

WYSE
Pamphlets on Art Teaching. No. 2

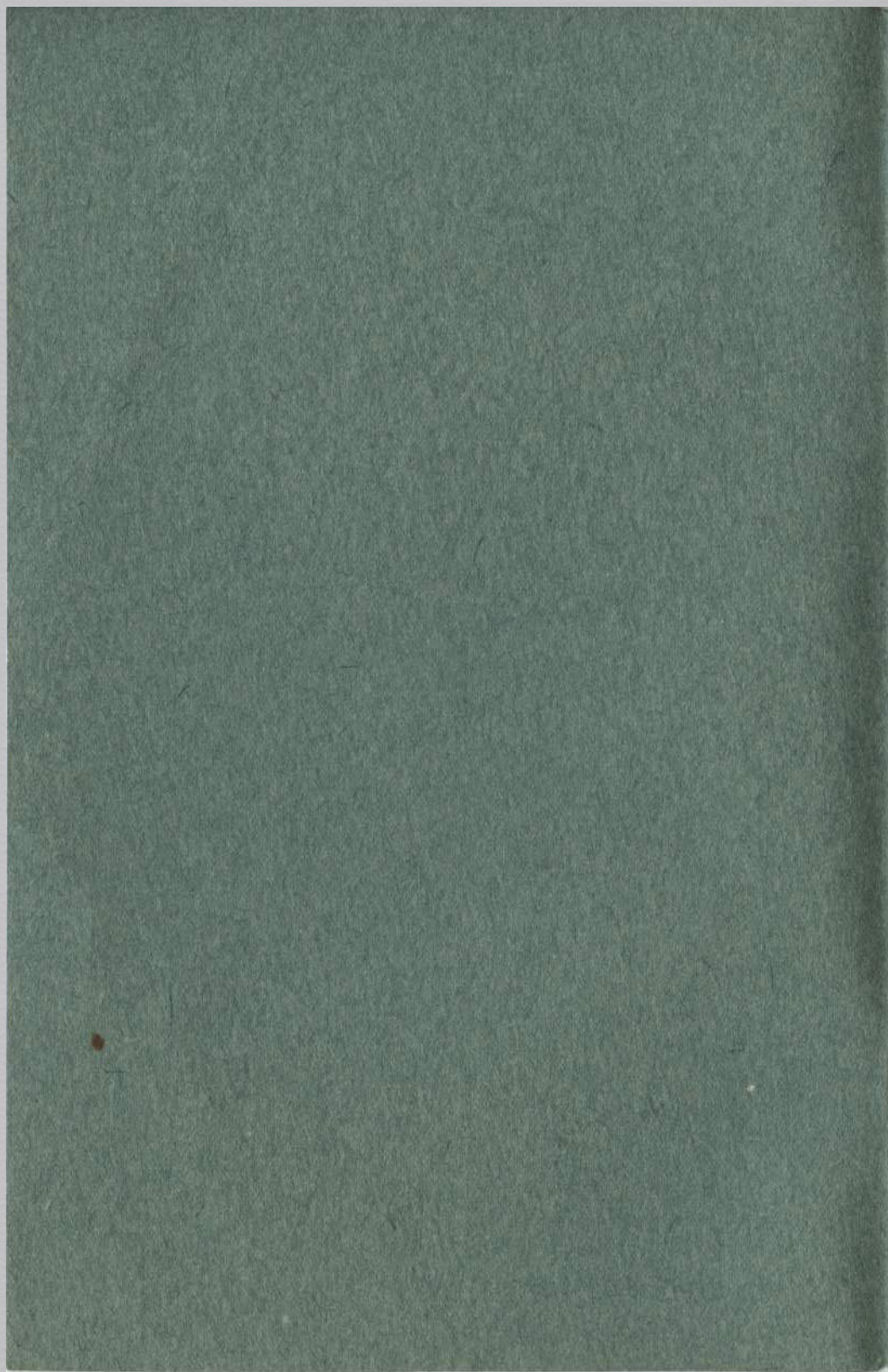
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MEMORY AND IMAGINATIVE DRAWING

By HENRY T. WYSE

EDINBURGH: ANDREW BAXENDINE & SON,
15 CHAMBERS STREET.

