

Following instructions is one of the basics we learn in Kindergarten class.

“Sit down in a circle, students, and I will read a story to you from the book Sally Anne brought in today,” says Teacher Miss Smith. We follow her instruction. After the chapter is read, we are instructed to play in the building block house or color in the crayon books. Next, we are instructed to have snack, drink our two-cent milk from a carton and then nap. It is a full morning of instruction in the early 1950’s.

That is just the beginning. From first grade to senior high all schools across the nation instruct, not only information but how to read, write and analyze it. Usually, there is no instruction for the imagination. There is no teaching to create artwork, to transfer the thoughts from the young brain onto paper placed on those wooden desks attached on rudders row after row in high ceiling classrooms. Windows from waist-high to ceiling allow daylight to brighten our way.

However, in a fourth-grade classroom comes an instructor for artwork, for crafts. Thankfully, we were introduced to Mrs. Kurtz. (teachers never have first names) who skillfully taught us the art of weaving reed baskets, the method of crinkling foil for a background of a silhouette ice skater which we painted on one side of a 5-inch by 7-inch piece of window glass. We would place electrical tape around the two pieces of glass sandwiching the foil on the inside. (a precursor to binding a quilt?) What a delightful lady! Her soothing, “We’re all quiet, now” would silence the entire 50 students in the classroom.

Sister Mary Joseph would teach art in the fifth-grade classroom. In her “free-flow” drawing class we would take our pencil (a No. 2, of course) and draw the first letter of our first name one after the other all over the page. An “L” was easy in the cursive style. Looking back, the scrollwork was the beginning of free-flow quilting. Squiggles and curves with loops would cover the 8 1/2-inch by 11-inch paper. “Okay”, Sister would instruct. “Now, take your crayons and color in the empty spaces, the loops and the circles. You will have a stained-glass window.”

Murmurs of delight would emanate from the “artists”. This is the beginning of design. Could simple swirls lead some of us into designing quilting patterns? Instructions may begin the way to a good life, but free-flow drawing may begin the way to a good quilting life. Lana Russ

