For Boyd, Elizabeth, and Greta – without whom I could not have gotten on

Ways with Words
Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms

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Prologue

In the late 1960s, school desegregation in the southern United States became a legislative mandate and a fact of daily life. Academic questions about how children talk when they come to school and what educators should know and do about oral and written language were echoed in practical pleas of teachers who asked: "What do I do in my classroom on Monday morning?"

In the massive reshuffling of students and teachers during desegregation in the South, I became a part of the communities and schools described in this book. I was both ethnographer of communication focusing on child language and teacher-trainer attempting to determine whether or not academic questions could lead to answers appropriate for meeting the needs of children and educators in that regional setting. Described here are two communities — Roadville and Trackton — only a few miles apart in the Piedmont Carolinas. Roadville is a white working-class community of families steeped for four generations in the life of the textile mills. Trackton is a black working-class community whose older generations grew up farming the land, but whose current members work in the mills. Both communities define their lives primarily in terms of their communities and their jobs, yet both are tied in countless ways to the commercial, political, and educational interests of the townspeople — mainstream blacks and whites of the region. The townspeople are school-oriented, and they identify not so much with their immediate neighborhoods as with networks of voluntary associations and institutions whose activities link their common interests across the region.

I was a part-time instructor in anthropology and linguistics at a state university which had an excellent local reputation for teacher-training. Black and white teachers, business leaders, ministers, and mill personnel were in my graduate courses, and with many of them I developed a research-partner relationship. Pres-
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Trackton folks is one which stresses feeling and being, as well as living one’s life with a spirit of acceptance of what cannot be helped, joy over blessings of the past and present, and great hopes and responsibilities for the future. In the churches Roadville families attend, they are told to know their weaknesses, to struggle to acquire more strengths, to rejoice over their blessings, and to keep striving to be worthy of the gifts of grace.

5 Oral traditions

In Roadville

A piece of truth

Roadville residents worry about many things. Yet no Roadville home is a somber place where folks spend all their time worrying about money, their children’s futures, and their fate at the hands of the mill. They create numerous occasions for celebration, most often with family members and church friends. On these occasions, they regale each other with “stories.” To an outsider, these stories seem as though they should be embarrassing, even insulting to people present. It is difficult for the outsider to learn when to laugh, for Roadville people seem to laugh at the story’s central character, usually the story-teller or someone else who is present.

A “story” in Roadville is “something you tell on yourself, or on your buddy, you know, it’s all in good fun, and a li’l something to laugh about.” Though this definition was given by a male, women define their stories in similar ways, stressing they are “good fun,” and “don’t mean no harm.” Stories recount an actual event either witnessed by others or previously told in the presence of others and declared by them “a good story.” Roadville residents recognize the purpose of the stories is to make people laugh by making fun of either the story-teller or a close friend in sharing an event and the particular actions of individuals within that event. However, stories “told on” someone other than the story-teller are never told unless the central character or someone who is clearly designated his representative is present. The Dee children sometimes tell stories on their father who died shortly after the family moved to Roadville, but they do so only in Mrs. Dee’s presence with numerous positive adjectives describing their father’s gruff nature. Rob Macken, on occasion, is the dominant character in stories which make fun of his ever-present willingness to point out where other folks are wrong. But Rob is always present on these
occasions, and he is clearly included in the telling ("Ain't that right, Rob?") "Now you know that's the truth, hain't it?") as story-tellers cautiously move through their tale about him, gauging how far to go by his response to the story.

Outside close family groups, stories are told only in sex-segregated groups. Women invite stories of other women, men regale each other with tales of their escapades on hunting and fishing trips, or their run-ins (quarrels) with their wives and children. Topics for women's stories are exploits in cooking, shopping, adventures at the beauty shop, bingo games, the local amusement park, their gardens, and sometimes events in their children's lives. Topics for men are big-fishing expeditions, escapades of their hunting dogs, times they have made fools of themselves, and exploits in particular areas of their expertise (gardening and raising a 90-lb pumpkin, a 30-lb cabbage, etc.). If a story is told to an initial audience and declared a good story on that occasion, this audience (or others who hear about the story) can then invite the story-teller to retell the story to yet other audiences. Thus, an invitation to tell a story is usually necessary. Stories are often requested with a question: "Has Betty burned any biscuits lately?") "Brought any possums home lately?") Marked behavior — transgressions from the behavioral norm generally expected of a "good hunter," "good cook," "good handyman," or a "good Christian" — is the usual focus of the story. The foolishness in the tale is a piece of truth about everyone present, and all join in a mutual laugh at not only the story's central character, but at themselves as well. One story triggers another, as person after person reaffirms a familiarity with the kind of experience just recounted. Such stories test publicly the strength of relationships and openly declare bonds of kinship and friendship.

