

Give your children the opportunity to create

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I am presently working on my master's degree in the art education department at Ohio State University. For a class assignment I was to relate a story about something on television that had influenced me as an artist in my childhood.

At first I was stumped. I couldn't think of anything. Then I remembered about a drawing segment on the Captain Kangaroo Show, the "Magic Blackboard." I couldn't remember any of the stories that were told by the blackboard, but I know that they did change from one episode of the show to another.

At sometime during the broadcast, the "Captain"

would ask the Magic Blackboard to tell the boys and girls a story. The board itself was nothing more than a plain black board. As the story was read by Captain, a white line drawing would begin to appear on the board. At first the viewer couldn't figure out what the blackboard was drawing, but as the story continued the lines would eventually become an image the viewer could understand.

I remember being fascinated by how just a grouping of lines could become a wonderful drawing. I loved to watch the drawing develop and to imagine what it was going to be. The "Magic Blackboard" was always my favorite part of the whole program. As I looked back on this memory it suddenly occurred to me what I had grown up to be — an artist that enjoys drawing pictures! Perhaps this is why I was always so fascinated with Captain Kangaroo's "Magic Blackboard."

As I remembered the "Magic Blackboard" I was reminded of how powerful the mental image can be. Perhaps this is what is missing in today's "high tech" society, when everything can be seen before we even have a chance to imagine it. Some of the power of the "Magic Blackboard" was using the viewer's imagination to conjure up an image before it is fully given. Children today are given so many images that they do not have time to form their own mental image.

I think about how my own childhood was affected by images that I saw on the television. I began by watching the black and white cartoons. My father didn't believe in "color TV" so he didn't buy a

color television until long after I had moved out of the house. I believe that I was greatly affected by these black and white images and wanted to create my own some day. At least these early television images did leave a lot of room for my imagination to add to them. But what of the television images of today? They seem to leave very little to a child's imagination.

My children's lives have been equally, if not more, affected by the many images that they watched and still do watch on television. So many of these images have been cartoon images that have been drawn by cartoon artists. In this way art on television is still greatly affecting our children and will continue to do so.

About a year or so ago I remember listening to a

discussion between my preteen children about the quality of the drawings in the cartoons that they watch. They discussed how they didn't like a particular cartoon because they didn't like the way the images were drawn.

Again they constantly are affected by the drawn image in somewhat the same way that I was affected by those early black and white television images on the "Magic Blackboard." They want it to match the creative mental image that they have within their minds.

My preteen drawing students are always drawing the cartoon images that they seen constantly on television. The cartoonists of these images have become the masters of our time. Kids want to be like them and draw what they draw. It is very difficult sometimes to get them to create their own images.

But they must always be encouraged to do so. I usually ask the students, of my cartooning classes to create their own cartoon characters and stories. I am always amazed at the products that these kids can create when given the opportunity to do so.

It is always important in art education to acquaint children with the past art masters. But it is perhaps equally important to let them explore the masters of our own time, like the cartoonists.

We must give children the opportunity to create as these artists have and will continue to as the technology of cartooning becomes more and more sophisticated. Perhaps these students will become the masters someday.

