

# Undercover Teacher

# Pupils Wage

# War of Nerve

Staff writer George N. Allen spent two months as a teacher in one of the city's "difficult" schools—John Marshall Junior High in Brooklyn. Mr. Allen was assigned to obtain a teacher's job at the school, JHS 210, to learn first-hand the experience of a teacher there, the attitudes and aptitudes of the students, the day-by-day problems of classroom instruction. He obtained a substitute teacher's license after having met all the necessary requirements. In this article, the twelfth of a series, he describes how a few pupils strike a heavy blow to the teacher's morale.

By **GEORGE N. ALLEN,**

World-Telegram Staff Writer.

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I felt pretty good. We were halfway through a lesson on how to use capitals. Most of the children in one of my ninth-grade adjustment classes had their heads bent over their notebooks, copying words and sentences from the blackboard.

While they wrote, I slowly circled the room, as I had been advised by my experienced colleagues. That way, they had told me, I could see what was going on in the back of the room and underneath desks.

As I walked, I watched Josephine (that's not her name) from the corner of my eye. She was squirming in her seat, sighing loudly, shuffling her feet, poking the girl in front of her. Experience had taught me that she was a sore spot of defiance and restlessness that might erupt at any time into an outburst against me or a classmate near her.



George N. Allen

**IQ IS 58.**

Josephine is a tall, well-built girl. She spent most of her time in class primping or looking at a magazine. Periodically she burst into a rage over some imagined insult. Her IQ, as listed on her record card, is 58.

I stopped behind her desk. Her notebook lay on her desk, closed. She had put a comb, a mirror and a songbook on top of it. I stared at her. She stared right back with a "what do you want now?" expression.

I asked if she had been copying the sentences from the board. "Yeah," she replied. She slowly moved the comb, mirror and songbook off her notebook and opened it. Then, looking for ways to waste time to show that she didn't care what the teacher thought, she began flipping pages back and forth, supposedly looking for a clean page.

She frowned and slowly tore out several pages that had

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# Morale Lowered by Pupils' War of Nerves

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been written on. She crumpled them into separate wads and threw them on the floor.

"This is a classroom, not a pig sty," I said sarcastically. "You may do that at home, but you can't do it here."

She looked at me with a hurt expression. "I don't do that at home," she declared heatedly.

"Pick the papers up and throw them in the basket," I ordered. Reluctantly, slowly, she picked them up and put them on her desk. "Put them in the basket," I ordered again.

"I'll put them in the basket in a few minutes," was her reply.

## 'I Mean Now.'

"I told you to put them in the basket right now. And I mean right now," I said.

Josephine gave me a long, hard stare. Then, figuring she had gone far enough, slowly got up from her seat, walked to the front of the room and dropped the papers in the basket. She returned to her seat. I waited for her to begin writing.

She picked up her book and again began flipping pages. She stopped, carefully put her comb in her pocketbook; placed her mirror between the pages of a textbook. Then she resumed flipping.

At long last, she began to write. I walked back to the front of the room, doing my best to mask my exasperation.

## Day After Day.

Situations like this occur day after day in every adjustment class. They wore me down. Other teachers told me that this type of recalcitrant, insolent pupil wore them down, too.

I learned from my teaching colleagues that in self-defense many had developed a "who-cares" attitude. These teachers let girls like Josephine alone. They would let her sleep or comb her hair, as long as she was reasonably quiet. That she wasn't learning anything, these teachers felt, was the responsibility of higher education officials, not the classroom teacher.

More sensitive teachers after run-ins with Josephine and her friends leave our schools to "go where they can teach." Others just despair and quit teaching altogether.

I recall vividly walking into a deserted classroom during the lunch period one day. The teacher, a new one, was slumped despondently in his chair.

"Hello," I greeted him. "I haven't seen you in the teachers' luncheon. Where do you eat?"

## Just Can't Eat.

"I don't eat lunch," he said wearily. "After battling with these toughs all morning I just can't eat. I have to go home to relax and get back to normal before I can eat anything."

This distraught man typifies the beaten teacher at John Marshall Junior High who is unable to cope with the toughs. There were many like him who finished each school day feeling weary, frustrated, angry. Other teachers, the hardier ones, adapted to the situation. They learned to conserve themselves by merely going through the motions of teaching the difficult classes.

I recall one of these harder teachers advising a new teacher who was having difficulty controlling his tough classes:

"Don't bother trying to control the troublemakers. Send them to the assistant principals. After all, it's their school."

## Starts Day With a Swool.

A new teacher, who also had been handed adjustment classes, accompanied me down the street after school one day. He had been discussing whether he would continue teaching beyond the end of the current term. Suddenly he burst out in exasperation:

"I have to go into that classroom in the morning. As soon as the first students come through the door my face freezes into a swool. Right away I have to start growling and shouting. 'Sit down! Keep quiet! Take off your coat! Get into your own seat! Open your book! Spit out the gum!' I have to go through this routine over and over again all day long."

Gum chewing is a favorite symbol of defiance in the difficult class—and a constant source of irritation for the teacher. At first I did not realize this. But in a few days I noted that entire classes were chewing simultaneously.

Many times my classroom looked and sounded like a zoo.

Brooklyn's problem schools has expressed interest in his findings. Mr. Allen is cooperating with this grand jury.

Five other investigations are now under way into the operations of the board.

Expanding Inquiry. Comptroller Lawrence E. Gerosa is expanding his inquiry—which produced sensational charges that the school board has wasted more than

\$100 million in its school building program—into the cost of textbooks and other classroom supplies.

Mr. Gerosa's charges sparked two other probes of building waste and extravagance. These are being conducted by the State Investigations Commission and State Education Commissioner James E. Allen Jr.

In addition, City Administrator Charles F. Preusse has

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J.H.S. 210

My television set was broken and I did not go to the movies for a long time.

Present school conditions force teachers in ordinary schools and without special training or equipment to cope with the pupils whose level of ability is indicated by the above "composition." A ninth-grader in JHS 210 struggled for a full period trying to write: "My television set was broken and I did not go to the movies for a long time."

9/13/58

English

1. The main part of the picture is like a sweet the man rich as ham to the girl.
2. The actor and the secretary what general and the part of the line what general.

"Don't give your ninth-grade adjustment classes examinations—you won't be able to read the papers," fellow teachers at John Marshall Junior High School advised. Examinations produced papers like the one above.

## FRIDAY: The Poor Ones

Staff Writer George N. Allen portrays the calloused teachers at John Marshall Junior High School and the ones unsuited for their work.

When I looked over the pupils I would often see nearly 30 jaws moving in unison to the accompaniment of snapping, chomping and bubble-popping.

When I ordered them to dispose of the gum, many pupils behaved as if I were invading their privacy. The loss of their chewing gum in the morning was enough to put some of the difficult students in a bad temper for the rest of the day.

Despite the worst the toughs can do to them, despite the impossible conditions they have to face, many sincere teachers at JHS 210 try to do their best with their difficult pupils.

## Akihito Troth To Be Bared

United Press International

TOKYO, Nov. 25.—The Imperial household announced today it will hold a conference tomorrow to discuss the marriage of Crown Prince Akihito.

At a news conference afterward, the Imperial household is expected to announce engagement of Japan's heir apparent to Michiko, Sho's commoner daughter, of wealthy Japanese industrial

been investigating the school board's administrative machinery—with emphasis on the building program—since last spring.

Yesterday, City Council President Abe Stark called for a City Council investigation to determine whether the proposed \$500 million exempt bond issue for future school construction is necessary.