

# Innovate!

Issue 3: August/September 2017



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# Ingenuity and Imagination as a Way of Life

As fall approaches and the summer draws to a close, children wonder what the new school year will bring. Will their classes inspire their curiosity and creative talents? Give them opportunities to explore the fields they love? Gifted children are always looking for ways to be more creative—through invention, innovation, and imagination—whether they're applying themselves to a mathematical puzzle, a poem, or a family ecology project.

When children invent, innovate, or imagine, they bring more of themselves to the learning process. Consider the following:

- **Through creativity, students make strong personal connections with the subject they're learning.** Gifted students feel a dramatic shift from passively receiving information to active engagement; imagining, inventing, wondering, intuiting, and improvising assume greater importance.

- **Students make discoveries.** Whether a teacher designs an open-ended thinking process in a STEM class or a parent uses art media and nature walks to inspire poetic composition in his daughter or son, the creative dimension stimulates new ways of approaching an assignment and enables gifted students to innovate and originate.

- **Students with different learning styles can engage in higher-level thinking.** Because of the rich variety of processes involved and materials used, creativity can more fully address a wider range of learning styles and also differences related to socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

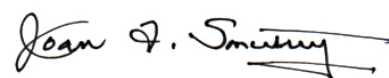
- **Students can develop a sense of artistry and depth of feeling.** Through regular exposure to the creative process in all its forms, gifted children focus and revel in their keen sensibilities, exploring such phenomena as a beautifully engineered invention, the intricate patterns in nature, or the richness of imagery and meaning in stories or poems.

Gifted students can only experience these benefits if schools, homes, and communities support the creative process. Incorporating the creative dimension nurtures the intrinsic motivations of children—inner curiosity, imagination, and passion—giving birth to the inventor, the scientist, the storyteller, the artist.

We are pleased to present the third issue of *Innovate!* a new publication offered by the Center for Gifted/Midwest Torrance Center for Creativity. Articles by Harry Roman, Kathy Goff, Janese Daniels and Stephen Schroth, and Jerry Flack show how important the creative dimension is for

gifted students. Divergent thinking, invention, intuition, and artistic sensibilities ignite thinking in unexpected ways. The authors share their expertise with talented learners from quite a diversity of backgrounds. Their practical wisdom and ideas for teachers and parents bring valuable insight to the question of how we can best provide advanced enrichment for gifted children during the school year, and open up their world to more creative learning experiences.

The Center for Gifted continues to explore new ways to open the door to the 4 I's—ingenuity, inspiration, imagination, and innovation—as it responds to the growing interests and needs of children and families. This fall, we are providing one-day workshops on STEM, including a new monthly TinkerSpace. The Center has also partnered with Triton College in River Grove and with their Cernan Earth and Space Center to develop unique learning opportunities for enthusiastic math, science, and engineering students. Please inquire about these as well as about our STEM fairs which the Center for Gifted is planning for local schools and libraries.



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**Joan Franklin Smutny**  
Director  
Co-Editor  
The Center for Gifted /  
Midwest Torrance Center for Creativity

**Maria Freeman Ph.D**  
Associate Director  
Co-Editor

**Jennifer Rinne**  
Associate Director

**Michael Gorelick**  
Associate Director  
Graphic Designer

**Cover Image:** Shea Frawley  
2016 International Torrance Award Winner

# Think Disruptively- Empower Your Gifted and Talented Students to Change the World

by Harry T. Roman

## The Premise

If you want to fully engage your gifted and talented (G&T) students, intellectually and spiritually, empower them to help change the world. Inspiring students to address big issues excites and stimulates their creativity, giving them the courage to tackle complex, open-ended problems. Make sure they know it's an iterative activity. Mistakes will be made. Learning on the fly is perfectly all right. Teamwork facilitates all this.

## Background

In my early days of engineering, I worked in a most forward thinking department. All junior engineers like me were quickly tossed into the deep end of the pool to see how they would respond. We were encouraged to take on big projects, potentially industry-changing in scope, and to learn quickly. Inter-departmental project teams were the norm. Failure was expected, an inherent part of the continuous learning process. We had a kind of rallying cry too, something like, "If you are proud of your work and accomplishments, sign your name at the bottom of it, on reports, letters and communications. Sign it big and bold." Use this as a real-world example to empower your G&T charges. Encourage them to identify relevant problems and bore into them with passion and creativity.

