and Rigor.” She writes that a “rigorous, integrated social studies approach will be successful in improving the content knowledge and understanding of students” (p. 1). Stephan Fleury in *Social Studies* argues that the Fordham report is politically motivated and an “intellectual counterrevolution.”

While I agree that geography and history should be taught in schools

over against social studies, I also agree with Fleury that the reason to teach geography is not to promote a certain political position. I also sense this in the Fordham report. Rather, geography must be taught from a Christian perspective, understanding that the entire world is controlled by God. The following textbook project intends to do that.

The 5th Grade United States Geography Textbook Project

The 5th grade textbook on United States geography that I am writing will have nine separate chapters on nine regions of the United States. Each chapter will have a preliminary section that covers the history, climate, and landforms of the region. Clear physical and political maps will be provided which will allow students to easily finish map assignments. Then, each chapter will continue with sections on each of the states in the region. The focus of these state subsections will be the cities, products, and resources of each state.

At present, two chapters are finished. The two chapters that are finished will be in the middle of the textbook and will be preceded by an introductory first chapter concentrating on general map skills and landforms. This past summer, I spent many hours researching and writing chapters on the New England and the Middle Atlantic States. I admit that this process took longer than I thought for several reasons. First, quality pictures needed to be obtained. This is a difficult process because of the legal difficul-

ties with using pictures obtained from the Internet. One alternative is to obtain pictures from fellow teachers and parents in our schools. At present, I am looking into a way to coordinate this collection, so please contact me with your ideas. Second, maps were difficult to make. I am thankful for the help of a relative who works in graphic design. Else, the maps would be too expensive to make. Finally, the editing and typesetting of the curriculum requires much work. I am thankful that Mr. Jerry Kuiper has agreed to be the editor of this work. This is essential to the curriculum.

Throughout the chapters, our distinctive worldview will be displayed. For example, in a discussion of Atlantic City, New Jersey, the students are instructed why gambling is a sin. When Massachusetts is discussed, the American Revolution is introduced. The students are taught that the revolution was really a rebellion against the authority of Great Britain. You will not find that in today's textbooks!

The finished product will be a textbook which our schools can use. First, it is the intention of the TED Committee to approve and produce one textbook for each school. Then, it is hoped that our schools will desire to use the textbook in their 5th grade classroom. Anyone who desires to view two chapters of the textbook may go to the following website: <http://literacy.calumet.purdue.edu/student/feenstram1>. These two chapters have not yet been approved by the TED Committee.

Bibliography

- Finn, Chester E. Jr. "Foreword" in *Where Did Social Studies Go Wrong?* Leming, J., L. Ellington, and K. Porter-Magee, eds. Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003.
- Fleury, Stephan. "Social studies for an empire: thoughts on *Where Did Social Studies Go Wrong?*" *Social Studies* 96(4): 163-169.
- Ravitch, Diane. "A brief history of social studies," in *Where Did Social Studies Go Wrong?* Leming, J., L. Ellington, and K. Porter-Magee, eds. Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003.
- Ross, E. Wayne, and Perry M. Marker. "Social studies: wrong, right, or left? A critical response to the Fordham Institute's *Where Did Social Studies Go Wrong?*" *Social Studies* 96(4): 139-141.
- Stern, Barbara M. "Debunking the myth: the social studies and rigor." *International Journal of Social Education* 20(1): 52-58.



Geography Quiz

1. What nation was the top producer of blueberries in 2005?
a) Canada c) France
b) China d) United States
2. Some minorities are called “visible” because they can be noticed in a mere glance, e.g. black or Asian. Other ethnic origins are much less noticeable. Which of the following “invisible minorities” has the largest presence in Canada?
a) Dutch c) Norwegian
b) Irish d) Ukrainian
3. What type of mining operation has left over 100 miles of underground roads beneath the city of Detroit?
a) copper c) salt
b) magnesium d) sand
4. What do the initials “B. & O.” stand for in B. & O. Railroad?
5. Which of the following groups of cities share a major highway?
a) Spokane, Sioux Falls, Chicago, Boston
b) Winnipeg, Sioux Falls, St. Louis, Wichita
c) Denver, Phoenix, Houston, Philadelphia
d) Denver, Kansas City, Indianapolis, Atlanta
e) Phoenix, San Diego, Portland, Seattle
6. How many of the following major rivers would be crossed by a driver traveling on I-70 from Denver toward Pittsburgh: the Colorado, the Arkansas, the Missouri, the Mississippi, and the Ohio?
7. Each of the following European cities is the second most populous city in its country, except for which one?
a) Birmingham d) Barcelona
b) Marseille e) Turin
c) Hamburg
8. How many of the fifty state capitals in the United States are the largest cities in their respective states?
9. Which of the following cities is farthest west?
a) Louisville c) Milwaukee
b) Memphis
10. Which nation has the largest Muslim population in the world?
a) Indonesia d) Sudan
b) Iran e) Uzbekistan
c) Saudi Arabia
11. Name one of the four main Japanese islands.
12. Name one of the largest cities in Mexico besides Mexico City.
13. In 2003, which port handled the most tons of cargo?
a) Guangzhou d) Shanghai
b) Hong Kong e) Singapore
c) Rotterdam

Answers begin on page 21.

Joys of Teaching

by Gertrude Hoeksema
and Mark Hoeksema

Most articles in *Perspectives* are formal, sober, instructive, and even technical, as befits a publication intended for teachers.

This article does not fit the usual mold.

This is not to say that it has no instructional character, because it does—at least to perceptive elementary level teachers, to parents, and to grandparents. The reason is that it gives an insight into the thinking process and the perception of young children. Therefore it will be beneficial to all who instruct our covenant youth.

The biblical instruction material written by my late mother, Gertrude M. Hoeksema (who is the “teacher” spoken of below), is excellent. It is used in the Protestant Reformed Christian schools, and worldwide. Any grade school teacher will correctly attest to the value of her writings. As a long-time teacher of first grade at Adams Christian School, she spent countless hours developing the Bible curriculum for which she has become well-known.

However, there was a completely different side to my mother, which few know. As those who knew her or who had her for a teacher can attest, she was serious, dedicated, strict, and professional. But what many do

not know is that she also had a great sense of humor. I can distinctly remember as a youth that at our family supper table she would often relate incidents that had happened to her during her teaching day. In the telling of the story, she would often laugh so hard that she would hardly be able to tell us the punch line.

True to her organized nature, my mom recorded what her family called her “funnies”—the misconceptions and malapropisms of young children, which in a hitherto unpublished manuscript she entitled “Joys of Teaching.” She even divided them into categories. I can do no better than to let her speak for herself:

For most of the years of my teaching career, I have kept a notebook of the expressions of tender feelings, the absurd misconceptions, the humorous answers and mistakes, and the heartening observations that young children, mostly first graders, make. I have compiled them into rough categories to give a better overall picture of the thoughts and ways of young children.

What is the purpose of this article?

Primarily, it is joy and laughter—unabashedly and unapologetically so. The Scriptures abundantly teach that joy and laughter are correctly the province of the righteous, and ought

to characterize their lives as those who with their precious generations are redeemed, and who have happiness in Christ. True, in no way may we commit sacrilege in the section on biblical humor. The examples do not, if viewed from a correctly Reformed perspective. Only the redeemed have good cause to rejoice in the raising of covenant children (Ps. 8:2), who are the future strength of the church. From the mouths of babes God has ordained strength; out of their mouths has he also ordained strength according to their understanding, and sometimes according to their misunderstanding, which means that he has also ordained joy and humor. If upon reading what my mom has written, the reader does not howl with glee (or at least chuckle), he has no sense of humor.

