

*See What I'm Saying*

# Sentence-Picture Stage/Sequence



Dr. Myra Levick

# **Sentence-Picture**

## **Stage/Sequence**

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### Around 4 To 7 Years

#### 4 Years

Adam, 4, sits on the living room floor, playing with the life-like female doll he had requested the previous Christmas. He is "Mommy," spanking his baby brother for "not drinking his bottle." Meanwhile, Adam's twin sister, Lisa, is busy in an upstairs bedroom. Preening before a full-length mirror in her mother's out-of-style clothes, she relays instructions to an imaginary babysitter. The beaded dress droops in folds around Lisa's ankles and trails on the floor; a large, floppy hat nearly covers her small, round face, completely hiding half of her head and all of her hair.

Four-year-old Lisa, like all children her age, is preoccupied with her own interests. She imitates Mommy and other important women in her life, pretending to cook and clean if Mommy is a homemaker, playing dentist if Mommy is a dentist, and "dressing up" like Mommy. Hair styles, makeup, and clothes are fun if they are also important to "Mommy" or a "Mommy" figure.

More than likely, Lisa has mastered her bodily functions and is quite pleased with herself. The adults around her are pleased, too. Naturally, there are times when Lisa does not like her interactions with Mommy. For example, if Mommy is too busy caring for a new baby brother to give Lisa the amount of attention Lisa wants, it might not be such fun to dress up and care for dolls. Lisa might be more likely to spank the doll, or throw the "bad" doll into a corner.

Whether or not children are able to act out their feelings, they may want to put some of these feelings into their drawings. They may even demand that these productions be displayed on the family showcase—the refrigerator door. This can also happen in the preschool or day care center where the teacher or aide represents a mother figure. The 4-year-old girl will have fun imitating Teacher, too, and sometimes be displeased with Teacher because of real or imagined slights. It takes some time to conquer

the feelings that accompany being separated for a long stretch of the day from Mommy. Lisa may express her thoughts and feelings about this new experience in destructive play, and/or on her drawings.

Adam, like all boys his age, is still strongly attached to Mommy. He will be 5 or 6 before he begins to imitate Daddy. Now, however, it is not unusual for Adam to imitate Mommy in the same ways Lisa does: playing with dolls, doing housework, or playing dentist. Adam's feelings of jealousy about a baby brother will be similar to Lisa's. Adam, too, may resent being taken to a day-care center or left with a sitter. We said before that boys are slower in learning to control bodily functions, and Adam may still be struggling with this developmental task.

Like Lisa, Adam will express feelings through play and drawings. He and Lisa will learn that destructive play results in punishment. Learning this is important, because during this period in their young lives Adam and Lisa begin to understand right and wrong. They learn what is acceptable social behavior, what makes those large, powerful adults around them angry and/or happy. At the same time, Adam and Lisa realize that drawing or painting their feelings and thoughts remains an acceptable and rewarding activity. They know these "creations" are not always understood by those same large and powerful adults, but these adults are always pleased with the children's art work. The more Adam and Lisa learn to behave like Mommy, Daddy, and teacher, the more they will tell us in their drawings how they feel about limits and expectations.

During this stage of their growth, Adam and Lisa develop a greater awareness of objects around them. They now can produce recognizable images, even when such images—a bed, for example—are out of sight. At first they will draw only one object at a time. Gradually, Adam and Lisa will begin to draw several objects on the same page. These objects may have no realistic relationship to each other. The door on Adam's house may be too small to walk through for the person he has drawn on the same page. The flower in Lisa's drawing may be larger than the person she draws on the same page.

Depending on the kind of stimulation they receive at home and at school, at this age Adam and Lisa may begin to read words and learn to converse socially. Speech continues to be a monologue, but it is now interspersed with attempts to be understood by others. Intellectual skills naturally improve with age, making the twins' verbal responses to others more appropriate. They understand and can offer criticism,

commands, requests, and threats. As the social need to communicate verbally increases, Lisa and Adam will learn more ways to speak with others.

The following drawings were produced by real-life children the same age as Lisa and Adam.

We met Scott briefly in Chapter 1 (Fig. 28). Let us look a little more closely at this image produced when Scott is 4. The scribbles and shapes within shapes are joined to represent a figure. One big circle is the head and two little circles inside are just where the eyes belong. A line marks the mouth. Scott knows that there are arms, legs, hands, and feet, and he connects them to the head. It looks as though he was trying to scribble hair but did not quite connect it to the top of the head. It does not matter that the hair does not quite connect, or that there is no body and nose. What does matter is that Scott is beginning to put together the artistic skills he had mastered over the previous 2½ years, to make something that even adults can recognize as a human figure. This drawing represents a classical developmental image that psychologists call a “tadpole” figure.



**Figure 28**



**Figure 11**

Dayna, also 4, is still mastering the word-shape stage, drawing shapes within shapes and beginning to connect them to represent a figure, all within the same picture (Fig. 11). Dayna is still drawing some of the images that gave her pleasure in the not-too-distant past. The embracing of these images is much the same as Linus's need (in the "Peanuts" cartoon) to carry a security blanket everywhere he goes. However, emerging from these early images is a figure that now includes a head similar to the one in Scott's drawing (Fig. 28). Dayna's drawing of the head includes a nose. She has made another circle for the body and added arms and legs.

Dayna, the third child in her family, has two older sisters and a baby brother. Both parents have careers outside the home. Dayna's mother is an artist who encourages her children to express themselves



freely with a variety of art materials. The children have no known developmental problems. An older sibling is naturally a model to copy, and a new baby in the house, who receives much attention, arouses a wish within Dayna to be a baby again. These normal mixed emotions are expressed in the blending of stages and sequences and the transition from one period of growth to another within one drawing. Later you will see other creative drawings from Dayna and her sisters.

Keith, 4, enjoyed attending preschool. He was not interested in learning to read, much preferring to have someone read to him from his older brother's books. Keith did love to draw, however, and he received an abundance of drawing materials from his parents, teacher, and artist grandmother. For an art activity at preschool, Keith was asked to depict "Spring" (Fig. 48). He has no problem pasting bits of colored paper to represent the foliage of a tree, and he has drawn lines down under the colorful collage to create the trunk. The image is bright and cheerful, reflecting Keith's bright and cheerful feeling about spring and the art activity. It is no surprise that the colors he chose are not realistic. Children of this age more often select colors they like, paying little attention to the actual color of an object.



