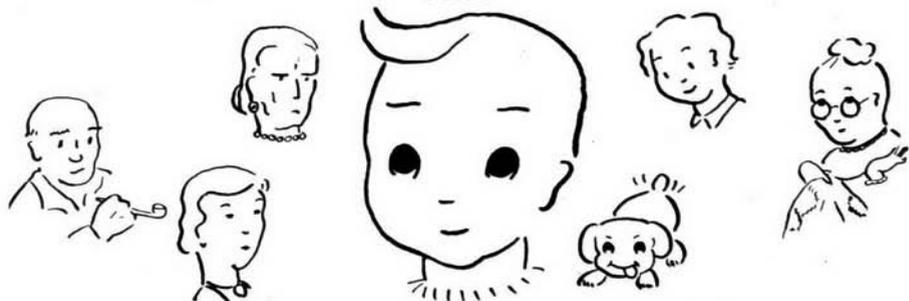


# The Importance of People

Ruth Cunningham

PETER



THIS IS THE STORY of Peter. Or is it?



It may be the story of Grandfather Ebenezer who told wondrous stories of faraway places and times. Some said Grandfather Ebenezer was decidedly queer, touched in the head. He talked of griffins, dragons, and unicorns as though they were just around the corner. Peter knew the old man was a rare and wonderful person.



Maybe this is the story of Grandmother Martha. She sat hour after hour stitching colorful crazy-quilts from bits cut from the gay dresses she'd buy and then be afraid to wear—afraid because the neighbors might laugh at an old lady trying to look like a young peacock. She would let Peter choose samples of crimson, gold, and blue to tuck in his pocket against a lonely moment. She often said, "Color is mood, and mood is color." Peter never quite understood, but he was sure it was a wise, wise statement.



Or maybe this is the story of Peter's father's boss' wife who made life miserable for the boss who made life miserable for Peter's father who

made life miserable for Peter.



Perhaps this is the story of Peter's mother's dog. When Peter's mother was a little girl, she played with a mongrel pup that wriggled all over when he wagged his tail. Peter's mother can never forget the day the puppy was killed. She remembers it so vividly that she says she'll never let a child of hers have a pet. Peter can think of no state closer to heaven than to have a dog to play with, but his mother chases off all the strays he brings home.



And perhaps this is the story of Peter's second-grade teacher, Miss Bishop. Miss Bishop was graduated from college a few years ago. They told her there that she had a high I.Q., a fast reaction time, a good score in tests of general culture, a splendid rating in reading speed and comprehension and, in a word, was sure to be a success. Miss Bishop felt, too, that she would be a success, but she left nothing to chance. She read and re-read the assigned readings she had listed in her college notebook, and tried everything anybody suggested. For example, there was the matter of the language program. She decided she'd have the very best second-grade lan-

guage program in the city, or in the whole state, or, maybe, the best in the entire nation.

She started out by giving tests. She found out some interesting things. For example, Peter couldn't read. Of course she'd known it before, but the test score made it a more final, formidable and unfortunate fact. How could she have a fine second grade program if Peter couldn't read? She couldn't, she decided. Ergo, Peter must read. She began on Peter in earnest and was delighted when he could pronounce some of the words in the primer when she pointed to them. But Peter couldn't talk very well either. For example, one day he burst forth with, "Miss Bishop, them clouds is like pink kittens, ain't they?" She was very patient. She said, "Peter, you know better than that. We don't say 'Them clouds is' or 'ain't.' Now try again." But Peter refused to repeat the sentence; so Miss Bishop concluded he was a stubborn boy, and didn't give him a star for that day. She found it necessary to put a poor mark on his report card.

When Peter saw his report card he decided it was just one of those sad things in life, like not having a dog. When Peter's mother saw it, she cried a little and asked Peter to promise to be a good boy. When Peter's father saw it, he gave Peter a whipping "to beat some of the stubbornness out of him." Peter's father hit a bit harder than usual, because the boss' wife had been meaner than usual to the boss and the boss had been meaner than usual to Peter's father. Of course Miss Bishop didn't know anything about all this, but she was glad to see that Peter was becoming a quiet, obedient boy, and everyday he could pronounce more words in his reader. Miss Bishop now knew she was actually the success she had known she would be.