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MEMORY AND IMAGINATIVE DRAWING.

GENERAL.

ALL drawing is, strictly speaking, drawing from memory, whether the representation is made direct from one fixed position and from reality, or indirectly from memories of appearances stored in the mind. The impressions have been received in both cases from reality, the lapse of time being merely longer in the second case than in the first. This difference in time between observation and representation has very important results. Direct observation and immediate representation tends to produce a pictorial imitation of appearances. Indirect representation from memory allows, indeed necessitates, arrangement, composition, the exercise of personal taste or the want of it. The first is a means of acquiring a knowledge of form, tone and colour, the second an opportunity of expressing ideas by the same means.

HISTORICAL.

Making pictures direct from reality is a growth of less than three hundred years; painting from memory goes back to the beginning of time. Experts estimate that representation by means of outline began about 15,000 years ago, and that Egyptian painting, in outlines filled with colours, goes back to 3,500 B.C. Light and shade was first employed by the early Greek painters about 500 B.C. Perspective was only vaguely understood in the thirteenth century. All pictures before the sixteenth century were made entirely from memory. During that century artists began to make studies (but not pictures) from nature; those studies or sketches were used to help their memories while they were

painting their pictures. Painting pictures directly from nature originated with the Dutch and Flemish painters in the sixteenth century.

THE MODERN CHILD.

The children of our own day repeat the practices of their ancestor—primitive man. As he drew "out of his head," so do they. No child away from a class room draws from reality, or draws with the intention of making a pictorial imitation to be compared with the original; he draws "out of his head" to please himself, just as primitive man did. This natural desire for self-expression should be encouraged, and may be trained by means of memory drawing. The child's interest is not so much in the thing he represents as in his picture of it, and this is the reason why the child always concentrates his attention on his drawing and never on the object he is drawing from. His picture has to agree with an idea of the object in his mind, and the object in front of him he regards as merely a reminder as to what that idea is. That is why he so seldom consults it. The child is so self-centred that if his drawing pleases his mind he is satisfied. In the same way the artist paints to satisfy his own mind, but, as his mind is less self-centred, he realises that his pictures have also to appeal to the minds of others. In both cases the intention is self-expression, not imitation. The artist divides his art activities between the study of appearances on the one hand and their function in enabling him to express his ideas on the other hand. The two activities for him are usually quite separate.

The child draws entirely "out of his head" and naturally away from school, and very unnaturally from objects during the drawing lesson. Drawing from reality is a means, not an end. The child concentrates on the end (which is self-expression), he is not interested in the means of acquiring the necessary knowledge of form and colour. When drawing from reality and drawing from memory are both practised, however, in the class-room, the child realises that the one

is complementary to the other. In memory drawing he has an opportunity of expressing his ideas, and by means of drawing from reality he enlarges his knowledge of form, tone and colour, which enables him to express his ideas more completely. It is certain that in the process of drawing from memory much that is unessential is forgotten, and that only those aspects of appearance which impress themselves on the mind will be remembered and emphasised in the representation. Such emphasis is the principal reason why photography so seldom becomes art. The modern double lens camera over-emphasises all it records, and the mind is irritated by this unnecessary detail, whereas the artist omits what is unessential, and presents his subject in a simpler manner. Memory drawing tends to become imaginative drawing, in which the child fills out the insufficiency of his memory by invention. The arrangement of the various items in his memory or imaginative drawing also introduces composition, which is the appropriate placing of the items of the picture. The methods which may be adopted by teachers of memory drawing admit of much experiment and observation.

METHODS OF INSTRUCTION.

Three different methods of teaching the subject are recognised as suitable. These are :—

- (1) Memorising from a fixed position *without drawing*, then immediately drawing from memory.
- (2) Memorising from a fixed position *by drawing*, then after an interval of days drawing from memory.
- (3) Memorising *by ordinary observation* from many positions, then after an interval of days drawing from memory.

First Method.

