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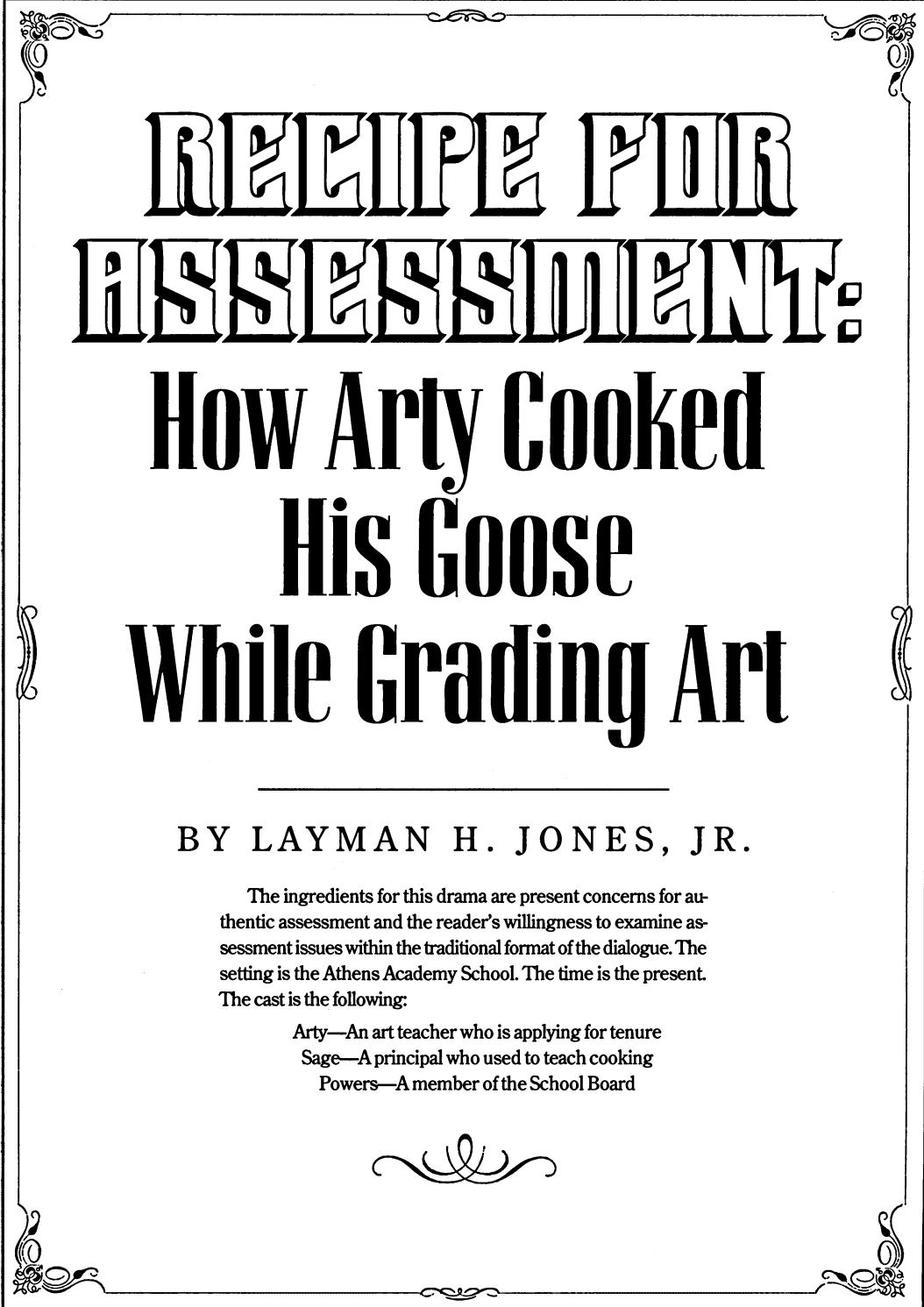
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RECIPE FOR ASSESSMENT: How Arty Cooked His Goose While Grading Art

BY LAYMAN H. JONES, JR.

The ingredients for this drama are present concerns for authentic assessment and the reader's willingness to examine assessment issues within the traditional format of the dialogue. The setting is the Athens Academy School. The time is the present. The cast is the following:

Arty—An art teacher who is applying for tenure

Sage—A principal who used to teach cooking

Powers—A member of the School Board



I

PLUCK UNTIL NO PRODUCTS REMAIN

ARTY and the principal, DR. SAGE, are in the outer office of the Athens Academy School. A group of teachers stand next to a nearby column.