Where can you find big issues to grapple with? In our global economy, there are literally tons of problems to be explored in current events from Sunday supplement news items, TV news reports, magazine/newsletters, Internet research, and so forth. Survey your stu-

dents to have them propose some issues, be they technical or non-technical in nature. Just make sure the candidate issues are powerful problems that require a solution both complex and meaningful to the world.

Being complex, these big issues or challenges should be evaluated from multiple perspectives (constraints) like technical, economic, social, environmental, and political/governmental concerns. Also, do not forget the legal, safety, and regulatory constraints that will surely exist; and since some challenges will transcend national borders, you will need to address geopolitical and cultural impacts as well. Urge students to construct a matrix type format (spreadsheets) to summarize evaluations. Much can be learned from environmental impact statements that are necessitated by U.S. law for major construction projects. Certainly this work will be a rich environment for integrating the subject matter of the academic day.

## The Rubber Meets the Road

I shall pump-prime this activity by proposing some interesting challenges to get your G&T kids started. This is not a prioritized or ranked list, but meant to identify some complex and compelling challenges of today. Your gifted kids/teams ultimately identify and select the ones they wish to take on. They must own the challenge and commit to attempting a solution.

- Energy is a very big issue so here is a potentially game changing problem. Did you know that American car companies produce so many cars every year that the electric power production potential of all these vehicles total more than the electric production potential of all U.S. electric power stations? Obviously, such engines would be dirty to operate in this manner, but what if you had a different kind of clean-burning engine installed in cars? Could cars be-

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Glenview: Grades 1-5

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Naperville: Grades 1-6

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Grades 1-3: "Egg"- Stravaganza  
Grades 3-6: Moto-Pets and Vibrobots

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come rolling power plants which either individually or in groups supply energy to homes, buildings, shopping malls, etc.? Can our cars be the secret weapon to mitigate large scale utility blackouts and terrorist attacks on the utility grid?

- Witness what the Internet has done to change the business model for shopping. Many brick and mortar stores are resorting to online sales instead of expensive physical stores. What does this mean for big, established stores and our shopping malls? What might become of those lavish properties and associated areas? What will shopping malls morph into? What will be the potential impacts and opportunities?

- How can we detect terrorist activities using large area networks of sensors and special instruments? What would we measure and where would the sensors be placed? Can existing structures be used to host the sensors/instrumentation, or would we need to install other structures? Do we need structures at all? Could we perhaps use other things like cars, trains, other mobile devices, maybe cell phones?

- Our current model for school is probably 140 years old, deriving from the days of automation and large scale factory employment. Obviously, this model for the workplace has changed, so why not change how we teach new generations? How would your G&T students re-design the academic day, and maybe the modern school itself? What are new paradigms for not only presenting and delivering curriculum/course content, but how teachers and administrators measure student growth? Should subjects be taught in clusters or individually as they are now, and how would this affect the way teachers are trained in the first place?

- So much is discussed about changing the fossil fuel economy to a less globally warming mix of energy sources. What can be done to accomplish this on both a national and global scale? What are realistic time frames to aspire to for this transition? What types of current and future energy sources/resources should we be looking toward?

- Workers are worried about industry use of robots and artificial intelligence in the workplace. Continuing education for employees is always a robust discussion issue. How does this IT rich technology impact employment and economic growth? How can this happen for U.S. and world economies?

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Get the drift of my discussions on what I am proposing for these complex issues and examples?

I think your gifted kids would love to tear into this kind of activity and teach us grown-ups a thing or two. Didn't you want to show up your elders when you were young? That never gets old.

Feed the urge for gifted kids to show how relevant they can be in the grown-up world. Make sure that students have the encouragement and guidance they need to propose major changes and to give to their ideas everything they have. Without a doubt, your G&T kids will blow the lid off some of the big issues/challenges they feel passionate about. Let student teams identify and solve key issues. Mistakes are welcome, as is out-of-the-box creativity. Stand back and be prepared for surprises!

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**Harry T. Roman** is an engineer, teacher, inventor, and author. He has published over 550 articles, papers and scientific treatises, along with 75 teacher resource products including books, math card games, and science kits. A recipient of multiple awards for outstanding service as an educator, as well as technological achievements and inventions, Roman is currently an educational advisor for the Edison Innovation Foundation.

