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## Talking with children

Brian Lever

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# Edith Cowan University

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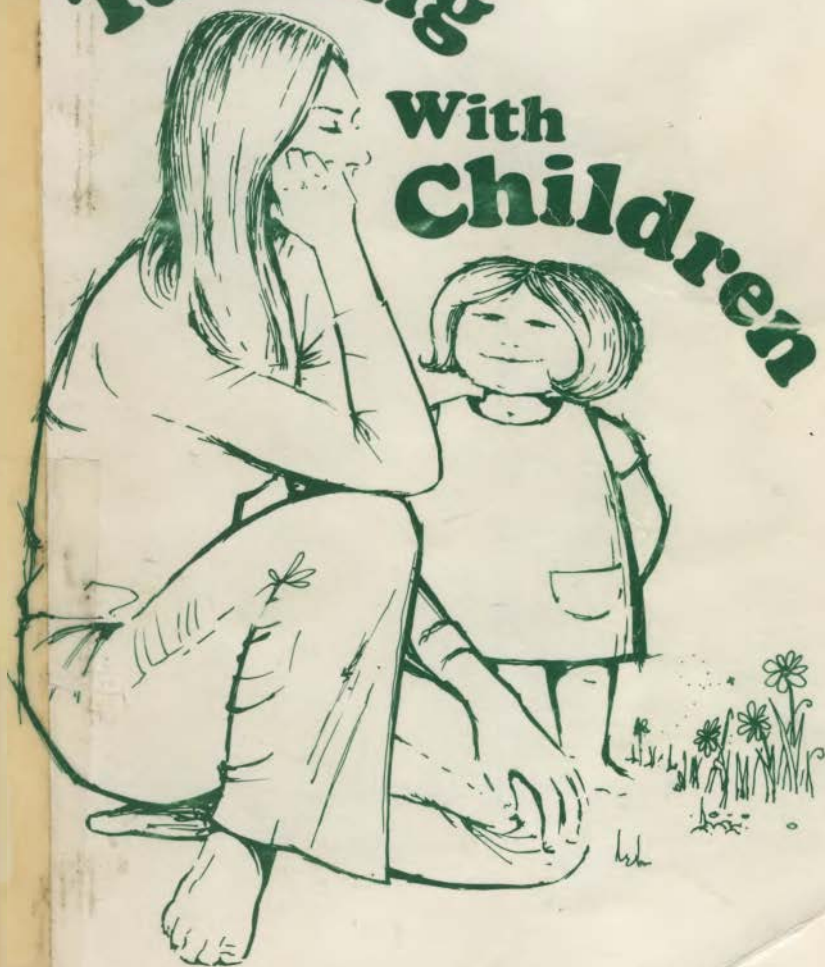
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# Talking With Children





**Designed and Illustrated by Brian Lever.**  
**Type set and printed at Churchlands College.**



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**INTRODUCTION**

This book is a collection of interviews with children. It is intended to give the reader a glimpse of some of the ways in which children think about things. Some of the interviews are almost whimsical. Others are quite serious.

The interviews were conducted by a group of twenty student teachers during their last term of teacher training. This group of student teachers were but a small part of a much larger group of students all of whom had been given the task of interviewing a child. The purpose of the task was partly to give the students an opportunity to talk to a child on a personal, one-to-one basis. It was hoped that they might learn to see the child as a person and not only as a receptacle for education.

More importantly though the interviewing task was intended to give the students practice in finding out how individual children think. The way in which they were asked to do this was to start with a particular question and systematically explore that one point with the child as far as they were able by means of a series of related questions. Therefore, nearly all the questions but the first one in each interview were made up on the spot, based entirely on what the individual child being interviewed said. Such interviewing is not easy but it is a skill well worth developing, especially for a teacher.

The students who conducted the interviews presented in this volume had expressed a desire to perfect their interviewing skills and perhaps to collect the results of some interviews as a small book. They conducted a total of 100 interviews. From this large number, the following 42 interviews were selected by the students themselves through a difficult process of discussion and voting. I believe the interviews which are reproduced here are the most interesting set out of a collection of very absorbing conversations and they certainly have provided me with many hours of entertaining and informative reading.

Before they began the interviews, the students made up a master list of over 60 questions from which they would freely draw to conduct the interviews. The questions can be separated into three types which form the basis for the division of the book into sections. In one section the questions are aimed at exploring children's understanding and abilities to give explanations of commonplace objects and experiences. In another section, the questions require the children to think beyond their immediate experience and everyday concerns. Finally, there is a section which deals with the inner world of the child.

The children interviewed ranged in age from 3 years to 15 years. There were 22 boys and 20 girls. Of the 60 original questions, only 28 are represented here. But the answers to them tell some fascinating things, not only about how children think but about what they think. This book does not represent a systematic study of children's thinking on any of the issues included. Nevertheless, I believe many insights can be gained from reading the interviews. I have included a few comments at the end of each section to illustrate some of the ways in which the children's answers can be viewed, and some of the interrelationships between their answers and more systematic findings from child development research.

**James L. Peterson, Ph.D.**  
**Psychology Department**  
**Churchlands College.**

For obvious reasons, the names of the children in the interviews have been changed. In addition, the initials of the interviewers do not relate to real persons. The students (now teachers!) who actually conducted the interviews are listed below, and to them go many thanks.

Walter Antonazzi  
Beth Bloxham  
Carolyn Blewett  
Diana Broad  
Rodney Carter  
Allison Clarke  
Debbie Cochrane  
John Davies  
Steven Dowie  
Anne Fouracres

Glenda Galante  
Oliver Galante  
Diane Hunt  
Paula Marchant  
Roslyn Massey  
Mary Molloy  
Julie Moran  
Judy Smallman  
Richard Sutton  
Jenny Yeomans

## EVERYDAY LIFE

The world of everyday experience can be separated into two major spheres: the physical and the social. The questions in this section asked children to explain different features of these two spheres. In the physical area, children were asked to account for the colour of the sky and the operation of a car. They were also asked to explain some physical characteristics of people, specifically the existence of toes and racial variations in skin pigmentation. In the social area, they were asked about habits and customs, in this case television-viewing and marriage. In addition, they were asked two more controversial questions relating to sexuality: why we wear clothes and what causes venereal disease.

Aside from the content of their answers, one of the main reasons in asking these questions was to see how children had thought about them. We wanted to know whether they had thought about these phenomena on their own, or whether they merely took them for granted. We guessed that if the children had thought about these questions themselves, their answers would reflect concrete thinking and they would offer simplistic, personified explanations based directly on their own experience. The extent to which a child pursued a topic, and his eagerness to do so would also give evidence of prior thinking about it. On the other hand, we suspected that a child who had not thought about a question before we asked it would respond in one of two ways. Either he would dismiss the questions as too obvious to discuss, with some such phrase as *Just because it is, that's all*, or he would offer a pseudo-scientific explanation which he might have learned in school or picked up from an adult.

**Why is the sky blue?**

**What makes a car go?**

**Why do we have toes?**

**Why are some people brown and some people white?**

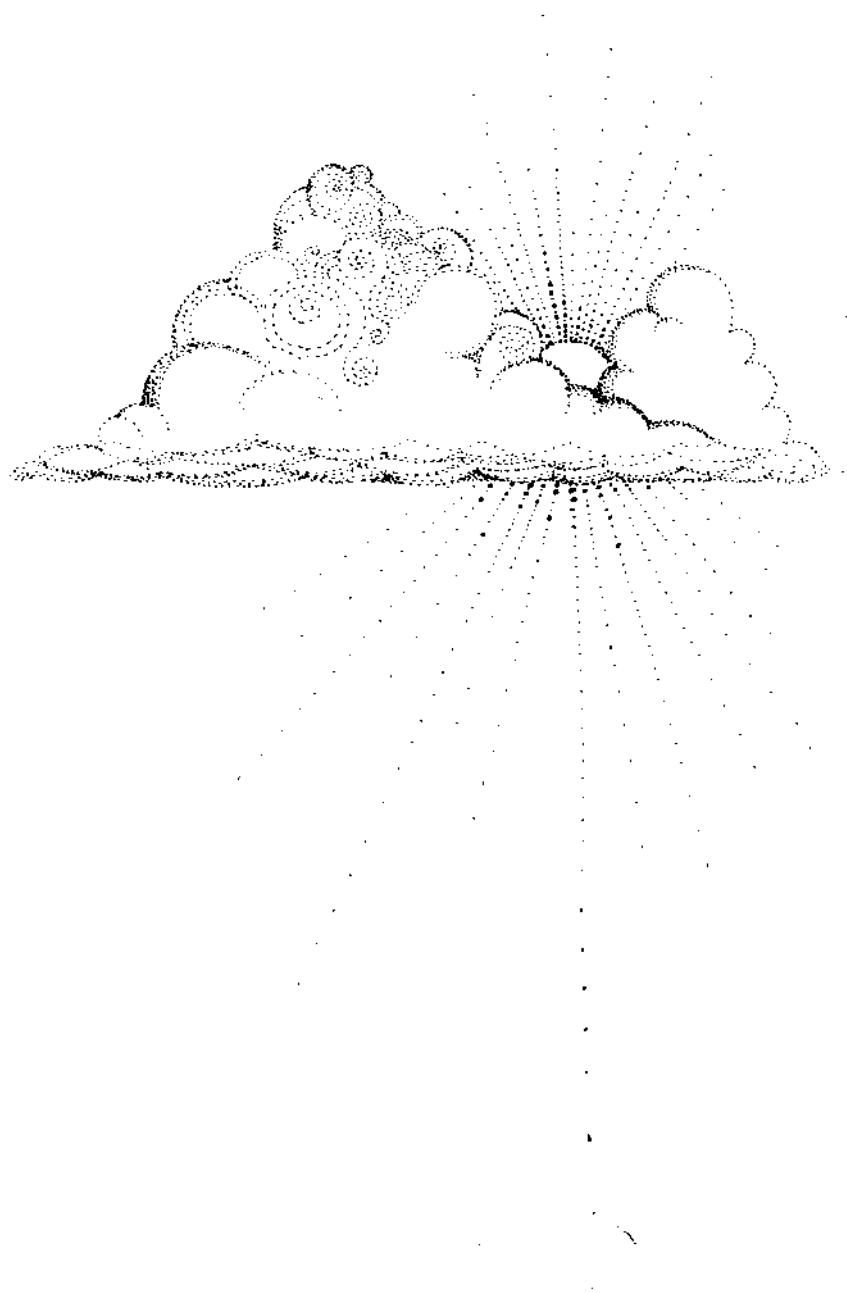
**Why do you watch television?**

**Why do you think people get married?**

**Why do we wear clothes?**

**How do you get VD?**





**BILLY — 6 years old**

**Ms. B.:** Why is the sky blue?

**Billy:** Ah . . .

**Ms. B.:** Why did God decide to make it blue instead of another colour?

**Billy:** Ah . . . because it's a nice bright colour.

**Ms. B.:** What else is there about it?

**Billy:** Because it looks good with the clouds.

**Ms. B.:** Is the sky always blue?

**Billy:** Not always.

**Ms. B.:** What other colours does it go?

**Billy:** Black.

**Ms. B.:** When is it black?

**Billy:** When it is going to rain and at night.

**Ms. B.:** Why is it black at night time?

**Billy:** Because at night time, sometimes there's um or sometimes at night there's um something like well we can see something like um something, like the sky on the ground.

**Ms. B.:** Where do clouds come from?

**Billy:** From the sky.

**Ms. B.:** How do they get in the sky?

**Billy:** They float.

**Ms. B.:** What do you mean they float?

**Billy:** I don't know.

**Ms. B.:** Like a ship floats?

**Billy:** Well yes but clouds float in the air.

**Ms. B.:** What are they made up of?

**Billy:** Ah . . .

**Ms. B.:** What do they look like they are made up of?

**Billy:** Wool.

**Ms. B.:** What keeps the wool together?

**Billy:** Ah wouldn't be glue . . . Ah wouldn't be gravity . . . yea gravity.

**Ms. B.:** Why are the clouds different colours?

**Billy:** Because there is going to be a shower over there and over here there isn't.

**Ms. B.:** How could you tell that?

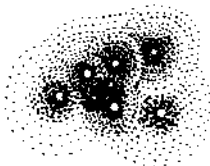
**Billy:** Because this part of the sky is white and the other sky is black.

**Ms. B.:** Why do stars twinkle?

**Billy:** Because they're bright.

**Ms. B.:** What makes them bright?

**Billy:** Ah . . . um, that's tricky.



**ROBERT – 6 years old**

**Ms. S.:** What makes a car go?

**Robert:** Ah, well all you have to do is press those um, things on the floor, pedals and turn the wheel to where you want to go.

**Ms. S.:** How do you press the pedals?

**Robert:** With your feet, one makes you go and the other makes you stop, I think that's right.

**Ms. S.:** Is there anything else that makes the car go?

**Robert:** Um, yes. There's the engine thing and you need petrol too. You get that at the petrol station, it's really good going there with dad.

**Ms. S.:** What does the engine do?

**Robert:** Well, you do need it because if you don't have one, well the car wouldn't go anywhere and it makes a lot of noise.

**Ms. S.:** Could you describe a car for me?

**Robert:** Well you can get lots of different colours. My dad's is yellow, and it's got lots of windows all around it and it's got um, four wheels and some lights, they're so you can see where you're going at night.

**Ms. S.:** Are the wheels very important?

**Robert:** Of course they are you dummy! They are black and they go around like this (*demonstration with hands*).

**Ms. S.:** How do you make the wheels turn around?

**Robert:** You just turn it on and press the go one, um, the pedal and that starts them turning.

*Ms. S.:* How do you make the car go where you want it to?

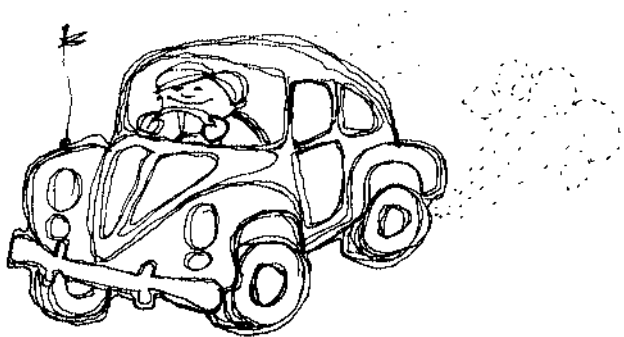
*Robert:* Um, well you've got to hold onto the steering wheel and turn it so it knows where to go. Say if you want to turn a corner, well then you just turn the wheel with your hands and you go.

*Ms. S.:* Would you like to drive a car one day?

*Robert:* Yes, I spose, I'd like a red one. But I'll have to get big first. My dad might buy me one when I get big.

*Ms. S.:* Do you think you would have many accidents?

*Robert:* Oh no, I would turn the steering wheel the other way cause I don't like the noise of accidents.





**GEORGE – 8 years old**

*Mr. W.:* Why do we have toes?

*George:* To help us grip on the ground.

*Mr. W.:* Why do we need to grip on the ground?

*George:* Otherwise we'd slide or slip.

*Mr. W.:* Can you think of any other reasons why we have toes?

*George:* I can't think of any others.



**CYNTHIA — 10 years old**

**Ms. M.:** Why do we have toes?

**Cynthia:** Well you'd have to wear very silly shoes if you didn't have toes.

**Ms. M.:** But if you didn't have toes that's how they would make shoes isn't it?

**Cynthia:** Yeah, suppose they would.

**Ms. M.:** So what would happen if we didn't have toes?

**Cynthia:** We could make our own.

**Ms. M.:** How? What would you use?

**Cynthia:** Plasticine.

**Ms. M.:** They would be difficult to keep on wouldn't they?

**Cynthia:** No. Shoes will keep them stuck to your feet.

**Ms. M.:** We don't wear shoes all the time. What about when we don't?

**Cynthia:** You could use glue. My Dad has got some real good glue, it never let's things come unstuck.

**Ms. M.:** Don't you think the plasticine would stick together?

**Cynthia:** You can always pull it apart.

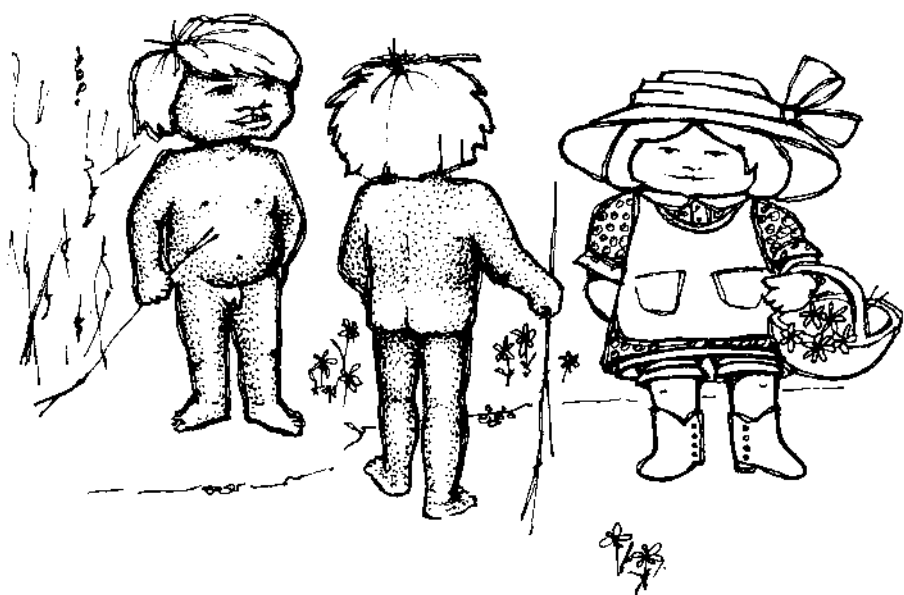
**Ms. M.:** Don't you think plasticine stretches easily?

