

Some ABCs

By RON INOUE

In education

Editor's Note: Should you have any questions or suggestions for this or a future "ABCs" article, please let the author know by writing him at the Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska 99701 or by calling (907)479-7185.

Once upon a time there was a young boy raised in Southeast Alaska who was helped by his father to become observant of the world around him. At a very young age he was asked by his father to run around the house every morning before breakfast. He wished to do as his father requested, but he was sleepy; and so initially he did so in only a perfunctory manner. At the breakfast table his father would ask him a question such as, "Was the sky clear when you ran around the house?"

Not having been sufficiently observant to answer the questions correctly the first day, he remembered to look up at the sky when he ran around the house the next day. Every morning, however, his father would ask a different question, and every day the young boy learned to become more and more observant of what existed in the world outside the house.

That particular manner of learning to observe served the young boy well; he is now a grandfather, and his grandchildren now run around the house before breakfast whenever they come to visit.

This same technique may be appropriate for parents and teachers who will soon be experiencing spring break-up, the reaction of the environment to the change of seasons. Break-up is an exciting time for students to observe those seasonal changes since the changes are rapid and dramatic and can be observed on field trips, by daily observations to and from school, or by merely walking around the house.

English, science, and arts students could organize journals for recording their individual or team observations and exercising their writing skills with daily entries. From those journals longer essays and stories could be developed. The types of observations, varying with the particular interest of the student or class discipline, could range from climatic data, bird migrations, or appearances of the greenery, to lighter parkas worn by residents and the appearance of the first pair of break-up boots.

The first sightings are always an interesting way for students to make a game of observation. The "first" mosquito, the first sighting of a particular migratory bird species, and the first willow bud could be listed; the categories may also be selected beforehand by the teacher or parent.

Interrelationships could also be studied; for example, the appearance of a particular food source prior to the arrival of a specific migratory bird or animal, the sequence of greening of the tundra and willows, and the later blossoming of the tundra plants, and so on.

The world is new every day to those who are observant of its changes; possibly students and children in your community can sharpen their latent powers of concentration and observation with a little help from their teachers and parents.