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**2017**

**International Torrance Legacy Creativity Awards**

**Sponsored by:**

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Creativity Network, NAGC

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**Ingenuity. Inspiration. Imagination. Innovation.**

# What Do the 4 I's All Have in Common?

## Creativity

by Kathy Goff

Beside the fact that they all begin with the letter **I**, they all need creativity. In terms of imagination, ingenuity, invention and innovation, creativity is a universal thread. I would like to look at each **I**, define it, provide a quote or two, and connect them to creativity.

**Imagination** - the ability of the mind to be creative, resourceful and to have new ideas; the ability to form mental pictures of people or things, or to have new ideas; a creative faculty of the mind.

*What is now proved was once only imagined.*

*~ William Blake*

*To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle, requires creative imagination and marks real advance in science.*

*~Albert Einstein*

E. Paul Torrance is recognized as the “Father of Creativity;” throughout his life, he was also very interested in the process of imagination as a component of creativity. In fact, Torrance called his original creativity tests “Imagination Tests” prior to their ultimate publication in 1965. Like Torrance, we understand imagination as a key element of creativity. The process of imagination entails the ability to consciously conjure, in one’s mind, responses or solutions to an unresolved need, challenge, or dilemma.

A new building is first raised in the imaginative mind of an architect before it can be raised in reality. The rhyming cadence of words and notes must first appear in the fertile mind of the songwriter until composed for others to enjoy. It is clear that without the process of imagination, the subsequent creative act is not possible.

Imagination involves the generation of ideas and possibilities in one's mind as a reality that, especially for the original thinker, often does not yet exist. Imagination provides the conceptual raw material—the ideas, images, connections, combinations. A fertile imagination is a requirement for creativity, inventing, and innovation.

**Ingenuity** – the ability to think creatively about a situation or to solve problems in a clever way; quality of being clever, original, and inventive.

*Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.*

*~ General George Patton*

A synonym for ingenuity is being original, and originality has long been recognized as a key element of creativity. Ingenuity can come from combining two ideas to create something new as when Benjamin Franklin combined two lenses into one pair of glasses, thus inventing bifocals. Alexander Graham Bell combined his knowledge of the human ear with his knowledge of magnetism and electricity to create the telephone.



Ingenuity may come from taking an idea from one place and applying it to another. The hypodermic needle was patterned on a rattlesnake fang. Velcro was invented by a Swiss engineer who observed a burr that grabbed onto his clothing and would not let go.

Fred Smith noticed that some businesses had a need for overnight delivery of their packages. He formed a company that specialized in that service called Federal Express. He used his ingenuity to become a billionaire.

Ingenuity may come as a flash of unexpected insight. It may be the cleverness of a catchy title or marketing campaign. It is a seed of creativity that can result in new innovations and inventions.

**Invention** – creative ability; productive imagination; the activity of designing or creating new things; creative problem solving.

*An invention has to make sense in the world it finishes in, not in the world it started.*  
~ Tim O'Reilly

*To invent, you need a good imagination and a pile of junk.*  
~ Thomas A. Edison

Inventions represent the harnessing of the imagination to solve a problem with a solution that is new and useful. Inventions may result from identifying a need or opportunity to fill a void. The mechanical washing machine was invented by a farmer who had to stop his work in the hayfields to wash the clothes for his sick wife. He had never washed clothes before and was surprised at what a back breaking job it was. After tiring of the whole thing, he set his mind to work and developed the mechanical washing machine.

Great developments often come from people who are not trained or skilled in that field. For example, the automated telephone was developed by an undertaker. Louis Pasteur was not a medical doctor. The Wright Brothers were bicycle mechanics, not aeronautical engineers. Sometimes trained people are too close to the problem to see the creative solutions.

A key ingredient for inventing and creative problem solving is persistence. Unique and new ideas are usually resisted and take courage to bring to reality. Thomas Edison went through over 1,000 types of filaments before he finally found one that worked for his light bulb.

Inventing is a creative problem solving process—finding a new and useful solution to a challenging situation. The ability to solve problems creatively is fundamental to inventing, requires imagination, and often results in innovation

**Innovation** – process of implementing something creative, such as a new idea, method, product, or strategy; trying new ideas, methods, products.

