

Young Children

MIMI BRODSKY CHENFELD

The Ransom of the Rabbit in Room 15

It was a typical day in the life of Rose Stough and her 3/4 split. Rose and her third graders were sitting in their reading group sharing one of the stories in their Houghton Mifflin Literary Readers. The story featured plants that were kidnapped and held for ransom. As the children read along, Rose stopped and wondered aloud if anyone could explain the word *ransom*. No takers. Finally, one guess:

"Something to do with getting stuff back from the courts?"

To the dictionary for help. The group read the definitions. With her magical teacher's eyes, Rose saw through the mechanically nodding heads that falsely signaled understanding to the puzzled eyes. The kids still didn't get it.

The next day, Rose's neighboring teacher, Marilyn Nelson, took her 4/5 split class on a field trip. Foolishly, they left their classroom rabbit, Cottontail, unguarded in their room.

The plot thickens.

Rose shared her innermost thoughts. "I wonder," she whispered, "what would happen if we kidnapped Room 15's rabbit. How would we go about it?"

Without hesitation, her third graders pooled their collective thoughts and agreed that they needed to sneak in, get the rabbit, and hide it in a nearby storage room (making sure it had its water and food handy).

After the dastardly deed was accomplished, the group worked together quietly and cooperatively, composing a ransom note. Of the many suggestions written on the board, these were the most popular.

Lucille suggested the library as a drop-off center.

Paul recommended that Room 15 leave \$1,000.00 in a paper bag at a

specific location in the library.

Tiffany said the deadline should be 2 p.m. that very day.

Rose added the terrible threat of "bunnyburgers."

Ramel volunteered to copy the note from the board in his clearest handwriting.

The note was taped to the door of Room 15 so it would be seen immediately upon return from the field trip.

By lunch recess, everyone in the school was abuzz with the news of such a dreadful act, committed right in their midst.

At 2 p.m. Rose sent the group of third graders to the library. They returned joyously, clutching a paper sack of monopoly money. They counted \$1,000.00.

Success! Congratulating themselves on masterminding such a crime, they were about to embark on a Dickensian celebration when *ta da*—a knock on the door. Silence and fear fell on the festivities.

Enter Mr. Kenny Smith, the school's P.E.A.K. (discipline) teacher accompanied by an "undercover reader" from Room 15 who had spied in the library and witnessed the entire ransom collection. The criminals were identified and arrested. After a few unsuccessful attempts to escape, they were taken to the office.

Under the strict supervision and jurisdiction of "Judge" Steve Stone (the principal) and consistent with their rights to due process, the mob was found guilty of kidnapping. Their stiff sentences took effect immediately:

1) Return Cottontail to Room 15 with a complete apology.

2) Every guilty person is to write a story expressing real understanding of the terms *kidnap* and *ransom*.

Rose Stough, as an instigator of and

accomplice to the crime, was sentenced to ten years of grading papers!

Rose promised to teach vocabulary in a more traditional way (for a little while).

Cottontail lived happily ever after in Room 15.

And Rose's third graders really learned the meaning of *kidnap* and *ransom*.

Case closed!

Author's note: This is a true experience. None of the names were changed to protect the guilty. Rose Stough, Marilyn Nelson, and Kenny Smith teach at Moler School in Columbus Ohio where Steve Stone was principal at the time of the crime.

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