

THE RIDDLE REPERTOIRE OF A MASSACHUSETTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Introduction

Most school systems district their schools according to place of residence, so children who live near one another generally attend the same school. The community atmosphere then established on the home front is carried over to the school. Each neighborhood becomes a community unto itself, with its own mores, customs and verbal folklore; by virtue of the fact that these same folk who make up a residential community also populate the school, the boundary lines are extended from the home to include the local institutions of learning. This is a study of the community which attends Bryn Mawr Elementary School in Auburn, Massachusetts. It emphasizes riddles told by children to their friends.

The function that a riddle serves for a child may vary in accordance with time, place, situation and, above all, the person with whom he is interacting. For some it represents a chance for demonstrating cleverness, for some it is used as a means of challenging the wit of the audience and, for many others, it is merely a form of entertainment. I spoke with several of the children about this and here are some of their reactions:

"Um . . . I tell riddles a lot . . . they make people laugh. I think they're hard unless you know the answer . . . my mother always does . . . um . . . that's no fun." (Subject #9) "I like 'em okay but my sister can make 'em up better than me. . . . She's in fourth grade." (#26) "I like the ones about animals the best . . . they're funny." (#31) "I tell 'em at home a lot 'cause they are fun to see if people can guess the answers." (#51) "They're fun 'cause sometimes something means something and sometimes it doesn't." (#117) "Elephant jokes are the funniest . . . when I can guess the answer I feel smart." (#140) "I hear a lot of riddles at school and if I like them then I tell them and that's what they're for." (#213)

This is a fairly representative sampling and nicely covers most opinions at the school. None of the children said that they never told riddles or that they didn't like them. It seems as if the riddle has established itself at Bryn Mawr as a major form of children's folklore.

Bryn Mawr School has about two hundred and sixty students attending the first through fifth grades. Almost all, with the exception of ten or twelve, were questioned. Only five youngsters refused to tell me any riddles at all because of shyness, fear or some other reason. When a child didn't know or couldn't remember a riddle, he usually made one up on the spot. Although these latter are quite evidently singular creative efforts with no tradition in verbal lore, I have included them in a section for each grade entitled "Off the Top of the Head Riddles." Along with garbled versions of real riddles, they make up a substantial part of the riddles told to me by the lower grades. This category begins to disappear around the third grade and is completely

gone by the fourth grade. Whether this is an indication of sophistication on their part or mere chance collecting I don't know.

All data was collected during the students' free time, which means lunch hour, recess, before and after school. The only difference in collecting from the grades is that I work with the fourth graders during the school day, thus allowing me and the students a greater familiarity with one another. This, in part, may be an explanation for the greater number of riddles obtained from each of the fourth graders. Knowing that I performed no authoritarian function in the school, they were much more at ease with me than were many of the others, who only saw me as an intruder into their world. One device I found it necessary to employ during the collection of data was a constant "I-don't-know-the-answer" routine. This became imperative when I found one of two things happening when I made a guess at the answer. Either the child looked crestfallen and sulky, or the answer I gave was accepted, whether right or wrong, thus not allowing me to pick up variations of the riddle. Telling the child that I didn't know the answer was the best solution all the way around and served both our purposes. As one child said, "Half the fun of the riddle is telling the answer."

A word about the data categories. First of all, the riddles do not all conform to the rigid definitions established for each of the types, so I will explain what and why certain riddles were included under specific categories. The category designated as True Riddles includes not only the traditional true riddle, i.e. a comparison between an unstated answer and something else which was described in the question (e.g., "What has eyes, but cannot see?" (potato)), but also those riddles which give a description of person, place or thing and generally end with the question, "Who am I?" This was done because the objects described were all being compared with the teller in a remote way, in that the child, for the moment, had adopted the role of the thing he was describing. The group I have entitled Logical Riddles is comprised of those riddles which I thought were obvious and apparent from the clues given in the body of the question. Common sense and not wit were necessary to answer these riddles. (For example, "Three men fell into the water, only two got their hair wet. Why?" (one was bald)) The group of riddles called Riddle Jokes are self-explanatory. They are riddles told as jokes, rather than as problems or puzzles. The one omission in the category of Riddle Jokes that I intentionally made was the "moron," or "man," riddle as it is told at Bryn Mawr. These I have included under the heading Conundrums or Puns, since I feel they are more appropriately placed there for the type of stylistic analysis I intend to make. Finally, in the third grade a new category had to be added. This was the Riddles Which Ask a Puzzle group. Under this heading I have included not only the traditional math and weight problems, but also those riddles which require the audience to figure something out (e.g., "Rhinceros is a hard word. Can you spell it?" (I-T)).

At the beginning of each group of riddles I have included a brief analysis of the group as a whole, giving information to familiarize the reader with the reactions of and pertinent information about each of the groups questioned. Each grade has been divided into male and female groups, because sex as well as age and grade plays an important role in the riddles a child hears and/or is willing to repeat. What two boys might talk about might not be repeated to a female and vice

versa. At the conclusion of each grade level's contributions a general analysis of texts and subjects is given; this is over and above the Analysis and Comments section which follows each individual group.

The Riddles

First Grade: Males

Information regarding name and age was obtained from each child at the time the riddle was related to me. All other relevant information, e.g. address, place of birth, etc., was taken from the school register. Ed. note: The biographical information is not included here, and the children are referred to by subject number. Overall, the age span for the first grade ranges from six to eight years of age. The overall mean age is 6.72 years.

To make the organization of the data less difficult I have divided the riddles into the several major groups enumerated above.

The riddles fall into two basic categories in terms of form. The first and most common form is the simple objective question which is usually prefaced with one of the following words: why, where, when, how, etc. The other type is more subjective in nature and consists of the child adopting, for the duration of the riddle, the identity of the person, place or thing he is describing. Such riddles are generally followed by the question, "Who am I?"

Riddles which were duplicated are credited to all persons who asked them, regardless of the sequential order.

Group I: True Riddles

(Subject #1)
What swims in the water but has many legs?
(an octopus)

(Subject #3)
I have a tail. I have a body. I have a face. I am white and black. Who am I?
(a skunk)

(Subject #9)
I am green. I am in your yard. You don't find me in the street. Who am I?
(grass)

(Subject #17)
I have three wheels and on the farm people use me. Who am I?
(a tractor)

(Subject #2)
I am round. I have two hands. I have numbers on my face. Who am I?
(a clock)

(Subject #8)
I am green. I'm a big animal. Maybe I live in Florida. Who am I?
(an alligator)

(Subject #13)
I have a square face and I have numbers on it. Who am I?
(a calendar)

Group II: The Riddle Joke

(Subject #22)
 What did the 200-pound mouse
 say?
 ("Here, Kitty, Kitty")

(Subject #23)
 Why was the funny elephant
 walking on his head?
 ('cause it was raining out)

Group III: Logical Riddles

(Subject #22)
 How come birds fly South in
 the winter?
 ('cause it's too far to
 walk)

(Subject #22)
 What does a kangaroo have that
 no other animal has?
 (a baby kangaroo)

(Subject #18)
 Why did the man throw the butter
 out the window, and the fireplace
 and the pan?
 (because he was too lazy to
 carry them)

Group IV: Conundrums or Puns

(Subject #20)
 Why did the man shove \$3,000
 down in the sink?
 (to see \$3,000 go down the
 drain)

(Subject #19)
 What's the tallest state in the
 world?
 (Empire State)

(Subject #4)
 I am the biggest laundry in the
 United States. What am I?
 (Washington)

(Subject #22)
 What goes up white and comes down
 yellow and white?
 (an egg)

(Subject #22)
 Three men fell in the water. Two
 men got their hair wet. Why didn't
 the third one?
 ('cause he was bald)

(Subject #20)
 Why do birds hunt worms?
 (to eat dinner)

(Subject #20)
 Why did the man throw the clock out
 the window?
 (to see time fly)

(Subjects #5, 22 and 25)
 What's the biggest pencil in the
 whole world?
 (Pennsylvania)

(Subjects #6 and 16)
 What did the pig say when the man
 caught him by the tail?
 ("That's the end of me!")

