You Draw
then I Draw:
The Graphic Dialogue
Alex and her mother, Joan, are busily engaged in verbal dialogue. Alex babbles, "da da da da," to which Joan responds, "ma-ma, ma-ma." As the sequence repeats again and again, Alex laughs delightedly. She wriggles her toes and frequently arranges her mouth as though preparing to form the sound of "mmm." Finally, one morning Alex calls from her crib, "Ma ma ma." Although she may not yet have made a connection between the person of her mother and the "ma-ma" sounds, Alex has learned the new sounds through their continual dialogue, as she will learn the next sounds and the next.¹ This interaction is necessary to the child's development of language.
The child who only listens to language does not learn to speak. A boy with normal hearing, whose parents were deaf mutes, heard language only through a daily diet of television and failed to develop verbal speech. There had been no interaction; one doesn’t talk to a television set, nor can the set answer back. The boy did learn to communicate, however, through the interaction that he did experience—the sign language used by his parents.²

Since the mother begins her dialogue with the child at birth, a dialogue made up of coos and other sounds, of words, of questions, it would be rare for interaction not to occur in verbal language. It is unusual, however, for children to "speak" through drawings to adults who "answer back" with drawings of their own. Chapter 3 offers suggestions for interacting verbally with the young child to assist them through early drawing development. Since children can benefit tremendously from graphic as well as verbal interaction, in this chapter we introduce a model for graphic interaction by presenting a series of drawing conversations between adults and children as young as five and among children of various ages.

Graphic Dialogues: Some Sources

The Italian philosopher and poet, Corrado Ricci, who wrote the first book devoted entirely to children’s drawings, actually discovered his topic when he took shelter from the rain under a portico. While he waited for the rain to subside he began to study the children’s drawings he found on the walls, noting how the older children seemed to influence one another, while the younger children’s drawings located lower on the wall appeared fresher and more spontaneous. In this first encounter with children’s drawings, Ricci appears to have discovered the graphic conversations that take place among children when they draw in the same setting.

Brent Wilson recalls his early experience with communal drawing:

In the fall and winter of 1942 and the spring of 1943, during WWII, American forces in the Pacific had just achieved their first success in the battles of the Coral Sea and Guadalcanal. In North Africa, Field Marshal Rommel was storming Egypt. American forces were landing in Algeria, and far behind the lines, on the blackboards of the third- and fourth-grade classroom in Fairview Grade School in Fairview, Idaho parallel battles were being fought with chalk and blackboard erasers as principle weapons. During the long winter noontime break and morning and afternoon recesses, Clair Drury, Tony Knudsen, Blake Harding, and I drew aerial dogfights. One day the U.S. Army Airforce battled Germany, and the next day, Japan. Chalk tat-tat-tats marked machine gun bursts, radial zig-zags recorded hits, the corners of erasers and wavy chalk lines were used to show planes in the early processes of disintegration as pilots parachuted to the ground. Below, a similar process was repeated simultaneously with tanks, trucks, jeeps, cannons, and soldiers. I can still remember our conversations about drawing styles as we stepped back to admire our glorious panoramas. We could tell, just by looking, who had drawn every plane, truck, tank, and soldier. We also borrowed any good idea that appealed to us. Clair Drury always drew with firm pressure. From him I learned the value of precision and how to draw flaring front fenders on my trucks with their radiators jutting forward in an exaggerated version of the Chrysler "Airstream." The entire board at the front of the room would be filled and then erased before class began.

Memories of Fairview Grade School came flooding back when, during the late 1970s, in a Brookline, Massachusetts, elementary school art classroom, we watched two fourth- or fifth-grade boys drawing together. They had completed the art assignment and had asked their teacher if they could use a fresh piece of 18" x 24" white drawing paper. On it they began to draw a space battle with fighters and rockets shooting at one another while emitting long orange back-blasts drawn with a colored pencil and a yardstick. One of us asked, "may I draw with you?" to which the answer was "yes." To accommodate the new player, an additional sheet of paper was taped to the first. Soon more students asked to join the battle, and more sheets were taped to the first. The excitement was palpable and we witnessed
again the dynamic and seductive power of making drawings together. We draw with children nearly every chance that comes our way and we encourage children to draw with one another.

**Graphic Dialogues between Adults and Children**

Three-year-old Becky (see figure 3-36) had just drawn a navel on the completed figure of a dog in the picture story. "It's called a belly button," she explained patiently to the adult who was drawing with her. "Oh," he said, "and what did I call it?" "A pupil," said Becky.

For some time the adult and the child had been engrossed in conversation—conversation in that it was an exchange of ideas—but although there was a good deal of verbal give and take, most of the discourse took place on the large sheet of paper on the table before them. We call this form of conversation a **graphic dialogue** or a **drawing dialogue**.

Through graphic dialogue the child can more easily pass through the early stages of graphic development to greater fluency in the language of art. In his book *Strategies of Representation in Young Children*, Norman Freeman considered the reasons for stereotypes in children’s drawings, suggesting that perhaps drawing was a “relatively solitary pursuit”:

Contrast [drawing] with conversation or social games and it becomes clear that there is rather limited scope for ongoing social interaction to alter the course of drawing. . . . People simply do not usually play social drawing games in which the adult and child act as colleagues.

For several years, however, we have been engaging in just such social drawing games and the adults and children in our graphic dialogues do indeed act as colleagues.

In verbal dialogue first one person speaks, then the other, in a rapid exchange of ideas ranging from highly serious to playful interactions. The drawing dialogue is also an interchange—I draw and then you draw. And, although always a serious business to those who participate, graphic interaction has many characteristics in common with the best and most spontaneous play. The participants enter into play willingly; they may tacitly agree to a few simple rules such as taking turns (although they remain free both to make and to break rules in the context of the play). Sometimes they may also agree to a general theme for the play.

As in play, once a drawing dialogue has begun there is no adult and child—merely two players. There is an excitement, a flow of ideas, a sensitive and willing response to unexpected cues suggested by the other or to the serendipitous occurrences in one’s own drawings. Sometimes one leads, sometimes the other. There is total absorption. Graphic play at its best is like being somewhere else—living within the bounds of a sheet of paper, in the world created there, to master or be mastered, good guy or bad, in real (if symbolic) events. Because these dialogues are free, playful, stimulating, and fun (for children and adults alike) they may be the very best way to expand the child’s narrative abilities, drawing skills, and inclination toward invention and fantasy. Through drawing dialogues and conversations in the company of adults, children have the opportunity to create, preview, rehearse, and test in symbolic form the very patterns of past, present, and future realities.

**Becky**

For Becky, who always had the desire and the encouragement to draw, the drawing dialogue recorded here was her first excursion into the realm of figure drawing. A few months earlier, at Christmastime, she diligently practiced circles and wove intricate stories about her scribbles; it is utterly astounding that only a few minutes before she began this dialogue, Becky had drawn her very first human figure (see *Where’s the Tummy*, p. 59).