Secondarily, all of us—teachers, parents, and grandparents—may take instruction from the examples given below, which will serve to enhance the clarity of our teaching skills. Most of the errors are not the fault of the teacher, but reflect the misunderstandings and misconceptions of young children. Some of the statements of the pupils may make little discernible sense to us as adults. As to the thought process that gives birth to these expressions, the reader is left to his own conclusions.

Biblical Humor

As will become obvious, most of the examples below (listed in no particular order) should be understood in the

context of a review of a lesson previously taught.

Teacher: “After Cain killed Abel, what did Cain answer God?”

Pupil: “Am I my brother’s babysitter?”

Teacher: “After Lot’s wife turned around to look back at Sodom and Gomorrah, what did she become?”

Pupil: “A pile of sugar.”

Another pupil: “She turned into solid pepper.”

Teacher: “After Abraham sent her away and she was very thirsty, what did Hagar find?”

Pupil: “Ice cubes.”

Teacher: “What did Joseph’s brothers throw him into when he found them at Dothan?”

Pupil: “A drinking fountain.”

Teacher: “What did Pharaoh’s butler serve him?”

Pupil: “Beer.”

Teacher: “Do you know why Pharaoh never kept his promise to let Israel go?”

Pupil: “He always crossed his fingers over his heart.”

Teacher, trying to teach the concept of death after the fall: “Did Eve drop dead after eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil?”

Pupil: “No, but I think she had a bad upset stomach.”

Teacher: “Do you remember for how much his brothers sold Joseph to be a slave?”

Pupil: “For twenty speckles of silver.”

Teacher: “At the time of Pharaoh, who was put into prison with the butler?”

Pupil: “The pie-maker.”

Teacher: “Who remembers the sixth plague on Egypt?”

Pupil: “Bubbles all over everybody.”

Teacher: “How do you think Isaac felt when he knew that he should bless Jacob, but wanted to bless Esau?”

Pupil: “Very nervous.”

Teacher: “What does the name *Benjamin* (“Son of my right hand”) mean?”

Pupil: “Son of my left arm.”

Teacher: “What did Moses call God’s people (rebels) when he struck the rock?”

Pupil: “You dumbbells!”

Teacher: “When Esther came to King Ahasuerus without permission, what did he do?”

Pupil: “He waved a flag at her.”

Teacher: “Who was the king that Ehud killed?”

Pupil: “Eggnog.”

Teacher: “Hezekiah had a sickness. What was wrong with him?”

Pupil: “I think he had a wart.”

Teacher: “Can you think of another name for the birds (ravens) who fed Elijah?”

Pupil: “Raisins?”

Teacher: “By what name did the king of Babylon call Daniel (Beltashazzar)?”

Pupil: “Danny.”

Teacher: “When the Syrians were trapped in Samaria and Elisha would not let Ahab kill them, what did Ahab give them?”

Pupil: “I think medicine.”

Teacher: “What does sheep-shearing mean?”

Pupil: “Scraping the skin off the sheep.”

Teacher: “When did God make a special star?”

Pupil: “At Christmas time.”

Teacher: “Who saw the star?”

Pupil hesitates.

Teacher: “Think back to the stories of Christmas. Then you will remember.”

Pupil: “Santa Claus!”

Teacher: “Where do you go to look up a word you don’t know?”

Pupil: “In the doxology.”

Teacher: “In the song ‘Silent Night,’ what does ‘calm’ mean?”

Pupil: “It’s what you do on the telephone. You know—call ‘em.”

A first grader’s version of Hebrews 11:3: “By faith Abel offered a more exciting sacrifice than Cain.”

As the first graders lined up for recess after a Bible story about Rachel and Leah and the trouble they caused in Jacob’s family, there was a ripple of talking among the children. After one girl noted the teacher’s frown, she volunteered, “It’s OK, teacher.

We just decided we're all for Leah, not Rachel."

In a review of the story of Babel, the teacher asked, "What did God do at Babel?" The answer: "He twisted their tongues."

The teacher had previously explained the rebellion of the ungodly at Babel by saying it was something like putting their fists in God's face. In the review session, one first grader volunteered, "And you know what they put in God's face? Knuckles!"

A first grader, eager and alert: "I know the name of the bushes near the city of Ai. Ambushes!"

In telling the story of Gideon and his three hundred men, the teacher stressed the wonder of his victory by means of only trumpets, torches, and pitchers, and described the fright of the Midianites. A first grader had a question at this point: "Did the Midianites wear pajamas when Gideon and his men walked around their camp?"

A first grader had a criticism as the teacher illustrated the story of Eli with a simple line drawing: "Teacher, you never draw Eli's chair right. It wasn't a straight chair. He was old, and his chair had rockers, because all old people sit in rocking chairs."

After the story of Ahab's taking Naboth's garden, a little boy reacted, "I hope God didn't let Naboth's garden grow for Ahab."

Upon hearing the story of Nabal, a first grade boy commented, "When

you told those words that wicked Nabal said, it sort of made my heart tip over."

Several weeks after participating in a Christmas program, a first grader bragged, "I still remember my Christmas text: 'Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good luck to men.'"

During the review of a lesson on the tabernacle furniture, a first grader volunteered, "I want to tell what they put on the table—store bread."

During Bible reading a little boy made the observation, "I know what it means when the Bible says, 'There is no more throne.' It means, 'They have no toilet.'"

A second grader summed up her ideas about listening to all the Bible stories she had been taught: "Teacher, I don't really *listen* to the stories. I see them in my mind. I have big pictures of everything that happened."

Teacher: "I know what you mean. I do, too."

Pupil: "Of course you do. I see the same pictures you do!"

Humorous Answers and Funny Mistakes

Teacher: "Can you give me a word that begins with 'b'?"

Pupil: "Begetable."

Teacher: "Can you think of a word that begins with sh?"

Pupil: "Shishkabob."

Teacher: “What is a shishkabob?”

Pupil: That’s when a hippie gets a haircut.”

Teacher: “What is twine?”

Pupil: “A pig.”

Teacher: “What is an oak?”

Pupil: “The middle part of an egg.”

Teacher: “What does *portion* mean?”

Pupil: “I know! A neat, small car.”

In a program recitation with a biblical theme, a kindergartner was supposed to recite, “Of Abraham and Isaac,” but it came out, “Of Abraham and Lincoln.”

A tearful student, coming in from the playground: “Teacher, I fell flat on my front face!”

A first grader was having trouble with the initial *ch* sound in the word *chair*. The teacher helped him by reminding him that the *ch* sound was the train sound. The pupil did not get the point. Prompting him, the teacher asked, “What is the train sound?” Finally getting the point, the confident pupil responded, “Toot, toot.”

Reassuring a student who was about to transfer to another school, I told him that he would like his new teacher. She had recently married, and I inadvertently called her by her maiden name.

“No, I know that isn’t her name,” protested the pupil. “It’s not what you said. It’s Mrs. Jump.” Her married name: Mrs. Hop.

A first grader proudly announced that he had an after-school job raking leaves from a lady’s lawn, but he confessed that he made no money for his efforts: “I told the lady she didn’t have to charge me.”

Updating the class on the hospitalization of one of its members, a close friend informed them, “I think he has to have his independix out.”

After a chapel speech about the scriptural concepts of the line, the square, and the cube, the teacher asked the class, “What did the speaker talk about in chapel today?” Answer: “Ice cubes.”