Group V: Off the Top of the Head Riddles

(Subject #15)
 Why did the man throw a bone out
 the window?
 (to see a dog come eat it)

(Subject #24)
 Why does the clock keep going around?
 (to say cuckoo, cuckoo)

(Subject #7)
I start with a D; what am I?
(a donkey)

(Subject #11)
How do you catch a fish?
(jump in the pool)

(Subject #21)
Why did the busman throw out
butter?
(he wanted to cook butter)

(Subject #12)
Why did the man throw money in the
pond?
(to see it drown)

(Subject #10)
Why did the man swallow the soap?
(he wanted to make bubbles)

(Subject #14)
Why did the man throw a banana out
the window?
(to see some monkeys)

Analysis and Comment

As is characteristic of the age group, the first grade boys have phrased their riddles in a simple format. The vocabulary is limited to simple words and sometimes the sentence structure is not complete. The sentences are short and choppy, resembling the reading books used in the lower three grades. The majority of the riddles are merely questions regarding things that kids wonder about and things they come in contact with every day. (This is with the exception of the few puns, most of which I am sure are not understood but merely repeated.)

If we are to accept the definition of a riddle as "traditional questions with unexpected answers which serve to demonstrate the cleverness of the questioner or to challenge the wit of his audience," then most of the "riddles" given me by the first-grade boys are not riddles at all, only questions.

The riddles listed under group VI are especially interesting if we are desirous of tracing the changes that arise through oral transmission of uncomprehended materials. From the structure, as well as the question, it is fairly obvious that they thought they were repeating a riddle that they had heard. Unfortunately a few wires crossed and several answers were combined and mixed to form the nonsense riddles. It is also interesting to note that the most popular of all the riddles, in terms of the number of times asked, is, "What is the biggest pencil in the world?" (Pennsylvania) This same riddle shows up frequently throughout all five grades and is very rarely omitted from any class. In summary, the riddles of the first-grade boys are simple in style, form, content and comprehensibility.

First Grade: Females

The collection of the data from the first-grade girls was conducted in the same way as was the data from their male counterparts. Each girl was asked first if she knew what a riddle was and then, if the reply was affirmative, she was asked to see if I could guess the answer to her favorite one. Unlike the boys, however, the asking of the riddle was accompanied by much giggling. This phenomenon was peculiar to the first-grade girls and was duplicated in no other class. The mean age for the first-grade girls is 6.61. The age range among the girls is far narrower than among the males in the same grade, and the girls

on the whole are younger than the boys in their class. The division of the riddles into major groupings is identical with those given for the male group.

Group I: True Riddles

(Subject #39)
I am green. I like to jump in
the grass. I have a lot of legs.
Who am I?
(grasshopper)

(Subject #32)
I am brown. I have four long
feet. I have long ears. I have
a long tail. Who am I?
(horse)

(Subject #30)
I am round. I am grey. I have
a long tail. I gather acorns.
Who am I?
(squirrel)

(Subject #33)
What is one that hops and has a
pocket but doesn't wear any clothes?
(kangaroo)

(Subject #31)
What is a pretty pink but eats
garbage for dinner?
(pig)

(Subject #23)
Sometimes I am white. I make
people cry when they like to eat
me. Who am I?
(an onion)

Group II: Logical Riddles

(Subject #44)
Why did the spider eat all the
bugs caught in the web?
(he wanted to get fat)

(Subject #38)
Why did the duck go across the street?
(to get to the other side)

Group III: Conundrums or Puns

(Subject #43)
What did the big chimney say to
the little chimney?
("You're too young to smoke")

(Subject #44)
Why did the people go out of the
haunted house?
(it was spooky)

(Subject #38)
Why did the man throw the butter
out the window?
(to see a butterfly)

(Subject #27)
What's the biggest fall?
(Wopping Falls)

(Subject #26)
What's the giantest ant in the world?
(giant)

Group IV: Riddle Joke

(Subject #36)
How come the monkey hit the
elephant?
(he didn't like the elephant)

(Subject #35)
What did the watch say when the girl
put the watch on?
("Tick")

(Subject #37)
Why did the elephant have to wear

(Subject #36)
Why did the monkey chase the

shoes?
(his sneakers were in the wash)

rabbit?
(to get his carrot)

(Subject #36)
Why did the dog take off his nose?
(he didn't like it)

Group V: Off the Top of the Head Riddles

(Subject #29)
What goes up and what goes down?
(umbrella)

(Subject #40)
Why can't an alligator walk on land?
('cause he can't skip)

(Subject #41)
Why did the man go over the pool
and put all his pool in?
(he wanted to see them swim)

(Subject #41)
Why did the window break?
(a lady screamed so hard)

(Subject #44)
Why did the man swallow the soap?
(he wanted to be a bubble person)

(Subject #34)
Something that begins with C.
Who am I?
(carrot)

Analysis and Comments

The first-grade girls seemed to have felt that they must answer my question about riddles even though they really had no idea what it was I wanted. Many times they just rattled off questions of a normal nature just so that they could say that they had given an answer. It was stretching it a bit to include many of the riddles in sections other than group V. In some cases once they got started they didn't want to stop, so that when they ran out of real riddles they began making them up. The girls in the first grade seem to be interested in animals. According to their teachers, Weekly Reader has been carrying stories about animals recently, and this may be one explanation for their interest.

Comparison: First-Grade Males and First-Grade Females

The style, form, content and vocabulary used in both groups was very similar; in fact, if I had not indicated the sex of the child on each form when I obtained the data it would have been difficult to differentiate between the two groups. For both boys and girls the most popular form of riddle was the short "Who am I?" riddle. In total there were twelve such riddles, more than any other type. The girls adopted the role of an animal more often than did the boys, who seemed more interested in such things as clocks, calendars and tractors. Both males and females employed short, choppy, simple sentences to express their riddle. Perhaps coincidentally, this is a characteristic of the style presented in the reading books used by the primary grade.

The use of puns in such questions as, "What is the biggest pencil in the world?" is something that both groups employed. It was my impression that the children had heard one or two such riddles and then made

up their own from there. Because I could not prove this theory all such riddles were included in the section on puns rather than the off the top of the head group. Another interesting point, which I am at a loss to explain, is why all the joke riddles that I learned as "Why did the moron . . ." have been altered to "Why did the man . . ." (e.g. "Why did the man shove \$3,000 down in the sink?"). The only possible explanation I could come up with was that the word "moron" has no meaning for a first grader and so they improvise with a word that they do understand--man.