The day came when Miss Bishop felt the class was ready for some Creative Writing. On that Monday morning she called the class to order and told the children she was going to allow them to write lovely, lovely poetry. They could start by writing about their pets. Peter, with everyone else, set to work to do his best.

This was the result of Peter's efforts:

"I have a mouse as big as a dog and he wags his tail and lives in a hole and he goes away when anybody comes but when I

come he comes out of his hole and wags his tail just like a real dog would."

Miss Bishop collected the papers and read the poems out loud to the class. When Peter's was read, everyone laughed and laughed because it wasn't poetry at all—it didn't have short lines and capital letters, and worst of all, it didn't rhyme. Peter tried to laugh a little, too.



That night when his mouse came to see him after he was in bed, he explained that he was sorry he had told about him and that the children had laughed. The mouse wagged his tail just like a dog and said it was all right but not to do it again. Peter promised, and they played together, just as they did every night.

By the end of May, Peter could pronounce most of the words in the second reader, and he only said "ain't" when he got excited. But Peter didn't get excited often, for now he brought his dog-size mouse to school. When it was poetry time, Peter wrote about the cat that sat on the mat and spat. He'd hurry to get through so he could play games with the mouse, and the mouse wagged his tail just like a dog. Miss Bishop and the children didn't laugh, for they never knew about the mouse.

Or maybe this is the story of Miss Andrews, Peter's third-grade teacher. Miss Andrews liked boys and girls. She liked their ideas and felt it was important they learn to express them, and that they learn to enjoy the ideas of others. It wasn't long before she found out that Peter couldn't read. Oh, he was good at pronouncing the words, but Miss Andrews knew that this wasn't reading. The only stories Peter seemed to understand were the ones about dogs; so she helped him find books with pictures of dogs and easy reading, and, later, stories with harder and harder words.



Peter liked Miss Andrews. One day, when the children were painting, he made a picture of the mouse which wagged its tail. It was a beautiful picture, a very good likeness, Peter felt. The mouse had a crimson body, golden feet, and sky-blue eyes. Some of the children started to laugh but Miss Andrews said it was an in-



teresting painting, and asked Peter to tell her about it. Peter felt a glow inside as he told her all about the games he played with the mouse, how it wagged its tail just like a dog, and used to come to school with him when he was in the second grade.

This is the story of Peter. . . . Or is it?

### Growth Through In-Service Action

(Continued from page 128)

had the privilege of visiting similar curriculum workshops in the teachers colleges. All materials developed by these groups will also be turned over to the curriculum coordinator for distribution to statewide committees.

#### Policies Are Important in Future Plans

During the second year the plans call for the development of more extensive local activity with curriculum staff members aiding local groups in their study programs. Each statewide committee, as well as the several resource committees, plans to present preliminary reports for local study.

Some counties have made detailed plans for this year's work in curriculum study. One county has eight centers geographically located so that a village or city is the center. It is significant to note that these centers are where the rural children will go to high school. Thus first steps in developing a twelve-year program for all these boys and girls are being taken.

The groups built around the eight county centers will meet four times during the year. The school boards are granting four half-days for this purpose. The bulletin *The Task of the School* is to be used for the year's study. Each group will pool its findings from studies made during the year. A county liaison committee will in turn summarize all the reports for the statewide committees and then proceed with plans for the next year.

The Cooperative Educational Planning

Program has been set up as a five-year study but all who are working in study groups realize that curriculum planning is a continuing process and in a dynamic society such as ours the curriculum must change if it is to meet the problems of the day and make plans for the future. Membership will change from time to time; perhaps new committees will be organized. Always guiding the direction of the program are the goals set forth by the early Curriculum Guiding Committee:

- to stimulate widespread study of public education in relation to pre-school and school-age children, older youth, and society so that the educational program may be continuously improved.

- to coordinate the efforts of educators and lay citizens in defining the task of the school today and tomorrow.

- to work with local schools in conducting continuous curriculum studies, aiding teachers in finding solutions to present and emerging curriculum and guidance problems and coordinating the preparation of curriculum guides.

- to help teachers and pupils in cooperatively planning, executing, and evaluating those experiences which will lead most effectively to the attainment of the real purposes of education.

- to aid and stimulate the development of such statewide conditions as will facilitate continued curriculum improvement.

- to promote such interaction with other community groups and agencies as will more fully utilize the total educational resources of the community for the best growth of the child.

Copyright © 1945 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.