*Creativity is thinking up new things. Innovation is doing new things.*  
~ Theodore Levitt

*The innovation point is the pivotal moment when talented and motivated people seek the opportunity to act on their ideas and dreams.*  
~ W. Arthur Porter

Innovation involves the deliberate applications of information, imagination, and ingenuity in creating greater or different values from resources. Innovation uses creative processes to generate new ideas and convert them into useful products/services.

Some examples of innovation are as follows:

- converting old phone booths into solar powered mobile phone charging points
- taking the idea of molded pulp used to create egg cartons and applying this process to protect other breakable products, such as wine
- taking digital models and changing them into three-dimensional solid objects of any shape via 3D printers

Innovation is the culmination of imagination, ingenuity, invention, and creativity. It is the process of communicating and applying the new product/process/service.

## Things to Remember

I have been a creativity researcher, educator, and inventor for over 30 years and would like to leave you with a couple of things to remember.

- We must create environments where people have confidence expressing themselves and sharing thoughts and ideas. Other perspectives add value and richness.
- The ability to be creative is not confined to any one group or type of person. Everyone is creative. All that is required is the desire to make it happen and the willingness to put in the necessary effort.
- Creativity is the gift that keeps on giving, to ourselves and others, for as long as we want. It takes place in the minds of all of us and can be tapped at any time.

Send me an e-mail (mcgoff@cimtel.net) requesting a free copy of my manual—*Creativity is Finding the Answers That Aren't in the Book* (2017) and I will send it to you.

# Enhancing Creative Endeavors by Assessing and Monitoring Children's Problem-Solving Style Preferences

by Janese Daniels and Stephen T. Schroth

**Kathy Goff** is the Co-founder and Chief Creative Officer of Vast Learning Systems, a cloud-based edtech software company that focuses on creativity assessments and brain trainings. She collaborated with E. Paul Torrance for more than 16 years and serves as the Director of the Oklahoma Torrance Center for Creativity.

*Robert is an eight-year old boy who is very bright and who scores at the highest levels on the statewide assessments given in his school annually. Robert is especially passionate about American history, and often speaks of a trip his family took to colonial Williamsburg the previous summer. When given the opportunity to read independently, Robert usually chooses books that are concerned with the American Revolution and the key participants on the colonists' side.*

*When Mrs. Fox, Robert's third grade teacher, had her class work on an independent project centered on the American Revolution, she was surprised that Robert did not seem to enjoy working on it. This was not what Mrs. Fox had expected, as she was aware of Robert's passion for the topic. Mrs. Fox also thought that Robert should have had no problems with the project, as she had established a great deal of structure to assist children in their work (including topic lists delineating a few workable, realistic solutions to the problem) and clear expectations about what she wanted done.*

*Puzzled by Robert's performance, Mrs. Fox consulted Dr. Cervantes, her district's gifted education coordinator. Dr. Cervantes was acquainted with both Mrs. Fox and Robert, and knew that Mrs. Fox was an exemplary teacher who would go the extra mile for her students. Dr. Cervantes suggested that Mrs. Fox have Robert take VIEW, an assessment that helped determine an individual's problem-solving style preferences. As Dr. Cervantes was a certified VIEW user, she administered the assessment to Robert and shared the results with him and Mrs. Fox*

## Introduction

Engaging bright young learners in open-ended, inquiry-based projects permits them to use and build their innate creativity to find solutions to problems that are genuine, germane, and grounded in real-world experiences. A variety of instructional strategies, approaches, and tools can be used to enhance such projects, including Creative Problem Solving, project-based learning, guided investigations, or collaborations with a mentor. Often, such work will require children to engage with others. Sometimes young learners, especially those who are gifted, struggle to balance the demands of the task at hand with the challenge of collaborating and cooperating with others. This lack of fit can result in disappointing products and a learning environment that is uncomfortable for the child. Teachers, administrators, and the children themselves sometimes wonder how such endeavors can be structured so that interpersonal conflicts do not derail the process.

## Problem-Solving Style Preferences

Children's experiences with creative projects can be enhanced by using *VIEW: An Assessment of Problem Solving Style*, which assists them in better understanding how they prefer to work with others, address problems, and structure the working environment. Individuals' creative problem solving styles represent relatively stable preferences that they articulate when approaching problems, considering information, and making decisions. If we place children in settings that recognize these preferences, the creative experience becomes more positive and productive. A variety of studies have shown that using *VIEW* to help children better understand

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their problem-solving style preferences enhances how they handle information—meeting both individual and project needs—and permits them to work most effectively. Using *VIEW* assures that work flows more smoothly and that greater results are accomplished than happens without using this data.

