

"My Sister is a Dog":
A Study on Children's Speech and Literature

Robin L. Shiels '89
Senior Thesis
May 8, 1989
Donna Jo Napoli-Linguistics
Judy Kegl-Psychology/Linguistics

Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank Donna Jo Napoli whose course description sparked the focus of this project; also thank you to Donna Jo for her fun, subjective approach to this project, and her flexibility. Many thanks to Judy Kegl for her advice on the objective aspect of this paper, and for the use of her videotape "Am I Normal?" Donna Jo and Judy have been a perfect "checks-and-balances" combination.

Thank you to Sam Shiels, who so generously provided me with a supply of cassette tapes for my recordings.

Thanks to Lia Theologides, who allowed me not only the use of her mini "cassette-corder," but also the unending use of her computer. And a most deep and sincere thanks to Celia Szuba and her class of third graders, without whom this project would not have been possible. Not only was it possible because of them, but it was a pleasure and a treat. Thank You.

Abstract. This paper examines children's dialogue and its rendering in children's literature, by looking at the speech and literature of eight (8) and nine (9) year olds, in an effort to find mappings from one to the other. The mappings are being applied in an effort to improve the author's own effectiveness in writing fiction for children. Several distinctive features of speech were found to be significantly characteristic of children's dialogue. Thus, it has been concluded that children's speech does have uniquenesses that distinguish it from adult speech, and which necessitate consideration in order to write literature that rings true for children.

INTRODUCTION

"Reading can be a chore or an exhilarating experience. For the child who finds language that rings true, reading is more likely to be a delight. Since the skill of reading is invaluable in our society, the goal of writing good children's literature is a functional one as well as an esthetic one." (adapted from course description for Linguistics 54--Swarthmore College Bulletin 1988-89.)

The purpose of this paper is to examine children's dialogue and its rendering in children's literature. Children's speech and literature are both looked at in an effort to find mappings from one to the other; then these mappings are applied in an effort to improve my own effectiveness in writing children's fiction. The study is based on children, ages eight (8) and nine (9), in a third grade classroom at the Swarthmore-Rutledge K-8 School in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

Laurie Ricou states in his book, Everyday Magic, that child language is magical partly because it is a process so rapid and so beyond complete description that we can only marvel.¹ Speech of children is different from that of adults in more than just lexicon, content, and complexity. But what are the additional differences that affect adults' understanding of children and children's understanding of adults so much? What is it about child language that makes it so magically unique? Ricou suggests two distinctions of child language: it is language in the process of being learned; and it is, up to a point, entirely a spoken

language, and therefore, much freer.² Language in the process of being learned might be expected to not be as smooth or as lexically complex as "well-developed" language, because rules of grammar and an extended vocabulary take time to learn. But there is more that sets it apart than that. Three distinctions of adult language pointed out by Ricou are: freedom from the here-and-now; ability to take account of variations in shared knowledge; and awareness of language forms.³ So even though children's language is freer in one sense, it is in another sense bound by the limitations of not having those three adult distinctions. However, linguists generally conclude that a child's understanding exceeds his/her articulation. This fact could explain the reason why children seem to prefer to read books written for an age level approximately one or two years ahead of their own. The language in higher level books is more advanced and thus appeals more to a child's understanding than to his/her articulation. The other possible reason for this preference is simply a social one dealing with curiosity.

The form and function of a single child's language will vary sharply according to the specific situation in which it used. The language of playground and classroom, for instance, are so different that a child might be said to be naturally bilingual.⁴ For this reason, both classroom dialogue and casual interview conversation were taped in my study.

Theorists' Categories of Features.

Elizabeth Dines refers to language features in a rather

general way, by the name of "response categories." She claims that questions are a valuable indicator of response; therefore, in linguistic research, one should know for what dimensions of speech he/she is coding (i.e. cognitive, structural, social), because this could determine the questions used, and thus, the responses.

Dines' eight (8) response categories are as follows:

1. Anecdote--a stretch of speech, the content of which is frequently drawn from personal experience and frequently told in past tense (interview)
2. Generalized anecdote--similar to anecdote, except unmarked for tense
3. Attributive statement--usually an utterance including an intransitive verb plus predicative adjective or nominal
4. Causal statement
5. One word/single term response
6. Affirm/deny--"yeah," "no," "sometimes," etc.
7. Hypothetical case--response using 'could,' 'would,' or 'maybe,' etc.
8. No response--also includes repetition of question, or "I don't know."⁵

In a parallel fashion, one distinctive feature that Ricou finds to be common in child language is egocentric language. According to Piaget, egocentric language is made up of three (3) categories:

repetition, monologue, and collective monologue.⁶ Other characteristics of child language noted by Ricou are:

- a. cumbersome predication
- b. unconscious poetry
- c. desire to know the names of objects, because names have magical properties
- d. rhythm
- e. stream-of-consciousness
- f. incomplete understanding of the standard vocabulary and semantics
- g. metaphors--based on likeness or analogy between literal words and metaphorical replacement. "The power of metaphors seems to lie in the unexpectedness of the dimension of similarity and

the way in which it captures the essence of the object being described in metaphorical terms."⁷

All of these categories contributed to the eventual decision regarding categories coded for this study.

Approach to Writing Literature.

Child language for some is the language of a child telling a story, particularly of a child telling a story to herself, or imagining a story. Ricou states that in writing for children, one should use imagistic analogies to explain the concepts resting in the child's mind. In doing this, the author is forced to reassess his/her childhood experiences and opinions, and the limitation of them.⁸ In approaching children's literature from this first person position as opposed to a third person narrative, Ricou suggests using the language of childhood remembered--the forms, grammar, and style by which an adult relates to his/her perception as a child. Using a child's formation and general rules, the author is urged to "report on her memory of her reaction as a child."⁹ By using "child language" and children's models of perception to achieve various literary effects, we write through children, as opposed to about or for children. Many different written interpretations of the child's perspective are possible. Different writers, in different cultures, in different periods will use different methods to write the child's point of view. How do we get to the place of knowing a child's point of view and understanding a child's' perspective?

Interviewing.

One way to gain such insights is through interviewing children. Interviewing is a method of obtaining thoughts and feelings first-hand from our "inquired-about" group. But to obtain the data most important for linguistic theory, we have to observe how people speak when they are not being observed. Labov coined the term "observer's paradox," which refers to a person's being recorded as being a formidable obstacle to obtaining casual speech.¹⁰ To obtain the most natural data despite observer's paradox, many researchers eliminate the first few minutes of a recording, with the assumption that the speaker was still getting "warmed up" and was feeling self-conscious about being taped. There is, however, great benefit in personal interviews, despite a subject's feeling self-conscious about being recorded. A personal interview enables the subject to talk about him/herself, which:

- a) makes him/her feel more comfortable (in most cases), and
- b) enables the interviewer to find out more and more about the subject (8 & 9 year olds, in the case of this research).

Within the actual interviews, Labov suggests using questions that must be answered by conversation--not yes/no answers. He further notes that the questions must be of a topic to which the subjects can relate. Pursuing the cues of informants' interests is helpful also for stimulating further dialogue. Emotional involvement in the conversation will engross the informant more in his/her subject matter than in his/her style of speaking; therefore, questions

should help alleviate the informant's consciousness of his/her own speech. Topics with which Labov has had success are: games/leisure, peer group, aspirations, and fighting and accidents.¹²

Effective Children's Fiction.

In order to gain insight into what other topics interest third graders, I read several children's books during this research project. Reading these books also provided information on the psychological side of writing children's literature and what styles of writing are considered effective. "Effective writing style" was determined by the students, for who would know better than those for whom the books have been written? The list of books they considered enjoyable includes: The Secret Garden, by Bennett Hodges; James and the Giant Peach and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, by Roald Dahl; Blubber, by Judy Blume; Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew selections, by F.W. Dixon and Carolyn Keene. The style of writing found in these books can be described as imaginative, suspenseful, gripping, a little bit unbelievable, adventurous, full of dialogue and cooperative efforts between people, and descriptive to the point of distinct vividness; I was able to clearly visualize each story. These authors also played with the fantastic. Eight (8) and nine (9) year olds are at an age of transition--this is their last chance to be sort-of fantastic, so this age level lends itself to one last imaginary "fling," through literature.

The results expected from this research into children's

language were many. The presence of metaphoric speech, imaginary depictions, teasing peers and siblings, talk of pets, and magical language were all expected. These styles of speech are not commonplace in adult language; thus, a true difference between child and adult language was expected to be found. The study does not examine adult language, but assumptions on the general makeup of adult speech are based on the author's familiarity with adult speech. The aim of this project is to determine what it is that makes child language particularly unique--the question it seeks to answer: What features characterize children's speech?

METHOD/DATA COLLECTION

The first step in answering the question is to elicit speech samples by children. Five (5) sources were used for data elicitation: tape recordings (some hand recordings for short blurbs), oral surveys, effective children's fiction, observational/naturalistic data, and hand-recorded student feedback.

There are four categories in which I recorded:

- a) spontaneous conversations between students
- b) spontaneous conversations between student teacher (myself) and student(s)
- c) student responses during literature activities or other formal instructional times
- d) interviews between interviewer (myself) and two students.

Recordings.

The two major sources of data used in this project were c and d, above. C was a literature activity called "Autumn Leaves" and d

was interviews with sixteen (16) students. The literature activity was chosen on the presumption that it would elicit a good deal of discussion and creativity from the students--it was something they would "get into." (A copy of the poem and the 50-minute-class transcript are in Appendix A.) The interviews opened up the students to talk about items of personal interest, and thus elicited a very natural piece of speech. (Transcriptions of the interviews are located in Appendix B.) The literature activity consisted of examining, as a class, many aspects (literary, scientific, phonetic, rhythmic, etc.) of the poem, "Autumn Leaves." Basically, I asked questions and the students answered; they were also free to offer their own information, observations, and questions. The literature activity conversation is of a more concise, on-track nature, than is that of the interviews, as would be expected.

