

YARDSTICKS

Children ^{IN} _{THE}
Classroom
Ages 4-14

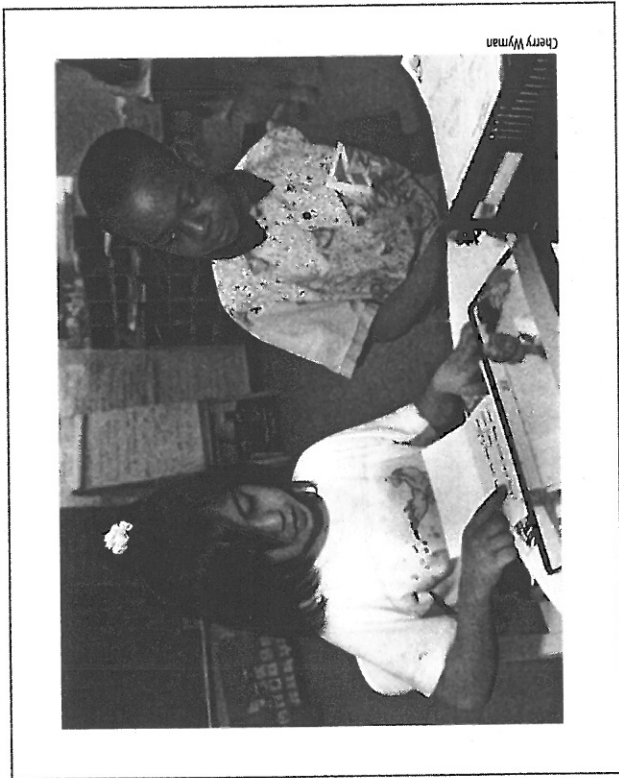
3rd Edition

CHIP WOOD



Foreword by William Crain

NORTHEAST FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN, INC.



Cherry Wyman

Six-Year-Olds

*"But now I am six, I'm clever as clever.
So I think I'll be six for ever and ever."*

Now We Are Six | by A.A. Milne

One of my favorite children's books about school is *First Grade Takes a Test* by Miriam Cohen (1980/2006). In this book, the children are confounded by the experience of taking a timed test for the first time. They have to keep still, answer questions without help from their friends, and finish within a specified period of time. Several hilarious examples of six-year-old thinking show that sixes are not at all ready for formal testing. Here's my favorite:

On the test there was a picture of Sally and Tom. Sally was giving Tom something. It looked like a bologna sandwich. Underneath it said:

- Sally is taller than Tom.
- Tom is taller than Sally.

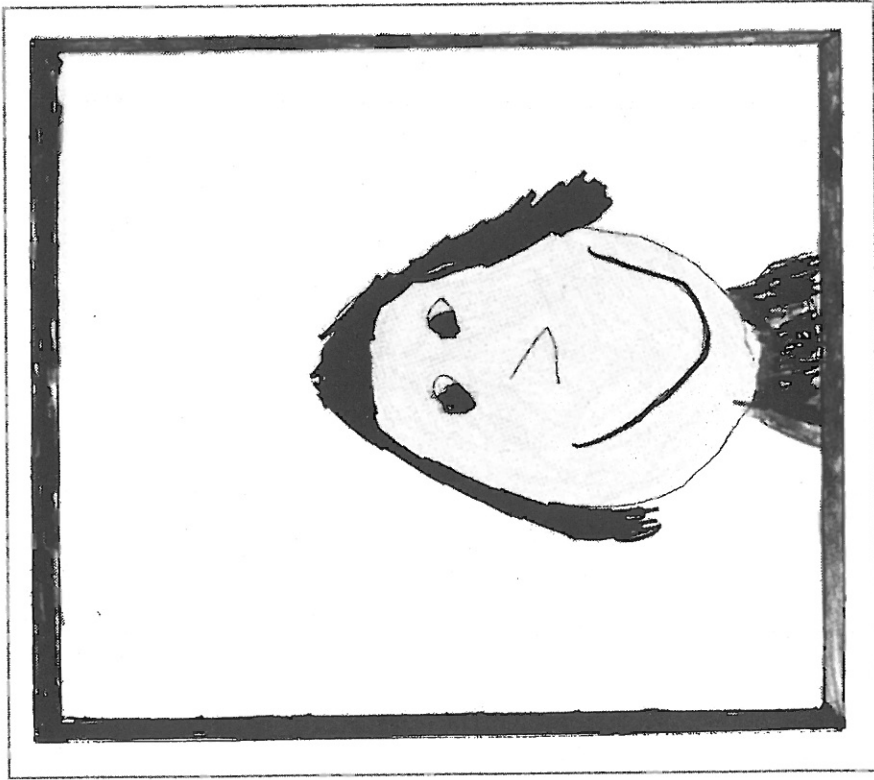
Jim wondered what being tall had to do with getting a bologna sandwich. And was it really a bologna sandwich? It might be tomato ... Jim took a long time on that one.