**Cynthia:** I s'pose it does. Well we would just have to put cotton wool in our shoes to make it comfortable.

**Ms. M.:** What about being comfortable when we don't wear shoes?

**Cynthia:** Well, —that's why we need toes, I s'pose (*long pause*) so we can walk properly and we can be comfortable.





**KITTY – 7 years old**

**Ms. A.:** Why are some people brown and some white?

**Kitty:** Because some people live in different countries, some people live in the bush and it's hotter.

**Ms. A.:** Where do you think people who are brown would live?

**Kitty:** In India, Hawaii, Germany and Switzerland.

**Ms. A.:** You said India and also Switzerland, why would people be brown in these two different countries?

**Kitty:** Well, India is a lot hotter and has many beaches, and Switzerland 'cause it's cold in winter but gets hotter in summer.

**Ms. A.:** Do you think people are born brown or white or do you think that it's because of the sun or where they live?

**Kitty:** Some babies get bruised, don't get brown when born; hotter places too often make them get brown.

**Ms. A.:** So, white people, why do you think they stay white when others go brown?

**Kitty:** Australia's not a real hot place; if it was real cold, we'd have a hot place, and we'd have hail and rain.

**DAVID – 12 years old**

**Ms. N.:** Why are some people brown and some white?

**David:** Umm . . . well some . . . you know, like the Aborigines got their colour . . . sort of . . . from their race . . . sort of thing . . .

**Ms. N.:** But where did Aborigines come from? How did they get a different colour?

**David:** For not washing, and all the dirt and all that just gathers up and it . . . 'caus . . . you know . . . this was in the first century before anyone came and then it just . . . when they . . . you know . . . and when years went on they tried . . . you know . . . it just, it just came out sort of thing . . . you know . . .

**Ms. N.:** It became ingrained in them so that when they had kids they had little black ones.

**David:** Yeah! And they're white if they come from a white family . . . you know like if you come from England 'caus they had the sort of . . . what you call it? . . . umm . . . what's that thing . . . umm . . . oh . . . what do you call schooling sort of thing?

**Ms. N.:** Schooling?

**David:** Yeah! You know . . .

**Ms. N.:** Education?

**David:** Yeah, they had the education to wash . . . you know . . . 'caus they were taught to wash you, so that's how they became white 'caus no dirt got on them, sort of thing.

**Ms. N.:** Who? White people?

**David:** Yeah! 'Caus in England, sort of thing . . .

*Ms. N.:* Do you think there were black people first or white people first or black and white people living together?

*David:* Black and white. They were all at one stage I'd say were white.

*Ms. N.:* Why were they all white?

*David:* But it would be different countries. Like one colour's in . . . they were all white to start off with.

*Ms. N.:* What makes you think they would be white?

*David:* Well, in England where it's really cold you can never get a suntan so they're always . . . you know . . . and if you're parents are English . . .

*Ms. N.:* Well what about if the first people on earth didn't know how to wash? Then if they got dirt ingrained in them, they'd all be black wouldn't they?

*David:* Yeah.

*Ms. N.:* For the next generation and the generation after that. So if they kept going like that how did white people spring off?

*David:* What do you mean?

*Ms. N.:* If they were black and didn't know how to wash how did white people come along?

*David:* Well . . . oh you know how that . . . that . . . what you call him? . . . that Robert Peel you know . . . started off the school and then he was in England . . . sort of thing . . . you know . . . so he started off in some other century before say umm . . . Columbus . . . or someone came to . . . and found Australia and they had the education to wash.

*Ms. N.:* But who gave them the education to wash? Something happened did it?

*David:* Yeah!

*Ms. N.:* So you're saying that there were white people first of all and they didn't know how to wash so the dirt became ingrained and as they had kids and more kids it became more ingrained into their skin, then for some reason a black person learnt how to wash himself so he got lighter and so as he had kids they became whiter and whiter . . .

*David:* No . . . it wouldn't work.

*Ms. N.:* Why not?

*David:* No, 'caus once you're you know . . . say umm . . . like you got a burn mark and sometimes it doesn't, you know . . . like you got a scar and it doesn't go away you know . . . well if you, you know . . . if you're black it doesn't go away. You can't wash it away . . .

*Ms. N.:* Well then how do we whites stem from all the black race . . . if the first people were white, they couldn't wash so they became black, then the next generation were black and so on . . . how did we get white?

*David:* 'Caus most people were in England first, then other countries before they came to Australia and they would have been white and white for centuries . . .

*Ms. N.:* Why would the people in England know how to wash but the people somewhere else wouldn't?

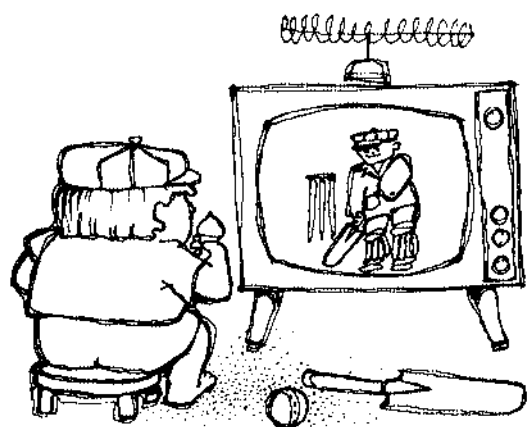
*David:* Because they are more educated!

*Ms. N.:* But who gave them the education in England?

*David:* Robert Peel.

*Ms. N.:* But I think Robert Peel founded the police force!

- David:* Oh . . . so he did!!! Oh well! Whatever his name!
- Ms. N.:* And Robert Peel only lived in the 18th, 19th century!
- David:* Oh well . . . mmmh . . . what's his name . . . ah . . . Andrew, St. Andrew or whatever his name is . . . the founder of school . . . that came about the 16th century . . .
- Ms. N.:* One man just broke off suddenly and started washing people?
- David:* Ummm . . . well he just thought . . . ooh it's horrible to be all this dirty colour . . . so they went . . . and put all you know . . . went in the river you know . . . sorta, 'caus . . .
- Ms. N.:* Would they feel the dirt or would it just be a colour?
- David:* It would be a colour, like you get a suntan.
- Ms. N.:* Is there anything wrong with being black?
- David:* No. Nothing.
- Ms. N.:* So this guy had a brainwave to wash himself? Where would he have got this idea from?
- David:* God. Like Noah in the Ark—one of 'em fell off and became a colour, white.
- Ms. N.:* So you don't really know how white people came about?
- David:* No.
- Ms. N.:* But you think there were white people on the earth first of all, they didn't know how to wash so the dirt became ingrained and they had black kids who kept having black kids. Then somewhere along the line someone decided to wash himself and so he washed most of his colour out and after years and years of doing it, the more kids he had the whiter they got so that's why me and you are white today.
- David:* Like that. Yeah! Like that.



**KIM — 8 years old**

**Ms. D.:** Why do you watch television?

**Kim:** For something to do and have enjoyment.

**Ms. D.:** Are there other ways of having enjoyment?

**Kim:** Yes.

**Ms. D.:** What are they?

**Kim:** Go to the football and play with my friends.

**Ms. D.:** Do you watch a lot of television?

**Kim:** Yes a lot.

**Ms. D.:** Why?

**Kim:** Because I like to see what's on and what's going on around the place.

**Ms. D.:** What sorts of programmes do you watch?

**Kim:** Cartoons, comedies, mid-day movies, and just normal things.

**Ms. D.:** Do you think you could do without television?

**Kim:** I suppose so but they'd have to invent something else.

**Ms. D.:** Why do you need T.V. or something else?

**Kim:** If you've got nothing to do and your friends aren't home you can watch T.V.

**Ms. D.:** How many hours of T.V. do you watch a day?

**Kim:** 4 or 5 hours.

**Ms. D.:** Is that every day?

**Kim:** Yes.



**BRIAN — 5 years old**

**Ms. G.:** Why do people get married?

**Brian:** I don't know. So people can see them . . . get married.

**Ms. G.:** Why do they want people to see them?

**Brian:** They like to see them. I don't know why.

**Ms. G.:** Do you think that there are any other reasons why people get married?

**Brian:** No, no more reasons.

**Ms. G.:** Why do you think your Mum and Dad got married?

**Brian:** I don't know.

**Ms. G.:** Do you think that you will get married?

**Brian:** Yes.

**Ms. G.:** Why?

**Brian:** So that people can see me.

**Ms. G.:** Who will you get married to?

**Brian:** I don't know. Cos people don't know who they get married to.

**Ms. G.:** Do they know the person when they get married to them?

**Brian:** Yes.

**Ms. G.:** How do they know them?

**Brian:** Because before they get married they ask what their name is. You've nearly filled that page up.

**Ms. G.:** Do they ask them anything else?

**Brian:** The lady asks the man what his name is. What would people do without any wheels on their cars? They'd scratch all the paint off as they were driving along. What would happen if the petrol . . .

**Ms. G.:** Hey I'm the one whose asking the questions.

**Brian:** O.K.

*Ms. G.:* Do you think a person needs to know anything else about a person before they get married?

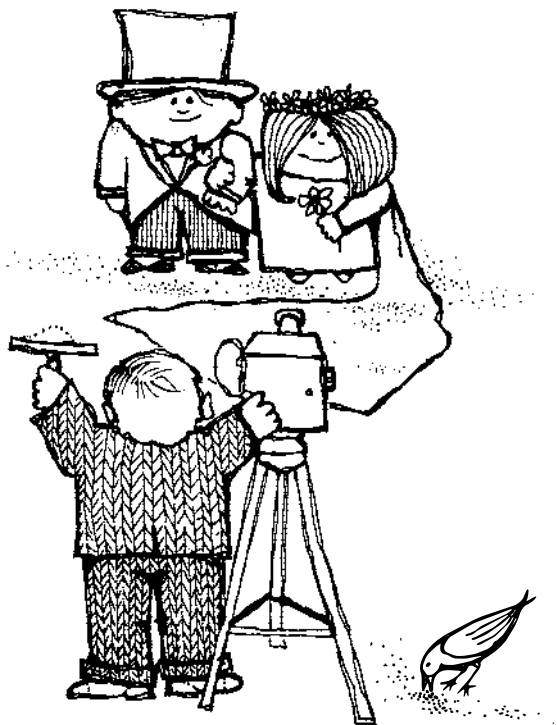
*Brian:* Don't know anything else — I'm not too good at it.

*Ms. G.:* You're doing fine.

*Brian:* Yeah, I know.

*Ms. G.:* Can you think of any other reasons why people get married?

*Brian:* No.





**JANE — 11 years old**

**Jane:** Michael was telling us a story about a king who had a really beautiful wife who had caught V.D. and ended up a real mangled mess.

**Mr. S.:** Well how do you get V.D.?

**Jane:** From another person.

**Mr. S.:** Who starts it off.

**Jane:** Don't ask difficult questions. Maybe from an animal.

**Mr. S.:** O.K. so if a guy gets V.D. from an animal how does it get passed on.

**Jane:** Because he does his girlfriend and then stops going with her. And then he goes round with another chick and she goes round with another guy and it spreads like that. Prostitutes pass it on.

**Mr. S.:** Before we didn't need a clinic for V.D. but now we do, why?

**Jane:** Can you cure V.D.? I thought you just died from it.

**Mr. S.:** No, you can cure it—by injections and pills. But why do we need a clinic?

**Jane:** Because you might die.

**Mr. S.:** Maybe.

**Jane:** Well more people get it.

**Mr. S.:** How do more people get it?

**Jane:** There are more prostitutes.

**JULIE — 8 years old**

**Ms. B.:** If Adam and Eve were created wearing no clothes, why do we, their descendants, wear clothes?

**Julie:** What are descendants?

**Ms. B.:** That means people who come after Adam and Eve like you and me.

**Julie:** Well, because Adam and Eve were the first ones born, but since then people have been born day after day, and get more things from the Government. We make cotton, that's how we get our clothes.

**Ms. B.:** Say if there was no Government, do you think people would still wear clothes?

**Julie:** Yes, because the Prime Ministers and Generals are part of it too, if we didn't have them, we'd put all our money, put a dollar a day, to make clothes and we wouldn't have to buy them. Since we didn't put money in we have to buy them.

**Ms. B.:** Why do you think people like you and me wear clothes and Adam and Eve didn't?

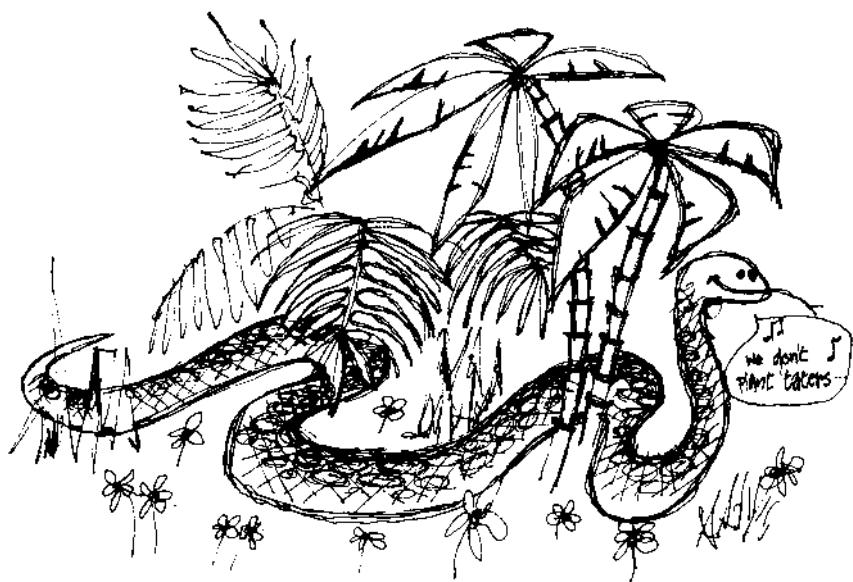
**Julie:** Because if we were living in Adam and Eve's days, we wouldn't have things — they only had leaves, and apples, and fruits, and bread and water. We've got things to make us warm.

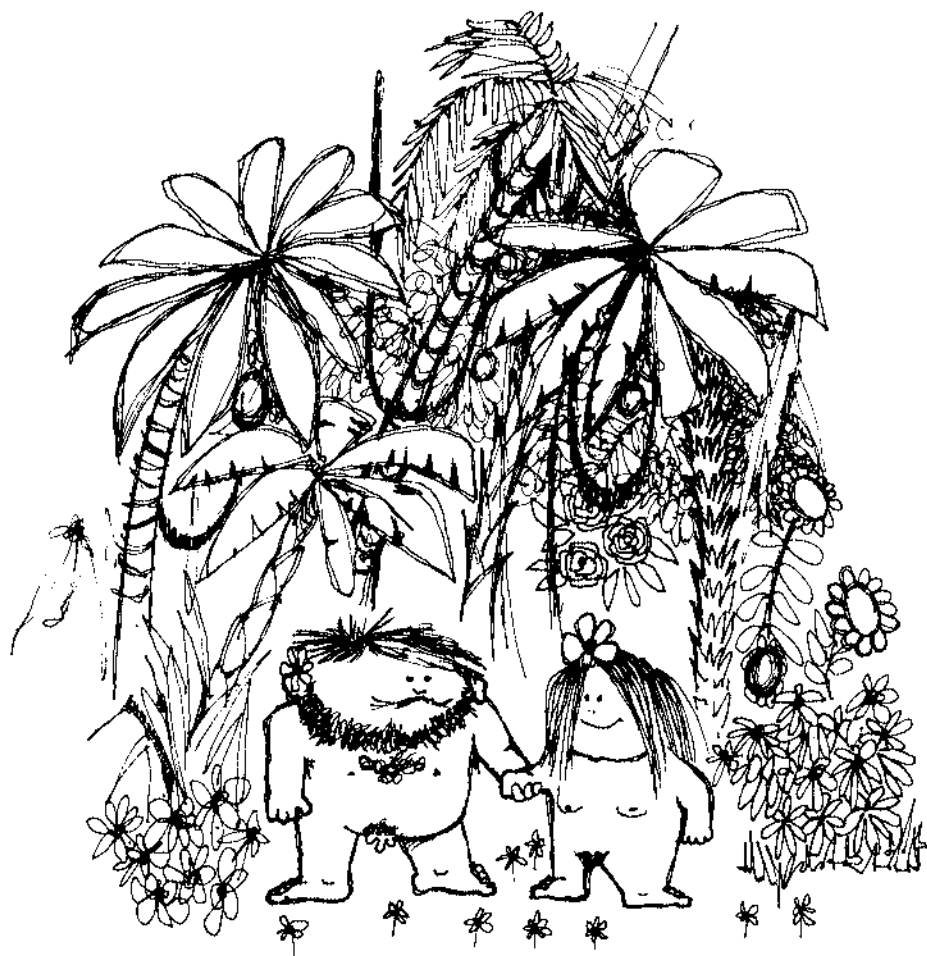
**Ms. B.:** We get our clothes from some animals, like wool from sheep, cotton from plants; wouldn't they have had these things in Adam and Eve's day?