This drawing dialogue began with the adult recreating Becky’s own first figure in the upper left-hand corner of the paper as Becky gave encouragement—“see, this is how I made it . . . yes!”—and instructions—“and then you have to make some fingers, too”—until the figure was completed to her satisfaction. The one thing that seemed to both fascinate and confuse Becky throughout the dialogue was the discrepancy in the verbal designations that she and the adult had given to a dot or a small circle within a larger circle: *navel* was called a *tummy button* by the adult and a *belly button* by Becky; the *pupil* of the eye was called a *pupil* by

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the adult but an eyball by the child. This confusion was such that finally for Becky pupil became not a mis-named eyball but a misplaced navel. But if Becky was confused by a play on words, her graphic play was lively and exciting and not at all confusing.

When the adult suggested that the person drawn on the page be "Becky," an ever-animated child responded "Me!" with a high-pitched squeal of joy. Getting into the story was even easier than anticipated: Becky was never at a loss for ideas or suggestions or enthusiasm, and she was prepared to try her hand at anything in the way of drawing challenges. Because she was drawing with a red pen, Becky was inspired to suggest that if the little girl in the drawing was going somewhere, she should be given a "red car." It was Becky's turn to draw and she was confident that she could draw the red car if only she knew how. "But how do you make a car?"

The most interesting result of this drawing dialogue was that Becky drew not only the human figure but cars with steering wheels and big windows and dogs (that are silly and don't know enough to get out of the way of red cars). If a car sometimes had hair and legs as well as wheels, Becky explained it as a "person-car," and if a dog had six legs, it was a "mean dog" so it was given "mean hair" and buttons. Nobody minded. Sometimes Becky simply talked the adult through the drawing: sometimes they drew together on the same figure. But there was no part of the drawing or the story to which Becky did not contribute. Becky, at the age of three years, nine months, is the youngest child we have played this game with.

The basic element of the narrative is telling or showing what happens and then what happens next. This element is even more exciting when it becomes a series of getting-into and getting-out-of difficult situations. When two play this drawing game, move and countermoves often follow in quick succession. This was certainly the case with some of the drawings we did with Sam.
“Sam’s Barriers”

Our dialogue with ten-year-old Sam demonstrated the “argumentative” flavor of many dialogues—in the best possible sense of the word. And, as in the best arguments, the necessity to counter the thrusts of one’s opponent leads to the further development and refinement of one’s own ideas.

This dialogue had begun with a long strip of paper. B’s character is confronted by one of Sam’s “weird people” with a “weird long arm,” and “You’d better not move or you’ll get rays.” But the character easily collects the rays from the ray gun in a “handy collector” box. Sam adds some “long, long, long grass,” and then “what comes out of it is a snake” which “goes over the weird person’s head—and what he does, he goes around the collector. He’s called a clear snake; you can see right through him.” Sam’s younger brother, Brent, who is drawing across the table, disagrees. “This one is,” retorts Sam. “Listen, Brent, this is my imagination, not yours.”

B’s character turns into a plastic man and slithers along the top of the page, avoiding the snake. Sam is stumped, but he soon adds “a giant ant mound with a bunch of flying ants that get on his hand—walk all over him.” B’s response is to supply his character with even greater flexibility, sprouting five “anteater tongues” with which he sucks up the ants. Sam’s verbal response is, “Yucky, yucky, yucky!”

Sam adds yet another anthill and a “spitting cobra” and a wall that “never stops.” As B attempts to get out of this predicament, Sam adds, “Hold it. You forgot about the wall. OK, the wall never stops; you gotta get through the cobra and ants before you can go through the wall—if you have anything to go through the wall with.” At this point the verbal assault runs alongside the visual barriers, and Sam reminds B that he is a formidable opponent. “And also you’re too full of ants so you can’t eat ‘em.” Sam watches as B draws. “What’s that?”

“He seems to be getting smaller, doesn’t he?” says B.

“Yeah, but you know what? The ants are filling up these cracks.” And then, aside, “I’m making it hard for you.” But B’s character becomes a “very small” atomic bomb that blasts the cobra “named Ralph” and heads toward the wall.

Sam is ready with his verbal barrage. “Now the ants—he’s too full to eat ‘em all. Remember, he can’t get through the crack, ‘cause the ants know what he looks like,” and Sam giggles with glee to think he may have stumped B. after all.

But B. is undaunted. Turned into a screw, his character screws an opening through the wall, emerges, encounters a minefield, and is blown to bits. The bits ricochet from wall to wall of Sam’s shed full of TNT. B. is trying to get Sam to draw figures. He taunts, “The only way you can get this guy is to get somebody as smart as him to take him on: snakes aren’t smart enough,” and “I think you’re going to have to create a character that has at least the same powers that mine has; otherwise, how can you take care of him?”

Figure 8-2
Sam (age 10) and B., an adult
Sam’s Barriers (colored marker and pen)
6” x 54”

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Sam accepts the challenge. "OK, I'll show you." He hedges still with hills and land mines and buildings but succumbs with a promise of "a motorcycle gang [in case B.'s character should surmount the other barriers] with guns and daggers and brass knuckles." He is finally cajoled into "putting his pencil where his mouth is." He draws a motorcycle. "There's the motorcycle."

"Where's the gang?" B. asks. Giggle. "Inside the motorcycle—that's the motorcycle gang."

B. threatens to have his character make his getaway on the motorcycle. "I'm glad you left the motorcycle for him. Maybe he couldn't ride it if somebody was on it or something." Sam tentatively starts to draw a motorcyclist with "shaggy hair, a big nose, and white eyes."

B., seeing that Sam has started his figure too high on the page, asks, "Is he standing behind it or is he on it?" Sam counters, "Oh, he's real short so he's standing on it," and encouraged, draws another. "I'm not done yet," but laughing, "I told you I'm not good at making people, space people, yeah."

B. continues to playfully tease Sam. "Is he standing on his [the first guy's] motorcycle, too?" Sam laughs, but says, "That's not all,

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**Figure 8-3**

*Philip* (age 6) and *M.*, an adult

**The Race** (colored marker)

11" x 27¾"

This dialogue between *Philip* and an adult took place three months after *Philip*'s first stories (see p. 113). Before the dialogue began there had been a discussion of figures running (Chapter 3), so what follows is a continuation of that exchange.

**M:** Start with a little boy and a little girl. Think about the story—do you know what they're going to be doing?

**Philip:** They're having a race. [He adds a sign, asks how to spell start.] S-T-A-R-T period!

**M:** Now there's a man . . . and he's standing over here.

**Philip:** I know what you're going to do with the man. You're going to make him hold a gun and it goes "pow." [The drawing of the referee is very similar to the best of *Philip*'s own figures. He adds black scribbles and red flame from the gun—to indicate that it has been shot.]

**M:** Here is the ground and there's this big rock.

*Philip*: Quickly points out the error of that move. His runners were proceeding down the page rather than across the page. Because he was not yet ready to do a profile view, his figures were drawn as if seen from above. He then proceeds to redraw the ground line with the proper orientation. Now here comes the biiiig rock—they're already trippin'—ohh—the boy's gonna trip right to here—and the girl falls down, too.

**M:** Are they going to help each other to get up, or what?

**Philip:** They can get up by themselves [but he looks again at his drawing] . . . but not without they have arms [and *Philip* adds arms to his figures, but not until he has gotten down on the floor to show just how hard it would be to get up without using his arms.]

