



By Donna Pitino

The Parent Connection

A Monthly Newsletter for Parents

Be a Math Model

Ways to show your kids that math can be fun

Last month, we talked about how wonderful it is when children begin to value reading. This month, we'll discuss math and finance skills. Unfortunately, many of us have a fear of math, which can be passed on to our children. When we help them to see that math is part of everyday life, math becomes less intimidating for them, and for us, too.

Personal Finance for Middle Schoolers

According to the Junior Achievement/Harris Interactive Poll (April, 2003), a national survey of 624 teens (ages 13-18) ranked parents as the top role models. For this reason, Junior Achievement (JA) recruits parent volunteers to help with a program that offers middle school students personal financial management and career exploration. It's also a way to stay connected to your teen and model solid financial skills at the same time. For more information, visit their website at www.ja.org

Real-Life Math

Take your child to the bank to open an account in his or her name. Start with a small amount, and explain to your child that he or she will be responsible for adding to it. For example, half of the money the child earns doing chores and half of the money the child receives as gifts could be deposited in the account. Does your child want to save for



"I got a 'No TV for a week' in math, a 'No phone calls for a month' in history and a 'Just wait 'til your father gets home' in English."

something specific? How much does it cost? How long will it take to save the amount, based on the child's weekly savings?

Math Baseball

Math Baseball is one of the most popular games for grades 2-7 at www.funbrain.com. The website includes sections for kids, teachers and parents and is divided by age and grade as well as subject. Math is just one subject among many at this site.

Time Out – For You!

Are you afraid of math or any other subject? Take a class at a local college or adult education center. It can boost your confidence and may offer new possibilities at your job. Taking a class for fun (tennis, ceramics, sign language) is a terrific way to do something for yourself while showing your child that learning is a lifelong process.

Books Worth a Look

The Grapes of Math by Greg Tang (Scholastic, 2001). These illustrated rhyming riddles will quickly engage children (and parents) as they discover new ways to solve math problems. Answers in the back of the book explain how to group objects and look for patterns to make clear connections for children ages 5-11.

Shapesville by Andy Mills and Becky Osborn (Gürze Books, 2003). This book offers a way to review shapes and colors while letting young children know they're special no matter their size or shape. The book's refrain is, "In Shapesville it doesn't matter what size, shape or color you are."

Boxes for Katje by Candace Fleming (Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2003). Inspired by actual events and set in post-WWII Holland, this is the story of Katje, a young girl who sends a sincere thank-you note after receiving a box of provisions from Rosie, an American child. This leads to even more provisions being sent, which Katje shares with others. Rosie's generosity continues and, in the end, she receives a gift of her own.

Continued on reverse

Donna Pitino was a teacher for 14 years and is now a freelance writer. She is the mother of two daughters.

I Wish I Had Known...

Because I'd taught school for many years, I prided myself on the fact that I fostered a love of learning in my own children. We learn because it enriches us as individuals, guides our choices and opens more doors.

Why, then, was I so startled when my nine-year-old came home and declared, "Yuck! Look at all this math. And it's not even *regular* math. They're story problems!"

Not even "regular" math? Christine meant that there weren't simple solutions. She'd have to do some thinking in order to determine the best method of answering the questions.

When children panic because there's no set formula, it's a great time for parents to step in. I admit that I was first tempted to step in with a lecture: "Stop whining and get to work. How are you going to learn if you don't try?" Instead, I fought that impulse and acknowledged her feelings: "You're right. This does look harder than the problems you usually do. Read the first one to me."

Reading the problem aloud helped Christine to relax. Then I asked her to talk out loud about what she could do to solve the problem. "Okay, that didn't work," I eventually heard her say. "Maybe I can do it this way..." When she "got" it, her eyes shone and I was glad I hadn't used the lecture approach, which has failed miserably in the past. Christine not only got the answer, she got the inner satisfaction that comes from answering a *thinking* question.

Wholesome Habit

Write down something special about your child, then leave the note in a spot where you know he or she is bound to find it – on the pillow, as a bookmark holding the page of the book he or she is reading, next to his or her toothbrush in the bathroom. What a fun and different way to say, "I love you. You're important to me!"

Quote of the Month

"An investment in knowledge pays the best interest."

– Benjamin Franklin

School Time

What's a parent to do when a child doesn't understand a homework assignment and becomes overly frustrated? Try these approaches:

- Take a break from the task to work on another assignment, read together for a while or have a snack. Often a short break is all it takes to come back to the work refreshed and ready to see the solution.
- Read the problem aloud and talk it through.
- Look at other examples in the book and try those before doing the assigned work.
- If, after 20 minutes, your child is still frustrated and close to tears, stop. Write a note to the teacher, explaining that your child tried his or her best, but was confused.
- If your child becomes frustrated with his or her homework on a regular basis, request a conference with the teacher. Perhaps your child isn't yet ready for that level of work, or needs some extra tutoring to help him or her understand a difficult concept.

What Works?

Share your ideas! Send your tips for helping your children complete math homework, your own "real-world" math activities or any other parenting suggestions to me at mdbc@aol.com

Books Worth a Look, cont'd

Crispin: The Cross of Lead by Avi (Hyperion, 2002). After his mother dies, Crispin is accused of a crime he didn't commit and is pursued as a "wolf's head," meaning anyone is free to kill him. Only later does Crispin understand why this has happened. Fluent readers will appreciate the use of language, while the reluctant reader will be drawn into the mystery and adventure. Ages 10 and up will love this book.

A Single Shard by Linda Sue Park (Clarion, 2001). In a small, 12th-century Korean village, Tree-ear struggles to survive by rummaging through rubbish and sharing his findings with Crane-man, who has taken care of the orphaned Tree-ear since he was two. The action, characters and quest to discover the meaning of the title will keep your child – or you – reading until the end. For ages 12 and up.

The Same Stuff as Stars by Katherine Paterson (Clarion, 2002). Angel's mom has taken off – again – and Angel and her brother are left with their poor, cranky great-grandmother who can barely take care of herself. Eleven-year-old Angel must take responsibility for the elderly woman and her own brother. Help comes from two unexpected sources: the librarian and the star man. Secrets are slowly revealed as the story comes to a true-to-life conclusion that will satisfy ages 10-13.

PICK FOR PARENTS

Taming the Tuition Tiger by Kathy Kristof (Bloomberg Press, 2003). The financial columnist for the *Los Angeles Times* gives the facts on what education costs from nursery school to college, and how to plan for it. It's never too soon to start saving for your child's future. 