



# Bad Guys Don't Have Birthdays: Fantasy Play at Four

*Vivian Gussin Paley*

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Bad guys are not allowed to have birthdays, pick blueberries, or disturb the baby. So say the four-year-olds who announce life's risks and dangers as they play out the school year in Vivian Paley's classroom.

Their play is filled with warnings. They invent chaos in order to show that everything is under control. They portray fear to prove that it can be conquered. No theme is too large or too small for their intense scrutiny. Fantasy play is their ever dependable pathway to knowledge and certainty.

"It . . . takes a special teacher to value the young child's communications sufficiently, enter into a meaningful dialogue with the youngster, and thereby stimulate more productivity without overwhelming the child with her own ideas. Vivian Paley is such a teacher."—Maria W. Piers, in the *American Journal of Education*

"[Mrs. Paley's books] should be required reading wherever children are growing. Mrs. Paley does not presume to *understand* preschool children, or to theorize. Her strength lies equally in knowing that she does not know and in trying to learn. When she cannot help children—because she can neither anticipate nor follow their thinking—she strives not to hinder them. She avoids the arrogance of adult to small child; of teacher to student; or writer to reader."—Penelope Leach, author of *Your Baby & Child* in the *New York Times Book Review*

"[Paley's] stories and interpretation argue for a new type of early childhood education . . . a form of teaching that builds upon the considerable knowledge children already have and grapple with daily in fantasy play."—Alex Raskin, *Los Angeles Times Book Review*

"Through the 'intuitive language' of fantasy play, Paley believes, children express their deepest concerns. They act out different roles and invent imaginative scenarios to better understand the real world. Fantasy play helps them cope with uncomfortable feelings. . . . In fantasy, any device may be used to draw safe boundaries."—Ruth J. Moss, *Psychology Today*

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