When the social bond is currently strong, such stories can be told with no "hard feelings." Only rarely, and then generally under the influence of alcohol or the strain of a test in the relationship from another source (job competition, an unpaid loan), does a story-telling become the occasion for an open expression of hostility.

Common experience in events similar to those of the story becomes an expression of social unity, a commitment to maintenance of the norms of the church and of the roles within the mill community's life. In telling a story, an individual shows that he belongs to the group: he knows about either himself or the subject of the story, and he understands the norms which were broken by the story's central character. Oldtimers, especially those who came to Roadville in the 1930s, frequently assert their long familiarity with certain norms as they tell stories on the young folks and on those members of their own family who moved away. There is always an unspoken understanding that some experiences common to the oldtimers can never be known by the young folks, yet they have benefited from the lessons and values these experiences enabled their parents to pass on to them.

In any social gathering, either the story-teller who himself announces he has a story or the individual who invites another to tell a story is, for the moment, in control of the entire group. He manages the flow of talk, the staging of the story, and dictates the topic to which all will adhere in at least those portions of their discourse which immediately follow the story-telling. At a church circle meeting, many of the neighborhood women had gathered, and Mrs. Macken was responsible for refreshments on this occasion. The business and lesson of the circle had ended, and she was preparing the refreshments, while the women milled about waiting for her to signal she was ready for them. Mrs. Macken looked up from arranging cookies on a plate and announced Sue had a story to tell. This was something she could not normally have done, since as a relative newcomer, a schoolteacher, and a known malcontent in Roadville, her status was not high enough to allow her to announce a story for someone who was as much of an oldtimer as Sue. However, as the hostess of the circle, she had some temporary rank.

ROADVILLE TEXT IV

Mrs. Macken: Sue, you oughta tell about those rolls you made the other day, make folks glad you didn't try to serve fancy rolls today.

Mrs. Dee: Sue, what'd you do, do you have a new recipe?

Mrs. Macken: You might call it that

Sue: [I, hh wanna=

Martha: =Now Millie [Mrs. Macken], you hush and let Sue give us her story.

Sue: Well, as a matter of fact, I did have this new recipe, one I got out of Better Homes and Gardens, and I thought I'd
try it, uh, you see, it called for scalded milk, and I had just started the milk when the telephone rang, and I went to get it. It was Leona /casting her eyes at Mrs. Macken/. I thought I turned the stove off, and when I came back, the burner was off, uh, so I didn't think anything about it; poured the milk in on the yeast, and went to kneading. Felt a little hot. Well, anyway, put the stuff out to rise, and came back, and it looked almost like Stone Mountain, thought that's a strange recipe, so I kneaded it again, and set it out in rolls. This time I had rocks, uh, sorta like 'em, the kind that roll up all smooth at the beach. Well, I wasn't gonna throw that stuff all out, so I cooked it. Turned out even harder than those rocks, if that's possible, and nobody would eat 'em, couldn't even soften 'em in buttermilk. I was trying to explain how the recipe was so funny, you know, see, how I didn't know what I did wrong, and Sally piped up and said 'Like yeah, when you was on the phone, I came in, saw this white stuff a-boiling, and I turned it off.' (pause). Then I knew, you know, that milk was too hot, killed the yeast /looking around at the women/. Guess I'll learn to keep my mind on my own business and off other folks'.

The story was punctuated by gestures of kneading, turns of the head in puzzlement, and looks at the audience to see if they acknowledged understanding of the metaphors and similes. Stone Mountain is a campground in the region which everyone at the circle meeting had visited; it rises out of the ground like a giant smooth-backed whale. The beach is a favorite summer vacation spot for Roadville families, and the women often collect the smooth rocks from the beach to put on top of the dirt in their flower pots.

