

FROM THE TEACHERS' LOUNGE

personal excuses. I didn't start it. I didn't say it very loudly. She didn't even hear me.

Through all the years since that day, I have seen again and again that small face twisted in despair, the tear-stained face, the reddened eyes. I began to realize that there are no excuses that can cover the wrong that I had done to another person that day.

Why did we do that cruel thing? We are so concerned about ourselves then, so self-centered. We tell ourselves that we will seem more important to ourselves and to our friends if we demonstrate how low someone else can be. We are afraid something like this may happen to us, and we think we are protecting ourselves by hurting someone else.

Why did we pick on Gladys? I think there were two reasons. One is the simple fact that she was different, and different to a youngster (and to oldsters, too) is bad. She wasn't like us. The other reason is equally simple: she was vulnerable. Because we knew that we could hurt her,

and she could not defend herself, we felt we had to attack her.

Why wasn't there anyone to defend Gladys? Any person who would defend Gladys would risk his own status before his friends. No one had the moral courage — yes, the Christian character — to come to her defense. It's one of the hardest things in the world to do — to risk one's social position — but one of the most essential things for a Christian to learn.

I think of Gladys going into school alone with the taunting pack at her heels, and I'm terribly ashamed. I'm reminded of what Jesus once said, "If ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Now you understand why I react strongly when I find children being cruel to one another. I don't want anyone to carry such a burden on his conscience.

Fred Hanko, Sr.

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*"Let's hear it for trying something new!" writes Karen Buiter in an article which we've borrowed from a **Heritage Herald** of last year. Though one wouldn't guess it from the article, Miss Buiter is hardly yet a veteran teacher. She was at the time, in fact, in her second year of teaching — at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville. And she was already enjoying the thrill and satisfaction of seeing students respond enthusiastically to a teacher's doing more than just "teaching the book." Sometimes it may take a little longer to complete a unit, when one "tries*

something new"; but the difference in retention makes every minute of it worthwhile.

Trying Something New

Karen Buiter

South America. I wasn't sure I knew enough about it to teach it and the students weren't sure it sounded like the most exciting topic. After all, it wasn't something familiar like the Netherlands; or the United States. . . . But that's where we landed several weeks ago in our Social Studies book, and we've been there ever since.

As it turned out, it has opened us up to some new learning experiences we may not have tried had it not been for this unit. For example, when we studied the resources, students discovered how dependent we are on South America for certain crops: sugar cane (we tried it raw!), bananas, cocoa, and coffee beans just to name a few. We also learned that the potato was first grown there.

When we studied the people, we had a South American woman "visitor" come in to tell us about growing up in the Andes Mountains. Instead of opening up our book to read (that can get kind of old), I decided to speak from her viewpoint. Never have I had such an attentive audience! Suddenly their teacher, without a change of voice or appearance, was a native of South America. The world of make-believe, which third and fourth graders are so good at, was

before them, and it seemed more like a story than "just social studies."

As we studied the history of South America and learned what a strong influence the Spanish have had there, I knew it was time to brush the dust off my Spanish vocabulary and give it a whirl with the class. Now when I say, "¿Hablas Español?" (Do you speak Spanish?) my students can respond "Sí" (Yes), and to "¿Cómo estás?" (How are you?) they can say "Muy bien!" (Very well). They can't be negative, because I didn't teach that in Spanish! Within a few days, the students had learned the numbers to the tune of "Diez Inditos" (Ten Indians) and several other short phrases. It was amazing how fast they picked it up, since multiplication tables can be drilled over and over and still go unknown! I guess the sounds of these foreign words rolling off their tongues, and testing them out on unknowing others, was much more fun. There's certainly something to say for the new and different! Why spend time on Spanish? Hopefully it will stimulate an interest they can take up later when foreign languages are often expected. If they encounter foreign language at all in the

public, there's a good chance it will be Spanish with the large migrant population.

Finally, in conjunction with pictures of women weaving seen in our book and on films, we decided to try our hand at yet another new skill and include a little art in our unit as well. We had done paper weaving much earlier in the year so the students were eager and quite confident it would be a simple task. How hard could it be to go over, under, over, under...? We started out with a cardboard loom and wrapped it with the warp, or vertical lines of yarn. This was easy and the students were still quite sure of themselves.

Our next job was to take the woof, the horizontal line of yarn, and begin the actual weaving. Now came the challenge and the frustration: twenty-eight students each with a thirty-six foot strand of yarn, and one person trying to give oral instructions. "I have a knot!" "My needle came off!" "I think this row is wrong!" "I can't find my end!" "What did I do??" ... That first day we all went home certain this project was more than we could tackle. I was a little dismayed with the several tangled piles of yarn and unrecognizable "things" that were supposed to be art!

But by the end of the week when all the first false attempts and tangles had been undone, and the first few rows were securely in, a neat thing happened. Stu-

dents were begging to do it during their free time. No more, "What can I do now?" There was quiet productivity going on. A few boys asked to work on it at recess! (Boys with yarn and thread—and during baseball season??) I overheard one who usually is indifferent when it comes to art, say to another, "This is the BEST art yet!" I saw students start helping others solve their weaving problems. Students learned what it meant to wait patiently for help on a tough tangle. I heard lots of "Neat!" and "Cool!" as the first few began to see their variegated-colored yarn start forming patterns, and I watched some students who often have difficulties with academics get complimented for the great job they were doing.

The first "mini-rugs" are coming off the loom now. It hasn't been what we thought at first. It has turned out to be hard work. But hopefully woven into what others might see as just a tiny piece of woven yarn, and tucked somewhere back in their minds, are some lessons learned about South America and trying something new. Let's not be too quick about passing up something just because we're unfamiliar with it, or it doesn't sound exciting, or we don't think we can handle it. Let's hear it for trying something new!

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