**Figure 48**

At age 4 years, 7 months, Keith has been able to draw a picture with more than one object (Fig. 49). On the same piece of paper he has drawn a house, a tree, a sun, clouds, and rain. Typically at this age, houses can be taller than trees; sun and rain can be present at the same time. Keith tells us that he now knows these elements in his environment and is able to represent them in a recognizable way.



**Figure 49**

Houses, suns, and trees appear frequently in children's drawings. The houses often represent security and warmth. Suns and trees represent powerful objects in the environment. A tree may also represent self. In Keith's drawing these three objects symbolize the three most important objects in his young life—his mother, his father, and himself.

Lilly, 4 years, 2 months, has painted a family portrait— mother, father, and child (Fig. 50). Lilly's father is a colleague of mine, and Lilly drew many pictures that were used as examples in art therapy classes. Although Lilly has an older sister, the sister does not appear in this painting. Lilly is just learning to deal with Mother and Lather as two separate people, but she is not ready to include her older sister in any "family" portrait. She solves her problem in a wonderful way, simply by omitting her sister from the painting—a natural solution at Lilly's age.



**Figure 50**

Around the same time, Lilly uses crayons to draw a house, a sun and a lamp on a table. In this picture (Fig. 51) Lilly substitutes a lamp for the symbolic tree. Like normal 4-year-old children, Lilly is telling us symbolically which objects are important in her life at this time. Lilly drew the lamp on the table outside of the house on the same page. She drew a face on the sun. Placing interiors and exteriors

side by side, and faces on suns are not unusual images at 4.



Figure 51

These two examples of Lilly's creativity illustrate her ability to handle crayon and paint and to represent objects graphically somewhat better than most children her age. This could be attributed to the fact that in addition to her natural talent, drawing and painting are encouraged and rewarded. Lilly knows that her art work is often presented to college students who are learning to be art therapists.

Hal, at 4, has discovered "King Kong" (Fig. 52). He combines his mastery of the scribble, lines, and shapes to create an image of this monstrous gorilla towering over many other forms, some more recognizable than others. Hal is trying to tell a story and make some order out of his impressions of someone else's fantasy—one that could be frightening to any child of 4. We do not know that Hal was frightened, but we do know that he wants to show us some of his thoughts and feelings about "King Kong." Hal's artistic and cognitive skills are not far enough advanced at this age to make the story very clear. His control of the art materials and efforts to communicate so many details in one picture are more likely to occur at 5 years of age than at 4. We said before that Hal was encouraged at a very early age to experiment with different art materials, and his innate abilities have helped him to learn more quickly

than most children.



**Figure 52**

Ray, 4, who lives across the country from Hal, also is impressed with “King Kong” and has drawn the monster hovering over a “boat, fish and lobster” (Fig. 53). Like Hal, Ray too is trying to tell a story about this gigantic creature, much bigger than all the other objects in the drawing. Ray’s forms are not connected in a logical, coherent fashion and they are not expected to be at age 4.



**Figure 53**

We have mentioned that children around 4 years of age are naturally learning to deal with Mommy and Daddy, and specific caregivers. Many of their pictures around this time include three objects—usually parents and child, or house, tree, and sun. Ray's representation of this important threesome includes Daddy and two other members of the family "in the woods." He has used the familiar scribble appropriately to fill in the bodies, hair, and ground. Ray's mastery of shapes within shapes has led to the creation of eyes and mouths. We believe he is expressing personal feelings and thoughts about two of the figures by placing them so close to each other but separate from the third form (Fig. 54). Had we asked, he might have told us why he did that, but this really is not necessary. Ray has invested much energy and time in creating a colorful picture, and once he has finished it, he is eager to move on to some other activity.



**Figure 54**

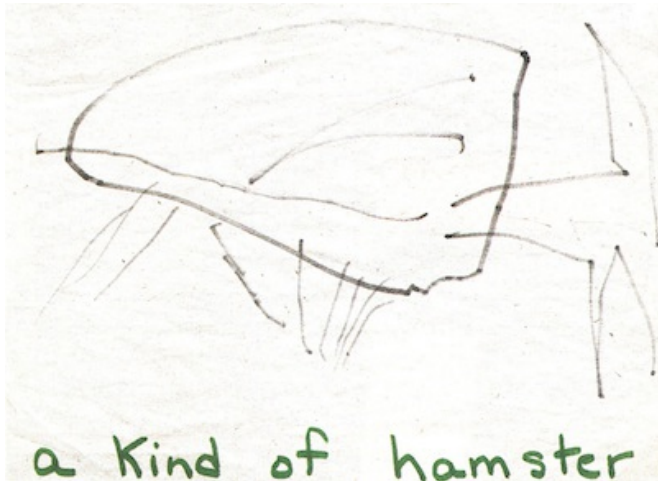
The drawings by Hal and Ray of “King Kong,” and Ray’s picture of the three family members (excluding himself), are examples of how children begin to express on paper strong impressions from the world around them. In the process, they master the feelings and thoughts stimulated by these people and events.

#### **Warning Signals at 4**

I met Leon when he was 4 years, 1 month old. He was a delightful, stocky boy, who was very articulate for his age and played nicely with the other children in the preschool. It was surprising, therefore, to see his drawings. Most of the time he produced line drawings more typical of a 2- or 3-year-old child than a 4-year-old. One day he outlined a shape, extending lines from it, and told me it was “a kind of hamster” (Fig. 55). I was struck by the fact that he seemed to be aware that it was not an adequate image of a hamster. There was an inconsistency in his behavior, which appeared normal for his age, and his artistic development, which reflected a lower level of intellectual and emotional development. This observation led me to gather more information about Leon. I learned that Leon had been hospitalized several times during the previous year for serious ear problems. Illness and hospitalizations that



interrupt the normal developmental process can cause what psychologists call “developmental lags.” Leon was not showing signs of regression, that is, going back to a previous level of development. Rather, he was telling us that he was still a little behind the other children in some areas of maturity.