When the class received a new girl named Robin, some of the students had a difficult time remembering her unfamiliar name. One first grader was overheard to say, “We have a new girl. She’s something like a bird. In my room I have a locker with that Sparrow.” On the playground another was heard to say, “We have a new girl. Her name is ‘Owl.’”

The first graders knew about a science presentation, complete with experiments and demonstrations, given by a science teacher to the PTA. The next morning during “talk time,” a little girl prefaced her understanding of the previous night’s events with, “When Mr. X was doing his miracles last night...”

Teacher, trying to teach the different sounds of the letter “a” in the words mar and mare, and deliberately asking

a student who lived on a farm: “What is a mare?”

Pupil: “It’s the ruler of a city.”

Trying to prepare her students for the first fire drill of the year, the kindergarten teacher asked, “Does anyone know what a fire drill is?”

Response: “It’s what you cook meat on in the back yard.”

A first grader’s comment on an unlit hallway one morning: “It sure is dark in the alley today.”

On a Monday morning after a stormy weekend when some churches cancelled services, a first grader had the following news for the teacher: “We went to your church when it was tomatoey weather.

For a word study in second grade, we had previously defined the word *adult* as a grown-up. Next came oral reading of a story about a trip to the town library. A student was reading aloud the description of the children’s section. He went on to describe the next step in the library tour: “Then the librarian led the class to the adultery section.”

While discussing the different sounds of “ea” in the words *bread* and *break*, a first grader said, “I know a word almost like *break*.” He went to the chalkboard and wrote *breek*. “Is that a word?” asked the teacher. “Why, sure, it’s a word. You know—like the breek language.”

The playground teacher said to a stick-toting boy, “Let me see how sharp that stick is that you are

waving.” The lad responded, “My mother said, ‘Never again let me see you waving a stick.’” The teacher observed, “But right now you are waving one.” “I know,” replied the lad, “but my mother isn’t here.”

In a study of compound words, the teacher asked, “What is a salesman?” A pupil answered, “Someone who drives a boat.”

On a worksheet with synonyms for *ask* were three answers: *tell*, *question*, and *inquire*. The assignment was to circle the two correct answers. One child circled *tell* and *question*, but then had doubts about *tell*, explaining to the teacher, “I don’t think it’s *tell*, but it can’t be *inquire* either, because I know what *inquire* means. It’s where you go when you leave us every afternoon. It means ‘to sing.’”

A first grader was eager to tell the class about a wall-papering project in his home: “I watched the man put paper toweling on the walls.”

In music class, as we practiced the intervals of *so-la-mi* to hear the differences in the tones, a first grader giggled, “All I can think of is *salami*.”

One morning a child told about his supper the previous evening: “We had a new kind of food last night. It’s called an omelick.”

A preschooler, expressing his opinions about food: “I like grandma crackers, but I hate coleslop.”

Students are not the only ones who make blunders in class. A fifth grade

teacher was teaching irregular plural formations. She wrote “baby” on the board, and said, “Here we have one baby. Now, how do you make more babies?”

Happy (and not-so-happy) Misconceptions

Teacher to kindergartner: “Put on the Keds your mother just bought you.”

Child: “Teacher, you don’t buy Keds. God borns them.”

Teacher: “I’m so proud of you! You got a straight A!”

Pupil: “Are crooked one just as good as straight ones?”

Teacher: “Listen carefully. You’ll need sharp ears to hear the difference between the sounds of the *f* and the *v*.”

Pupil: “But I was born with rounded ears.”

Teacher: “What is a chum?”

Pupil: “A husband is a chum.”

Teacher: “But a chum may be someone other than a husband. Do you have a chum?”

Pupil: “Yes, it’s David, but I’m not married to him yet.”

Pupil: “My mom is in the hospital with a baby boy.”

Teacher: “What is his name?”

Pupil: “Teacher, the baby is in the hospital yet. He won’t have a name until he comes home and is a *real* baby.”

In a lesson on subtraction, the teacher was trying to get across the

concept of subtraction and the meaning of the word. To show that it is the reverse of addition, the teacher gave one child a turkey from the flannel board, and then two more. The little girl quickly understood that $1 + 2 = 3$. Suddenly the teacher needed two of her turkeys back, and now the girl had only one left. The teacher asked what it was called that she had just done. The little girl knew the answer immediately: “Indian giving.”

During a class discussion, the teacher asked, “What is a burden?” No one seemed to know. Prompting, the teacher asked, “When a man walks down the street with a burden, what is he walking with?” The hesitant answer came slowly: “An unmarried girl?”

While we were dressing for recess, a pupil asked, “Teacher, why do you say ‘Okey-dokey’? My grandma says that.” The teacher answered, “Probably because I’m old, like your grandma.”

“No,” came the reply. “She’s fat.”

In a discussion of relationships, the teacher explained, “My big boy who is married still has to call me ‘mother.’ And my girl who is married calls me ‘mother,’ too.” A first grader responded, “Why can’t they just say ‘mom’ like we do?”

Question 7 on a worksheet read, “I must have a dust cloth.” In an opposite column the pupil had to find a matching statement. The correct answer was, “The chairs are dusty.” A first grade girl complained, “I can’t

understand number 7.” “Read it,” said the teacher. The little girl read, “I must have a bust cloth,” adding, “I don’t know what a bust cloth is.”

A first grader, struggling with a math paper and getting nowhere, though helped repeatedly by the teacher: “I can’t tie my shoes alone yet, either.”

A first grade boy and his kindergarten sister waited for the bus on the first day of school. The brother boarded, but the sister did not. The driver asked the boy if his sister was supposed to ride, and the brother told him that she was. Meanwhile, the sister stayed happily at the curb, waving to the riders, until finally the driver persuaded her to board. She later explained: “I thought it was my brother’s first grade bus. I was waiting for the kindergarten bus.”

A kindergarten informed the first grade teacher, “We’re going to help our teacher after school with eggs.” “What are you going to do with them?” asked the teacher. “Kill them,” responded the youngster. The kindergarten teacher had to step forward with a correction: “We’re going to dye them.”

In teaching the idea of musical accent to first graders, the teacher asked, “Have you ever seen *Accent* in your mother’s kitchen?” “Yes,” answered one of the children, “She puts it on the meat to make it more gooder.” “To make it *better*,” the teacher corrected. “No, teacher, not badder. Gooder!”

When a first grader asked what the terms election and reprobation meant, the teacher asked, “Does anyone know?” Responded one bright student, “I know what it means in our country. When we want a president, we vote for him and elect him. That’s election. We got President Nixon. But now I think they’re going to reprobate him.”

A concerned first grader complained to her parents, “Something is wrong with the clock in our schoolroom. It goes too fast.” Not understanding, the parents asked, “How do you know?” Her reply: “Because my teacher looks at it and says, ‘Oh, there isn’t time. Our clock went too fast again.’”

A mystified first grader came home with a paper on which he had printed his name. His last name contained a lower case p, but he had written it with the downward stroke on the wrong side of the circle. His teacher had drawn a wavy line through the offending stroke to point out his error. His problem? “Why did my teacher draw an auger on my p?”

Feelings—Strong and Tender

Pupil to teacher: “When you run in gym, teacher, does it feel like you’re breathing ice cubes?”

A first grader’s description of a sad, heavy heart: “I felt all bumpy inside.”

“Teacher, here’s my note because I was absent yesterday. I was sick, and I still have fur in my throat.”

After being scolded about grouchy faces and perfunctory obedience, the first-grade class was silent and subdued, until one brave soul ventured to ask, “Are we as bad as the Israelites?”