It will be noticed that as we progress through the grade levels the riddle type "Who am I?" begins to disappear, the sentences become longer, the clues more complicated, and the answers more pun-like. Thus, the first grade represents the most uncomplicated effort at this form of entertainment and to the first grader the function of a riddle is nothing more than fun. The challenge of wit or the need to show off is not present at this stage. The children all said that they played riddles with their brothers and sisters at home as well as with their friends at school. Almost every child could attribute his riddle to a sibling or friend as creator of the query. Not one child realized that many of these riddles were known all over school. Even more remote to them was the idea that they had been in circulation for many, many years.

Second Grade: Males

As was the case with the first grade, many more second-grade males participated in the study than females. Part of this is due to the fact that there are more males, but another factor was the reluctance demonstrated by the younger females to take part. The boys were less embarrassed and more straightforward with their answers. When a boy didn't know a riddle he calmly made one up without batting an eye; however, most of the girls who found it necessary to make up riddles were more sheepish about it. The mean age for the second-grade boys is 7.42, which makes the mean only .70 years more than that of the first-grade males.

All data collected from the second-grade boys was obtained in much the same manner as from the first graders, the only difference being that the second graders had recently held a class discussion of riddles and jokes. This did not seem to make a significant difference in the number of repetitious riddles they gave me, however.

Group I: True Riddles

(Subject #63)
What has four legs but stands on
only two?
(bear)

(Subject #49)
What has two arms, two legs and
laughs a lot?
(laughing hyena)

(Subject #46)
What has a long neck and four
legs?
(giraffe)

(Subject #60)
What has teeth but doesn't chew?
(comb)

(Subject #59)
What has two hands and is round?
(clock)

(Subject #50)
What never moves but goes right
by your house?
(the street)

Group II: Logical Riddles

(Subject #54)
What does a frog sit on in the
pond?
(a lily pad)

(Subject #67)
What's red, white and blue?
(American flag)

(Subject #52)
What's purple and eats worms?
(a purple worm eater)

(Subject #64)
What has two wheels and goes in
the street?
(a two-wheeler)

Group III: Riddle Jokes

(Subject #56)
Why did the bear climb up the
telephone pole?
(to call his mother)

(Subject #58)
Why couldn't Batman go fishing?
(because Robin ate all the
worms)

(Subject #62)
What's yellow and flies in the
air?
(Superbanana)

(Subjects #55 and 62)
What's long and yellow and wears
diapers?
(baby banana)

(Subject #66)
What's black and white and red?
(a skunk who's getting a
sunburn)

(Subject #68)
What's yellow, delicious and floats
in the water?
(a floating banana)

(Subject #45)
What has four wheels and lives in
a cave?
(Batmobile)

(Subject #47)
What has four legs and crosses
the street?
(a mother and father hen)

(Subject #51)
What has four eyes, two noses
and six legs?
(a jockey on a horse)

(Subject #57)
What's white and red?
(a baby skeleton with diaper
rash)

Group IV: Conundrums and Puns

(Subject #61)
When is a boy most like a bear?
(when he's barefoot)

(Subject #65)
What did the dachshund yell to the
wiener?
("Hot dog, we look alike!")

(Subject #69)
Why did the man go outside to
get his garbage can?
(to feed his little piggy
toes)

(Subject #70)
Why did the man throw butter out
the window?
(to make a butterfly)

(Subject #53)
 What's the biggest flower in the
 United States?
 (Flowrida)

(Subject #43)
 What's the biggest Jersey in the
 world?
 (New Jersey)

(Subject #51)
 What cannot see and begins with a
 C and ends in an I?
 (a cock-eyed lion)

Group IV: Off the Top of the Head Riddles

(Subject #66)
 How do you get down off an ele-
 phant?
 (you get down off a goose)

(Subject #66)
 What has two legs, two arms, two
 eyes and sometimes wears glasses?
 (principals)

Analysis and Comments

One year away from the first grade, and already a major stylistic change takes place. The structure of the riddles has changed--they are becoming more complicated, and less choppy than those of the first graders. This may have a lot to do with the fact that the children have had more experience with reading, and in conjunction with this the style of the readers used is smoother than the primary reader. Not one of the second grade boys used the "who am I?" riddle. All the riddles that the first graders would have put in this form the second graders converted to single sentences with the clues connected by conjunctions.

Another very noticable factor in the second graders' riddles is the frequent use of numbers in the riddles they selected. This is also interesting because the second grade is the child's first real introduction into mathematics as opposed to simple counting. From the above two observations I am beginning to think that factors other than social play a part in the selection of riddles among children, e.g. school subjects presently being taught in their particular grade. I asked some of the boys about this, but they really didn't know. If schoolwork does exert an influence upon folklore it apparently is of an unconscious nature.

Second Grade: Females

The age span among the second grade girls is between seven and eight years of age. The overall mean is 7.47 years. The age gap, therefore, between the males and females in the second grade is less than in the first. For the first time, during the collection of data from the second-grade girls I used a tape recorder rather than pencil and paper. This seemed to have an inhibiting effect on the children and so this technique was discontinued. Although the recorder was small, it was not small enough and the children noticed it immediately, asking what it was, why I was using it, etc. For some reason children don't want to say anything when they're not sure what's happening. The one good thing it accomplished was to give some of the children who had never heard their voices a chance to do so. This

was a "fun"-type class demonstration but not useful for my purposes.

Group I: True Riddles

(Subject #71)

What has a tongue but cannot talk?

(a shoe)

(Subject #73)

What has eyes but cannot see?

(potato)

(Subject #80)

What has a head but cannot think?

(pin)

(Subject #80)

What has four legs but can't walk?

(a bed)

(Subject #82)

What is a black thing with numbers on its face?

(telephone)

(Subject #82)

What has four legs and two arms but does not move?

(chair)

(Subject #78)

What can people ride on but doesn't move?

(road)

Group II: Logical Riddles

(Subject #74)

What has four wheels and rides in the street?

(car)

(Subject #86)

Who wears his shoes to bed?

(a horse)

(Subject #87)

What two things can't you eat for breakfast?

(lunch and supper)

(Subject #72)

What has six wheels and rides in the street?

(a truck)

Group III: Conundrums or Puns

(Subject #78)

What tastes good in a pumpkin pie?

(your teeth)

(Subject #89)

Why did the man throw the clock out the window?

(to see time fly)

(Subject #73)

What's the biggest boss you ever saw?

(Boston)

(Subject #76)

What letter is never found in the alphabet?

(the one you drop in the mailbox)

(Subject #76)

What's the biggest pencil in the whole world?

(Pennsylvania)

Group IV: Riddle Jokes

(Subject #81)

What did they call Batman and

(Subject #88)

What did the Lone Ranger say when

Robin when they got run over by
the Batmobile?

(Flatman and Ribbon)

he was going to the dump.

(Sing to "William Tell Overture")
"To the dump, to the
dump, to the dump, dump, dump")

Group V: Off the Top of the Head Riddles

(Subject #85)

Why did the mouse run after the
cat?

(to use his tail for a
toothpick)

(Subject #84)

What did the big house say to
the little house?

(you're too big to smoke)

(Subject #83)

Why did the pig say oink, oink?