ARTY (Handing in his grades and hoping to make a good impression.) I stayed up all night to get these done on time—grading must be the worst part of teaching art.

SAGE. You seem dedicated, but your distaste for grading concerns me. When I taught cooking I looked forward to grading. I really enjoyed sampling all the things that my students cooked. Did your assignments lead to student work that you did not appreciate?

ARTY. How I felt about the student artwork is unimportant. I based my grades on an evaluation of each student's process of making art. *(Smiling.)* The process is more important than the product!

SAGE (First sympathetically.) I assume that you understand how to evaluate the artistic process. *(Then sternly.)* But, shouldn't you grade student art rather than student process?

ARTY. Grading students' art would inhibit them. It would make them anxious for praise and prizes. And, they would miss the joy of making art.

SAGE. Suppose that I taught cooking students proper cutting, folding and blending. And, suppose that at the end of the term, all the students baked pudding. Would the proof of their achievement be in their mixing, or in the tasting of their pudding?

ARTY. (Becoming assertive to hide his confusion.) But, I am teaching students rather than pudding.

SAGE. A cooking teacher who loved students would want them to make good pudding instead of bad pudding.

ARTY. I don't want to teach them pudding! I want to teach taste.

SAGE. Grading process, instead of products, is likely to diminish the taste of students. Cooking teachers should give higher marks for fine cuisine than for junk food. Otherwise, students are unlikely to value one more than the other. Don't you want students to value fine art more than vernacular art?

ARTY. (Hoping to save face in front of the other teachers.) Your comparison of cooking and art is unfair. Cooking is all about following recipes, but art values originality.

SAGE. Your reasoning is unfair. Part of what characterizes cooks is their use of recipes, but cooks also improvise, and some invent new dishes. Moreover, part of what characterizes art is recipes—perspective is a recipe with many rules.

ARTY. I would never require my students to follow *all* the rules of perspective. That would be expecting too much. The purpose of art education is *not* to train students to make professional quality art.

SAGE. Including only part of the ingredients in a recipe seems to ensure failure. Do you want your students to fail?

ARTY looks to the other teachers for support. They look away.

ARTY. (Retreating to the door.) I've got to prepare for my class now.

II

SEASON WITH NOTIONS OF STAGES AND PROGRESS

That afternoon SAGE joins ARTY in the hall as ARTY hangs artworks for the Open House.

SAGE. You are exhibiting artworks, instead of your notes on observations of student processes. Does your exhibition show that you want parents to judge your program by student products, rather than processes?

ARTY. Artwork is important to parents, but student work shouldn't be judged by adult standards. Adult standards are unnatural for children.

SAGE. It would be a peculiar cooking teacher who taught children to cook like children. What children do naturally with food is smear it about on their plates until it looks like garbage.

ARTY (Picking up a geometric construction.) Does this look like garbage? Students don't stay at the smearing stage. They progress through more advanced stages. Teachers should grade whether students are doing work that is typical for their stage—or an advanced stage.

SAGE. Your stage theory for assessment seems to move closer to product assessment than your previous concern for process. Still, I do not understand how you can decide whether a stage is typical, or advanced, without reference to an adult standard. Suppose that a student at age six prepared a peanut butter sandwich on whole wheat toast, and suppose that a year later the same student used a boxed mix to cook brownies. You cannot decide whether the student is advancing or regressing without reference to a standard. If your standard is nutrition, the student is regressing. But, if your

standard is hedonistic pleasure, the student is advancing.

ARTY. Actually, I keep portfolios of student work and look for progress. I judge student work against previous work, not external standards.

SAGE. Suppose that we could carefully freeze the ice cream made by a student. We might save samples of the ice

cream from different batches over the entire year. Then, we might open the freezer and analyze the ice cream. Our analysis might reveal that the latest samples were increasingly smooth and creamy, while the earlier samples were more like iced milk. How would you

decide whether the creamy product or the reduced calorie product is better? A decision about improvement requires external standards.

ARTY. I could decide! I prefer the really rich ice cream, because it tastes better.

SAGE (*Holding a print while ARTY staples it to the wall.*) But, I prefer the iced milk, because my standard is healthfulness.