*VIEW* examines three preferences that individuals have when determining how to perceive and approach problems, to generate ideas that may result in solutions, and to evaluate and choose among possible resolutions.

*Orientation to change*, the first preference, examines how comfortable people feel when working within a structure to solve a problem, with some working best within the existing structure and others preferring to create entirely new arrangements and rules. The second preference, *manner of processing*, scrutinizes how individuals prefer to grapple with a problem, especially with regard to managing inner energy, resources, and information, and sharing their thoughts and ideas. *Ways of deciding*, the final preference, denotes those considerations that people deliberate upon when choosing among possible solutions. None of these preferences are “good” or “bad,” but instead indicate how someone chooses to attack problems. *VIEW* is a 34-item self-reported Likert-scale instrument that measures three largely independent constructs. The poles for orientation to change are *explorer* and *developer*, for manner of processing *external* and *internal*, and for ways of deciding *person-oriented* and *task-oriented*.

*Robert's VIEW scores indicated that he scored a 36 on the orientation to change scale (which ranges from 18 to 126), a 48 on the manner of processing scale (which ranges from 8 to 56), and a 56 on the ways of deciding scale (which also ranges from 8 to 56). These scores indicate that Robert prefers generating new options in ground-breaking directions, and that he has little concern for details, order, and efficiency. Robert finds structure confining or limiting, preferring instead to generate many novel and unusual ideas*

*that stretch or go beyond the current reality that may be more challenging for others to accept and apply. Robert is less likely to conform to rules, procedures, or authority that he finds arbitrary and stifling to his creativity.*

*As Mrs. Fox considers these results, she realizes that the structures and supports she had put in place in an effort to assist her students had proven to be too confining and limiting for Robert. As a child with a strong explorer orientation, he learns and performs better with fewer constraints upon his work, preferring to approach problems in novel and unique ways. As a result, Mrs. Fox resolves to differentiate instruction where possible, and to recognize and validate Robert's problem-solving style preferences, which will often result in better products from him.*

## Using *VIEW*

Once teachers calculate children's *VIEW* scores, they may consider how various assignments or groupings might be affected by student preferences. When developing learning activities and deciding how to group students, teachers may want to consider structures that include a range of working style preferences. Embracing a combination of working style preferences within a learning group would allow children to bring their various perspectives and strengths, thereby strengthening the productivity of the group, and allowing all group members to contribute to the assignment.

Considering Robert's *VIEW* scores, the teacher might place him in a group with members who are more likely to think through decisions before acting. Such a group could help Robert to stop and consider his decisions before responding too quickly. Conversely, Robert may encourage group members to take more risks. If he were placed among more diverse classmates, he may learn to share his concepts with other group members, while still generating and his own ideas. Additionally, in a group of peers with different preferences, Robert may feel encouraged to consider how he could be sensitive to and interested in others' ideas.

When teachers understand the preferences of children in their classrooms, based on the results of the *VIEW*, they can be more strategic in grouping students in the classroom. Ultimately, each learner will be able to use his or her strengths to contribute to the group effort. The *VIEW* helps teachers better understand how to engage bright young learners in the classroom and assists in creating a learning environment where students can best tackle problems using preferred learning styles. As teachers embark on this journey to support creativity in their classrooms, they might consider some of the resources gathered in Table 1, all of which augment classrooms using the *VIEW*. Whatever steps teachers take to support children's creativity, however, they can be assured that these efforts will serve to enhance their imagination, insights, and inquiries in a variety of problems.

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**Janese Daniels** is an Associate Professor and Department Chair of the Early Childhood Education Department at Towson University. Her research interests include teacher induction, Head Start programs, and technology and young children.

**Stephen T. Schroth** is a Professor and Graduate Program Director of the Early Childhood Education Department at Towson University. His writings explore problems facing gifted children and their parents, the arts, differentiated discipline-based instruction, and early childhood education.