In the first method the lesson is given entirely in the class-room. This method is based upon *limited* observation. Limited opportunity of observation produces concentration,

When the children know that the object will be lost to their view in a limited time, they realise that it is now or never for them. The lesson appeals to them as a game in which they pit their powers of observation against time. This arouses the combative instinct which is usually very active in children, and which, if directed in the right channels, makes for self-reliance and character.

Suppose the object to be a brown earthenware teapot with a white paper background and foreground. The object should be placed in such a position that every member of the class can see it clearly. If more than one object is necessary, they should be of the same type, that is with spouts and handles, such as coffee-pots and kettles. It should be possible for the teacher to obtain all the data in reference to proportion from the pupils by question and answer. The two main proportions "over all," extreme width and extreme height including spout and handle, should be estimated by each child for itself. As no two children occupy the same place, *no two drawings can be alike*. The importance of the two main proportions being right should be emphasised, as much of the subsequent failure or success of the representation depends upon these.

Their attention should next be directed to the different parts of the object and their uses. The body for holding the tea, the spout through which it is poured into the cup, the handle for lifting the teapot, and the lid for keeping the tea hot. After the uses of the parts have been considered, their proportions and positions next call for attention. The body being the bulkiest part, must be considered first, whether it is broad and low, narrow and high, or equal in breadth and height, the form of its outside shape (contour), and its position in relation to spout and handle. The spout, its position to the left, to the right, or in front of the body, has next to be considered, and it is just here that the difference between a drawing memorised from many positions and one memorised from one fixed position is realised. In the first case a generalised drawing will be made in which the characteristic

forms of each part of the object will be shown. In the second case a *portrait* is expected. Thus no child, if asked to draw a teapot without immediate reference to the object, would show the spout and handle, except in profile, and yet a certain number of children in the present lesson will see the spout and handle pointing to or away from them. All primitive drawings present the characteristic views of objects, showing that in memory drawing the mind selects those appearances which it feels will be most explanatory in its representations. This is instanced in the case of early Egyptian pictures, where the characteristic profile or side view of the face, the front view of the body, and the profile view of the legs and feet are always presented. Thousands of years elapsed before the uncharacteristic attitudes were employed in pictures, incidentally proving that drawing from nature is the growth of a very few centuries. Those uncharacteristic views of spouts and handles must, however, be faced by the children and the difficulties attacked and conquered. This may be done by noticing whether the spout and handle appear to right or left of the body or in front of it, whether it is entirely or only partly in front. It will be noticed that the spout is inserted low in the body, and that its other end is usually on the level of the lid. The point of insertion and the position of its upper end in relation to the body will fix the positions of the beginning and end of the spout, while the curved form of the spout lies between. The drawing of the handle may be treated in the same way. The usual questions in relation to the *apparent* width of ellipses at different levels will have to be considered, and especially the apparently small width of the lid and its characteristic knob. After those points have been discussed and the children feel reasonably sure that they have memorised the form of the whole and its parts, the object should be covered by a sheet of brown paper or a cloth, and the memory drawings made. The amount of time necessary for this depends upon the complexity of the object and the age of the children. The wise teacher, while allowing

sufficient time, is quick to notice that air of having "nothing to do" which comes over a class when they have done all they can.

When no more can be done from memory, the object is again exposed to view. The children now criticise their own drawings, memorising any alterations to be made, and noting the darks and lights of the object, in relation to the tones of the background and foreground. They may notice that the reflected lights are brighter and whiter than the white paper background and foreground. To obtain this brightness they will realise that it may be necessary to represent the foreground and background by a grey tone with their pencils, and the darkness of the tone can easily be judged by half closing the eyes when comparing the different parts of object and background and foreground. It is presumed that the children are working with soft black pencils, as an ordinary H.B. pencil is quite useless in shading. The children will readily notice that some parts of the object are very light, some parts very dark, and some neither light nor dark (half tone). The distorted reflections of the windows will be recognised on the projecting parts of the teapot, they will also notice that the white foreground is reflected on the under side of the teapot. This seems a good deal to memorise at one time, but it must be remembered that the eye and mind grasp the significance of form and tone more rapidly than a written or printed description of them. The object is now covered for a second period, during which the memorised corrections of form are made and the light and shade recorded. The children should understand that the outlines should be absorbed in the process of shading, and not be visible in the completed representation. A third and last exposure of the object should now be made, with a final criticism by the teacher, who should direct the children's attention to their weaknesses of memory and expression, not forgetting to commend them on the successes of their efforts. The best representation should be exhibited on the black-board, so that all may see it.

