Sitting in my favorite spot on the sofa near the window, I look across the room and see a glowing wall. It's a "stained-glass" fabric rectangle of bright blues, reds, yellows, greens and off-whites.

It is a magical quilt, a work of folk art made by three seventh-grade classes and given to me as a surprise when I retired from teaching. It reminds me of what 12- and 13-year-olds are like and how they think. At the same time, it also tells a bit about who I am.

The quilt is made up of 4" x 4" squares and includes three consecutive alphabets. Following is a description of the "Peace Alphabet" activity that eventually led to my wonderful quilt surprise.

The "Peace Alphabet" is an idea that I immediately liked when I found it years ago in Watermelons Not War, a book about parenting in the nuclear age. As a resource specialist, I have since shared it with teachers and classes at my school. In those instances, the end result was a class book or wall hanging.

Students are assigned letters and use them in a pattern called the "Peace Alphabet." Each child takes a letter and writes and draws his or her piece on the whole. The letter is used in contrasting a positive, life-enhancing idea or thing against a negative, life-threatening one. Two examples: Apples not Abuse (for "A") and Rainbows not Racism (for "R"). The children used paper and crayons or felt pens to illustrate the life-affirmations.

My "Peace Alphabet" quilt was made with narrow fabric pens on cloth. Each square of text and art is separated from its neighbor and set off by a square of solid color. Blue squares border the quilt and the binding is bright red. Contrasting colored yarn ties the quilt together—top, batting and back.

The project was the work of two seventh-grade teachers, Marilyn Stewart and Madelynn Micon. With teacher Vic Carrion and their classes, these two former coworkers of mine put it all together. The students who were involved came...
and I How a lesson came back as a gift

from diverse cultural backgrounds: Caucasian, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, Asian, African American, Native American, and recent immigrants from Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

The messages on the quilt reflect the problems and, more important, the possibilities in the world. Our students have experienced many of the problems in their own lives. Some to a depth that has hurt them.

Our school community is part of the wider urban area of Oakland, Berkeley and San Francisco, and shares similar big-city problems. In fact, all communities are troubled by the concerns expressed on the quilt. And, all the children share the same hopes for a peaceful life.

This quilt has variety and beauty just like the faces of the children who made it. I love it for all these qualities and with all its misspellings and imperfections. There is no other quilt like it in the world.

Jane Freeman was the resource specialist for Lorenzo Manor School in Hayward, California. She retired in June 1993.

PEACE ALPHABET ACTIVITY

If you use the Peace Alphabet with your class, here are some suggestions to make the activity accessible to all students:

- List the letters of the alphabet on chalkboard or chart paper (the paper has the advantage of reuse). Leave enough room next to each letter for writing suggested ideas. Write "not" and "to help students focus on the form as they think.

- When a child contributes, he or she may want that letter, so write student's name by that letter. This is also a good way to make sure each letter and student are accounted for. Children of all language backgrounds and abilities are stimulated and helped by hearing the oral part and seeing the list.

- A student might want to use someone else's contribution. In some cases, two students might feel more comfortable working together on the text and picture. Book covers, title page and perhaps more then one page per letter are ways to accommodate groups larger than 26.

- Depending on grade level and teacher judgment, the following might also work. After a few examples are given, students take a couple of letters and work in pairs, writing down their ideas. Dictionaries can be used for word searches, if needed. Then the oral part of listing phrases takes place, as described above.

- You will have fun with this because there are humor and surprises in what the children say. And, what they say will touch your heart. —J.F.