Several conventions of stories and story-telling in Roadville stand out in this incident. The highest status members present, Mrs. Dee and her granddaughter Martha, reannounce Sue's story and subtly convey that Mrs. Macken stepped out of line by asking Sue to tell a story on this occasion. Within her narrative, Sue follows a major requirement of a "good story": it must be factual, and any exaggeration or hyperbole must be so qualified as to let the audience know the story-teller does not accept such descriptions as literally true. Sue qualifies her Stone Mountain description with "almost," her equation of the rolls with rocks by "sorta like" and her final comparison of the rolls to rocks with "if that's possible." She attempts to stick strictly to the truth and exaggerates only with hedges and qualifications.

Perhaps the most obligatory convention Sue follows is that which requires a Roadville story to have a moral or summary message which highlights the weakness admitted in the tale. "Stories" in these settings are similar to testimonials given at revival meetings and prayer sessions. On these occasions, individuals are invited to give a testimonial or to "tell your story." These narratives are characterized by a factual detailing of temporal and spatial descriptions and recounting of conversations by direct quotation ("Then the Lord said to me:"). Such testimonials frequently have to do with "bringing a young man to his senses" and having received answers to specific prayers. The detailing of the actual event is often finished off with Scriptural quotation, making it clear that the story bears out the promise of "the Word." Sue's story is confession-like, and its summing up carries a double meaning, both a literal one ("on my own business = cooking) and a figurative one ("on my own business = general affairs). Any woman in the group can quote Scripture describing the sins of which the tongue is capable (for example, James 3:6 which likens the tongue to a fire which spreads evil).

Unspoken here is the sin of Sue and Leona - gossip - the recounting and evaluating of the activities and personalities of others. Gossip is a frequent sermon topic and a behavior looked upon as a characteristic female weakness. Leona, who is not present at the circle meeting, is a known gossip, who occasionally telephones several of the women to fill them in on news in the neighborhood. All of the women know, but none says explicitly, that any phone call with Leona is likely to bring trouble, both to those who are the topics of her phone conversation and to those who are weak enough to listen to her. The story, told at the end of a church circle meeting, appears to be an innocent piece of female chatter, but it carries a message to all present which reminds them of their own weakness in listening to Leona. All the women have gossiped, and all have given in to listening to Leona at one time or another. Yet on this public occasion, all avoid direct negative talk about either Leona or anyone else, since engaging in this censured activity in such a public setting where more than two individuals
are present would be foolish. Instead Sue’s story is an occasion in which all recognize their common, but unspoken, Christian ideal of disciplined tongue. The major understandings and background knowledge on which a full interpretation of the story depends are unarticulated.

Sue’s story carries subtle messages about the values and practices of the culture out of which the story comes. She reaffirms that the most frequent gossip in Roadville takes place between only two people, with an unstated and often unfulfilled agreement that neither will reveal her participation to others; breaches of such trust are frequent causes of female disagreement. Moreover, Sue asserts her maintenance of certain community norms for homemakers: she makes her bread “from scratch” instead of buying store goods; she is unwilling to throw out food; she has obviously trained Sally, her daughter, to be attentive to kitchen matters. Picking up, or recognizing all of this information depends on the familiarity with Roadville’s norms and daily customs which the women of the church circle share.

In several ways, stories such as Sue’s are similar to Biblical parables, a frequent source for sermons and Bible lessons, and a literary source familiar to all. Parables told by Jesus recount daily experiences common to the people of his day. Often parables end with a summary statement which is both a condemnation of one or more of the story’s characters and a warning to those who would hear and understand the parable for its relevance to their own lives. In aparable, two items or events are placed side by side for comparison. The details of the story bring out its principal point or primary meaning, but there is little or no emotional expressiveness within the story evaluating the actions of the characters. The action is named and detailed, but its meaning to the characters is not set forth in exposition or through a report of the emotions of those involved. Biblical parables often open with formulas such as “The Kingdom of heaven is like unto this...” (Matthew 13:24, 13:31, 13:33, 13:44, 13:45, 20:1, 25:1), or admonitions to listen: “Listen then if you have ears” (Matthew 13:9) and “Listen and understand” (Matthew 13:10). Roadville’s parable-like stories often open with announcement of the comparison of the events of the story to another situation: “That’s like what happened to me...” Both men and women often open their stories with the simple comment “They say...” or a metaphor such as “We’ve got another bulldog on our hands” (referring to a fighting personality who is the central character in an upcoming story). In ways similar to Biblical parables, Roadville folks share with their listeners experiences which provide a lesson with a meaning for the life of all. The story is told using direct discourse whenever possible: “And he goes ‘Now, you look out.’” or “Like yeah when you was on the phone...

