

YARDSTICKS

Children ^{IN} THE
Classroom
Ages 4-14

3rd Edition

CHIP WOOD



Foreword by William Crain

NORTHEAST FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN, INC.

Eight-Year-Olds

“Mothers for miles around worried about Zuckerman’s swing. They feared some child would fall off. But no child ever did.

Children almost always hang onto things tighter than their parents think they will.”

Charlotte’s Web | by E.B. White

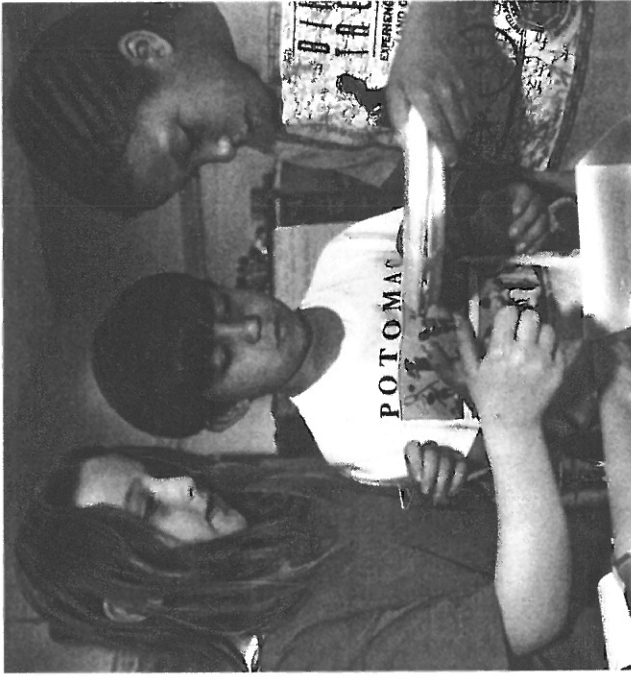
“Teacher, we have a great idea!”

Watch out! Here come the eight-year-olds—full of energy, imagination and little sense of their own limits.

“We have this great idea to do a play about Rosa Parks and we have all the clothes at home and we’re going to bring them in tomorrow and we can use your desk for the bus and we can make tickets and charge admission and we’ll put it on tomorrow ... OK?”

There’s no thought of a script, assigning parts, rehearsal schedules, the hard work of learning lines, practice, set, and production. It’s all a blur of enthusiasm tempered by only a vague understanding of how things get done.

The job of the second or third grade teacher is to harness that eight-year-old energy and give it some direction and focus. Throughout the year, teachers need to help children cut work down to bite-size pieces. This includes homework assignments, which should never be longer



Cherry Wyman

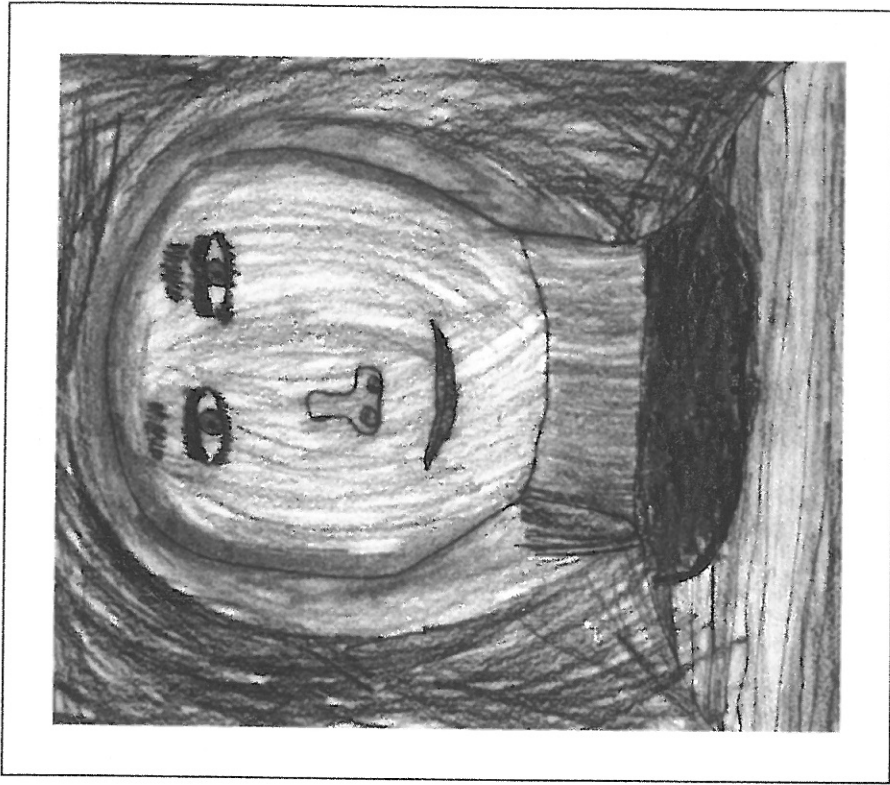
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than a half-hour in duration and should be limited in scope and expectations. Children at this age need to experience "incremental success" in their school work—success in gradually increasing quantities and levels of complexity—so that they will continue feeling motivated and excited.

Eight-year-olds tend to gravitate toward their own gender when making choices about working and playing with others. Boys tend to be fascinated by the world of "smutty" jokes at this age, but both boys and girls enjoy virtually any kind of humor, including riddles, limericks, and knock-knock jokes.

A key developmental struggle for eight-year-olds is gaining competence over the tools of their trade. At school, this means industrious efforts in such areas as handwriting, handcrafts, computer skills, drawing and sketching, and simple geometry. But when accomplishments don't come easily or quickly, the children feel a strong sense of inferiority. Patience is not common in eight-year-olds. Again, assignments (in handwriting or spelling, for instance) need to be short and to the point. Drafts of children's work as well as beautiful, finished work should be liberally displayed in the classroom so that children can see the range of effort required to make progress toward mastery in a certain area. Children also benefit by graphing or charting their progress in certain areas, which helps combat that feeling of "I'll never get it ... I'll never be able to do this."