**Figure 55**

In a previous chapter we discussed Bobby, who was drawing “gaping mouths” on all of the faces of figures. Aside from this one unusual repeated image, his images were varied and similar to those of other children his age. One of those forms, unnamed, is very similar to Leon’s “kind of a hamster” (Fig. 56). This picture had been made by Bobby at 3 years 4 months of age—almost a year younger than Leon when he produced Fig. 55. This drawing is normal for Bobby’s age, but comparing these two drawings will help you to understand what we mean when we say Leon is creating images on an earlier developmental level. Almost a year younger than Leon, Bobby is easily drawing a form that is still difficult for Leon.



**Figure 56**

A lag in development is not unusual for a child who has experienced repeated hospitalizations within a year. This development was not observable in play, but it certainly would have been apparent when Leon started school. He was showing us through his art that he needed more support and encouragement than his peers, to help him make up for lost time.

The painting that Harry, 4, made in preschool, I refer to as a “muddy blob” (Fig. 57). As I watched, Harry applied one color on top of another, smearing it all together, like a 2- or 3-year-old child who has

just discovered paint. A few weeks later, I observed Harry drawing circles with a pencil and trying to fill them in with orange paint. In the first picture, Harry was regressing—returning to an earlier level of development. We know that because Harry's second picture tells us that he is very capable of drawing circles with a pencil and controlling paint. These two very different images within a period of several weeks signal us to explore Harry's world further. How does he behave? Is there anything about his home environment that might explain this erratic creative expression? In Harry's case we were able to learn some answers. Like his drawings, Harry's behavior in school and at home was erratic. Sometimes he would act like an extremely mature 4-year-old. At other times he would whine, cling to his mother (at home), or the preschool teacher and reject the attentions of any other staff person. The director of the institution in which this particular preschool was housed shed some light on Harry's problems. This little boy's mother was expecting another child in a few months. Mother and father were a bright, intelligent, and sophisticated couple. They lovingly believed that sharing the process of the pregnancy would help Harry accept the new baby more easily. Sharing meant inviting Harry to touch and see Mother's growing body and to give him information about the birth process.



**Figure 57**

Harry's parents meant well in trying to share the details of his sibling's birth, but this kind of information is too much for any 4-year-old to handle. Harry's drawings and behavior told us he vacillated between the need to regress—smearing paint and clinging to home and school “Mommies”—and the need to try to control his anxieties by drawing circles to contain paint or by acting like an adult. Many of us believe that if we are “open” with our children and tell them “everything they need to know,” they will grow up without fear of sexuality and will display mature sexual behavior. I believe this is true, but we must also be sensitive to the fact that children will ask questions, especially about birth and sex, when

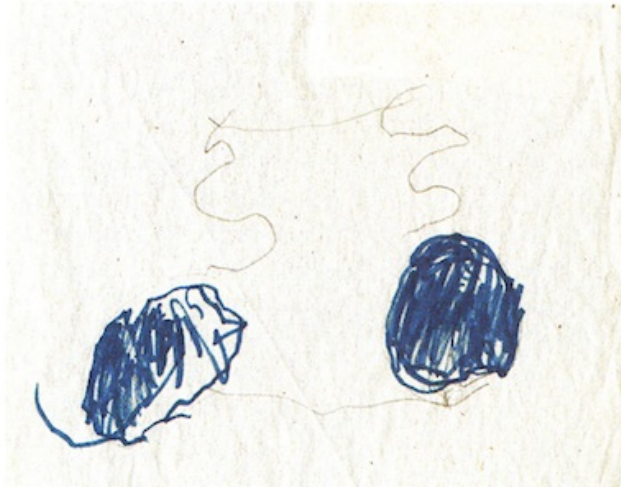
they are ready. Giving too much information too soon, and inviting a 4-year-old boy to touch his mother's growing abdomen and breasts at a time when he is naturally struggling to be like Daddy, can only cause confusion and anxiety. At this age all little boys are still emotionally attached to their mothers (more will be said about this later), and this kind of intimacy can only create havoc, which Harry was manifesting in many ways.



Color-pencil drawing by Katie, age 9

Michael, 4 years, ten months, also attended this preschool. I was asked to do an art evaluation. How this came about, the results, and follow up will be discussed in depth in a later chapter. Two drawings clearly indicated difficulty with learning of a perceptual problem (Figs. 58, 59). We knew that Michael was showing signs of emotional problems as well. A picture of his family told us a little about some of his sad and angry feelings, and how he was coping with them. This drawing (Fig. 60), was produced several days after Michael's evaluation. By this time he was very comfortable working with me and was more than willing to draw his family. At the bottom of the picture, he has drawn what appears to be a fence, and a figure, which he describes as himself "shooting and killing robots with my ray gun." The second figure is his brother, Tom, who is not shooting because "the robot is his best friend." He has identified the third figure as his father who is "not seeing" and "not shooting." When asked, Michael said that mother

was not in the picture because “she would get hurt.”



