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Christmas Problems for the Home Economics Class

By MARCIA E. TURNER

ON the principal's desk this morning a blazing poinsettia greeted you, and as you passed down the corridor you noticed for the first time that on the windows of the kindergarten room was pasted a gay procession of reindeer and fat Santa Claus chasing each other across the panes. And the morning paper proclaims: "Fifteen more days to do your Christmas shopping." When the home economics classes hustle into the laboratory to the accompaniment of the hall bells that have suddenly assumed a festive jingle, they demand as one girl: "Are we going to make Christmas candy?" And there is it before you, the usual question of a Christmas problem to be planned for your classes.

Perhaps you have been letting the question answer itself in two or three ways that seem to take care of the matter pretty well. Your class, for example, will be happy to spend a day or two in making candy and another day in the fascinating work of learning how to make boxes and wrap ping and tying the boxes of candy in attractive ways. Someone suggests a pretty box for the principal and as the Christmas season by that time, you may even think of remembering the janitor in the same way. After all, this kind of Christmas problem does very well, and if you attempt to score it you will rate it high intnuence to life and certainly so as to interest. It goes down a bit when you consider its scope and difficulty and when you reach that most important factor of the kind of thinking involved. If it is well, then, what shall we do, anyway, you ask yourself.

Some member of the class suggests that each one plan and make a Christmas gift for some one else to be given at some time during the year. The suggestion meets with unanimous approval and as in the case of the first problem, the score on interest and certainly trueness to life soars to the peaks. Perhaps, with the comforting problem, the score on interest and making it, surely comes well within the realm of "superior type of thinking." And then the next day your class comes back with an assortment of stamped table runners and guest towels and fudge aprons and quantities of embroidery floss, before which the well known coat of many colors must have paled into insignificance. The colors that follow, as orange grows upon pink, and flowers and butterflies appear that never were on land and sea; as your laboratory takes on an atmosphere of such tran quility that there really isn't much need of supervision from you; and you even have time to work on those hem stitched napkins, during class time, or to make your own hand-tinted Christmas cards—then I say, there may be times when you wonder just how much thinking has been involved. And perhaps, with the brand of poverty will you have foreseen the end from the beginning you might have asked with a hint of asperity this time, "But what would make a worthwhile Christmas problem, for goodness sake?"

Perhaps, on the other hand, your Christmas problem has taken an even more altruistic form of providing a Christmas box for an orphans' home or for some family in the community which would otherwise, it is assumed, have no Christmas. This problem scores high on all points and as the work of making little garments; of knitting little caps; of embroidery; of all the love and kindness that goes with it—this project may seem the wisest plan to let the young daughter of the family do the selecting. In some cases it may be possible to interest the parents to the extent of turning over to the young daughter the amount of money to be spent on Junior's toys and letting her do the selecting. Merchants in your town will usually be glad to loan toys for illustrative material. The problem of making Christmas gifts should be preceded by problems involving the making of Christmas lists, tested by the true purpose and motive of giving, and of appropriate selection. Usually at this point it may seem the wisest plan to let the student make the list for her own holiday home unless the work can be justified as a class problem on its own merits.

Using the Christmas season by whatever method for promoting a closer drawing together of family ties is a good start toward future work in family relationships. Methods which have been suggested include planning a holiday party for the family in which each one takes some part in the entertainment. Many home economics teachers plan at this time a unit on hospitality, which results in a Christmas party for mothers.

And then—when the Christmas ornaments have been taken down and packed away and the little tree is discarded, and when your classes come back to the home economics laboratory on a bleak January day, then and there another be it that the Christmas flame burning high, light ing the way at all seasons to happier homes and better communities through whatever problems you may teach.

There is no music in a rest, that I know of, but there is the making of music in it.—Ruskin.