

DRAWING:
A LINK TO LITERACY

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DRAWING :
A link to Literacy

A collection of
student writing and art
with some thoughts
on the implication for teaching

Editors: Catherine Bates & Linda Shohet

Background

The works presented in this collection were gathered from the fall of 1991 through the winter and fall of 1992 in the context of a project at The Centre for Literacy. This initiative, entitled the Resource-teacher Project, posits literacy as the root of learning across the disciplines.

The Resource-teacher Project, begun in 1990, was originally designed to release several teachers drawn from different disciplines in colleges, high schools, and literacy programs for three hours/week for one semester. During that time, the group studied together and developed methods and materials to integrate literacy - reading, writing, speaking, listening, critical thinking - into content-area courses.

After one semester of collaborative study, we expected that these teachers would form a corps of "resource-teachers" able to work as change-agents within schools, departments, or programs by giving peer support to other teachers and by leading workshops/sessions inside or outside their own institutions. The project provided a rare opportunity for teachers from different levels and systems to work together and learn from one another. Since its inception, the project has included teachers of English, media, French second language, physics, art, music, photography and study skills, among other subjects.

When Fine Arts teacher Catherine Bates applied to the 1992 project, her idea of exploring the ways in which students express themselves in two symbolic media, word and picture, fit in naturally with the work undertaken by other teachers in the previous two years.

The difference was that, in this case, we were thinking not only about how literacy might enhance the teaching of art, but how art might enhance the teaching of literacy.

When we began to do some background research for this project, Catherine Bates and I discovered that while there was a reasonably substantial literature on the connections between drawing and literacy development in young children, there was almost no literature on the connection between drawing and adult literacy outside the field of art therapy. No researchers seem to have hypothesized that normal healthy adults could engage in art and writing for any but therapeutic purposes. Our own work suggests otherwise.

This publication presents a selection of writings and drawings produced in Catherine's Fine Arts classes as well as some of our speculations about the teaching implications of explicitly linking art and language in the classroom. The students whose work appears range from second-language learners to students with limited language experience to extremely sophisticated writers.

Catherine, in describing the classroom process that produced the array of thoughtful and spontaneous writings and drawings, opens up a series of questions about the possibility of using personal writing/ explorations as a way into teaching the formal elements of art and

changing the current Fine Arts curriculum.

I provide an overview of the research on art and children's literacy and suggest reasons for extending the research into the area of adult literacy and for bringing drawing and painting into adult literacy classrooms in order to deepen personal engagement in language awareness and acquisition.

A selected bibliography is included.

Linda Shohet
Montreal, Quebec
June 1993

Joining Forces: The Visual and Verbal Arts

The works reproduced in this book were spontaneous responses to a project first conceived as a variation in the studio teaching of Dawson College Fine Art students. They were asked to both write and draw (or paint) about a subject of their own choice.

I did not expect the results to be so very different from the results obtained in traditional Fine Arts projects, those which are concerned more directly with the elements of painting - composition, colour, etc. - and in which still life and models are the more usual subject matter. I simply felt at the beginning of this research that I was presenting a project to vary the process, the class routine. The works cover a time span from the fall term of 1991 through the spring and fall terms of 1992 and were chosen from a variety of Fine Arts classes (those specializing in Fine Arts as well as those given as interest subjects).

The project was assigned to each of the student groups approximately half-way through the term when a relationship of understanding and trust had developed and when some of the fundamentals of class routine had been established. The first results convinced me to contact The Centre for Literacy to see if this interdisciplinary research could be extended to explore the pedagogical implications of joining these two art forms, the visual and verbal. After I was accepted into the Resource-teacher project in winter 1992, I continued to collect student work, kept more systematic records and brought samples to weekly discussions.

I followed the same procedure for collecting work in each class. The choice of subject-matter was left to the student. There were limits to size and length, imposed by the time factor of a three-hour studio class in which to complete both the written and visual parts of the project. Questions from the students at the beginning of the class were almost

completely to reassure themselves of the freedom they were being given.

This freedom was increased by my saying that the results would not be marked. Rather than producing a laissez-faire attitude, this combination of personal decision about the approaches to subject-matter and the freedom from marking galvanized the Students into concentrated effort which lasted, with unusually few interruptions, throughout the class time.