"I'm bored!" is a common complaint of the eight-year-old. Adult translation: "This is too hard!" Look beyond these words to what the children are showing you in their work. Encouragement and redirection go a long way. For example, to a child who's beginning to become frustrated with a math problem, a teacher could say, "It is a hard problem. But if you keep thinking and trying new things, I bet you'll get it." A child who's ready to quit after unsuccessful tries might be helped with a firm but gentle redirection: "Try it this way now. Then let's talk about what happens."



Often, parents and teachers lament about an eight-year-old, "He could do it if he only tried. He's lazy and unmotivated. He never sticks to any one thing for more than a day." Actually, the eight-year-old is exploring his potential. He may be struggling with feelings of inferiority as he tries out one new area after another in an expanding awareness of the broader world. This uncertainty will reach a peak at nine.

Eight-Year-Olds: Growth Patterns

PHYSICAL

- Full of energy; do things in a hurry
- Need physical release through time to play outdoors
- Somewhat awkward
- Visually, focus well on both near and far objects

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL

- Enjoy socializing and sharing humor
- Love group activities and cooperative work, preferably with peers of the same gender
- Adjust well to change; bounce back quickly from mistakes or disappointments
- Form larger friendship groups than at seven

LANGUAGE

- Like to talk, explain ideas, and use rapidly expanding vocabularies
- Tend to exaggerate
- Listen well, but they have so many ideas that they may not always remember what they've heard



COGNITIVE

- Have limited attention span but do become engrossed in the activity at hand; love to socialize at the same time
- Industrious, impatient, and full of ideas; work quickly and often take on more than they can handle
- Can use geometric solids, math counters, rulers, balance scales, and other manipulatives to explain their thinking and problem solving in concrete ways
- Beginning to master handwriting, handcrafts, computers, and drawing

Eight-Year-Olds in the Classroom

VISION AND FINE MOTOR ABILITY

- Better control of eyes and hands enables children to copy from the board and learn cursive writing; they love to practice writing but often produce sloppy work
- Pencil grasp should now be the same as an adult's; if not, they may still need a pencil grip placed on their pencil to help correct their grasp

GROSS MOTOR ABILITY

- Often experience a growth spurt; restless and need lots of physical activity; short exercise breaks (even in the classroom) help concentration
- Love group games on the playground; gravitate toward same-gender activities, so the teacher should lead whole-class games such as tag and soccer
- Play hard and tire quickly; benefit more from several short play breaks than one long one

COGNITIVE GROWTH

- Very industrious, but often exaggerate their own ability and have trouble knowing their limits; more short assignments, rather than a few long ones, build confidence through success in small doses
- Enjoy responsibility, although they do not always successfully complete tasks
- Care about both the process and the product of school work; want their peers' approval as much as their teacher's

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COGNITIVE GROWTH

- Usually organize work well, though tend to be sloppy; some need the teacher's help with organizational strategies
- Show increasing interest in rules, logic, how things are put together, how things work, the natural world, and classification
- Can handle increasingly complex tasks but tire easily; may give up but soon want to try again

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR

- Work best in groups at tables or at pushed-together desks; teachers should change groupings frequently throughout the year
- Prefer working and playing with peers of the same gender
- Respond well to class projects and traditions that build a sense of unity and cohesion
- As they develop a growing sense of moral responsibility beyond themselves, they become more interested in fairness issues and may argue about them
- Like stories that concern fairness and justice
- Enjoy studying other cultures

Eight-Year-Olds: Curriculum

READING

Provide opportunities for children this age to:

- Work in groups reading trade books (which are good for children at all ages) or in core reading programs keyed to their ability levels and organized around their interests
- Begin reading independently and doing simple independent assignments (such as making book covers, conducting interviews, and building dioramas); teachers should design these projects specifically to spur children's interest in reading and to let them show their comprehension
- Be read to from books with lengthier chapters and more advanced themes

WRITING

Expect from these children:

- *Writing:* Quite lengthy stories with increasingly descriptive language; interest in diverse kinds of writing such as poetry, newspaper articles, and cartoons; fascination with the "breakfast to bed" story line—tendency to provide more detail than any reader (except the author) would care to know; beginning understanding of the importance of making drafts and revising
- *Spelling:* Increasing ability to spell correctly; readiness to learn compound words, dictionary use, and alphabetical order; skill development to a level that makes lingering phonetic mistake patterns and real difficulty in spelling more obvious

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WRITING

- *Writing Themes:* Adventure and "breakfast to bed" stories, animals, sports with friends and heroes, unicorns and other mythical beasts, stories based on cartoons, poetry about nature and the seasons, nonfiction writing that shows learning from concrete science and social studies investigations
- *Handwriting:* Good posture, good pencil grasp, and fluid movement of arm and hand across the page; readiness to learn cursive handwriting and to practice extensively; although easily frustrated, enjoyment of writing practice and motivation to become competent

Favorite themes for children this age:

- Our neighborhood, our community (interdependence)
- Community institutions (bank, newspaper, radio)
- Long ago or far away (but not both)
- Topics in nature (trees, rocks, animals, etc.)
- Cultural and racial diversity

THEMATIC UNITS

(Social Studies, Science, Current Events)

MATH

Provide opportunities for children this age to:

- Solve math problems using all four operations, as well as borrowing and carrying
- Study fractions by measuring, weighing, and doing some pencil and paper tasks
- Explore geometric patterns constructed with pencil and paper
- Use games as a way to practice math strategies