

What Is a "Good" Report Card? _____

BETTY IRISH

Although it is not customary editorial practice to use articles which have been published previously, we feel that this "timely allegory" by Betty Irish, elementary coordinator, San Diego County Schools, Calif., which came to our attention a few weeks ago is highly pertinent to this month's issue of EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, and should make us pause for reflection on the type of yardstick by which we may measure our children. We wish to thank the *Parent-Teacher Courier* for permission to publish this article.

LONG AGO, when first the world began, there was a mother. This First Mother had a child who, having reached the age when he should go to school, was sent to First Teacher. First Child attended First School for several weeks, and the time came for First Report Card.

First Teacher gave First Report Card to First Child, and he carried it happily home to First Parent. But First Parent looked sadly at First Report Card, and said, "I do not understand the markings upon this card. Does this card mean that my child is better or poorer than all other children in First School? Does this card mean that First Child reads as well as other children? Does this mean that First Child can ADD?"

So First Mother put on her newest tiger skin and went to call upon First Teacher at the very end of the last hour on Friday afternoon. And First Mother said to First Teacher, "I do not understand the markings on this card." Now, if First Teacher had been a woman of both courage and sagacity, much of the trouble which followed upon her words would have been avoided. But it was the last hour on Friday afternoon, and First Teacher was weary, and her courage was greater than her sagac-

ity. So she said, "First Mother, First Child can sing so sweetly that all the birds stop to listen. All the children are his friends. He is quicker to run than all the others, but slower to read than any child. Therefore he is not UP TO STANDARD. Unless he works very hard and very long he will not PASS. And he cannot ADD, even a little—so, although he is so happy and so kind, and although in time he will grow to read and add, he is not an AVERAGE FIRST GRADER."

So First Mother sadly nodded her head and said, "I see. You could not give him a Good Report Card!"

And First Mother took First Child unto the cave, and she scolded him soundly because he could not add nor read as well as other children. And First Child wept and he hated the other children because they could read and add. And he forgot his music, and threw stones at all the other children to prove that he was UP TO STANDARD. And as the weeks went by he threw his stones straighter and straighter, and hit more and more other children, and grew to hate them all.

Now, if First Teacher had been a woman of greater sagacity on that fateful day so long ago, this is what she

would surely have said to First Mother:

"First Mother, listen and heed! *This is the most important learning of life:* that your child learn to live well with other children. Because it is the most important learning of life, it is the most important learning of the school—for school is a part of life. No child is born with this skill to live well with others, and no child has ever mastered it completely. Each child learns little by little to be kind to others, to do his share of the work, to help, to wait his turn, to say the thing he believes to be true in such a way that no other is hurt thereby. The question to ask is this: Is my child growing every day in his ability to live well with others? Is he growing happily and proudly in this skill? Never can report cards be a yardstick to measure your child against another child—to say 'My child is better than the rest' or 'My child is poorer than the rest.' For each child must be measured by his own yardstick, even as each child must grow at his own rate and in his own pattern.

"*And this is the second important learning of life:* that each must keep his body well and strong in order to live well with other people. Your child must understand how to do this, and he must perform faithfully all that he knows. This knowledge and this skill grow slowly, little by little, and never is the learning finished. And never can the learning be measured except by the child's own yardstick, which shows how much greater that learning is today than it was yesterday. So when your child is growing in his ability to stay well and strong and to help others to do likewise, he is a satisfactory child. He cannot be measured by another's yardstick, for each child will grow in

his own pattern and at his own rate.

"*And this is the third important learning of life:* First Child finds there are many tools he needs to use and to use well as he grows in his skill in living well with others, and as he builds a strong and healthy body. He must read, that he may learn what knowledge others have of living. He must write, that others may share his knowledge. He must use many numbers and record their use. And his reading and writing and counting must be done as well as may be, for on these tools hinge a part of human progress. But even as First Child has learned to run at his own rate, even as he has made friends and kept them in his own way, so must he learn in his own pattern to use these important tools with skill which grows slowly, a growing which is never done.

"And the wise parent measures the growth from day to day and says, 'First Child, you grow well—and we are proud of you, First Father and I.' For a wise parent remembers that, by careful teaching, we can help the child to grow—but we can help him to grow only at his own rate and in his own pattern. We help him to grow only if we help him to *want* to grow. We shape the pattern only if we help him to *want* to shape it.

"A report card is neither a club to beat the child into that pattern, nor is it a measure by which all children may be judged. It is a record of taking stock, so that we may, all of us—First Teacher, First Parent, and First Child—know what has been done, what needs to be done, and the direction now to be taken in the doing. And this is the meaning to be found in the marks on First Report Card."

Copyright © 1947 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.