**Figure 58**

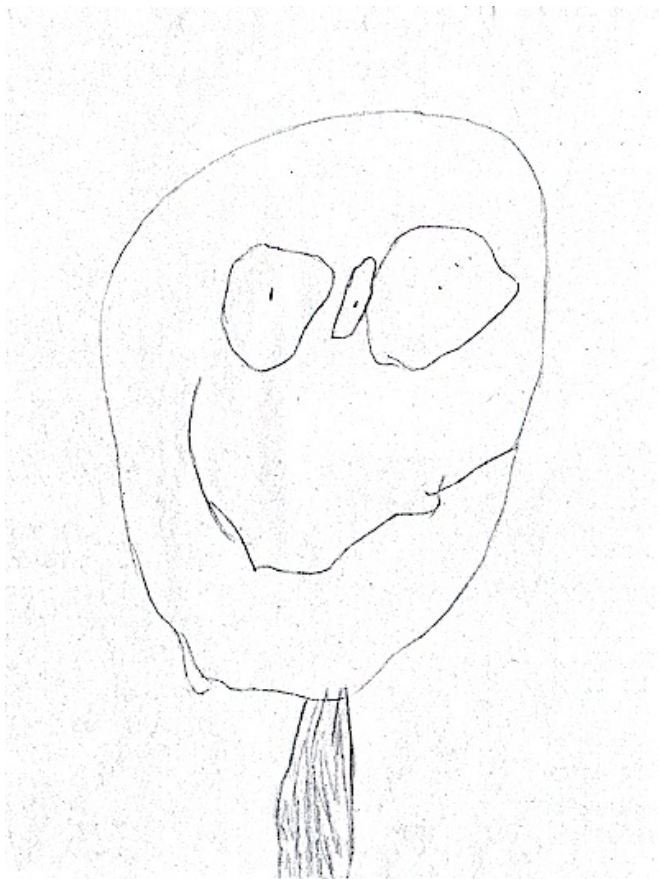


Figure 59

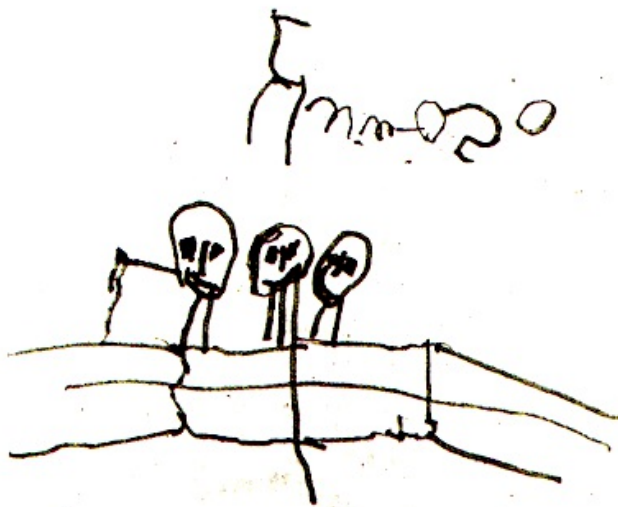


Figure 60

Michael's parents had been separated for a year, and his picture probably represents some of the loss Michael feels about his father's absence from the home. Although there had been no contact between them for a year, Michael wanted his father in the picture. As in a dream, Michael has reversed events. He cannot see his father, so he draws him as someone who is present but "not seeing." Children this age cannot understand the concepts of divorce or separation on an adult level. Michael feels he must explain the loss to himself in some way. Like other children in such a situation, Michael is angry. Some children turn this anger on themselves and decide they are responsible for a parent's "leaving"; some children blame the remaining parent. I suspect that Michael is very angry with his mother and may even fantasize about killing her—feelings and thoughts that he has learned must be suppressed. The drawing is Michael's creation. He is the only person doing the shooting and he has decided to leave Mother out of the scene so she would not get hurt. In Michael's cast of characters, he is the only one who could hurt her.

Michael's drawings and behavior give us an idea of the extent of his difficulties in trying to create



order in a disordered household. This effort is made even more difficult for him because of his perceptual problem. As we studied his drawings more closely, we gained some direction to help us plan intervention and treatment for Michael and his family.

## 5 Years

Around age 5, Adam and Lisa begin to respond differently to Mommy and Daddy. They also have become more aware of the differences between girls and boys.

Lisa still wants Mommy's and Teacher's attention, but now seeks more attention from Daddy—the same kind of attention she sees him giving to Mommy. The pervasive intrusion of television has speeded up the awareness of male-female interactions for Lisa and her twin brother. Lisa is beginning to “flirt” with Daddy and other adult male family friends and relatives.

Adam, on the other hand, not only wants Mommy's attention, but wants to treat her the way he sees Daddy treating her. Traditionally, this would have meant wanting to climb into bed with her and imitating his father by asserting himself around the house. But times are changing for the 4-year-old Adams of the world. They still want to be physically close to Mommy, but the familiar male “macho” image is not necessarily the norm. Adam may enjoy sharing the quiche with both Mommy and Daddy and playing catch with Mommy.

Play activities with other children provide an opportunity for 5-year-olds to act out some of their fantasies about adult relationships, and it is around now that Adam and Lisa will play “house,” or pretend to be a doctor, salesman, or carpenter with each other and with other children. An interest in “war games” becomes evident. While in the past this scenario was strictly for the boys, Lisa and her girlfriends now will participate frequently.

Images of people are drawn a little more realistically at age 5, and telling a story in a picture is evidence of better organization of thoughts. This story-telling is aided by the natural advancement of intellectual and artistic skills. These normal accomplishments will appear when Adam and Lisa have mastered all the artistic skills they have learned up to now, which may occur at different times for them and some of their real-life counterparts.



Figure 48



**Figure 49**

The following drawings were created by 5-year-old boys and girls. You have already seen drawings done by some of these children at an earlier age; it is interesting and valuable to follow their developmental paths through their drawings.

At age 5, Keith attended Sunday school regularly, describing to his parents what he was learning about the creation of the Earth. To reinforce their lessons, Keith and his classmates were asked to draw the seven days of creation. To illustrate day six, Keith drew the creation of Eve from Adam's rib (Fig. 61). Adam is definitely bigger than Eve—his hair goes up. Eve's hair goes down. We have also seen some of Keith's drawings at age 4 (Figs. 48, 49).



**Figure 61**

Male-female differences become more explicit at age 5. Even though Keith has omitted hands, feet, and facial features, he has communicated his growing awareness of the differences between Mommy and

Daddy by drawing Adam, with short hair, larger than Eve, with long hair—just like his Mommy and Daddy.

In this project Keith has learned that on the seventh day “God rested,” and with the typical 5-year-old’s ability to understand this and represent it, he has drawn a figure sleeping in bed (Fig. 62). In Keith’s world, bed is a logical place for resting.



**Figure 62**

At home Keith often turns to ever available art media. One day he learned that trying to make a tree with paint was not as easy as he thought it would be—paint was messier than crayon. Keith persevered, however, and has created a recognizable tree with surprisingly realistic colors (Fig. 63). At age 5, the bottom of the paper is the most obvious base line, and the way Keith has spread his tree over almost all of the paper tells us he does not feel inhibited about expressing himself artistically. This is also true of Keith’s verbal communications.



**Figure 63**

Nicole, also 5, is the daughter of an art therapist mother and a photographer father. She always has free access to all kinds of art materials. Nicole has just acquired her first bicycle, for which Daddy has bought a bell and streamers. She and her father have gone bike riding together, and she has drawn a picture to commemorate this exciting event (Fig. 64). We said above that little girls at this age want to be with their fathers, and Nicole is no exception. She appears complete, at the top of the picture, but is much smaller than Daddy on his bicycle. Nicole's mother has unusually long legs, and it probably is not a coincidence that Nicole and Daddy both have unusually long legs in the drawing. She is still combining

characteristics of both parents in her drawings.