The interviewing process involved taking out two students at a time, to a space at the end of the hallway to interview. The combination of the students who interviewed together was random. The recorder used was a SONY cassette-corder TCM 11. At the start of each interview, I gave a brief introduction telling the students that I would like to talk with them to find out how they are and what they have been doing. I told them I would be taping our conversation, because I am writing a paper on the way third graders speak, so that I can write books for third graders. They were assured that only I would listen to the tape. They were also told the three topics about which I would be asking them:

Christmas/Hanukkah vacation; school work content and school events; and sports teams or instrument lessons with which they are involved. Throughout each interview, I also asked personally-directed interest questions, since after having worked with the class for three months in the fall, I knew their personal interests. The introduction was ended by the students' being told they are also welcomed to talk about anything else of interest to them. In many of the interviews, the tape recorder was not turned on until most or all of the introduction had been completed, because the interviewer did not feel the introduction had significant relevance to the ensuing conversation. No interview lasted more than six (6) minutes, and no interview was shorter than 3.5 minutes. A standard amount of analyzed interview was not established. Each interview was transcribed and analyzed in its entirety, because the students "warmed up" quite quickly since we all knew each other from my having student taught in their classroom. All tape recordings were transcribed the same day the recording took place, so that each was clear in my mind as I worked with it. Next, the transcripts were analyzed by applying the following coding system to find distinct child language characteristics and the frequency of such characteristics:

1. metaphor--frequency of metaphoric speech (e.g. "My sister is a dog.")
2. magical language (e.g. "sugar raindrops")
3. sarcasm
4. name-calling
5. mention of sibling
6. mention of relative
7. mention of pet
8. acknowledgment of sexes (e.g. boys' and girls' leaf piles)

9. chronological thought pattern exposed in speech?
10. average length of utterance between promptings--number of words
11. utterance unrelated/irrelevant to question/topic
12. sex of student--m/f
13. age of student
14. slang
15. egocentrism
16. imaginary--something imaginary spoken of
17. question/disagree with something said
18. exaggeration
19. pro-drop
20. start utterance over again
21. incomplete utterance
22. um, uh
23. stuttering/word repetition--word appears two or more times consecutively

The above coding categories are used to support or disprove my hypothesis of the existence of distinct child language characteristics. They were arrived upon by ideas given from the background readings, but also by reading through the transcripts and noting the kinds of characteristics of the children's language that stood out. The coding categories are objective, for the sake of simplicity, clarity, and consistency. When a thorough list of twenty-three (23) categories was developed, the coding process began. With one category in mind at a time, I read through each transcript, looking for evidence of the category. When evidence was found, I penciled in next to it, the number of the corresponding category. This was done for every coding category on every transcript. Following this, I made Table 1 and Table 2, which include rows of pseudonyms for the students' real names (in order to protect their identity), and columns of the twenty-three (23) coding categories. I penciled in a tally mark for every time evidence for a category was present. The frequency of each category's occurrence is charted in Table 1 for the interviews and

Table 2 for the literature activity. Table 3 provides a total summary of the occurrence of each category. The three tables are located in the "results" section of this paper.

Oral Survey.

Part of my classroom research involved taking an oral survey to collect data on what kinds of things go through a child's mind. My goal with this type of data was to get a feel for what things concern these students most, so that I will have "real-to-life" topics for my fiction writing. I orally surveyed the class of twenty-two (22) students all together, requesting, "Raise your hand and tell me something that really concerns or worries you." When an answer was given, I asked the other students to raise their hand if the answer was something which worried them a great deal also. Students could raise their hands as many times as they wished. The results yielded six (6) major concerns, which are included in the "results" section of this paper.

Children's Literature.

The third source of data came from reading effective children's literature. The "Introduction" section mentioned books I read to myself; books I read to the students are Bunnicula and Snow Treasure. In reading to them, I asked, for instance at a suspenseful point in the story, "What do you think will happen next?" The students' creativity knew no bounds! No data was recorded from this section, because it dealt with specific answers to specific questions about specific books.

Observational/naturalistic.

Observational/naturalistic data was the fourth source of information on child language. This category includes a videotape called "Am I Normal?", which enabled me to "watch" children's literature. Even though this data was observed, it should be noted that the dialogues were written by an adult specialist in young adult literature, so this source of data could also be categorized as "Children's Literature." The videotape depicted adolescent boys going through puberty. Though the boys in the video were older than the subjects used in this study, there existed many parallels between my data and the boys' general actions, attitudes, and words. Also within the category of observational data are classroom "tidbits" which I heard, observed and recorded. I chose to obtain this type of data in addition to the other recorded data discussed earlier, because these statements were basically unsolicited. They can be examined in the "results" section. The other marvelous thing about observational data is it provides insight into how children think, in addition to how they speak.

Student Feedback.

The final source of data is student feedback. This data elicitation will be referred to as Part II. Once I obtained a significant amount of data using the above sources, I began writing fiction according to my findings. From there, I have begun a second sort of data collection, which involves fine tuning. Before presenting the passages to the students, I read them aloud to myself to hear the sound of them, because children have a voice in

their ear. I have been reading several passages of my fiction to the students and asking such questions as:

How does each passage go over?
Which passage do you like the best?
Why was passage "X" the favorite?
What part of the passage made it most likeable?

For part II, I obtained parental permission for the students to participate. The reason I asked for permission in part II but not part I is because I did part I while I was student teaching, or having just finished my student teaching in some instances, in the third grade classroom, and thus, under the privileges of that position, written permission was not necessary. However, once my position expired, I felt it appropriate to obtain formal, written permission (see Appendix C for letter). The eventual goal of this project is to create/produce, according to my findings, an effective piece of fiction for children.

RESULTS/DATA (that not located in appendices)

The following two tables, 1 and 2, show each coding category's number of occurrences. For instance, if a student said "um" a total of six times in his/her interview, six tally marks are put under the column heading of 22 (which corresponds to the use of "um") in the row of the student's name. The first table gives the results of the interviews and the second table gives those of the classroom literature activity, "Autumn Leaves." Totals for each coding category are given in Table 3, which follows Tables 1 and 2.

The least frequently occurring features in the interview data were numbers four (4), fifteen (15), and seven (7); name-calling, egocentrism, and mention of pet, respectively. In the literature activity, the least frequently occurring features were 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 19; sarcasm, name-calling, mention of sibling, mention of relative, mention of pet, and pro-drop, respectively. The four (4) most frequently occurring features were identical for the interview data and the literature activity data. They were 14, 20, 22, and 21; slang, start utterance over, "um," "uh," and incomplete utterance. Utterances in the interviews were, on the average, longer than those in the literature activity. Average utterance length in the interviews was 14.0 words and in the literature activity, 5.5 words. The average age of the subjects was identical for the two data pools.

The interview speech was varied; it represented all of the feature categories. Representation of the two data pools cannot be compared, however, because the interviews had six times as many

ent's Name

Table 1. Coding Categories for Interviews

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
rol										13.2		F	9										
n										5.7		M	9	### 								###	
y										9.3		M	8	### 								### ###	
rt										5.3		M	8									### 	
										10.0		F	8							###	### 		
a										14.7		F	8										
nn										41.0		M	9	### 									
nee										5.0		F	8	### 									
ott										3.4		M	9										
n										13.0		M	8							### 			
ny					###					13.6	###	F	8										
am										3.3		M	8										
rb										5.8		F	8										
hi										39.0		F	8										
th										32.7		F	8							### 		### ### 	
e										8.8		M	8										

Table 3. Totals from Coding Tables 1 and 2

<u>Coding Category Number</u>	<u># of Tallies from Table 1</u>	<u># of Tallies From Table 2</u>
1	5	5
2	4	4
3	5	0
4	2	0
5	11	0
6	13	0
7	3	0
8	4	2
9	10	6
10	14.0	5.5
11	13	2
12	8/8	13/7
13	8.25	8.25
14	43	9
15	2	4
16	5	3
17	7	5
18	23	1
19	13	0
20	42	10
21	28	6
22	72	16
23	14	5

These numbers represent the total number of each category's occurrences in each of the two sets of data. Category #10, average length of utterance, is calculated to the nearest tenth decimal. Category #12, gender of student, is given in terms of Male/Female. Category #13 tells the average age of the students included in that particular pool of data. The value, that being 8.25 for each type of data, is equivalent to eight (8) years and three (3) months old.

Ranking of Occurrence Frequency. 1=most frequently occurring
15=least frequently occurring

1. "um," "uh
2. restart of utterance
3. slang and incomplete utterance
4. exaggeration
5. stuttering/word repetition
6. chronological thought pattern
7. utterance unrelated to question/topic
8. pro-drop and mention of relative
9. question or disagree with something said
10. mention of sibling
11. metaphor
12. magical language and imaginary
13. egocentrism and acknowledgment of sexes
14. sarcasm
15. name-calling

words uttered as did the literature activity; therefore, the interview speech will naturally have greater representation. The total number of words uttered, by students, in the interviews was 3233; the number in the literature activity was 510.

When the number of occurrences from Table 1 are added to those of Table 2, the four most frequently occurring categories remain the most frequently occurring categories, of course; and on the least frequently occurring end was 4, 7, 3, and 15, two of which occurred least frequently for both tables alone (see previous mention of least frequent occurrence for each table).

Oral Survey.

The survey of students' worries/concerns yielded the following results (the number beside each concern indicates the number of students who raised their hands when asked if "X" also concerns them a great deal):

nuclear war (16)
death--of dog, self, parents, or grandparents (14)
strangers approaching (12)
house burning down (11)
forgetting things when coming to school (11)
school work (10).

Observational/naturalistic.

The videotape, "Am I Normal?" contained several interesting linguistic effects. Hesitant speech was very common as the boys talked amongst each other and as one boy went to adults to find answers to his questions. The boys' speech also included teasing, both behind the main character's back and to his face. Concerning mention of relatives or siblings, one character, Tony, used his younger brother as a scapegoat; and the main character tried to fool his mom, because he was concerned and embarrassed about what she would think about some of the events going on in his life due to the onset of puberty. Frustration was evident in the characters

as they questioned their puberty and as they tried to find answers to their questions. Though they were afraid, at first, to admit to one another that they had questions, they eventually became more open about their curiosity.