In today's educational environment, six-year-olds are often asked to master tests much more complicated than this. Understanding of young children's needs in the classroom seems lacking in today's standards-driven educational climate.

Six is an age of dramatic physical, cognitive, and social change. Tooth eruption is continuous; first grade teachers find chewed pencils, papers, and workbook corners in the first grade. Visual development is maturing, allowing for easy introduction of beginning reading tasks. Rapid physical growth is mirrored in rapid physical activity. Children are constantly in a hurry, rushing to be finished. They love to do their assignments, but are decidedly more interested in the process than in the product. Schoolwork tends to be sloppy or variable in quality. Children show great interest in being first, in doing the most work, or in the opposite extreme: Those who can't be first may gladly be last; dawdling can be a favorite pastime. Along with great bursts of energy come periods of fatigue and frequent illnesses.

"Industrious" describes the overall behavior of children at six. Classrooms full of six-year-olds are busy, noisy places. Talking, humming, whistling, and bustling are the order of the day. The children are now as interested in school work as in spontaneous play. The importance of friends now rivals the importance of parents and teachers in the child's social development, and children delight in cooperative projects, activities, and tasks. No job is too big, no mountain too high. Their enthusiasms, however, can outstrip their skills, and sixes risk an overpowering sense of inadequacy and inferiority as they tackle new frontiers. Teachers and parents need to remember that at this age, the process is more important than the product.

As the six-year-old works hard to order and structure the world in new ways, an ounce of encouragement produces a radiant smile, hugs, and excitement. An ounce of condemnation can produce tears, pouting, and withdrawal. A teacher's words, tone, and body language all have a great effect on six-year-olds.

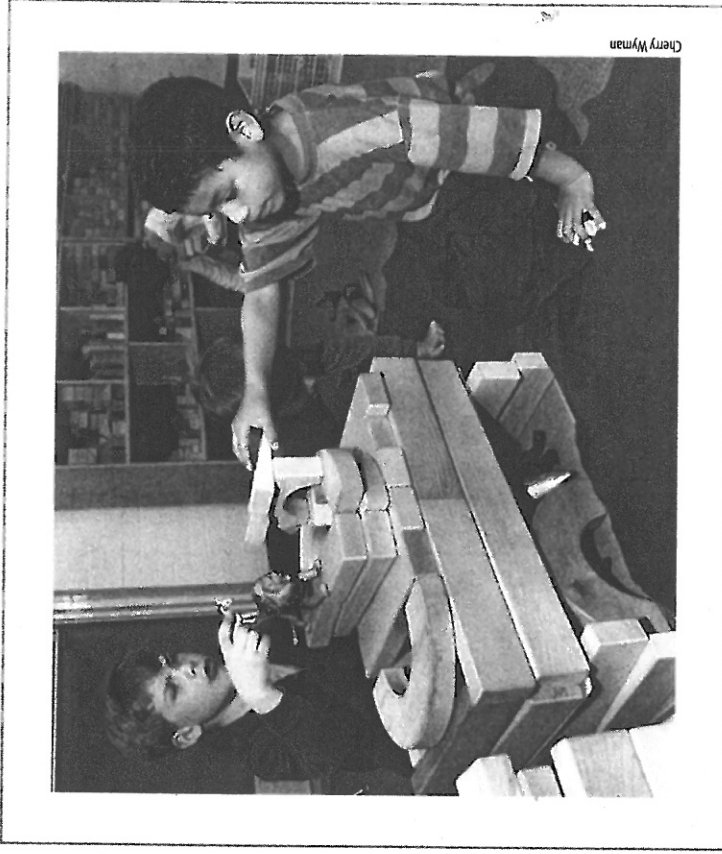


It is at six that most children begin a major transition in their intellectual growth. When they are younger, children are unable to accommodate an adult view of reality and generally don't understand adult explanations of cause and effect (although they may accept such explanations without challenge). Now learning to approach the world more logically, children begin to organize concepts symbolically and systematically.

The beginning of reasoning is marked by the child's ability to identify differences, compensate for these differences, and reverse an idea through mental activity. In one classic example of child psychologist Jean Piaget's, a six-year-old will see two equal balls of clay as equal quantities even after one is rolled out into a clay "snake" and compared with the ball. Younger children, able to hold onto only one idea at a time, will see the "snake" as containing more clay because it is longer.

Most six-year-olds begin to show a shift in reasoning, an understanding of cause and effect in the natural world (for example, what makes the clouds move), and a widening vision. Sixes can begin to see another's point of view and consider rules and conduct with greater objectivity.

In many ways this is a key moment, a turning point, an open door. At six, the child is extremely receptive to all new learning. The eagerness, curiosity, imagination, drive, and enthusiasm of the six-year-old are perhaps never again matched in quantity or intensity during the life span.



