

## CHILDREN'S WRITING AND DRAWINGS by Sue FitzHugh

THIS talk is about children's writing and drawings. The children who have donated their drawings come from "ordinary" families, and have been selected randomly from the 5 to 10 age range. The samples are all original. Most families received the same letter asking them to ask their children for drawings of a tree, a house, their family and if they could, a starry sky over ocean waves; plus a little piece of handwriting. For some it has been easy and spontaneous, but for others, not so; but I am so grateful to all of them for producing such lovely work.

Children are our future and they have far greater insight and understanding than most of us ever give them credit for, not only about how they feel about themselves and the world around them but also about the adults who care for them. Their drawings are unfettered by adult inhibitions but are loaded with honest feelings and observations. Towards the end we'll have a look at a few selected children's drawings alongside their writing in greater depth, to see if we can find similarities in interpretation in both.

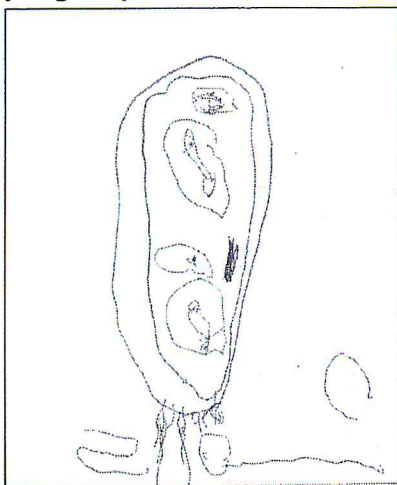
I am privileged to have 3 small grandchildren myself, aged 6 next week, 3¾ and 17 months. As a grandparent one can stand back and observe much more than one can as a parent; and to see the progress of the children as they develop expression through their manual skills has been delightful. Much study has been made of children's drawings over the last 60 or so years and being anything but a research scientist, I am not adding anything new to that. However I very much hope that those of you who have expertise in this field will share it with the rest of us, as we go along. Having begun to really understand what is revealed in the drawings, I feel that this is an area ripe for further development both in the classroom and in the family. Having spoken to a couple of young primary school teachers near me it seems that a request for a "drawing of their family" is about as far as it goes.

From the graphological point of view, it is not possible to analyse with great accuracy the handwriting of very small children, we all know that maturity takes 25 years at least. At a tender age their writing is not spontaneous, and malformations are common. But pointers are often to be seen and may be backed up in their drawings and doodles. Ruth Rostrom's talk on colours, printed in the autumn 2006 journal, naturally applies just as much to drawings as it does to handwriting. As graphologists we are all aware of the significance of angle, square and round shapes.

I was fascinated to find that certain themes are to be found around the world, no matter what background or culture the children come from. Drawings of houses, flowers, trees, people, animals, the sun, stars etc., show that young minds and feelings develop from a similar basic understanding. We must however remember that children's drawings are a representation not a reproduction, and no serious interpretation should be made on one drawing or on one day – just as in graphology.

Great artists stir our emotional responses in many ways. They have deep insight into human nature, exceptional powers of perception and observation, and the ability to express all this in visual form. Most young children are too immature to be able to do this, but if we look closely at their drawings, we can see the expression of our 4 most basic human emotions - joy, sorrow, anger and fear. Children express these wonderfully well, as we can see if we just stop and look, without the need to be great artists.

In the 1940's Buch did much study in the area of children's drawings, and asserted that a house, a tree and a person together would encourage conscious and unconscious associations, not only in children but in adults also. Added to that Dafna Yalon's absorbing book about the Star Wave Test and the research into that by many wonderful people, compounds this theory. They all tie in well with what we as graphologists already know about spacing, placement, pressure, sizes, shapes, fillings-in / retouchings, colours and control. Both tests are suitable for use with children as young as 4 yrs and I have 2 Star Wave drawings by 99 year old twins!



*Zac's rocket aged 3½*



*Isabelle's family - aged almost 6*



Scribbles executed by very young children of 18 months to 2½ - 3 years of age are pure **movement**. No form or spatial distribution yet exists. As they mature, control begins to develop and pre-conceived movements begin to appear. A little later, more distinct **forms** are drawn, their sizes are controlled, and **placement** on the page is planned.

All these improve in parallel and become more diverse, accurate and varying. The quality of them depends on the children's emotional and cognitive development as well as their motor abilities. A change of pen grip from hand to fingers allows further refinement and shapes such as circles, squares and triangles appear spontaneously.