Throughout my three months of working with the students of this study, I observed many traits common to this age group. The results of my listening and observing are as follows:

One strategy that Roy uses is his "clownish smile." Every time he wanted to be called on, he grinned at me when my eyes were directed his way.

Roy was also very supportive of his classmates. He sometimes acknowledged what he thought was a good answer by saying to his classmate, "Good answer."

Roy experienced some sensitive moments in our classroom. After reading a newspaper article (he was underlining verbs) on the middle East, he very sensitively asked why countries bomb each other. He went on to tell why he did not think that was good, fair, or right.

One day in reading group Roy curiously asked a classmate, who had been absent for several days because his grandfather died, "Were you crying?" The classmate responded, "No.--Well, kind-of."

There were times when Roy could have used a bit more sensitivity than he did! One day a male friend of mine came to sing to the class. During the question time following the singing, Roy asked him, "Are you going to marry Miss Shiels?"

One day I was walking from desk to desk, checking over the stories the students were working on. As I approached Roy's desk, he explained to me the plight of his handwriting: "Miss Shiels, my hand went wild and spastic--that's why this is so sloppy. It got all excited..."

I showed the students a piece of work by Picasso. Sam pointed out, "It looks like little pieces of paper stuck together. A little kid could draw it and he could look famous. But it's not that great."

Two students were discussing politics as they were lining up for lunch. (This conversation took place in the month when the Presidential campaign and the Olympics were both on television.)

B: Did you see the debate last night?

R: No.

B: Dukakis won. He crushed Bush! He romped!

R: What's that--a wrestling match?

B: No--the Presidential debate between Bush and Dukakis!

During reading seatwork (possibly while working with spelling words, two of which might have been *heart* and *hors d'oeuvre*), Jim proclaimed, "My heart is an hors d'oeuvre!"

Ben was reading aloud with his reading group when he observed a line of asterisks dividing two very different paragraphs (a scene change). He said the asterisks seemed like a big apostrophe--like a contraction.

Third graders are in a vocabulary-building stage. One student wondered about the meaning of the *barracks*. Another student guesses it was similar to *barricade*, because the two words sound the same. Even though the words are not of the same origin, he reasoned that they were, because they sounded similar.

In reading Bunnicula to the students, I asked what they thought would be found next in the story; they answered: "another white veggie," which followed a pattern of reasoning, based on previous experiences in the book; and "a dead mouse with all its blood sucked out," which followed a creative, imaginary, gruesome sense of reasoning.

These results reveal some of the workings of a third grader's mind.

DISCUSSION

This study was aided by the fact that I student taught in the S-R K-8 classroom in the fall of 1988. Being in the classroom on a daily basis enabled me to get to know the students, their interests, their topics of conversation, and their abilities. When it came time to interview them, these pieces of knowledge proved helpful, because I could pursue topics of discourse that were of interest to individuals. All taping, except for that of the interview, was done during my months of student teaching. The interviews were taped in January, 1989.

Before a discussion of results is given, it should be noted that in the data totals for the interviews, four of the five tallies for *metaphor* correspond to Emmy, thanks to her claim, "My sister is a dog." Five of the eleven tallies in the category of *mention of sibling* also belong to Emmy, for the same statement. In the literature activity results, the three *magical language* tallies belong to Roy. The reason for these explanations is that the results in the three mentioned categories might be more representative of the language of the individuals mentioned than of "child language" itself.

The results for least frequently occurring features in the interview section are not very surprising. I did not expect much name-calling to come out in the interview; however, I did expect more mention of pets. Pets are supposedly a big part of the life of a child who is at the age of gaining responsibility. Maybe this indicates that pets are not as big a part of a child's life as one might assume. The low-show of egocentrism seems to indicate that

these students are growing out of that Piagetian stage.

The literature activity elicited good discussion and creativity, as anticipated. The results from this section were not surprising. Due to the focus of the activity being on the poem, there was not opportunity for a child to mention a sibling, a relative, or a pet. These three features are topic-directed, so it is not surprising that their occurrence was infrequent, considering the topic of the dialogue was so focussed. To jump to one of these three subjects would have been off-topic; then there would have been a high occurrence of category 11: *utterance not related to question/topic*. *Sarcasm* and *name-calling* are content features. The children's speech did not contain these. This is neither surprising nor expected. *Pro-drop*, usually of a rather casual nature of conversation, is a stylistic category. In classroom discourse, one uses a more formal style of language; so it is not surprising that pro-drop did not occur in the literature activity.

The frequent occurrence of *slang*, *restarting an utterance*, "um," "uh" usage, and *incomplete utterances*, in both the interviews and the literature activity, is not surprising. One interesting note, however, is that the use of "um" and "uh" is probably just as frequent, if not more frequent, in adult speech. So though "um," "uh" is being labeled a common feature of child language, it is not a characteristic which distinguishes child language from adult language. *Restarting an utterance* and *incomplete utterance* go hand in hand. Often when a child restarted his/her utterance, it was with new words; therefore, the initial start of the utterance was counted as incomplete, and the second start was counted as the restart. When the restart used the same words, it was counted as only a restart, because the utterance was actually completed, even though it took two "attempts.". *Utterance restart* and *incomplete*

utterance may be so common in child language because children's language is still developing and it is not smooth, yet. However, tapings of adult speech, not elicited for the purpose of this study, also showed frequent utterance restarts and incomplete utterances. *Slang* was unexpectedly frequent in the literature activity. It was also frequent, but not surprisingly so, in the interviews. It is surprising to find it so often in the literature activity, because, as mentioned previously, the literature activity is classroom discourse and therefore more formal. Most of the "slang data" was the use of the word "yeah." The fact that both data pools had these four categories tallied as most frequently occurring confirms that these are common features of child language.

The difference between the interviews and the literature activity in length of utterance was expected. I did not speak much in the interviews, because I wanted the students to feel free to go on. In the classroom activity, however, the students were usually responding to a question; therefore, he/she stopped speaking once the complete response was uttered. Knowing there are twenty-one (21) other people listening and wanting a turn to speak shortens most children's utterances.

The topics I presented for interview material possibly steered the conversation topics, toward in some cases and away from in others, my coding categories, rather than their just occurring naturally. This could be the reason why there are so many zeroes in the literature activity. In redoing this research, I would eliminate the question concerning schoolwork content, because it may be inhibiting, as it creates teacher/student mode. I would replace it with "What is your favorite movie?" because it would lead to the students' taking a stand, providing reasoning, stating

an opinion, etc. It would expose many thought processes.

"Observer's paradox" was not present, so I would keep my method the same. In some of the interviews there was a little bit of unease for the first few lines, but not enough to justify eliminating them. For the most part, however, the interview method was also successful in that subjects did talk about themselves and random topics, as I had hoped they would. This, I thought, would result in more natural discourse. The coding categories would remain the same. They were all quite codable. I felt Dines' categories or "response categories" were too broad and would provide no insight into what really characterizes child *language*, as opposed to just child *responses*. I would incorporate more of Ricou's distinctive features. *Stream-of-consciousness* and *cumbersome predication* are two of Ricou's for which it would be interesting to code.

Adding the two data pools together eliminates, somewhat, the factors that affected the speech elicited from each pool. Combining them enabled them to be treated as one big pool of data. The Introduction to this paper set forth the following as expected characteristics of child language: metaphoric speech, imaginary depictions, teasing of peers and siblings, talk of pets, and magical language. Name-calling comes under the category of teasing peers and siblings, and it was one of the four least frequently occurring features of child language. The prediction that teasing of peers and siblings is a characteristic of child language was not confirmed by this study. Only one subject frequently employed this in her speech. Talk of pets was also one of the four least frequently occurring speech features; so it, too, has not been confirmed to be a characteristic of child language, by this study. Metaphoric speech, imaginary depictions, and magical language are

all ranked in the bottom third of occurrence frequency. This indicates that they were not very prevalent in this study, but they were not the least prevalent of all the categories. Furthermore, their being in the bottom third in terms of occurrence frequency does not necessarily mean there was a large spread between the number of times the top third ranked categories occurred and the number of times these in the bottom third occurred; however, a large spread is actually the case in this study. Metaphoric speech, imaginary depictions, and magical language are not necessarily common features of child language, but they are characteristics of child language. Anything ranked 1, 2, or 3 is confirmed as a common feature of child language. Any feature ranked 13, 14, or 15 is not confirmed to be a characteristic of child language. Categories ranked 4 through 12 are considered characteristics of child language. The more common the occurrence, the more often that feature of children's speech will be mapped into my fiction.

The students took the oral survey, dealing with concerns, very seriously. None of the six factors mentioned will be a major theme in my story, but the two concerning school are appropriate to incorporate in some way. A follow-up on this part would be to find out how the students feel or what they think of when they say these things are concerns for them. Is it something with which they are mentally confronted every day, or is it just something that is a concern to them but does not really affect them?

Some of the parallels between "Am I Normal?" and the speech of my subjects are: embarrassment about sensitive, personal subjects; secrecy about things; and an outer image of toughness, but a sensitive inside.

The observational/naturalistic data can be summarized as follows:

1. students use strategies to get the teacher's attention
2. support exists amongst classmates
3. children do not completely understand what is going on in the world, but they do hear enough about it to be fearful
4. students are curious about sensitive subjects and want to know how their peers react to them. They have a tough outer shell that can be cracked off with just a bit of curiosity.
5. students of this age are still indiscriminate of appropriateness--they need reminding of what to say and what not to say
6. eight and nine year olds place blame on outside sources/sources beyond their control, rather than on self
7. these students draw on experiential reasoning

The above will be referred to as characters are developed in my fiction. Also employed in my fiction will be those mappings from "good" children's literature. Such literature is: imaginative; suspenseful; gripping; a little bit unbelievable; provokes a feeling, emotion, or reaction; adventurous and out-of-the-ordinary; full of dialogue and cooperative efforts between people; and descriptive--each story could be clearly visualized.

I plan to continue working on my story this summer, following the procedure described as "Part II." My hope is to eventually redo this research, using a different subject pool and revised questions. A second run-through would hopefully confirm my findings. Since children like to read older children's literature and since their understanding exceeds their articulation, I may actually be writing for first or second graders. Carrying out part II with one of these two age groups might also be implemented in the second run-through.

