



Book Reviews

Children's Drawings by Maureen Cox

London: Penguin 1992. 244pp. RRP \$16.95

Drawing, according to Maureen Cox, is a natural spontaneous and artful activity in which children engage more often than any other of the pictorial activities. Cox's message throughout this interesting and readable book is that the ability to draw in a realistic style is not something which naturally or automatically evolves as human beings grow up. Although most young children appear to embrace drawing with enthusiasm and delight, by about the age of eight to nine years, children seem to become dissatisfied with their efforts, become reluctant to draw and some give up altogether. It is at this point, Cox argues, that adults should be able to teach children the basic techniques of drawing without sacrificing their creativity and without having them produce fixed solutions to and stereotyped images of pictorial problems.

The book begins with a well-rounded introduction to the role of drawing in human life and describes the history of the study of children's drawing over the past 100 years. A brief overview of the developmental stages of children's draw-

ing which explains why children's drawings are different to conventional adult drawings is provided as well as an outline of parental expectations regarding children's drawings. Chapter 2 explains and illustrates children's early drawing attempts such as scribbling, first representations and line drawings. Chapter 3 describes children's representations of the human figure and covers the emergence of tadpole figures through to the development of the ability to draw differentiated human figures. The ability to draw recognisable objects is covered in Chapter 5 with later chapters covering spatial relationships, proportion, perspective and typical errors in children's drawings.

An interesting chapter concerning the diagnostic use of children's drawings illustrates their potential use as a source of information about individual children's intelligence, learning difficulties, personality and emotional adjustment. The limitations of such techniques are also pointed out. The drawing ability of exceptional children is covered in Chapter 10 with the extraordinary drawing ability of Chinese children

highlighted. The author argues that this ability is related to compulsory tuition in calligraphy from a very young age and an ability to generalise skill in calligraphy to other graphic problems.

Throughout the book, Cox supports her arguments with reference to research and includes many anecdotal examples and illustrations of children's drawings from a local and international perspective. She concludes by arguing that, because children receive little formal tuition in drawing, both parents and professionals have a role to play in fostering the talents of average and exceptional children. For those adults who wish to offer children more guidance in drawing, this book provides interesting information about the way in which drawing develops, the types of skills involved and those skills that evolve by themselves or need to be nurtured.

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Living Aboriginal History of Victoria: stories in the oral tradition

by Alick Jackomos & Derek Fowell

Melbourne: Cambridge University Press 1991

The jacket of *Living Aboriginal History of Victoria* describes it as not an ordinary book, but as a corroboree in print. Throughout this volume, the living past of the Aboriginal people of Victoria is brought to life through the stories told by Koori people.

The importance of oral history in the Koori tradition is well-known and the authors note that there have been few occasions in the past when Aborigines have been able to speak directly to the readers through the medium of print.

A vivid and moving picture of the lives of Aboriginal people in Victoria is provided in the volume. History has been called the 'intersection of individual biographies', and the collection of portraits and reminiscences of individual Koori people paint an interesting and disturbing canvas.

The stories were told in the oral tradition to Derek Fowell and Alick Jackomos by Koori people throughout Victoria. Derek Fowell studies Aboriginal culture at the University of Western Australia and has worked in the Abor-

iginal education field for many years. Alick Jackomos was a founding member of the Aborigines Advancement League and, for 24 years, worked as a community advisor to Aboriginal people.

Barriers confronting individual Koori people are highlighted, as well as the documentation of examples of the systemic racism and discrimination they have faced in Victorian towns. However, the stories also provide insight into both the challenges that Koori people have met and conquered and the maintenance of Aboriginal culture.