*Julie:* No, because they didn't have sheep but they did have cotton plants, but they didn't have the special kind of plant that makes cotton.

*Ms. B.:* Why didn't they have the special cotton plant in Adam and Eve's day?

*Julie:* 'Cause God didn't make any then!





## STANLEY — 9 years old

**Ms. A.:** If Adam and Eve were created wearing no clothes, why do we, their descendants, wear clothes?

**Stanley:** Cos otherwise we'd be cold.

**Ms. A.:** Why would we be cold?

**Stanley:** Because we've got no clothes on . . . or maybe we might not want to show ourselves.

**Ms. A.:** Why wouldn't we want to show ourselves?

**Stanley:** Because of privacy.

**Ms. A.:** What's privacy?

**Stanley:** Privacy is being . . . um . . . well . . . it's being sometimes when you are alone and no-one else is allowed in with you.

**Ms. A.:** So you would want to wear clothes so that no-one could see you.

**Stanley:** Yeah.

**Ms. A.:** Why do people want privacy?

**Stanley:** So they can do things without other people knowing.

**Ms. A.:** Why don't they want other people to know what they're doing?

**Stanley:** I don't know.

**Ms. A.:** So why don't people not wear any clothes?

**Stanley:** It's a bit rude — no not rude — but these days you can get fined for being in the nude. So if somebody saw somebody in the nude over the back fence, they might call the police and get fined.



**Ms. A.:** Are there any other reasons why people shouldn't not wear clothes?

**Stanley:** Might get cold.

**Ms. A.:** Just cold?

**Stanley:** Could get hot and I think to protect you from falling over. Sometimes when you've got shoes on it keeps your feet from hurting or stubbing your toes.

**Ms. A.:** Are there any other reasons why people should wear clothes?

**Stanley:** No, I can't think of any other reasons.

**Ms. A.:** Would you not wear clothes?

**Stanley:** I'd wear clothes.

**Ms. A.:** Why?

**Stanley:** Cos I'd catch cold.

**Ms. A.:** But you've got a cold anyway even though you are wearing clothes. So does it make any difference whether you wear clothes or not?

**Stanley:** You should but it's not very important.

**Ms. A.:** Would you be embarrassed if you didn't wear any clothes?

**Stanley:** I would but if everyone else didn't I wouldn't be embarrassed.

**Ms. A.:** So it doesn't really matter to you whether people wear clothes or not?

**Stanley:** Not very much.

## COMMENT

Jean Piaget (1971) asked children not why the sky is blue, as we did, but a similar question, "What is the sky made of?". The youngest children he questioned, aged 3 to 4, usually answered that it was made of *blue*. They thought of it as solid like a ceiling or a solid archway. A little later, by about 5, they went so far as to think of it as made of stone or earth or bricks, just like a wall which God or men had built. Still later they sought a physical rather than a man-made cause and described the sky as a big cloud produced by chimneys or steam from boats. Eventually, by about age 10, they believed the sky was made only of air. According to Piaget, the youngest children's thinking is hampered by *artificialism* which is a tendency to see everything in the world as the product of human activity. The extreme form of this is to view the sky as an archway built by men. But indirect human influence is also seen in the belief that the sky grew out of clouds floating out of humans' chimneys.

Why does the child subscribe to artificialism? According to Piaget, because young children believe that everything on earth was put there for a purpose, to serve their own needs and other peoples, and if things were all made for men, it is logical to suppose they were also made by men. Artificialism is gradually abandoned, according to Piaget, as the child begins to realise that his parents, and therefore men in general, are not the all-powerful agents he once thought them to be. When he accepts the fact that people lack the power to have built something as immense as the sky, the child comes to seek a physical explanation.

We have an excellent example of artificialism in our own interviews when Billy (6) was asked "Why is the sky blue?". His answer, "Because it's a nice bright colour" which "looks good with the clouds" suggests both a purpose and a humanly-motivated celestial decorator. Interestingly enough, however, Billy did not accept the artificialist explanation his interviewer offered when she asked "Why did God decide to make it blue ...?". According to Piaget the child's belief in God as maker of the universe is more the result of inherent artificialism than religious teaching, since even deaf-mute children who have had no religious education at all come up with artificialist explanations spontaneously.

Later on, Billy also revealed artificialism when he suggested that the clouds were made of wool. But this was only after the interviewer prompted him by asking what they looked like they were made of, and he considered and rejected the clearly artificial explanation that they were held together by glue in favour of the magical explanation: gravity. So it seems, appropriately for his age, that he may have been approaching the transition from simple artificialism to a more indirect physically-based form of artificialism.

How does a child of the same age explain the operation of a truly artificial or man-made object, the car? In Robert's interview we have a surprisingly accurate description of how to operate a car. Robert not only knows what you must do to start it and run it, but he also knows that components like an engine and petrol are necessary to make it go. The only information he seems to lack are the principles of the internal combustion engine. Although we cannot generalize from two children, it is interesting that there seems to be a much better understanding of a car than of a natural phenomenon like the colour of the sky. Perhaps this is due to differences in experience and conscious interest. A recent survey of children's interests in Western Australia (Peterson, 1975) has shown that real and toy vehicles, especially cars, are a major interest of boys.

The existence of toes may puzzle the very young infant, but after a short period of exploration, he seems to accept them and even forget about them altogether. Therefore, the children were probably puzzled when we questioned them about their toes. However, they quickly came up with explanations, and ones which strongly resembled the explanations we encountered for the sky and the car. According to George (8) and Cynthia (10) people have toes because they are useful. They help us to grip the ground, to walk properly, and to be comfortable. It is not as clear in this case that the children saw toes as being of human creation, although 10-year-old Cynthia suggested that we might be able to make some, if we lost our own, using plasticine. Neither child attempted to explain the origin of toes.

When asked about differences in skin colour, the children did attempt to give explanations in terms of origins. Seven-year-old Kitty suggested a naturalistic origin for dark skin colour, i.e., hot climate. Piaget found that naturalistic explanations of the origins of things were characteristic of later stages of development and that children of Kitty's age were much more likely to use artificialist explanations. Especially interesting are 12-year-old David's replies to the same question. At first, he seemed aware that the difference in skin colour had something to do with racial variation. His subsequent explanations, however, suggested that his first response was probably a reflection of something dimly learned in school. Attributing brown skin colour to a failure to wash is characteristic of the first stages of artificialism. This suggests that stages of understanding of the physical world are not necessarily correlated with age.

How did the children we interviewed come up with these explanations? Perhaps they consciously thought them through prior to being questioned. It is also possible that they had merely rote-learned some explanations from adults. On the other hand, they might have been making up their answers on the spot. In the interviews we have looked at, there seems to be little evidence of parroting of adult explanations (see, for

example, the discussion of Billy's interview above). It is difficult to tell whether the children had consciously worked out explanations prior to being questioned. It does appear that some of the children were constructing their explanations as they replied. The pauses and the lack of organized structure are suggestive of spontaneous thinking.

Piaget believed that most of the children he questioned had never explicitly thought about issues like the origin of sky or clouds before. Instead, he felt that the basic artificialism which is inherent in most childish thought was liberated by his questioning, which forced the child to seek for answers beyond formulas learned without understanding. This is seen also in the most open segments of our interviews when the interviewer probed the child to reply without suggesting a direction for the reply to take. This opportunity to think and gather together the elements of an explanation is one reason why teachers might find the interview a useful method for stimulating their pupils' mental growth.

What can we learn about a child's knowledge of the social world from studying his television-viewing habits? Television-viewing is basically a solitary, almost anti-social activity and our interview with 8-year-old Kim suggested that it is an alternative to social activity when friends are not available. In fact, if viewing is excessive it may become a substitute for real social activity and thereby interfere with social learning. Is Kim's television-viewing excessive? A recent study (Gerber and Gross, 1976) of 12-year-old children in America showed that half such children watch an average of 6 or more hours of television per day. So Kim's claim of 4-5 hours does not place him in the category of a heavy viewer of television. But then he is only 8 years old.

These studies revealed that heavy viewing of television (defined as an average of 6 or more hours per day) can substantially change the viewer's perceptions of the social world. Apparently, they think that there are many more doctors, lawyers, teachers and business executives in society than there really are. More importantly, they become much more suspicious of people in general and they are much more afraid that they will encounter violence than statistics would justify. Thus, not only does heavy television viewing prevent real social learning but it may replace it with other artificial social understanding.

Monogamous marriage is one of the hallmarks of our society. A survey (Schofield, 1969) of nearly 2000 teenagers in Britain indicated that over 95% of girls and 90% of boys expected to get married. It was not reported that they indicated why they wanted to get married, but it is interesting to note that over one-fourth of the teenagers said they expected that marriage would be unenjoyable. In our interview with 5-year-old Brian, we found that he fully expected to get married although he had no idea

why. Society, in the form of popular literature, television, film, and parents, teaches children that people marry for love, companionship security, and sex. We wonder how many of them really understand these reasons.

Studies of marital knowledge have been eclipsed in recent times by studies of sexual knowledge and behaviour among all levels of society. Sex has become a dominant social interest. What do children know about sex? Our interview with Jane (11) revealed that her knowledge of venereal disease contained one serious flaw, the fact that it is completely curable and that you do not inevitably die from it. Perhaps Jane had been misinformed or was too young to know the truth. However, the survey of British teenagers mentioned above revealed that 'half the young people in our sample would not be able to recognize the symptoms (of VD) if they were infected'. And the authors expressed serious doubts that many teenagers would go to clinics even if they suspected they had the disease. Obviously, if they thought like Jane, there would be no reason to go to a clinic. How did Jane acquire such knowledge? The British survey showed that roughly 30% of boys and girls learned about VD from their friends, 16-17% from television, 13% from books and only about 6% from parents or school. We cannot say how Jane might have learned that VD causes death, but it sounds suspiciously like a moral prohibition intended to discourage sexual interest or activity.

Moral knowledge is an aspect of social knowledge. Nowhere is this clearer than in the topic of nudity. Although the naked human body is a potentially important source of sexual knowledge, there is wide disagreement about its propriety. Thus, when we asked children why people wear clothes, a question of social knowledge became a question of moral knowledge. According to Julie (8) we wear clothes because we have clothes to wear. Long ago they did not wear clothes because they had none. With Julie this was not a moral question, but simply a problem of circumstance. She could not imagine any reason why people nowadays might not wear clothes, because everyone has them.

Stanley (9), however, clearly saw the moral implications of the question. Even though he was not always sure why, he knew people must wear clothes. His answers illustrate some of the ways people justify moral rules. At the simplest level, they give practical reasons. At first, Stanley said people wear clothes to keep warm. Later, he said we could get too hot or that we might get injured without clothes. Under continued questioning he revealed his awareness of the social sanctions, 'It's a bit rude'—and the legal sanctions, 'they might call the police'—which are the basis for many peoples' understanding of morality. Finally, he appeared to recognize the basic relativity of moral rules when he said, 'if everyone else didn't

(wear clothes) I wouldn't be embarrassed'. Thus, Stanley seemed to have a more accurate knowledge of this feature of society than did Julie.

How much did the children we interviewed seem to know about the world in which they live? Surprisingly little, in either the physical or the social spheres. Much of their lack of knowledge may have been due to the developmental immaturity of their thinking. Their explanations tended to be concrete and simplistic. Sometimes they repeated an explanation apparently learned from adults. However, the infrequency with which they did this was surprising, considering the amount of direct instruction they receive from adults in and out of school. Such instruction must be poorly learned and even more poorly understood. Piaget believed that true understanding comes through the resolution of problems and not through mere instruction. Unfortunately, school seldom provides this kind of experience with problems of any sort, let alone problems of real life. We suggest that children could learn much more about the world than they do, if given the right stimulation and encouragement.

## BEYOND IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE

The domain of thought which extends beyond immediate experience encompasses the areas of religion, philosophy, science, mythology, and creative imagination. It may also include dreaming and hallucination. In this section, we have included questions which concern many of these areas. We have divided the questions into two categories: those which ask about life and death, and those which ask about other worlds. The phrase *other worlds* is used in a figurative rather than a literal sense to include belief in Father Christmas or God, and what it would be like to be an animal, as well as the dilemma of the existence of life on other planets and the theory of evolution.

We were interested both in the answers themselves and the way in which children would approach questions like these. Would they attempt to concretize these abstract philosophical issues, explaining them in terms of examples from their own direct experience? or would they transcend everyday experience and respond in the spirit of free imagination?

**What would you do if you were the only person left on earth?**

**What would you do if you woke up dead?**

**Do you think old people should be put to sleep?**

**Can you think of anything worth dying for?**

**Do you think there is life on other planets?**

**If you could choose to be any animal, what would you be?**

**Do you believe in Father Christmas?**

**Who is God?**

**Do you think man may have descended from the apes?**

**JAMES — 8 years old**

**Ms. H.:** What would you do if you were the only person left in the world?

**James:** I would have all the watches, all the ships, all the aeroplanes—

**Ms. H.:** But you wouldn't have very much fun on your own would you?

**James:** I have all the guns—

**Ms. H.:** But what are you going to do with them all?

**James:** I'm going to have target practice—bang, bang, bang.

**Ms. H.:** But what at?

**James:** What at? An emu.

**Ms. H.:** But there's no other things living in the world, there's only one person left.

**James:** I'd shoot at the person.

**Ms. H.:** But you're the person.

**James:** Oh—

**Ms. H.:** So you'd kill yourself?





**James:** No, I'll shoot at bullseyes and go bang, bang.

**Ms. H.:** That's all you would do all the time? Don't you think you would get lonely?

**James:** Nup, you could go for a swim in a swimming pool.

**Ms. H.:** But you wouldn't have anybody to talk to, no-one to play with, you would have to cook all your own meals; do all your own cooking.

**James:** That's good, I'd make cakes in a tumble dryer cos they cook really quickly.

**Ms. H.:** A tumble dryer?

**James:** Yea.

**Ms. H.:** Oh, so you would sit and eat cake all day?

**James:** Yea, I could eat hotdogs too, and pies.



**PETA – 6 years old**

**Ms. B.:** What would you do if you woke up dead?

**Peta:** Oh I don't know . . . say a prayer.

**Ms. B.:** Why would you say a prayer?

**Peta:** That's what our teacher tells us to do. Always say a prayer.

**Ms. B.:** What good would saying a prayer do if you were dead?

**Peta:** I don't know but we're always told to say a prayer even when you don't know.

**Ms. B.:** What sort of prayer do you think you say when you are dead?

**Peta:** Ummm, one to bring you back to life again. But I don't know one, I haven't learnt one yet, I am going to though, when we're older.

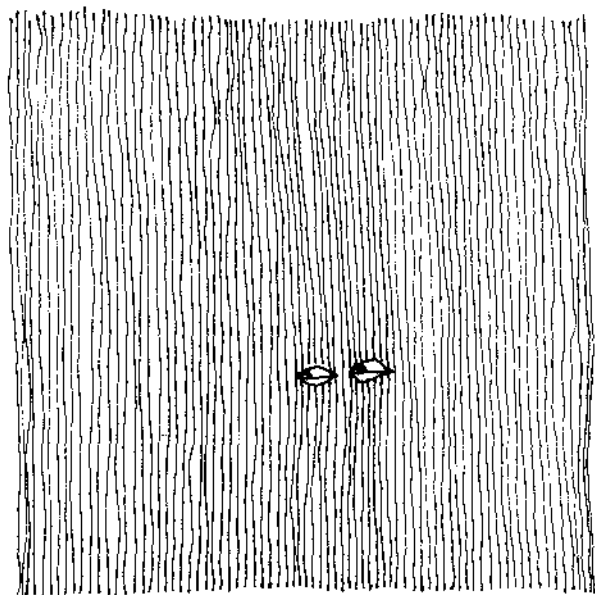
**Ms. B.:** What do you think it would be like to be dead?

**Peta:** I don't know. Black, I guess.

**Ms. B.:** Why black?

**Peta:** 'Cause when you're dead it's black. Like when you sleep. Dead people are really only asleep. When you sleep, you close your eyes and it all goes black.

I wouldn't like to be dead 'cause I don't like black, pink's my favourite colour.



**CARLO – 7 years old**

**Ms. S.:** What would you do if you woke up dead?

**Carlo:** Well, I would go to Heaven.

**Ms. S.:** Why?

**Carlo:** Because I was dead.

**Ms. S.:** Why wouldn't you go to hell?

**Carlo:** Because I aren't bad and I don't want to get burnt and hell is nasty.

**Ms. S.:** How do you know hell is nasty?

**Carlo:** Because I've heard that it's nasty and where bad people go all the time.

**Ms. S.:** How would you get to Heaven?

**Carlo:** I don't want to go to Heaven.

**Ms. S.:** Why not?

**Carlo:** Because I want to stay with my Mum and Dad and my sister—not my sister—my brother, my Uncles and Aunties and my Great Uncles and Great Aunties and Granny and my pets and the animals and birds and cows and sheep.

**Ms. S.:** But you're already dead.

**Carlo:** No I'm not, I'm right here telling you all the questions you're asking me.

**Ms. S.:** But what if you were already dead?

**Carlo:** I wouldn't be there to see all the Great Uncles and cows and everything. Besides I don't want to die.

*Ms. S.:* Why?