Figure 64

Figures in profile are not usually seen in the artwork of 5-year-old children, but the open invitation to draw in Nicole's home and her exposure to photography has made her more expressive than most children her age. It has also made her aware that she can recall and record a special time on paper.



Previously, we discussed Scott's progressing recognition of the differences between girls and boys and his ability at age 5 to put more than one object in the same picture.

At the same age, Scott has drawn a boy, a girl, and rainbows (Fig. 65). Scott at 5 wants to be Mommy's little boy as much as he wants to be like Daddy, so the figures represent the important people in his life as well as himself. There is now a new baby sister in the family. We do not know whether the girl in this picture is supposed to represent Mommy or Baby Sister, but she is easily identified as female. The two figures are the same size and Scott is telling us some important thoughts he is having at this time. If he has drawn the girl to represent Mommy, she is now small like Scott; if the girl is a representation of his new sister, she is now big like him and does not need Mommy's undivided attention. While we know Scott naturally wants to be close to Mommy, he draws the boy leaning away from the female figure, but looking at her; at the same time he shows this female figure looking away from him. Mommy and sister are the two females in Scott's life and by representing both in one ambiguous figure he is beginning to realize that it is time to move away from Mommy and accept his sister.



Figure 65

Like most children, Scott is fascinated with rainbows. He has learned about them from stories, and

there are three rainbows in his picture. We said previously that one of the ways a child symbolizes a mother/father/child relationship is through three related objects in a drawing. Scott's rainbows may be a way of keeping his "threesome" separate from the "foursome" that now makes up his family.

Children learn about clowns from stories from television or from a trip to the circus. Scott drew a "clown and a boy bouncing balls together" (Fig. 66). The figure of the clown is complete; the figure of the boy is not. Clowns are awesome—they do all kinds of amazing tricks that make children laugh and cry and even feel scared. For children this age, Daddies can also be awesome, especially when little boys are trying to be like them. Scott tells us in this drawing that the little boy (Scott) can "bounce balls" with the clown, but he is not as complete as the clown (Daddy).



**Figure 66**

Scott's rainbow drawing and clown drawing are personal expressions of his normal developmental efforts to master moving away from Mommy and identifying with Daddy.

Around this time, Scott has drawn a picture that illustrates how children create images that are indicative of past and present sequences of artistic development. Scott wanted to draw a turkey, which is not an easy bird to represent on paper. His effort was a return to combining shapes within shapes and scribbling to fill in the turkey's body (Fig. 67). It is common for a child to try to draw something before he/she has acquired the skills to produce it, especially if, like Scott, he or she is interested in everything

in the environment and encouraged to use art media to give expression to these objects.



Figure 67



**Figure 11**

We discussed Dayna's drawing at age 4 (Fig. 11). Becca, Dayna's next older sister, at age 5, has drawn a smiling little girl apparently skipping through the flowers (Fig. 68). The large head on the figure and the omission of arms are not unusual at this age. Human beings experience a greater amount of physical growth between birth and 5 to 6 years of age than during any other five-year span of life. This enormous growth spurt stimulates a natural striving for physical balance that is likely to be reflected in children's drawings around this time. Up to around age 7, it is normal to see figures drawn with one leg or arm larger than the other, heads bigger than bodies, big hats and bows on tops of heads, and even the omission of some parts of the body. This would be abnormal if we had other evidence that the child was well past this stage/sequence and capable of drawing people and objects with realistic proportions.



Figure 68

The next three drawings discussed are good examples of images produced by normal 5-year-old children, and show different manifestations of a striving for physical balance.

A teacher gave us Tom's drawing; we know nothing about him other than his age. In this wonderful picture, Tom clearly distinguishes male from female, but he has drawn an oversized head on one figure and unequal arms and legs on both figures. He has used the same lines for hands and feet (Fig. 69). It is very interesting to us that he makes the female larger but gives the male a more "aggressive" image. This probably reflects the normal process of this period—Tom is beginning to identify with the important male figure in his life and become less dependent on "Mommy."



Figure 69

Cleo, 5, presents us with a delightful example of “balancing” her female form, and probably some of her thoughts and feelings about being like the special adult female in her life. A hat with an extended ornament sits atop the oversized head. Arms hang down almost to the ankles and legs are longer than the upper portion of the torso. There is no sign of the lower torso. Colors are used unrealistically, and Cleo skillfully combined familiar shapes within shapes, scribbles, and lines. Her “lady” reached from the top to the bottom of the paper (Fig. 70). It is apparent that Cleo is having no problems expressing herself artistically.



Figure 70

Some children will move into the story-telling sequence sooner than others. Martin, 5, is telling us about a character who is sitting on top of a large form, and brandishing weapons (Fig. 71). (The two

rectangular scribbled forms to the left of his head are not part of his story. They were inserted to cover his real name, which was printed very well for his age. ) Martin has put what looks like a hat on the head, made one arm larger than the other, and even made the weapons consistent with the size of the arms. The legs are almost hidden, but Martin is showing us his wish and natural need to begin to assert himself.



Figure 71

### Warning Signals at 5

We have already presented some examples of warning signals at age 4. In Chapter 8 we will discuss examples of drawings produced by children who were expressing many problems and how their images provided information for determining interventions. Below is further elaboration on an image discussed briefly in the Introduction.

This is Kim's floating house (Fig. 1). At 5½ years of age, Kim has drawn a house similar to the houses drawn by other children of that age. However, children at 5 do not usually draw houses floating in air. If not yet able to draw a ground line, a child will use the bottom of the page as a base line, as Keith did. Regardless of the country or climate in which they live, children learn from storybooks that houses



often have chimneys, and they will show this in their drawings. Frequently there is even smoke coming from the chimney. Also by 5½, children are normally interested in representing people, making some early distinctions between female and male. You have seen an example of this. Intellectually they are able, also, to put more than one object in a picture.



**Figure 1**

Kim's drawing has none of these normal indicators. A professional art therapist's view of the images in Kim's drawing raises questions about his home life. Who cares for him? What are his relationships with these caregivers? Why does the picture make the therapist feel that Kim is lonely, isolated, and depressed? And, finally, how does the drawing reflect Kim's behavior in preschool?