ARTY. There's no disputing taste. (*Then, more aggressively.*) You may want me to grade artworks, but there is no way to do it. You can't judge art objectively any more than you can judge apples and oranges.

SAGE (*Annoyed.*) It is possible to judge whether apples are better than oranges, but the explanation would take too long for now. Let's meet for lunch tomorrow and continue our discussion.



PLACE IN ROASTING PAN WITH HISTORY, CRITICISM, AND AESTHETICS

ARTY waits in the lunchroom. In his hip pocket is a free publication from an organization in California. DR. SAGE enters, and sits beside ARTY.

ARTY (*Placing his hand on his publication.*) Instead of grading art products, I think that we should grade art history, art theory, and art criticism. I don't think that we should grade apples and oranges. We ought to measure the appreciation of fruit, knowledge of fruit history, or the theory of fruit. That makes more sense than trying to compare apples and oranges.

SAGE. Too many broths will spoil the kitchen. Too many pots on the stove will likely prevent the cook from truly tasting any of them. Moreover, carefully tasting three new broths will

tell nothing about the taste of the old broth. How can you teach broth appreciation, before you know how to recognize good broth? Would you risk teaching students to prefer bad broth?

ARTY fills his mouth with food so that he won't have to answer.

SAGE. Measuring achievement in other art disciplines is likely to distract from measuring studio achievement. Achievement in art history or aesthetics is not an adequate measure of student artworks. How can you propose to measure critical ability in your students, unless you are able to make distinctions in the quality of artworks?

ARTY (*Swallowing.*) But, how do you judge apples and oranges?

SAGE. Why do you eat food?

ARTY. Because I like to; must I have a reason?

SAGE. Do you eat because you enjoy the taste of food or do you eat for nourishment—do you live to eat, or eat to live?

ARTY. I eat some foods that have vitamins and minerals, but I prefer high cholesterol dishes.

SAGE. So you eat some foods for pleasure, and you eat other foods for their nutritional value.

SAGE. Is wedding cake tasty? Is it filled with vitamins?

ARTY. It's as tasteless as the purity that it symbolizes, and it has few vitamins. (*Hoping to make a point.*) But, I would still eat it. It would be antisocial to refuse.

SAGE. So, you sometimes eat for social reasons. Do you eat fish on Friday?

ARTY. My stomach is Catholic on Fridays.

Achievement in art history or aesthetics is not an adequate measure of student artworks. How can you propose to measure critical ability in your students, unless you are able to make distinctions in the quality of artworks?



SAGE. So, sometimes you eat because of religion. (*Smiling.*) There you have it; when you know why you eat, you can judge apples and oranges.

ARTY (*Not understanding.*) How's that?

SAGE. If we eat because of authority, then we must serve applesauce with roast pork. If we are planning a Halloween party, then apples are better for bobbing and for cider. If we eat because we want more vitamin C, then the orange is the choice. If we eat for hedonistic pleasure, then we will prefer an orange chiffon pie.

ARTY. But, I still don't know whether apples are better than oranges. Each of your examples depends on a different reason for eating.

SAGE. Exactly! And, you can grade your student art work, if you identify your assumptions about the reason for each project.

ARTY. But each project may have a different purpose. Writing different standards for each project sounds like an unfair work load.

SAGE. It would be unfair to assign the baking of bread, and then judge the products of the oven by the standards of cake.

ARTY. But, I often give students materials and let them make whatever they want. If every student makes something different, then students should be evaluated by their individual intentions. (*Remembering a concept from Aesthetics 303.*) But, believing that you can evaluate artwork by the intentions of the artist is a fallacy.

SAGE (*Looking at the food displayed on the cafeteria line.*) At a buffet brunch it is probably more important that something looks like pancakes than to

guess whether the cook intended to make cookies or cake. Yet, it would be a fallacy for me to let students cook what they want, and then hope to grade their cooking without knowing whether they intended to make pancakes, cake, or cookies.

ARTY (*Perplexed.*) Isn't defining artistic intent a problem for aesthetics? The problem for the studio is *how to make art*. Aren't studio and aesthetics separate disciplines?

SAGE. If *cooking* and *why we cook* are separate disciplines, then what guides the cook's efforts? The disciplined study of taste enables cooks to judge whether mashed pumpkin and ground turkey patties are appropriate for a Thanksgiving dinner.

ARTY (*Looking defenseless and exiting.*) I'll be late for class.