*Carlo:* Because I want to stay with my Uncles and Aunties and Mum and Dad and write in my pad and stay with my teacher and play with my friends.

*Ms. S.:* But what would you do if you did die?

*Carlo:* I don't know . . . I'd go up to Heaven.



**PAUL — 9 years old**

**Ms. H.:** What would you do if you woke up dead?

**Paul:** I would spook people.

**Ms. H.:** Anybody in particular?

**Paul:** No, anybody.

**Ms. H.:** Wouldn't you be sad if you woke up dead?

**Paul:** Our teacher was dead a couple of times and he woke up alive again.

**Ms. H.:** How could he be dead, and wake up alive?

**Paul:** He fell off something and broke his neck, but then he just woke up and came alive again.

**Ms. H.:** Are you sure he was really dead?

**Paul:** Yea.

**Ms. H.:** That sounds funny, I don't think he was ever dead.

**Paul:** Well—you can ask him.

**Ms. H.:** Okay, what's his name?

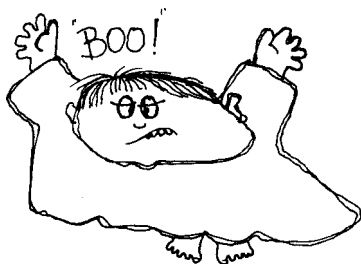
**Paul:** Mr Nicholson.

**Ms. H.:** Right, Mr Nicholson, and he died how many times?

**Paul:** Five.

**Ms. H.:** Five times and he woke up alive again? Oh I think that I might have to ask him about that. It's pretty hard to believe.

**Paul:** Well that's what he tells the whole class, and if you don't believe it you can ring up his mum.



*Ms. H.:* He's pretty young is he? Does he still live with his mum?

*Paul:* Yep.

*Ms. H.:* I think he might have been having you on. You tell him I think he is joking.

*Paul:* He would laugh at you, he reckons he always tells the truth.

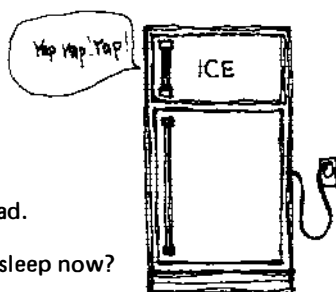
*Ms. H.:* So it wouldn't worry you at all if you woke up dead?

*Paul:* No, I'd just spook or go back to sleep.

**NEVILLE — 8 years old**

- Mr. S.:** Should old people be put to sleep? Do you know what being put to sleep means?
- Neville:** No.
- Mr. S.:** It means killing people when they get old like we do to dogs sometimes.
- Neville:** Oh yeah.
- Mr. S.:** Do you think old people should be put to sleep?
- Neville:** Yes.
- Mr. S.:** Why?
- Neville:** They could get put in a freezer and stay in one bit for a longer time.
- Mr. S.:** Why would you freeze them?
- Neville:** It would keep them much much longer.
- Mr. S.:** Why would you want to keep them?
- Neville:** Because you can remember them and see them in the ice.
- Mr. S.:** When you are old would you like to be frozen?
- Neville:** Yes when I'm dead. That's what they do in Africa and America.
- Mr. S.:** But being put to sleep means to kill people not to freeze them.
- Neville:** Yeah, put them to sleep then freeze them — make a needle which you just put in them and it lasts for something like 22 hundred hours.





**Mr. S.:** Have you got any Grandparents?

**Neville:** Yeah, I've got a Gran and a Grandad.

**Mr. S.:** Would you like them to be put to sleep now?

**Neville:** No.

**Mr. S.:** But they are old aren't they?

**Neville:** They're not very old but my Gran is — my Grandad died.

**Mr. S.:** Would you like to see your Gran put to sleep?

**Neville:** Yeah.

**Mr. S.:** Why?

**Neville:** You wouldn't have her nagging at you all the time. Yap, yap, yap, yap!

**Mr. S.:** Wouldn't you miss her?

**Neville:** No.

**Mr. S.:** Why wouldn't you miss her?

**Neville:** Oh . . . er . . . um . . . She doesn't give you much things for Christmas.

**Mr. S.:** Are there any other reasons why you wouldn't miss her?

**Neville:** No. See you later.

**BERNARD – 15 years old**

**Mr. R.:** Can you think of any thing worth dying for?

**Bernard:** No. It depends on what type of person you are, you know, courage and all that.

**Mr. R.:** What about if you were in a situation where you could save your mother's life?

**Bernard:** That would depend on how old she was.

**Mr. R.:** Take the example where you have two good kidneys and another person has two bad ones. You could give that person one of your kidneys but run the risk of your kidney failing. What would you do?

**Bernard:** If I loved someone, I might take the chance.

**Mr. R.:** Would you risk your life for something you really wanted?

**Bernard:** No.

**Mr. R.:** Not even for \$1,000,000?

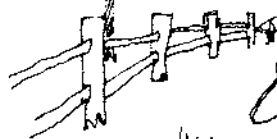
**Bernard:** No – what's money if your dead? It's not worth it.

**Mr. R.:** Would you take drugs, knowing that you're risking your health, but be in with your friends.

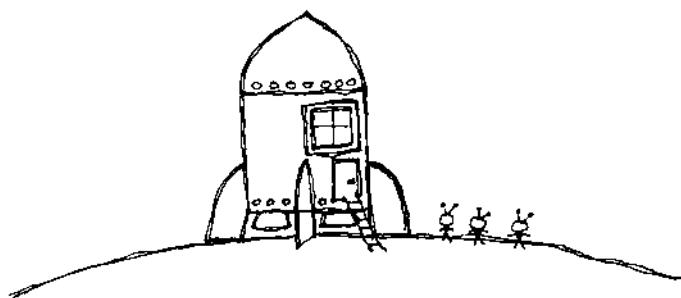
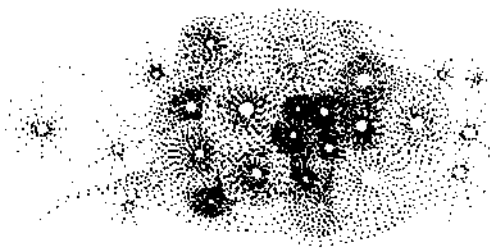
**Bernard:** To a certain extent. Not to endanger my health.

**Mr. R.:** Do you believe people when they say, "I'd rather die than . . ."

**Bernard:** That's just a phrase they use. The majority of people wouldn't risk their lives for anything.



High Noon



## JESSE — aged 9

*Ms. D.:* Do you think there is life on other planets?

*Jesse:* No.

*Ms. D.:* Why not?

*Jesse:* Cos there isn't, couldn't be.

*Ms. D.:* Why couldn't there be?

*Jesse:* Cos they'd just float off from the ground, cos there's no gravity.

*Ms. D.:* Why isn't there gravity on the other planets if there is on earth?

*Jesse:* That's not fair!

*Ms. D.:* Why not?

*Jesse:* Um . . .

*Ms. D.:* If there's no gravity on the other planets, how come there is gravity on earth?

*Jesse:* The sun keeps the gravity on the earth cos it shines on it.

*Ms. D.:* Doesn't the sun shine on the other planets? Are they dark all the time?

*Jesse:* Yes. They don't shine, only the moon.

*Ms. D.:* So could there be life on the moon?

*Jesse:* No.

*Ms. D.:* If there is light on the moon doesn't that mean there could be gravity on the moon and therefore life on the moon?

*Jesse:* No, there's no life, but men can go up to the moon in rockets because there is gravity on the moon. The people from the other planets come to the earth and live on earth.

*Ms. D.:* What do the people from the other planets look like?

*Jesse:* Green guys.

*Ms. D.:* Green guys, have you seen any green guys?

*Jesse:* W—e—l—l.

**Annabel – 6 years old**

**Ms. C.:** If you could be any animal you wanted, what would you be?

**Annabel:** A bird.

**Ms. C.:** Why would you like to be a bird?

**Annabel:** Because they can fly.

**Ms. C.:** Why would you like to fly?

**Annabel:** Because you can go places instead of walking.

**Ms. C.:** Don't you like walking?

**Annabel:** No.

**Ms. C.:** What would you need to fly?

**Annabel:** Wings.

**Ms. C.:** What sort of wings would you like?

**Annabel:** They'd be big and they'd be made of feathers.

**Ms. C.:** What colour would they be?

**Annabel:** Brown or white.

**Ms. C.:** Would wings be all that you needed to fly?

**Annabel:** Yes.

**Ms. C.:** Can you think of anything bad about being a bird?

**Annabel:** You could get a broken wing.

**Ms. C.:** Are people always nice to birds?

**Annabel:** No. People shoot them.

**Ms. C.:** Then what do they do with them?

**Annabel:** They bury them.

**Ms. C.:** Anything else?

**Annabel:** They cut them up and have them for their lunch.

**Ms. C.:** If you were a bird flying in the sky, what could you see?

**Annabel:** Buildings, people, cars, houses, bikes, roads.

**Ms. C.:** If you were a bird, what would you like to eat?

**Annabel:** A piece of apple, seeds, water, and milk.

**Ms. C.:** Would any animals scare you?

**Annabel:** Lions and tigers.

**Ms. C.:** Why would you be scared of them?

**Annabel:** Because they're vicious.

**Ms. C.:** Would you be friends with any animals?

**Annabel:** Yes. Horses.

**Ms. C.:** Anything else?

**Annabel:** Not people because they come up and birds fly away.

**Ms. C.:** Don't you think birds like people?

**Annabel:** No.

**Ms. C.:** Do you think birds should like people?

**Annabel:** Yes. They both should.

**Ms. C.:** If you were a bird, what would you do to make friends with people?

**Annabel:** I wouldn't fly away when they came up to me and I'd let them pick me up.

**Ms. C.:** If it was Winter time, where would you go to be safe?

**Annabel:** I would . . . um, what's winter time?

**Ms. C.:** When it's cold and rainy.

**Annabel:** I would find a spot where it was warm.

**Ms. C.:** Where would that be?

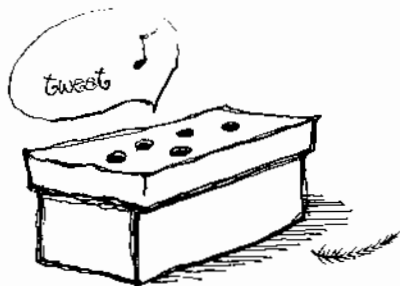
**Annabel:** In a nest.

**Ms. C.:** Where would the nest be to be nice and warm?

**Annabel:** In a . . . box.

**Ms. C.:** That would be warm, wouldn't it?

**Annabel:** Yes. And I'd cover it with a rug and put holes in it so that I could breathe.







**JUNE – 9 years old**

**Ms. A.:** If you could be any animal, what would you be?

**June:** I'd like to be a monkey because if I were a horse, I'd get ridden on every day and I'd get a sore back.

**Ms. A.:** Why would you like to be a monkey?

**June:** Because you wouldn't get ridden on and because you'd have clothes on. If you lived in an American home, you'd be spoilt.

**Ms. A.:** I didn't think monkeys wore clothes. Which monkeys wear clothes?

**June:** The chimpanzees.

**Ms. A.:** Do chimpanzees wear clothes? (*puzzled*)

**June:** Sometimes, most of the time they do. They wear clothes because they're like real people in many ways and they have no tails.

**Ms. A.:** Do chimps and monkeys in the jungle wear clothes?

**June:** No, matter of fact I don't think there are chimps in the jungle. Are there?

**Ms. A.:** Yes, I think there are.

**June:** I've never heard of any!

**Ms. A.:** You'd be a monkey or chimp who lived with someone?

**June:** Yes.

**Ms. A.:** Who would you live with?

**June:** I'd like to live with my Mum and Dad.

**Ms. A.:** Would they treat you like a child?

**June:** Yes, because our dog gets treated like a child. He sleeps on the beds. And they wouldn't be cruel.

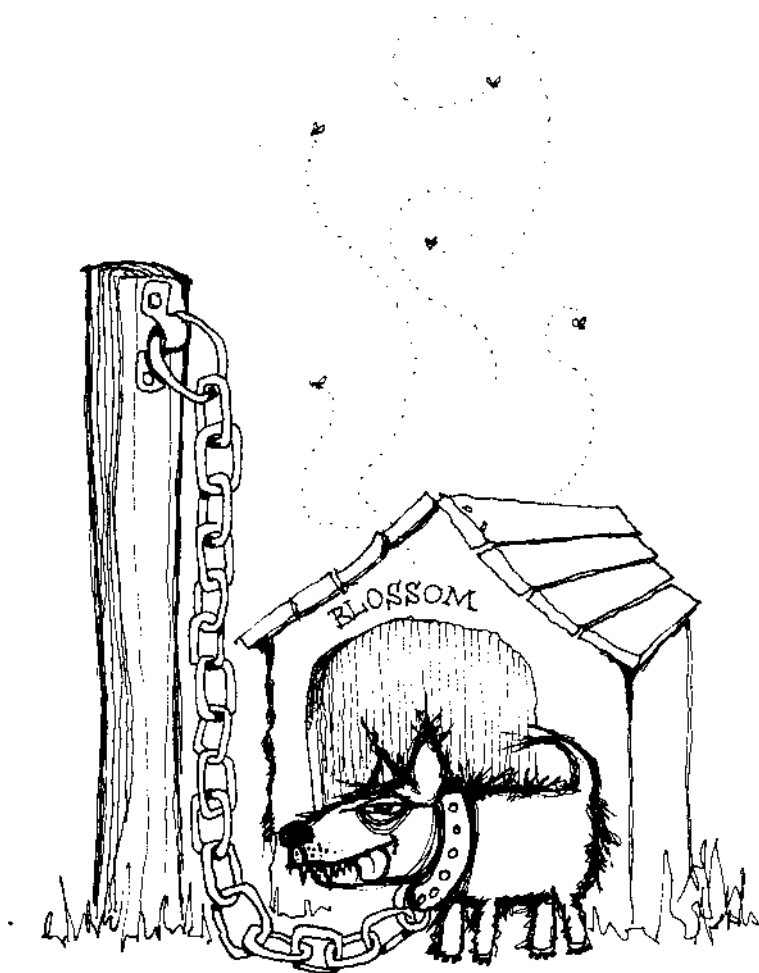
**Ms. A.:** Is it cruel to put a chimp in the backyard.

**June:** Yes.

**Ms. A.:** Why is it cruel. Isn't he just an animal?

**June:** It's cruel, because we started up as apes. You never know because these chimps could turn into a human. If they do things like we do, their children may be more like us.





## Kathy — 11 years old

**Mr. W.:** Given the chance to be any animal, what would you choose to be?

**Kathy:** I'd choose a dog.

**Mr. W.:** Why would you choose a dog?

**Kathy:** Well dogs have homes and I like to be kept in a home and they get fed and well kept but other animals well they get exhausted. They are deserters, they go wandering in the street, so I'd like to be a dog and have a place to live in.

**Mr. W.:** A lot of dogs are also deserters and wander around the streets.

**Kathy:** Yes but before they were born they must have had a place, you know. Well I know this dog who had a home, then his owners went away and so he roamed the streets, then they came back for him and he had a home again.

**Mr. W.:** Why wouldn't you like to be a cat or a bird?

**Kathy:** Cats are too fussy and birds? Well you have to stay in a cage all day and that's pretty awful just hopping around from one stick to another.

**Mr. W.:** What type of dog would you like to be?

**Kathy:** I like to be like my dog — Kelpie Cross.

**Mr. W.:** Why would you like to be a Kelpie Cross?

**Kathy:** Well German Shepherds. Well I wouldn't like to be a tough dog. German Shepherds—they're nice but they have to guard the house and all I do is like to sit around, but Kelpie Crosses some of them are guard dogs but most of them just walk around doing nothing.

**Mr. W.:** Again if you had to choose to be an animal but this time you had to choose to be an animal from the wilds of Africa. What would you choose then?

**Kathy:** Um, I would like to be a lion.

**Mr. W.:** Why would you like to be a lion?

**Kathy:** Well, I would be with other lions. It would be something like human life only this time you would have to kill for your food. It seems pretty awful, but its the only thing to live on. Off other animals that are smaller.

**Mr. W.:** Would you like killing little deers . . .

**Kathy:** No, I wouldn't like to kill those. But um we kill animals to eat and so this way we have to kill them ourselves. The lion has to kill them themselves and not other people to kill them for them.