Conclusions as Applied to Story.

In addition to including the features considered characteristics and common features of child language, I will

incorporate the following:

1. Avoid "filler" material; the attention of the reader must be maintained.
2. Go for the fantastic!
3. The words must create a clear picture in the reader's mind.
4. The writing must be such that the child can hear him/herself saying it.
5. Use imagistic analogies (as the students did with why leaves change colors and fall from the trees in the wintertime) to explain concepts resting in the child's mind.

The purpose of this project was to examine children's dialogue and its rendering in children's literature. The goal of the examination was to know a child's point of view and to understand a child's perspective. Knowing these two things enables us to write through children, by using "child language," the characteristics of which have been defined by this paper, and child models of perception. Children's speech does have uniquenesses which necessitate consideration in order to write literature composed of language that rings true for children.

For all of the transcripts included in Appendices A and B, the following applies:

I=Interviewer

Quotes of students are indicated by the students' first initials.

Appendix A

Autumn Leaves

R. Shiels

As I was walking to school today,
I saw a leaf along the way.
I looked at it and said, "Good grief,
You've fallen from your tree, dear leaf!"
The leaf looked up at me and said,
"You're right--and I almost fell on your head!"
Oh, silly leaf, who starts out green,
Most beautiful thing I've ever seen,
Who turns to orange, brown, and gold,
When summer air begins to get cold,
This time of year you fall to the ground,
And walking on you makes a crunchy sound.
The leaf spoke up and said to me,
"Winter is not for long, you see,
Because spring will arrive and with it will come,
New leaves on the trees and the bright yellow sun."

C. "Autumn Leaves" Literature Activity

I: Who can give us some examples of rhyming words? (pause) Just name two words for me that rhyme. Beth?

B: My, pie.

I: My, pie; Sam?

S: Pie, bye.

I: OK, Sam.

S: I also wanted to say something else. Um, it also kinda sounds like a poem.

I: Why do you say it sounds like a poem?

S: Because in poems words rhyme.

I: Do all poems have to rhyme?

S: Well, no but most of them do.

I: That's right; not all poems have to rhyme. So what makes something a poem if it doesn't rhyme? Scott?

(tape recorder was moved, so part of recording was too muffled to understand)

I: Now we'll all read it together. Who will start us off? (pause) Emmy, go ahead.

(Poem read in unison by all--lots of intonation)

I: This time I'd like us to read it together and we're going to go through it like you do in music class where you clap to the rhythm. A poem is very similar to music in that, well, some poems are, in that there's a rhythm to them. So this time let's go through and we'll clap; so I'll give you an example of

the first line:

As I was walking to school today (*=clap)
* * * *

And we're going to add one thing to this to make it a little more difficult, because I know that's not too hard for you. We're going to go...First, let's do something else. Let's pick out a pattern. I know you do this in music class, also. How are we going to find a pattern in this poem? How do you think we'll pattern this?

J: What do you mean?

I: If I were to ask you which line you would call A , when you have the A, B,...

J: Um, "As I was walking to school today,"

I: And then what would you call this line?

J: I don't know...(couldn't hear the rest of this on tape)

I: Let's do it according to the rhyme. So as an example, these would both be A because they both rhyme, and then the next two, grief and leaf is a new sound, so we would call those B s. OK? Does everyone understand that now? So let's go through and do that very quickly. These are both A and we said that these would both be B. What would we call said and head ? Scott?

S: C

I: C, because that's a new sound. And green and seen ?

J: D, D, D.

I: D. Gold and cold ?

Class: E.

I: Ground and found ?

Class: *F*.

I: *Me and see ?*

Class: *G*.

I: *And come and sun ?*

Class: *H*.

J: Miss Shiels, why do you make your *g s*...it comes around like this and it goes around, then it goes like that and goes...

I: We'll talk about Miss Shiels' *g s* later...(humorously)

D: That's how my, my brother writes...

I: Alright, let's do this together and this time let's clap up on the *A s*, then down on the *B s*, and up on the *C s*, 'en down on the *D s*. We're going to alternate, every other one, so let's clap to it. Ready? (class and teacher recite poem with up-and-down clapping)

I: That was pretty good. Autumn is one of four what? Who can fill in the blank? Autumn is one of four...

B: Seasons.

I: That's right. Can you name the four seasons for us?

B: Winter, spring, summer, and autumn.

I: OK, winter, spring, summer, and autumn. What's another word for autumn? Beth.

B: Fall.

I: Fall. Why do you think it's called fall?

B: 'Cause um the leaves fall from the trees.

I: OK. Here we have the four seasons (referring to pictures), and we're going to start out with spring, because spring is sort-of the beginning of things.(student says "yeah") New flowers

bloom, and new leaves come up on trees after everything has died in the wintertime. So let's say the four seasons together:

All together: Spring, summer, autumn, winter.

I: We'll call this autumn (referring to the large autumn-ish copy of the poem). This is the poem. We're going to hang it up in the room. And this will be the copy that we'll use around the room. What colors do you think of when you think of autumn?

Emmy.

E: Um, red and orange.

I: Red and orange. Any other colors? Ken?

K: Red and brown.

I: Red and brown. Jodi?

J: Yellow.

I: Burt?

B: (nothing was recorded on the tape)

I: Any more colors? Sam?

S: Gold.

I: Gold.

M: Ooohhh! (hand raising sound)

I: Marvin?

M: I know that sometimes (can't hear this part) purple.

I: Purplish; yes, I've seen that, too.

S: Yeah, so have I.

I: And you'll see some of the leaves over here (indicates to real leaves on front table) are sort-of purplish. Some of them are still green and some are brown and orange and then we have this

purplish sort of color. Why do you think the leaves change color in autumn? Think about it for a minute. (pause) Donny, why do you think the leaves change color in autumn?

D: Because they're rotten.

I: Dawn?

D: Because it's cold.

J: (can't hear answer)

I: That's a neat way to think of it. They don't die completely because they come back to life in the spring. All right, I'm going to give you a sort-of scientific definition of why leaves lose their color in the wintertime. It's not that a leaf is gaining color; it's not gaining these orange and brown colors, it's that it's losing its green color. And the thing that makes plants green is called chlorophyll--you don't need to remember that--and in the wintertime, just as Diana said, it gets cold, and so chlorophyll is not, um, there's not as much of it in the wintertime, because we learned in science class that the sun is not facing the earth as directly when it's wintertime as when it's summertime--so that's why leaves lose their green color; when they lose their green color, the color that's left is the brown and orange and red. Sam.

S: Um, and also there's another way of saying it. Umm, they're dying and um they turn colors when they're dying and then they fall.

I: Oh, so you're saying that they die while they're still on the tree.

S: Yeah.

I: That's what makes them fall off?

S: Yeah.

I: John?

J: I just thought of something else. The trees aren't dying; it's just falling asleep and then it can't grip onto the leaves anymore; it has to let go.

I: That's a neat way to think of it. That's kind-of a continuation of what Marvin said. Roy?

R: Well, I don't, I don't like to think of it as dying kind of thing. I, I like to think of it better as see, when it gets colder, they jump off, off their trees go buy colored coats and they all understand(?) their colored coats.

I: Ooohh! Well, that's a really neat way to think of it. Very optimistic approach. Scott.

S: See, in the wintertime it's so cold (remainder is unintelligible)...(class laughed)

I: Hmm (skeptically), all right, let's move on with this. Who can think of a synonym for the word *crunchy*? In this line right here (asterisked line) we have the word *crunchy*, "Walking on you makes a crunchy sound;" give me a synonym. Joe.

J: A potato-chip-sound.

I: OK, that is the sound a potato chip makes. Before we move on, who can tell us what a synonym is? ...an English (class) word. Anyone in this row? Adam, what's a synonym?

A: Um, it's the...it's something that, that are alike. Different words that still mean the same.

I: Give me an example.

A: Um...things like tiny and small?

I: Good, those are synonyms--tiny and small. They're two words that mean the same thing. So who can give me a synonym for *crunchy*, now? John.

J: Hard?

I: OK. Ken?

K: Crackley.

I: Crackley. Scott.

S: Crouton?

I: Crouton? Crouton's a noun; this (referring to *crunchy*) is an adjective. But croutons are crunchy; that's right. Carol?

C: Noisy?

I: Crunching can be noisy. Sam?

S: I forget.

I: Marvin?

M: Dry?

I: Dry--sometimes dry things make a crunchy sound. If we were going to substitute a word in here, if I took out *crunchy*, someone said crackley, that would fit. What's another word we could stick in there? See, we couldn't say, "...makes a crouton sound;" we kind-of could, but it wouldn't quite be the same. What could we stick in there? Lia?

L: Scrunchy.

I: I'm sorry; I can't hear Lia, because there's other talking going on.

L: Scrunchy.

I: Scrunchy? OK, any more? Sam.

S: Scrunchy?

I: That's what Lia just said.

S: Oh.

I: Joe?

J: Scrumptious.

I: Scrumptious sound? What does scrumptious mean?

J: Yummy.

I: OK, well, we'll stick crackley in there for now. What words in the poem tell you that the person is surprised? The person who's walking along and met the leaf. What words tell you that the person is surprised? Jim?

J: *Good grief.*

I: Good grief. Have you ever heard that used? Charlie Brown says that a lot. He says, "Good grief..." Usually Charlie Brown is just kind-of disgusted, but the person here sounds pretty excited: "Good grief, you've fallen off your tree, dear leaf!!" And what does this symbol (referring to exclamation point) tell us? Beth.

B: It's um, it's kind-of like you're really surprised. It's like, you're like saying something really fast; like, we,,, "There's a fire on the street!"

I: Right.. What is that symbol called?

B: Um, exclamation point.

I: Exclamation point. So, right, if you said, "There's a fire on the street!" you would put an exclamation point at the end of that. So that's how we can tell this person is kind-of surprised. Roy?

R: Well, I've got one for crunchy.

I: Oh, you thought of another synonym for *crunchy*?

R: Yeah, you know what if he had to change the sentence, then say,
"And walking on you makes a ce- a cereal-with-milk sound,
'cause you know when you take the cereal and you pour the milk
in it makes like a that crackling noise?"

