

4-1-1965

## Round Robin

Dorothy E. Smith

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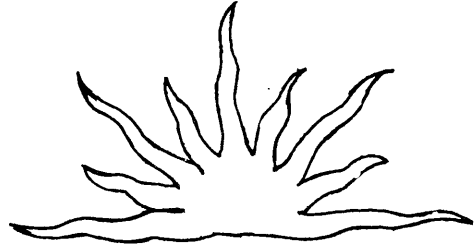
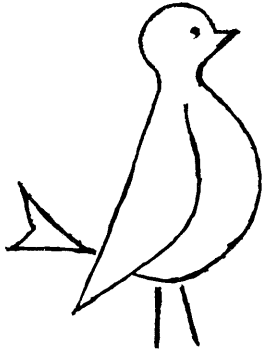
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### Recommended Citation

Smith, D. E. (1965). Round Robin. *Reading Horizons*, 5 (3). Retrieved from [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading\\_horizons/vol5/iss3/8](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol5/iss3/8)

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## ROUND ROBIN

*Dorothy E. Smith, Editor*

Now that spring has made its reluctant—but inspiring—appearance it is difficult to remember how we felt two months ago when the snow fell. And fell. And fell. It was on February 25 and 26 that the Michigan Reading Association Conference was held in Lansing, Michigan. Sister M. Bernetta who is President-Elect of the association, has written her summary reactions to that convention and, incidentally, the effect the weather had on it. We are most proud to present her report to you.

Dear Editor:

During the worst snow storm in over thirty years for the southern part of the lower peninsula of Michigan, less than one-third of the usual number of people attended the Michigan Reading Association Convention. The five hundred or more who attended were applauded as pioneers and heroes of the storm.

We were informed in Grand Rapids that the impending storm would make it too precarious to travel on the first day scheduled for the meetings and that we must go the night before on the bus. When Sister M. Paula and I arrived at East Lansing Bus Station, it was locked and the storm was raging with a blizzard of snow. The only place to take refuge was in a telephone booth. We called a taxi and they promised to come, but over a half hour passed, and we called again and they promised to come as soon as possible.

This was at 8:30 p.m. and at 9:00 p.m. we were still waiting when a Greyhound Bus unloaded several more people. Among them was a very young child. We invited them in the telephone booth but they did not have the collapsibility of coeds and declined. We invited

the little child and she eagerly came and I tried to keep her from shivering in the cold.

We grew very friendly and she was most outgoing and talkative. "What is your name?" I asked. "Betsy Brzeinski," she replied. "Where are you from?" and she answered, "Denver, Colorado."

Here was the daughter of the man I wished to interview for my introduction of him at the Thursday luncheon of the Michigan Reading Association. I went out of the booth to welcome Dr. Brzeinski and informed him of my desire for an interview. He told me that Betsy would give even more than I needed to know which was true. He was happy that I did not tell all she told me. We have some secrets yet.

Betsy and I had an interesting chat. When I asked what her Daddy did, Betsy informed me that he worked at the University and gave speeches.

Dr. Brzeinski is Director of Research for the Denver Reading Studies and has been since 1957. A very solid scholarly but practical consideration was given by him of the controversial issue of parents teaching the young to read. They not only know that the young can be taught but in the Denver research a searching examination of all the evidence that will help to answer the question: "Should the young child be taught reading?" is being carried on.

Parents are presented special helps and urged to avoid pressure of any kind. The ordinary time table does not exceed thirty minutes per week and probably not more than five minutes a day for reading readiness work. Parents are encouraged to read to their children about an hour a week at very brief requested intervals. The "School of the Mother's Knee" was painted in an attractive manner as well as the benefits of a "one to one relationship." I was skeptical before but am much wiser now. There are so many variables that one lives and learns even at a ripe old age.

Another main speaker was Dr. Bill Martin, Jr., author of the Little Owl Books. He fascinated the audience as a born and grandmother-made story teller. Dr. Martin said his grandmother's anguish and simple pleasures were all part and parcel of her story heritage. The family wore the pages thin of A. A. Milne's, *When We Were Very Young*. In a most delightful and dynamic manner several poems were given such as: "Speak Gently Spring" to contrast with our weather, and "The King's Breakfast."

In fact most every word of Dr. Martin had the unction of poetry. Well did he practice what he said. "The miracle of language should never be separated from the miracle of man." The teacher should

be an appreciator and guide and have a built-in radar to give warning of when one should enjoy and appreciate and when it was time for skills. There are always greater values than the text in the child and the teachers. Generosity of taste and appetite for language will sharpen the taste for work and make reading a joy.

Children are the purest of all linguists. What better ear training than in "Sing a Song of Sixpence." In it there are not only words but real language. "Life lifting language is man's kinship with greatness." Man alone has language.

Teachers need to search our souls for poetry; fill hearts with beauty and get in tune with souls of God's creation: "Life has Loveliness to Sell," "The Lord is My Shepherd."

Mrs. Dorothy Kendall Bracken is President-Elect of I.R.A. and she gave an excellent presentation of "Individual Difference in Reading Development." In taking a historical look at individual differences and the teaching of reading it is not the value of one method such as the revival of individualized reading and self selection versus basal reading. It is as Nila B. Smith says that it is not one or the other that provides most for individual differences but the good of each which becomes better than either.

There are over nine groups of individual differences in reading. Those of normal capacity, high capacity and low capacity can each be divided into those who are moving as they should; second, those who are doing less than they should; third, those who are doing more than it appears they could. Charts of reading scores of grade four showed a range of reading levels from grade two through grade eight. A seventh grade class had the range from grade two to grade twelve. A college group had the range of twenty grades from grade four to the twenty-fourth grade level.

There are other kinds of differences than rates of learning. The environmental differences are vast; so are the physical and psychological differences. Diagnostic tests should be well analyzed for skill differences that do not show up in scores of the same average. In the reaction to various methods there are great differences and we need to be eclectic and inclusive in our methods. It is not a matter of one or another but the teacher should have a repertoire and play it by ear as the child reacts.

Ways of dealing with individual differences are to vary the question given to each child according to his needs; vary the assignments according to group needs; use multi level materials; study many new

materials and use when and where they help. All this and more was given in a very interesting and enlightening manner.

The preceding is but a skimpy resume of the principal speakers from Denver, New York City and Dallas. They were excellent, I thought. Also, our own fair state of Michigan has so many people who are outstanding in the field of Reading and the Language Arts at all levels of instruction. The sectional meetings were of very high quality and were very practical. Because of the limits of space in *Reading Horizons* and time in God's world we will just indicate that all of you participants made it an excellent meeting in spite of the limitations of stormy weather.

Most of all did I admire the skill and adaptability of our fine President of M.R.A., Doctor William Durr. He quickly changed his role to fit in with emergency presentations for the absent snowbound members. The chalkboards were filled with cancellations but a companion board was filled with substitutions. We missed our absent members. Those present said they had a very fine meeting and were repaid for the sacrifices they made in coming.

Please all order better weather for next year. Keep this idea in our prayers. God bless you.

Sister M. Bernetta, O.P.  
 President-Elect of Michigan  
 Reading Association  
 Aquinas College  
 Grand Rapids