**Mr. W.:** If you were given the choice to be any fish you would like, what would you choose?

**Kathy:** I'd like to be um, a little Schnapper.

**Mr. W.:** Why would you like to be a Schnapper?

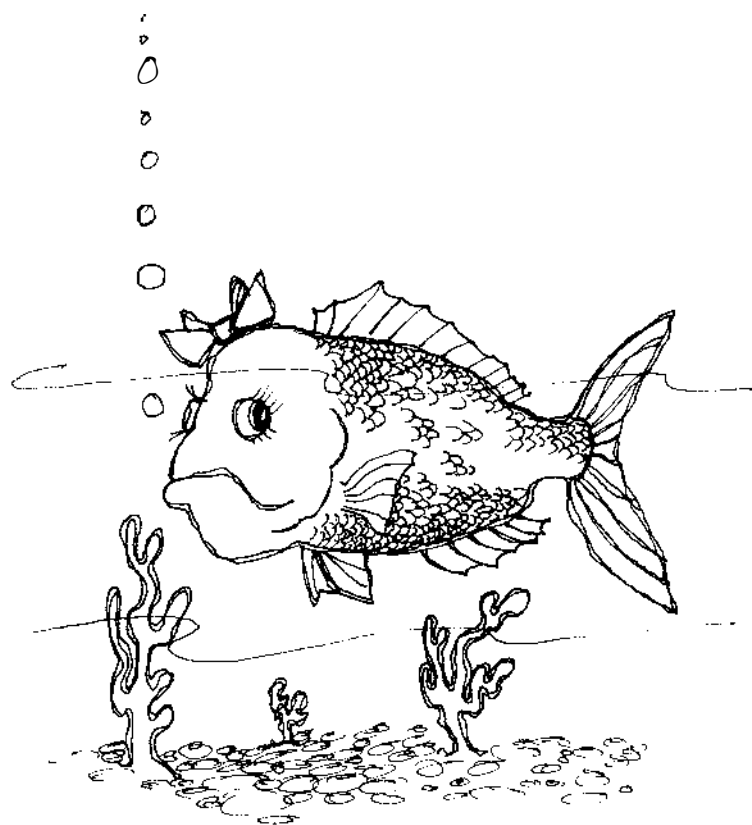
**Kathy:** Well, its pretty awful but because Schnapper are most common to be picked up to eat but there are so many in the sea still so I'd just like to go around and be a Schnapper.

**Mr. W.:** Would you like to be a Shark?

**Kathy:** No.

**Mr. W.:** Why not?

**Kathy:** Because Sharks like to eat other fish and they seem pretty awful with their long teeth going around biting people.



**KENNETH — 6 Year Old Boy**

**Ms. D.:** Do you believe in Father Christmas?

**Kenneth:** Yes.

**Ms. D.:** What does Father Christmas do for you?

**Kenneth:** Brings presents . . . Toys of course.

**Ms. D.:** Why does he bring presents to you?

**Kenneth:** Because it's Christmas.

**Ms. D.:** Why does he bring presents at Christmas time?

**Kenneth:** 'Cos of being good.

**Ms. D.:** What does Father Christmas look like?

**Kenneth:** He's got a black belt and some glasses, red coat, black shoes, white hair, a white beard.

**Ms. D.:** Is he old or young?

**Kenneth:** He's old.







**Ms. D.:** Is he the same Father Christmas who visits you and everybody else?

**Kenneth:** Yes.

**Ms. D.:** Is there anybody you know who doesn't believe in Father Christmas?

**Kenneth:** No.

**Ms. D.:** If you can remember, does Father Christmas always bring you the presents you want?

**Kenneth:** No.

**Ms. D.:** Did you like the presents he brought anyway?

**Kenneth:** Yes.

**Ms. D.:** That's good! What do you think Father Christmas does all the year before he brings the presents?

**Kenneth:** Makes the toys and the fairies help him.

**Ms. D.:** Do you know where Father Christmas lives and makes the toys?

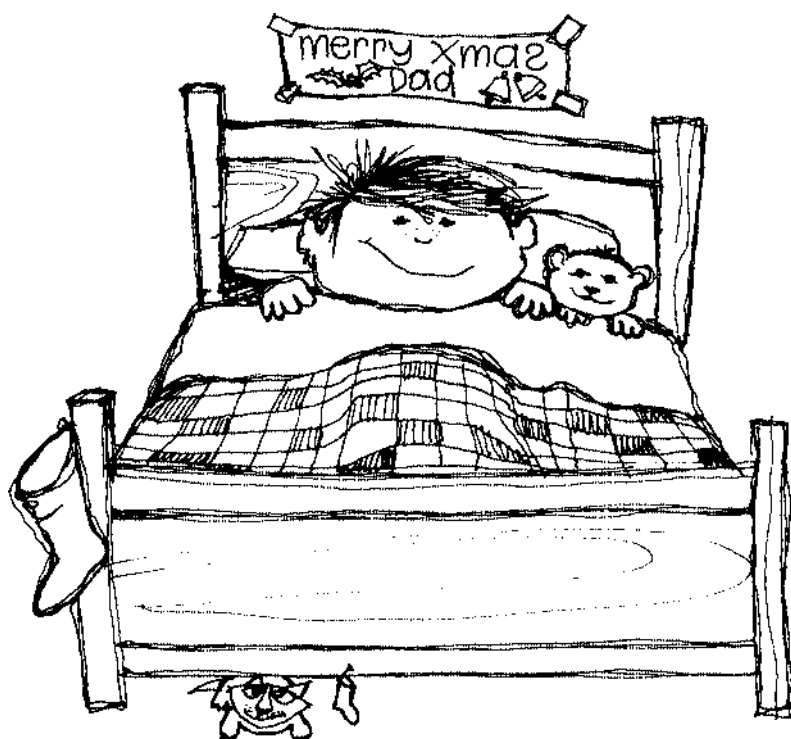
**Kenneth:** In the snow.

**Ms. D.:** Are you glad Father Christmas comes to you?

**Kenneth:** Yes.

**Ms. D.:** How old do you think you'll be when Father Christmas doesn't come to you any more?

**Kenneth:** (long pause) . . . Twenty.



**GEORGE — 7 year old boy**

**Ms. R.:** Do you believe in Father Christmas?

**George:** Of course not.

**Ms. R.:** Who is Father Christmas then?

**George:** Just my Dad.

**Ms. R.:** How do you know it's just your Dad?

**George:** Becuase we have these pillowcases with presents in at the end of our beds.

**Ms. R.:** How do you know Father Christmas didn't put them there?

**George:** Oh I dunno, maybe I saw Dad or else he told me. I dunno.  
(laughter)

**Ms. R.:** Why do adults say there is a Father Christmas?

**George:** 'Cos of the little kids.

**Ms. R.:** Do you think this is right to pretend?

**George:** Yeah, 'cos it's fun for the little kids. I get really happy looking in my pillowcase.

**Ms. R.:** Did you used to believe in him?

**George:** Yeah I think so but I used to wonder why he was different on the Christmas cards. He wasn't the same.

**Ms. R.:** If you have children when you grow up will you pretend to be Father Christmas?

**George:** Yeah, 'cos it's fun.

**CONNIE — 11 year old**

**Mr. W.:** Do you believe in Father Christmas?

**Connie:** No I don't.

**Mr. W.:** Why not?

**Connie:** Well when I was little I used to believe in him but all people now when they grow up they hear it's a legend about Father Christmas. Only parents, friends or guardians put the presents there, under the Christmas tree.

**Mr. W.:** Do you ever think there ever was a person such as Father Christmas?

**Connie:** Um, in every country there are Father Christmases but, um... they got different names, um... like St. Nicholas.

**Mr. W.:** So do you think there was such a person or were they made up?

**Connie:** No. They are people. St. Nicholas goes around giving cookies and lollies, and in other countries I don't know but there are people with other names.

**Mr. W.:** Do you think that they go down the chimney?

**Connie:** No.

**Mr. W.:** Why do they say that Father Christmas goes down the chimney?

**Connie:** Well that's just for little children to believe so that parents say you had better go to bed early or else Father Christmas won't come down the chimney unless you are asleep.

**Mr. W.:** Why do adults trick children? Why don't they just tell them they put the presents there?

- Connie:** Well children have heard the legend before and if the parents tell them they will be upset 'cause they want the presents by Father Christmas.
- Mr. W.:** Where do they hear the legend?
- Connie:** Well parents, teachers and friends tell them.
- Mr. W.:** Should adults be allowed to tell such lies?
- Connie:** Well, they've told all kinds of fairy tales to the children so why shouldn't they be allowed to tell that to the children?
- Mr. W.:** Do you think children should be told there is no Father Christmas at a certain age?
- Connie:** Well they'll find out.
- Mr. W.:** How would they find out, and at what age?
- Connie:** About 10.
- Mr. W.:** At what age did you find out, and how?
- Connie:** Well one night I got up and I saw Mum putting presents under the Christmas tree and I figured out that they put the presents there and they told me that Father Christmas put them there.
- Mr. W.:** Were you shocked to find out?
- Connie:** I didn't expect it, I was surprised and then it didn't matter really.
- Mr. W.:** Do you think that you will tell your children that there is no Father Christmas?
- Connie:** Oh, I'll just tell them when they are little but when they come big I'll let them find out for themselves. But if they haven't found out when they are 10 I'll tell them.

**ADELINE — 6 years old**

*Ms. C.:* Who is God?

*Adeline:* He's a man who helps people and helps them get better.

*Ms. C.:* Where does he live?

*Adeline:* He lives in a church.

*Ms. C.:* What does he look like?

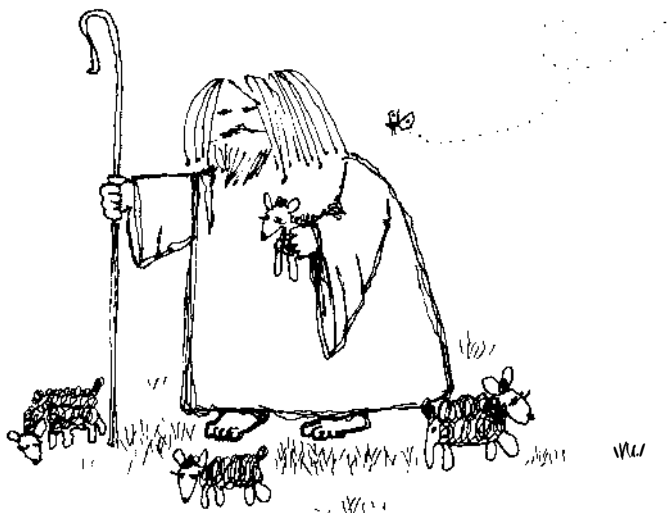
*Adeline:* He looks like . . . he's got a moustache and a big long thing—a gown and long hair.

*Ms. C.:* What colour skin has he?

*Adeline:* White.

*Ms. C.:* Have you learnt about him at school?

*Adeline:* Yes. We have scripture about him.



**Ms. C.:** What have you learnt about him?

**Adeline:** Some of the grade two's come in and our teacher has a board with things that stick on it. Things like the church and a sick little girl. We had a scripture about a man with a thing on his face and he had to go away. He wasn't allowed near his wife or his children.

**Ms. C.:** Did God help him?

**Adeline:** Yes. He made him better so he could go back to his family.

**Ms. C.:** How long ago did this story take place?

**Adeline:** A long time ago.

**Ms. C.:** Where did it happen?

**Adeline:** On a big road with a lake and a lot of bushes.

**Ms. C.:** Is God the best person in the world?

**Adeline:** Yes because he helps people and sees that they don't do naughty things.

**Ms. C.:** Does everyone do what he says?

**Adeline:** Yes.

**Ms. C.:** What would happen if someone didn't do what God said?

**Adeline:** God would help them.

**Ms. C.:** Do you do everything God says?

**Adeline:** Yes. I say my prayers in bed.

**EMILY — 13 years old**

**Ms. B.:** Do you think man may have descended from the apes?

**Emily:** No, I don't believe we have descended from the apes, but I am not sure how we or from what we have evolved. I don't believe that we were originally created by "God" or we evolved from fishes or apes. I think we have just *been* since the beginning of time.

**Ms. B.:** Do you believe by looking at yourself, that you can see some resemblance between you and the present day ape?

**Emily:** There is a strong resemblance but only in the fact that we and the apes possess two legs, two arms, eyes, nose, etc. Skin covering is similar except that the ape is more thickly covered in hair. Appearances are the only resemblance I find between ape and man.

**Ms. B.:** Do you believe scientists have gone beyond doubt that we have descended from apes?

**Emily:** No, I don't. How could they prove it? When this evolution happened millions of centuries ago? And why *if* we did evolve from apes are there still apes that didn't become men? The apes that are here today don't just suddenly change into men. So, what went wrong with them, if, as scientists say, man evolved from apes?

**Ms. B.:** How do you explain the theory that we descended from Adam and Eve?

**Emily:** This theory is only believed by those who believe in Christianity and I think it is just a story that was made up so Christians had an explanation of when and how we began.

**Ms. B.:** Do you think transformation from apes to our present state has taken less time in the Southern hemisphere than in the Northern?

**Emily:** No, I don't think it makes the slightest difference. If we were evolving, I don't think climate or land would interfere at all.



## COMMENT

In this section we looked at ways in which children think about questions in philosophy, religion, science, and mythology. We asked them to extend their thinking and imagination beyond their everyday experience. The most serious and perplexing extensions involved questions about life and death. However, these questions were not always taken very seriously. The significance of being the last person on earth was entirely lost on 8-year-old James. Nonetheless, his replies told us a little about what was important to him in life. Obviously social companionship was not important. The interviewer repeatedly suggested that he would be all alone, but he was not concerned. This seemed surprising because most people become very anxious even at the thought of being entirely alone. Social companionship was undoubtedly a constant feature of James' life. He had probably never been completely alone and simply could not imagine what it would be like. James' imagination only extended to the fact that if no one else was around, there would obviously be no restrictions on his activities. He could do whatever he liked and to James this was an appealing prospect because the things he really wanted to do were to have an orgy of aggression and to fill up on forbidden foods.

Are the things James really wanted generally considered to be important features of life by children his age? We can gain some insight into this question by looking at the work of social psychologist Milton Rokeach (1973). He has studied life values, or the things people think are important, among many age groups. To do this he developed two 18-item check lists which he used to test values. One list, called terminal values, gave different life goals which people might desire. The other list, called instrumental values, gave different ways of behaving which they think are important. The youngest age group to whom the scales have been administered was eleven years old. Among these children the most important terminal values were a world at peace, freedom and family security. The least important were a sense of accomplishment, social recognition, and salvation. The most important instrumental values were honest, loving, and cheerful and the least important were imaginative, intellectual and logical. The values expressed by James in our interview would be classified in Rokeach's scales as an exciting life, pleasure and independence. In the 11-year-old sample these values were relatively unimportant. Why did we find a difference? Perhaps our question was too specific and did not reveal James' most important values. However, it is also possible that 8-year-old children are more hedonistic than 11-year-old children.

When asked what they would do if they woke up dead, children gave three different kinds of responses. Peta (6) answered the question very matter-of-factly. She would rather not be dead but only because black, the colour of death, was not her favourite colour. For 7-year-old Carlo, however, being dead was a very serious concern. Life was very important

to Carlo for reasons which we thought would be given in response to the previous question. He wanted to be with all his family and friends and the nice things in life, like animals. Paul (9) did not treat death as a serious concern at all. In fact, he almost seemed to believe that it was not a permanent condition, but only like going to sleep.

In the next two interviews we saw an even more casual attitude towards death. Neville was quite happy to put his grandmother to sleep because she nagged him and didn't give him presents. And Bernard, when asked if his mother's life was worth dying for, replied, "That depends on how old she was."

To what can we attribute these extreme differences in attitude toward death? It is not a simple question, but one important factor may be children's conceptions of death. Sylvia Anthony (1971) has distinguished five stages in the development of the concept of death in children. The first stage is characterised by an apparent lack of understanding of words like *dead*. But it may also be reflected in a *lack of concern or interest in situations involving death*. All of the children we interviewed seemed to show some sense of understanding the word *dead* but some did show a singular lack of concern. In the second stage, children show an interest in the word but have a very limited conception of death, which is often incorrect. A good example of this stage of thinking was seen when two of the children we interviewed equated death with sleep. The third stage is characterized by an apparent understanding of the word or fact of death but also a belief that it only applies to people or a focussing on non-essential details. We did not observe any clearcut examples of this stage in our interviews, but it would be similar to Peta's statement that you close your eyes and everything is black. In the fourth stage, there is a correct understanding of the concept and an awareness of essential components, but it may be limited to people or to specific aspects of death. An example of this stage is Carlo's understanding that death is a permanent separation. The fifth stage is a complete understanding in terms of logical and biological components.

We cannot point out any examples of the last stage in our interviews; however, Anthony's research suggested that by the age of 11 or 12 most children have achieved a fairly accurate understanding of death. How, then, do we account for Bernard's casual approach to his mother's death? It was obvious that he understood the concept because he preferred his own life to any amount of money. The rest of the interview suggested that the reason lay in a fairly high degree of cynicism, as when he said, "the majority of people wouldn't risk their lives for anything." Bernard's cynicism is not unusual. A recent survey of religious behaviour (Anderson and Weston, 1975) attempted to measure the degree of cynicism in a

sample of nearly 1800 Australian adolescents. It was found that on the average 45% of the students surveyed scored high on a test of cynicism devised for the study.

How do children discuss less serious questions which are beyond their everyday experience? A question about life on other planets ought not to be a difficult one considering the amount of attention it receives on television and other media. However, 9-year-old Jesse had some difficulty putting together a consistent answer. At first he said no, but later he said yes, and at the end he was uncertain. Popular discussion of this question is certainly inconsistent. But Jesse's difficulties were more fundamental than that. We noted in the previous section that many children's thinking is concrete and self-centred. Heinz Werner (1964), who has studied the thinking of children and primitive man extensively, suggested that it is also very global or diffuse. By this, Werner meant that children seem to be able to grasp a problem or situation in a general, undifferentiated way but do not see that all the components must be logically and consistently related to one another. For this reason, when they attempt to relate a series of ideas they can only relate two at a time. Furthermore, the principle according to which they relate any two ideas will probably not be the same one they use to relate the next two ideas.