**M:** The boy is running very fast.

**Philip:** Are you going to make the boy win?

**M:** Here is the girl.

**Philip:** She's way behind. [But she is sad. *Philip* guesses she is sad because the boy has gotten so far ahead.] But she isn't running. [The girl has hurt her knee.]

**M:** Do you think the boy will feel sorry and go back and help the girl?

**Philip:** Bring her a Band-aid. [He draws the boy as he turns to go back to the girl. This figure is drawn perpendicular to the others—still from a bird's-eye view.] The boy and girl are both running together and they are smiling and holding hands. *Philip* is pleased with this turn of events [he adds a finish line—again asks about the spelling and writes F-I-N-I-S-H and places between the clasped hands of the girl and boy . . . a trophy.] They have both won the race.
behind them is the Muppet gang. Nobody can go through them—Kermit the Frog and all those weirdos." There is a discussion involving Sam’s brother, who is not sure that Sam can draw “all them,” and B. again teases Sam about men standing on top of motorcycles, but all’s fair and, “Come on,” says Sam, “your guy has two thousand tongues and eats ants.”

And as Sam proceeds, B. gently encourages him. “I thought you couldn’t do that; that’s better than mine.” Accepting the praise, Sam answers, “Cause I’m using your pen.” Encouraged, he adds more characters. “He’s dancing,” and “Miss Piggy—has a dress on,” and “and then there’s Cookie Monster.” Sam has discovered that he really can draw people.

The story ends with the bits of B.’s character finally blasting out from the TNT-filled room and plastering themselves to the faces of Sam’s gang. When a bit hits Miss Piggy, the creature recomposes, as if kissed by the fairy-tale princess. Sam finally decides the only way to take care of this creature is to create another like it. The final figure is his and it runs to encounter B.’s creature. Perhaps the important thing here is that Sam’s figure is running. Not only is he drawing figures, now his figure runs—a first for Sam.

In the getting-into and getting-out-of-difficulty dialogues, each new countermove virtually demands new drawing skills of the players, but because the playing is so much fun the new skills develop almost effortlessly (p. 153).

Elephant Story

Almost always when we draw stories with children, we ask the child to draw first. This permits us to observe the level at which he draws—so that we can draw at slightly higher levels while at the same time drawing in a style similar to that of the child. This is what B. did as he drew with Teal. (8-4)

(8-4A) Teal was just four years and five months when she drew the little figure—hardly more than a tadpole—taking a shower.

(8-4B & 8-4C) B. drew the empty shower with the little girl leaving it, getting dressed, and putting on her beautiful hat with a flower on it. The drawing of both the shower and the little girl getting dressed continues the sequential action element—showing and getting dressed—while adding the element of time by showing the empty shower the little girl has left.

(8-4D) Teal models her next drawing after B.’s previous two drawings; she shows the little girl going outside by drawing the door and the little girl beyond it—echoing the girl in B.’s drawing.

(8-4E) It’s B.’s turn again. He takes the opportunity to introduce an unexpected element. He has the little girl begin to push her doll carriage. Surprise! A huge elephant sits in the place where one might expect to find a doll. It’s unlikely that Teal would have done something as silly as drawing an elephant in the doll’s place on her own. Most four-year-old children are quite content to tell ordinary slice-of-life stories—first we did this, then we did this, and then this; the end. The role of the adult partner is to add a bit of spice to ordinary stories.

(8-4F) Teal’s next drawing is very tiny—just one-half inch tall and an inch long. It shows the little girl and an even smaller elephant approaching a body of water. We wonder if the smallness of the
drawing may reveal Teal's tentative thoughts about drawing elephants or about what might happen next. Never mind, she got us to the water.

(8-4G) In the seventh drawing, B. has the little girl and her elephant friend board a boat and sail away—with the elephant standing precariously close to the edge of the boat. "Oh oh! What's going to happen next." A well placed verbal cue sends a signal that it is time for more disequilibrium.

(8-4H) Teal has taken the cue nicely; the elephant, seen from above, has fallen off the boat and is now under water.

(8-4I) B. suggests that the little girl toss a line to the elephant.

(8-4J) Teal draws the elephant attached to the line, and the elephant blows water out of its trunk.

(8-4K) Back aboard the boat, Teal draws the little girl standing atop B.'s elephant as they sail for shore.

(8-4L) Home safely! Teal draws the elephant and the little girl walking through the door of their house.

(8-4M and 8-4N) B. draws the elephant asleep in its bed and Teal draws the little girl asleep in her own bed.

Figure 8.4
Teal (age 4) and B., an adult.
Elephant Story (black "rolling-writer")
7" x 15¼"

The Two Nice Sisters, the Cat, and the Lion

(8-5A) Once there were two sisters. They were always nice to each other. They went for a walk and saw a big box.

(8-5B) They opened the box and saw a little cat. Oh oh! They saw a big lion too. The little sister grabbed the little cat. (Teal drew the little sister and the cat and B. drew the surprised older sister and the lion.)

Sometimes a child's level of drawing changes considerably more than the level of her story telling, even when she draws with an adult. Teal and B. drew the story of "The Two Nice Sisters, the Cat, and the Lion" (8-5) when she was nine years and nine months old—five years after they drew the elephant story.

As in her earlier story, Teal drew the first frame—a picture of two sisters, probably Teal and her younger sister Kess. B. added a box to her drawing. One never knows what a box might hold. Once the story was finished, Teal recounted it verbally. (It's interesting that the elephant in the earlier story needed to be rescued, while the lion, in this later story, gets himself out of the lake.)
(8-5C) When they got home they began to play with the cat. At the side of the house they saw the big lion. (Teal drew everything but the lion.)

(8-5D) The big lion started to chase them. They ran down to the lake, the little cat was with them. B. drew almost everything but the cat.

(8-5E) The lion tripped on a rock and fell in the lake. The two sisters were surprised and the cat began to cry because the lion was its friend. (Teal drew almost everything but the two sisters showing their distress. It appears that the water provided a means to neutralize any threat posed by the lion.)

(8-5F) The lion climbed out of the lake, onto some rocks that were nearby. The girls got a towel for the lion to dry himself and they all became friends.

(8-5G) The final drawing in the series was inspired by Teal’s retelling the story to her family. It shows the sisters and the sleeping cat, drawn by Teal, and the lion drawn by Teal and B.

Figure 8-5
Teal (age 9) and B., an adult
*The Two Nice Sisters, the Cat, and the Lion* (black “rolling-writer”)

The Space Horse (That Shoots Fire) and the Mean Robot

When Teal’s older brother, Dane, was five years and one month old, he also drew a story with B.—one of many they have drawn together over the years.

In Chapter 3, we talked about how children discover regular configurations within their irregular scribbles. Some children (and some adults too) continue the practice of beginning to draw with a scribble, looking to see what it reminds them of, and then taking additional steps to transform the marks into what they appeared to resemble. This is how Dane started “The Space Horse and the Mean Robot.”