After a Bible story about Moses’ difficulties and frustrations with the often-recalcitrant Israelites, a preacher’s son volunteered, “My daddy is a lot like Moses. Every single day someone calls him up with lots of troubles, and he gets more tired even than Moses did.”

On a reading worksheet the first graders were required to underline items in a list entitled “Things you can do.” One child raised her hand with a problem: “Is it right for a little Christian girl to put a line under ‘Learn to dance’?”

“Singing a song we haven’t sung in a long while is like dusting off a big piece of glass on the tops of our brains and making them all shiny again.”

After our artwork—blowing ink with straws—was posted on the bulletin board, one boy proudly surveyed his work and commented, “I blew my heart out.”

A comment at lunchtime regarding a bologna sandwich: “Man’s worst enemy.”

A first grader was finishing her work during lunchtime when the teacher called some misbehaving boys into the room. After listening to the teacher scold and reason with the boys, the girl volunteered her opinion: “I would give you an A.” “For what?”

asked the teacher. “For scolding,” responded the little girl. “You’re the best scolder I ever heard.”

A little girl shared this information with her first grade class: “Do you know what we call our aunt? Aunt Bubble Gum. Know why? Because she’s going to have a baby, that’s why.”

On a worksheet, next to a picture of Patsy’s dress, were two choices, one to be underlined as the correct answer: Something for Pony and something for Patsy. Instead of proceeding with the assignment, a first grade boy closed his eyes, smiled, and then confided, “I just closed my eyes and put Patsy’s dress on Pony and made him gallop away.”

During an enthusiastic math presentation by the teacher, a first grade boy interrupted: “You act as if you really love this stuff.”

After a morning of hard work, the class took a relaxing breath and got in line for lunch. Said one of the children, “I’m not even thinking. I’m filling my mind with *nothing*, and it feels so good!”

Just before lunch, as we were finishing a flash-card drill, one of the children volunteered, “I was trying so hard that I could feel myself losing weight.”

The thoughts of a first-grade boy, reflecting on a severe storm the previous night: “I’m not afraid when the lightning is very bright and the thunder is very loud, because God is right there in my bedroom with me.

But last night in the bad, bad storm, I got out of my bed real quick and ran to my big brother's room—just...just to see if he was alright.”

In a discussion of the concept of *conscience*, a first grader asserted, “I don't really need a conscience. I have a little sister who tells on me all the time.”

The teacher, quizzing a child concerning his role in a misdeed against which everyone had been previously warned, received this answer: “I believe I'm inclined to be rather forgetful.”

After we had been sitting on rugs during story time, one child did not return to his seat with the rest of the children. His explanation: “I can't get up. My leg has to come down first. It feels like it's up in an airplane.”

In the library a first grader asked, “Does *ar* say *ar* in library books, too, or just in our reading books?” When assured that *ar* says the same thing in all books, he beamed in relief: “Hey, that's neat! Then we don't have to start over to learn to read *every* book!”

A child's evaluation of a difficult assignment: This is such a hard story, and it has so many new words in it. Oh, I can read it alright, but it makes me feel all jiggly in my head.”

A child's comment about a worksheet: “The first half of this worksheet was so hard I felt all strapped in. Then the next part was easy. The straps dropped away, and presto, I felt free again.”

The teacher absentmindedly often called Dan “Jim” because it was his brothers name. Also, she called Eric “Jim” because he was the image of his father. All of this obviously led to considerable confusion. In a busy art class, without looking up from her work, the teacher announced, “You may come up now, Jim.” After a protracted silence, a small voice inquired, “Which Jim do you want: Dan or Eric?”

Observations

My mom's comment: The best category of all is that of the spontaneous, heart-warming observations that very young children make and mean with all their little hearts.

Teacher to kindergartner: “Hold on tight!”

Pupil: “I don't have any tight in my hand.”

Teacher: “We have had two weeks of school already, and we are starting to read. Can you believe it?”

Pupil: “Oh, good! Now will we have summer vacation again?”

Pupil to teacher: “Promise me that's all there is to reading—just putting sounds together. Promise me it's as easy as that? Then I'm going right ahead and learn to read!”

Pupil: “My aunt came over last night to help my mom.”

Teacher: “What is your aunt’s last name?”

Pupil: “Oh, she’s not married. She doesn’t have one.”

First grader to teacher: “You’re pretty, and I know how to spell what I think of you: *b-u-t-t*.”

Teacher: “What did you spell?”

Pupil: “Beauty.”

Teacher: “Thank you, Mr. Principal. You’re a lifesaver.”

Pupil: “Now I know that you really like Mr. Principal. Lifesavers are my favorite kind of candy.”

First grader to teacher, who was wearing a dress with a reddish background dotted with off-white: “Do you know what I call you in my mind when you wear that dress? Mayonnaise and ketchup.”

During a first-grade class outing to a park, we witnessed some individuals vandalizing park equipment. One of the children asked, “Are they being punished now, or will God punish them later?”

A teaching mother with four children and many lunches to make labeled each sack with the name of its owner. An observant first grader burst out one day: “Teacher, you have the new word we learned on your lunch sack—how come?” The word, of course, was “Mother.”

Extract from an initial attempt in first grade composition: “God sends

rain to help the plants and trees to grow. If there were no rain, it would be like a dessert. When it rains my mommy gets sick of me.”

Sentence from a paragraph in “Why I Love My Parents”: “Sometimes I like my parents better than at other times.”

The class was studying a picture in our reading book of children walking to school empty-handed. One alert first grader remarked, “The dumb people who wrote this book forgot to give them lunch buckets when they went to school.”

During a first grade discussion, the teacher asked, “What is an orphan?” After a discussion of “poor” and “sad,” they concluded that it was a child whose parents had died. Commented one child, “I’d feel sad if my parents died, but not so sad, because I know just what I would do. I’d go to live with Teacher, because I know she really likes children.”

What higher compliment can a teacher receive?



Contribution

T*he Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute (PRTI) is an association of Protestant Reformed teachers who come together to participate in activities that promote Christian education. Specifically, we come together once for a convention and twice for lectures, activities, panel discussions, or debates. At our last meeting our board called us together to produce two lists of advice that we might give to parents. One list contains recommendations about how children can be helped and guided academically, while the other list has recommendations about how children can be helped and guided through their school years in general. We do not mean to be presumptuous and tell you how to raise your children. Instead, we publish these lists as they may provide insight and guidance in the rearing of God's children. May our efforts and these lists promote the cause of Christian education to his glory.*

Top Ten Advice Lists

Academic Advice (K-3)

1. Read to your child often and at all ages.
2. Emphasize phonemic awareness—rhyming, sounds, and games.
3. Encourage creativity—writing, coloring, etc.
4. Take child places—nature trips, museum.
5. Ask “how” and “why” questions.
6. Speak proper English at all times— use extended vocabulary.
7. Volunteer at school.
8. Use everyday opportunities to teach academic skills.
9. Read teacher note and look

through school child's papers that come home.

10. Be a model of what to do— reading yourself, speaking, respect, etc.

General Advice (K-3)

1. Communicate with your children's teachers.
2. Have your child get plenty of sleep and eat breakfast.
3. Model social and academic skills.
4. Limit screen time (TV, computer).
5. Allow choices their natural consequences.
6. Keep children home when they are sick.

7. Pray with child for school and teachers.
8. Speak about appropriate topics in front of children.
9. Teach practical social skills (please, thank-you).
10. Encourage independence at school and home.

