

MATH CURSE

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by Jon Scieszka, illustrated by Lane Smith

Grades: 1-4; Ages: 6-9

Themes: Math, Problem Solving, School

Running Time: 13 minutes

SUMMARY

On the day after Mrs. Fibonacci says to the class, “You can think of almost everything as a math problem,” one girl wakes up to find that a MATH CURSE has been put on her. As she realizes that everything actually IS a math problem, her head starts spinning with questions such as: How many feet in a yard? How many yards in a neighborhood? How many fingers are in our class? How many M&Ms would you eat if you had to measure the Mississippi River with M&Ms? At times puzzling, and always hilarious, students will enjoy trying to solve this girl’s myriad of problems, while delighting in her zany train of thought. At the end, the girl proves that with enough critical thinking, anyone can reason their way out of even the toughest math curse.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will solve everyday math problems.
- Students will create their own math problems.
- Students will search for math in their everyday lives.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Brainstorm with students how math is used in everyday life.

Guiding questions:

- In what types of situations do you have to use math or counting in your life?
- Why is it important to understand different kinds of math?
- For what kinds of jobs do you need to be a good mathematician?
- Have you used math today? When?

Post students’ answers. Tell students that they will be watching a movie about a girl who finds math all around her. Encourage them to watch and listen for ways that they can make connections with the math in the girl’s life and the math in their own life.

Play math games with the students. Some suggestions are:

- Uno
- I’m thinking of a number... (use the number line)
- Find hidden numbers in pictures
- Monopoly
- Dominoes
- Dice games
- Sudoku

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Incorporate some of the problems in the movie into a “Problem of the Day” for math class. Revise the problems to meet your students’ knowledge and skill level, as well as to reflect the dynamics of your classroom. For example, change 24 students to the number of students in your class. As an extension, after students have solved the problems, have them write their own multiple choice answers, including one silly or clever answer as the girl did in the movie.

Go on a school Number Hunt with younger students. Create a list of things within the school for children to count. Suggestions are: teachers, students, water fountains, doors, fire alarms, book shelves, desks, chairs, windows... Construct a poster with the students entitled, “How Many In Our School?” Write the numbers for each thing counted and have students illustrate the poster. Display the poster in the hallway.

Tell students that you have put the MATH CURSE on them!

Challenge students to go through a whole day thinking of math problems that apply to their everyday lives. Encourage them to use examples from the movie, such as: How long does it take you to get ready in the morning? How many outfits do you have to choose from? How far is it between your house and school? How long does it take you to travel that distance? How many students are in your class(es)? How many different body parts do those students have?

Other suggestions for problems are: How many times do you write your name in a day? What is the ratio of free time to work time at school? What is the ratio of how many times you raise your hand to how many times you get called on? Tell students to write down 5-10 questions from their day to share with the class. Then, use their collection of problems for homework and class work assignments. Be sure to credit the authors!

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