(8-6A) Dane began a random scribble on the left-hand page of a sketchbook. Almost immediately he saw the head of a horse, jaws open, an ear, and front feet. Where the horse’s back might be, however, he had scribbled a curious volcano-like cone shape. No matter, he named it “a space horse that is a robot. He shoots fire.” Lines were quickly added to represent the volcano’s eruption—and wings were added to the horse. Its possible that, for Dane, the space horse became a robot because another scribbled shape where the horse’s tail might be reminded Dane of the mechanical...
hand of a robot. The quarter moon and a star were added to show that this fire-spouting horse was certainly in space.

On the right hand page, Dane drew more stars, more volcanic eruption, and "a mean robot with snoppers (like Leif does)." Dane had recently seen a story drawing made by his uncle Leif and B. (8-7) In this story, a robot named Hornen possessed huge mechanical hands, which Dane called "snoppers."

(8-6B) It was B's turn to draw. Because Dane and B. had been drawing together since Dane was two and one-half years old, B. knew that Dane was unperturbed if he drew several levels above the five-year-old's developmental level. In fact, using the more advanced drawings as models, Dane frequently raised the level of his own drawing. On the next two pages, B. drew the mean robot with snoppers attacking the robot horse.

(8-6C) When it was Dane's turn to draw, B.'s static drawing inspired a veritable firestorm of action that spread over the next two pages. On the right hand page Dane drew the horse in the act of breathing fire on the poor robot (drawn on the left-hand page). The furiously-scribbled mass of lines show the ferocity of the flames. Dane shows the mean robot's distress by the expression on his face, borrowed from B.'s drawing on the previous two pages, and by the two snoppers the mean robot holds high as if to escape the flames. Dane told the story this way "they are in the war. Robot horse blowing fire. The mean robot's snoppers are melting." All around the mean robot, Dane adds "other animals, a frog, are fighting too." In addition to a Kermit-like frog (directly above the mean robot's head), Dane had drawn birds and other marvelous creatures who join the battle to subdue the mean robot.

(8-6D) It was B's turn to draw. Turning the page, he drew the fire-breathing horse standing triumphantly over the mean robot. The story could have ended there, but Dane had already planted the seeds of the next phase with his introduction of animals who joined the battle. As B. began to draw more animals being set free, Dane joined in, creating a mar-
velous menagerie of birds, dinosaur-like creatures, and fish. When this part of the story was complete, Dane told it this way: "the horse destroys the robot. His parts—insides—come out. The frog sets all the imprisoned animals free. They are happy to be out of jail. They say hurrah! We are free." ("Imprisoned" must have been a term B. used as he drew; it's not a word one expects to find in a five-year-old's vocabulary.)

(8-6E) Dane started his next drawing with the mean robot in the swamp. The empty animal prison (on the far right) is drawn with a single animal standing on top. Dane had the idea that the animals should go to a new world. B.'s enthusiastic response to the idea was the drawing of an ark-like rocket ship, to which Dane added an interesting unnamed structure to its right. Following the Noah's ark model, B. had the animals board the ship, drawing the animals nearest the rocket ship receding in size. Dane's recounting was: "the robot with its broken parts is going into a swamp. All the animals are going to an enormous space ship to go to a new world."

(8-6F) B. established the context for the new world by drawing a curved line to show the contour of the planet and Dane immediately drew the ark-spaceship resting on its surface. There was enormous excitement as Dane and B. began to plot how their new world would look. Dane's description of this part of the story was: "The new world. The spaceship landed and the animals got out. Welcome! Skyscraper for fish. Tree house. A steggie (Stegosaurus) village. A church. A park."

B. began to draw a huge skyscraper in the shape of an inverted fishbowl mounted atop a tower (on the left). Dane quickly drew a row of jagged teeth-like shapes across the top of the bowl. "What are those?" B. asked. "Scrapers," Dane replied. Of course! Skyscrapers are not complete until they have their scrapers. Dane's skyscraper on the right has them too. No longer was it your turn, and then my turn. Dane and B. drew whenever and wherever they wished as the new world grew and grew.
(8-6G) The new world came to exist both above and below ground. This drawing shows the new world at night. Underground there is a factory for the manufacture of candy Stegosauruses and a long tunnel to convey the steggies above ground. A huge rat begins to eat the steggies and has to be contained in a glass bottle. Above ground a little boy eats too many steggies and throws up.

(8-6H) At about drawing number eight, most of which was drawn by Dane, the five-year-old recited, “The sun came out in the new world. A farm had tall grass. The grandfather and grandson were lost in the tall grass. The grass-eating dinosaurs couldn’t eat it up. So they (the grandfather and the grandson) went underground (actually they fell down a shaft—this is the part that B. drew). The Diplocauses (a kind of dinosaur?) were having a birthday party. The tyrant (Tyrannosaurus Rex) was swimming in the water (in the far left corner).” Dane wanted everyone who viewed the drawing to note the “loud-speaker too” (directed toward the tyrant.) This was enough drawing for one day.

(8-6I) The drawing was continued the following day. About this drawing Dane said: “In the new world all the animals are learning to fly.” The two dinosaur-like creatures in the center were drawn by B. but Dane drew the rest. When B. asked Dane, “where did you learn to draw birds like that?” he already knew the answer. B. had been reading the book Cave Birds: An Alchemical Cave Drama, with poems by Ted Hughes and drawings by Leonard Baskin 1978, New York, Viking Press). As B. read the book aloud, Dane looked over his shoulder and asked about each of Baskin’s illustrations, “Is that a good bird or a bad bird?” Dane’s marvelous birds had been drawn from his memory of Baskin’s birds.
(8-6) The cave birds began to dominate the story. About this drawing Dane said: "the cave birds are having a party." Dane drew the birds on the left side from memory, and on the right side of the page he drew birds while looking at Baskin's illustrations. B. drew the cake and the bird in the lower right hand corner.

(8-6K) Dane drew the big birds above, and B. drew the small birds below. Now the story had evolved from a space adventure to the challenge of drawing birds in the style of Baskin.
(8-7A) Leif had just turned twelve when he drew a robot he named Hornen. A day earlier Leif and B. had drawn a story about robots, but Hornen was a new character. (Note that Hornen has mechanical hands—the ones that Dane had seen and called snoppers, which he drew on his mean robot. (8-6A) (See Leif’s attempts to draw airplanes when he was age 4 [5-1-5-6].)

(8-7B) When it was B.’s turn to draw, he divided the page into three panels and established Hornen’s origin—that he was a destructive robot who had been vanquished from earth. With the cropping of Hornen in the third frame B. attempted to establish a new convention for Leif. B.’s question, “how did he manage to return? Has he gained new powers?” was intended as a narrative challenge to Leif.

(8-7C) Leif borrowed the idea of making panels from B.’s drawing, but cropped Hornen only slightly in the first of two frames. The city that Hornen found was Birmingham, England, where Leif lived. The tower Hornen attacked was the Birmingham Post Office Tower. In the second drawing Leif shows his skill in depicting the robot from an unusual perspective.