The question of the size of drawings is one of considerable interest. Generally speaking the complete representation should be made, if possible, in *one* lesson. Drawing an object at one lesson and shading it at the next, breaks up continuity of observation and representation. The drawing should be made of a small size, if this is necessary to permit its completion in one lesson. The pencil is not a suitable tool for large scale work ; when the latter is necessary, charcoal or a suitable brush should be employed.

Second Method.

The second kind of memory drawing consists in memorising by drawing from reality, and repeating the representation from memory after the lapse of some considerable time. The object to be drawn from memory is announced by the teacher at the end of one lesson, and the memory drawing is made in class on the next drawing day. The object is drawn from reality in the child's own home and the same points which were emphasised by the teacher during the first method lesson are looked for when the representation is being made direct from the object away from the classroom. The memory drawing made in the class is a memory *not of the object* but of the child's own drawing of it. The conditions of criticism are novel, as the teacher has not seen the object, though the children have, and he must needs be cautious in his judgments. What has to be synchronised in this case is not the object with the drawing, but the teacher's mind with the child's, and reason rather than observation is of the greater importance here. It will be observed that all the objects will be represented in their characteristic forms, which are usually profiles. The children will realise that the drawing is to satisfy the teacher's mind, they will therefore choose the characteristic and self-explanatory position.

Third Method.

In the third method of drawing from memory, the object to be represented is not specially observed beforehand and

the children have no opportunity of preparing for it. Suppose the children are asked to represent a house. This is something with which they are all quite familiar, and as the house is no particular one, each child has a certain freedom of choice. What is required is not a portrait of a house, but a picture of one. The child makes a representation which must agree with his own idea, and as his idea often includes the furnishings and inmates, these often appear in his picture as if seen through transparent walls. Children seldom forget the walls, chimneys, windows, and doors, yet they often forget the end of the house, which, if remembered, is usually unlike in form. Such drawings are usually imaginative, the expression of an idea (their idea) rather than of a thing. In this third method it is advisable to ask the children to draw from memory one thing at a time, such as a house, a man, a woman or a child, and the exercise will not carry the child's knowledge any further, unless after seeing the drawings the teacher discusses them with the children. The characteristics of headdress and clothes should be commented upon, and due comparisons made between the appearances of men, women, and children. It would be a very enlightening exercise for the children to draw a man, woman, and a child in a row and beside each other. By this means the child acquires a personal knowledge of forms which it can use to express action in Imaginative Drawing.

STRAIGHT LINED OBJECTS.

So far no comment has been made upon the drawing of straight lined objects from memory. This offers a special difficulty not only to children but also to adults. Perspective was only vaguely understood even in the thirteenth century, and gradually developed till the camera confirmed the growing visual experiences of scientists and artists. Such nations as the Chinese and Japanese practically neglected the subject in their pictures. What the eye sees and the mind knows are usually contradictory, and the mind is generally the dominating factor. Knowledge of real and

apparent form have to be reconciled, and this is always a slow process. Drawing of real form should be linked up with drawing of apparent form. A moderately thick volume may serve as a first example. The actual form of its surfaces should be drawn by plan and elevation, and the apparent form drawn afterwards from observation and from memory. The book should be laid on the teacher's table so that all the children may see it. The plan (looking from above) is an oblong, the elevation (or front view) looking from in front is an oblong showing the length and thickness of the book, and the end view shows the width and thickness. The three drawings should be made to a small scale, the plan first, the front elevation above it, and the end view to the right or left on the same level. All the angles are right angles and the relative lengths are correct. The children will appreciate that those three drawings show the real shape of the book seen from three different points of view. The object drawing or perspective view is made from one fixed point of view, and each child will realise that his view is different from every other child's in the class. It will be seen that the horizontal lines of the book now appear sloping to right and left, and that the top of the book looks much narrower than it really is. It is not necessary to describe in detail the methods of teaching object drawing, as this is well-known to all teachers of drawing. The exercise in memory drawing will consist in drawing say a box of similar shape, or a child's box-cart with small wheels, in the same position without seeing the object.

