

Mr. Kozol....a year ago our youngsters were acquainted with grief, suffered the oppression of racism and the frustration of the strait-jacket of American Public Education. The expressions of their feelings are evident in these poems written in the summer of '1977 in the USA.

The screams, the cries, the claws as the gas fills the packed room,
The thoughts of terror and shock,
Not knowing if you will awaken after a second of sleep,
Without a breath of clean, sanitary air,
The mushy spoonful that you get,
The leftovers from the poorman's dog,
The angry cry of the mother without her child,
Standing in the winters greedy air,
Without an inch of clothing upon your naked body,
Yanking and slaughtering of your loved ones,
Your insides burning with anger, sorrow and hurt,
The makers of oppression are haunting you.
The pain increases to where you are numbed with lingering thoughts.
The moments you have left,
You end your continuous thoughts with
Sorrow, doubt and questioning.

As I sit here in this cold, damp cell, I remember the times when I was doing well.
Life has stopped for me now. I'm doing time.
It's do this and do that and don't get out of line.
It's up at seven and do as the pigs say.
That's how it is each and every day.
On nights when I can't sleep
And letters never arrive from my so-called nigger friends so deeply deprived,
Sometimes I wonder what the hell is keeping me alive.

If I were President of the United States
I could murder millions of black people and
I wouldn't do time.
If I were a big corporator I could fix up prices and
Cheat people out of their money.
I wouldn't do time.
Me, I'm a Hype.
I sold two nickle bags to feed my babies.
I'm doing life - brothers and sisters -
A day at a time.

....and this next poem was written by youngsters who in the States would have been branded incorrigible. They didn't want to read because they couldn't read. They didn't want to write because they couldn't write. There they call it Learning Disabilities...here, it's translated Learning Opportunities. They're reading because they want to read what they've written and they've written it because it makes sense. They're writing because they've got a whole lot of stuff inside themselves to tell people. They're finding out that they can paint pictures with words and even make people giggle, cry or get angry.. just with words (their old enemy). The roadblocks are gone...spelling, punctuation and grammar come after the ideas come tumbling out and only then to aid the reader, not to handicap the writer. Jonestown has allowed them the freedom to express themselves and provided a wealth of "happenings" to share. They no longer have to sit in a straight backed chair in a straight backed classroom and imagine what it might feel like to swing on a vine, sit in a tree or take an anteater to lunch. They're doing it and writing about it and they're loving it!

...turn the page over.

WE SEE A NEW DAY - WE FEEL A NEW WAY

In the jungle...

we see black toucans with green and red and yellow vests,
we don't see housing projects,
we see blue butterflies as big as your two hands,
we don't see gangs fighting,
we see a spider spinning a silvery web,
we don't see rapes and muggings,
we see fish beating their way up the falls,
we don't see pollution,
we see monkeys jumping in the air,
we don't see capitalism,
we see ants chopping leaves like scissors and packing them to their holes,
we don't see jails,
we see a white kind of flower that smells like vanilla.
we don't see police cars,
we see rhinoceros beetles crawling from tree to tree,
we don't see price tags,
we see yellow, red and blue macaws flying over two by two,
we don't see trash,
we see lightning bugs twinkling,
we don't see hungry children,
we see a slow, brown, pretty sloth moving to a higher branch,
we don't see seniors crying and dying,
we see candle-flies glowing at night.....in the jungle.

In the jungle...

we hear water trickling over logs and rocks,
we don't hear guns shooting and killing,
we hear macaws squawking,
we don't hear babies crying,
we hear sun bees bzzt, bzzt, bzzting.
we don't hear police sounds,
we hear a branch snapping and cracking and crashing through other branches to the
we don't hear families fussing, floor of the jungle,
we hear the six o'clock bees buzzzzzzzzzzzzzing,
we don't hear trash cans banging,
we hear the wind whistling through the trees,
we don't hear buses roaring and cars crashing and ambulance sirens screaming,
we hear fish splish, splash, splishing,
we don't hear cash registers,
we hear crickets going tick, tick, tick,
we don't hear racist remarks,
we hear frogs burping,
we don't hear Carter's curious words,
we hear quiet.....in the jungle.

In the jungle...

we feel fish nibbling at our toes,
we don't feel napalm or torture,
we feel smooth and rough bark on the trees,
we don't feel over-crowded or over-pressured,
we feel mud squishing up between our toes,
we don't feel alone or left-out,
we feel sand rubbing against our feet,
we don't feel racism or hatred,
we feel cool water pouring over our heads,
we don't feel like committing suicide,
we feel a cool breeze blowing,
we don't feel put-down or imprisoned,
we feel sun rays touching our hands,
.....and we don't feel sad or scared.....anymore.