Academic Advice (4-6)

1. LIVE GODLY so your children will live godly.
2. Monitor and limit activities (sports, computer time, etc).
3. Encourage reading (Bibles, for pleasure, for information).
4. Play games (interaction with each other + learn how to lose).
5. Family field trips (building curiosity).
6. Communicate with teachers about academics, but also family/home issues that will affect children.
7. Develop good study habits: set time and place for homework.
8. READ weekly teacher memo: will know assignments/test dates.
9. Be more INVOLVED! (homework assignments, what's going on in class).

General Advice (4-6)

1. Model friendship and respect.
2. Discuss life after school (college, careers, etc.).
3. Be a MODEL for your children.
4. Be a teacher at home.
5. Pray with children about school life (diligence, kindness, obedience).
6. Communicate with teachers.

7. Develop family learning ethic (attitude).
8. Speak positively about school.
9. Parents need to be interested in school.
10. Stress the importance of Christian education.

Academic Advice (7-9)

1. Read!
2. Take child to the library (get a card).
3. Visit historical sites and museums.
4. Read maps.
5. Spend time talking with child about their day (academics).
6. Play strategy games with kids.
7. Encourage hobbies.
8. Nature hikes and talk about nature around children.
9. Expose to many different experiences.
10. Limit electronic obsessions.
11. Work WITH them.
12. Allow children to do it on their own without controlling.

General Advice (7-9)

1. Resolve your own school issues.
2. Be aware of what's important to you.
3. Be positive about school experience.
4. Express thankfulness for school.
5. Teach children to obey the first time.
6. Create a safe, quiet, orderly, and peaceful home.
7. Don't have your child do too much.

8. Teach personal responsibility.
9. Teach respect for boundaries.
10. Love your child for who they are, not what they do.
11. Don't view a child solely on the basis of performance.
12. Teach importance of relationship and community.

Academic Advice (10-12)

1. Teach children to search the Scriptures... respond appropriately.
2. READ!
3. Stimulate creativity (less TV, computer, and other "non-thinking" activities).
4. Provide books or help children

5. Current events—help them stay informed.
6. "I don't have anything to do..." is never true. Don't accept that.
7. School is a priority (are unlimited nights with friends supporting this?).
8. Modeling appropriate behavior is essential—e.g. read yourself, admit your mistakes and apologize.
9. Teach organization and prioritization of time.
10. Be careful about speaking negatively about school subjects, e.g. "You got that from me—I was horrible at math."



Contribution

Learn On!

by Shaun
Karsemeyer

Ahh. June. "Pomp and Circumstance." Graduation. Vacation! Summer is here. What sweet words those are to the students and the teachers who have labored for nine months—nine months of teaching, learning, homework, and memorization. Time for a break!

Not so fast, I answer. Why does summer have to be equated with a complete vacation from learning? Who says that you can't—or don't have to—learn during the summer vacation? The Bible very clearly calls us to never stop learning. Summer

should be considered a vacation from school, but not from our learning.

Solomon, the wisest man in the world, tells us in Proverbs 4:5-7,

Get wisdom, get understanding; forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee; love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding.

It is the "understanding" in these verses upon which our wisdom is based. Solomon tells us to get under-

standing, and in that getting, to forget it not. Solomon followed his own advice. I Kings 4:31-33 tells us,

For he was wiser than all men... and his fame was in all nations round about. And he spake three thousand proverbs; and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.

Three thousand proverbs! Over one thousand songs! And what a wide variety of subjects in which Solomon showed interest. Granted, Solomon was given extraordinary wisdom by God. But what is important here is that Solomon used that wisdom to gain much understanding of God's creation round about him. He tells us in Ecclesiastes 1:13, "And I gave my heart to seek out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under the heaven." And again in verse 17, "And I gave my heart to know wisdom." Solomon gave his heart to learn and seek out wisdom. This is an active seeking. This is our calling.

It is the duty of every Christian to form the habit of a lifetime of learning. The emphasis here is on learning about the creation not the learning of the Bible, which is a given. We were commanded by God, when He gave over the rule of His perfect creation to man, to learn all we can about this wonderful world of His.

This is not only our calling, but also our right and our heritage. What an enjoyable way to use the talents

God has given to each of us. To avoid learning would be to make ourselves as the unfaithful servant who buried his pound in the dirt (Matt. 25:14-30). Students, do not bury your pound during the summer. Follow the advice of the wisest man in the world, and seek after knowledge. Make a commitment to yourself to never take a vacation from learning.

I can hear some say, "But we learn all year in school. Summertime is my break from all that." To those I say, yes, summer is a vacation from the learning you do in school, but it is not a vacation from learning altogether. The wonderful part of summer is that you may choose what you learn. You do not have to follow a curriculum. You are in control of your own learning. This is why it is so important to form a desire for learning. When given a chance to choose, you have a direction in which to head. Create and interest from an appropriate hobby or two. Find something in nature that you really enjoy, and then learn about it. Older students, begin to choose books that are meaningful. The possibilities are almost endless, with the right attitude.

Parents, this is where you come into the picture. Encourage your children to learn. Give them goals. Point them in the right directions in their seeking after knowledge. Who knows, maybe you'll even find something new to learn about in the process! After all, we are called to continue in our learning all our lives. What better way to encourage your children than to be the example to them of a good

learner?

So what will we gain from a solid summer of learning? We will gain a greater appreciation for what God has done for us. The more we study God's creation, the more we come to an awareness of what a marvelous God He is. This greater awareness will cause us to praise Him more and more. And because of this praise, we will feel in ourselves a greater desire to learn more about our God. This is our motivation. The words of the

psalmist sum up this motivation perfectly. After writing about the oceans, the hills and valleys, the rivers, and animals, David says, "I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live: I will sing praise unto my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD" (Ps. 104:33, 34). Let this be your desire, child of God. Let this be your motivation to be a lifelong learner, even during your summer vacation.



Answers to the Geography Quiz

1. What nation was the top producer of blueberries in 2005?

Answer: (d) United States. Canada was #2. France and China were far down the list. Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, Statistics Division, FAO-STAT online database

2. Some minorities are called "visible" because they can be noticed in a mere glance, e.g. black or Asian. Other ethnic origins are much less noticeable. Which of the following "invisible minorities" has the largest presence in Canada?

Answer: (b) Irish, 13.94%. Dutch and Ukrainian are both at 3.87% and Norwegian 1.38%.

Statistics Canada, 2006 Census

3. What type of mining operation has left over 100 miles of underground

roads beneath the city of Detroit?

Answer: (c) salt—much of it used on winter roads

4. What do the initials "B. & O." stand for in B. & O. Railroad?

Answer: Baltimore and Ohio

5. Which of the following groups of cities share a major highway?

Answer: (a) I-90 runs through Spokane, Sioux Falls, Chicago, and Boston. I-29 includes Winnipeg, Sioux Falls, and St. Louis but not Wichita. I-70 connects Denver, Kansas City, and Indianapolis but not Atlanta. I-5 goes through San Diego, Portland, and Seattle but not Phoenix.

6. How many of the following major rivers would be crossed by a driver traveling on I-70 from Denver toward Pittsburgh: the Colorado,

the Arkansas, the Missouri, the Mississippi, and the Ohio?

Answer: Three. I-70 does cross the Colorado River, but it does so west of Denver. The Arkansas runs close to I-70 in the state of Colorado but does not meet it. Both the Missouri and the Mississippi must be crossed (separately) around St. Louis. And I-70 runs over the Ohio River at the Ohio-West Virginia border.