(because he was sick)

Analysis and Comments

The second-grade girls, like their male counterparts, have improved upon the style of the riddle as given by the typical first grader. The "Who am I?" style is gone and has been replaced by the more sophisticated and longer sentence type. The puns have become more complex and the jokes a little less obvious. The biggest change among the females that I had occasion to notice was the more easy-going attitude. They all seemed to enjoy telling their riddles and there was much less tittering in the background. In terms of language used the vocabulary has increased and the sentence structure has become smoother. As with the boys, I must attribute this to increased skills in reading and English. A few of the riddles given by the second-grade females are also found among the first graders, e.g., "What's the biggest pencil in the world?" It should be noticed here as well as later that this particular riddle has no variations on it other than a complete change of object in any of the other grades. The variations of objects described, for example, are similar to, "What's the biggest boss you ever saw?" Whether this was spontaneous generation or imitation, I hesitate to say.

Comparison: Second-Grade Males and Females

Several new stylistic devices and subjects have entered the scene for both the males and the females. Under the "True Riddles" the style of "What has ____ but cannot ____?" is becoming more predominant than in the first grade. This I think demonstrates the realization by the children that often inanimate objects are named for something we usually associate with ourselves, e.g. potatoes and needles have eyes, clocks have hands, etc., but that on these other objects they don't perform the same function as they do for us. The elephant, banana and Batman riddle have all been introduced here. I have noticed that generally if two or three people know one of these then it is a fad among the members of that particular group. Unlike the traditional and classic riddles that seem to arise repeatedly in every generation, these riddles come and go as soon as the secret to them is discovered by the majority of the children. To a much greater extent than in the first grade, the use of the pun is prevalent among the second-grade riddlers. Although they may not understand all of them they know they

get a laugh by repeating them the way they heard it told elsewhere. This was particularly demonstrated by Subject #65, who after telling his riddle asked me what it meant; he had never seen a dachshund.

Third Grade: Males

In compiling the data obtained from the third-grade boys I found that the Off the Top of the Head riddle had disappeared from the scene. The boys had learned enough additional riddles that the creation of a riddle on the spur of the moment became unnecessary. The boys were more than willing to tell me their favorite riddle, and two of the boys even asked if they might do so. I found that as the grade level and the children's ages rose, collection of data became easier. The boys became more sure of themselves with age. The age span in the second grade among the males ranges from eight years to ten years of age. The overall mean for the third grade males is 8.75 years.

Group I: True Riddles

(Subject #96)
I am a brown and white animal.
I live in the woods. Who am I?
(a deer)

(Subject #98)
What has four eyes and cannot
see?
(Mississippi)

(Subject #101)
I can jump high. I live far
away. And I have a baby in my
pocket. Who am I?
(kangaroo)

(Subject #106)
What has four legs but only
one foot?
(bed)

(Subject #109)
What has two handles but cannot handle?
(clock)

Group II: Logical Riddles

(Subject #93)
Why does the Statue of Liberty
stand in New York?
(it can't sit)

(Subject #100)
Who was the first man to ride in
a cab?
(the cab driver)

(Subject #102)
Why do you go to bed at night?
('cause the bed won't come
to you)

(Subject #102)
Why do geese fly South in the winter?
(it's too far to walk)

Group III: Riddle Jokes

(Subject #90)
On yonder hill there is a mill,
Around the mill there is a walk,
Under the walk there is a key.
What is the name of this mill?
(Milwaukee)

(Subject #92)
How many letters in the alphabet?
(22: L&M got kicked out for
smoking)

(Subject #103)

(Subject #97)
When does a chicken break the egg
after it lays it?

Why did Africa flood?
(King Kong wet his pants)

(when the chicken weighs
two hundred pounds)

(Subject #104)
When two chimneys were across from
each other what did the big chim-
ney say to the little chimney?
("You're too young to
smoke!")

(Subjects #105 and 106)
What time is it when the clock
strikes thirteen?
(time to get a new clock)

(Subject #108)
What has two legs, two arms, two
heads and is very, very tall?
(a two-headed giant)

(Subject #110)
Once there were two boys, Pete
and Repeat. One day they went
for a ride in a boat. Pete fell
off. Who was left?
(Repeat [this is a riddle
with no end])

(Subject #107)
What's black and white and black
and white?
(a nun rolling down a hill)

Group IV: Conundrums or Puns

(Subjects #91 and 94)
Why did the man throw the clock
out the window?
(to see time fly)

(Subject #99)
When is a meter not a meter?
(when it leaves her)

(Subject #103)
Silly, why do you put a ruler in
your bed?
(to see how long I sleep)

Group V: Riddles That Ask a Puzzle

(Subject #95)
As I was going to St. Ives
I met a man with seven wives,
Every wife had seven cats,
Every cat had seven kits.
How many were going to St. Ives?
(one---me)

Analysis and Comments

The riddle given to me by Subject #95 was the only example I received of a traditional riddle which came from a written source. He says that he didn't read it but that someone told it to him, which is the only reason that I included it with my collection. Often things which are written regain their oral vitality by being put back into circulation.

An introduction of several new topics has been made in the third grade, e.g. places far away, nuns, strange animals and the riddle with no end. The children's world view is increasing as they are progressing through the grades and being introduced to new places and things through their schoolwork. This will become more evident as the

higher grades' riddles are presented. Basically the riddles related by the third-grade males are more complicated in terms of subtlety used to confuse the audience. Except for two reversions back to the "Who am I" style, the advancement predicted in terms of style has been fulfilled.

Third Grade: Females

There is not much I can add to the information given several times before in reference to previous groups. The data was collected with pencil and paper, and there were no noticable unusual reactions to my soliciting of riddles from them. By the time I started doing the third-grade girls the news that I was collecting riddles had already spread from the other children (this in itself may be an example of how fast information travels along the grapevine in a school). The overall mean age is 8.52 years.

Group I: True Riddles

(Subject #115)

The strongest man in the world
can't hold it long but yet it is
lighter than a feather. What is
it?

(his breath)

(Subject #136)

What has an eye but cannot see?
(a needle)

(Subject #121)

I am something that cuts things.
I have a hundred teeth. Who am
I?

(a saw)

Group II: Logical Riddles

(Subject #123)

What is black and white and
stinks?

(a skunk)

(Subject #114)

What's big and red and eats
rocks?

(a red rock eater)

Group III: Riddle Jokes

(Subject #113)

What does an elephant do when he
breaks a toe?

(gives up ballet)

(Subject #118)

What did one burp say to the
other burp?

("Let's come out the other
end!")

(Subject #125)

What's red, white and black all
over?

(sunburnt zebra)

(Subject #129)

(Subject #112)

There were twenty-six letters in
the alphabet, now there are twenty-
four. Why?

(L&M got kicked out for
smoking)

(Subject #116)

Why did the mouse bite the ele-
phant's ear?

(he thought it was a gray
potato chip)

(Subject #126)

What waddles in the mud and car-
ries a basket full of Easter eggs?

(Easter pig)

Adam and Eve and Pinch-me-tight
went over the ridge to see a
fight. Adam and Eve left. Who
was left?

(Pinch-me-tight [action
riddle])

(Subject #132)
What does a two-hundred-pound
mouse say?