I: The snap, crackle, pop sound?

R: Yeah.

I: Yeah. All right, I'm going to move these pictures so we can
look at some words more closely now. For instance, here we
have *leaf* and *grief*. What are the letters in each of these
words that make the long e sound? How about in the first word?
Barb?

B: i and e.

I: i, e. How about in the second word? Bobby.

B: e, a.

I: e, a. We've been working on sounds in reading a little bit.
Have you come across anything like this where you have two
different combinations of letters that can make the same sound?
(pause) No, not yet? (student: We have!) You have come across
some? This will happen often. Even though these are different
letters, they can still make that same long e sound. Who can
find some more examples of that? Look at the words that rhyme.
Try to find some more examples of letters that make the same
sound even though they're different letters. Take a few
minutes; look at the poem--don't look at me--look at the poem.
(pause) I want you to find pairs, like *grief* and *leaf*, that

have the same sound, OK, they're both that [i] that we decided on, but they have different letters there making that sound. Give everyone a few minutes to look. (pause) Carol, what did you find?

C: *Said* and *head*.

I: *Said* and *head*, good. Here we have the ai and the ea, but they both have the [E] sound: [sEd], [hEd]. Any more? Donny.

D: *Sun* and *come*.

I: *Sun* and *come*. OK, that's the [ə] sound. Even though the n and the m are not the same, we're looking at the vowel there and that's the [ə] sound. We have o and u, very good. Joe, found some more?

J: Um, what is it? See, I mean, *me* and *see*.

I: OK, good! What makes that sound in *see*?

J: S, e, I mean, the e.

I: One e, or two e s?

J: Two e s.

I: Right. Here, we see two e s, and here, only one, but they both have that [i] sound. John.

J: *Seen* and *green*; *green* and *seen*.

I: Excuse me?

J: *Green* and *seen*.

I: *Green* and *seen*; OK, where is that? Over here. OK, these are the same, though, right? They're both that double e. You see any more that are different? Jodi.

J: Uh, um, (can't hear what she said)

I: You found some that are the same? (pause) I think we hit them

all. You can see from this that even though we use different letters we can still make the same sound. And that's one thing that makes the English language a little bit difficult sometimes---people see sounds and they'll be pronounced the same even though they're different--different letters. Do you think this poem is true, or fictitious? Who can tell us what fictitious means, first of all? Jim.

J: I have some words same sound. Um, there's *gold* and *cold*; they have the same sound.

I: Right, they both have the o-l. Who can tell us what fictitious means? Ben?

B: Fictional?

I: Fictional, and what does fictional mean?

B: False?

I: False. So do you think this poem is fictitious or is it a true poem? Do you think it really happened? Do you think the author really had this happen to her one day as she was walking to school one day?

Students: No.

I: No?

B: A leaf could not talk.

I: We don't call out, Burt. John.

J: Fiction.

I: Why did you say fiction?

J: Because a leaf can't talk.

I: A leaf can't talk? Oh, OK. What else? Any other things about this poem that seem odd to you, or does it seem pretty

believable, except for the fact that the leaf talked? Diana?

D: Well, usually, you don't talk to the leaves.

I: Oh, that could be true, too. I bet most of us don't talk with the leaves on the way to school, do we?

Various students: I do!

I: OK, we'll see what happens tomorrow when you're walking to school.

Various students: Tomorrow?!

I: (gasp) Monday. So, everything about this poem is pretty...
(wait for noise to abate) Ken, do you think everything else about this poem is pretty believable? Does this seem pretty normal to you, other than talking to the leaf and the leaf talking to you?

K: Yeah.

I: Yeah, OK.

M: A leaf can land on your head.

I: (in response to another student's unheard comment) That doesn't happen? Leaves don't fall off the trees---?

B: Leaves fall off the trees but not very many people are surprised when they do.

I: Oh, OK, OK, that's a good point.

B: Except that it starts talking to you obviously you're surprised.

I: Shhhh...please don't call out, Burt. What do you think the, why do you think the author wrote this poem? Do you think we're supposed to be scared by it, or are we supposed to laugh at it? or...why do you think the author wrote this poem?

Marvin.

M: Because (rest of answer not heard on tape)

I: Knowing that fall's gonna come? That could be, that's a possibility. Joe.

J: Um, so that, say if it was in a book if the poem was in a book, but if somebody bought it wouldn't he get the money?

I: (laugh) So you're saying the author wrote it to earn money?

J: Yeah.

I: That could be true with some poems; not this one, but with some. John?

J: Maybe she wrote it so people, for people to feel sad or happy?

I: For people to feel sad and happy? Is there something in this poem that makes you feel sad?

J: The leaves falling off the trees.

I: Oh, does that make you sad?

J: Yeah.

I: That makes some people sad. That does make some people sad. They don't like to see summertime go away. Other people love it when summer goes away and it gets cooler again. Carol?

C: (can't hear her comment)

I: For enjoyment; that's a good reason for people to write poems. (pause) Do you know what it's called when things that are not human, things that are not real, talk, or take on other human characteristics? John?--or Jim, I'm sorry.

J: Speak(?)

I: OK, it's a word that we use in English class. Scott?

S: False?

I: No, I'm thinking of the word *personification*. Has anyone ever heard of that? (none say yes) Later, I'm sure when you do poems later on and more stuff in English, you'll come across the word *personification*. It has the word *person* in it. I'll write that on the board so you can see that. It has the word *person* in it, which means that things that are not real or things that are not humans, like a leaf?, they take on human characteristics, or things that a person would do. Here's the word *person* in *personification* (underlines *person* within *personification*). I have an idea that I think Mrs. Lark would...(remainder of text is teacher speaking, until the following dialogue was picked up by the tape:)

R: (to a classmate) Eeww, you farted?

B: _____farts all the time.

Appendix B

Interview #1: Joe and Carol

I: Start us off, Joe. What did you do over Christmas/Hanukkah?

J: Well, um...uh...I don't know. Carol, you go first.

C: Well, we've been doing, well, after Christmas, we've been starting times...and...and next Monday then we start division.

J: We are?

I: Have you had a test on multiplication yet?

J: Yeah.

C: We've done eleven.

I: Mm-hmm.

J: I don't know, um, we learned every cursive, every letter in the alphabet in cursive.

C: No we haven't.

J: Two, woah.

I: Which two haven't you done yet?

C: Um, z and y.

J: Yeah, y, z. (laugh/chuckle)

I: Tell me what you did over break.

C: No, you go first.

J: I don't know. Played with my cousins, and I went up the mountains, played with my pony(?), did a lot of stuff.

I: You went to the Pocono mountains?

J: Um-hm.

C: I went all over the place, because I went to my, first I went to my grandmother's, then I came back to my house with my grandmother, then I went to my grandmother's house again for

about a week, and then I went back to my house and then my grandmother left and now they're going off to something ...eh...I, I don't know.

I: Sounds like you were busy.

C: Yeah, I guess.

I: Are you guys playing sports or taking lessons for anything?

J: No. I'm playing baseball, but I'm not ...I'm playing baseball, but not for the SRA.

C: Well, over the summer sometimes I go to SRA.

I: What is SRA?

C: SRA is when you play games.

J: Swarthmore-Rut...oh, wait...Swarthmore-Rutledge Athletics, yeah.

I: Hmmm.

J: Everybody in the school, well, not everybody, but no one else can play, only people in the school.

C: And then, well, yeah, only people in the school; yeah, but mostly.

I: So you're selling Girl Scout cookies, Carol?

C: Yeah, I already sold twenty boxes. Well, actually my mom does it. She takes them in to work.

Interview #2: Jim and Roy

I: What did you do over Christmas/Hanukkah, Roy?

R: Um, I got toys.

I: Like what?

R: Um, (laugh) a, I don't know...a Nintendo.

I: A what?

R: A Nintendo.

I: What is that?

R: It's a computer and a Atari mixed together.

I: Oh, so you can play games on it?

R: Yeah.

I: And you can type stories and things?

R: Nnno, but it's all games. (laugh) It's really graphic. It's, it's like more graphic than computers and it's more graphic than Ataris.

I: Oh, neat, that's neat. How about you, Jim?

J: I got a gumball machine lamp.

I: A what?

J: A gumball machine lamp.

I: Wow, fun! Do you have to put in money to get out the gumballs?

J: Mm-hmm.

I: So then you get to collect the money in the end, I guess, huh?

J: Mm-hm.

I: Did you visit friends over Christmas?

J: Uh, I went down the shore, saw our house down there.

I: Which beach do you go to?

J: Ocean City---New Jersey.

R: That's where I go.

J: And um, over Thanksgiving we went down to the Poconos.

I: Up to the Poconos?

J: Yeah.

I: Great, sounds like you've been travelling around a bit. What kind of things are you working on in school, now? What have you done since I left?

R: Um, we've learned all of our times.

I: All of them?!

J: Yeah.

R: And we've learned all of our, um, cursive 'cept y and z.

J: All of our cursive letters except y and z.

I: You guys are really moving along. So what sports are you going to be playing this spring?

J: Ouh, soccer.

R: I don't want tuh play any sports.

I: No? You don't play a spring sport?

R: I'm bored of, um, soccer.

I: You're bored of soccer?

R: Yeah.

I: Are you guys taking any instrument lessons?

J: Uh, recorder.

R: I'm just taking recorder.

I: Neat. Each of you tell me something exciting that has happened since I left.

J: Uh...

R: Joe's birthday. Friday, the thirteenth.

J: Yeah, I had a party last Friday, the 27th.

I: So, you're nine?

J: M-hm.

R: And my birthday's in February fifth.

I: Oh, so you're coming up, too!

J: Um, my party was at a gymnastics place--where they do gymnastics. And there was a pinata; ya have to pull the str..., the ribbons down and then the candy'll fall out."

R: I got a new computer game but um, it's called Gold Rush and it, it's before they found gold in California, and you can, um, instead of cars and carriages and stuff, you can get ran over. They have stables, they have, um, steamboats and stuff.

I: Is that your favorite game?

R: Um, so far, yeah.

I: How many games do you have?

R: I don't know.

J: I have four.

I: Oh, do you have the same computer?

