



Janet Siegler

Teacher of Week Janet Siegler teaches 2nd graders at Maytown about people, crickets

Mrs. Janet (Arthur) Siegler, second grade teacher at Maytown Elementary, believes that education is a "threesome," not just a "twosome." Education is not merely teacher-child, nor is it parent-child; it's parent-child-teacher.

"I think it's good for children to realize that their parents are interested in their work. I try to get everyone involved together."

One way Mrs. Siegler gets parents, children, and teacher involved together is to invite her pupils and their parents to visit her home in Donegal Heights. The parents and children are eager to visit the Sieglers, to see Mr. Siegler's elaborate model trains. Parents call up the Sieglers and make date to view the trains. Each family comes at a separate time, enabling Mrs. Siegler to get to know them all well.

"It helps the children," she says. "It's a big thing for the children to visit us. We have made a lot of lasting friends from these visits."

Mrs. Siegler thinks that the parents in our area are unusual in the interest they show in their children. "I would miss that if I would ever go somewhere else. I don't know whether that would be true somewhere else."

It is clear that for Janet Siegler, education is concerned with relations between people, their feelings and attitudes toward each other.

"I believe that every person is different," says Mrs. Siegler. "People are not good or bad, but different. For example, handicapped people like Louis Braille and Helen Keller are different from other people. We all have different handicaps. There are degrees of being handicapped."

"I once had a little boy in my class who wore a hearing aid. Through him we invited a specialist in hearing problems from the I.U. to come and talk to the children in my class. He taught us a little about sign language."

"Recently, I took a course in sign language, and I am teaching some of it to the children. They learn the alphabet in sign language. Sometimes we spell in sign language. We learn a few words in signs. It makes learning more interesting."

"One little girl is communicating in signs with a deaf child. Another is teaching her father a few words; he works with some people who are hard of hearing or deaf."

"Last spring we went to Middle Creek Conservation Park and took the multi-sensory hiking trail for the blind, where you can smell, touch, taste, and hear as well as see many different things."

"The children felt with their fingers the messages at different locations along the trail."

"Handicapped people are not much different from us. Some people have trouble walking, but I have trouble with something else."

Mrs. Siegler wants her pupils to realize that all people are the same—in being different. She doesn't want her pupils to grow up thinking that some other people are "strange or odd." She tells her pupils the story of Louis Braille

who was blinded as a three-year-old playing with one of his father's tools. When Louis was only 14 years old he invented the raised dots of the Braille alphabet, but for a long time experts ignored his idea because he was only a boy.

The children in Mrs. Siegler's class watch a movie about Helen Keller. When the movie is over, and the lights go up, there are some little, red eyes in the class. "There is nothing wrong with showing some emotion," says Mrs. Siegler.

Mrs. Siegler is not imparting warm feelings just about people to her children. Her classroom is filled with the soothing chirping of crickets, kept in a small aquarium in the back of the room. The children brought the crickets in and are feeding them, apples and lettuce, also dogfood. Mrs. Siegler says that the crickets did not sing so much at first, but as they got to know the children better they lost their shyness and started to chirp.

In another container, the children are raising mealworms in the dust of cornmeal. The mealworms are also eating apples and lettuce. One of these days the children will behold with their own eyes the miraculous metamorphosis of the worms into large black beetles.

Learning is vital in Mrs. Siegler's brightly decorated classroom. The walls are covered with pictures, all with an educational and stimulating message.

Learning in her class is creative and purposeful. "Why should anyone want to learn to write a letter?" she asks. Each of pupils writes a letter for a good reason. A letter is written

during Fire Prevention Week to Smoky the Bear, applying for a position as a junior forest ranger. In child an individually addressed letter containing a junior forest ranger badge, a membership card, and stickers.

"Reasons for doing things are important, even for second graders," says Mrs. Siegler.

All the teachers in the early grades cooperate in a school fair where old books and drawing are sold for toy money which the children have been receiving as rewards for learning. Learning is motivated—and the children learn arithmetic by making change in their purchases.

Reading and writing are taught together in Mrs. Siegler's class, and the writing is often original, composed by the child. The children make up a lot of their own reading material in small groups. One group composed a story of a school bus driver who let the children on the bus do whatever they liked. They sang and shouted, giving the driver a headache. They ate and threw their food; the bus was a "mess." There was moral in the fable, of course. The anarchy on the bus, the children concluded "drove them bananas."

Here is a poem composed by a group including Jimmy Dickinson, Jane Endslow, Amy Maguire, Michelle Nissley, and Niki Wivell:

"What is Blue?"

Blue is the color of
The great big sky,
The rain
And also a blueberry pie.
Blue is the ocean
And the bluebirds that sing
The color of people's eyes
And cold, cold lips that sting.

Beat L-S!

*The codfish lays ten thousand eggs,
The lonely hen but one.
The codfish never cackles when her laying's done.
And so we scorn the codfish,
The humble hen we prize.
Which only goes to prove, my friend,
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