("Here, Kitty, Kitty")

Group IV: Conundrums or Puns

(Subject #111)
Why are Boy Scouts so chubby?
(from eating so many Brownies)

(Subject #128)
Why did the man throw the clock
out the window?
(to make time fly)

(Subject #119)
What is the difference between a
soldier and a baby?
(a soldier loads his gun
and a baby loads his pants)

(Subject #120)
What has four wheels and flies?
(a garbage truck)

(Subject #124)
What does the word illegal mean?
(a sick bird)

(Subject #133)
What building has the most stories?
(the library)

(Subject #135)
What does the Lone Ranger say on
his way to the dump?
([sing to "William Tell Over-
ture"] "To the dump, to the
dump, to the dump, dump dump")

(Subject #116)
How do you catch a squirrel?
(act like a nut)

(Subject #117)
What kinds of tables have no
legs?
(multiplication tables)

(Subject #119)
What would you do if you broke
your toe?
(call a tow truck)

(Subject #122)
Why did the man throw the butter
out the window?
(to make a butterfly)

(Subject #127)
Why did the man bring a ladder
to church?
(because the priest said it
was a long, hard climb to
Heaven)

(Subject #134)
What's the biggest pencil in the
whole wide world?
(Pennsylvania)

Group V: Off the Top of the Head Riddles

(Subject #118)
What did one goose say to the
other goose?
(*"Let's lay a golden egg"*)

(Subject #118)
What did one hen say to the other
hen?
(*"I think I'm going to have a
baby"*)

Group VI: Riddles Which Ask a Puzzle

(Subject #119)

Rhinoceros is a hard word. Can you spell it?

(I-T)

(Subject #130)

Tommy Tucker stuck his thumb on Tommy Tucker's tie clip. How many T's in this?

(one)

(Subject #119)

If Washington's wife married Washington's wash and Washington walked down the street with a watered wigly buggy in his hand, how many W's in all?

(none)

(Subject #131)

How many sides does a barrel have?

(none)

Analysis and Comments

The most noticeable difference among the third-grade girls, as opposed to the second-grade girls, is the large increase in the number of puns employed in the riddles they gave. Ten out of twenty-six children used the pun as a stylistic device. And, for the first time I was given the impression that they really understood that they were using words and sayings with two completely different meanings.

Only Subject #118 gave any Off the Top of the Head riddles and, because of the style used, I must assume that since the first riddle she gave me was funny all riddles put into this format would be considered humorous.

Basically the generalizations that I made at the conclusion of the third-grade male riddles hold for the females as well. There was only one real surprise, and that was Subject #111's obscene riddle, "Why are Boy Scouts so chubby" (from eating so many Brownies). The same riddle was given me by her sister Marie (Subject #219), who is in the fifth grade, but the answer as given by Marie was "'cause scouting rounds a guy out." I would have to assume that this is the link of transmission, since the riddle was given to me by no one else. The divergence of answers I cannot explain. If it had occurred in the reverse order, maybe, but . . . third grade?

The riddle, "What's black and white and red all over?" appears in both the male and female groups in several of its many variations. This is true of several other riddles, and indicated that there is still much interchange between the sexes.

Comparison: Third-Grade Males and Females

Stylistically the third-grade males and females are on about the same level. Subject matter is slightly divergent, however. The males still maintain their interest in mechanics and strange beings, while the females seem to be more stay-at-home types, interested in things around them. The use of the pun to evoke laughter is something which both males and females use. This use is almost without discrimination by sex. It would be my guess that this is the case throughout the grades. That is, style and form will probably develop at the same rate among the males and females; only the subject matter will vary to any great extent.

The elephant and banana jokes seem to have bypassed the third grade since they were fairly popular in the second grade and become more so in the fourth and fifth grades; yet, out of forty-seven or so third graders interviewed, only one was posed. The tricky puzzle riddle seems to be fairly popular among third graders, however. This type of riddle is used primarily to challenge the wit of the listener and demonstrate the cleverness of the questioner more so than any of the riddles I have encountered so far.

Fourth Grade: Males

The fourth-grade males are slightly different, to me, than any of the other groups, excluding the fourth-grade females. This is because for the last three months or so I have been working with them in the capacity of teacher's aide. This duty includes paper grading, help with work and, most importantly, tutoring the slower children. It is because of this bond as well as some of the insight that the teachers have given me that I feel I know the children a little better. At first I was tempted to do a brief sketch of these children and explain why or why not the riddles were relevant to the child. I realized this was highly impractical and almost impossible from the limited knowledge I could possibly obtain.

There is a two-year age range among the fourth-grade males, nine to eleven years. The overall mean age is 9.55.

Group I: True Riddles

(Subject #138)

The strongest man in the world
can't hold me long, yet I am
lighter than a feather. What
am I?

(his breath)

(Subject #144)

What's white when it's dirty and
black when it's clean?

(a blackboard)

(Subject #151)

What can have a house full, a
yard full, but not a spoon full?

(smoke)

(Subject #143)

What runs all day and runs all
night but never gets tired?

(a fountain)

(Subject #143)

What has four legs and a stripe
down its back?

(salamander)

(Subject #153)

What can you feed and feed and
feed, but it never gets full?

(a thresher)

(Subject #156)

What has over ten eyes and cannot
see?

(a potato)

Group II: Logical Riddles

(Subject #151)

What looks like a cat, sounds like
a cat, but isn't a cat?

(kitten)

(Subject #153)

What has legs like a cat, feet
like a cat, a tail like a cat, a
body like a cat, a head like a
cat, but isn't a cat?

(kitten)

Group III: Conundrums or Puns

(Subject #141)
Why did the man take hay to bed?
(he wanted to feed his
nightmare)

(Subject #152)
What's the biggest pencil in the
world?
(Pennsylvania)

(Subject #148)
What is the richest snake in the
world?
(diamondback rattlesnake)

Group IV: Riddle Jokes

(Subject #137)
What is the difference between a
flea and an elephant?
(an elephant can have fleas
but a flea can't have ele-
phants)

(Subject #140)
What's gray and pink?
(an elephant with pink
sneakers)

(Subject #146)
How do you spell hard water in
three letters?
(I-C-E)

(Subject #149)
What has four legs and weighs two
hundred pounds?
(two one-hundred-pound
ostriches)

(Subject #154)
What's black and white and red
all over?
(a skunk with a rash)

(Subject #155)
Why did the mother put her two
babies on the record player?
(she wanted to see them
rock and roll)

(Subjects #154 and 145)
What gives milk and has one horn?
(a milk truck)

(Subject #156)
Where do old Volkswagons go?
(to the old Volks' home)

(Subject #139)
What is the first thing you watch
when you're on a cliff looking
through binoculars?
(your step)

(Subject #142)
What lives in a tree and is very
dangerous?
(a crow with a machine gun)

(Subject #147)
What has four wheels and flies?
(garbage truck)

(Subject #150)
Which side of a hen has the most
feathers?
(the outside)

(Subjects #155 and 153)
What's white and black with a
cherry on top?
(police car)

(Subject #155)
How do you know an elephant is
going somewhere?
(you can see his trunk)

Analysis and Comments

As seems to be the trend, the fourth-grade boys have an increased number of Pun Riddles, Riddle Jokes, and the real type of True Riddle, in proportion to the total number of riddles given. This is a good indicator that the function of the riddle has changed and that a new dimension has been added, that of cleverness as opposed to simple humor. The change in style of the riddles is not as great between the third and fourth grades as was the case between the first and second. This I found also to be the case between the fourth and fifth grades. It seems as the grade level gets higher the differences occur at a diminishing rate.

Fourth Grade: Females

The sentiments that I expressed for the fourth-grade boys in terms of personal feelings hold true also for the fourth-grade girls. Because of this I have found it difficult to make an objective analysis of the data presented. Rather than increasing the depth at which I look at the information, however, it has seemed to stilt my style, and rather than be too subjective I have become overly objective and shallow.