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**Table 1.**  
*Additional Resources for Supporting Creativity in the Classroom*

Resource	Author(s)	Use
<i>Educating for Creativity &amp; Innovation: A Comprehensive Guide for Research and Practice</i> (Prufrock Press)	Donald J. Treffinger, Patricia F. Schoonover, & Edwin C. Selby	Designed as a resource for those who wish to extend their understanding of their personal creativity and to be able to nurture creativity in others.
<i>Igniting Creativity in Gifted Learners, K-6: Strategies for Every Teacher</i> (Corwin Press)	Joan Franklin Smutny & S. E. von Fremd	A wonderful guide for classroom teachers who wish to develop and enhance the creativity of gifted and talented children.
<i>VIEW: An Assessment of Problem Solving Style</i> ( <a href="http://www.viewassessment.com/">http://www.viewassessment.com/</a> )	Edwin C. Selby, Donald J. Treffinger, & Scott G. Isaksen	Based upon a deep research base, an assessment of problem-solving styles that may be used with adolescents and adults.
<i>Parenting Gifted Children to Support Optimal Development</i> (NAGC)	Stephen T. Schroth & Jason A. Helfer	Provides guidance for parents looking for ways to support their gifted children's cognitive, physical and social and emotional development.

## “SOME PIG!” Some Writer!

by Jerry Flack

Sweet, Melissa. *Some Writer! The Story of E. B. White*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books for Young Readers, 2016. NCTE Orbis Pictus Award, 2017.

The American Library Association, famed for juvenile literature honors such as the Newbery, Caldecott, and Sibert awards, is not alone in recognizing authors and illustrators. Since 1989, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has named one single book each year to recognize unusual excellence in nonfiction for children. The NCTE award, Orbis Pictus—derived from a book of the same name by Johannes Amos Comenius in 1657—is considered the first book ever planned directly for children. Melissa Sweet’s *Some Writer!* received this high honor in 2017.

Elwyn Brooks White was born in 1899 in Mount Vernon, a suburb of New York City. He was the youngest of the six children of Samuel and Jessie White. Samuel White worked in a piano

company in Manhattan and brought home instruments for his children. All of the White children played musical instruments, so “En” as he was called by his older brothers and sisters fell in love with music at an early age. (The mandolin was “En’s” contribution to the White Family Band.) The White children were also challenged to read and write, and E. B. White began keeping a journal at a very early age. He also wrote poems and articles as a child. He was only nine years old when he won first prize for his poem about a little mouse that he submitted to *Women’s Home Companion*. Still in his childhood, “En” both read and contributed literary works to *St. Nicholas*, the premier children’s magazine of the era. He was in elite company from this early beginning point. Other *St. Nicholas* contributors included Rachel Carson, William Faulkner,

and Edna St. Vincent Millay. White’s earliest writings often featured animals, a subject that would remain a favorite with him throughout his lifetime writing career. During his childhood years, White also began to experience the split between his life in the sophistication of urban New York City and his far more remote upbringing and adult life in rural Maine. White’s early Maine years and the gift of his very own canoe began a fascination with boats that would carry on throughout his life.

White’s early passion for creating with words was evidenced in his own contributions as well as editing both his high school and college newspapers. He earned the nickname “Andy” from his Cornell University classmates and it remained with him throughout his adult lifetime. Gifted students may

well chuckle that “Andy” became so immersed in his editorship of the college newspaper that he received a D grade in college English. His professors were understanding. For the remainder of his tenure as editor of the Cornell University newspaper, he was not required to enroll in any further English classes. One of his Cornell English professors, William Strunk, Jr., wrote his own grammar and writing rules as the textbook for his English courses. Strunk’s writings had a profound influence on White. He would later combine his own composition rules and recommendations with Strunk’s classroom manual to produce what great American writers could not be without, *The Elements of Style* (1919; Penguin Press, 2005). This writers’ handbook of grammar, composition, and usage has never been out of print.