During the class time, there was a consistency of concentration by all the groups. After the first flurry of questions, the students worked by themselves, quietly and engrossed. Most students took no break and worked until the end of the class. There was very little talk in a studio situation which is normally open to conversation relevant to the project. It may be that the absence of marking allowed them to focus more easily on personal expression.

In a few instances, students were allowed to take the project home because their reach had exceeded their grasp, but they were the ones to initiate the idea of completing the work at home. Furthermore, students who had been absent the day of the project almost all came to the next class with the project completed, saying they had heard about it, found it fascinating and decided to do it. Without the clout of marks to be gained, I find this attitude a rarity indeed! Whatever the reasons, it appeared that the students were intrigued by their search for a personal statement in the process of joining the visual and verbal art media. This was evident from the first and I came to wait eagerly to see the products.

The students clipped the visual and verbal sections of their project together, putting whichever they had done first on top, and labeling them A or B accordingly. The choice had been theirs but I was curious to know what those choices would be; the majority chose to do the drawing/painting first. Perhaps this can be accounted for by the fact that the project was presented in an art class. An extension of the research would see if the reverse would happen were the project to be presented in a language class. The students themselves insisted after the project that they did the drawing/painting first because that was the primary mode of expression - "We did that long before we learned how to write." Another finding was that more time was spent doing the visual part than the writing, perhaps because the greater fluency and speed achieved through years of practice with writing gave the students some assurance that it could be done in a shorter period of time. Spelling mistakes were numerous, not a surprising finding in a multi-language college.

As they handed their projects in, a significant number of students asked whether they would be getting them back, and when. I asked the students why they wanted them back. As one student said, "Other projects are projects - these ones are us and we want them back!" Hardly a week passed without a student appearing at my office door to ask about getting the work returned; they wanted them as things they treasured themselves or as gifts, for family members or friends. We asked to keep the works in order to do the research and to come up with the choice for this book. Those students who agreed signed

releases allowing publication.

Despite the personal nature of the project, many of the very specific subjects also touched on general social concerns; for example, race (p.15), drugs (p.16), pollution (p.17), war (p.23), and pregnancy (p.38). One student made a painting of poppies (p.42) and wrote about her growing awareness of the relevance of Remembrance Day which she had treated with light-hearted casualness until her entry into college. The work on AIDS (p.27) came from a student who had watched his uncle die from it, but the strength of both his visual and verbal work reaches beyond personal grief. The openness and frankness of the students were amazing, perhaps more understandable when it is considered that these specific issues cut across our society.

Besides the wide choice of subjects, the predominance of the narrative mode of writing and painting was particularly striking. A large number of poems were handed in - a thought-to-be-difficult task but one which seemed to go with the project and put the expression into a verbal format as condensed and artistic as possible. The fluidity and rapidity of their poetic expression reinforced intuitive and spontaneous creations. This fit in with their personal themes and connected the writing and drawing/painting.

For the teaching of art, one result was that with the relaxation of the formal elements, such as design, texture and composition, the narrative elements came to the forefront. In fact, perhaps narrative should be reconsidered as one form of entry into the formal elements themselves. This might provide a balance between the historical narrative tradition and twentieth century formalism.

These observations on personal themes and narrative mode may be important ones for curriculum changes in the teaching of art. To what extent should one sacrifice the personal for the learning of contemporary fashions in painting and drawing? How important is the expression of the personal for the development of the formal elements? Can the two be combined in meaningful ways?

For more definitive conclusions, the project needs to be taken further, and more precise research needs to be done. But the results thus far are, at the least, intriguing and suggest adaptations to the existing art curriculum. As well, the project piqued my own interest, an important lateral finding! The opportunity for a teacher to cultivate his or her own curiosity helps to keep alive the sense of adventure in teaching and learning.

Catherine Young Bates
Montreal, Quebec.
June 1993

Note to readers: Student errors in spelling and grammar were retained as authentic first- draft statements. We believe that given the opportunity, these would have been corrected in the revision process. [C.Y.B.]

Drawing and Writing: Research on Connections

There is a credible language arts literature that looks at drawing in early childhood as the beginning of children's writing (Calkins, Dyson, Graves, Harste, Hubbard, Luria) and that argues strongly for the inclusion of drawing in reading and writing classrooms, often in the form of illustrating text.