J: Yeah, I got it for my birthday.

R: He says he got a Sega and Nintendo. The Sega is pretty much the same as the Nintendo, only I don't think it, they have as good as games.

J: They don't have the same games.

Interview #3: Lia and John

L: We finished multiplication and all...already.

I: Oh, good!

L: Well, not all...

J: We still have to do our tens.

I: Oh, you have to do the tens?

L: Yeah, we have to take our test, but we've been going a lot...

J: We've been, yeah, we've been going over a lot.

I: Do you guys feel ready?

L: Pretty much.

J: Yeah.

I: I bet you are.

L: It's not the easiest thing in the world.

I: Oh, I know it's not--I know, but I bet you'll do fine.

Anything exciting happen over vacation?

J: Mmm, well, my cousin came over; he made a mess of my room, like always. He, he's, um, six, and he comes in my room; he loses almost everything. See, he lost my drumsticks for my drum lesson, yesterday, so we looked all over my room for 'em for half-an-hour and we couldn't find 'em.

I: How long have you been playing the drum?

J: Only for two weeks.

I: You're not taking lessons through the school, are you?

J: No, I'm taking them at the school of music in Swarthmore. My teacher there is fun, too. He sticks his pen in the ceiling.

He has one of those ceilings like that (points up); he sticks it in the ceiling so he knows where it is.

I: How about you, Lia? What did you do over Christmas?

L: I didn't do much; I was sick.

I: You were sick?

L: Mm-hm. Stayed up all night.

I: Oh, no, really?

L: Mm-hm.

I: Because you couldn't sleep?

L: Yeah...Not that I believe in Santa Claus, but he had to come two times. He gave, my mom was sick, too, and he gave, um, some Pepto Bismal? Well, we have this dining room where we have the tree, but then we have a living room comin' right off of it; we were sleeping in the living room and, um, he put these chairs and then he put this blanket over the chairs so we couldn't see the presents, yet. I kept going into the kitchen and peeking... (remainder of sentence was unintelligible on tape)

J: Oh, umm, I think it was, yeah, last weekend, these men, they were supposed to come at one time but they didn't till yesterday and they'll only be in town for a little bit and they almost went without replacing our refrigerator and it looked like we were moving. We put all the glass stuff in boxes with a lot of paper just in case the refrigerator dropped. We had it for like, wait, he didn't, they didn't come till like three days and we had it like that for three days. The furniture was all moved; it was all close together and you couldn't get into

the chairs; you'd have to climb over them to get in; and we had to have everything like that for two days.

I: That must have been a different way of living.

J: It's hard to sit downstairs.

I: Is everything back to normal now?

J: Yeah.

I: I bet you're glad?

J: At Christmas vacation I only hoped for four things: a monorail, a drum set, although the only drum I got was snare drum--it's pretty cool, and I wanted, wait, sweaters, 'cause I like sweaters. And I got, and for my sister get better. She threw up on Santa Claus one night, and then when she went out, see, we have a carpeted Santa Claus and she threw up on that and then when she came to see Santa Claus she stood next to him and threw up all over him.

I: At the mall she went to see Santa Claus?

J: No, they were coming in, like, fire engines, and then he said, 'Oh, I wish it was rain, I wish I didn't have this cover over me..., ' 'cause they had like a cover over him 'cause it was raining.

I: Did he bring his reindeer?

J: No. Oh, I saw another Santa Claus. They thought they were, see, there's a dead end, they're tearing up the street at my grandmother's at the end of the street so they could make like a new path, and they thought that it wasn't a dead end. They thought the road was still there and they kept going down. It took them like an hour to get back 'cause it was just straight

and you know how big fire engines are? That one was like from the end of the hall to this room. Well, not from like the end of the hall, but...It was huge.

Interview #4: Renee and Scott

R: What should I say, first?

I: Tell me about your Christmas.

R: What do you mean?

I: What did you do over Christmas?

R: Um, well, I went to my house at the shore, um, and I had a snowball fight.

I: At the shore?

R: Na, not at the shore. I don't have a house at the shore; I have a house--(long pause) in the country.

I: In Pennsylvania?

R: No.

I: Which state is it in?

R: Rhode Island.

I: Oh, nice! There was snow up there?

R: Yes, a lot. And I played with my friends. That's all.

I: That sounds fun. That's the way to spend a break. (to Scott:) How 'bout you, Sir? What did you do over Christmas?

S: Nothing.

I: Nothing?

S: Went skiing.

I: You went skiing?! Do you have your own skis?

S: Mm-hm.

I: So you must go pretty often, huh?

S: Mm-hm.

I: Where do you ski?

S: Vermont.

I: Which place?

S: I forget.

I: Killington?

S: (some noise in response to question)

I: No? (laugh) Did you spend the whole week skiing, or were you around here part of the time?

S: That whole week.

I: Hmm?

S: That whole week.

I: Whole week?

S: Whole week.

I: What else have you been up to?

S: Nothing.

I: Nothing?

S: Nothing.

I: Are you playing some spring sports?

S: (shook head no)

I: No? How 'bout you, Renee?

S: I'm riding motorcycles. I'm in drag races now.

I: Oh, you are?!

S: Mm-hm.

I: On weekends you have drag races?

S: Mm-hm.

I: Where do you do that?

S: Poconos.

I: Wow, so you drive up there every weekend?

R: You do?!

S: Drag races on my motorcycle. Four-wheelers.

I: How long have you been doing that?

S: Since Christmas.

I: So you've been riding a motorcycle for a long time but then you just started doing the races..., around Christmas?

S: Mm-hm.

I: A real motorcycle?

S: (unclear utterance, but in the affirmative)

I: (to Renee) So what have you been up to?

R: Uh, nothing.

I: Life is pretty much the same?

R: Yeah.

I: Still good?

S: I always hang around the college, now, 'cept I never see you. You don't go jogging, anymore.

I: Oh, I go jogging sometimes. As a matter of fact, the other day I saw some people and I looked to see if one of them was you, because I know you're there a lot.

S: I'll see you.

I: Keep looking, keep looking; I'll be there; you'll see me one of these days (laugh). So what are you guys doing in school, now?

S: Multiplication.

R: Yeah, multiplication.

S: We're finished our multiplication.

R: No, we aren't.

S: Yes, we are; we're finished.

R: Nu-uhh.

S: Uh-huh.

R: We haven't learned twelves.

S: Aahh, big deal.

I: What is 10 x 9?

S: Nineties.

I: What else--how 'bout in reading?

R: Um, we're doing maps in my reading group.

I: Are you making maps?

R: Yeah, we just made 'em.

I: Maps of what?

R: I, I had to do North Dakota.

I: (to Scott) How 'bout you? What are you doing in your reading group?

S: Nothing.

I: You must be doing something.

S: I am reading with Mrs. Browne and it stinks.

I: It does? Why?

S: Just read a book.

(tape became extremely muffled at this point, so a few lines were not able to be transcribed)

R: I take piano lessons.

I: How long have you been playing?

R: Two years.

S: I'm getting in the spring concert because I play the viola.

I: Hey, great! And you just started that this year, right?

S: (shook head yes)

I: And you enjoy it?

S: Me and Diana.

I: What songs are you playing?

S: Um, *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*; *French Folk Song*; *Song of the Wind*; um, mmmm...?

I: Does everyone who plays an instrument get to be in the concert, or are only some of the students chosen?

S: Yeah, um, it matters what instrument you play--since, um, they have different concerts for different instruments.

I: How about, like, does Burt still play the violin?

S: Mm-hm; he smashed his.

R: He did?!

S: It broke in half.

I: Ut-oh, I'll have to ask him about that when I talk with him.

R: He's not here.

Interview #5: Burt and Sal

I: OK, I'm gonna ask you guys some questions. I'd just ...

B: Yeaah!!!!

I: ...like to find out how your Christmas was, what you've been doing since I've seen you last and you can just tell me whatever you feel like talking about. This is just a time when you guys can talk with each other and when we can all talk together.

B: OK, I got this letter from Tony Hawkins...

I: Go ahead, Burt, you start.

B: I don't know what to say. Is that thing ON?

I: Yes.

B: Oh, OK. (laugh) Uh, oh, uh...

I: Just pretend it's not here. I'm the only one who's gonna listen to it.

B: (sigh) I don't know. (whiney)

S: Burt, say something.

I: OK, go ahead, Sal, you start...

B: Hullo...

I: ...us off.

S: I don't know what to say, either.

I: How was your Christmas?

S: Nice.

B: I know, ...ooh, I know, now!

S: No, no; it was stupid; it was horrible; my Christmas was terrible.

I: Why was it terrible?

S: Everybody was sick and so was I.

I: Oh, no.

S: What?

I: All week? The whole week you had off?

B: I was sick, too.

S: (laugh)

I: Was your whole family sick?

B: Mm-hmm!

I: My gosh, I've talked to so many of you who were sick that week.

B: And I got a new, a new, a new, a new keyboard. Yep, my sister gave me it.

S: I got a keyboard, too.

B: I'm lucky, lucky, lucky.

I: Burt, tell me about your violin. What happened to your violin?

B: What, you heard, you heard that it (sound)?

I: I...just heard vaguely. Why don't you tell me what happened?

B: It snapped in half.

I: How did it happen?

B: I was slipping and sliding on the ice and I went woaaaahhh...and clankity, clank, bash.

I: Oh, no, really?

B: But I got another one. And it cost 250 dollars, though...no, just kidding.

I: You're still taking lessons?

B: Mm-hmm! It's fun.

I: Good. Are you going to be playing a sport in the spring? Do you play baseball or soccer or anything?

B: Mmm, I wanna play basketball.

I: Oh, yeah?

B: Mm-hmm.

I: Are you still skateboarding?

B: Um- hmm (laughing).

I: Of course...Tell me how that's been going. What've you been doing?

B: Fine.

S: (giggle)

I: Did you make any new ramps?

B: No, not late...(thinking)...

S: Burt, you take so long.

B: I don't know; No, n'I didn't; no, no, no, no, no, nop! Nope!

S: Think you made a mistake on bringing him out here.

B: Me?!!

S: Yes!

B: No, let's have a fight, here, now...