CONVERGENCE OF LINES.

The convergence of lines is a fact of appearance which cannot be omitted in any discussion on memory drawing. This convergence is quite well known among children, though they often neglect to employ it while drawing straight-lined objects in the class-room. Children, if questioned on the subject, will readily volunteer the information that tramway and railway rails seem to get closer together the further they

retire into the distance, and that this convergence is also seen in the horizontal lines of buildings. This appearance of convergence and its concomitant of apparent diminution are the two principal modifications of appearance which it is necessary the child should remember in connection with memory drawing involving straight lines. Photographs of local buildings and streets may be used to accustom the eyes and minds of the children to those appearances, and it is an advantage to have those prints on the walls of the school-room at such a height that the children can consult them easily. The question of apparent diminution of size may be elucidated by questions such as the following:—Whether does a boy who is near you *appear* larger or smaller than a boy at the far end of the street? Is the moon large or small? Why does it look so small? Do birds really get smaller as they fly away from you, or are they really the same size as when near you? Is an aeroplane the same size when flying as when near you? Any pictures or photographs which illustrate this principle of diminution should be shown to the children, and they should be encouraged to look for similar appearances in the picture papers and on the screen of the cinema. The pupils may be asked to bring any prints which illustrate *convergence* and *diminution*. Exercises in the drawing of a half round tunnel may be given, or in the drawing of a wide road with telegraph poles on each side of it. Attention should be directed to the fact that the upright lines of lamp posts, sides of buildings, and telegraph poles always appear upright in a picture. Such drawings should be to a small scale and should be diagrams to illustrate the principles and impress them on the minds of the children. It must not be forgotten that, if children are allowed to draw objects without instruction, they will remain in the mental position of primitive man. Modern knowledge is built upon generations of experience, and it were futile to imitate the methods in common use at the beginning of time. Care must be taken, however, not to do the child's thinking for him, and he is usually ready to respond, if his mind is

judiciously awakened. Other methods of memory drawing will suggest themselves. An interesting method is for the teacher to dictate the different parts of a well-known object, and for the children to draw them one by one. This might be called constructive drawing, and the following will illustrate the method. The teacher may ask the pupils to draw a watering-can. By question and answer, he will find out that the most important part is the body, which holds the water, the spout which is usually straight—as this is the easiest form in making a metal spout—the rose for distributing the water, the two handles and their uses, the half cover and its use, and the metal ground-rim. In discussing those different parts the children will call the images of them to their minds, and will respond by making a memory drawing of the can. No particular position has been mentioned in connection with the drawing, and it will be found that each detail is shown in its most characteristic form. A second exercise may consist in drawing the same can with the spout towards or away from the draughtsman. Other objects, such as a round three-legged stool, or an oblong stool, a child's wooden horse, a chair, or a table, or a closed or an open door, will readily suggest themselves to the teacher as being suitable subjects.

IMAGINATIVE DRAWING.