Six-Year-Olds: Growth Patterns

<p>PHYSICAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Good visual tracking from left to right ■ More aware of their fingers as tools ■ Noisy and sloppy; in a hurry; speed is a hallmark of six ■ Often fall backwards out of their chairs ■ Learning to distinguish left from right ■ Because they're teething, they often chew on pencils, fingernails, hair, books, and other objects ■ Tire easily; frequently ill ■ Enjoy being active both outdoors and in the gym 	<p>SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Care a great deal about friends; may have a best friend ■ Less influenced by happenings at home than at school
<p>SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Want to be first ■ Competitive; enthusiastic ■ Sometimes "poor sports" or dishonest; invent rules to enable themselves to win ■ Anxious to do well ■ Thrive on encouragement ■ Tremendous capacity for enjoyment; like surprises and treats ■ Can be bossy, teasing, or critical of others ■ Easily upset when hurt 	<p>LANGUAGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Enjoy explaining things; sharing about things they like helps develop their language skills ■ Use boisterous and enthusiastic language ■ Love jokes and guessing games ■ Tend to complain frequently
<p>SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Learn best through discovery; love asking questions and trying out new games and ideas ■ Better understand spatial and functional relationships ■ Very ambitious and motivated to learn; may choose projects that are too hard ■ Enjoy the process more than the product ■ Love to color and paint ■ Engage in more elaborate cooperative and dramatic play than at five ■ Increasingly interested in computers ■ Beginning to understand past and present and also how and why things happen ■ Beginning to be interested in skill and technique for their own sake ■ Like to "work"; enjoy reading and writing 	<p>COGNITIVE</p>

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Six-Year-Olds in the Classroom

VISION AND FINE MOTOR ABILITY

- Will copy from the board, but find it very difficult; some schools use personalized whiteboards
- When writing, find spacing and staying on the line difficult
- Ability to track visually from left to right readies them for reading instruction

GROSS MOTOR ABILITY

- Comfortable with a busy level of noise and activity; often work standing
- Can produce products of higher quality when encouraged to work more slowly or when teachers limit the number or complexity of tasks

COGNITIVE GROWTH

- Enjoy and learn from games of all sorts; poems, riddles, and songs delight them and teach more effectively than workbooks
- Experience an artistic explosion; children seriously experiment with clay, paints, dancing, coloring, book making, weaving, and singing; need to feel that their attempts are valued, that there is no right and wrong way to approach art; risk-taking now enhances later artistic expression and competence

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COGNITIVE GROWTH

- Proudly produce a great quantity of work but are unconcerned with quality; whatever the activity—whether academics, cleanup, or snack—their delight lies in the doing (especially when doing for themselves)
- Need social studies content connected to here and now; find history difficult unless it is closely associated with the present
- Enjoy and learn much from field trips followed by representational activities such as telling about the trips or using blocks to recreate things they saw

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR

- Use tantrums, teasing, bossing, complaining, and tattling to try out relationships with authority; learn best when adults understand but do not excessively tolerate this behavior
- Extremely sensitive—an ounce of encouragement may be all they need to get through a difficult situation; severe criticism can truly injure them
- Highly competitive, can overdo the need to win and be first; do better when teachers take the competitive edge off games used for learning
- Ready to try taking on individual and group responsibility

Six-Year-Olds: Curriculum

READING

Provide opportunities for children this age to:

- Continue to do partner reading
- Continue phonics learning by doing guided reading with the whole class and in small groups
- Continue reading predictable books while beginning to move on to easy chapter books
- Use writing, drawing, clay, painting, drama, or blocks to show their thoughts and feelings about a story
- Show their understanding of differences between genres (for example, poetry versus essay)

WRITING

Expect from these children:

- *Writing:* Story development still strongly influenced by drawings—for example, stories may be based on a collection of drawings; ability to write whole sentences, even if these sentences are early phonemic or use “letter name” spelling strategies—“I WNT TO HR HS” for “I went to her house”
- *Beginning Spelling:* Letter naming and “transitional” spelling (My frends ride bickes); emerging sense of phonetic clues
- *Writing Themes:* Best friends, school-related stories, family, pets, going on trips, new possessions, holidays, fantasy
- *Handwriting:* Proper grasp of pencil; letters the same size or slightly larger than at five and more sloppily written because children are usually in a hurry or experimenting with new letter formation; spontaneous mixing of uppercase and lowercase letters; unpredictable spacing

Favorite themes for children this age:

- Families
- Friends
- Our school
- Workers in our school
- Jobs people do in our community
- Nature topics (such as butterflies, seasons, plants)
- Losing teeth
- Cultural, racial, language, and other differences among people

Provide opportunities for children this age to:

- Do mental mathematics and problem solving after they’ve mastered the necessary skills with concrete materials
- Do basic computation with money, sometimes using a calculator or computer
- Complete simple worksheets to practice basic computation
- Experiment with reversing operations (+ and -)
- Do lots of measuring using the sand or water table, their feet, and blocks
- Work with manipulatives such as magnets, pulleys, puzzles, interlocking cubes, scoops, funnels, measuring cups, and sand

THEMATI UNITS

(Social Studies, Science,
Current Events)

MATH