For the best of the parable-like stories, that is, those which are told repeatedly or are handed down in families over generations, the retelling of the entire story is often not necessary. Only its summary point need be repeated to remind listeners of the lesson behind the story. Proverbs or well-known sayings also carry lessons stating the general will of the community and ideals of Roadville families. Understanding of these depends, as do parable-like stories, on comparing one thing to another, for example, seeing similarities across nature.

A whistlin’ girl and a crowin’ hen will come to no good end.
A rollin’ stone gathers no moss.
A stitch in time saves nine.
Rain before seven, clear by eleven.

For those activities which are traditionally part of the daily routine of mill families’ lives – agriculture, weather, male–female relations, pregnancy and childbirth – proverbial guides to behavior abound. Proverbs help determine when certain crops are planted and harvested, predict rain, sunshine, good fishing or bad, link personality traits to physical features, and dictate behaviors of mothers-to-be. The anonymous and collective voices of those who have abided by these lessons in their experiences remind Roadville residents of behavioral norms and reinforce expectations of predictable actions and attitudes among community members.

The Bible’s parables and proverbs are sometimes quite consciously used as a written model for Roadville’s oral stories and proverbs. However, few written sources, other than the Bible, seem to influence either the content or the structure of oral stories in Roadville. Access to written stories, other than those in the Bible, is relatively rare. Women buy home and garden magazines and read their stories of successful remodeling or sewing projects – testimonials on the merits of budget shopping, thriftiness, and
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tenacity in do-it-yourself projects. Some women buy "True Story" magazines and publications which feature the personal stories of movie and television personalities, but they do not usually read these publicly. Some women occasionally buy paperback novels, and when asked about their hobbies, they often include reading, but then add comments such as "There's no time for it, for reading, you know, for pleasure or anything like that."

In church-related activities, they not only use stories from the Bible, but they occasionally hear certain other types of content-related stories. The circle meeting at which Sue was asked to tell her story is an example of one such activity. In such meetings, women share study of a designated Bible passage or a book of the Bible. The leader often reads from other short story-like materials to illustrate the need to follow the precepts covered in the Biblical passage. Throughout the discussion, however, there are numerous references to "our own stories [the experiences of those present]" which better relate to the Bible message than do the printed materials supplied for Bible study. Men's and women's Bible study groups prefer that a pastor or an elder lead them. The pastor sometimes suggests to lay leaders that they use a book of exposition of the Scriptures (especially when the Bible study focuses on a particular book of the Bible, such as Revelation). Some members of the Bible study group may be assigned portions of supplementary materials to read and discuss at the next Bible study. However, such efforts usually fail miserably. Roadville men and women do not like to read in public and do not wish to admit their lack of understanding of expository materials. They state strong preferences that, if any written materials are used to expand on Biblical passages, the pastor, and not they, should do it. As Mrs. Turner's mother explained, "I believe what the preacher speaks to be the truth, because I feel he is our leader, and I don't feel, well, I feel like he is tellin' us the right thing."

Thus, in interpreting the Bible, church members prefer either their own stories or Biblical accounts to written stories - whether factual expositions or tales of the lives of other modern-day Christians. Their own stories are often modeled on Biblical parables, but they are also personal accounts of what God's Word has meant to them. They reject depersonalized written accounts which come from unfamiliar sources. They use their own stories told on themselves and their friends to entertain and instruct, as they highlight personal and communal weaknesses and their struggles either to overcome them or to live with them.

Oral traditions

Children's stories

Preschool children of Roadville first meet stories as their parents read to them from books. A majority of these books are not sustained chronological narratives on a central character or event, but are nursery rhymes, alphabet books, and collections of one- and two-line descriptions of animals and familiar objects. Some few are, however, sustained narratives such as "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," tales of a boy and his pets on a farm, or simplified stories from the Bible.