Bruner and Olver (1963) have called this method of relating ideas or concepts *edge matching*. They asked children of different ages how a banana, a peach, and a potato are related to one another. At least half of the 6-year-old children they tested used edge matching. These children said that a banana and a peach are the same colour, and that a peach and a potato are both round. The other half of the children attempted to use a single rule or principle to relate all three things, for example, you can eat them all. This type of relationship is called a superordinate complex and indicates that the child may be able to produce logically consistent explanations. Bruner and Olver found that three-quarters of the 10-year-old children and nearly all the 12-year-old children they tested used superordinate relationships.

Jesse's explanation of life on other planets is a good example of the diffuse, edge matching kind of thinking. When asked why there was no life on other planets he said it was because there was no gravity. When asked why there was no gravity on other planets if there was gravity on Earth, he said it was because of sunshine. When asked why there was no light on other planets if there was light on Earth, he said it was because they (the planets themselves) didn't shine. In each case he used a different principle to relate two ideas. The questioning revealed the overall inconsistency of his ideas.

The content of his explanation was simply a string of ideas borrowed from

adult conceptions with little or no understanding or elaboration on his part.

The question of life on other planets may be too difficult. It is not based on real experience. What about becoming an animal? Children have much more experience with animals and are much more interested in them. They might find it easier to describe the life of an animal. Annabel (6) developed a meaningful and consistent account of being a bird. Kathy (11) gave very perceptive descriptions of becoming many different creatures. On the other hand, June (9) had great difficulty becoming a chimpanzee. Whereas Annabel seemed quite able to take on the life and ambitions of a bird, June was unwilling to give up being human. She chose the most human-like animal and even distorted her conception of it to make it more human. Even so, all three girls gave fairly consistent accounts of what it would be like to become an animal. This suggests that children may be better able to extend their thinking in areas of real experience than in areas of pure imagination, like life on other planets.

Children's conceptions of Father Christmas and God are interesting because, unlike the problem of becoming an animal, they often get these ideas in more or less complete form from adults. Therefore, in answering these questions children are more likely to simply repeat what adults have told them than to think it out themselves. The interview with Kenneth (6) is a good example. His conception of Father Christmas was exactly what adults always tell children. On the other hand, George (7) and Connie (11) realized it was just a myth. However, George had no other conception except that Father Christmas was just his Dad. Connie must have thought about it more, because she believed that there might have been actual people like Father Christmas throughout history and, of course, that it would be a different person in every country.

Six-year-old Adeline's conception of God is like Kenneth's conception of Father Christmas in some ways. Elizabeth Hurlock (1972), after reviewing several relevant studies, claimed the following was true of most American children's conception of God:

God is a very large person, dressed in white flowing garments, with a kind or stern face and a white beard. He is a "watcher" and punishes those who misbehave, though he can be supplanted through prayer. He rewards those who are good and sends them to Heaven when they die.

This concept seems very stern, almost malevolent. Adeline's ideas were much more positive. When asked what God would do if someone disobeyed him, she said he would help rather than punish the person. Hurlock says that an individual child's conception of God can vary a great

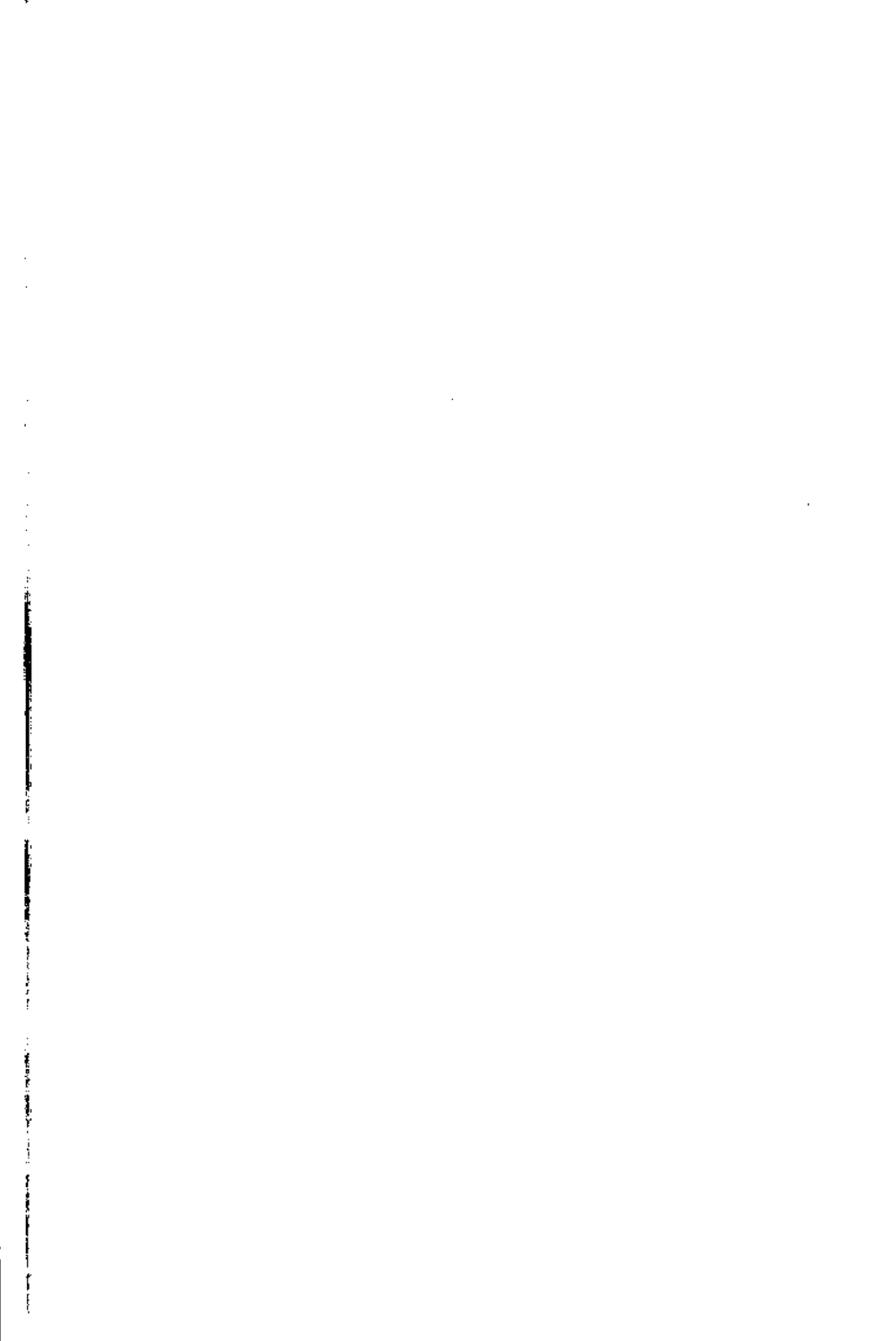
deal depending on experience and specific teaching. So perhaps Adeline had learned about a nicer God.

Before the age of 10, children tend to have very personal, physical ideas about God. After this age, they think in more abstract terms and talk about spirit and mystery. What causes these changes? It may be direct instruction from adults but, as we have seen earlier, this does not seem to have as great an impact as the actual experience of conceptual discrepancies. The 6-year-olds we interviewed thought of Father Christmas and God as physical beings who live in particular places but who go all over the world watching and helping people. To these children there was no incompatibility between the two ideas. As children grow, however, the discrepancies become more apparent to them and their thinking changes. This was illustrated by the two older children who said they did not believe in Father Christmas because, although they were told that he brought presents, they actually observed their parents putting them out.

The last interview in this section concerned the origins of man. Thirteen-year-old Emily's analysis of this question illustrates truly adult-like reasoning. She rejected both the religious and evolutionary theories and offered reasons for doing so. Her own alternative explanation was not really an explanation at all, but she seemed to realize that. She was clearly capable of giving a structured, consistent argument and of considering several points of view simultaneously.

How did the children we interviewed respond to this collection of unreal ideas and events? Many of them interpreted the questions in terms of concrete details. They seldom went beyond their personal experience or concerns. They often found themselves caught in logical inconsistencies by the interviewers' questions. It is difficult to tell whether or not this disturbed them, but we would suggest that it was probably a worthwhile experience which stimulated their thinking. We believe that such questioning will expand children's thinking beyond concrete, everyday experiences. Although it may not have an immediate effect, we hope teachers will reflect on its value.

The content of the children's thinking on these issues was surprising. Sometimes it seemed to be a regurgitation of things learned from adults. However, the originality of many of their ideas and viewpoints showed us very clearly how little we really knew about what they think as opposed to how they think about such issues. It seems an area well worth exploring.



## **THE INNER WORLD**

The inner world of the child is very wide and intricate. We have looked at three features of it in this section. One is the process of identity formation in which the child gradually learns who he or she is. Identity formation to a large extent involves the learning of roles and identification with adult models. To this end, we asked children two questions relating to sex role development and several questions about potentially important adults or events in their lives.

We also asked a few questions about attitudes. One was about the controversial question of using corporal punishment in school, which is within the immediate experience of children. We wondered if their viewpoints would reflect self-interest, or whether they would treat this issue as a moral question. Two other attitude questions relate to the more general current issues of smoking and politics. We wondered what attitudes children had about issues outside their own immediate world and how their thinking about these questions compares to the logic they apply to personally relevant attitudes.

Finally, we looked at some aspects of children's motivation by asking them what they would do with some money and what things they would wish for. In relation to motivation, one issue we were especially interested in was whether things they desired would be confined to themselves, or would they altruistically wish to share their good fortune with others.

**Would you rather be a boy or a girl?**

**Is there anything wrong with girls playing football?**

**If you could choose a teacher, who would be your ideal one?**

**Who is the greatest person you know?**

**What do you want to be when you grow up?**

**Do you believe the cane should be used in school?**

**What do you think about smoking?**

**Who do you think should win this next election?**

**Should children get pocket money?**

**If you had \$100 what would you do with it?**

**If you had three wishes what would you wish for?**

**GORDON — 6 years old**

*Ms. J.:* Would you rather be a boy or a girl?

*Gordon:* A boy.

*Ms. J.:* Why?

*Gordon:* Cos I am a boy.

*Ms. J.:* What if you had the choice of being a boy or a girl?

*Gordon:* A girl.

*Ms. J.:* Why?

*Gordon:* Because I had a choice.

*Ms. J.:* Why wouldn't you still like to be a boy?

*Gordon:* Cos sometimes boys fight.

*Ms. J.:* Don't you think that girls fight too?

*Gordon:* No.

*Ms. J.:* Why don't you think girls fight.

*Gordon:* Cos most times they go to ballet with each other.

*Ms. J.:* Would you like to go to ballet?

*Gordon:* No.

*Ms. J.:* Why?

*Gordon:* Cos I don't know how to do ballet.

*Ms. J.:* Don't you think you could learn?

*Gordon:* No.





**Ms. J.:** Why not?

**Gordon:** Cos Mummy doesn't know where the ballet teacher lives.

**Ms. J.:** Why else would you like to be a girl?

**Gordon:** Cos most times girls like catching boys.

**Ms. J.:** Would you like to catch a boy?

**Gordon:** No.

**Ms. J.:** Why not?

**Gordon:** Because boys are rougher.

**Ms. J.:** Are there any other reasons why you would like to be a girl?

**Gordon:** Cos girls don't play with cars cos they easily break.

**Ms. J.:** Don't boys break cars as easily as girls?

**Gordon:** No.

**Ms. J.:** Why?

**Gordon:** Cos boys are rough.

**Ms. J.:** Doesn't that mean that they break them more easily?

**Gordon:** Yes.

**Ms. J.:** Are there any other reasons why you would like to be a girl?

**Gordon:** No.

**SALLY — 11 years old**

**Mr. S.:** Would you rather be a girl or boy?

**Sally:** Sometimes I'd rather be a boy, sometimes I'd rather be a girl.

**Mr. S.:** Well, why would you rather be a boy sometimes?

**Sally:** Because a boy can ask a girl to go round with him but when a girl asks a boy they feel silly because they are not supposed to ask boys.

**Mr. S.:** Why do girls have to wait for boys to ask them?

**Sally:** Because it doesn't work out as well. When Lucy asked John to go round with her it didn't work.

**Mr. S.:** Well, how do you know it would have worked better when the boy asks?

**Sally:** Because when John asked Lucy to go round with him it worked a lot better.

**Mr. S.:** Do you think from that, that the guy resented being asked by a girl?

**Sally:** Yes.

**Mr. S.:** Why?

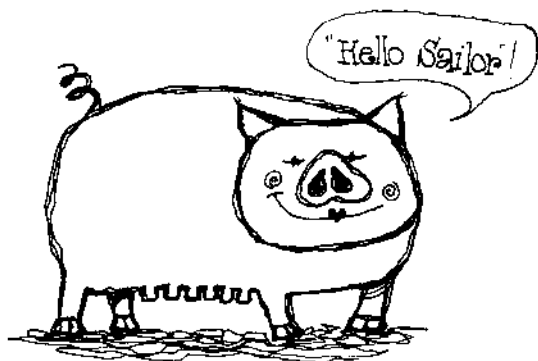
**Sally:** Because he thinks "you know you're doing my job".

**Mr. S.:** Well, why is it his job? Isn't that standing up for the male chauvinist by waiting for him to ask before you go round with him.

**Sally:** Well, who wants to go round with a male chauvinist pig?

**Mr. S.:** Yeah that's right, if you're going to wait for him.

- Sally:** By that time you might have lost him.
- Mr. S.:** Well then, isn't it better to go out with a guy? Isn't it better to ask him and if you do and he says no not if you ask me I won't. Then you know he's a male chauvinist pig and you don't want to go out with him anyway.
- Sally:** Yeah, but you might love him even if he is like that.
- Mr. S.:** But isn't that a big bad point against him?
- Sally:** Yeah, but there's a lot of female chauvinists in the world too you know and if you ask him he might think you're a female chauvinist.



**KATHY — 11 years old**

**Mr. W.:** If you had the choice of being a boy or a girl what would you choose?

**Kathy:** Well I'm a girl now but if I was born a boy I wouldn't mind it because you get used to what ever you are.

**Mr. W.:** If you were given the choice before you were born, what would you pick then?

**Kathy:** I'd still pick a girl.

**Mr. W.:** Why?

**Kathy:** Well, girls have to do all the house work and boys they have to go out and work in a shop or factory, they get all the hard jobs. Girls get hard jobs but they can go around in the day time and talk to other ladies. I still like to be a girl.

**Mr. W.:** Do you then think that girls are better off than boys?

**Kathy:** Yes.

**Mr. W.:** What are some advantages of being a boy?

**Kathy:** Well they wouldn't do the house work, they get everything easy.

**Mr. W.:** Do you believe in Women's Liberation?

**Kathy:** Um.

**Mr. W.:** Do you know what Women's Liberation is?

**Kathy:** No.

**Mr. W.:** Have you heard of it before?

**Kathy:** No. I've only heard of Women's Lib.



**Mr. W.:** I don't understand it. Could you explain Women's Lib to me?

**Kathy:** Um, er . . . um . . . er . . .

I think its when a group of ladies get together and I heard this on T.V. and they get together and form a club um, and does everything like cooking and cleaning and um that's all I know, but I'm not sure.

**Mr. W.:** There's another thing called the Women's Movement, who say that the man should stay home and do the house work while the woman goes out to work. What do you think of this?

**Kathy:** I think that's right because women should know how to work so that later on when women finish their house work they could go out and look for a job and get experienced in it and know how to work.

**Mr. W.:** Do you think that a husband should stay home for 5 or 6 years and look after the children while the woman goes out to work?

**Kathy:** Well men shouldn't stay home that long because women do everything calmly but men do it very fast so they shouldn't stay home but they should let the women get experienced at a job for when the children go to school so that she can go out and get herself a job.

**TOM — 12 years old**

**Ms. R.:** Is there anything wrong with girls playing football?

**Tom:** Yes.

**Ms. R.:** What makes you say that?

**Tom:** Too rough a sport, they'd get knocked over and bashed around.

**Ms. R.:** What about girls playing hockey and basketball, aren't they pretty rough sports?

**Tom:** No way!

**Ms. R.:** What makes you say that?

**Tom:** Well basketball has fouls, and you can't tackle and pull players to the ground as you can in footie, and hockey, you might get hit in the shins once and a while, but you can't drag someone down with your hockey stick or tackle 'em.

**Ms. R.:** Don't you think girls could put up with tackling and fighting?

**Tom:** No way! Probably get up and start crying!

**Ms. R.:** What about ice-skating and roller-skating, they're pretty rough?

**Tom:** Yeh, you need skill and class to do ice-skating, but you can just pick up a rule book, read it and play footie! With a bit of training.

**Ms. R.:** O.K. You say you need more skill to do ice-skating and girls do ice-skating so why can't they just read a footie book, then go out and play footie?



**Tom:** But ice-skating's not rough, you don't tackle or prang each other or bash 'em.

**Ms. R.:** But if girls can do ice-skating why can't they play footie?

**Tom:** It's not just skill in footie. If a girl went out and played footie and was tackled by ten boys, she'd be taken off by half-time. Girls'd get in fights, wouldn't be much good anyway. They'd have to be pretty big and weighty and fast to play footie.