7. Each of the following European cities is the second most populous city in its country, except for which one?

Answer: (e) Turin is fourth in Italy behind Rome, Milan, and Naples. Birmingham is second only to London. The bustling port of Marseille is second only to Paris in France. Hamburg trails only Berlin in Germany. Barcelona is second to Madrid in Spain.

8. How many of the fifty state capitals in the United States are the largest cities in their respective states?

Answer: 17. Each of the other thirty-three capitals is listed below with at least one city that is larger: Montgomery, AL (Birmingham); Juneau, AK (Anchorage); Sacramento, CA (Los Angeles, San Diego, San Jose, and others); Hartford, CT (Bridgeport); Dover, DE (Wilmington); Tallahassee, FL (Jacksonville, Miami, Tampa, and others); Springfield, IL (Chicago); Topeka, KS (Wichita); Frankfort, KY (Louisville); Baton Rouge, LA (New Orleans); Augusta, ME

(Portland); Annapolis, MD (Baltimore); Lansing, MI (Detroit and Grand Rapids); St. Paul, MN (Minneapolis); Jefferson City, MO (St. Louis and Kansas City); Helena, MT (Billings); Lincoln, NE (Omaha); Carson City, NV (Las Vegas); Concord, NH (Manchester and Nashua); Trenton, NJ (Newark); Santa Fe, NM (Albuquerque); Albany, NY (New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse); Raleigh, NC (Charlotte); Bismarck, ND (Fargo); Salem, OR (Portland); Harrisburg, PA (Philadelphia and Pittsburgh); Pierre, SD (Sioux Falls); Nashville, TN (Memphis); Austin, TX (Houston, San Antonio, Dallas); Montpelier, VT (Burlington); Richmond, VA (Virginia Beach); Olympia, WA (Seattle); Madison, WI (Milwaukee)

9. Which of the following cities is farthest west?

Answer: (b) Memphis

10. Which nation has the largest Muslim population in the world?

Answer: (a) Indonesia

11. Name one of the four main Japanese islands.

Answer: Honshu, Kyushu, Shikoku, or Hokkaido.

12. Name one of the largest cities in Mexico besides Mexico City.

Answer: Possible answers include Guadalajara, Tijuana, Monterrey, Puebla, Ciudad Juarez, and more.

13. In 2003, which port handled the most tons of cargo?

Answer: (e) Singapore. Rotterdam was second; Shanghai and Hong Kong were third and fourth. Eight of the top 25 were in China. Eight

more were in Japan, South Korea, or Taiwan.

American Association of Port Authorities; Information Please Database by Pearson Education, Inc.



Book Reviews

by Brenda Dykstra

I'm a Michigan Kid: An Artistic Tour of the Great Lakes State by Gary Bower; illus. by Jan Bower. Story-book Meadow Publishing, Traverse City, Mich., 2004. (ages 6-12)

The colorful, artistic journey of the state of Michigan begins here in a kid-friendly book by the Bowers, obvious Michigan natives. Each tourist aspect is featured with a personal child narrative proudly telling a special feature of this state. What do you know about the Mackinac Bridge? Or the Mackinac Island? Soo Locks? Or the powerful Great Lakes surrounding? Or Boyne Mountain even?

Response: This book is a must-purchase for the elementary teacher who teaches Michigan history. The illustrated paintings of Jan Bower are just breath-taking. The many facts about Michigan present a fun excitement about this state. Really Michigan is a fantastic tourist state. It would be a great purchase and is available at the RBO.

Let's Go on a Mommy Date by Karen Kingsbury; illus. by Dan Andreasen. Zondervan, 2008. (ages 4-8)

Every child values special time with Mom, and in this book two children seek to go on a special outing with her. They try all sorts of places from the zoo, park, circus, and even a farm. But will the rain stop them from being with their mother? Or even the snoozing farmer? Or the packed-up circus tent?

Response: I chose to review this book because of the popularity of its author Karen Kingsbury; her numerous adult religious fiction books have even reached New York Times best selling list. Did it reach my expectations?! Not quite. Certainly it is admirable for an author to promote a mother taking special time and playing with her children. I appreciated the ending as it concluded that spending time with mommy is special no matter where or how—even curled up with a good book. But even the rhyming patterns were not always succinct. The illustrations were rather bland to

taste. Beware, too, as there is an entire spread devoted to Mommy taking her kids on a “movie” date, complete with popcorn. All in all, this book certainly promotes a certain amount of family values, but the name of Christ was nowhere mentioned by this “Christian” author, and I found the literature to be somewhat substandard, even disappointing.

Railway Rhymes—a Thomas the Tank Engine novel based on Rev. W. Awdry’s books; illus. by Richard Courtney. Random House, 2005.

Join the ever train famous Thomas, his friends Edward, James, Gordon, Percy, and many more, along with Sir Topham Hatt, Harry the Helicopter and many other fictitious characters of the make-believe land of trains on the Isle of Sodor. The rhymes in this book make fun reading, and the adjectives and sharing of the ever popular characters are worth a look.

Response: Children are fascinated by Thomas the Train. We’ve read quite a few in our home, and we’ve found Thomas to be a rather innocent character with child-like adventures kids to which kids really relate. Though I wouldn’t categorize as quality literature, I certainly wouldn’t hesitate to encourage literacy through Thomas the train books. Rev. W. Awdry’s imagination has come alive with the help of the media and publications. The rhymes and photos are so fun!

Puff the Magic Dragon by Peter Yarrow, Lenny Lipton; illus. by Eric Puybaret. Sterling Books, 2007 (ages 2-5)

Created by a child’s imagination, Puff is a harmless, gentle dragon whose boy, Jackie Paper, frolics with him in the land of Honalee, a land of magic, love, and acceptance. When Jackie gets older and tires of their magical journeys, the ending pictures another young girl enjoying Puff’s friendship.

Response: Recommended as a new, best-selling bedtime story novel with a popular song title, this book definitely fosters a young child’s imagination. The illustrations tell the story, and listening to the included CD duet by Peter Yarrow and his daughter—the infamous 1970’s group “Peter, Paul, and Mary”—definitely soothes and relaxes a child. The bigger issue I found, however, was that the book subtly promotes love and acceptance of all, offering rest and peace, characteristic of the era of the 1970’s and modern today as well. But as the child Jackie found strength in his gentle friend, (King) Puff the dragon, certainly our little ones need to know that acceptance and peace are found only in the Savior himself; this may be a nice time to talk with the little ones of this peace in the Savior.

Focus on David Shannon

Contemporary Caldecott winning artist and author

Too Many Toys by David Shannon. Scholastic, 2008. (ages 3-7)

Young boy Spencer has too many toys. From robots, to board games, to stuffed animals, to drains, toys spill from drawers and closets and clutter all the rooms. One day Spencer tries to persuade his mother to keep them all as she frantically begs him to get rid of some. I'd like to invite you to continue to come along with Spencer as he gets rid of some today, but I did find many questionable issues.

Response: Assuredly, the Caldecott honor author David Shannon is an excellent artist, and the book was recommended as a modern illustrations favorite. But the child Spencer is nothing short of a spoiled rotten menace who consistently is talking back to his mother. The necessity of proper discipline shouted from the pages as Spencer bargains and argues with his mother. As godly parents and teachers who strive to teach our children proper respect and authority by shepherding their hearts and proper discipline, this book is a blatant argument of these Scriptural values. And spoiled Spencer with his many, many toys—ought our children have such materialism present to begin with? Though it's quite comical when Spencer chooses the favorite toy as a box at the end, I still would discourage its selection.