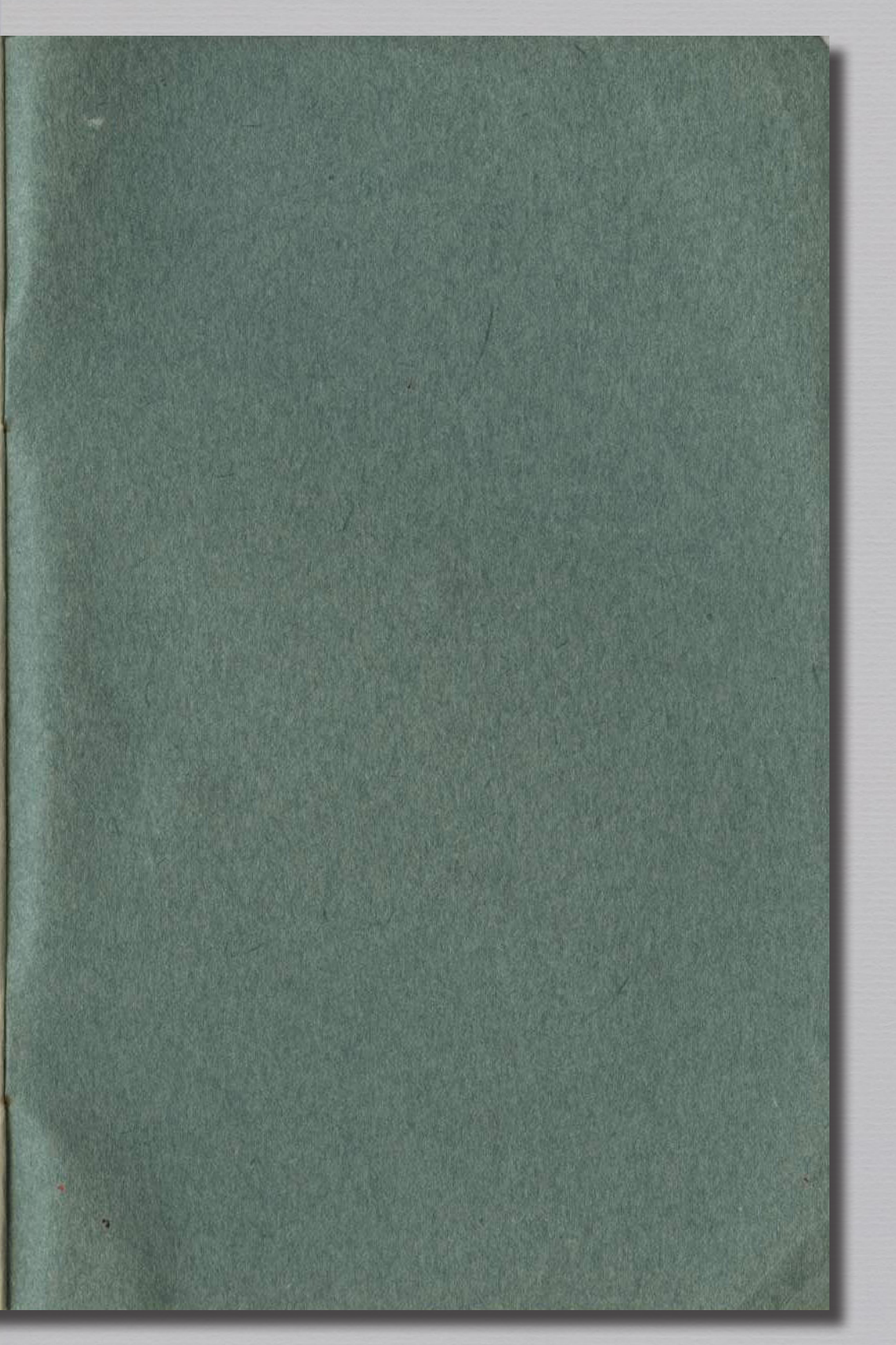
It has been shown that object drawing from reality and object drawing from memory are really a means of storing the mind with the raw material of which pictures are made; and children left to themselves will naturally utilise this knowledge when "drawing out of their heads." Children's imaginative drawing or picture making is usually ineffective because, though the child has the desire to express himself in form and colour, he usually has not the necessary knowledge and technique. The acquirement of these would at first sight seem to be beyond the average child, but it has been proved by experiment that the capacity to portray scenes from imagination is quite as common as any other

form of mental capacity. What is required to develop this power is sympathy, encouragement, and judicious instruction. Children, like adults, are chary of revealing their thoughts in speech, or in form and colour, and, unless they can count upon a sympathetic understanding, the expression of their imagination will remain dormant. Provided that a child has ideas to express (and all children have), he must understand how to express them materially, and, so far as pictorial expression is concerned, this involves the question of composition or arrangement. Composition or arrangement is necessary so that the picture will be understood by others. Without definite instructions to the contrary, a young child arranges the figures necessary for his story in a row, one after the other, usually putting the most important person at the front, followed by the others of less and less importance. This is the exact method followed by the early Egyptians, and is the natural one. The result is a processional frieze, and while it is usually dignified and decorative, it is seldom a convincing representation of the idea. The child sets down the items as they occur to him in the order of their importance or interest; he does not arrange his figures as they would naturally occur in reality.