The fourth-grade girls seem to stick together in groups not based on homeroom, as was the case in the earlier grades, but rather on the basis of academic division. It is almost as if the girls in the faster group think it beneath them to associate themselves with the slower group. Another explanation of this phenomena lies in the fact that much of their time is spent with the children in their own reading and arithmetic groups while only two to three hours a day is spent with the children in the homeroom.

The mean age is 9.56. The age span is less than for the fourth-grade boys, with all the girls between the ages of nine and ten, making the ends of the spectrum closer together.

Fourth Grade: Females

Group I: True Riddles

(Subject #175)
House full, yard full and cities
full, you can't catch a spoonful.
What am I?
(smoke)

(Subject #175)
Over the hill there's a big red
bully, feed him and feed him and
he never gets full. What is it?
(thresher)

(Subject #169)
I have a talking umbrella and I
fly in the sky. Who am I?

(Subject #175)
East, west, north, south, a
thousand teeth and no mouth.
What am I?
(saw)

(Subject #172)
You can never answer yes to
this.
("Are you sleeping?")

(Subject #169)
I can be very hot. I can be
different colors. And I keep
people warm. What am I?

(Mary Poppins)

(fire)

Group II: Logical Riddles

(Subject #168)

What is water?

(wet)

(Subject #168)

What is that under your hat and over your hair?

(hair)

(Subject #171)

When is it light enough to read in the woods?

(in the fall, when all the leaves fall)

(Subject #172)

What has a mouth but cannot talk?

(a river)

(Subject #174)

When would you stop looking for something?

(when you found it)

Group III: Riddles That Ask a Puzzle

(Subject #158)

There were seven copy cats sitting on a fence. One jumped off. How many were left?

(none)

Group IV: Conundrums and Puns

(Subject #157)

What room can you never enter?

(a mushroom)

(Subject #162)

Why did the man throw his clock out the window?

(he wanted to see time fly)

(Subject #164)

What bus sailed across the ocean?

(Columbus)

(Subject #165)

What's black and white and read all over?

(newspaper)

(Subject #159)

Riddle me, riddle me, what is that under your hat and over your hair?

(hair)

(Subject #172)

There were three men in a boat and the boat tippen over. Two men got their hair wet. Why didn't the third?

(he was bald)

(Subject #173)

Why did the chicken cross the street?

(to get to the other side)

(Subject #161)

What's the biggest pencil in the world?

(Pennsylvania)

(Subject #163)

What's the biggest burn in the world?

(Auburn)

(Subject #165)

What smells most in a perfume shop?

(your nose)

(Subject #166)

What's the best thing to put on

(Subject #167)
 What did the Beatles say when
 they saw an avalanche?
 (here come the Rolling
 Stones)

(Subject #168)
 What did the windows say when
 the tree hit them?
 ("Tremendous")

(Subject #171)
 Why do people walk when they're
 pregnant?
 (to lose some baby fat)

(Subject #174)
 What did the scientist see when
 he saw his wife cooking?
 (an unidentifiable frying
 object)

(Subject #179)
 A man was locked in his room
 with just a bed and a calendar for
 thirty-four days. How did the
 man live?
 (he drank from the springs
 in the bed and ate the dates
 off the calendar)

(Subject #178)
 What holds up a train?
 (bad men)

Group V: Riddle Jokes

(Subject #160)
 What has two heads, four ears,
 six feet and one tail?
 (you, when you ride on a
 donkey)

(Subject #168)
 What is something you can give
 up?
 (a bald head)

(Subject #168)
 How many letters in the alpha-
 bet?
 (22: L&M got kicked out
 for smoking)

(Subject #170)

apple pie?
 (your teeth)

(Subject #168)
 What bird has a bald head?
 (a bald eagle)

(Subject #177)
 If a tree broke a couple of win-
 dows way up high what do you
 think they would probably cry?
 ("Tremendous")

(Subject #172)
 What kind of coat is wet?
 (a coat of paint)

(Subject #177)
 If a man was locked up from spring
 to fall with a piano and that was
 all, how in the world would that
 man get out?
 (hit each key until he found
 the right one)

(Subject #178)
 What's black and white, and read
 all over?
 (newspaper)

(Subject #165)
 Why did the traffic light turn
 red in front of all the people?
 (if you had to change in front
 of people you'd turn red too)

(Subject #168)
 What is white and flies up?
 (a retarded snowflake)

(Subject #168)
 If a rooster laid an egg on the
 roof, which way would it fall?
 (neither, because roosters
 don't lay eggs)

(Subject #171)
 Why did the elephant get on the

What's green and has a big mouth?
(a Girl Scout that talks a
lot)

scale?
(to see how little he
weighed)

(Subject #174)

What's the longest word in the
dictionary?

(smiles, because it's a
mile from one S to the other)

(Subject #176)

Why do elephants paint their
nails red?

(to hide in the cherry
trees)

Analysis and Comments

One new stylistic device has been added among the girls and that is the riddle which is presented in a rhyming verse form, e.g., "East, west, north, south, a thousand teeth and no mouth. What am I?" This is quite a change from the simple who- or what-am-I riddle presented in the first grade, and is only one indication of increasing sophistication of verbal folklore as age increases. Age and sophistication seem to work in direct proportion to one another.

It will be noticed that the conundrums and puns are becoming again more subtle and the jokes a little funnier, in accordance with adult standards, than previously noticed. This is not to say that each grade does not appreciate its own riddles, but only that now a level has been reached on which I too can appreciate more than the majority of them.

Comparison: Fourth-Grade Males and Females

Many of the riddles are duplicated among the males and females of the fourth grade. The ones that differ in subject matter seem to resemble each other in style and form. Several of the old standbys have shown up again, e.g., "Why did the man throw the clock out the window?" "What's the biggest pencil in the world?", etc., which demonstrates a link with the lower grades that is belied by the changes in style, form and content of the majority of the riddles.

One riddle which I found particularly interesting was the two variations on the thresher riddle. Not only did it show up among the boys and the girls of the fourth grade, but it is something which is relevant to the whole class as they were studying the thresher in geography at the time I obtained the riddles in the fourth grade. The picture hanging in the geography room shows a giant red machine eating up the whole field. It seems relevant that only in the fourth grade was this riddle mentioned. Either it is an "in" riddle among the fourth graders or else the other children did not find it important or funny enough to relate. I am using the above as supporting evidence that often subjects studied in school are an important factor in riddle subjects as well as a guide to form and language used.

Fifth Grade: Males

Due to the extremely large number of fifth graders at Bryn Mawr School there are three fifth grades, whereas at all other levels there are only two of each grade. It is for this reason, and the fact that the

number of sixth graders was equally as large, that the sixth grade pupils have been transferred to another school, making the fifth grade the highest level attainable at Bryn Mawr.

Many of the fifth-grade boys have younger brothers and sisters also attending Bryn Mawr, making this grade the melting pot, or originator, of many of the riddles circulating throughout the school. It should be noted that many of the riddles that were presented before show up again among the fifth graders. In some instances brothers and sisters have given the same riddle, making it evident that there is intra-family transmission among the children.

The mean age of the fifth-grade males is 10.54 years.