**Ms. R.:** Well, aren't there some girls like that?

**Tom:** Yeh, but they're not fast, and can't kick a footie 'cause they're so fat their legs don't meet!

**Ms. R.:** Say if there were some girls who were big, weighty, fast and could kick a footie, would you put them in a team?

**Tom:** If they were good enough.

**Ms. R.:** Would you have girls mixed with boys to form a footy team or have just all girls playing against all boys teams?

**Tom:** None!

**Ms. R.:** Why?

**Tom:** If boys teams played all girls teams there'd be fighting and tackling and the girls'd have rings on and scratch with long fingernails, bangles, etc., and probably grab you round the neck and try to choke you.





**LINDA — 8 year old girl**

**Ms. M.:** If you could choose a teacher who would your ideal one be?

**Linda:** Miss O'Donald.

**Ms. M.:** What do you like about her?

**Linda:** She's not that tough and she likes doing sport. She likes people a lot.

**Ms. M.:** What don't you like about teachers?

**Linda:** A teacher who is growly even when you do something a little naughty.

**Ms. M.:** How should teachers look when they come to school?

**Linda:** They should look neat.

**Ms. M.:** Why should they look neat?

**Linda:** Well it's not nice to go around with your hair untidy and your shirt not tucked in. You should look respectable because we have to look neat and tidy too.

**Ms. M.:** What do adults do that annoy you most?

**Linda:** Litter.

**Ms. M.:** Litter?

**Linda:** Most men that drink beer throw their bottles away and tin cans.

**KITTY — 11 years old**

*Ms. F.:* Who is the greatest person you know?

*Kitty:* The greatest?

*Ms. F.:* Yes.

*Kitty:* The Queen.

*Ms. F.:* Why the Queen?

*Kitty:* Because she is important and she's well-known all over the world.

*Ms. F.:* Do you think it is a good thing to be known all over the world?

*Kitty:* Yes.

*Ms. F.:* Would you like to be well-known?

*Kitty:* No.

*Ms. F.:* Why not?

*Kitty:* Because I wouldn't like people knowing . . . if I was rich or something I wouldn't like people to know me because if you're rich lots of people try to blackmail you.

*Ms. F.:* Do you think people try to blackmail the Queen?

*Kitty:* Some people might.

*Ms. F.:* Do you think they would ever succeed?

*Kitty:* No.

*Ms. F.:* Why?

*Kitty:* Because sooner or later they'd get found out.

- Ms. F.:* Why do you think the Queen is an important person like you previously said?
- Kitty:* Because she has a lot of money and if you went to London you would see her and you know she is important because she has got all good and important things like she's got a big palace and all the things in the palace are worth a lot of money.
- Ms. F.:* Would you like to be the Queen and have all the things she has?
- Kitty:* Yes.
- Ms. F.:* Why?
- Kitty:* Because well she comes and visits all around the world a lot of times and because I'd like to see not just London but all the places she goes and if she wants something she can usually get her own way because she has maids waiting on her and everything.
- Ms. F.:* Do you consider it important for people to be able to do as they please and get what they want?
- Kitty:* Yes for some people but for others no.
- Ms. F.:* Why only for some people?
- Kitty:* Because if you let everybody have their own way, everything would be terrible because everybody has something the other person's got and they wouldn't want to give it to them.
- Ms. F.:* Do you think the Queen does everything and gets everything in the right way?
- Kitty:* I think so but I wouldn't really know because I haven't really been there to see what she does and all that.

**TOMMY — 3 years old**

*Ms. B.:* What do you want to be when you grow up?

*Tommy:* A man like Dad.

*Ms. B.:* What sort of man is Dad?

*Tommy:* A Doctor.

*Ms. B.:* Do you think he is a good doctor?

*Tommy:* Yes and I only want to be a doctor too. So I can help him.

*Ms. B.:* What would you be if you couldn't be a doctor?

*Tommy:* I would play with my tools because I have got tools — a hammer.

*Ms. B.:* What would you do with your tools?

*Tommy:* I got a hammer, you know those little hammers.

*Ms. B.:* What sort of man would you be if you used your tools?

*Tommy:* A man who fixes things. Daddy can fix things. When he's on holidays he fixes things.

*Ms. B.:* What would you rather be. A doctor or a man who makes things?

*Tommy:* A man who makes things and a doctor.

*Ms. B.:* Which do you think people like better. A man who makes things or a doctor?

*Tommy:* A doctor.



**Ms. B.:** Why do you think people like doctors?

**Tommy:** Because they fix up people.

**Ms. B.:** Do you think doctors are good or bad people?

**Tommy:** Good people.

**Ms. B.:** Why do you think they are good people?

**Tommy:** Because they fix people up.

**Ms. B.:** Do you think they earn lots of money?

**Tommy:** Yes.

**Ms. B.:** Would you like to be a man who earns lots of money or not lots of money?

**Tommy:** Lots of money. The Banker's got lots of money.

**Ms. B.:** Do you think there might be a better way of earning lots of money than being a doctor?

**Tommy:** No.

**Ms. B.:** Why do you think Daddy was a doctor?

**Tommy:** So he can fix up people. But he can't fix up dead people who are dead.

**GEOFF — 10 years old**

**Mr. O.:** Do you think the cane should be used in schools?

**Geoff:** No.

**Mr. O.:** Why not?

**Geoff:** Because the teacher makes us learn. They're not our parents and so they can't tell us off.

**Mr. O.:** Don't teachers take care of you, so aren't they responsible for what you do?

**Geoff:** No, because when we are out playing they are in the staffroom doing nothing.

**Mr. O.:** What about in the classroom, can't he tell you off?

**Geoff:** No, because half of the time she gives you work you haven't done before.

**Mr. O.:** Are you doing things you want to do in school?

**Geoff:** No.

**Mr. O.:** Do you get in trouble at school?

**Geoff:** Yes.

**CLARISE — 9 year old girl**

**Ms. Y.:** What do you think about smoking?

**Clarise:** It's a really bad thing 'cos it makes you die.

**Ms. Y.:** Why do you think people smoke then?

**Clarise:** Because they really like it and it makes them feel good.

**Ms. Y.:** Why don't these people stop if they know smoking is bad for them?

**Clarise:** I don't know, perhaps they can't because they like it too much.

**Ms. Y.:** Do you think anything should be done to stop these people from smoking?

**Clarise:** Yes, I think the police or Governor or someone should say it's against the law.

**Ms. Y.:** Do you think this would stop people?

**Clarise:** Yes, if the shops stop selling boxes of cigarettes and that.

**Ms. Y.:** Wouldn't that put a lot of people out of work though? For example, the tobacco growers?

**Clarise:** Oh., um . . . Well smoking is making people die so I guess the farmers would have to start new jobs.

**Ms. Y.:** Would you ever try smoking?

**Clarise:** No.

**CONNIE — 11 year old**

**Mr. W.:** Who do you think should win this next election?

**Connie:** The Liberal Party.

**Mr. W.:** Why should they win the election?

**Connie:** Because they're fair.

**Mr. W.:** Why do you think they are fair?

**Connie:** Well, on T.V. tonight Mr. Lynch from the Liberal and well he beated Mr. Hayden, and he seemed pretty fair.

**Mr. W.:** Who would you rather have as Prime Minister? Gough Whitlam or Mal Fraser?

**Connie:** Gough Whitlam.

**Mr. W.:** Why would you rather Gough Whitlam?

**Connie:** Well, he gives a decent pay to students and that and everyone is disagreeing that Fraser should be Prime Minister.

**Mr. W.:** Do you think the Governor General was right in sacking the Prime Minister?

**Connie:** No.

**Mr. W.:** Why not?

**Connie:** Um, well, what right has he got to sack him for?

**Mr. W.:** Do you agree with the demonstrations that are going on around Australia supporting Mr. Whitlam?

**Connie:** Yes.

**Mr. W.:** Do you think they're doing any good?

**Connie:** They are doing both harm and good. Good because they are making Fraser shamed of what he's done. All the people are cheering Whitlam which is making Fraser feel ashamed and the harm, well, anyone could bring them to prison, for what they're saying about Fraser.





**Mr. W.:** What party is Gough Whitlam in?

**Connie:** I think he's a Liberal.

**Mr. W.:** What do you think of inflation and unemployment in Australia?

**Connie:** I think it's bad.

**Mr. W.:** What do you think of unions in going on strike?

**Connie:** I think they're silly. Because every time they go on strike prices go up, like the fuel. They've gone on strike and now prices are going to go up and cars on the road have got less because they're running out of petrol and it's pretty silly now.

**Mr. W.:** If the workers don't think they're getting enough money do you think they should be allowed to strike then?

**Connie:** No, they should keep on working and go to meetings and see what they can do, if they want more money but keep on working, or else every thing will go bad around Australia.

**Mr. W.:** Do you know who Bob Hawke is?

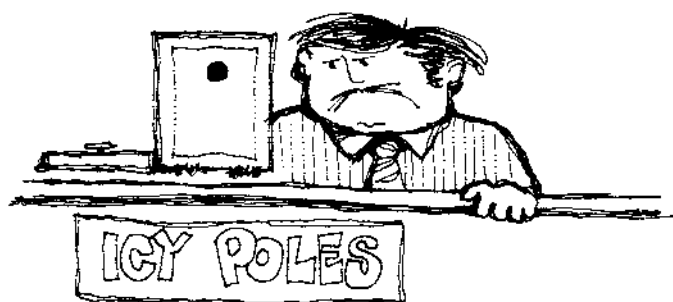
**Connie:** Yes, well he's in the Government. Well I just know he's in the Government.

**Mr. W.:** Do you like or dislike him?

**Connie:** Well I haven't heard of him often, but I don't like him much.

**Mr. W.:** Why don't you like him much?

**Connie:** Well every time I see him on T.V. well...um...he's always shouting at people and disagreeing and...um...I think that's pretty in the bag.



**SAMUEL — 6 years old**

**Mr. J.:** Do you think children should get pocket money?

**Samuel:** Yes.

**Mr. J.:** Do you get pocket money?

**Samuel:** Yes.

**Mr. J.:** How much do you get?

**Samuel:** 10 cents a week.

**Mr. J.:** Do you think you should get more?

**Samuel:** Yes.

**Mr. J.:** How much do you think you should get?

**Samuel:** \$2.

**Mr. J.:** Why \$2 — what would you do with all that?

**Samuel:** Spend it.

**Mr. J.:** What do you buy with your 10 cents?

**Samuel:** Anything.

**Mr. J.:** Can you buy a lot?

**Samuel:** Yes.

**Mr. J.:** What kinds of things do you buy with your 10 cents?

**Samuel:** Lollies, icy poles . . .

**Mr. J.:** Do you save any of your 10 cents?

**Samuel:** No.

**Mr. J.:** What would you buy with your \$2.

**Samuel:** More icy poles.

**Mr. J.:** Would you save any of the \$2?

**Samuel:** No.

**Mr. J.:** Will you ever save money?

**Samuel:** No.

**Mr. J.:** Why?

**Samuel:** Because money is for spending.

**FLORENCE — 7 years old**

**Ms. C.:** Should children get pocket money?

**Florence:** Ummm, yes.

**Ms. C.:** Why? Why do children need pocket money?

**Florence:** Because they might want to buy toys.

**Ms. C.:** Is that all?

**Florence:** I don't know anything else.

**Ms. C.:** What about you, do you get any pocket money.

**Florence:** Yes.

**Ms. C.:** How much pocket money do you get?

**Florence:** Twenty-five cents.

**Ms. C.:** Really, all that . . .

**Florence:** My brother gets thirty-five cents. He's older.

**Ms. C.:** What do you spend your pocket money on?

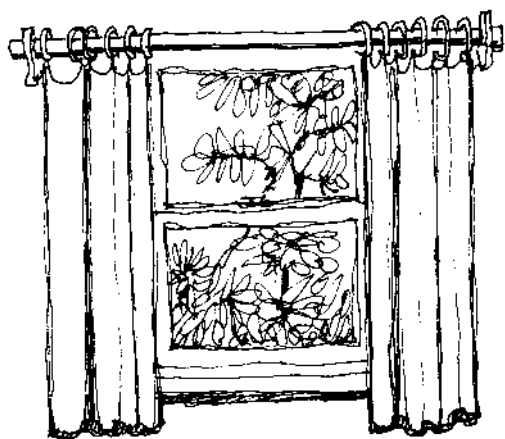
**Florence:** Some weeks I buy lollies and toys.

**Ms. C.:** What else do you spend it on?

**Florence:** Some weeks I save it for Mummy and Daddy.

**Ms. C.:** What do you think you will do, one day, with all the money you have saved?

**Florence:** Some I'll put in the bank, some I'll give to Mum and Dad when I'm old, and some I'll keep for the house.



**CHARLES – 12 years old**

**Ms. J.:** If you had \$100 what would you use it for?

**Charles:** I'd put it in the bank.

**Ms. J.:** Why would you put it in the bank?

**Charles:** Because I don't know what to do with it.

**Ms. J.:** Why put it in the bank, why not in your room?

**Charles:** If someone came in, it would get stolen.

**Ms. J.:** Would you worry a lot if it got stolen?

**Charles:** I wouldn't be happy, put it that way.

**Ms. J.:** Why wouldn't you be happy about it?

**Charles:** Who would! You've got a \$100, you could do anything with it—buy a bike or a fish tank. You'd be back at the beginning.

**Ms. J.:** Do you think you'd buy a bike or a fish tank with it?

**Charles:** Not a fish tank though I'd like one. I've already got a bike and a tank is too much responsibility. If we go away, we'd have to have someone to look after it. I think I'd leave the money in the bank. Maybe in a few years, I'd buy a canoe or put it to a car for when I'm older. Why couldn't you have something like a \$1,000,000?

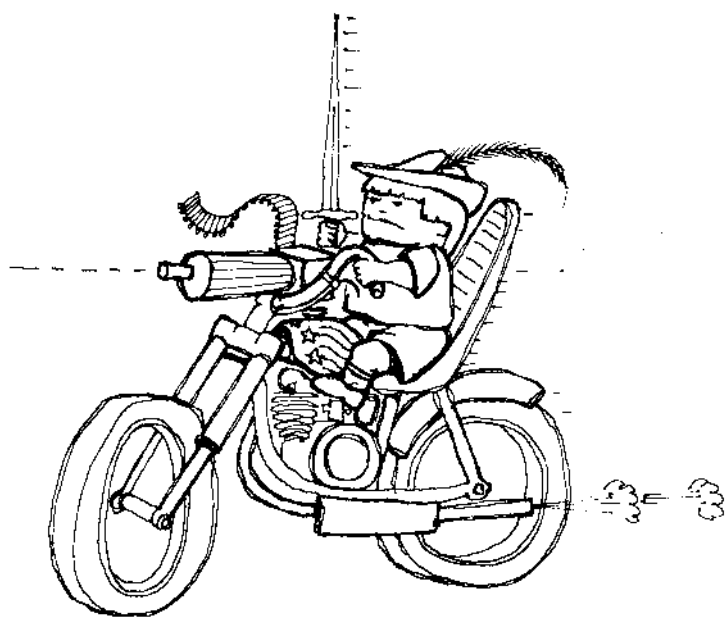
**Ms. J.:** Why would a \$1,000,000 be better than \$100?

**Charles:** You could do more with it.

**Ms. J.:** If you had \$1,000,000 would you put it in the bank or buy something with it?

**Charles:** I'd put it in the bank.

- Ms. J.:** Later on, would you do something with it?
- Charles:** Later on, yes. Buy a house, car and leave the rest in the bank.
- Ms. J.:** Apart from the fact that in the bank the money wouldn't get stolen, are there any good uses of it there?
- Charles:** Well . . . interest. How much a year, interest would I get? (*thinks*). I might invest it in gold, silver or mining companies, buy shares. But I couldn't do anything with it, because I don't know anything about it. I'd have to give it to someone else to handle it.
- Ms. J.:** Who would you give it to, to handle it?
- Charles:** I think there's special people. Or Mum and Dad.
- Ms. J.:** Why would you give it to your Mum and Dad?
- Charles:** They know how to handle money, I think. Well, better than I do.
- Ms. J.:** Would your Mum and Dad know better than these special people?
- Charles:** Yes, I reckon Mum and Dad would be better because special people charge, and Mum and Dad probably wouldn't. But these special people would know better how to invest it.
- Ms. J.:** So you'd rather not pay to have your money invested?
- Charles:** No! These people invest it in shares. They don't take any money from you but I think they take the profits.





**BERNIE — 8 years old**

**Mr. O.:** If you had three wishes, what would you wish for?

**Bernie:** A machine gun, a motor bike and a sword.

**Mr. O.:** Why do you want all these things?

**Bernie:** 'Cause I like playing wars and when Robin Hood was alive I liked playing Little John with my sword. I like playing wars.

**Mr. O.:** Would you like Australia to be in a war?

**Bernie:** No!!!

**Mr. O.:** Why not?

**Bernie:** Because I could get blown up and the whole of Australia could get blown up!!

**Mr. O.:** Well then, why do you like playing wars?

**Bernie:** Well I like playing war, pretendy and I've got a machine gun like a real one, but I wouldn't like a real war.