Class teachers who have not specialised in Art expression might feel embarrassed if asked to give a lesson upon pictorial composition, but need not feel so when they realise that pictorial composition is really commonsense applied to picture making. Suppose the children are asked to make a picture entitled "Going to School." This is a subject with which they are perfectly familiar, as they and their companions are the figures which would appear in such a picture. They have plenty opportunity of studying the appearance of their fellows, the hats and caps they wear, for the girls, large wide hats, close-fitting fur and knitted caps, high and low hats, straw and cloth hats, wide-brimmed, narrow-brimmed, and no-brimmed hats; curly and straight hair, long, short, single and double pig-tailed hair, hair with and without ribbons, and "bobbed" hair. Girls with long coats,

short skirts, pinafores and jumpers, with stockings or socks, with boots or shoes—surely plenty of variety. Boys with and without caps, with short and cropped, long tousy hair, with jackets, coats, and jerseys, with shorts and knickers, with boots and shoes. So much for the details of dress of the figures. The first thing to be considered, strange as it may seem, is the shape of the picture. Unless for some special reason, the oblong inside which the picture is to be made should be rather wider than broad, or rather higher than wide. A square shape or a long narrow shape is seldom suitable. Inside the oblong the figures and background have to be arranged. The first question is how many figures would be necessary to express the subject "Going to School." One figure would look too solitary, more than three would be a crowd, and too difficult to arrange, so that two or three would be a suitable number. The three might be girls or two girl friends and a younger brother. The children will know how they should be dressed, and that each should have a school bag either slung on the shoulders or carried in the hand; two of one kind and one of the other will make for interest and variety. The various hats and clothes should also be contrasted, otherwise the picture may be devoid of sufficient interest. Of the two girl friends, one may be stout and the other thin. The next question to be settled is how much space in the picture the three figures should occupy and where the figures should be placed? The figures should occupy not less than half of the space and be placed not exactly in, but near the centre of the picture. They should not be placed one behind the other in a row, as this would suggest that they had quarrelled, but the two girl friends (slightly different in height) should be walking side by side with arms linked into each other, and the small brother trotting a little behind. They may be standing upright, or their action may preferably be a walking one (one leg in front and one behind). This arrangement will appeal to the children as being natural and will express fairly well the idea of "Going to School." It will

be understood that the near girl will partly cover the one farther off, and the small brother may also partly cover the nearest girl. Question and answer will supply the information about an appropriate background which will appear round about the group of figures; the street, road, or pavement on which the figures walk will also require to be indicated. The background may consist of houses with windows and doors, if the figures are walking along a street, or of trees and bushes if they are walking in the country. To get the figures to appear duly important, they should be drawn, shaded, or painted, more strongly than the background, which should be treated lightly as being of less importance than the figures. This emphasis or exaggeration of important parts is of the very essence of Art, the aspect of appearances which the camera fails to produce. For very young children, colouring by means of crayons or pastels on brown paper is very suitable, and for older children, painting in water colours. Pencil outline, or light and shade, is not full enough to satisfy a child's desire for complete expression. If the children are not in too great a hurry to begin their picture, it saves time and helps them to set down their idea simply if they first make a small sketch about two inches long, showing the arrangement of the figures and background. A gradual development towards competence is only possible if the teacher discusses with the children the excellences and weaknesses of their efforts. Well-placed enquiries, generous acknowledgment of successes, produce enthusiasm in both teacher and pupils. Coloured illustrations of pictures of similar subjects will do much to bring the pupil into touch with the work of artists, and will lead to an understanding of their pictures and of Art appreciation in general.



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