(8-7D) B. proved to be inept at showing Hornen in perspective. The answer to Leif’s “why is he (the robot) changing?” is that B. couldn’t draw the perspective of the head correctly. Consequently, the misdrawn head became a new transformational narrative element.
The Extended Graphic Dialogue

In the "you-draw-I-draw" graphic dialogue, the act of drawing alongside an adult accelerates a young person's ability to depict details, actions, events, and cause-and-effect in remarkable ways. The rapid-fire graphic interaction that leads to engrossing narrative sequences, however, discourages the careful and thoughtful development of a drawing's composition, expressive qualities, and detail. These features take time, and one's graphic partner can hardly be expected to wait patiently, even stifling his or her own enthusiastic response while the other labors to complete a detail in a highly complex drawing. The extended graphic dialogue makes such an opportunity possible. Rather than the immediate exchange that takes place on a single piece of paper, this dialogue consists of a series of drawings produced individually and sent to one's partner only after being fully worked to one's own satisfaction.

Ordeals of the Zargonian

This "Ordeals of the Zargonian" (8-8) was created by Jeff and B. Jeff was eleven at the time, but already he was something of a Renaissance man. In the course of the previous two years, he had written six or seven plays, two of which he not only produced and directed, but in which he also starred. The most recent was a James Bond spoof, "Thames Bland." Perhaps his most astounding play was a complex twenty-five-page, true-to-myth drama of the Trojan Wars. One of his poems had been published in an arts festival booklet, and he was writing two books, one of which consisted of a series of illustrated short stories about "The Ultrasound," a star system composed of thirteen planets, including Erthrogg, Nargal, Zargon, Hivaak and Paagorn, each with its own distinctive ecology and inhabitants. So it was no surprise that when Jeff began the dialogue he chose an Erthrogg cave as the setting.

(8-8A) In extended dialogues, written notes serve the same purpose as verbal dialogues between graphic narrators. Notes signal intent, explain implications, and represent attempts to move the story in preferred directions. Jeff notes below his first drawing: "This somewhat gory little doodedad takes place on the arid planet of Erthrogg. That Zargonian Samurai who effectively skewered the Nargalian won't be so
ecstatic when the other Nargalian webs him up and whatever is in the cave takes a hand in the situation.

(8-8B) In his drawing B. throws the question of what the cave conceals right back to Jeff. "The worms will have Zar for lunch if help doesn't arrive soon! What is in the cave?"

(8-8C) Jeff supplies the help, but leaves the cave question hanging. "It looks like everybody's attacking everybody right now, except Zar, of course. Who—what—will save him?"

(8-8D) As Jeff had done before him, B. directs his interest toward the action, but also raises the possibility that another force might provide Zar with a means of escape. "Meanwhile, inside Zar's head, a complex of biologically mechanical circuitry begins to . . ."

(8-8E) Perhaps Jeff is more experienced than B. at juggling the many complex threads of such a fantastic tale, because although he thwarts any hope of Zar's self-help project with a single self-destruct command, he does manage to dispatch whomever or whatever was in the cave once and for all. Jeff's note reads: "... activate his self-destruct mechanism, and in a moment, Zar the drone Zargonian is dead, along with every living thing in the cave."
(8-8F) B., by now having grown fond of Zar and determined that he will prevail in some form or another, brings about the Zargonian's recomposition, leaving the exact form to Jeff. The caption reads: "But bioelectric forces begin to reassemble the parts... Will Zar be the same? Or will his form have changed? Will he have new and marvelous powers?"

(8-8G) Nothing comes easily, especially if you control all the forces of the universe with your mind and hand, and Jeff continues to play with ideas and images and to toy with his partner, never fully losing control of the situation. Under his drawing, Jeff has written: "He assembles! But there is a malfunctioning in his circuits! The damage to his body is irreparable! His unstable molecules change painfully from one shape to the next. In a last-ditch effort, Zar releases his bio-mechanical life force to seek out another body to house his life forces! He finds..." And the dialogue continues.

The narrative tensions of the dialogue are evident, but what may be less apparent are the ways in which Jeff and B. influence one another graphically. Of course, B. had to learn to draw Zar and the various creatures, circuitry, and mechanical elements with which Jeff was already familiar. At the same time, because B. showed dimensionality in his drawing, Jeff was encouraged to add volume to his own subsequent drawing of rocks and cubes and figures as well. The two talked about shading and contrast, and after B. provided him with a 3B drawing pencil, Jeff bought his own set of drawing and charcoal pencils. Each new visual expression presented in the dialogue literally demands that the respondent draw things he has not previously drawn and to imagine what he has never imagined. This is the power of the extended graphic dialogue.

The extended graphic dialogue formalizes and accelerates an important, perhaps essential, aspect of art learning. It facilitates the process of working from and responding to the images of other artists. Far from inhibiting creativity, working with and alongside the images of others actually mandates invention and novelty as in the illustrations we have provided.
The graphic dialogues that we have shown thus far are sequential narratives, where—with a bit of description, it is possible to tell what happened first, and next, and next. There is another form of communal drawing where bits are added both sequentially and simultaneously. Consequently, when the drawing is finished, it is often impossible to tell, or even to remember, what came first and what came later.

**Around Holly’s House**

What happens when children who have not drawn interactively are introduced to the graphic dialogue? This was the question we asked ourselves as we began to draw with Holly. Holly was eight-years-old and liked to draw—a fact confirmed by the display of artwork on the family refrigerator. Holly’s drawings were those of a typical eight-year-old girl: flowers and houses, single figures (“Daddy” adorns the refrigerator door), and colorful designs. There was no indication from the drawings we saw that Holly had ever used any storytelling or fantasy in her drawings and it was difficult to predict what would happen when she was introduced to the idea. A great many exciting things did happen, not just with Holly, but also with her five-year-old sister Lindsey and Lindsey’s friend Jonathan, also five. When the dialogue acquired “eavesdroppers,” in fact, it became so exciting that the only way to convey the richness of this four-way conversation is to describe three drawings at once.

B. asked Holly if she would like to draw something. Holly seemed eager to try although she appeared to be unsure of what was expected of her, and it was clear that she had no story in mind as she carefully drew a table and chair at the very bottom of the page. (8-9)

Because there is really no story without characters and because he hoped that Holly would soon initiate some action, B. supplied a character, a boy standing beside the table, and then it was Holly’s turn. For each of B’s moves, Holly would cautiously add a detail to the drawing—a hat on a figure, a dish of marshmallows on the table—but it would take several more turns before there was any action.

Meanwhile five-year-old Lindsey was busily drawing on her own.

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**Figure 8-9**

Holly (age 8) and B., an adult

_Holly’s House_ (colored marker) 13½” x 17”
paper on the other side of the table, with a watchful eye out for the activities of her sister and B. But it wasn't until B. enclosed table, figures, and everything else within a frame and Holly added a roof that Lindsey, quickly recognizing the familiar "house" configuration, turned her own paper over and drew a house. (8-10)

When Holly answered B's next query about what might live in the top of the house by suggesting a dog, B. said that he was "not very good at dogs." As he drew, Lindsey allowed that she could draw a dog, but "I'm not good at it either." She then proceeded to draw a dog in the same part of her house as B. was drawing his. When B. wondered if his dog was really a cat, Holly assured him there could be no mistaking its dogness by adding a balloon reading "RFF." So that her dog would resemble B's, Lindsey then added a curlicue, like Holly's "RFF," coming from the mouth of her dog.

