

by Adaline Starr and Gudrun Alcock

Mrs. Adaline Starr is a Chicago psychodramatist, columnist, and director of role-playing at Downey Veterans Administration Hospital. Gudrun Alcock is a free-lance writer whose articles on family and social problems have appeared in leading magazines.

**A** DRILL-PRESS operator suddenly hails his floor supervisor and asks angrily, "Say, how come Joe makes more money than me?" What should the supervisor do?

If he works in one of the many large industries which teach their supervisors how to handle employee grievances, he'll know just what to do. He will put into use the "listening-adjustment" method. Or, in simpler words, he'll give the worker a chance to "let off steam."

Only this isn't as simple as it sounds. Industrialists, from floor manufacturers to brewers to oil producers, now use a new teaching method to show their supervisors how to handle employees effectively. They use "role-playing," a technique whereby a person learns by "acting out" rather than by listening.

Technically, role playing is a form of psychodrama, the scientific name for this teaching-by-action procedure developed by Dr. J. L. Moreno of New York. It is now used in such hospitals as Downey Veterans Hospital in Downey, Ill., to resocialize patients. At the University of Michigan, it is used to train teachers; at the University of Chicago, a study of family relationships is based on role-playing.

If you were a supervisor in a large plant, you would be assigned, along with about 10 other supervisors, to meet for a concentrated period of study under the



The barber's chair will hold no fear for this youngster who works off qualms in role-playing at school.

company's trained instructor. After a thorough briefing on what is considered the most successful way to handle grievances, you act out what you've learned in a series of test cases.

For example, you are given an outline which says you are to play a supervisor in charge of a drilling and punching department of 30 employees; that Fred, the complainant, is 28, has been there for two years, has a good production record; that Joe is an older man, handles more difficult jobs, has slightly higher earnings. That's all you know.

Another supervisor in your group is assigned to play Fred and is given the dialogue he is to use on you. The two of you stand before the group and the role-playing begins.

"Say," Fred asks, "how come Joe makes more money than me?"

Your goal is to find out the real cause for Fred's discontent. Is it due to unsatisfactory working conditions? Have you slighted Fred? Is it because of Fred's personal problems?

You know you are to start with some "W" questions: "Who, what, why, when, or where?" So you ask, "Why are you concerned about what Joe makes? He's only one of 30 men on the floor."

"Well," Fred answers, "the guys think it's pretty funny that married men get all the breaks here."

You know this isn't a fact, but instead of starting an argument you ask, "What makes you feel the married men get all the breaks?"

Fred replies, "My girl friend always says how peculiar it is that married guys with kids seem to have their own homes, TV sets, and new cars, and we don't have enough dough to get married."

## A New Way to Solve Problems

It's called role-playing, and it's proving effective in a wide variety of social and emotional situations.



Adults, too, find acting out problems leads to clearer thinking and a solution. Here a tenant discusses an issue with "landlord."