**IN A SEPARATE PAN SAUTÉ
DESIGN, REPRESENTATION,
EXPRESSION, AND
COMMUNICATION. THEN,
BRUSH OVER EACH
ASSIGNMENT**

Three weeks later ARTY is in the principal's office with SAGE and DR. POWERS from the school board.

POWERS. So you are Herman's art teacher. What is this junk that Herman brought home and wanted to hang on the refrigerator?

ARTY. My students did not make junk. They used junk to make assemblages. Why are you complaining? Herman got an A for his artwork.

POWERS. That is why I am here. If Herman did some of the better work, then the standards of the art program have really gone to h—

SAGE (*Interrupting.*) I think ARTY

should show you the work of the rest of the class.

ARTY (*Opening a portfolio.*) I photographed the projects before I sent them home.

POWERS. You needed photographs to preserve them. Herman's did not survive the bus ride home. It arrived in six pieces. Herman was in tears—I cannot imagine why.

ARTY (*Confident that he had used aesthetics—just like the principal wanted.*) The purpose of the assemblage project was to integrate the major theories of art. The students were to make a representation, use good design, express themselves, and communicate some environmental concern. I did not want them to be preoccupied with a single narrow theory of art. They were to experience the wholeness of being an artist.

POWERS. The photographs are finely crafted. They show in magnificent detail that all the students made junk piles.

ARTY. It seems that you might not be open to a new aesthetic experience. Have you had any art training?

POWERS. I am a professor of contemporary art at the University. And, I see nothing in the work of your class that makes it like the work of artists. On the contrary, it looks like the work of garbage collectors.

ARTY. I don't understand what you mean. I showed the students reproductions of artwork by Cornell, Marisol, and Chamberlain.

POWERS. That explains why most of the students filled little boxes with automobile parts and drew faces on the boxes with pencil.

ARTY. Is there something wrong with my criteria? The students

achieved unity of design by overlapping their auto parts and placing them in a box. They put themselves in their works by including drawings of their faces. And, they recycled discarded materials by using them as art objects. Thus, they created an environmental message.

POWERS. *Representation, expression, design, and communication* are traditional concerns of art critics, but they appear to be a poor guide in the making of art. Aesthetic criteria define ends, rather than the problems of form and content that lead artists to discover new ends. What question did you use to motivate students to identify some personal concern in the environment and then transform that concern into forms that an audience would understand? What is there in your assignment that requires more than superficial emulation and eclecticism?

ARTY. I think you are expecting too much from students of this age.

POWERS. You expect too much of students of any age, if you assign the total complexity of performing as an artist, then give so little guidance. No wonder your students resorted to such superficiality. I don't think much of you as an art teacher, and I do not think much of whoever hired you

SAGE (*Interrupting.*) I have been meeting with Arty regularly about his methods of assessment. I am certain that he has profited from your visit. I believe that, as we continue to meet, improvement will be evident in Arty's grade book and on your refrigerator.

ARTY avoids the principal for several days. Then, SAGE sends ARTY an invitation to dinner. ARTY is pleased. He believes that the principal wants to make

up for the POWERS incident. ARTY arrives late.

ARTY. (*Looking around.*) Where are the others?

SAGE. The dinner is just for you. I am working on a new menu. I think you will be especially receptive to it. Watch TV, and I'll be out of the kitchen soon.

ARTY watches the channel that the principal had tuned in. It is a "B" movie about an executive who poisons an employee.

Listing criteria for art does not constitute an art problem. Combining criteria will not make art, just as cooking is more than combining ingredients.



ARTY (*Feeling uncomfortable.*) I hope the menu is a light one, I am not very hungry.

SAGE (*Entering with an enormous platter covered with a silver lid.*) Nonsense! Just look at this.

ARTY. (*Leaning back as SAGE lifted the lid.*) What's THAT?

SAGE (*Triumphantly.*) It is spinach leaves stuffed with oysters, dipped in chocolate, marinated in yogurt, rolled

in anchovies, and fried. It is on a bed of ground turnips, segments of mandarin oranges, and green pea soup. The garnish is an aromatic blend of garlic, blue cheese, and cinnamon. It is an integration of all the standard dishes: salad, soup, main course, and dessert. Doesn't it look grand?

ARTY. If you weren't my boss, I would tell you that it looks like. Why would you want me to eat this?