At this point, Lindsey's friend Jonathan came in, joined the group at the table, and obligingly began to draw. As B. urged Holly to be "silly" as she drew, Jonathan declared that he would make a silly drawing. (8-11)

Although Holly seemed to be enjoying her participation in the drawing, it wasn't until some time later that things began to happen, but happen they did, and in rapid succession. Birds appeared, escaped from cages, and flew into the air carrying baskets. The baskets sprouted snakes (this was Holly's inspired addition); a snake crawled up and bit a bird; the bird dropped the basket of snakes; one snake slithered into the house and bit the boy standing at the table; the boy jumped, ran across the table and out the door, and came face to face with a spaceship complete with Martian.

It is necessary, though difficult, to keep track of what was happening on both sides of the table because the conversation and interaction were to influence each of the three drawings. Jonathan talked incessantly, explaining his drawing and his markings, which were surely more kinesthetic than graphic. (Jonathan's drawing quickly became a mass of lines laid one on top of another.) The staccato beat of his pencil and his chatter, however, added an infectious note of excitement to the proceedings. His animated questions, such as, "What's happening to the snakes?" also triggered some more imaginative responses from Holly;
or he could be heard arguing with Lindsay about the merits of a
snake's biting somebody.

"They should!" said Jonathan.
"They shouldn't, Jonathan," admonished Lindsey.

We believe, also, that it was
Jonathan's enthusiasm about the
"flying saw-saw" that had appeared
in Holly's and B's drawing and his
stated determination to add Mar-
tians to his own drawing that
caused the appearance of Holly's
Martian.

Ideas bounced from one side
of the table to the other and fed
three separate drawings. The flying
saucer had inspired Jonathan to
invent Martians, and Holly
absorbed the idea from him.
Jonathan, in turn, wanted a "flying
saw-saw" in his drawing, and as the
Martian idea bounced back to him
when he saw Holly's man from
Mars, he began to chant (because
Jonathan's ability to fantasize out-
distances his drawing skills, there
was little on the paper that was rec-
nizably Martian-like), "There's
his nose; there's his mouth!" Lind-
ssey joined in, "I'm going to make a
Martian," thus completing the
cycle.

The electric mood that sparked
the completion of this story is best
conveyed by presenting the dia-
logue exactly as it occurred.

Jonathan is still talking excitedly about
his Martian who, he now says, "has no
doctrine."
B. continues to narrate, as he has done
throughout the session in order to keep
the story going. "This gets more and
more complicated; the Martian has
fallen [after having leaped through the
air]—what's he fallen on?"
Holly is now primed to expect bizarre
situations and is completely involved
in the action. She answers brightly,
"A snake."
B. asks, "And what does a Martian do
when it's fallen on a snake?"
Jonathan pipes up, "It gets bitten!"
The snake makes a truly enormous
leap.
"Oh, what a picture!" Lindsay mar-
vels. She has abandoned her own
drawing and is now intently watching
the drawing activity of Holly and B.
B. continues, "And the poor Martian
that was on it?"
Jonathan (gleefully), "Got bit!"
B., "He really didn't."
Jonathan (determined), "He
should've!"
B. goes on, "He was flying in the air,
up into the smoke. He still has an
unhappy look on his face—as you
can imagine."
Holly interrupts, "He has a bump on
his head." This is a detail she had
added earlier and she wants to be sure
that B. does not leave it out.
Lindsey (eagerly), "He got bitten."
B. says, "So there he is flying away
from the snakes . . . ."
Jonathan is explaining that the Mar-
tian in his picture was bitten by a
snake (if no one else would oblige).
And then B.'s Martian "says he's so
terribly tired, finds a bed and, closing
his eyes, goes to sleep. Shall we have
that be the end?"
Holly agrees.

"The Lion and the Bats"
The story of Holly's house had
ended but the excitement lingered
on. Another story was begun
immediately. This time the plan
was that Holly, Lindsey, and B., at
least, would draw together.
Jonathan, unsure of his drawing
abilities, declined to join in at first
but, as we shall see, was finally
enticed by his own curiosity and
imagination to participate in the
adventure unfolding on the paper
across the table.

It was another example of the
residual effect of "Holly's House"
that the drawing that Jonathan
began on his own started with a
bird carrying snakes in a basket.
Jonathan says that his "bird is
going to be in trouble—this is a
copperhead snake and he's going to
bite him." He is still determined
that somebody will be bitten by a
snake one way or another.
Jonathan makes a biting
sound. "Oh, poor, poor bird." It is
hard to concentrate on one's own
story with Jonathan being so insist-
tently vocal. "Supersnake to the res-
cue!" he shouts, and then, as the
snakes attack the house, "Charge!"

"The Lion and the Bats," drawn
by Holly, Lindsey, and B., also con-
tained suggestions of the earlier
effort. (8-8) Lindsey began by
drawing a house. Holly's first sug-
gestion that a snake lived there,
however, was gently sidestepped.
The birdcage that Holly had
invented for the earlier production
was enlarged for the lion she had just drawn. She perhaps was certain that B. would free the lion as he had the bird (he did). And it is here that Jonathan was lured into taking part in the story; after all, there had already been a snake story and what imaginative five-year-old could resist a runaway lion? By this time Jonathan was intently examining the situation and already had the solution to the problem—a bat would swoop down and bite the lion. Of course! “I’m going to draw a bat!” Jonathan began to draw a wing and was surprised and pleased with the result—his other drawings, as we have noted, had been very complex scribbles with few recognizable elements. “Hey, I drew a good wing.” He is encouraged by praise from all. “It’s the best wing you’ve ever made!” Holly marvels.

He continues to draw. “He has a spear [it is actually a large front tooth . . . sound effects]—he’s going to kill the lion.” Truly encouraged by this time, Jonathan draws another bat swooping down on the lion—and still another, “good bats because the lion is

Figure 8-11
Holly (age 8), Lindsey (age 5), Jonathan (age 5), and B., an adult
Bats (colored marker)
13½ “ × 17”
bad...sharp teeth." He is really wound up now. He counts, "One, two, three, four, five—five bats."

B. determines that, in spite of the digressions, something has to be done about the poor lion: "Is he dead or is he just wounded?"

"He's wounded bad," Jonathan replies.

"I'm sorry." B. says that is what the bats say to the lion (who wasn't a bad sort after all).

"They just wanted to keep him quiet," Jonathan pipes in.

B. says that the bats will carry him away to the hospital.

"There's lots of bats," Jonathan says (enough to carry the lion). Jonathan is making baby bats now, all sizes of bats. "I'll count the bats—four, five, six, seven, eight, nine bats."

B. counts ten bats.

Holly thinks there are eleven but counts again. There are ten.

Lindsey adds a fire to the hospital, "just to keep him warm."

"OK," says B. "Let's decide. Does the lion get better?"

All agree, and the story ends on a happy note.

