

and room cleaning! (*RALPH's proscenium light dims to black and he exits.*)

MISS SHIELDS. It will count heavily toward your final semester grade. Choose an appropriate subject and limit it properly. Now, what are the four purposes of a theme?

CHILDREN'S VOICES (*in unison*). "To inform, to describe, to persuade, to tell a story."

MISS SHIELDS. That's right. For this assignment, write a theme to inform or persuade. Your choice. Single page. Watch your margins. Since it's the holiday season, this will be your only homework assignment for all of next week. But with two weekends and five school days, I expect excellent work. Questions? (*Bell rings.*) Dismissed.

(*Lights crossfade: down on MISS SHIELDS, up on apron D. Fence rolls back into place as HELEN and ESTHER JANE enter DR, walking home from school, moving DL as they talk.*)



HELEN. Know what Roxane said?

ESTHER JANE. What?

HELEN. Roxane said Ralph Parker likes you.

ESTHER JANE. Really? Roxane said that? (*HELEN nods. After a pause.*) I think he's cute. Don't you think he's cute?

HELEN. I like older men.

ESTHER JANE. Older?

HELEN. Sixth-graders.

ESTHER JANE (*clearly impressed*). Oh! (*Pause.*) Have you picked a subject for your theme?

HELEN. No. Something about politics, maybe.

ESTHER JANE. Maybe I will, too.

HELEN. Are you Democrat or Republican?

ESTHER JANE (*uncertainty, then, with conviction*). Presbyterian.



(*They exit DL, crossing past RALPHIE, FLICK and SCHWARTZ, who enter DR and move DL.*)

SCHWARTZ. You see that, Ralph?

RALPHIE. What?

SCHWARTZ. Esther Jane was lookin' at you.

FLICK. I thought she was lookin' at me.

SCHWARTZ. Why would a girl look at you? (*SCHWARTZ pokes FLICK affectionately as he crosses to RALPHIE.*)

FLICK. Hey, that's my sore ...

SCHWARTZ. You still gettin' a BB gun for Christmas?

RALPHIE. No. They think I'd shoot my eye out.

SCHWARTZ (*incredulous*). Man! How do they come up with these ideas? (*RALPHIE shrugs. SCHWARTZ pulls a new copy of Open Road for Boys from his backpack.*) You seen the new ad? It's all about cowboys not givin' up and how great the Red Ryder BB gun is. (*RALPHIE takes the proffered magazine.*) There. See? It's a whole story.

RALPHIE (*in awe*). Wow.

FLICK. Farkas! Run!

(*FARKAS runs on from DL as FLICK, SCHWARTZ and RALPHIE run DR and exit to music. FARKAS pursues. SCHWARTZ and FLICK reenter immediately DR, chased by FARKAS. As they reach the proscenium, FARKAS grabs FLICK and ALL exit DL. Music fades.*)