FOUR BOOKWORMS
Virginia Halcarz

(1) I have been a mother for twelve years. I have been to sixteen Christmas programs, thirteen school plays, and four music recitals. I have attended thirty-six P.T.O. meetings, forty-three Girl Scout meetings, and seventeen parent-teacher conferences. I have seen pint-size Pilgrims cross the Atlantic in a cardboard Mayflower. I have assisted in the construction of a workable paper-mache volcano. I've spent countless hours watching and coaching basketball, volleyball, and baseball games. I've read Dr. Spock, Piaget, and Erma Bombeck. I am well acquainted with Dr. Seuss and Judy Blume. I am not a child psychologist or an expert in family relationships, but I believe my experience with my own children and the parade of their friends that has marched through my kitchen in the last twelve years qualifies me to classify children into four recognizable categories. The four categories that I will describe here are The Whiner, The Spoiled Brat, The Perpetual Motion Machine, and The Good Kid.

(2) A little insight into the characteristic traits of each type of child should prove to be valuable information for new mothers and fathers as they enter the confusing world of parenthood. Adults who deal with children on a day-to-day basis need all the ammunition they can acquire. I will admit that the four categories I have mentioned cannot account for the behavior patterns of all children and that most youngsters display traits from all four types in various situations. However, I will try to give a general view of The Whiner, The Spoiled Brat, the Perpetual Motion Machine, and The Good Kid in an everyday setting. Let us examine how each type
reacts to his or her evening homework.

(3) The Whiner's approach to homework can be compared to a smoldering volcano. He begins his studies by calmly spreading his books across the dining room table. As he sputters through the first subjects, he tightens his grip on his pencil. Beads of sweat appear on his forehead; the tension grows in the pit of his stomach. Then, without warning, it happens. He makes a simple mistake. When he attempts to erase his error, the paper becomes torn. The Whiner erupts.

(4) "I can't do this homework!" he screams. "It's too hard! There's too much to do! It's stupid! I'm stupid! The teacher hates me!"

(5) The Whiner keeps up this irritating tirade until someone pleads with him to stop. Sympathy and recognition are all The Whiner really needs. He has conditioned his family like Pavlov's dogs; once they give him the necessary attention, The Whiner's volcano subsides.

(6) Pacifying The Spoiled Brat is much more complicated. The Spoiled Brat is not a self-starter. He needs to be encouraged to begin his homework. Threats and bribery are sometimes useful in this endeavor. Once The Brat sits down to the books, the battles begin. He attacks each subject as if it were a personal enemy. Unlike The Whiner, The Spoiled Brat rants and raves through the entire homework session.

(7) "Why do I have to do this stupid homework? Who cares about George Washington? I'm not going to do it! Nobody can make me do it!"

(8) Before he finishes his homework, The Brat may throw his books or tear up his papers. The family tries to stay out of the line of fire. Attempts at assistance are usually rebuffed. The parent who sits down and tries to help The Spoiled Brat with homework needs the patience of a saint
and the stamina of a Marine sergeant.

(9) Just getting The Perpetual Motion Machine to sit down can be a monumental task. Perpetual Motion Machines and chairs seem to repel each other like identical magnetic poles. These children are sometimes labeled as hyperactive. Most doctors now agree that certain foods affect the physical activity of many youngsters. Foods which contain chemical additives have an adverse effect on hyperactive children. So after a dinner of hot dogs, processed cheese and macaroni, and Kool-Aid, it is difficult if not impossible for The Machine to concentrate on parsing sentences. He jumps up from the table to get a dictionary. He writes one sentence. Next, he gets up to pour a glass of milk. He solves a math problem. Then he takes time to check out what his little brother is watching on television. He goes back to the table to identify the planets.

(10) Left on his own, The Perpetual Motion Machine will eventually finish his homework, but his poor parents may be worn out from watching him. The Machine's batteries never seem to wear down.

(11) On a different level of energy, The Good Kid does his homework without a great deal of prompting. He tackles his studies systematically and diligently most of the time. Some Good Kids are content with assistance from family encyclopedias or the library. Others like their parents' help. It is not unusual for Good Kids to generously allow their parents to take over the math assignments and science projects. Paper-mache relief maps and castles built from sugar cubes are typical projects which are suitable for the adult.

(12) There are a few Good Kids who can only do their homework with a telephone attached to their ear. They call their classmates for the assignments they missed or to discuss
a particularly difficult story problem. Sometimes they call to giggle over who got caught passing a love note in history class. Kids like these can be sub-classified as The Ma-Bell Generation.

(13) From time to time, my children have been Whinners, Spoiled Brats, and Perpetual Motion Machines. Luckily for me, they have been Good Kids the majority of the time. Recognizing these patterns of behavior has helped me to cope with my childrens' special needs. All parents who see their kids as individuals with unique personalities must find a recipe for guiding them that includes generous portions of love and understanding. Children add the spice to family life. Together parents and children can create a gourmet's delight.