There are several important aspects of the drawing conversation, but "the ten bats of Jonathan" is of special interest. Jonathan was a bright, imaginative, and energetic five-year-old. His ability to tell stories and to fantasize was great, but Jonathan did not customarily draw. His mother revealed that, although his older sister Amy drew continu-
ally, Jonathan generally refused to participate in any drawing activity. It then becomes significant that he consented to draw with us, became caught up in the excitement, and on his own, produced ten bats.

Let's examine the circumstances of his bat production. Jonathan had come to play with Lindsey and found her and Holly drawing at the table with a couple of unfamiliar adults. They all seemed to be enjoying themselves so when he was invited to join in he accepted. He readily became part of the group; his first declaration as he prepared to draw was, "I'll make a silly one [drawing]," and he found the making fun. As we have noted, Jonathan's participation was at first more verbal than pictorial; he was timid about drawing and often asked for help. When he was drawing his bird (the one carrying a basket of snakes) he enlisted B.'s aid and B. patiently drew for him, "like a circle, and then a circle on the head, and then a big beak and an eye—and then they have wings like that and other wings down there and sometimes they have feet going down below the wings." A short time later he was drawing "eight, nine [ten] bats."

Perhaps Jonathan's drawing ability would eventually catch up to his ability to narrate, to fantasize, to verbalize. It might catch up quickly and he may develop a more positive attitude toward his own drawings, given the open accept-
ance of his limited ability in the drawing dialogues—encouragement such as Holly's "It's the best wing you've ever made!"—and B.'s demonstrations of simple ways for him to give form to his more complex fantasies.

It is important to note again that it was also the excitement of the interaction in the drawing session that inspired Jonathan's participation, the way ideas bounced across the table and found their way into all of the drawings produced that afternoon. The first idea, that a drawing could tell a story, seemed natural to Jonathan, but Holly and Lindsey were also intrigued by the notion. (And we know that Holly continued to draw "silly" stories with her friend Amy after we had left.) Snakes and Martians ricocheted from drawing to drawing, and the bullets with which Jonathan was bombarding his "flying saw-saw" became, for Lindsey, a pattern of small circles with interconnected lines on the side of her paper. Lindsey's ability to reproduce almost anything she saw drawn proved extraordinary. And Jonathan's enthusiasm and imagination certainly added to the excitement of each drawing; if he was not contributing a part of the drawn story then he was animating the story verbally. Surely, the most enjoyable kind of learning was shared by all that afternoon.
Worldmaking

As we have said, one way the child develops his ideas about the four realities is through the creation of a coherent world, or at least a fair portion of a world. Such worlds sometimes take the form of a map; sometimes a panorama or terrain reveals the existence of worlds above the ground or worlds below, and frequently both at once.

The conversation of the Worldmaking game may be quite different in tone from that of the Getting Into and Getting Out of Difficulty game. In the Difficulty game, one participant waits while the other either makes a move or counters one. The waiting is essential. In Worldmaking, the drawing by two or more participants usually occurs simultaneously, although it is by no means a matter of everyone for himself. There is a continual consultation about what goes next to what, where things ought to be attached, the form things should take, and what happens and what happens next.

Many of the dialogues we suggest derive from the self-initiated drawings of children. In these drawings we have seen elaborate machines (like those of Andy shown in Chapter 2 in figures 2-15 to 2-17) shown in the process of manufacturing such things as ink, automobiles, and human body parts ready for assembly as bionic people. Whenever possible it is advantageous to begin a dialogue with the ideas commonly used by children in self-initiated fantasy games. A “machine making” dialogue might begin with a short discussion of “what should we make?” and once something is decided upon then “what kind of machine would it take to make it?” It’s also possible just to begin with a machine, because machines themselves sometimes “tell” their creators what sorts of things they might make. This is precisely what happened in a dialogue held between six-year-old David and B shown in Figure 8-12.

“The Solar-Powered System”

This drawing conversation had three participants: two ten-year-old boys, Sam and Bobby, and B., an adult. Earlier, Sam’s mother had shown us a drawing by Sam and Bobby that appeared to be an X-ray view of the prow of a huge aircraft carrier with compartment upon compartment for sleeping, with tunnels and airshafts. Sam and Bobby corrected us, however, explaining that it was actually the inside of a mountain. And so the contour of a mountain was the starting place for “the solar-powered system.” B. started by drawing hilly contours near the top of the page to assure that much of the world would appear underground. Sam’s line, continuing on the second half of the paper, described a deep ravine climbing to a steep cliff, assuring for his part that the world would appear above the ground as well.

As with most worlds, the world that developed is far too complex to be described easily. The idea for a world with solar power was Sam’s. “You know how there is an energy crisis and all? Let’s say this thing is solar powered.” But it was Bobby who was responsible for most of the solar power collectors, underground power substations, power lines and transformers, and vehicles whizzing through tunnels. Sam specialized in rocket ships, their elaborately detailed interiors, and cavernous underground warehouses for storing rocket parts. B. was the gaudfly, adding elevators to Bobby’s substations, helping Sam with some of his rocket-ship components, and spending a lot of time on the distant city seen floating in midair on the left-hand side of the drawing.

The world took on highly realistic characteristics, and an implicit logic controlled its structure. It was Sam who decided that this was to be a working place and that people were to return to the city for sleeping purposes, but since they did need to eat, underground caverns for growing food as well as restaurants were created. An air of seriousness characterized this drawing session, until at the very end, when people began falling down shafts and then had to climb all the way back to the top. (8-9A–1)

What are some of the things we learned from the conversation? There was a considerable amount of sharing of technical drawing information. Sam had already learned from Bobby how to depict things in three-dimensional form. Here, Sam and Bobby both learned that in drawings, tunnels, shafts, and power lines can pass in front of and
David sat as we talked about machines and described a hay bale we had seen, a machine that picks up hay, bales it, and ejects the bales through a chute to a trailer in the rear. This was a new game to him but he entered into it with as much enthusiasm and invention as he had the games of pure action which David and B. had drawn together earlier.

B. suggested wheels and David immediately drew a box with wheels and added two components with a pulley to the box (indicating that he understood the nature of machines).

B. drew a pipe, from which small pellets dropped into a bin. In response, David quickly extended the pipe from beneath the bin and connected it to another box-shaped area and on up the side of the page and back across the middle with a sweep to the upper left-hand corner, just above his starting point. He then proceeded to add the pellets going through his length of pipe (and might have continued filling the page except that B. decided that he wanted his turn). B.’s controls were drawn on the second box-like part that David had constructed and then more controls cropped up in other spots, while David obligingly added the men to handle the controls.

At this point B. stopped and asked, “What are we making?” David thought (but not for long), picked up on the pellet shapes, and said, “They could be nuts”—and quickly, “We could be making peanut butter.”

From there the machine took off almost on its own, David and B. working together to smash the peanuts. B.’s smasher, a wheat-grinding mechanism with grinding wheels, David’s a device that resembled two places that come together like symbols. Salt and sugar were added through additional devices. The finished peanut butter was poured into jars that traveled on a conveyor belt across the bottom of the page to the right-hand side, and across the top to a machine that placed the jars into boxes and finally places them onto a truck. (David pictured a sort of forklift for this part of the operation.)