These studies focus on art as instrumental in the development of linguistic literacy. They are generally not interested in art as another mode of literacy. As one commentator notes, "Illustrative drawing is more a function of eliciting information from text than it is an expression of creativity - although many times children produce imaginative, creative pictures." (Neu/Stewig,1991)

Researchers Neu and Stewig, in reviewing this literature, report that these studies find "that, besides using drawing for artistic expression and emotional enjoyment, many children draw to explore and understand language." Among the various hypotheses they cite about how children use drawing are the following:

- As a rehearsal and scaffolding technique while learning to write, read, and comprehend language.
- To decode words and understand story-language patterns.
- To learn spelling.
- To generate and organize ideas for reading and writing.

Soviet psychologist A.R. Luria has pointed out that without being taught to draw, young children naturally and compulsively draw to explore and "play with" their expanding world (Neu/Berglund).

Another psychologist has suggested that some visually-oriented children become slow learners when visual experience such as drawing does not take place. In fact, many low-achieving learners have been shown to be highly visual.

Unfortunately, there is also a predictable tendency for drawing to disappear from children's writing as they mature. But there is disagreement among educators about what this disappearance means. Some believe it is a sign of writing growth, that the child has taken control of language. Others believe that children stop drawing because their visual perceptions exceed their drawing skills and they are frustrated or embarrassed by not being able to reproduce accurate representations of what they see. Constraints on class time and teachers' indifference increase these natural inhibitions. There is evidence that without formal art teaching at this point most children stop drawing.

Extending the Range: Why Stop with Children?

The connections between drawing and writing have been made explicit. According to

researcher Ann Dyson (1982, quoted in Neu/Berglund):

- Both graphically symbolize an object.
- Both create one graphic object for another.
- Both represent a symbolic narrative form.

In the early stages of reading and writing, print and picture form a complementary whole.

These researchers suggest that teachers give older children opportunities to continue drawing as part of their language experience as a means of facilitating language learning, comprehension, vocabulary, and more. For poor readers and slow learners, it provides a way of literacy "seeing" words, helping them get to the meaning in a way that traditional teaching has not; for strong readers and able learners, it provides a way of extending their thinking.

If this rationale is taken to its logical end, why stop with children? The classroom experiments that Catherine initiated in her course suggest to us that adults also welcome the invitation to draw, as well as write, their lives; This opportunity could be a powerful aid to learning in many subject areas, including adult literacy and second-language classes. The possible classroom applications are as varied as teachers' imaginations. [L.S.]

A Question of Perspective

Here I sit, with my eyes on the universe around me
I create my own world,
in my own mind space.
My chair is tilted forwards,
peering onto the objective world beyond.
Past my subjectivity is another world
with another person inquisitively glancing at me
We are from different planets
seeing foreign galaxies.
He from his blue, lensed binoculars,
me from my chair.
The bug on the window is looking back and forth
seeing the two separate worlds;
side by side.
Who's perspective is real?
Is the world simply composed of
millions of subjective scope?
Is it all just an illusion?
We shall never know
We'll just continue observing
everything around us
million of eyes
from millions of places
and mind space.



A Matter of Perspective

I sit here on the edge of my world
peering onto the universe beyond
My world exists within my own mind space
within my subjectivity
Before me is the objective surroundings of the OTHERS
the window is my perspective
Staring back at me are a pair of binoculars
The blue lensed binoculars are observing my world
The bug on the window sill is the middle man
caught in between the two separate worlds
which is real?
Whose perspective is valid?
What is reality... within this universe made up of
SUBJECTIVE WORLDS & MIND SPACES.

Anonymous



A Young Knights' Honor

His oath bounds him to his lawful ways.
His sword brings blood and pain in war filled days.
His word is his honor, and his honor is his life
But if his honor failed him it would be like the cut of a jagged edged knife.

The rich kill to maintain their wealth,
While the poor die to bring money for their children's health.
The young knight helps the needy with all his might
But he fails to eliminate the wrong that was once a right.
His word is his honor, and his honor his life,
But if his honor failed him, it would be like the cut of a jagged edged knife.

He holds his head up high,
You will never see a hint of fear in his eye.
He never shares his feelings with anyone other than his fellow knights,
for they are the only ones who understand his emotions and those foul sights.
His word is his honor, and his honor is his life,
But if his honor failed him, it would be like the cut of a jagged edged knife.

He's cold and stern on the outside,
But grieving and crying for the suffering on the inside.
He lives to uphold the law, and help and protect all who are in need,
But who will help this poor soul when he cannot take heed?

His oath bounds him to his lawful ways.
His sword brings blood and pain in war filled days.
His word is his honor, and his honor is his life,
But if his honor failed him it would be like the cut of a jagged edged knife.