Following graduation from Cornell, Andy White purchased a brand new Model T Ford for \$400 and loaded it with his most treasured possessions that included his Corona manual typewriter and reams of copy paper. White spent months leisurely crossing the United States from New York to Seattle, Washington. White’s first full-time job was as a reporter for the *Seattle Times*. Much of E.B. White’s successful writing life revolves around chance encounters. The young journalist returned to New York City just in time to purchase the initial copy of a brand new magazine, *The New Yorker*. By the time the ninth issue debuted, White was a successful writer at the magazine, where he also met his wife, Katherine Sergeant Angell. While a success for the short essays he contributed to the *New Yorker*, White longed to write longer and more sophisticated compositions. Hence, he became a regular contributor to *Harper’s* magazine. Collections of his *Harper* essays were published in White’s most sophisticated work, *One Man’s Meat* (1938; Tilbury House, 1977). One of White’s earliest and greatest heroes was Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). He once commented that he owned but

one book, Thoreau’s *Walden*. He had an extensive library, but he cherished no other book as much as Thoreau’s American masterpiece. Many of the essays in *One Man’s Meat* were written during World War II while White labored on his salt marsh farm in Maine. His essays may well be read as a 1940s version of *Walden*.

For young readers unfamiliar with E. B. White’s masterful adult writings, such as his *New Yorker* columns, *The Elements of Style*, and *One Man’s Meat*, the author’s three children’s books are their markers for Andy White as “Some Writer.” White’s chapter books for youth are *Stuart Little* (Harper, 1945), *Charlotte’s Web* (Harper, 1952), and *The Trumpet of the Swan* (Harper, 1970). All three of White’s juvenile classics employ anthropomorphism, the technique of attributing human feelings, thoughts, and speech to animal characters. Garth Williams provided the illustrations for *Stuart Little* and *Charlotte’s Web*. *Stuart Little* was his initial illustrated book. Williams would go on to receive great acclaim for his illustrations of the books penned by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Artist Edward Frascino was the original illustrator of *The Trumpet of the Swan*. In 2000, Caldecott honoree Fred Marcellino added beautiful drawings for *The Trumpet and the Swan* as newly released by HarperCollins. Despite their current fame, White’s books for children were not universally embraced when first published. The New York City Public Library refused to own and circulate copies of *Stuart Little* because the children’s librarian thought the birth of a mouse to a human family was an unseemly subject for young readers. She stamped a preview copy of the book: NOT RECOMMENDED FOR PURCHASE BY EXPERT. Additional juvenile literature critics argued that White had badly blurred the lines between reality and fiction, an act they claimed would leave young readers hopelessly confused. The harsh criticism even caused White to wonder if he had erred. He believed it was a mistake to write

“down” to children and his wisdom prevailed. The critics underestimated young readers. Children everywhere wrote letters to White expressing their love for *Stuart Little*, even begging for a sequel. The novel sold one hundred thousand copies in a relatively short time. The subject of death in the cycle of life on a farm was just one of the many criticisms noted upon the release of *Charlotte’s Web*. But *Charlotte’s Web* was a Newbery Honor book in 1953, and in 1970, the American Library Association bestowed one of its highest honors, the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal, to E. B. White for *Stuart Little* and *Charlotte’s Web*. In 2000, *Publishers Weekly* named *Charlotte’s Web* the best-selling children’s paperback of all time.

Melissa Sweet has won high honors from the American Library Association (ALA). Twice she has received the Robert F. Sibert Medal for information books for *Balloons Over Broadway* (Houghton Mifflin, 2011) and *The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus* (Eerdmans Books, 2014) written by Jen Bryant. Sweet also received Caldecott Honors for both *The Right Word* and *A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams* (Eerdmans Books, 2008) also written by Jen Bryant. Sweet is especially noted for her dramatic collage illustration techniques. *Some Writer!* resembles a kind of scrapbook approach to her sharing of White’s life. The illustrated biography includes White’s letters, journal entries, rough drafts and edited manuscripts, copies of printed pages from his most prized books, period photography, and exquisite paintings by Sweet. The book is as beautiful to look at as it is fascinating to read. At a very early age, Andy White fell in love with the sound of a typewriter and he used a manual one throughout his entire writing life. Appropriately, the artist uses font from an antique Corona manual typewriter to highlight all of White’s own words. One of the best highlights of *Some Writer!* is Sweet’s accurate portrayal of E. B. White’s dedication as a writer. This is especially true

in her description of his diligence in creating *Charlotte's Web*. White worked on a great many drafts of this favorite children's story over a time span of more than three years. The opening sentence consumed his attention for an agonizing period of time. He noted that "I had as much trouble getting off the ground as the Wright Brothers." Gifted readers come to realize the absolute importance of editing one's writings.