Alice the Fairy by David Shannon. (ages 2-5)

A*lice the Fairy* is the story of young toddler Alice who wants to wave her magic wand, sport her fairy wings, and princess crown, to perform magic feats. She certainly sports an active imagination to which toddlers can relate.

Response: This book is more worthy than the following David Shannon books reviewed, but certainly not of notable accolades. Alice's imagination draws the young toddler in, and the illustrations are undeniably quite cute. The issue of fairy dust and magic is present, of course, too.

David Smells; David Gets In Trouble; No, David; and David Goes to School.

Each of these books is a simple story written from an eighteen-month-old to three-year-old small child's perspective as he explores the world. In *David Smells*, this little tike explores his senses—even his own dirty diaper. Learning to obey and live by rules is the theme for *David Gets in Trouble*. *No, David* centers on the toddler learning to listen while *David Goes to School* journeys with the little one to the foreign place called school.

Response: Shannon won a Caldecott honor for his *No, David*, but the quality of literature is just not that. The drawings are so simple and kid-like that a really poignant element defining Caldecott quality is not there. And who needs to teach kids

about smell using dirty diapers and behaving properly by exemplifying negative, naughty behaviors? I would leave Shannon books right on the library or book store shelves. Certainly Shannon knows how to relate to kids—yes, our own toddlers at home somehow liked the character David. But for the wrong reasons! His illustrations depict a child’s drawings, which likely, in fact, draw the young right into his stories.

The Little House, 1943 Caldecott Award winner by Virginia Lee Burton. (ages 4-7)

How does change personally affect you? Truth be told, many of us struggle with change as does the *Little House* in Burton’s tale. The Little House was a strong, well-built house in the country that was to be kept in the family and never to be sold. But alas, the busy streets of city begin to encircle her, skyscrapers reach to the heavens near her, fast-paced trains and subway systems begin to envelop her. Will she be torn down? How does the little house survive such change?

Response: An oldie, but goodie is my initial feedback. Though this book looked rather boring on the shelf, the tale is simple, but could easily be appreciated even by young readers. The photos are simple, but drawn and painted in color. Many children have struggles coping with change just like the Little House did. The concepts of day/night, varying seasons, country/city, and even different transportation mediums may easily be discussed

as well. The book certainly had no questionable issues and would make a nice, simple read-aloud or even a bedtime story. Look it up and enjoy!

Newbery Awards

A Single Shard, 2002 Newbery Award winner by Linda Sue Park. 152 pages. (5th to 7th grade)

Tree-Ear, an orphan boy in 12th century Korea, is content to live with friend and care-taker Crane-man under a bridge. But Tree-ear eagerly desires to learn the trade of pottery after observing the talented potter Min. Tree-ear then accidentally drops one of Min’s pieces and is indebted to instantly be hypnotized to return to the fox’s lair to become its next dinner. Tree-ear did, however, overcome that fear by believing in himself. Nice discussion opportunity is presented in this: Who ultimately helps us overcome our fears? And how do we overcome these fears?

Buddhism, the Chinese idolatrous religion, is background for the novel’s setting, too. This certainly offers even more opportunity to study and compare to our knowledge of the one, true and living God.

Overall, this is a great book for middle-age kids—its simple flow will hold the interest of most students. And it assuredly would make a nice purchase for the teacher’s shelves, a school library, or the literacy-friendly home.

Dobry, 1935 Newbery Award winner by Monica Shannon. (5th to 7th grade)

Set in the country of Bulgaria, a young, fatherless peasant boy named Dobry lives with his hardworking mother Roda, eagerly searching to find out about life. Though peasantry involved agriculture and crop-farming, Dobry's talents don't seem to lie in this area; the animals for which his mother wants him to care, Dobry would much rather draw or carve. His special friend Neda, a shoe-maker's daughter, and her goat friend support Dobry on his quest as he carves a goat, a beloved gypsy bear, a baby Jesus nativity scene, and more. Dobry's deceased father desired Dobry's life to become as a strong tree branch, just as the one he personally planted shortly before his death. Will Dobry continue his quest to become an artist? Or will he follow his mother's wishes to take care of the farm animals? How does his father's dream desire play out in his life? Will he stay friends with Neda and her goat as his quest continues?

Response: The qualities of a Newbery are certainly present as Dobry is a well-described character with a clear endeavor in seeking his life's vocation. Rich with the culture of the peasantry of Bulgaria, this story further offers some great historical knowledge of the Balkans and the countries of Greece, Yugoslavia, and Romania. The peasant customs of song and dance, strong gypsy influences, and rich storytelling heritage

describe a unique setting.

Will the child of today, though, be able to relate? The better reader will certainly enjoy this novel, but I fear that many children may have difficulties relating to Dobry as his life is so far removed from the contemporary, rushed life-style of today. Furthermore, the Biblical accounts and storytelling reveal many confusing variances in truth as revealed in Scripture. The Greek Orthodox tradition is strong and is certainly seen as Dobry carves the baby Jesus—another issue which demands attention. A more discerning reader will appreciate this book rather than an average, young reader. However, this book certainly holds opportunity for the history teacher to connect a past to a present using a memorable character.

Focus on Helen Lester *Author of children's picture books with illustrator Lynn Munsinger*

Helen Lester is a former principal and 2nd grade teacher originally from Texas with a doctorate in early childhood education. She currently writes books with quite a knack for relating to children as she is paired with Munsinger to illustrate her kid-friendly tales. Many of her novels have practical messages infused in the story-book presentation—be patient, consider others first, accept compliments and give them, accept unique individuals, and more. Lester doesn't advocate specific Christian values as I found no evidence of her faith, though few blatant questionable issues surfaced. Apparent, however, is

her love for children and even teaching throughout her books.

Tacky the Penguin books (all published by Houghton Mifflin): *Tacky the Penguin*; *Tackylocks and the Three Bears*; *Tacky and the Winter Games*; *Three Cheers for Tacky*; *Tacky and the Emperor*; *Tacky in Trouble*; as well as: *Author, a True Story*; *A Porcupine Named Fluffy*; *Hurty Feelings*; *Batter Up, Wombat*; *Hooway for Wodney*; *A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing*; *Something Might Happen*; *Me First*; *Listen Buddy*; *The Wizard, the Fairy, and the Magic Chicken*. (ages 3-6 for read-aloud; 6-8+ for applicatory reading)

What do you think of when you picture penguins? To most, they are sleek, formal, interesting birds who live in a bitterly cold environment. But Lester introduces Tacky, an odd bird who likes to be eccentric, boisterous, and altogether un-ordinary. His problems really aren't his own though; they stem conformists penguin friends Goodly, Lovely, Angel, Neatly, and Perfect. Tacky can't neatly dive—he cannonballs! Hunters arrive on the scene in Tacky the Penguin. Will they take Tacky and the others home from the nice, icy land?

Response: These books bring barrels of laughter to children.

Lester teams with Lynn Munsinger for the Tacky books as well as her other listed books. The stories are innocent and fun with characters that will bring smiles!

Author, a True Story by Helen Lester
Houghton Mifflin Publishing, 1997

This book is Lester's biography and perhaps a nice place to start as she visually and poignantly shares the tale of becoming an author. It starts a long time ago with a three-year-old grocery list copier. She shares her hurdles and frustrations, gives writing tips like a "fizzle box," and really the essential ability to laugh at mistakes and grow from them. It's a great, amusing story of writing triumph—and her only book that is self-illustrated!

