

Vivian Paley's work as a teacher researcher has focus on many aspects of the classroom and the students within it. After reading about Paley and some of her work, it seems that the most important feature of her inquiry is the utilization of her own observations of her students as it provides her with a new or different perspective on human behavior. We see many examples of this in her writing including in the works, *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* and *Talking to Myself in a Daily Journal: Reflections of a Kindergarten Teacher*.

In *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, Paley writes about her last year as a kindergarten teacher. She has an extraordinary group of students and reflects on her observations as well as her communications that she has with them. This particular year, Paley has chosen to focus on a specific author, Leo Lionni and fourteen of his books. As Paley reads Lionni's books, she discusses themes of friendship with her students. The first book is about a mouse named Frederick. Frederick lives among other mice but does not contribute to the community in the ways that they do; gathering food for the winter. Instead, Frederick shares his poems and art with the other mice as his contribution. Paley makes a point of stating that adults would not accept Frederick's contribution. By contrast, her young students do not see the problem. Lionni's stories offer several characters to which the kindergarteners are able to identify with. Through this, Paley learns about their unique perspective of friendships- one that is genuine and accepting. One of my favorite parts of the book centers around a little boy named Oliver. As I was reading about Oliver, I could not help but note similarities in him with some of my students with autism. He fixates on rabbits and draws them each day, he does not interact with the other children unless the conversation centers around his rabbits, and when his routine is disrupted, he gets extremely upset and goes into his hiding place (Oliver's mouse hideout). On the day when Reeny's mother, Mrs. Willens, comes to visit, Reeny introduces her to Oliver. Reeny knows Oliver's distinct personality and has adapted her phrasing of questions so that she can talk to him. She asks him how his rabbit, Sweetheart is doing. Oliver, usually quiet, tells a detailed account of the minutiae of Sweetheart. Paley's reflection on Oliver struck me the most. While some of her students identify with Lionni's characters, Paley wonders how a child like Oliver could fit into one of his books. She writes, "Yet could Leo Lionni put an Oliver in one of his stories, a character for whom life has so many terrors? Such a book would probably be thought of as unsuitable for children, though the children, for all their frustration with Oliver, do not think him unsuitable for our classroom" (p. 32). Paley realizes how she has a classroom full of students who love and accept Oliver for who he is. As Paley states, the children do not see Oliver as unsuitable for their classroom. He belongs just as they do. This element of Paley's reflection lets her see into the world of her young students and their mindset of genuine acceptance. Just as Frederick's friends accepted him for who he is, her students accept Oliver. This is one of the moments when Paley gains a new perspective of human behavior- she begins to understand her students' behavior and tolerance of Oliver's outbursts and rituals. Her students see that Oliver is who he is.

Another work by Paley, *Talking to Myself in a Daily Journal: Reflections of a Kindergarten Teacher* includes another example of her ability to use observation to gain new perspectives on human behavior. Paley uses daily journal writing as a means of reflection as well as a tape recorder. She reflects on a conversation she has with several students about a mean giant who needs a wife. She asks the kids how someone who is mean would find a nice wife. The kids provide answers about the giant; that he used to be nice but something happened to him to

make him mean, but that his wife would have to be nice so that he acts nice. Even more, that if the giant tries hard, he can be nice again. Paley gains a perspective from these students about their comprehension of what is right and what is wrong and about relationships. This is characteristic of Paley's work because it illustrates how she values her students' ideas and learns from them. Through observations of her young students, Paley discovers parts of herself. She also realizes that she is most open and honest when she is with her students rather than with her colleagues.