What we learned was that Kim lived in an orphanage in Eastern Europe until the age of 3, when he was adopted by a couple from a Western European country and brought to a land that was new to him. Both countries, incidentally, experience all four seasons, and houses heated by fireplaces are more the rule than the exception. When Kim showed signs of difficulty in adjusting to his new environment, his

adoptive parents had him psychologically tested, and I met him while he was attending preschool.

Kim could not play with the other children and rarely paid attention to group activities, although his command of the new language was more than adequate. He saw a psychotherapist once a week and a volunteer aide in the preschool stayed with him constantly. It was believed that, based on his history, he needed one person to relate to, and trust, before he could make relationships with other staff and children.

I relate an experience that typifies Kim's abnormal behavior. I had been at the school every day for several weeks, and while Kim kept his usual distance from me, I was not a "stranger"; he knew me by name. Kim was playing alone in the sandbox when I approached quietly and asked if I could watch him play. He became very excited and told me I had to turn my back and stay that way until he was finished. I could not see what he was making until he gave me permission. I did as he requested, turning around only when he said it was okay. I admired the form Kim had created from the sand and asked him to tell me something about it. He acknowledged my praise, but he would not talk to me and would not look me in the eye. All of this behavior is abnormal for a child of this age.

I learned also that Kim was not encouraged to draw at school, either alone or with the other children. His therapist told me that his mother frequently made him draw at home and was often critical of his drawings. The teachers and preschool staff naturally wanted to avoid creating this same kind of stress. I asked to see what Kim would express through his drawings. It was decided that while playing "house" with him in the kitchen, the aide would hand Kim some paper and felt-tipped pens. Silently he chose green, and the image of the little house emerged.

What we suspected when we looked at the drawing was supported by Kim's history, behavior, and psychological testing. He was a bright child, but seriously emotionally impaired. Intellectually he could represent the parts of the house and put them together correctly, but the floating image, the emptiness of the house, and the space all around it told us that in many ways Kim still felt like a "floating abandoned object." Fortunately, Kim's new parents knew the value of seeking help for him and for themselves to help this little boy grow emotionally.

## 6 Years

Around age 6, the separation of the sexes becomes more pronounced for Adam and Lisa. Children begin to act out male/female roles, and normally they imitate and gradually begin to identify with the parent of the same sex. While there may still be some merging of Mommy and Daddy in pictures drawn by the twins, the female figure has become more female, and the male figure has become more male.

More and more, Adam and Lisa are becoming aware of what those large, powerful adults who direct their lives deem to be right and wrong. The twins will try to avoid or control behaviors that result in the wrath of these adult “godlike” persons. The impulses, feelings, and thoughts that inspired these now unacceptable acts have not gone. Although children are not always aware of these feelings consciously, they still can feel the need to express them. And feelings do get expressed in fantasy, in play, and in drawings—all acceptable outlets for children’s emotions.

For Adam and Lisa, adjusting to first grade is a new, exciting, and demanding experience. Preschool and/or Kindergarten helped in the transition from home to school, but now they must spend at least six hours away from home—twice the time they were away last year. However, Adam and Lisa are developing their intellects and sharpening their learning skills. They are beginning to read and write short, complete sentences. This provides them with additional ways to express their emotions. The twins are learning to solve problems by dealing with Mommy and Daddy together and individually and by learning to relate to a new teacher for a longer period of the day. They need these skills to adapt to that new environment in their young lives called “school.”

Adam and Lisa, and their real-life counterparts, draw objects more realistically, begin to use color more appropriately, and tell pictorial stories in greater detail.

Brent, at 6, was much more aware of the differences between boys and girls than Scott was at 5, and this is to be expected. These two drawings (for Scott’s see Fig. 65; for Brent’s see Fig. 72) illustrate how, within a year, normal development progresses so that drawings express greater details, more recognizable images, and compliance with parental rules.



Figure 48



Figure 49



Figure 50

Brent's immediate world has consisted of four people (not three) for some time, and he shows us that he has accepted that fact. This is consistent with his good adjustment to school. Although Brent has not put a ground line in his family picture, the feet of all figures are planted firmly on the bottom of the page.

Brent is the older brother of Keith, whose drawings at 4 and 5 were shown previously (Figs. 48, 49). Unlike Lilly at age 4 (Fig. 50), Brent acknowledges his brother's presence in the family and includes Keith in the picture, along with Mommy, Daddy and himself.

From the time he was very young, Brent was interested in using any materials he could find to express and display his creativity. His "family" portrait was produced with colored pencils and pieces of tapestry he found in his mother's sewing basket. He cut out a skirt for Mommy and pants for Daddy, Keith, and himself (Fig. 72).



**Figure 72**

In the drawing, Brent is almost as tall as his father. Mommy and Daddy are distinctly different: Daddy wears a hat, and Mommy has hair. Brent still uses parts of both parents to represent himself. He has a hat like Daddy's, a nose like Mommy's, and has drawn the upper torso of himself and Mommy in the same way—with the familiar scribble.

Brent has not allowed Keith to be as big as his parents or himself, but he has given his little brother some recognition. By age 6, Brent has learned that it would not be favorable to exclude 3-year-old Keith or draw him separately from the rest of the family. Brent has put a tall hat on Keith so this littlest member of the family can be equal in height, and even grants him Daddy's belly button. However, he does put himself between Keith and Mommy, taking the same position as Daddy—next to Mommy!

Looking closely at the drawing, we see that Brent has given Daddy enormous hands and each successive family member smaller and smaller hands. We do not know whether this means that Brent views Daddy as the most powerful family member or whether the large hands on Daddy, as well as the hats on heads indicate that Brent is still striving for balance. It may mean both. We know that a certain object (such as a hat or body part) may symbolize more than one thing for the person who draws that object.

Whatever the meaning (and even Brent may not be consciously aware of that meaning), there is a wonderful aspect to this artistic creation. Brent's feelings and thoughts related to his family are being expressed in a way that tells us this 6-year-old boy is learning rapidly and knows what is expected of him. He is organizing his family relationships in an orderly fashion that is comfortable to him and acceptable to everyone else.