Response: This is an excellent book for any early elementary teacher to check out and even purchase and keep on shelf. The gift of writing is really a trial-and-error learning process as she clearly tells about and even illustrates for the child reader. The Christian teacher or parent could even take it beyond this to the level of questioning children concerning their own writing abilities: What writing areas and abilities can you continue to develop and how? How do we serve Jesus with our language gift? Enjoy!

A Porcupine Named Fluffy by Helen Lester; illus. by Lynn Munsinger.
Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

A super story! Lester does an excellent job of correlating Munsinger's artistic talent with her creative stories, and visually seeing poor Fluffy, the silly porcupine, on each page will make any child want to continue reading the text. Fluffy goes to extreme

measures to live up to his name, but alas, how can a porcupine be fluffy?

Response: This is certainly a tale well worth reading aloud—with really no questionable issues. Will the shaving crème help him become fluffy? Or the marshmallows? Or the silly rhino friend named Hippo? Join Fluffy as he seeks to discover his identity—Fluffy or not, here we go! This is a book that would be nice for parents or teachers to have on shelf.

The Wizard, the Fairy, and the Magic Chicken by Helen Lester; illus. by Lynn Munsinger. Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

Three mighty magicians—a wizard, a fairy, and a Magic chicken, all argue with each other and are constantly jealous and showing off their magical talents. Who can make the scariest monster? But when the magical trio makes monsters they simply can't get rid of without assisting each other, the adventure gets really zany and hilarious.

Response: Munsinger's colorful illustrations capture the storyline so very well. The issue of magic powers is again present just as in Shannon's book. The story line will certainly grasp a child's imagination—though the scary monsters may be even a bit too scary for the youngest reader.

Hurty Feelings by Helen Lester; illus. by Lynn Munsinger. Houghton Mifflin, 2004.

Fragility was a solid piece of work—a hippo, no less—whose feelings were very, very fragile. No one could even complement here without her flopping on the ground and weeping. Even though her friends are afraid to talk to her, bully Rudy the elephant certainly isn't. Will Fragility learn to face real insults? How about take a compliment?

Response: Again, the drawings and story work so well together to tell a vivid, funny story. Many kids need to learn to deal with compliments and insults because they certainly will inevitably arrive in our sin-filled world. Lester is not a Christian author so the next stop of applying how a Christian might respond to criticism isn't addressed. But this book certainly gives an open door to do so verbally.

Batter Up Wombat by Helen Lester; illus. by Lynn Munsinger. Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Donned in their spiffy clean uniforms, it's the beginning of a baseball season for the Champs whose record was last place the North American Wildlife League the previous year. But then a wombat, a new, unique animal of Australia, arrives—a WHAM-BAT they see! The game is about to become played in a totally different way. Will the poor wombat meet their expectations? What will happen to the champs and the opposing raccoon

team the bandits when a tornado soon appears?

Response: This book will capture young readers who will immediately be able to relate to the poor wombat that is completely ignorant of baseball and its rules. The hilarity of Lester’s writing again coupled with the illustrations make it winning combination of detail and wit. Once again, I didn’t find any questionable issue, but the door remained shut to take it one step further for the Christian parent or teacher. How DO we respond to newcomers? Does everyone have the same talents and gifts? How so? What kinds of things can we do to encourage another in his gifts?

Hooway for Wodney by Helen Lester; illus. by Lynn Munsinger. Houghton Mifflin, 1999.

All of his classmates make fun of main character Rodney Rat because he can’t pronounce his “r’s,” but when the class, smart, big bully Camilla Capybara arrives on the scene her torture is unbearable for all. But then Teacher Miss Fuzzleworth decides they had time to play “Simon Says,” and Rodney is selected. Will the poor rats of P.S. 142 Elementary School be forever taunted by Camilla? Poor Wodney’s speech makes for interesting “Simon Says”—how does bully Camilla react?

Response: This one is a real keeper, especially as a read-aloud book on tape available, too. Any child will relate well to shy Rodney and his classmates, and the triumph at the

end is rewarding for any—even adult—readers! One slang word was present—stupid—in the text—but can easily be edited. Though again the picture book was not told in a Christian fashion, it would be a great opportunity for the godly teacher or parent to discuss bullying and dealing with others. Super fun!

The Sheep in Wolf’s Clothing by Helen Lester; illus. by Lynn Munsinger. Houghton Mifflin, 2007.

Ewetopia, a sheep, is not comfortable in her own wool and is always trying to press others with her flashy outfits. But when the Woolyones’ Costume Ball arrives, along with a big, bad wolf dressed in a handsome sheep’s suit, Ewetopia, dressed as a wolf this time, must make a choice. “Why does he have such long claws and keep calling me Mother,” she wonders. How does Ewetopia deal with the wolf? Will all the sheep and rams be eaten promptly? Will Ewetopia learn to understand that friendships aren’t built on the perfect clothing?

Response: It is interesting that Lester chose the sheep, the not-so-smart animal God’s people are incessantly referred to in Scripture, to share this tale. The story is well-told, and Ewetopia is a very understandable character. Lester’s story once again has a well-designed plot line. This story would be a great opportunity to talk about how we encourage each other in our own gifts, no matter what attire. Christian teachers and parents, take note!

Something Might Happen by Helen Lester; illus. by Lynn Munsinger. Houghton Mifflin, 2003.

A quirky lemur named Fidget won't shampoo his hair, eat his crunchy cereal, go outside, or even to a parade or party because his imagination has him convinced of impending disaster. Fidget becomes lonely as he awaits his fears until his Aunt Bridget drops in for a visit. Will she convince him to face his fears? Will Fidget forever be a loner?

Response: A fun story that children will relate to because imaginations can certainly run wild. Aunt Bridget fearlessly attacks fidgety Fidget's problems. No issues of concern were present, but again, an opportunity arrives as Helen Lester presents another viable childhood issue worth addressing. Questions such as: Who watches over us at all times and takes care of us? What is our comfort in fear? These issues easily bring the young child to clearer understanding of their Savior and Protector.

Me First by Helen Lester; illus. by Lynn Munsinger. Houghton Mifflin, 1992.

Pushy, pink, plump Pinkerton pig always wants to be first at everything—from eating at the trophateria to sitting in the front row. Until one day he hears a voice call, "Who would care for a Sandwich?" Pushy Pinkerton follows his tummy to the voice to discover a Sand-witch in need of desperate care. Join Pinkerton as he

learns patience caring for a tiny witch who needs to be fed, read stories to, cleaned up after, and more.

Response: Again, another really fun story with cute word plays and alliterations as well as a memorable character in Pinkerton as he learns he must let others go first and be patient. And once again, this story has great application to the home and classroom as we learn to model our Savior Jesus Christ who taught us about being putting each other first as He laid his own life for us!

Listen Buddy by Helen Lester; illus. by Lynn Munsinger. Houghton Mifflin, 1995.

Buddy Rabbit had terrifically long ears, but does he use them to listen? Well, not exactly. One day his parents sent him on a long hop, and scatterbrained Buddy chooses the wrong path and faces a scary Scruffy Varmint who sets him to work making soup for him. But Buddy isn't good at following directions. Will he learn to listen? Before it's too late?

Response: Lester is specifically targeting the skill of paying attention and listening—which many children choose NOT to do. The fun character Buddy shares the messages as he learns the importance of listening. The message is clear, and a Christian parent or teacher could easily apply the importance of listening well and obeying those in authority. Fun story with a poignant message!

P

Protestant Reformed Teachers Institute

1401 Ferndale Avenue SW

Grand Rapids, MI 49534

Forwarding Service Requested

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Jenison, MI
PERMIT 71