I: Sal, what have you been up to? Are you gonna be doing anything exciting this spring? You're taking some kind of instrument lessons, right?

B: No, she quit. (quietly)

S: I quit violin.

I: Oh.

S: But I still play two instruments.

I: Which two?

S: Piano and recorder. You have to do recorder.

I: Do you have a piano in your home?

S: Two.

S: (to Burt) What are you staring at?

I: So what have you guys been doing in school?

S: Uh, uh...

B: Work!

S: And recess.

I: What kinds of things have you been learning? What have you been learning? (repeated to gain their attention)

S: Health.

B: Science?

I: What have you learned in health and science?

S: We've learned to get over our multiplication table of 6.

I: Oh, good. Hey, what do you do when you multiply something by nine--what's the trick to that?

B: I forget that one. But I know $7 \times 7 \times \dots$

S: I remember, I think. Oh, OK; Uh, you take--you have like 9×6 . You take away one, I think?

I: Mmm-hmm.

S: And then you add up what it would be to get nine.

I: So you take away one from 6,

S: Uh-huh, and then you add a five, then you add four on, because that's what it would take from $5+4$,

I: Very good.

S: And then you get 54.

I: Super!

B: That's what I was gonna say! uh (laugh)

S: Burt, you said you for-get!

B: I did (laugh). I did...(mumble)

S: Can we talk about recess?

I: Sure, tell me about recess.

S: Oh, boy, I wanna tell. I'm the one who did it.

B: Yeah, she's lucky she quit. Now she can go out to recess. But I can't.

S: Well, there's there were these two leaf piles--one was

B: Oh, yeah, the boys' leaf pile; this is fun (clapping)!

S: Be quiet. They were really, one was really small, and that was the girls' and one was really gigantic--that was the boys'.

B: That's us.

S: So (giggle), and so it's a girls'. So the boys started taking leaves from the girls and they would run over

B: (sound)

S: ...and then and then the girls started going to the boys'; but we have some problem. There are two people who were getting in our way. That is Scott--he just bams you right, he pushes you right into the ground and if you try to run away, he throws you in the ground?

S: (to I) Why are you smiling? That hurts!

I: Who is the second person?

S: I forget.

B: Meeeee!

I: Yeah, that's what I was afraid...

S: Joe, I think.

B: Joe?

S: Can never get the leaves back from him and um...

B: Of course, no one can (laugh).

S: And....Burt, be quiet. They're ruining our leaf piles but

B: (noise)

S: ...and see, when they try to steal from us, we try to get the people from a lot of the boys a little small, so we can stop them. So...

B: But Beth's big! That's what (mumble) ummm main attack. Or narmanda (?). Aaahhhhh....

S: Oh, this is really funny. This is before anyone started throwing leaves in people's faces? OK, well, you, there was this boy and Da...and Dawn was tr-- he was trying to get the the leaves from Dawn so all of sudden she just turns around and goes WHAM, fight in his---just started runnin' around, was like this (sound) die!

B: Darn, never saw that one.

S: ...just got knocked down!

Interview #6: Ken and Emmy

I: We'll start with you, Ken. How've you been?

K: Fine. Um, I was out once, so far.

I: Were you sick?

K: Uh-huh.

I: But you got over it in one day, huh?

K: Mm-hmm. Well, not really. It was on a Monday.

I: Oh, so you were sick all weekend?

K: I was sick on Saturday and sick on Sunday, too.

I: So how was Christmas vacation?

K: Good.

I: Was it relaxing?

K: Mmm, (gestures *I don't know*) mmm, not really 'cuz whenever, whenever anybody came over my house I had to guard my *Crossfire* 'cuz everybody, 'cuz I mean all the boys that came to my house would just, wanted to, I mean as soon as they saw it they fell in love with it. I had to keep them from shooting the balls out.

I: So you had a lot of friends over?

K: Mm-hmm.

I: Did you just get that game at Christmas?

K: Uh-huh.

I: So I bet it got a lot of use over Christmas, huh?

K: Mm-hmm.

I: (to Emmy) How about you?

E: What?

I: What have you been up to?

E: Nothing.

I: Nothing?

E: I was sick on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday!

I: Oh, my goodness! I should stay away from you guys!

E: Well, I had, I had a virus and I went down to the nurse cuz I had a headache, then I threw up, and I went home; then the next day, um, my temperature was 101-and-a-half, then I had a cold, 'n' then I got over it!

I: Well, I'm glad you're over it, now.

K: I think I was sick yesterday. I felt sick yesterday. I felt like I had a fever.

I: Emmy, you should be happy to see I'm not wearing my same earrings today!

E: Oh, aahh, finally!

I: I did this for you. I knew you'd be happy to see I'm finally wearing different earrings. (to Ken:) She always told me I had on the same earrings every day.

K: You did! So does Mrs. Grate.

I: Does she?

K: Yeah, she always wears those faces.

I: So are you guys playing spring sports or taking instrument lessons or anything?

E: Mmm, I'm taking violin.

K: Indoor soccer. I'm taking cello and piano.

E: I'm taking piano, violin, and I take (couldn't understand this

part). My sister has to take 'em with me and that's a pain.

I: You don't like being with your sister?

E: She's a dog.

K: Me neither.

I: How old is your sister?

E: Eleven.

I: And you're nine, (E gestured no) eight.

E: My sister is a dog.

I: Are either of you going to be in the spring concert?

K: Um, I dunno.

E: Um, I might, I might. I think so, I think, yeah, well, I don't know.

K: Mr. Shindoore said um, probably. I have to learn some more instruments and that kind of stuff.

E: My Christmas, I hate when my dad invites um, well, uh, he invites all our relatives over, then, we have to listen to all this classical music in the background, and he, every time guests come over, then he pulls out his video camera and he tapes everybody. It gets a pain. My sister breaks the camera.

K: Oh, so does my dad. My dad just got this video camera and he got it for 600 dollars. It was, like, on sale. It was like, I think it was usually , um, 800, but he got it for 600. So now whenever we have friends over he just takes out his video camera. He's getting a little, he's getting a little better. He's getting a little better about it. He doesn't waste the tape as much as he used to.

E: My dad does. (imitating father:) 'And this is Christmas. Now

we are eating...' It's a pain...My sister breaks the camera.

I: You guys don't like being taped?

E: No, I hate it; try to hide.

K: I don't mind being video...

Interview #7: Adam and Barb

I: Adam, we'll start with you. Tell me what you did over winter vacation.

A: Nothing.

I: Nothing at all?

A: Mm-hm.

I: Did you sleep a lot?

A: Mmm, yeah.

I: Did you have friends over?

A: Nope.

I: Did you get some new toys?

A: Yes.

I: Like what?

A: Mmm, I don't know.

I: Can't remember?

A: Mm-hm.

I: How about a computer? Do you have a computer?

A: Oh, yeah, I got some computer games.

I: Oh, good. Do you have the same computer that Roy and Jim have?

A: (sarcastically) I don't know what kind they have.

I: Nintendo.

A: Ah, no.

I: What kind do you use?

A: An Atari 130 XZ.

I: How about you, Barb?

B: Um, well, I got a Mac II.

I: Oh, good!

B: And a Victorian house, bigger than me.

I: WOW.

B: Well, almost the size of you, except you have to take off the head, off your head.

I: Geez, is that supposed to be a dollhouse?

B: Yes.

I: A huge dollhouse? Wow, that sounds nice. What kind of things did you do with your week?

B: Mmm, nothin'.

I: I know it was a while back; it's hard to remember. So are you guys playing instruments?

A: I am. Um, I play the violin.

I: Are you going to be in the spring concert?

A: No.

I: How about you, Barb?

B: I don't play an instrument.

I: Oh, OK. How 'bout sports? Do either of you play sports?

A & B: (shook heads no)

I: No, I didn't think so. So what have you been doing in school?

A: Nothing.

I: Ohh, I don't believe that--I know you've been doing something in school!

A: Mmm--having recess.

I: Oh, wait, what's the big thing going on at recess these days? I hear there's a boys' leaf pile and a girls' leaf pile.

A: No, there is?

I: Barb is shaking her head yes and Adam's saying no.

B: Umm, we do a lot of reports and now we're doing um reports about body.

I: Oh.

A: We just finished our country reports.

I: What country did you report on?

A: I had Africa.

I: What can you tell me about that?

A: Mmm, they have a lot of holidays.

I: Such as?

A: Mmm, the Yam Festival, the Zola Festival, mmm--can't remember very many.

I: What country did you report on, Barb?

B: Asia.

I: Mm-hmm.

A: Umm...

I: The whole continent of Asia, or just one country within Asia?

B: The whole countries. Korea, I know, is one, and then Turkey, Japan, China, and I forget the last one.

I: Hmm, Thailand, maybe?

B: Maybe.

I: Or Taiwan? Well, that's neat; that sounds good.

Interview #8: Jodi and Beth

I: We'll start with Jodi.

J: Well, last night, um, I was in bed my brother's cat, he got up in the closet and he got out all the toys.

I: Your brother's cat?

J: Yeah. He went out, he, he...My brother was playing with the toys last night and he forgot to shut the, um, closet door and it my brother's cat likes playing with the um soft part like little balls in there and stuff and the marbles, so he got 'em and so he got up in the closet and when he tried to jump up to get the marbles, like, there's this string that pulls a bag and he usually fools around and he knocked down all the, he knocked down a basket and woke me and my brother up.

I: Oh, geez. (all laugh)

I: How old is your brother?

J: Um, twelve.

I: Do you have anything to top that, Beth?

B: Well, um, um, for Christmas I got a scooter and two baby dolls that um, they're twins; there's a boy and a girl and they're academically correct dolls. (laughing)

I: They're what?

B: Academically correct dolls. They have anything that people have except for the inside.

I: Oh, OK, hmm.

B: And one of th- the boy's diaper's falling off. So every time I

pick him up the boy's diaper goes shoom! I'm like geez. So it's like...And also yesterday for the two-hour delay opening, well I was getting dressed and um, Jeff came into my room and I hid in the closet--in my closet, sitting on a box with an Armitron in it; it's a machine. I was sitting on it and Jeff looks in the closet and I'm completely camouflaged and he thought and he pushed the clothes back, like towards me. So I just leaned over and luckily he didn't even see me. And also um, I um, Mark came in my room; he wanted to stay and he started to cry when he couldn't stay in.