One weekend Scott's family went fishing. When they returned, Scott at 6, drew how he felt about the adventure.

Scott did not catch a fish and neither did his mother or little sister—only his father was successful. But Scott had developed a good way to compensate for disappointment. He went to his art materials and drew what he wished would have happened. He could not quite bring himself to draw a boy catching a fish—that might have been too close to telling how he really felt. Instead, he drew a series of pictures of a girl catching a fish.

Scott's story begins with a picture of a sunset, water, and a fish; he titled it "Jumping Fish" (Fig. 73). The colors are appropriate. The sun is setting on the horizon line where water meets sky, and the fish really appear to be "jumping." The next drawing, titled "Fishing Girl," shows a big head with eyes, nose, smiling mouth, and lots of hair (Fig. 74). The figure stands on the bank and throws a line to a fish in the water. A bright yellow sun is in the upper right corner. The third drawing has the same figure, this time without hair, standing on the bank and holding the line with the fish dangling from it (Fig. 75). On this Scott wrote, "She Caught a Fish." In the final drawing (Fig. 76) the figure is smiling, holding the fish on a chain. The line and hook are drawn above the bank, and the figure appears to be falling down the bank's slope. Scott titled this one, "She Has It on Her Chane."





Figure 73



Figure 74



Figure 75



Figure 76

When we look back at Scott's ability to draw objects and people at age 5, we might think that his graphic skills have regressed in the past year. This is not true, however; he has actually improved those skills. In fact, Scott is now able to draw water and sky meeting at the horizon line, a readily recognizable fishing line, a chain, fish, and a river bank. He is even able to write complete sentences with only a few words misspelled.

What did happen between the ages of 5 and 6 was that Scott learned to overcome his disappointment by fantasizing that another child had caught the fish. It is not surprising that the other child was called a girl, as his baby sister had been on the trip, and like Brent, Scott was adjusting to including her in his immediate world. In this four-part picture story, Scott expressed his wish that he had caught a fish and did not even pretend to himself that he had been the lucky fisherman. He mastered his disappointment by drawing a girl, who by the fourth picture could easily pass for a boy—like himself and his father.

The achievements here are many: He fulfilled his fantasy vicariously; he acknowledged that there was another female in the family; and he identified with his father who had caught a fish.

Jon, just 6, is learning about castles and kings and queens. He uses these objects to master the constant triangle in a small child's life: two caregiving adults and self. Jon's drawing is a castle complete with turrets on the top, a wall extending from each side, three archways, and two sets of three windows (Fig. 77). There is one figure in each of the three archways; two figures are equal in size and larger than the third. On the heads of the two larger figures there are objects resembling crowns, while the smaller figure appears to be wearing a hat.



**Figure 77**

We have said before that it is not unusual for children around this age to show different levels of development in intellectual and emotional growth within the same drawing. Jon's portrayal of the castle is done well for a child of 6. His ability to draw figures has developed a little more slowly. Solving the problem of more grown-up relationships with Mommy and Daddy is a major task for a child, and Jon is traveling at his own slower pace.



Figure 68

Dayna, 6, did not accept all her siblings as readily as did Scott and Brent. We have already met Becca, Dayna's next older sister (Fig. 68), and we will meet Elysa, the oldest sister, in Chapter 6. We know that Dayna's brother was born when Dayna was 2 years old.



**Figure 11**

Using a pen with remarkable skill for a 6-year-old, Dayna has drawn a balloon with a gondola. In the gondola are five, not six, people (Fig. 78). We assume that one sibling is missing because there are three small and two large figures. The figures are so tiny that it is hard to tell male from female, but the largest person is smiling, standing in a row with three small figures and another larger one. We compare this with Dayna's imagery at 4 (Fig. 11).

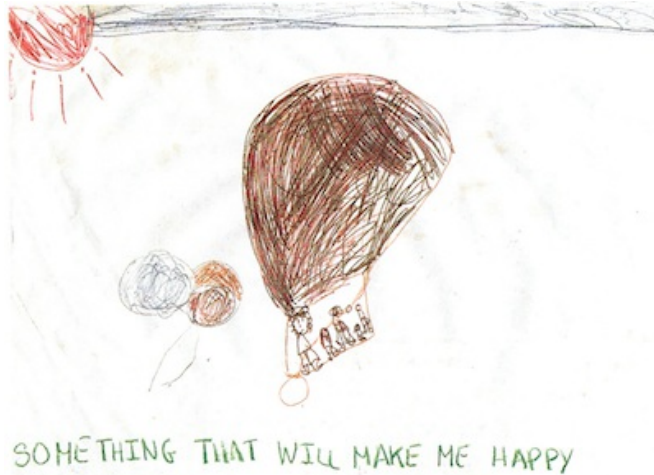


Figure 78

The title on Dayna's picture at 6 is "Something that will make me happy." She tells us that a wonderful fantasy for her is to ride in a balloon with just the people she wants with her. She also demonstrates that she can write almost complete sentences. Like Lilly, whom you have met, Dayna handles the arrival of her brother by simply omitting him.

Cleo tells us that she, too, has learned a number of new skills in the past year. At 5, she drew one large figure with female characteristics just beginning to appear. In that drawing she also reflected her feeling of imbalance through the natural distortion of some of the limbs and body parts. At 6, Cleo creates an idyllic scene of a "couple" out walking their pets (Fig. 79). Her images of the woman and man are well proportioned and illustrate some skillful handling of the medium—the woman has a shoulder bag and the man has a bag in his hand. Cleo tried to show the pet leashes around the wrists of the couple, and she has drawn a house in the distance. Her artistic efforts tell us that she is observing what people do and details in her surroundings. She is aware of trees, birds, butterflies, sky, and ground. As she tries to represent them realistically, Cleo learns more about them. In this process she naturally develops new learning skills.



Figure 79

We know very little about Cleo, but her “couple” drawing leads us to believe that she is romanticizing what it would be like to be walking with her own male partner. Like all girls of this age, Cleo may be learning that to be like Mommy means she must also imagine her own male partner. The one she would really like to have belongs to Mommy.

Halloween is a time that inspires the creation of wonderful images, which are shown in the following examples from children at different ages.

