



Children's Folklore

If you have ever tried to ask a group of children what they are doing only to have them run away, you have encountered the community of children. A teacher who turns to write a lesson on the chalk board to the accompaniment of giggles and flying airplanes is dealing with the community of children.

Best friends, blood-bonded clubs, play groups and organizations as elaborate as the S.E. Washington Boys' Football League, are all manifestations of children bonding together to explore the unknown, to share information, to organize their play and to feel some security and privacy from the demanding world of adults. The content of their activities is made rich with children's dreams, curiosities and challenges, faced as they are with the prospect of growing up one day themselves.

Boys and Ball Games

Kate Rinzler

Children have always imitated adults in their play, enacting scenes of work and recreation. For generations, ball games have been a major community recreation. Highlighted by the mass media, ball games draw families together to talk excitedly about their favorite teams and players. Whether played by adults or enjoyed by families as a spectator sport, ball games provide images of status and success that motivate children's play. They preoccupy the thoughts of many a would-be athlete in the classroom, elicit hours of exhausting practice, provide themes of children's folk-art and give rise to feats of community organizing.

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The Ball Game in Children's Art

Sports events are often the subject of highly prized children's drawings. The drawings may be collected and taped to a bedroom wall or given to friends. While they often represent the expression of an individual, it was a surprise to find that some drawings represent the shared reminiscences of friends.

Kevin Boyd, master artist, and Rodney Day, his friend and artist-apprentice, explained a basketball drawing they had done together. "This was the All-Star Game on TV between the East and the West. They had chosen players to go against each other. This is where #22, John Drew, shoots a jump shot over Darnell Hillman and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. These two men are trying to get the rebound. And #20 for the West side is



trying to block the shot. Julius Erving, #6, from the East side, is trying to block #20 so he won't block the shot. And #36 for the West fouls #44, George Gervin, for the East side. And the East is leading 55 to 45."

Kevin and Rodney spoke animatedly, pleased that their classmates crowded around to hear about their private world of sports: during basketball season, they told us, they met at Kevin's house to lie on the living room floor and draw as they talked about games from memory. When they had thus drawn and dramatized the actions of their favorite players and reviewed the highlights of the game, they wrote the score at the top of the page. Kevin had a list of players' names and numbers copied from the sports page.

This kind of drawing activity (the detailed picturing of specific players, the recollecting of a particular game as it is being drawn, the writing of a final score at the top of the page, and the apprenticeship of one friend to another) exists as a tradition among black boys in Washington, D.C.

The Ball Game in Children's Community Organizing

In addition to works of art, ball games stimulate feats of children's community organizing. For example, Thomas Hicks, graduate of Hine Junior High, has been using his social skills since he was 9 years old to organize football seasons in Southeast Washington, D.C. Each summer he and his friends reconstitute the Boys' Football League of Southeast D.C., elaborating

with great imagination and devotion upon the theme of a football season. At first they had only a play group. Then Thomas signed up a neighborhood sports hero as their coach. Soon the boys decided that they needed other teams to compete with, so Thomas sought out other play groups and helped them to get coaches. The teams thus created played their season on different turfs every Saturday evening of a summer, culminating their competition with a super bowl. Over the years, teams waxed and waned; coaches, managers and coordinators came and went; but the Boys' Football League carried on.

The boys enlisted the help of their girlfriends, cousins, and families. The girls collected, choreographed and performed more than 30 cheers and put on bake sales to buy football equipment. The mothers catered a grand football banquet at the end of each season. And the boys contributed 50 cents a week to buy trophies for themselves, to be presented at the banquet by their coach.

Thomas became team historian, collecting statistics on each player and each game which, after 6 years, he typed up as the *History of the Southeast Skins*. It included articles on players' strengths and how they acquired nicknames, and photographs of players and cheerleaders.

The over-arching fantasy of being football stars infused their dreams. One boy said he dreamed strategy while another said he dreamed that he was playing for the Redskins. Their vision of themselves as stars is illus-

trated by a fragment of sportscasting from one team member who volunteered to announce for a game that was videotaped.

"Thomas Hicks is bringing his team into a huddle again. He has a good arm and a good ability to throw the ball when his team is down in the hole. Now they are having a little discussion on the field. They seem to be getting themselves together. They are breaking out of the huddle and the ball is snapped. The ball is picked up by Thomas Hicks. He's waiting for his blocking—decides to go around the end. Look at how smart the quarterback is! When the play is broken he just gets his legs together and runs it in no time. And that's the game! Thomas Hicks has just scored the last touchdown for the Jets. But the Jets have still lost to their opponents. And that's all for the day, ladies and gentlemen!"

At the Festival we will be examining children's community organization and games, and you will have the opportunity to share personally in their activities.

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