Group I: True Riddles

(Subject #182)
What is brown and wears a mask?
(a raccoon)

(Subject #198)
What looks like half a cherry?
(the other half)

(Subject #200)
What is yours but is used by everybody?
(your name)

Group II: Logical Riddles

(Subject #188)
What's black and blue and goes
ding dong?
(a black and blue ding dong)

(Subject #193)
What has an eye, a nose and nothing,
is red and likes muffins?
(a red-nosed nothing that eats
muffins)

Group III: Riddles That Ask a Puzzle

(Subject #191)
Mr. Gray is a butcher. He is
six feet tall and he wears a size
ten shoe. What does he weigh?
(meat)

(Subject #205)
How many feet are there on a
lamb if you call a tail a foot?
(four--calling a tail a foot
doesn't make it one)

(Subject #195)
If Washington's wife washed Washing-
ton's wash while riding down the walk
in a four-wheeled canoe. How many
W's in all?
(none)

Group IV: Conundrums or Puns

(Subject #180)
What mill has a walk and a key?
(Milwaukee)

(Subject #183)
Why did the crow sit on the tele-
phone line?
(he wanted to make a long-
distance caw)

(Subject #185)
What is the monster's favorite

office building?
(the Vampire State Building)

(Subject #189)
What did one wall say to the other?
("Meet ya at the corner")

(Subject #205)
What is ten acres?
(a baseball catcher's fingers)

(Subject #209)
What did one rose say to the other?
("Hi ya, Bud!")

(Subject #212)
Why did the man throw butter and a net out the window?
(to catch a butterfly)

(Subject #215)
Why did the man throw a clock out the window?
(because he wanted to see time fly)

Group V: Riddle Jokes

(Subject #181)
If a rooster laid an egg on the top of a building, which way would it roll off?
(neither--roosters don't lay eggs)

(Subject #181)
How far can a dog run into the woods?
(halfway, because then he would be running out)

(Subject #184)
What's green on the inside and white on the outside?
(a frog sandwich)

(Subject #187)
What's purple and rides on a horse?
(the grape General)

(Subject #190)
How do you know a pig from a hog?

(Subject #186)
If the famous Italian movie star, Mary Soga, married the American sports star, Bill Toomey, what would her name be?
(Mary Soga Toomey)

(Subject #207)
What is like a tree?
(a library, with leaves and branches)

(Subject #210)
What's blue and sits on a toilet?
(a Cub Scout doing his duty)

(Subject #213)
What did the big chimney say to the little chimney?
("You're too young to smoke")

(Subject #182)
Why do elephants step on lily pads?
(because the water won't hold them up)

(Subject #185)
What is red, green, orange and white?
(well, it's crawling up your back)

(Subject #187)
What's big and gray with a purple spot in the middle?
(an elephant hit by a Comanche grape)

(Subject #187)
What's purple and surrounded by water?
(Grape Britain)

(Subject #192)
What has a t in the middle?

- | | |
|--|---|
| (the pig is always in the mud) | (an island) |
| (Subject #194)
What's black and white and red
all over?
(a nun stabbed with a knife) | (Subject #196)
What's gray, has a long tail, and
you can ride on it?
(a horse in gray flannel
pajamas) |
| (Subject #197)
How can you lift an elephant?
(put an acorn under him and
wait 20 years) | (Subject #199)
Why can't an elephant ride a
tricycle?
(he doesn't have a pinky to
ring the bell with) |
| (Subject #201)
What's black and white and red
all over?
(a skunk with diaper rash) | (Subject #202)
What's green, covered with cookie
crumbs and lays in the gutter?
(a Girl Scout selling cookies
that got hit by a car) |
| (Subject #203)
What's green, brown and covered
with cookie crumbs?
(a Girl Scout selling cookies
that fell in a muddy sewer) | (Subjects #203 and 206)
Why is a race horse like a piece
of candy?
(because the faster you lick it
the faster it goes) |
| (Subject #211)
What's the difference between
illegal and unlawful?
(one's a sick bird and the
other is against the law) | (Subject #214)
What did the Lone Ranger say when
he was going to the dump?
(sing to "William Tell Over-
ture") "To da dump, to da
dump, to da dump, dump, dump") |
| (Subject #216)
What has four legs, flies, lives
in a tree?
(a flying squirrel) | |

Analysis and Comments

The first noticeable thing among the fifth-grade boys is the influence of television, i.e. Rowan and Martin's "Laugh-In," on at least one of the boys (Subject #186). I must admit that before I began collecting my data I expected more such riddles, especially from the older children. Even among the younger children I expected things they heard on television in the form of riddles to be given to me. This, however, was not the case.

Riddle Jokes seem to be the predominant form of riddle, with Conundrums and Puns a close second. In addition to the elephant and banana jokes to which we have already been introduced the fifth-grade boys add a new type, the grape joke. Even the girls in the fifth grade do not use it, making it peculiar to the fifth-grade boys only.

Fifth Grade: Females

The stylistic development which culminated with the style demonstrated by the fifth-grade males is paralleled by the fifth-grade girls. As a group they are more differentiated from their male counterparts than

has been previously noticed throughout the different grades. Most of their riddles differ in content significantly from the children in the lower grades; unlike the males, who seem to repeat many of the other children's riddles, the females have a group of their own.

The mean age for the firth-grade girls is 10.65 years. The age difference among the different classes of females is greater than it has been in any other grade before this.

Group I: True Riddles

(Subject #223)
What has an eye but cannot see?
(needle)

(Subject #229)
What kind of dog cannot bark?
(hot dog)

(Subject #231)
What goes up but never comes down?
(your age)

Group II: Logical Riddles

(Subjects #243 and 231)
Three fat ladies were under an umbrella. It started to thunder and lightening. Why didn't they get wet?
(it wasn't raining)

(Subject #244)
Three men were in the water, one of the men's hair did not get wet. Why?
(he was bald)

Group III: Riddles That Ask a Puzzle

(Subject #239)
How much is 1 + 1?
(eleven)

(Subject #220)
I am something that occurs once in a month and twice in the summer. What am I?
(the letter W)

Group IV: Conundrums or Puns

(Subject #218)
What did one wall say to the other wall?
("Meet ya at the corner")

(Subject #219)
Why are Boy Scouts so chubby?
('cause scouting rounds a guy out)

(Subject #221)
What did the man step on when it was raining cats and dogs?
(a poodle)

(Subject #221)
How did the frog, the duck and the skunk get into the carnival?
(the frog had a greenback, the duck had a bill, and the skunk had a (s)cent)

(Subject #219)
Who is the strongest man in the world?
(a policeman--he can hold up traffic with just one hand)

(Subject #223)
What is a dandelion?
(a lion that dresses well)

(Subject #224)
 What's better than singing the
 "Star Spangled Banner" for hours?
 (singing the "Stars and
 Stripes Forever")

(Subject #226)
 What do you call a monkey that
 eats potato chips?
 (a chipmonk)

(Subject #233)
 What did the big chimney say to
 the little chimney?
 ("You're too young to smoke")

(Subject #242)
 Why didn't the baseball player
 meet Cinderella?
 (because he missed the ball)

(Subject #229)
 How do you catch a squirrel?
 (act like a nut)

Group V: Riddle Jokes

(Subject #217)
 What is gray and blue?
 (an elephant holding his
 breath)

(Subject #223)
 What's yellow and writes?
 (a ballpoint banana)

(Subject #225)
 What has a trunk and is gray?
 (a mouse on vacation)