From his research Buch realised that as the house, tree and people drawings were produced so readily and so widely, children must see them as significant influences in their lives, although they are unaware that they are also ego projections. The star wave drawing is different in that the drawer is asked for unconscious portrayals of form, movement and space only, with no ego projection.

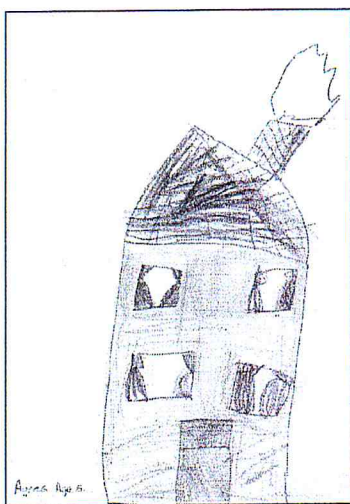
One other important issue is that the analyst needs to observe what is **missing** as well as what is actually seen. With small children, the drawing of people for instance, is unlikely to be very precise. But for slightly older ones, an absence of hands, feet, eyes or arms may be significant. An absent parent might be drawn in as part of the family but there may be no facial features – a sort of “there” but “not there” image. An absence of eyes might signify that they don't want to see something. Sometimes omission of the “self” is seen – this may show feelings of rejection.

I'll take each topic in turn and elaborate briefly on the symbolism. As in handwriting analysis, the whole picture needs to be observed before the details are analysed. We need to ask ourselves whether the drawing appears to be happy with lots of colour or whether it appears monotone and sparse. If possible ask the drawer who is shown in the picture and ask them to describe what they are doing. Also are there additions to the original request or are there disturbances?

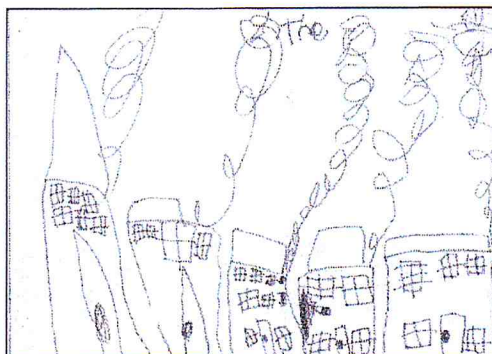
**The house.** A house symbolises the place where affection and security are sought; basic needs that should find fulfilment in family life. When looking at the picture we need to ask ourselves if it looks like a home; being lived in by a family and a place that we would like to visit or live in ourselves? Additions to the drawings not asked for such as trees, flowers, and the sun appear as expressions of a growing need for light, nature and the bigger world outside. Houses with smoke coming out of the chimney show that the house is “warm inside” as do features such as curtains, people looking out of windows, the inclusion of family pets or other animals, or paths going up to the door, which has a door knob. Less happy features may be the addition of aggressive shapes or violent filling in with black. Also unusual placement of the house, a small house or a distant house, no or sparse smoke, no door or knob, or bars at windows.

Interestingly the majority of houses drawn by city children in one research project showed country style houses with chimneys, rather than blocks of flats! Children living without a home of their own, or maybe one that they don't like for whatever reason, often draw one as a wish, for some it may be a wish for security and love.

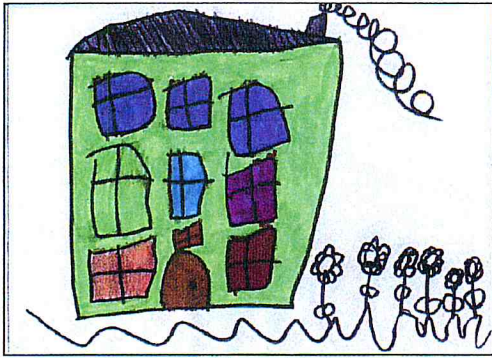
Research has shown that as children mature the incidence of houses as the main subject in spontaneous drawings diminishes, symbolizing their greater life expansion needs, beyond the home. Before the age of 7 – roughly, a child will draw what they know to be there whether it is visible or not. Gradually this will change to be more logical as the child matures.