**VANITY — 10 years old**

**Ms. D.:** If you had three wishes, what would you wish?

**Vanity:** I'd have a horse—a beautiful dancing horse.

**Ms. D.:** What would you do with the horse?

**Vanity:** Ride him and try and get money.

**Ms. D.:** How would you get money?

**Vanity:** By making him dance.

**Ms. D.:** That's one of the wishes, what would your next one be?

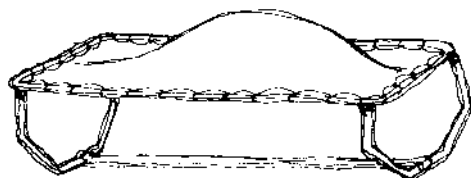
**Vanity:** I'd get a trampoline.

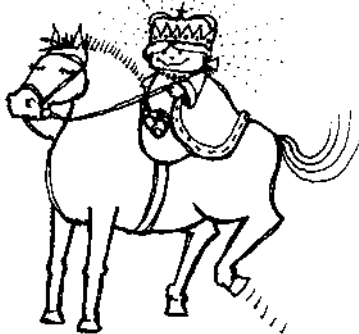
**Ms. D.:** Why would you get a trampoline?

**Vanity:** I want to learn to do flipovers. On the ground I am too scared so a trampoline would help.

**Ms. D.:** What else could you do with a trampoline?

**Vanity:** I think that's about the only thing. I guess if I had the trampoline near a pool, I'd jump off into the pool.





*Ms. D.:* What would you do with the third wish?

*Vanity:* I'd find a treasure chest full of pearls and jewels.

*Ms. D.:* Why would you like to have a treasure chest of pearls and jewels?

*Vanity:* To get money—sell the pearls and jewels but not many of them. The treasure chest goes to a museum—people give money for them. The main thing I am interested in, in wishes, is money.

*Ms. D.:* Why are you interested in money?

*Vanity:* Buy lots of things with it—a good house, lots of dogs and servants and you don't have to work if you don't have a job.

*Ms. D.:* Do you think you'd rather not work?

*Vanity:* It would get rather boring. I think work about 4 or 5 days and then the rest of the week go to a meeting and meet people. I don't like school but I like meeting people. If you stayed in your house all day you wouldn't go out and meet people—like me. I didn't meet anybody until I was six and went to school.

*Ms. D.:* If you want money from your wishes, why didn't you wish for a bag of money instead of a treasure chest?

*Vanity:* With a treasure chest it would be a surprise. You could wear the jewels and the pearls and show them off but you can't do that with money—it stays in the bank.

**FLORA – 10 years old**

**Ms. C.:** If you had three wishes, what would you wish?

**Flora:** I wish that my Mum would win the Lotteries because she wants to make a lot of improvements on the house, and we could get a built-in swimming pool and a bike. Secondly, I wish that I was the eldest person in the family because my older brothers and sisters always boss me around and I'm sick of it.

**Ms. C.:** Would you like to boss them around?

**Flora:** I wouldn't treat them like they treat me but I'd like them to see what it's like to be pushed around all the time and maybe they wouldn't do it to me then.

**Ms. C.:** What would be your third wish?

**Flora:** Thirdly, I wish that I didn't have to go to school because the teachers are always telling you what to do and also I hate work because you could be doing something better at home.

**Ms. C.:** What better things could you be doing at home?

**Flora:** You can watch T.V. or go out or visit a friend or play games.

**Ms. C.:** Wouldn't that get boring after a while?

**Flora:** No. Not really. You get bored doing the same things at school.

**Ms. C.:** Don't you like your teachers at school?

**Flora:** Some are alright but some are always yelling. Also our teacher has a pet and she's the only one who can ever do anything for the teacher.

- Ms. C.:** Would you like to be the teacher's pet?
- Flora:** No. But sometimes you feel like you're not getting enough attention.
- Ms. C.:** Why do you think the teacher has chosen a particular person for a pet?
- Flora:** I don't know.
- Ms. C.:** Could it be that if this person misses some work, she can catch up on it more easily than anyone else?
- Flora:** No. I'm not all that good at Maths but I'm on Book 4 and this girl only just got that book last week. I've nearly finished it.



## COMMENT

Knowledge of the inner world or self awareness develops most dramatically and quickly in adolescence but begins to grow in less self-conscious ways much earlier. One of the earliest forms of self-learning relates to sex-role identification. From birth a child learns his or her sex and the behaviour, feelings, and attitudes considered to be appropriate to it. The thoroughness of this learning varies as we see in the following interviews.

When children are asked whether they would like to be a boy or a girl, their answers reveal the degree to which they have adopted their biologically-defined sex-role. Gordon (6) did not seem quite sure which he preferred. At first, he wanted to be a boy because that was what he was. But then, he chose to be a girl because girls are not as rough as boys. The instability of his answers may be partly due to cognitive immaturity and to nervousness about being interviewed. But it may also reflect basic anxiety about his sex-role development. Although some of the differences between boys and girls do seem to have biological and temperamental origins, most of them result from cultural stereotyping. Parents and society literally train boys to be boys and girls to be girls. Studies (Hetherington and Parke, 1975) have shown that the sex-role training of boys is much more severe than that of girls. Masculine behaviours and dress are tolerated much more readily in girls than feminine behaviour and dress are permitted in boys. This seems to be particularly true of fathers, who often show intense concern that their sons do not exhibit feminine behaviours. The difficulty is that mothers are most responsible for the early care and nurturance of children and, therefore, most likely to become role models. All this means that a greater degree of conflict surrounds sex-role learning in boys than in girls. In fact, it has been found that boys between the ages of eight and eleven express intense anxiety about their sex-roles and often panic at the thought of engaging in feminine behaviour or wearing feminine clothing. Thus, it was not surprising that Gordon exhibited confusion and anxiety about the questions.

Kathy (11) and Sally (11) seemed much less anxious when asked about being a boy or a girl. Neither girl was afraid of being a boy, although both were happy being girls. As Kathy said, "you get used to whatever you are". Sally seemed more resigned to her culturally-defined sex-role than Kathy. She accepted the fact that girls could not ask boys out on dates. Although she could not rationalize this rule, she was convinced that it would not work any other way. Kathy, on the other hand, recognized and accepted the functions that women normally perform, but she also felt that it was only fair for women to get out and have jobs. Kathy believed that women were better suited for childcare and housework than men because "women do everything calmly but men do it very fast". It has actually been found (Hetherington and Parke, 1975) that infant boys are more irritable and more motorically active than infant girls. In older

children and adults, however, these characteristics are more closely related to socialization than to inherent temperamental differences. Thus, boys may be just as capable of housework and childcare as girls if it were not socialized out of them.

The most clearcut example of a sexual stereotype was shown in the interview with Tom (12). He was totally opposed to girls playing football, even though he could not develop any consistent justification for his prejudice. He was almost willing to admit that if girls could satisfy the necessary requirements for a footballer, *big and weighty and fast*, then they might be allowed to play. But when it came down to actually playing football with them, the sexual stereotype reasserted itself and he would have none of it.

How did Kathy, Sally and Tom acquire the sex-roles which they seemed to have accepted? In general, the degree to which a child adopts the appropriate sex-role and the child's satisfaction with that role depend on the sort of model which each parent presents. Normal sex-role development occurs when the father presents a basically male image and the mother a basically female image. However, it is not true that the stronger the image, the better will be the child's development. For example, it has been found that the most well-adjusted men did not have the most masculine fathers, but rather fathers who presented only a moderately masculine image. Hetherington and Parke have suggested that this is probably because most adult roles require both male and female traits rather than one or the other exclusively.

Sex-role development is one manifestation of the more general process of identification. As they grow, children take on characteristics of many important people in their lives. The first and most serious identification occurs with the parents. As we shall see in subsequent interviews, older children also identify with other people. Identification is not simply a matter of consciously imitating isolated features of the adult's behaviour. The child actually seeks to be like the adult in every possible way, often without realizing it.

We observed this most clearly when 3-year-old Tommy was asked what he wanted to be when he grew up. Tommy said he wanted to be either a man who fixes things or a doctor. Wanting to be a man who fixes things may have been a passing fancy. Theories of vocational development call the period prior to age 12 the *fantasy period* because it is believed that all childhood vocational interests are mere whims. However, it should be clear that Tommy's desire to be a doctor was not a whim, since his father was a doctor. We are suggesting that his desire to be a doctor was a direct reflection of his identification with his father. Of course, it is also possible that the profession of doctor was the only one he knew anything about. But this seems unlikely.

As the child grows older, other models may become involved in the process of identification. The teacher is probably the next most frequent model for most children. We saw this clearly in the interview with 8-year-old Linda. When asked who her ideal teacher would be she picked her own teacher. Will a child always identify with her own teacher regardless of who that teacher is? Certainly not. It depends on how the teacher reacts to the child. It happened that Linda's teacher was a friendly, easy-going person who shared Linda's interest in sport. Had she been growly or unfriendly, Linda obviously would not have identified with her. The same is true with parental identification. Children identify highly with parents who are warm and accepting but do not identify with parents who are rejecting and cold.

Towards the end of middle childhood, children also begin to have fantasy identifications. They may emulate pop stars or television heroes. They may also make other choices, as we saw in the interview with Kitty (11). The greatest person in the world to Kitty was the Queen. Why? Partly because she embodied many of Kitty's personal desires, like being able to travel freely and having money and palaces. But also because the Queen is important. Presumably being important means being a great person. Why is the Queen important? Because everyone says she is. Perhaps to Kitty it is simply the Queen's profession to be *the greatest person in the world*.

Attitudes are another part of the inner world of the child. Attitudes are formed either through direct experience with the object of the attitude or in a number of indirect ways, including imitation, conditioning and thought. We thought that the nature of the attitude would change according to whether or not it was likely to have involved direct experience. We also thought that the rationalization or justification which a child was able to give for his or her attitude might be related to the way in which it was formed.

Geoff (10) clearly had a negative attitude toward the use of the cane in school. A recent report on school discipline in Western Australia (1972) showed that Geoff's attitude was not uncommon. Over 80% of the secondary students interviewed also had negative attitudes toward caning.

Many children's attitudes toward use of the cane are based on direct experience. The negative attitude of children who have not been caned is probably a matter of imitation of peers' attitudes or some form of conditioning. The interview with Geoff suggested that his attitude was based on direct experience. This is indicated by his obvious dislike of teachers and school and the fact that he has been in trouble in school. It was difficult for Geoff to justify his attitude. He could not give any good reasons for not using the cane. This may have been partly due to developmental immaturity of thinking. But it probably was more



influenced by the way in which his attitude was formed. If Geoff has had emotional experiences with the cane, it may have been difficult for him to view it in the cool light of reason. This does not mean Geoff is wrong. The report on school discipline concluded that physical punishment of children in school is not justifiable. However, it does suggest that highly emotional attitude-forming experiences may interfere with the ability to give thoughtful justification for an attitude.

Cigarette smoking is still a controversial issue. Even though there is clear evidence of its harmful effects, many adults and children smoke. Clarise (9) was against smoking. Her attitude was not based on direct experience, since she indicated she did not smoke. Imitation or conditioning would probably have given her a more positive or neutral attitude, since it is such a common habit and there is so much advertising in favour of it. Therefore, it seemed that her attitude was based on rational thinking. She knew that people enjoyed it and that it was habit-forming. She also understood that if smoking were stopped some people would lose their jobs. However, she thought that the health hazard outweighed the other considerations and so to her smoking was bad.

Arnold Gesell and his colleagues (1971) found that very few 10-year-old children had tried smoking but that about half of the 16-year-olds they interviewed smoked to some extent. Thus, if we had interviewed older children, we might have found different attitudes toward smoking, since it is more likely that they would have tried it. It is also likely that their peers would have reinforced different attitudes. In either case, we would have expected more positive attitudes and poorer justification for them.

Of the three topics which we have examined in this section, politics accounted for the least direct experience in the children interviewed. Yet, because of current events at the time the interviews were conducted, children would have been continuously confronted with political issues and information. Therefore, it was of considerable interest to us to look at political attitudes. It was difficult to tell exactly what political attitudes 11-year-old Connie had. Her choice of political party was the Liberal Party, but her preference for Prime Minister was Gough Whitlam. We thought she had simply made a mistake, except that she seemed to have a fairly accurate understanding of some of the more pertinent issues. She then confused the picture even more by identifying Whitlam with the Liberal Party.

A recent study of children's political conceptions (Connell, 1971) revealed that children in Sydney tended to prefer the Labor Party substantially over the Liberal Party, with a third of the children undecided. What was more interesting was the origin of their preferences. More detailed analysis revealed that children from lower and middle social status

districts preferred Labor heavily over the Liberals, whereas children from upper social status districts were about evenly split. This finding confirmed many previous findings that children's political preferences tend to be highly correlated with their parents' preferences. The most common explanation for this phenomenon is that it results from the process of identification which we described earlier. Trying to be as much like their parents as possible, children might also adopt their political attitudes.

Connell, however, could find no real evidence to support this argument. Instead, he believed that children's political attitudes originate more from their own thinking and reasoning. The reason that children's political attitudes are so similar to their parents is because they depend on their parents for most of the information which they use to make their decisions. Naturally, parents will be most likely to give them information supporting the parents' own beliefs.

This is only a theory, but it might help explain some of Connie's confusion. Perhaps she has received conflicting information from several different sources. One source which she mentioned was television. It is also quite possible that her parents did not agree, each one providing her with a different source of information. She might even have received some information from peers and neighbours. In any case, she did not appear to be merely imitating someone else's prejudice and beliefs but seemed to be trying to develop her own political attitudes.

Children's motives are the subject of the last few interviews. Motives can be divided into two groups which we call *needs* and *desires*. Needs are those things which people must have to sustain an adequate level of existence. Desires are those things which people would like to have but could do without. This distinction is very similar to one made many years ago by psychologists Krech and Crutchfield (1958). They distinguished between what they called *deficiency motivation* and *abundance motivation*. The former refers to the necessities of life and the latter to "desires to experience enjoyments, to get gratifications, to understand and discover, to seek novelty, to strive to achieve and create". When looking at people's motive, it is important to distinguish the level of motivation we are dealing with. Thus, it was doubtful that any of the children we interviewed were lacking in the basic necessities of life. We believed they all were living at the level of abundance motivation and we did not expect them to express any urgent needs for food, clothing or shelter.

Nor did they. It is true that the younger children expressed a desire for lollies and icy poles but these, of course, are not really food necessities. Virtually all the expressed desires were luxuries. The younger children's desires were more trivial but, of course, they were dealing with a very

small amount of money. The older children's desires differed only in cost and not in importance. Several children did express concern about having a house, but this may be more a cultural habit than a deficiency motive. We doubt that any child seriously expected not to have a place to live at any time in his or her life.

If we examine the abundance motives listed above, we can group them into two levels of importance in terms of human potential. At the lower level we have those things relating to experiencing enjoyments and getting gratifications. At the higher level we have seeking novelty, understanding and creating, and achieving and creating. Most of the motives of the children we interviewed were at the lower level of importance. None of them were at the higher level.

There are several reasons why children responded this way. In the case of questions about money, the children's answers may have been influenced by their conceptions of money. Elizabeth Hurlock (1972) has noted that children's money concepts depend a great deal on their individual experiences. According to Hurlock, children may view money as a symbol of love, a method of controlling people's behaviour, a yardstick of value, or a source of independence or security. To some of the children we interviewed, money was obviously a source of security. But to most of them, it stood for something else, not mentioned by Hurlock. It was a means for obtaining other things. As 6-year-old Samuel said, "money is for spending".

However, we found the children gave the same sort of answers to the question of what they would do with three wishes. This suggested that their motives were determined by more widespread influences than their conceptions of money alone. Many motives result from habit. People learn to desire what is familiar to them. If children are repeatedly exposed to enjoyments and gratifications, these things will become motivational habits. The strength of these habits is then increased by modelling. Children learn to want what their parents and the rest of society wants. None of the children we interviewed at any age said they wanted anything relating to understanding or discovering, or achieving or creating. We suggest that, in reality, adults do not value these activities as highly as enjoyments and gratifications. And if adults do not value them, can we expect children to?

A final, related point regards the direction of their motives. In most cases, we noted that the things children desired were for themselves. In one or two instances, a child extended his or her good fortune to parents, but that was all. How can we explain these observations? Is man basically selfish? This is a very complex question, but one discussion of recent studies of altruism (CRM, 1974) suggests that the answer to this question is no. Children are selfish to the extent that they observe others being

selfish. But if they observe adults being altruistic—helping and giving things to others—they will be also. The interesting thing is that children imitate whatever the adult models. If the adult is a hypocrite—verbally generous but actually very stingy in his behaviour—the child will also become a hypocrite. And so on. Again we can only say it is no accident that the children we interviewed seemed selfish.

## SUMMARY

To us, this has been an exciting and enjoyable, if not very systematic, study of children's talking and thinking. We have covered a very broad range of topics. But they are some of the most interesting topics at any age. What has come through most clearly to me in these interviews is the obvious drive of the children to do their own growing in spite of the massive amount of interference they receive. Events shape their individual growth patterns in many unpredictable ways. Imitation is certainly a very important process, as is conditioning and a variety of other experiences that happen to children. But we have seen in these interviews that children are not mere reflections of things that happen to them. They are active integrators. They want to make some sort of sense of things for themselves. If they fail, it is usually through no fault of their own but, as we have already pointed out several times, neither is it an accident.

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