Sweet proves to be a noteworthy and scholarly writer as well as a consummate book artist with the creation of *Some Writer!* Following her riveting biographical exposition, she provides informative author and artist notes, a highly complimentary afterword by White's granddaughter Martha White, as well as an illustrated timeline, ample source notes for each of her primary thirteen chapters, a selected bibliography of White's writings, key essays and books about his life and work penned by others, and a thorough index.

One of the joys of *Some Writer!* is its appeal to readers of all ages. Young readers will enjoy the youthful adventures in the chapters dedicated to his great children's books. Secondary gifted

readers are introduced to White's New Yorker magazine columns and his essays written for *Harper's* magazine that make up *One Man's Meat*. Present and future writers are treated to highlights from *The Elements of Style*. (The Penguin Press published a special edition of *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White in 2005 complete with wonderful illustrations by Maira Kalman.) "SOME PIG" from *Charlotte's Web* are the two most famous words E.B. White ever published. *Some Writer!* is a fitting tribute to the life and works of one of America's truly great writers.

### Extensions

Compare and contrast E. B. White's three juvenile chapter books, *Stuart Little*, *Charlotte's Web*, *The Trumpet of the Swan*.

Are critics, librarians, and educators always correct in their praise and prize-giving? The 1953 Newbery Medal Selection Committee awarded the top prize that year to Ann Nolan Clark for *Secret of the Andes* (Viking). *Charlotte's Web* was named a Newbery Honor book. Read both books and write an essay from today's perspective that

describes which of the two books most deserved the 1953 Newbery Medal.

White noted that Thoreau's *Walden* not only shaped his writings but his life as well. Research the life of Thoreau and read *Walden*. Read from the many varied works of E. B. White. Examine White's life as portrayed in *Some Writer!* What similarities marked the writings and lives of both men?

Assume the posture of a literary critic. Write a book review of *Charlotte's Web* that might have appeared in a magazine or newspaper in 1952, the original publication date of the book.

Read *The Elements of Style*. When should "as" be used in place of "like"? When should a writer use "that" as opposed to "which"? What other rules of grammar and composition stand out as being essential?

Survey the many writings of E. B. White. What important roles do animals play in his poetry, essays, and books? Cite at least five examples.

Andy White hated the word "classic," especially as applied to his own published works. He believed writings needed to be read and loved by generations of readers before they could rightfully be called "classics." Write a review of *Some Writer!* Will Sweet's illustrated biography become a classic? Why? or why not?

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**Jerry Flack** is Professor Emeritus of Education and President's Teaching Scholar at the University of Colorado. He is a reviewer of children's literature for various publications, author of 10 books as well as numerous articles on creativity and curriculum development. He is the 2003 recipient of the E. Paul Torrance Award from the National Association for Gifted Children.

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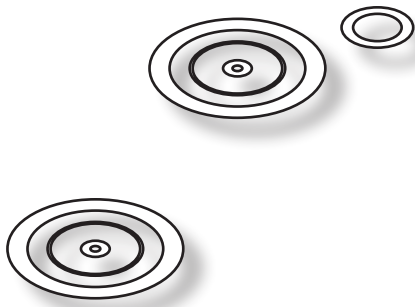
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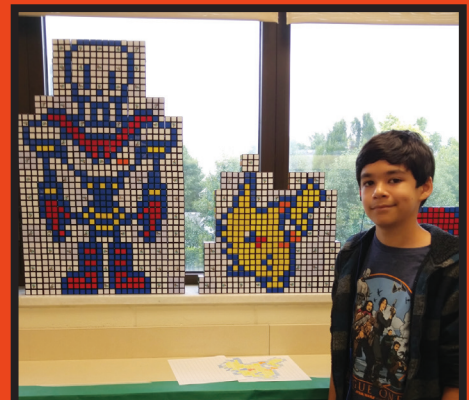
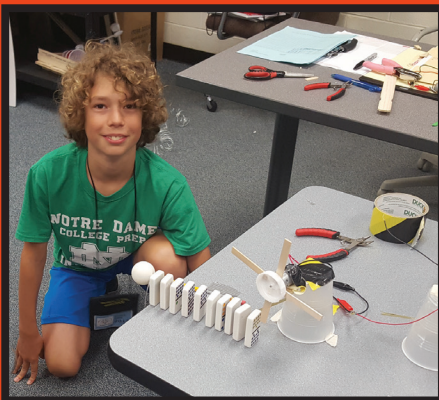
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