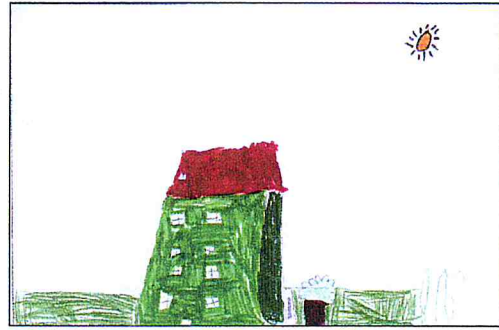
*Sloping chimney by Agnes age 5  
Agnes lives in London!*



*Rosie wants to have her whole multi generational family  
living in one street*



*Ellen aged 5 has added flowers*



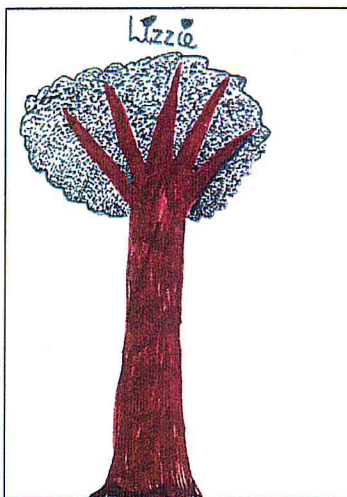
*Charlie K aged 5 has drawn a house where the door is rather too small and there is no chimney. However he has shaded the side of the house showing great maturity*

**The Tree.** The tree metaphor is used in almost every religion, myth, legend, ritual, art and literature around the world. Symbolically it is associated with the inner person, development and the emotional state.

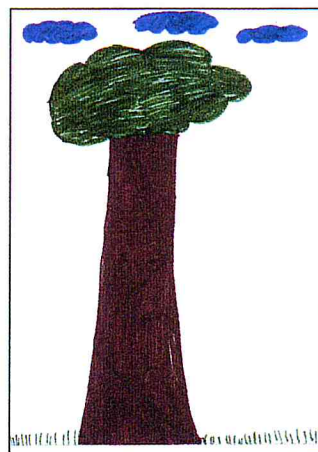
At first glance we need to observe whether the tree looks alive or dead - reflecting the drawer's own zest for life? Does it look weak or broken, or is it growing strongly and branching out? Do the branches reach up or go downwards? Does the trunk have knots or scars? Finally observe the relationship of the tree to the amount of space on the page as this is a good guide to self-perception.



*Jack & Matt B are brothers aged 5 & 7. Their parents are divorcing. Note the placement of Jack's tree and its size when observing "projection of self". Matt's tree shows the oversized trunk that is typical of young children, although further development is usually more apparent by 7 years of age*



*Lizzie aged 8 has projected a strong sense of self and the branches are growing firmly upwards*



*Issy aged 10 has also drawn a strong trunk but the crown is more restrained and the clouds may indicate anxiety*



Maya aged 8 has drawn a tree that gives cause for concern with its



with tenuous dead appearance and large scar on the trunk roots. he is trying

As in handwriting analysis, the tree is divided into 3 zones;

The **root** is the symbol of the tree's life source; it represents the beginning and the area of the unconscious – the id.

The **trunk** represents the early development of the personality, the core of the tree, the ego, the self. In children under 7 this is often enlarged as their inner emotional life is predominant. As anybody who has dealings with small children will know, the world revolves around them! After this age it should become less prominent.

The **crown** represents later personality development, the intellect, ideals and self-consciousness. Therefore in young children, this part of the tree is often stunted, hopefully developing more as they mature

The way that the trees are set on the baseline is also important; a sloping baseline shows distrust, insecurity or lack of will-power. A tree set on a hill shows a wish to be idolised, loved and held in esteem; but it also shows loneliness, as if the drawer was waiting for someone to fetch them and take them down to a warm, loving family, which they don't at the moment feel part of.

The **Family**. These drawings will show how comfortable the child feels in the family and whether there is strain, conflict or fear in the relationships within it. The significance of hands and arms; the details and shapes of the faces and clothing; order, & placement of the various family members; pressure of the various individuals; colours chosen; overall size and comparison of each, are just some of areas that need to be examined. Kieran's family is drawn on a slope.

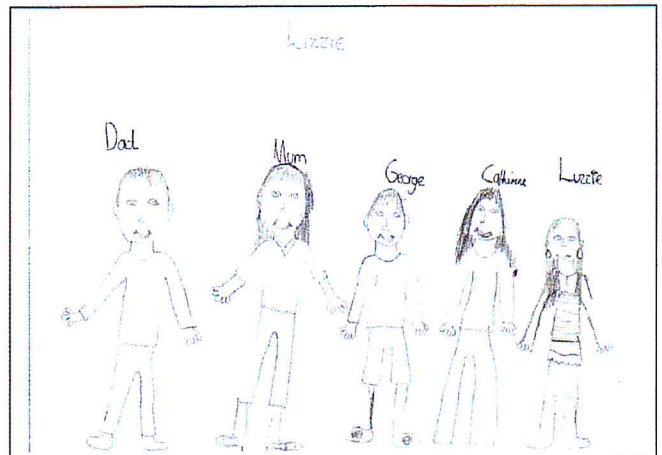
Kieran aged 8 has drawn his tree on a hill