C.R.

▶
A SPECIAL PLACE
A SPECIAL FACE
BLACK OR WHITE
IN WRONG OR
RIGHT
TAKE THE TIME
TO COME
TOGETHER
AND MAKE PEACE
THROUGH-OUT
FOREVER...
C.N.





▲

Q: See something wrong with this picture?

A: Person A is the jumper who made a mistake and forget about one thing. Which means he's putting one very important thing one the line. Now person B is you if you consider taking crack; or any other narcotic for that matter. Which means your putting that same important thing on the line because of one careless mistake.

Q: What do you and person A have in common?

A: Height. It's all downhill from then on. Just remember, the "higher" one gets the harder the fall.

K.D.

▶

From the beginning to the end
the sun still burns
cleaning up is a new trend
while the earth still turns.

J.M.





Flowers are supposed to say a thousand words. Some grow wild but the ones I get are cultivated. Bought every time something goes wrong for eight dollars at the McKenna flower shop, then wrapped and delivered with an apology. Once, I would like to get a wild flower, picked from the roadside for no other reason than to make me smile.

L.M.



Lia
19/2/92

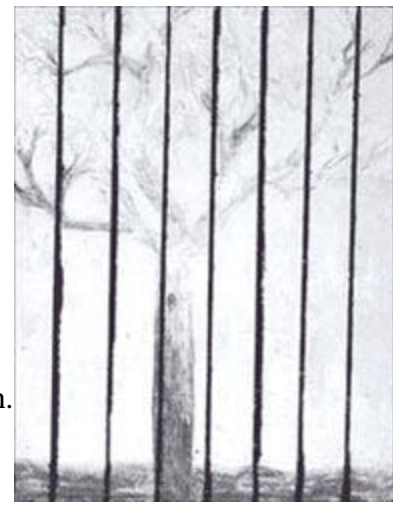


Behind bars, we view the world through I rose-tinted glasses. The beauty and love that we so desire is Just out of our reach. On the other side, we have all that we desire, but somehow...

...somehow...

...it is never enough.

K.C.





Food to many on this earth is attained only in a dream
In third world countries the main focus is not on the materialistic amenities of our North American societies. By contrast, these overpopulated countries concern themselves day to day with the nourishment of their children and themselves.

K.W.

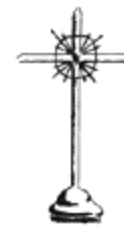


Every morning I sit on the bus down the highway, high above the city. The buildings are like a blanket, covering everything as far as the eye can see but once in a while something manages to break through and disrupt the monotony. Huge green balls and towering spikes pushing through the flatness like huge wild flowers growing in a tidy garden.



Mackey

Lia



Lia
19/2/92

L.M.



Since the beginning of 19th Century, deserts stretch for miles and miles everyday. If we do not stop logging in the rain forest now, we will see this view in front of our house ten years later.

J.C.





I am particularly interested in Amerindian art and culture. The four native girls are crying because of the environmental problems we face today. The gray, black and blue colors in the distance represents pollution. The day break and the mountain symbolizes hope. That there will still be hope and not too late to save Mother Earth. All these images I saw where in a dream.

A.C.



War, such a short word for so much pain, misery, sadness and other terrible feelings that come and scar for life. This "game" it's called war and it comes from sensitive "civilized, peoples" big guys, the model citizen, the President. What is civil about taking someone's life away, destroying what took years, centuries to build. What is civil about a war? No winner nothing good comes out of it, why bring out an unnecessary killer when we have other killers to deal with on daily basis.



B.C.



Youth

Standing
On the rooftop with the birds
Aiming high
Being
Free and idealistic.
Taking
In the sun and a liberating view
of
Small adults below.

K.M.



Thirteen we stand
Anything less and we'll fall
To be reassimilated one and all
And then will come a time
That every one of us will hate
Being the newest addition of the United States.

So I ask you now
All those who believe themselves "Distinct"
To forget your petty squabbles and think
About the country we have
With its majesty and grace
And put Canada first and everyone else in their place.

