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## Note from the Editors: On Education

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## Note from the Editors: On Education

Taro Yashima's 1955 children's book *Crow Boy* is, to my knowledge, the first fictional narrative depicting an autistic child's experience in school. The book, a Caldecott Honor recipient, tells the story of a Japanese boy known only as Chibi, whose strange interests (insects and birds) and unusual behaviors (hiding in small, dark places) make him an outcast in school. Chibi is teased by his classmates and ignored by his teacher for five years, until the arrival of a new teacher, Mr. Isobe, changes everything. Isobe, who is based on Yashima's real-life teacher Takeo Isonaga, recognizes Chibi's extensive knowledge of nature, puts his artwork on display in the classroom, and even enjoys talking to him. At the end of the story, Mr. Isobe encourages Chibi to participate in the school talent show, where he shows an incredible ability to mimic the call of crows—calls he hears every day on his long walk from his village to school. His classmates and the community members are amazed by his knowledge and his performance.

*Crow Boy* is beautifully drawn and sensitively told, and as such, it offers a fitting introduction to this issue of *Ought*, which focuses on education. Just as *Crow Boy* occurs almost exclusively in the Japanese school where Mr. Isobe teaches, the pieces in this issue focus largely on educational spaces and structures, as they ask important questions about how school systems accommodate or fail to accommodate autistic and neurodivergent students. Marie Adrienne R. Manalili, for example, examines how ableist ideologies underlie educational policies and practices, as she relates her own experiences as an autistic student in both the Philippines and the U.K. And Pernille Fraser interviews the autistic artist and activist Jessica Starns about the history of inclusive education in the U.K.

Two parents of autistic students also share personal stories about navigating the complex, fraught world of inclusion advocacy. Kevin Timpe and David Urban both contribute articles about the ins and outs of advocacy. Timpe takes on the resistant, even negligent public school system that pared down its support for his son during the pandemic shut-down; Urban looks inward to examine his failures and successes as the advocate-in-chief for his

college-age son. Both authors see advocacy as “a moral imperative,” as Timpe writes, though their approaches differ.

In their scholarly essay “Being the Curriculum,” Alyssa Hillary Zisk addresses an educational challenge that even parent advocates like Timpe an Urban might not anticipate: the use of autistic students as representatives of autism to their neurotypical peers. Zisk recounts how this occurred in their graduate neuroscience program. While Zisk graciously agreed to “be the curriculum,” in their words, their essay details what they hope their classmates might *really* learn about cognition, autistic identity, and neurology. Likewise, other pieces in this issue speak to being autistic in school from a first-hand perspective, including poems by Jon Adams and Natalie Joelle, artwork by Pernille Fraser, and comics by Steve Asbell and Vera Pudilova. Collectively, their words and images reveal schooling experiences that were mostly absent of teachers like Mr. Isobe, the kind-hearted and brilliantly accommodating teacher in *Crow Boy*. The authoritative teacher in Jon Adams’ poem “Specific Learning Disability” asks, “You’re just wrong again can’t you see what I’m saying”/ Why do you sit there like that in your permanent daydream”?

In this issue, *Ought* recognizes and celebrates the autistic and neurodivergent students who may have been “permanently daydreaming” in school. They become poets, artists, musicians, essayists, and scholars. They know the call of crows.

—Robert Rozema and Christopher Bass

## References

Yashima, T. (1955). *Crow boy*. Viking.