In preparation for Halloween, Shelley, age 6, has drawn four people dressed for the occasion (Fig. 80). They are all carrying bags and I imagine they are on their way to visit homes for “trick or treat.” The figures are all complete. Males are differentiated from females and the colors could be very appropriate for costumes. The four figures could very easily represent a family. Because family members are the most familiar people to a 6-year-old child, it is very possible that Shelley has used her own family members as “models.”





**Figure 80**

Shelley's ability to draw figures, and organize shapes and forms to tell a story, indicates that she has very advanced learning skills. Her illustration of figures touching each other in a natural way makes us believe that touching and holding in a healthy way are usual occurrences in her home environment.

At 5, Tom drew a picture containing both female and male figures; we described how the female figure was the larger of the two. At 6, however, Tom tells us that he wants to stand alone by placing only a male figure in his drawing (Fig. 81). The boy Tom has created looks like he is flexing his muscles and taking a very assertive position. I suspect that the decision to draw just the image of the boy evolved as Tom was working. He did not center the figure, and, had he wanted to include another person, there is space on the paper. Tom is beginning to identify with the important male figure in his life and is trying to be less dependent on the important female in his life. His "strong" boy is not grounded by either a line or the bottom of the paper, but Tom is moving slowly in this new role. When he feels more secure, he will probably plant his feet firmly on a baseline.



**Figure 81**

Keith, at 6, is still trying to master paints. We have already described his success in creating a tree with this difficult medium at age 5. Keith now produces two figures and a building that looks like a castle resting on a green ground (Fig. 82). He is progressing well and does not hesitate to experiment. His pride

in this image is evident—he wrote his name in bold brush strokes across the top of the page.



Figure 82

Warning Signals at 6

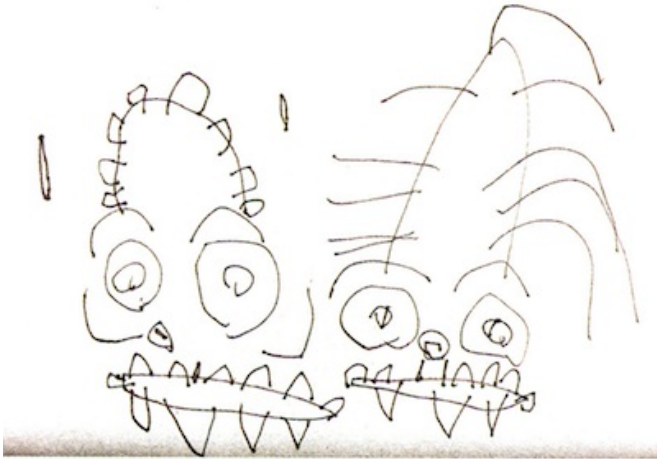


Figure 15

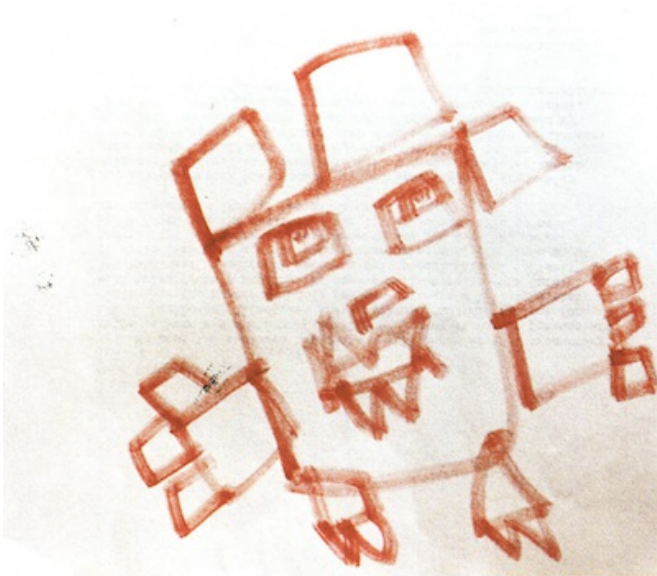


Figure 29

In a later chapter we will discuss at length Bobby whom we introduced to you in Chapter 1 (Fig. 15) and at age 4 (Fig. 29). We are very familiar with Bobby, and his many graphic representations of how he has been coping with the numerous surgeries on his cleft pallet. This drawing is another creative expression of how this child dealt with his problem. The “gaping mouth” that was repeated over and over in those early drawings is not present here. Instead, the jagged lines of the teeth appear on different parts of the bodies and in lines on the paper. At this age, Bobby probably is feeling much better about himself, but he may still be expressing some suppressed anger through his imagery (Fig. 83). This drawing is discussed in this section on “warning signals” only to illustrate how viewing one isolated drawing, without other background information, could lead us to form inaccurate conclusions.



**Figure 83**

Arthur’s and Rafe’s graphic representations will be discussed at length in a later chapter to illustrate how one art therapist worked with learning-disabled children in a special school setting. I refer to them here because they are very good examples of images drawn by a 6-year-old child and a 7-year-old child of average or better intelligence who were hampered by a perceptual problem (Figs. 84, 85). We have observed that children with this difficulty will “perseverate”—they will repeat the same answer to different questions, or become “stuck” on a word or idea, unable to move on to the next task. In

drawings we see this in a repeated form or line. Most often it is a line, and in Arthur's picture he has drawn a series of lines as in Fig. 84, where the lines make a trail of smoke. Rafe's image show us that he has made a great deal of progress in organizing his thoughts. However, the series of lines still is present around the circle that forms an apparent tree top as well as the lines that radiate around the sun in Fig. 85.



Figure 84



**Figure 85**

We have traveled with Adam and Lisa and their real-life counterparts as they made their way from home to school, formed a normal attachment to Mommy and spread that attachment to include Daddy. Gradually they established some independence and greater awareness of self. By now this sense of self will begin to be expressed in the way they conduct themselves, particularly around each other and their parents. Adam and Lisa know they are different from each other. They have known this for several years. Lisa knows she will “grow up” to be like Mother, and Adam knows he will “grow up” to be like Father. There is still much they do not know about male/female differences, but they will ask for more information when they are ready. They are learning that the bathroom is a “private” place for one person at a time and that bedrooms have definite ownership. This natural need to identify their own “space” should be encouraged and respected as much as possible.

The next four years are a time for Adam and Lisa to acquire the knowledge and everyday living skills they will need to face adolescence.