In Sunday School each Sunday and in Vacation Bible School (a week-long Bible study and camp-like activity held each summer), the children are given printed materials prepared by the national association of their church's particular denomination. Some stories in these booklets are Bible stories (such as Daniel in the lions' den, or Miriam placing the baby Moses in the reeds, etc.) rewritten in contemporary English. Others, however, especially since the mid 1970s, are stories about boys and girls of today meeting temptations and overcoming them through remembering and living according to Biblical precepts. The end of the story always contains the moral and the Bible verse most relevant to the story's conflict resolution. Children talk about these stories with their Sunday School teachers and are encouraged to tell about similar incidents in their own lives: "Were you ever asked to do something you didn't think you could do, and God gave you the strength to do it?" When children do not offer such incidents, teachers provide examples which revolve around their membership in families and their activities with their playmates. Occasionally children are asked to give the moral of such stories, but they are discouraged from introducing situational ethics - "what if . . .?" "but maybe he . . ." - and they are admonished to "pay attention to what the story says, how it goes, and don't go wandering off somewhere and making up things." Children are called upon to use their rote memorization of Bible verses to suggest appropriate verses for morals to the stories they volunteer or their teachers provide about their transgressions. At home, parents continue the practice of asking children for stories about their weaknesses and
providing morals for these stories. Adults, however, rarely tell stories focusing on their own behavior in front of their children. The only exception is the occasional story an adult may tell of his own childhood, and the moral of such stories usually carries the message “Don’t do what I did.” Older members of the community sometimes tell young people stories they remember about their children as they were “comin’ up,” but these stories also carry heavy didactic messages.

Children in Roadville are not allowed to tell stories, unless an adult announces that something which happened to a child makes a good story and invites a retelling. When children are asked to retell such events, they are expected to tell non-fictional stories which “stick to the truth.” Adults listen carefully and correct children if their facts are not as the adult remembers them. In contrast, fictive stories which are exaggerations of real-life events, modeled on plots or characters children meet in story-books, are not accepted as stories, but as “lies,” without “a piece of truth.” Children grow up being taught to tell true stories on themselves:

**ROADVILLE TEXT**

**Sue:** Tell yo’ mamma where we went today.

**Wendy** (at five years): Mamma took me ‘n Sally to the Mall. Bugs Bunny was =

**Sue:** =No, who was that, that wasn’t Bugs Bunny.

**Wendy:** Uh, I mean, Peter, no, uh a big Easter bunny was there, ’n we, he, mamma got us some eggs =

**Sue:** =’n then what happened?

**Wendy:** [turning her head to one side] I don’t ’member.

**Sue:** Yes, you do, what happened on the climbing =

**Wendy:** =me ’n Sally tried to climb on this thing, ’n we dropped, I dropped, my eggs, some of ’em.

**Sue:** Why did you drop your eggs? What did Aunt Sue tell you bout climbin’ on that thing?

**Wendy:** We better be careful.

**Sue:** No, bout the eggs ’n climbing?

**Wendy:** We better not climb with our eggs, else ’n we’d drop ’em.

Throughout the story (told when Martha came to pick up Wendy from Sue’s house), Aunt Sue calls for strict chronicity (“’n then what happened?” “What happened on the climbing?”) and adherence to the correct facts of the story. She has given an open-ended directive: “Tell yo’ mamma where we went today,” which Wendy could take as an invitation to tell about the grocery store, service station, or department store in Laurenceville, other places they also went that day. But Aunt Sue is after a particular story, and using questions which ask for information already conceived in the head of the questioner, she probes until Wendy produces the particular story in Aunt Sue’s mind. Furthermore, the story which Sue wants Wendy to tell is one which has the same conventions as those told by adults: Wendy is to detail her foolishness, and to give a summary moral or a repetition of the moral – the lesson – of the story at its closing.5

Repeatedly, Roadville children are prompted to tell such stories on themselves, and they are prodded until they construct the story along the model of adult stories. Here Wendy wants to tell about what she saw – Bugs Bunny and other characters; she does not want to retell the conflict, but Aunt Sue insists, and Wendy, with considerable coaching, finally constructs the story as her aunt had decided it should be before the telling.

