

CASE 6

Houses and Boats

While waiting for a visit from the local fire chief, Mr. Rodriguez asks his third graders to draw floor plans of their homes-as he puts it, to “draw what a bird would see if the roof were missing.” Once the fire chief arrives, the children will use red colored markers to create several fire exit routes in their floor plans.

As the children work at tables of four students each, Mr. Rodriguez walks around the room to oversee their efforts. He notices that Jenny is copying Tian’s floor plan on her own paper.

“Jenny, do you live in the same house as Tian?” he asks her.

“No.”

“Then why are you copying his drawing?”

“Because I don’t know how to draw things on my own.”

“Of course you do. I’m asking you to draw your house, not just any old house.”

“I can’t.”

“Jenny, I was your kindergarten teacher. I remember that you used to draw lovely pictures.”

“Maybe, but I don’t remember how to draw houses anymore.”

“You don’t **remember** how to draw them?”

“That’s right. I can’t do it by myself, so you’ll have to show me how.”

“Well, I can get you started, anyway. How many stories does your house have?”

“Two.”

“Okay. Let’s start with the first floor. How many rooms are there on the first floor of your house?”

“Uh...let’s see...there’s the living room and the dining room and the kitchen and the bathroom. That’s four.”

“Is there also a hallway with stairs going up to the second floor?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. **now** what shape is your house? What shape would it be if a bird were looking down at it?”

“A rectangle, I guess.”

“So start by drawing a rectangle on your paper. Good, now why don’t you show me where the front door is in this rectangle house of yours, and then we can talk about where each room should go and where we should put the stairs...”

During the fire chiefs visit, Ms. Piesman, the art teacher, arrives carrying a stack of watercolor paintings. “Say, your students did a wonderful job painting these boats,” she tells Mr. Rodriguez. “I thought I’d hang them up in the hallway. Would that be all right with you?”

“Sounds like a great idea! If you have time now, I can help you hang them.”

“Thanks, I’d appreciate that.”

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As the two teachers begin hanging the paintings in the hallway on both sides of the classroom door, Mr. Rodriguez comments, “This is the first time all year that I’ve had a chance to see any of the children’s art work.” He pauses to stare at the paintings. “Hey! All of these boats look the same.”

“Of course.”

“I mean, everyone used the exact same proportions, the same colors, the same...everything!”

“Yes,” Ms. Piesman sighs. “It took me awhile, but I finally got everyone to think on the same wavelength.”

Possible questions for “Houses and Boats”:

- 1 . From Erik Erikson's perspective, in what stage of development is Jenny?**
- 2. Why might Jenny be having trouble creating her floor plan?**
- 3. Is it wise for Ms. Piesman to insist that the children all make their boats in the same way? Why or why not?**