The various short branches show that out lots of options.  
The sun (his mother) is large and the clouds (his dreams) blue and a little rigid

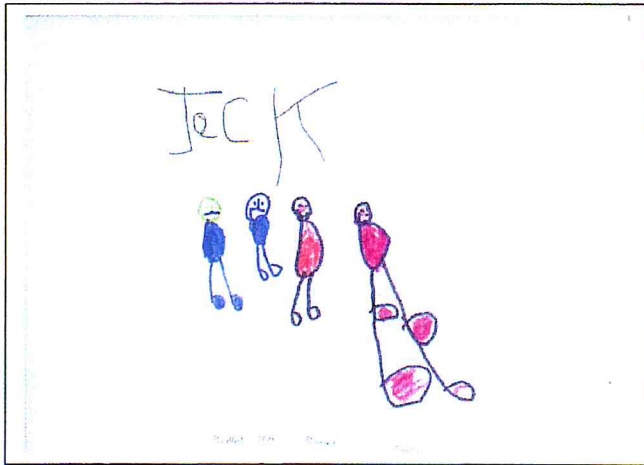


Charlotte aged 5 shows a happy colourful family



Lizzie aged 8 shows a strong family with every one's identity clearly defined

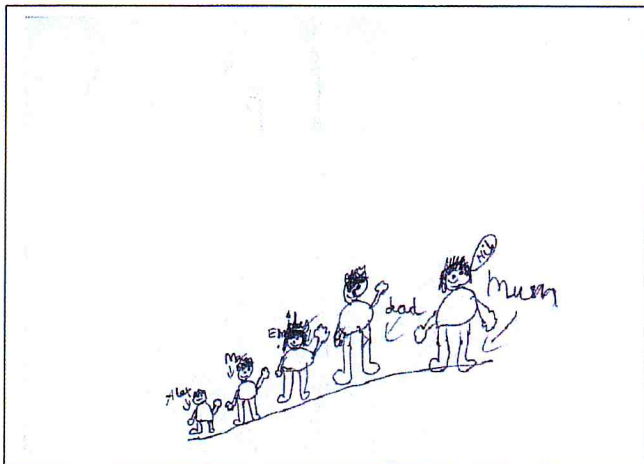




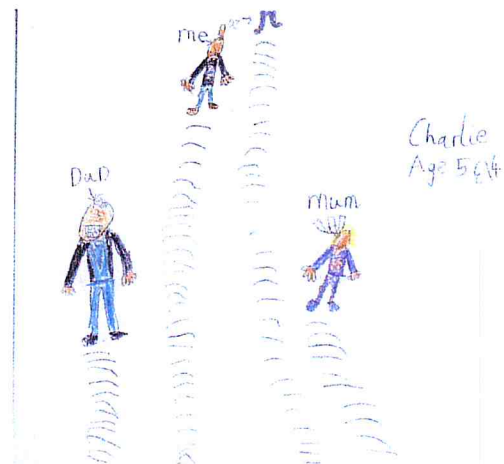
Jack B see above has omitted his mother on this occasion. No arms or hands are shown



Jamie aged 5 is a much wanted only child. He is warmly drawn between his parents



Kieran's family placed on a slope - often denoting insecurity



Charlie aged 5 shows his bouncy family with his brother almost out of the picture. His dad is showing his teeth, a sign of aggression. A very mature drawing for such a young child

**The Star Wave drawing.** As mentioned above we need to look at the overall harmony of the picture. Does it look choppy or disconnected? Are there areas that appear different, that may be due to an earlier trauma? Comparison of the two sections (stars versus waves) is as important as the individual sections. The ideal is for balance but a slightly larger wave zone may still be considered normal. Obviously total avoidance of one zone is significant; every void reflects a focal issue that is loaded with blocked energies. Exaggeration has the same meaning as neglect.



If the child has been clearly asked to draw a picture of "a starry sky above ocean waves" then it is significant if additions to that are made. For instance, a moon, fish, boats, cliffs, sand, rocks etc. may be symbolic projections of the Jungian **Personal Unconscious**. The symbolic meanings attributed to placement and directional patterns in the drawing space are based on the archetypes of the Jungian **Collective Unconscious** – i.e. universal and culture free.