Wendy is asked to recapitulate both the story and the adult’s warning in this episode. Often adults admonish children through the use of a saying or proverb, which at one time accompanied a particular story, but used alone thereafter serves to remind children of the message and moral of the story. For example, Mrs. Dee told a story of a grandmother who had money enough to take only one of her two granddaughters on a trip; the grandmother debated numerous ways to decide which child should go. She finally chose the “wait-a-minute” test. She called each girl to her. One answered “Wait a minute” and the other came at once. The granddaughter who came at once was chosen to go on the trip. Mrs. Dee recounts this story whenever a young child does not come immediately upon being called. However, if the child knows her story, she admonishes a child who is slow to come with only the question “A little Mr./Miss wait-a-minute, huh?” and the child is expected to register remorse and to apologize for his or her misbehavior. Often a proverb or a summary moral from Biblical parables is used to stimulate a child to recall the entire story to which the moral belongs and to remind him of his failure to conform to expected norms. Parents ask “How does that story go?” Children’s recall of a particular story as the context of a
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statement or moral dictate is a highly valued and frequently practiced method of social control. On such occasions, children are expected to repeat in just the way they have been told both the story and its moral. They are not expected to evaluate the actions of the story or to punctuate their retelling with expressions about how they or other story figures feel. They may introduce no fanciful or fictive characters for a bit of levity or reduction of tension.

Thus there is not a chance that in the exchange between Wendy and Aunt Sue noted above, Wendy could tell a story in which she joined with Bugs Bunny or any other fanciful character to participate in fictive antics. To do so would shock the adults and cause them to accuse her of “tellin’ a story,” i.e. changing a real incident to make it a lie. In general, only children and the worst scoundrels are ever accused of lying. “Thou shalt not lie” is an adage on the tip of everyone’s tongue, and the community is on the lookout for offenders. “Don’t you tell me a story” means “Don’t tell me a lie.” Young children caught doing wrong and tempted to tell stories to get themselves off the hook or to exaggerate the responsibility of others are quickly and severely admonished.

Danny and Bobby, at age four, played in the backyard of the church one afternoon while their mothers attended a meeting. The boys had begun a sand-throwing contest when their mothers emerged from the church to catch the game in full swing. They stopped the battle, and each child began to blame the other. Each mother had seen her own child throw sand, and neither was willing to accept her child’s blaming the other. Both children were scolded, first and foremost for blaming the other, and secondarily for throwing the sand. Later, on the way home in the car, Bobby was carrying a small toy truck. Betty noticed it and asked where it came from. Bobby answered: “Found it in the sandbox, ’n some lady said I could have it.” Betty hesitated a moment, looked at Bobby, and said, “Don’t you tell me a story! Now where did you get that truck?” Bobby hesitated again and said: “Danny made it. He got a big truck, it makes lotsa lil’ trucks, ’n I got this one.” Betty stared in amazement: “Don’t you ever tell me a story!” Bobby looked remorseful and whined: “Digger Dan talks.” Betty seemed not to hear this comment, took the toy away from the child and demanded “Where did you get this truck?” Bobby answered: “I took it outta the sandbox.” Betty’s worst fears had been confirmed: Bobby had taken the truck from the church and he had lied.

The background of Bobby’s story and follow-up comment (“Digger Dan talks”) begins with the afternoon nursery school provided by some local women in the social hall of one of the churches. There the church women had collected many books for the children, and among the books was one which featured Digger Dan, a mechanical crane which performed magnificent feats in building skyscrapers, befriending little boys, and treating small trucks kindly. Digger Dan had animated features, talked, and did many other things unlikely in the behavior of mechanical cranes. Bobby was especially fond of playing with trucks, cars, and road equipment toys, and was always fascinated by the Digger Dan story. Bobby’s follow-up to his story of where he had gotten the truck seems an attempt to say to his mother that his story was no wilder than those of the books at his school; if cranes could talk, then big trucks could make little trucks. In nursery school, Bobby played with trucks, big and little, and entertained his friends at play time with stories of fantasy about the escapades of his trucks, many of them fashioned after Digger Dan. At both nursery school and in play, Bobby could suspend reality and create trucks that flew, talked, and produced other trucks.

Before they enter nursery school (usually at age four), Roadville children have had relatively little exposure to extended prose fictive or fanciful stories, either told or read to them. They have also not been allowed to tell stories, except those which they recite in accordance with adult coaching. The nursery school, however, provides a wide variety of books about fanciful characters doing preposterous deeds, and the children themselves are often asked to tell stories. Nursery school teachers do not follow the story-telling norms of the Roadville community, but instead they begin rehearsing the preschoolers for the book-reading and story-telling experiences of the school. As nursery school teachers read from books, they guide the children through the story: “Who is this (pointing to a picture of the main character)?” “What do you think is going to happen?” Questions, gestures, announcements of links between text and illustrations in the book, and reinforcement of teachers’ story-reading with TV programs, records, or songs repeatedly present the children with fictive characters whose behaviors do not follow real-world constraints.