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Unit 2: Inquiry at School, K to Retirement
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Golden Wings

Vivian Gussin Paley taught children how to learn through fantasy play and storytelling. She uniquely used books to stimulate children's thinking about their worlds. Rather than using a conventional teaching method, Paley used dictation and dramatization to guide her role as a teacher in the kindergarten classroom.

Paley looked and listened to the children's words, pictures, and plays which guided her job as the teacher. In the *Appendix to Wally's Stories* Paley said, "I act as the ancient Greek chorus, seeking connections and track of events, but the decisions must come from the children." In order to do this efficiently, Paley recorded conversations in the classroom and analyzed them later that day. She felt, "It ha[d] become an essential tool for capturing the sudden insight, the misunderstood concept, the puzzling juxtaposition of words and ideas."

Recording and analyzing how the teacher and student interacted was only part of Paley's inquiry. In *Reflections of a Kindergarten Teacher* Paley shared that "Only as we write down our thoughts and observations may we question and argue with ourselves about the things we do and say." She firmly believed that writing and reflecting about the day was almost as important as teaching. It was the quiet time, without judgment, where a teacher could truly grapple with her own thinking and her students understanding.

Paley's use of tape recording and journaling fostered her success in her classroom. In *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* Paley showed us how we use others' narratives to understand our own experiences and the world around us. Specifically, Paley's life story was greatly enhanced and understood due to her interactions with her beloved student Reeny. Reeny's dreams, play, and stories allowed Paley to dig deeper into her own narrative. As Paley shared her author study of Leo Lionni, we learned more about Paley's own self discovery and aspirations to give back to a career that was quickly ending. She closely identified with Tico, a wingless bird, who felt the need to assimilate to be accepted, rather than the confident crocodile Cornelius, which I find her to be more like.

Rather than leaving the field of education quietly, Paley strived to reach higher as a teacher. She enjoyed not only teaching her students, but her colleges, by publishing learning tools that we are benefiting from today. While her time in the classroom was coming to an end, Paley's teaching through play and storytelling was touching her students and allowing them to succeed in the future. She continued to explain her thinking about Lionni's stories and how it impacted her life in *The Mouse That Roared*. "What is mine to decide and what decisions belong to the group? Why do fairness and friendship intersect in such puzzling ways, until we can hardly tell which course of action will make us happy? Is conformity required in order to be loved by the flock?" This example is the foundation of Paley's teacher-inquiry. It isn't until we think about our classroom conversations that we truly make deeper connections in our own narrative.

Paley's advances in her own understandings were deeply rooted due to her relationships with students. "Each year," Paley says, "I wait to be awakened by a Reeny, just as she has entered school looking for a Frederick, a something to ponder deeply and expand upon extravagantly." Rather than teaching students how to think, Paley discusses the importance of listening to

students and yourself. Paley was able to deepen her understanding of her students needs, desires, hurts, and hopes through a tape recorder and a daily journal. She could stop, rewind, and re-play her day learning more about herself with each touch of a button. It was through Paley's way of inquiry that we can get to know more about ourselves as humans and use that to teach.