SAGE. I want you to understand that eclectic art assignments cause junk in the art room, just as eclecticism in the kitchen produces garbage. And, I hope that you will agree that listing criteria for art does not constitute an art problem. Combining criteria will not make art, just as cooking is more than combining ingredients.

ARTY (*Turning away from the Principal's intruding platter.*) But there are one-dish meals that combine lots of ingredients.

SAGE. True, but one-dish meals are built around traditional dishes. There are salads that have meat and fruit. There are main dishes with a vegetable garnish for salad and a sprinkling of nuts for dessert. (*SAGE serves ARTY a large portion.*) Don't you agree that eclectic theory is a recipe for bad taste? Won't you agree that cooks and artists must have a higher goal than just making new combinations of ingredients?

ARTY. Don't make me eat that stuff, and I'll agree to anything. Let's go to the Hut for pizza. I'll treat.

SAGE. I would prefer souvlaki at the Acropolis, but if you pay ...



BAKE UNTIL NO PROBLEMS REMAIN

At The Hut they order a large cheese and pepperoni. SAGE eats with enjoyment, while ARTY only picks at his portion of the pie.

SAGE. Why aren't you eating? I thought you wanted pizza.

ARTY. I'm thinking about grading art and grading cooking. I usually like the pizza here because it is predictable. But, should I like it? I don't like art that's imitative. If taste in art and taste in food are the same, should I like only original pizza?

SAGE. If you know how to judge originality in food, you know how to judge originality in art. Earlier this evening we considered the notion of just adding different ingredients. We now agree that simply adding new ingredients will make the dish different, but it may not improve the dish. Thus, *difference* and *improvement* are separate concepts.

ARTY. I don't like the implication of the separateness of difference and quality. I always think that I have succeeded when all the students do something different. What would it take to make their work *different* and *good*?

SAGE. How would a chef make different and good pizza?

ARTY (*Thoughtfully.*) The chef might first list the typical ingredients of pizza: mozzarella, pepperoni, tomatoes, white flour, and yeast. Then the chef might ... Will it still be pizza if those are changed?

SAGE. Exactly how much the cook can change and still have people

respond to it as pizza is a matter of judgment. Part of what makes this a challenging problem is the danger of making something that is more like a casserole than pizza.

ARTY. If we change the pizza, and if it still seems to be a pizza, how can we know that the changes are for the better?

SAGE. Have you forgotten our earlier conversation? If we know why we changed the pizza, we can judge the finished pizza. If we want to make the pizza more authentic, we might make it more like those that Italian children eat as they walk to school. Such a pizza would be mostly bread with a topping of olive oil, tomatoes, anchovies, and parmesan spread so thin that most of the bread shows through. If we wanted to make the pizza more nutritious, a whole-wheat crust would be good; then we could replace the fatty pepperoni with vegetables. If we are tired and want a minimum-effort pizza, we might substitute tortillas or English muffins for the crust. (Of course, this would decrease the authenticity.) Or, we might approach the pizza as gourmets and explore how each flavor interacts with all the other flavors. As gourmets, we would want to balance the flavors so that no flavor overpowered another.

ARTY (*Paying the check, and starting toward the door with SAGE.*) Must the cook decide to do just one of these? It seems to me that art in the galleries may have more than one theory at work. Can't cooks have more than one "why" at a time?

SAGE. Are we talking of student cooks or professional cooks? It's probably difficult for a student cook to concentrate on more than one thing at a time. It is like trying to make a salad while making a casserole. Still it may be possible, unless the teacher requires a simultaneous mixing process in the

same mixing bowl. Conflicting teacher requirements increase the chance of making garbage. I hope that you are no longer confusing the requirement to do several things with the kind of problems that challenge chefs.

ARTY. But, should we teach everyone to cook like professionals?

SAGE. Most people will have kitchens. Too few good chefs will certainly spoil the broth in a lot of kitchens.

ARTY. That all sounds easy in cooking school.

SAGE (*Smiling.*) If you understand how to grade cooking, you can grade art. Can taste in food be so different from taste in art?

ARTY (*As they go out together.*) I don't have much of a taste for food or for grades. All of this thinking about grading makes me feel very anxious. Why can't I simply grade intuitively—the same way that I make art?

SAGE (*Waving good night and growing more serious.*) You should think about grades as though your career depends on the quality of your thinking, because it does.

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Note: Many of the ideas in this article were suggested by George T. Hole, Philosophy Department, Buffalo State College, Buffalo, NY.