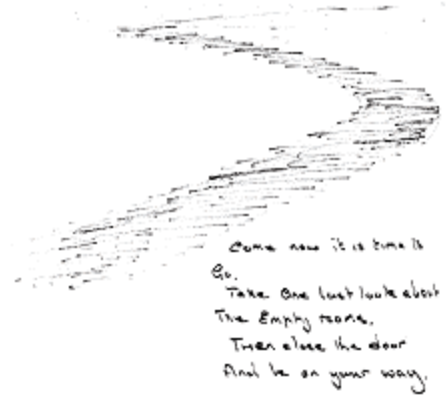
S.H.



THE SOUL OF SNOWBOARDING

The days are colder,
The air becomes pure
And White.
Something stirs inside.
The soul of winter.
The soul of snow.
The soul of speed.
The soul of flying.
With a primal scream
It carves an S into
The newly fallen fresh.

D.S.



Come now it is time to
Go.
Take one last look about
The empty rooms,
Then close the door
And be on your way.

B.N.



THE KILLER (AIDS)

Puny human do you really know
how little it takes to make me grow,
you're ignorance is my strength,
you're well- placed fear I do hate.
Desire is my father,
blood is my mother,
hate I do know, ignore me and I
shall grow, niggers, whites,
queers, kykes to me you do look
all alike and for those who think
they are too white too pure too
bright, one night stands take two
to dance, I'm the one you should
hate for I've killed millions up
to date, fine by me if you can't
see how little it takes to kill
humanity.

four years ago my uncle died
of aids I couldn't cope with his
Death so I drew this which has now
become a painting at first
didn't know why I drew this
creature but since the
assignment I understand why.

C.P.M.





The trees dance to the song of the zephyr.
The blue sky tumbles.
crashes,
roars across the sky.

The fire coloured grass shivers
as the breath of the wind passes it.
The world is in motion

all about me.

In me,

I am alive

P.B.

▶
Laughing

I can still see the
smile on Scott's
face when he stood
in that old row
boat.

I had the rain coat
on and he wore the
captain's hat. We
would always have
the
same fight over
who would get to
wear that
old cap. Somehow
he Always won, At
least that's
the way I've
Remembered it.
Together we
thought we were
leading the world
without ever
leaving the sand
that the boats were
anchored in.

I still think of those
old boats in the
sand and what they
meant to me.
Last winter Scott
sent me a
Christmas card
with a letter, from a
better place. He
told me of how he
was working hard
so that he could
pay the bank. He
told me life is an
ugly circle that
never seemed to
end. He didn't say



anything that I had
not already known.
Although he didn't
mention it I knew
he had
been thinking of
those hot summers
by the
lake both of us
standing in those
old boats laughing.

K.S.



▲
This painting was made according to a quote that I thought of.

“You're crazy,” he said
“Of course,” she replied.
“Isn't that what life's all about... being crazy.”

C.R.



▶
IGNORANCE

Trapped in the mind's protective cocoon
bearing the weight of the imposing darkness
The inward flight from icons of unfulfillment.
The loss of identity nurturing the
birth of anxiety.

A futile attempt to dismiss that which
restrains it.

The perpetual & self-inflicted disempowerment of one
ignorance upon ignorance from an abused
soul.

The handicapped unexploited prodigy.

The one is the whole.

Existence is perception, perceived by
the majority,

No time for a dialectic.

Bearing the fetus of failed generations.

This perception has been tainted and
festers with disease.

Only upon Arrarat do I await.

The second coming of the rains

The darkness is within.

J.L.



You are my best friend because you feel so much like home to me...
that feeling that someone cares;
that feeling of welcome;
that like sight of home always brings.

S.M.I.



The clouds hang heavy with their burden
the low rumble of the thunder
echoes across the miles.
The moon and stars are smothered
by the great black wings of the storm.
Is it raining where you are?
The rising wind rises,
and the last few leaves of autumn
begin the storm's strange ritualistic dance,
and the first few drops of rain
kiss the feet of Mother Earth
My blessing to you, dear friend
may the sun be shining upon you,
may it light your precious face
while I stand here quietly
and contented -
in the blessed heart of the storm,
in the rain.
My friend, how I wish you
were here
to call me into the warmth
and out of the storm.



C.G.



▲
A quiet site, an open mind,
No need to worry. no thought for time.
The soft cool colours turn down the heat
The pressures of everyday life.
Where tensions do not rise, but
float into the clouds.

Where people do not sink. in the
cold waters.
But find a place to rest.
The tranquility of this far away place
I have found once again, by painting
this picture. in my bedroom, in my
duplex, in this place that I call
home -- the city.

G.S.