(Subject #234)
 What's black and white and red
 all over?
 (a bleeding nun)

(Subject #236)
 Chief Great Running Water had
 two sons. What were their names?
 (Hot and Cold)

(Subject #241)
 Why doesn't an elephant ride a
 tricycle?
 (he doesn't have a pinkie
 to ring the bell with)

(Subject #226)
 When is a dog man's best friend?
 (when he's a boner)

(Subject #232)
 What would you do when you feel
 run down?
 (get the license number of
 the car)

(Subject #237)
 Why are fish so smart?
 (because they travel in
 schools)

(Subject #245)
 Why is an alligator like a sheet
 of music?
 (because they both have scales)

(Subject #222)
 What is the first thing you should
 watch when you're on a cliff look-
 ing through a pair of binoculars?
 (your step)

(Subject #223)
 What's white and comes down yellow
 and white?
 (an egg)

(Subject #230)
 What is red, white and black?
 (a zebra with a sun tan)

(Subject #235)
 What's black and white and red all
 over?
 (a skunk with a diaper rash)

(Subject #240)
 What's the difference between a
 dentist and a teacher?
 (the dentist tells you to open
 your mouth and the teacher tells
 you to close it)

Analysis and Comments

As with the males in the fifth grade, the use of puns as a means to tell a joke is very much used by the females. It should be noted that as the grades have progressed the number of puns used in the riddles related by the youngsters has gotten larger with each succeeding grade. The traditional play on words serves the functions of entertainment, demonstration of wit, challenge to the quick thinking of the questioned and the cleverness of the riddler simultaneously. This is the reason why they become more popular as the traditional role of the riddle is attained.

Comparison: Fifth-Grade Males and Females

It has been previously mentioned that the fifth-grade males and females are far more differentiated by sex lines than the males and females of the lower grades. Part of this can be explained by the fact that for the first time probably each realizes that there is a social connection between them and each is trying to ignore it. I am not sure if it is this way in the Auburn area, but in many of the areas in Worcester the boys and girls begin attending coed parties with their classmates at about this time. Because they are so young, rather than drawing them together it seems to separate them in all other types of interaction. Only among the fourth- and fifth-grade children did I see no girls participating in recess sports with the boys. It has become unladylike for them to run around the baseball diamond with a bunch of dirty boys. Because at lunch and recess they have separated themselves from their male classmates, the links which must exist for verbal folklore to be transmitted are broken, making both the males and the females a sub-group among the larger folk group of which they are a part.

In terms of style and language used by the fifth-grade girls most of what was said of the males in their class holds for them also. It is something which seems to develop simultaneously even without interaction of a large scope between the two groups.

In terms of style there is very little difference between the fourth and fifth grades. It seems that until the child reaches the stage where a riddle is told as an expression of intelligence or pure wit the style will change hardly at all.

One other factor shows up several times among various students, and that is the mocking or jesting about the scouts. Except for Subject #111, no mention of the scouts has been made earlier. (This case has been explained by the tracing of the riddle to the subject's fifth-grade sister.) The reason for this, I wish to theorize, is the important role that scouting begins to play for some of the youngsters in the fourth and fifth grades. This is also important as another area where folklore is transmitted. In the case of the Bryn Mawr children, however, the children who attend the school also make use of the school troops, and thus the boundaries of interaction are not extended except that a few of the children are given a chance to interact with some children with whom they might not chance to do so otherwise.

Concluding Statement

It seems clear indeed that the three-hundred-odd riddles I have collected indicate that, as verbal folklore for children, the riddle plays a significant role. It is something which is not confined to any one age group and is appreciated by everyone. Once the format of the riddle is adopted and understood it is employed well into old age. Beginning as a simple question with the younger children, it finally develops into a form of humor which has no equal for the enjoyment it creates. It is one of the few types of folklore in our mass culture which allows both audience and relater a chance to participate fully. This is one of the reasons why, along with the short joke, the riddle is entrenched in the minds of children of all ages.

Many of the riddles I collected exist in variation, either in the body and style of the question, or the answer itself. Some of the more numerous variations are:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. (Subject #2)
I am round. I have two hands.
I have numbers on my face.
Who am I?
(a clock) | (Subject #13)
I have a square face and I have
numbers on it. Who am I?
(calendar) |
| (Subject #59)
What has two hands and is round?
(clock) | (Subject #82)
What is a black thing with numbers
on the face?
(telephone) |
| (Subject #109)
What has two handles but cannot handle?
(clock) | |
| 2. (Subject #19)
What's the tallest state in the
world?
(Empire State) | (Subjects #22, 5, 25, 76, 134, 152
and 161)
What's the biggest pencil in the
world?
(Pennsylvania) |
| (Subject #4)
I am the biggest laundry in the
U.S.
(Washington) | (Subject #27)
What's the biggest fall?
(Wopping Falls) |
| (Subject #53)
What's the biggest flower in the
U.S.?
(Flowrida) | (Subject #43)
What's the biggest Jersey in
the world?
(New Jersey) |
| (Subject #73)
What's the biggest boss you ever
saw?
(Boston) | (Subject #163)
What's the biggest burn in the
world?
(Auburn) |
| 3. There are a number of variations for: "What's black and white and
red/read all over?" | |

(Subjects #125 and 230)
(a zebra with a sunburn)

(Subjects #154 and 66)
(a skunk with a sunburn)

(Subject #194)
(a nun stabbed with a knife)

(Subjects #201 and 235)
(a skunk with a rash)

(Subject #234)
(a bleeding nun)

(Subject #57)
(a baby skeleton with a diaper rash)

(Subjects #165 and 173)
(newspapers)

The above three groups are just a small sampling of how, once a riddle becomes popular, variations on it are produced. In the case of group two, it seems as if the children hearing the one about Pennsylvania began to think of other places with which they could do the same thing. With regards to group three, most of the children know more than one of the possible answers, allowing them to correct any answer you might give to their riddle.

Many of the riddles I have presented in the various groups exist in identical form throughout all the grades. One classic example of this is the riddle: "Why did the man throw the clock out the window?" This riddle was related by at least seven different people. Another example would be the very similar, "Why did the man throw the butter out the window?" Almost as many youngsters gave this as their favorite riddle as the one about the clock. This simple type of punning is usually the child's first introduction to the art of punning.

This brings me to mention some of the "gross oversights" of the children in the types of riddles they ask, based on the riddles I remember from my own childhood. The change in the moron joke so that it becomes a man joke is something I at first thought was peculiar to the first grade, but it is not. The word moron was not used once. There is also a noticeable lack of Little Audrey riddles and Helen Keller jokes. The old Superman jokes have been replaced by Batman jokes and, in addition to the old standbys elephant and grape, the banana joke has been added to the repertoire.

Within this one example of a children's folk group we have witnessed the progression of the riddle from a simple question to a challenging query that can test the knowledge of any who do not know the answers. Detailed analysis of a word-by-word nature is possible for some future investigator. Throughout this paper I have made several hypotheses as cause for this development, as social and academic progress, and I think that an overall view of the riddles I have presented will bear me out.

Transmission of riddles takes place on many grounds, in the schoolyard, in class, at home and at play. Each of these situations offers a good opportunity for interaction among the youngsters, and children, being children, take advantage of every opportunity to do so. Everyone loves a good riddle, and the asking of one sometimes opens the door to many hours of fun with the exchange of jokes and riddles by all the parties present.