

The teaching of arts and music in New York City's urban schools:

READING CRITICALLY

Now critically read the selection and complete the following outline as you read or after you finish. You may want to make this outline into a visual cluster of the important information.

Jonathan Kozol

From *Ordinary Resurrections*

- 1 New York City once had comprehensive art and music programs for the children in the elementary schools. Most of this was terminated years ago as a cost-saving measure at a time of what was called "the fiscal crisis" in New York, around the same time that the city also took school doctors from the elementary schools and more or less **dismantled** what had once been very good school libraries in order to save money on librarians and books. Since that time there have been several long-extended periods of great prosperity in New York City, and the city's revenues, of course, have soared in recent years during the escalations of stock values, which have brought unprecedented profits to the banking and investment principalities of Wall Street; but the savage cutbacks in the personnel and services available to children in the city's public schools, who now are overwhelmingly black and Hispanic, have not been restored.
- 2 So third-grade kids at P.S. 28 learn to make do, and make music, with imaginary flutes; and the children here at P.S. 30 get a couple of hours of good choral practice once or twice a week with a retired black instructor who received his love of music from a mother born to segregation in the South and does his best to pass these treasures on to children born into another kind of segregation, nearly as absolute but possibly a good deal less **genteel** and less protective than the somewhat milder kind of rural isolation that his mother knew some sixty years before.
- 3 The detail that stuck with me was the way he reached his hand out to the child who was lying on her stomach next to him and lightly

touched her on her hair. I've seen Mr. Bedrock do exactly the same thing: reaching out one of his hands to graze one of the children on the shoulder, or an elbow, or her hair, not even looking up but knowing somehow that the child's there. The children in his class like to pretend that they're eavesdropping on his conversations, peering up at him obliquely like small **espionage** agents, with stage smiles. He'll just reach out while he and I are talking and locate the child's hand or arm and maybe draw the child in to him and hold her head beneath his arm like a good-natured soccer ball, and then look down and act surprised, as if to say, "What have we here?"

4 Mr. Bedrock used to teach at Temple University. He was a war resister in the 1960s and served time in prison. He's a deeply serious man, and he's politically tough-minded. His observations about life among the children, his belief in their intelligence and moral goodness, and his recognition of the obstacles that many face, as well as his intense, unsparring condemnation of New York for its apparently eternal acquiescence in the racial isolation of these children, had a powerful effect in focusing my own perceptions of the neighborhood and reinforcing my beliefs about the structural **inequities** that narrowed opportunity for many of these girls and boys.

5 Political loyalties, however, as some of us learn belatedly, do not automatically equate to qualities that make a teacher likable, exciting, or successful in the classroom. I think that Mr. Bedrock's **pedagogic** victories have less to do with his political beliefs than with his willingness to let the children know him as the somewhat undefended, open-hearted, earnestly affectionate good person that he really is.

6 "She misbehaved" he told me once about a child who was making faces at him while we spoke, "because she knows I love her."

7 Sometimes his students do get out of hand. When they do, he seems to know the way to get them back under control. Mrs. Gamble has imaginary music for this purpose. Mr. Bedrock has his own approaches, which do not exclude raising his voice from time to time, although his far more usual approach to moments of disorder is to show a truly pained expression on his face and to convey his disappointment in a voice of mournful sorrow. "I don't understand why there is *any* need for table six to talk about the definition of a simile," he said one day this fall when I was in his class. "I admit it isn't a terrific lesson but you're *not* making things easier by talking." When the children saw him smiling after those distressing words, they looked relieved and actually did quiet down to keep their teacher happy.

8 Both Mr. Bedrock and Mrs. Gamble are politically sophisticated people. Yet both respect, and keep alive, another part of the imagination that does not belong especially to politics or even, really, **intellection**; they both retain their playfulness and, even more than that, they *learn* some of that playfulness from being in the company of children.

- 9 I was with Mr. Bedrock once in April when he took a group of older boys for mathematics. The subject of the lesson was “improper fractions.” Isaiah was in the class that day and the idea of “proper” or “improper” fractions struck him as amusing. Mr. Bedrock asked him what he found so funny and Isaiah simply said the words with an exaggerated English accent, in the phrasing you might hear in films about the British upper class. Mr. Bedrock picked up on Isaiah’s humor and continued with the lesson on improper fractions in a very funny, very “proper-sounding” imitation of an English gentleman. It was only a brief moment in a long day of instruction, but it helped to lighten up the lesson and perhaps to animate a subject that the students here apparently had had a hard time learning.
- 10 In the cafeteria one day, a child in his fourth-grade class came up to him with several very tiny cakes with decorations in the frosting, which she’d brought from home. She held them on her hand and told him, “Look!” and asked him if he wanted one for his dessert. They were the size of postage stamps. There was something so mysterious about the way she seemed to speculate upon those little cakes!
- 11 “I don’t know . . .,” he said, “They look too good to eat.”
- 12 He peered into the child’s hand as if the cakes were tiny works of medieval sculpture. “Did your mother make them?”
- 13 “No,” the child said, “they’re from the store.”
- 14 “I don’t know . . .,” he said again, making it seem a difficult decision. Then he chose one of the cakes and popped it in his mouth and ate it in one swallow.
- 15 “Is it good?”
- 16 “I’m full!” he said.
- 17 The child laughed and went back to her table.
- 18 Why does this remind me of the moment in the garden of the church when Mother Martha and Katrice were watching Otto and the other children playing in the sprinkler? It is, perhaps, only the pleasing insignificance of a spontaneous connection between adult **sensibilities** and juvenile amusement. Elio’s pants are falling off. The priest, who went to court this afternoon to get a teenage boy released from the Manhattan lockup called “The Tombs” and who returned with the frustration that she almost always feels when coping with the overloaded courts, is suddenly relaxed and carefree, and gets soaked!
- 19 Grown-ups need these moments just as much as children do. The water refreshes the bodies of the children and renews the **torpid** air of afternoon. The laughter of the children is refreshing too. Carried away by unimportant **bellicose** preoccupations, some of them call out from time to time to make sure that the grown-ups are not missing anything that’s going on.
- 20 “Look, Katrice!”
- 21 “What is it, child?”

- 22 “Look, Katrice!”
 25 “I’m looking!” says Katrice.
 24 “Look! Look, Katrice!” another child cries.
 25 “Lord’s sake, child!” says Katrice. “What more do you want of me?
 I’m *looking!*”
 26 She sounds slightly put upon. It’s part of her manner, though. Her
 Caribbean lilt, as always, is quite beautiful and full of tenderness. I am
 reminded of imaginary music.

SOURCE: Jonathan Kozol, *Ordinary Resurrections* (New York: Crown, 2000), pp. 280–284.

OUTLINING/CLUSTERING

I. Why teaching arts and music in New York City’s urban schools is a problem

II. Mr. Bedrock’s style of teaching

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

III. How Mr. Bedrock maintains classroom harmony

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

IV. How Mr. Bedrock teaches mathematics creatively

A. _____

B. _____

V. What children can teach their teachers

A. _____

B. _____

dismantled: taken apart; **genteel:** well bred; **espionage:** spying;
inequities: unfairnesses; **pedagogic:** pertaining to teaching;
intellection: thinking; **sensibilities:** feelings; **torpid:** sluggish;
bellicose: warlike