



47

Welcome to **ATTACK!** a two-page occasional publication. Most of **ATTACK!** will be concerned with the holistic curriculum which, if acted on, is a fundamental way to undermine the present undemocratic education system. Don't be discouraged if opportunities to teach holistically are limited, do your best, be a guardian, and act as a witness to this culturally significant and inspiring way of teaching and learning. **ATTACK!** is a partner to <https://networkonnet.wordpress.com>

### Attack! 47 Reuben and WALTs Part 3

Reuben was thoughtful.

'Your name first.'

Reuben wrote the heading 'Me' in capitals. She registered the first sally, but ignored it.

Reuben came again.

'Where was I before I was?'

'Write down where you were born, Reuben.'

'Not after I was born. Before. Where was I?'

'You were very clever when you talked to me about yourself.'

'Now write down, "I was born at ..." '

'I think I was like a dandelion seed. Blowing all over the sky. Way, way up by aeroplanes, and on the trees and flying out over the sea.'



For a moment she was entranced by the poetic vision of specks of life floating aimlessly through infinity.

'How do you spell "dandelion"?''

'I would like the story of your home and parents.'

Reuben wrote, 'I am a dandilion sid up in the ski.'

She worked hastily to grab control. 'Reuben. I am going to put the writing on hold for about five minutes more while we talk about your ... about ... before you were born. After that you do as I say. Okay?' (This way she hoped to settle him down, but in a way that deprived him of the audience of the other children.)

Reuben grinned, 'Okay.'

'Well now. Your turn to start.'

'Was I a seed?'

'What do you think?'

'I don't think I was a seed.'

'Why not?'

'Because seeds are hard.' Reuben screwed up his face in puzzled thought. 'I think,' he said conspiratorially, 'that I was a ghost. Before I was born I reckon I was a ghost. No-one you could see.'

'That sounds about right, Reuben. Some call your ghost a soul or a spirit.'

'How do you spell "soul"?''

Reuben crossed out his first sentence and wrote, 'I was a soul.' Then he smiled and continued, 'I was born at ...'

She gave Reuben a dinosaur stamp on the back of his hand. Her friend (who taught in the room next door) was impressed, though she did ask where the 'soul' bit had come from.

'Early days yet,' she replied.

The following fortnight continued in a similar vein. In the middle of the maths session Reuben would suddenly ask, 'How do flowers know what colour they ought to be?'

'It has to do with genes. We'll read it up in nature time.'

Or as spelling was in progress, 'Why is the sea salty when all the rivers run into it?'

'You have a very good point there, Reuben; we'll look it up later.'

Or as he was doing large ball handling, 'If the moon makes the tide come in, what happens when it's cloudy?'

'We will talk about it when we do science next week.'

The five minute time-out to talk was undertaken regularly. It was both challenging and exciting.

'How do you know there was sun above the clouds?'

'Because I've been there.'

'Above the clouds?'

'Yes.' The question did not seem to be up to his usual standard of challenge; was she being set up?

She was.

Reuben paused ever so slightly: 'How far does the sky go?'

'Back to fractions, Reuben, and as soon as you've finished, all neat and correct, you can use the computer.'

They had agreed that good progress in getting his work done would be rewarded with thirty minutes on the computer. This time on the computer was highly prized by Reuben.

By the end of week four, the project had proved a great success. Reuben was a changed child. At home his parents reported he did as he was asked, refrained from endless arguing and questioning, even brought school mates home. 'He's not perfect,' they said, 'but he's like a normal kid.' Other teachers who taught him were even more complimentary. 'I hardly know he's here these days,' one said, 'no fuss ... able to work without continual oversight, pretty focused on his studies, and not disruptive to the class with his questions.'

The principal even gave her what passed for a warm smile.

She and Reuben were good friends, enjoying the banter that was part of their relationship, and respecting each other's astuteness. She felt a sense of achievement.

It was the last day of term. The school was empty, the chairs neatly stacked, the staffroom blinds pulled. The main doors locked and, except for a lunch wrapper skidding across the tennis court, the playground was deserted.

Laden with teaching books and notes, also a bunch of roses brought by Reuben from his parents, she took a short-cut through the back of the playground to catch the bus. It was autumn. Bronzed oak leaves matted the path, spent rye grass brushed her skirt, and ripe thistle-heads from their prickly containers, sought air currents.

'Just like dandelion seeds,' she grinned.

She paused, and then stopped abruptly, lifting her face skyward as a soft westerly surrounded her with a veil of thistledown.

'Where was I before I was?' she heard the ghost of Reuben whisper.

She felt faint, dreamlike, and in the distance she could hear a voice calling, 'Who tells the bulbs to grow in spring?'

'Why is it cold on mountain tops when they're nearer the sun?'

A rush of anguish.

She knew then it was all over. (*Kath Beattie and Kelvin Smythe*)