I: Ah, who's Mark? Another little brother?

B: Yeah, he's three. Jeff goes to school and Mark's going next year. He's gonna go into, um, pre-school.

I: Hm, wow. Three is a cute age!

B: Mm, not when he gets-- you know what he used to do?

I: What?

B: He, when we didn't get these um, cabinet locks, he used to get up in the morning--everybody else was asleep unless I, I'm usually up but I stay in my bed; and he, um, he got these um, he got out parmesan cheese and spilled the whole, opened the whole thing and spilled it all out. He was doing so many things so we got these locks and he doesn't even know how to open it. So these things, ya just, you push a button and you slip it up to the cabinet.

I: Oh, uh-huh.

B: There's one thing we can't shut, the goodie cabinet. So...but he hasn't paid any attention to that yet.

I: Wait, this is your three-year-old brother you're talking about, right?

B: Mm-hmm.

I: (to Jodi) What does your cousin do?

J: My cousin he one time I was over like over my aunt's and my grandmother's babysitting and I was helping my grandmother with dishes and...and my um cousin she's one year old she went upstairs and we heard the cat meow and I and I said go see what it was and I went upstairs and she was putting her mom's makeup all over the cat!

I: Oh, that poor cat!

J: I know.

B: How would you ever tell your mom?!

I: (pause) So do either of you play instruments?

B: Well, we just play recorders.

I: Oh, OK, that's right--from music class.

B: Um, I have to make up my mind for um make what instrument to play next year for fourth grade. It's either the violin or the flute, and I can't make up my mind--it's really hard. I'm like aahhh...I want I like both of them and I'm like geez, which one should I do?--aaahhh!

I: That's a tough decision.

B: I think I would rather do a flute. And then some days I like violin, flute, violin,...like blaahhh...

I: Did you start the violin this year?

B: No, I wasn't allowed, because I needed to learn the notes, anyway.

I: Yeah.

B: I was holding on to my next door neighbor's handle--for something for his garage and the handle, the bottom part of the handle broke and I went chunk. I was like, aahhh, geez...I was lucky I wasn't wearing a skirt!

Appendix C

Footnotes

¹ Laurie Ricou, Everyday Magic--Child Languages in Canadian Literature (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987).

² Ricou, Everyday Magic.

³ Ricou, Everyday Magic.

⁴ Ricou, Everyday Magic.

⁵ Elizabeth Dines, "Functional Variation in Classroom Discourse," in Variation Omnibus (Edmonton: Linguistic Research Inc., 1981).

⁶ Ricou, Everyday Magic.

⁷ Ricou, Everyday Magic.

⁸ Ricou, Everyday Magic.

⁹ Ricou, Everyday Magic.

¹⁰ William Labov, The Social Stratification of English in NYC (Washington D.C.: Center For Applied Linguistics, 1982).

¹¹ Labov, The Social Stratification.

¹² Labov, The Social Stratification.

Bibliography

Bar-Adon, Aaron and Leopold, Werner F. Child Language, A Book of Readings. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971.

Dines, Elizabeth. "Functional Variation in Classroom Discourse." Variation Omnibus. Edmonton: Linguistic Research Inc., 1981.

Donaldson, Morag L. Children's Explanations-A Psycholinguistic Study. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Labov, W. The Social Stratification of English in NYC. Washington, D.C.: Center For Applied Linguistics, 1982.

Ricou, Laurie. Everyday Magic--Child Languages in Canadian Literature. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987.

Shepard, David and Franco, Debra. "Am I Normal?" Videotape--CA.

Students. Interviewed by Robin L. Shiels. Swarthmore-Rutledge K-8 School, Swarthmore, PA. January 1989.

Vasta, Ross. Studying Children. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1979.

Waterhouse, Lynn et.al. eds. Language Awareness and Reading. Newark: International Reading Association, 1980.

Wolfram, Walt and Fasold, Ralph W. The Study of Social Dialects in American English. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974.

My Sister is a Dog

Do you know what third grade is like? The girls in my class don't think the greatest things about the boys, and the boys definitely don't think the girls are very funky. One of the girls in my class, her name is Emmy, she even calls her sister a dog. She always says, "My sister is such a dog," so I can imagine what she calls us--the boys, I mean. My teacher's name is Ms. Gooster. She always tells us that we shouldn't talk about our siblings that way. "Siblings" is the word Ms. Gooster uses instead of saying "sisters and brothers." I have a sister who's really awesome.

My name is Roger. My friends--well, even people who aren't really my friends, call me Rog. I kind-of like having a nickname. Afterall, my dad's name is Gerald and people call him Gerry, or even Jair, as Mom says. Dad is a big guy; I think he's about as big as Paul Bunyan. He's not fat--but he's not a stringbean, either. Mom looks tiny compared to Dad. She is only as big as our cubbies at school. Well, maybe a little bigger. She has red, or orange really, orange hair, and lots of freckles. My friends all like my mom, because she smiles a lot and gets excited when we tell her things. One time, we got my mom overly excited. Ken and I, he lives down the street, we were playing outside after a rainstorm, and the sidewalk was covered with worms; they were all over. Ken dared me to pick up one of the worms. I told him I wouldn't do it until he did it, so he picked up a short, fat one. I found a long one and picked it up. Then Ken told me that if I wanted to be really dudely, I should toss a worm to my mom, who was walking toward us at the time. So to prove to Ken that I was a dude, I picked up a short, skinny worm, so that my mom wouldn't be too freaked out, and I tossed it to her as she walked by, and said,

"Here, Mom, catch!" I felt a chill go down my spine when I did it; but poor Mom felt a worm go down her spine, because without realizing it, I threw the worm right down the back of Mom's shirt! We were all quite surprised. Mom was very panicky and very grossed out. I always knew I had a good arm...

The telephone is ringing...Mom got it. "Sure, Ken, he's right here," I heard Mom say, cheerfully. (She had since forgiven Ken and me for the worm incident...) I invited Ken to come over to my house. I also whispered to him that my mom is making chocolate chip cookies. She heard me say it but that was OK; she smiled and said she knew we'd want something fun to eat, since we couldn't go outside to play, because there was a thunderstorm. I knew that the cookies would lure Ken to my house, despite the rain. Within minutes, the doorbell rang and Ken dripped through the door. He peeled off his yellow raincoat and matching galloshes that his mom always made him wear in the rain. Ken looked like a drowned rat, but I knew he would perk up as soon as he stuck his finger in the cookie batter. There was a time Ken regretted having stuck his finger in the batter. When we were in second grade, Ken tried to get a taste while my mom was still mixing the batter with the electric mixer. Unfortunately, his impatience resulted in extensive finger damage, as his fingers got tangled in the mixer blades. We had to rush Ken to the hospital with the mixer hanging off his hand. Two of his fingers were broken, but he learned a valuable lesson in patience. After receiving our tastes of batter, we proceeded to the den, where my family's photo albums were shelved. Ken and I flipped through the pictures from my trip to Disneyland, and he helped me decide which pictures to use for sharing time the next day at school.

Sharing time arrived quickly the following day. I grinned my most impressive grin as Ms. Gooster's eyes looked from one person

to the next. I could tell she was deciding who to call on first. "Roger, you may start us off," she said. WOW! It worked; that was just what I was hoping to hear. I enthusiastically went through my presentation, showing pictures of myself with various Disney characters, pictures of my family on different rides, my sister and me riding an elephant, ... At that point, Emmy called out, "My sister's a dog." I felt like telling her to chill, but I refrained and continued my presentation.

Emmy was the second person to share. She told about the camping trip her family went on over the weekend. She showed us her messkit--she uses that to eat--and she tied some knots that her mom taught her for outdoor sports and activities. Then she told about how she and her sister shared a tent: "We had it all to ourselves, and we did everything together because my sister follows me wherever I go." Katy asked her, "How old is your sister?" "She's six. She's such a dog," Emmy told her.

At recess that afternoon, Emmy and I were on the same kickball team. She told me her favorite picture was the one I showed of my sister and me riding on the elephant. That was my favorite picture, too. Then she said, "My sister's a dog; she'd break the camera if I tried to get a picture of her!"

When I got home that afternoon, I made a salami and tuna sandwich--a neat concoction my friend, Scott, introduced to me. As I sat there eating it, I thought to myself about why Emmy calls her sister a dog all the time. I got an idea. I called Ken and Scott and told them to come to my house right away! When they arrived I told them what I had been thinking about and what I thought we could do. They agreed that my idea sounded fun. We worked on our spy plans all week, and decided that next Monday, we would begin our investigation of Emmy's sister. "I bet she's really gross," Ken said, "...or why else would Emmy call her a dog and say that

she would break the camera?" Scott and I agreed this must be the case.

Monday arrived. "Today we begin our mission," Ken kept saying to me. We ran, no, walked quickly back to the classroom following lunchtime recess. Once we sat down, Ms. Gooster announced sharing time. Emmy was one of the five people to share. That's not fair--she just shared last Monday. But then again, maybe we would find out more about her sister. When it came time for Emmy to share, she made her way to the back of the room, where she slid a closed cardboard box from under a brown, wooden chair. I wondered anxiously what was in it. As she picked up the box, I heard a scraping sound against the cardboard, as if what was inside the box had moved. All eyes were on Emmy. No one dared look away, for fear that they might miss being the first to see the grand revelation of what was in the box. Emmy grinned from ear to ear as she began speaking. "My sister is six years old and she's a dog!" She's said that a million times. With that said, she opened the box and out jumped a little brown dog! She skipped...Emmy's dog, she skipped from one end of the row of desk tops to the other. We all laughed in surprise! Josh spoke up, sounding a bit confused, "So you mean you don't have a real sister, like who is a person?" Emmy simply replied, "This is my sister!" Matt leaned over to me and said, "I wondered why she always called her sister a dog!" I didn't tell him that I had wondered that so much that Ken, Scott and I were going to investigate it... Ms. Gooster was smiling, too. I have a feeling that she knew all along...