In children a larger star area might show that the intellect is suppressing the soul. They live under too-high demands concerning their academic success.

Kieran aged 8 shows a larger star area. The sea has a distant ship, The stars are fluidly drawn and fill the sky.

A larger wave area shows an emphasis on emotionality, passion or instinctual urges or problems. **Overlapping between sky and waves** is rare after 5 years of age but if it persists it might show that the child has difficulty in distinguishing imagination from reality. Thoughts and feelings are mixed up. Also as children mature there should be no "air gap" between the water and the sky. Just as tree knots can indicate trauma, so can the lack of horizontal wave continuation.

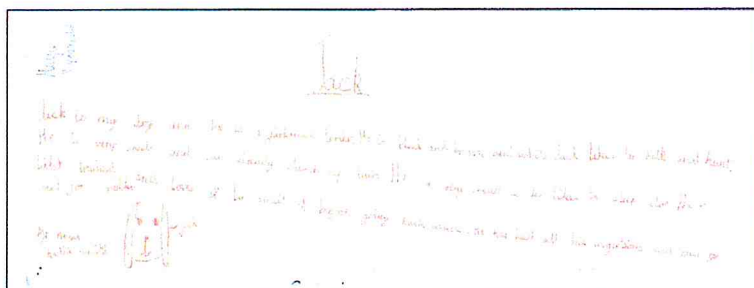
**Stars (form)** symbolise light, knowledge, ideas, aspirations, and success; their constancy also relate to order and eternity. Their shape and **placement** in the drawings are significant. In this test a central figure has not been requested, the drawer has been asked to forget his ego and describe his place in the world without of course being aware of it. Primary narcissism may be seen in a larger star and is common in children under 7. After that the never ending need for recognition, approval and attention is not healthy and emotional neglect or abuse might be suspected.

**Waves (movement)** symbolise change and regeneration, a source of life and vitality. Waves reflect emotional experiences and crises; calm or stormy. High waves and troubled waters can also reflect intensity of drives and give information about the Id. The sea symbolises the Collective Unconscious; and in its depths, the Personal Unconscious. Wave shapes such as crest "hooks" towards the right may indicate overt aggression, fear or anger, but also a need to confront the world and move on. Hooks facing towards the left may show self-protection, resentment, isolation and withdrawal from the world.

The significance of additions to the stars and waves such as boats are often seen in the drawings of children who live near the sea but in those that don't, they might signify insecurity and / or a mother problem (womb projection). Clouds might show insecurity, anxiety, unclear goals or a period of crisis and change. Obscuring clouds may show a lack of parental love. Rocks signify obstacles, resentment, conflicts or tension. If hidden on the sea bottom = deep problems with *future / father* (right side) or *past / mother* conflicts (left side). Fish show vivid feelings, the type of fish (i.e. shark or dover sole!) show whether this is positive or negative.

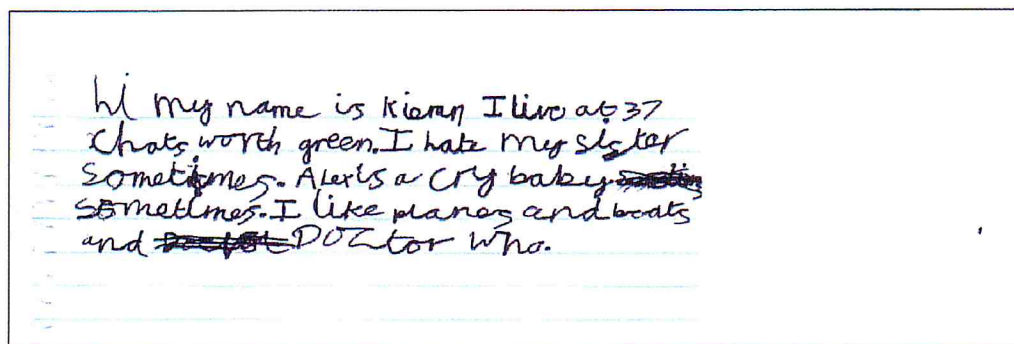
## TWO SCRIPTS BELONGING TO 8 YEAR OLDS

Maya aged 8 See her tree above



Kieran's script – aged 8

See his tree, family and star wave drawings above



The amount of drawings shown in my original talk has been reduced for the journal but I have chosen what I hope are the most relevant to illustrate the points that I have raised. Apart from Jack and Matt, all the children have two parents living at home with them, but two children particularly (the two above) are showing signs of distress at the present time.