Dialogues of this sort provide particularly rich opportunities for problem solving and because of the requirement for group mach no parts that could conceivably perform a particular action or that could convey a product from one section of the machine to another. Machine making is also an excellent means of developing ideas about cause and effect and processes.
Figure 8-13
Sam (age 10), Bobby N. (age 10), and B., an adult
The Solar-Powered System (colored marker and pen)
17" x 27"

behind one another. They had previously thought of drawings as one-dimensional and that an object, once encountered, could only be circumvented. So Bobby was disturbed when he discovered an elevator shaft in the path of his power lines. Only when B. reminded him that the lines could go behind the shaft did he happily go back to drawing. B. learned from Bobby how to draw jets in a contemporary way and watched as Sam reproduced almost exactly the World War II planes that B. had drawn when he was Sam's and Bobby's age. "My father used to draw those real kookie planes." When the boys asked B., "Where did you learn to draw that [the city]?" B. explained that he had remembered the illustrations drawn by the Austrian artist Schmögner for a book called The City. So Sam and Bobby learned, too, that it is acceptable to borrow ideas.

In the drawing of Holly's House and the Things That Happened Around It, we described how Martians and flying saucers flew from one drawing to another; in another session it was fleets of ships and aircraft drawn in a particular way that traversed the two drawings. Just as ideas feed other ideas, drawings feed other drawings, adding layers of richness to one drawing after another. It is these things that make drawing dialogues with children so important to their drawing development. Where do the ideas for graphic dialogues come from? There are as many ideas for dialogues as there are children who draw. It is important only that the participants share ideas and agree on the rules. Remember that whatever can be imagined—the more extreme the better—can serve as the subject for a graphic narrative.
Final Thoughts about Graphic Dialogues and Conversations

We have many more graphic dialogues and conversations we could share. With some children we have drawn stories from before they were in preschool until they graduated from high school. With other children, we have had only a single opportunity to draw. We have drawn with children who spoke only Arabic, Dutch, or Japanese while we spoke only English. Nevertheless, we communicated readily through images. (And with the names of objects being identified as we drew, our knowledge of the children’s native language vocabulary increased.) Moreover, there isn’t a single child with whom we have drawn from whom we haven’t learned something—usually a lot. By drawing with children we have gained a deepened respect for the intricacy, subtlety, and imagination of young minds.

The drawing conversations in this chapter help to illustrate most of what this book has been about:

- Children learn to draw more skillfully through practice.
- Children can learn to draw images that are more varied and exciting and stimulating by adapting and recombining images modeled after those of others.
- Drawings can tell complex stories—what happens and what happens next.
- Drawings can be “real” or fanciful; one’s imagination often leads to new and exciting insights and ideas.
- Drawings can deal with major life themes and the four realities: the common—the reality that we all share in common; the archetypical—the reality of the self; the normative—the reality of right and wrong; and the prophetic—what will be? What may the future reality hold?
- Entire worlds can be envisioned and created on a single sheet of paper.

The Role of the Art Teacher

We wish that virtually every parent would engage in graphic dialogues and conversations with his or her children. Parents, if they wish, can find dozens of opportunities for drawing with their children in the course of a single week. But what about the teacher—especially the art teacher? Can the interactive drawing dialogue be used by an elementary school teacher who may have thirty children in a classroom and teach as many as 600 children a week? Teachers can learn a lot about an individual child and about that child’s drawing and narrating abilities through a one-on-one interaction, but we are aware that such activity probably cannot take place in the busy classroom. Before- or after-school sessions with a few highly interested children could prove a worthwhile pursuit, however. And there is a place in the classroom for the drawing dialogue between child and child, and it is important to provide the opportunity for this interaction. In fact, our own ideas about the drawing dialogue were reinforced while watching two boys in an art classroom (subsequently joined by an adult and other interested onlookers) as they created a marvelous Star Wars battle using straight edges, colored pencils, and numerous sheets of large white drawing paper taped together as the action required.

Once children have seen the possibilities for this type of dialogue, teachers can pair them off in the classroom as part of the ongoing learning experience or encourage them to engage in this activity spontaneously. One art teacher from Orlando, Florida, who learned about drawing dialogues in a workshop we gave, recently told us that her students engaged in drawing dialogues in her art classroom, and they did so with such enthusiasm that they would hurry to pair off for dialogues when their other work was completed. She recently moved to a new school where she immediately introduced the graphic dialogue with the same enthusiastic response.

The drawing dialogue occurs spontaneously, and because it does, it is a natural and easy model for children to follow. With encourage-
ment and stage-setting from adults, it can become a regular part of in-school as well as out-of-school activities for children. As a result of such interaction, children will develop greater drawing skill through practice and what they can teach one another. And, even more importantly, children will create even richer models of reality and of the world, the very purpose for which most of their drawings are made.

![Figure 8-14](image)

Sam (age 10) and B., an adult

*Just Space* (colored marker and pen)

17" × 27"

We started our discussion of communal drawing with a description of the air battles of World War II recreated on the blackboards of Fairview Grade School. Expanses of space, represented by clean sheets of paper—freeing the young graphic artist from the necessity of anchoring objects to the ground—provide nearly irresistible invitations to create Star Wars. "Just Space" shows one of the dozens of space battles in which we have participated.
Figure 8-15
Dane (15), Jens (12), Teal (10), Kess (7), and B., an adult
The Playground (various ball-point and fountain pens)
10" x 16"

The playground is filled with characters, many of whom went off their diets years ago. They are joined by a variety of space creatures, circus performers, and insects. More ominous, however, are the huge creatures in the background who lurk in the tops of trees and hide behind slides.

Figure 8-16
Dane (16), Jens (13), Teal (11), Kess (8), and B., an adult
The Natural History Museum (various ball-point and fountain pens)
10" x 16"

Made a year after the "Playground," the "Natural History Museum" drawing has the subtitle "Where are Waldo's Severed Limbs?" The action centers around an excavation pit in which a huge eye has been unearthed, and the rest of the action hangs on the neck and body of a dinosaur. Overgrown human feet and a pizza cover a considerable portion of the dinosaur's body. The balcony hold an exhibit of "modern art."
Dane (16), Jens (13), Teal (11), Kess (8), and B, an adult

Another Kind of National Park (various ball-point and fountain pens)
10'' x 16''

Made just two months after the "Playground" (1-14), the National Park has natural rock formations as its central features. The challenge is "to find all ten of Waldo's missing digits."

The Dallas botanical garden, which is located near the artists' home, is the setting for this "place" drawing. Much of the terrain was established by Dane before the others began drawing. Kess provided

the challenge: "to find 'Waldegg.'" There may be more than one—or, perhaps, lots of impostors. One has to look closely to find a Gulliver character asleep just below the fountain court. When are all those ants going to start to bite Gulliver?
Figure 8-19

Jeff and Chris (grade 5)

Scroll (black marker)

18" × 25"

This is only one small segment of a 25-foot scroll produced in one evening by two fifth-grade boys working side by side. Their fantastic world of humorous creatures plays with shapes and spaces between shapes as they continuously stretch, compress, and combine both ideas and images. Since both are at the same level of drawing development, growth occurs through the challenges presented through the continual interplay of images.