So far away lies a man
Who waits upon his death
my arms extended, heart
weighed down
My reach helpless to his fate.
...but long ago this man
stood tall.

A heavy man, who whirled me up
and pretended I could fly
the hand I held was for support
It protected and I felt loved.

Time has passed and it is I
who gives support to hold
his hand and break the fear,
the devil age, has given him
...yet long ago this man stood
tall.

I love this man, it is NOT time!
to let go of the hand
Oh, Grandfather hold on tightly
my hand will keep you tall
Today This hand is here for you
As yours was in the past
It is all who won't forget you
P.S. Grandfather, I love you.

D.B.



Take it
I want you to understand
I give you my brain
Cut it up
Disect
Explore
Investigate
Explain it to yourself
Tell me what you've found
Cannot hide my feelings
If you have them in hand
Take it.

V.O.



A Dream

A while ago
I had an odd dream
That stuck in my
mind.
In the dream I was I
not a man and not
a wolf but a strange
mixture of both. I
lived in a nightmarish
city filled with
people who shunned
me because I was
different. In this
dream I sat in
a dark corner and
watched those that
went by. After a
while
the flow of people
stopped and a hole
opened in the wall
of bodies and a

lone wolf walked
through. I got up
and followed the
wolf as it turned
and left. It lead
me to the edge
of town and
into a dark forest.
After travelling for
only a few minutes,
we came out into
a clearing which
was filled with
wolves. I realized,
with extreme
joy that I was
a wolf.

A.B.





Myriam, 19, is pregnant
Nancy, 14, is with child
Phebee, 20, will soon give birth to her son
Jenny had an abortion
God is sending me a message by making all my
female relatives pregnant: Abstinence!!
Eyes everywhere. what will the neighbors think?
What will Rev. Evens think, say?
Pressure, time: Is it too late to get an abortion?
What if ...What if I die?..

J.V.



We as individuals constantly seek means of expression. For a true expression we must be in touch with our inner selves.

G.D.



I'VE SEEN TOO MUCH

I've seen enough to know
I've seen too much
I've felt the gruling pain
of your unwanted touch.

Its amazing you can reach me
On that pedestal you stand
But the only view I see
Is the back of your strong hand.

It used to be an accident
And apologies you'd bleed
Now to tame that hunger
On my pane you always feed.

It's gone much further
My bruises aren't enough
My friends don't even ask
They know I'll always bluff.

Well it's finally happened
You can't hurt me anymore
There's no more pain inside me
For all my blood is on the floor.

M.H.



HANDS

Skinny pretentious bastard why do I let you
hurt me this way? I need to touch
your hair your eyes your back

your hands
everything

funny tears reality tears
tearing me apart hands building me up again
two dimensional walking paradox a
Moebius strip of hands
Fists of rage shatter your
empty illusions of profundity
fingers cold damp and
bloated as your self sense you sense
nothing your hands destroy as they hurt
let them go your hands are bound
they rage following me into darkness

S.A.

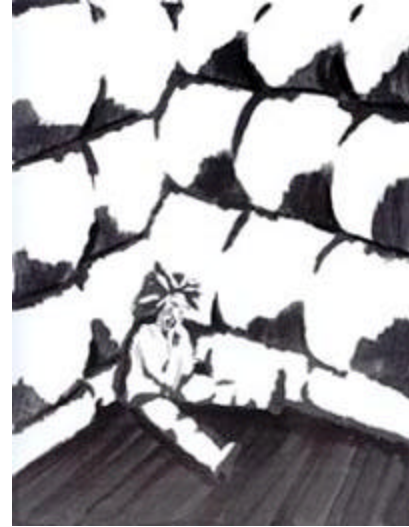


▶
“Quel est le plus fou des deux, le fou ou
alors le fou qui le suit?”

-Ben Kenobi

A person's behaviour is only abnormal
in the eyes of the society she lives in.
Left in their own world, these people
would probably be very, perfectly
happy. But they live in our world...
Is it really better?

G.D.



▲

In high school there used to be a minute of silence for
Remembrance day. It was kind of an awkward moment
because I never knew what to think about. I usually ended
up getting the giggles or something. Now that I am in
Cegep there is no minute of silence so I end up forgetting
it's Remembrance day. It's sad that this day means
so much to my grandparents and so little to me.
This painting is my way of remembering all those
men and women who went to war.

K.W.



▲
When I get self confidence
by solving the problem for
myself. I am very happy

K.S.

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Biographies

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