JENNINGS—A three-year-old boy paints a sun falling out of the sky. No one else is allowed to touch his brush. A lonely girl reveals her inner feelings in paint. A soft-faced child unconsciously paints herself as a clown.

An art teacher learns much about her students from their work, says Mrs. Sue Lewis of Jennings.

Art is a source of enrichment and a balm for the soul, Mrs. Lewis says. She hopes to open the world of painting to many people through the private classes she teaches and through her "If You Think You Can't Paint" workshops that she gives throughout the Acadiana area.

Many people are afraid to paint especially with oils, Mrs. Lewis says. She has conducted her two-and-a-half hour workshops in New Iberia, St. Martinville, Franklin and other communities around the state.

Some of her workshop students have been memorable, although she has not been able to follow up on whether they continue with art classes.

"I had one elderly man whose wife was an artist," she said. "He came and painted an oil canvas and was fascinated with all that we did. Another time I had a black boy, his mother said, constantly filled the pages of his school notebooks with drawings and sketches. The workshop was the first chance he had to work under a teacher."

Mrs. Lewis said a group of women she had in a workshop in New Iberia continued meeting and teaching themselves, with the help of art books, for quite awhile after she left.

"Many people think art is an inscrutable world," Mrs. Lewis said. "For example, never once have I had a black person come to me and ask me for private lessons. They seem to think that the art world is closed to them. It's too bad because many of the blacks I get in my workshops are talented."

Mrs. Lewis says she wants to break down the feeling shared by many people that artists are apart from normal society.

"I think art belongs in everyone's everyday life. Artistic creativity enriches people's lives," Mrs. Lewis says. Her workers benefit from art education and a balm for the soul. Mrs. Lewis' feelings about the value of art come from personal experience, and her observation of how her students benefit from art classes.

"Art can be therapeutic," she said. As a child she was creative. Mrs. Lewis said, but she was encouraged to go into business instead of art. She went into business, got married and had children. "I should have been content, but I wasn't," she said. "I could not deal with things inside me."

So she returned to painting, which she had studied during her school years.

"Painting gives me a source of satisfaction. It is good to realize that I am capable of putting on canvas something that is good to look at."

She said that the art of painting is also satisfying. "While painting, my concern is with what I am doing. It is a form of meditation, helping me to clear my mind and sort things out."

She said she sees in many of her students the same frustration that drove her to return to painting. "They need an outlet and they find it in art," she said.

Mrs. Lewis has been painting professionally for three and a half years. As for teaching, she feels workshops and classes open the world of art to others in a way she can repay the field of art for what it has given her.

"Painting has given me so much that I'll never be able to give back what I was given," she said. "Teaching is just my first installment on a long-range note."

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