



Math: Facing an American Phobia

By Marilyn Burns

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Challenging negative attitudes and delivering a positive message about what math can and should mean to all of us, this resource is both an entertaining and invaluable read. From “Talking Turkey About Arithmetic” to “Making Math Make Sense,” the 13 chapters help everyone conquer their fear of math.

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Math: Facing an American Phobia By Marilyn Burns Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #452476 in Books
- Color: Multicolor
- Published on: 1998-02-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: .50" h x 5.50" w x 8.20" l, .64 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 164 pages



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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

An award-winning educator and author of many math storybooks for children grades two to eight, Burns explains her teaching approach by example, presenting her ideas as classroom scenarios and conversations. She believes that children learn math concepts best by trying to apply them to ambiguous, real-life situations. She also argues that "anything known about how children learn was ignored once our school math learning began." Her book is like a role-playing game for math teachers. Rather than presenting specific lesson plans or educational games, Burns illustrates a style of teaching that encourages children to discover mathematical concepts by themselves. For instance, the chapter on fractions describes the lesson and the classroom give-and-take as a group of fifth graders works out solutions, with reproductions of the students' written papers to show how individual children followed different methods to think out a solution. Though aimed at teachers, this book has an easy style that makes it accessible to parents as well. AAmy Brunvand, Univ. of Utah Lib., Salt Lake City

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Review

Math has gotten a bad reputation with the American public, and this book for parents and teachers provides possible reasons why this is so. The book also discusses what math can and should mean to people and explains how adults can avoid passing their math phobias on to their children.

Author Marilyn Burns traces the underlying conflict between the public's assumption that mathematics means arithmetic and the belief of math educators that the mathematics taught in schools must foster reasoning, thinking, and problem-solving skills. The book begins by outlining the mathematics involved in preparing a holiday dinner: determining the size of the turkey, the amount of stuffing required, and the cooking time. Burns then compares this practical mathematics to what is taught in schools, explaining that there is a divide between the classroom emphasis on paper-and-pencil activities and the real-world application of mathematics. As an example, a chapter on pizza problems explores the meaning of doubling an object size, the relationship between diameter and area, and processes of mathematical thinking and investigation. Other topics discussed are the value of timed math tests, the use of expanded student answers in student-teacher communication, and the appropriate use of the calculator. The final chapters contain practical suggestions to help children avoid math phobias. Burns recommends actively engaging children in mathematics outside the classroom and supporting and encouraging children throughout their math education. An answer key contains the solution to the seven problems found in the book. Detailed explanations and illustrations of the reasoning behind the solutions are designed to help readers think mathematically. --Reviewed by Judy Spicer, Mathematics Abstractor. Reprinted with permission from *ENC Focus: A Magazine for Classroom Innovators*, 9 (3), 69 (2002).

About the Author

Marilyn Burns is a nationally known mathematics educator whose message about math have reached teachers through her many books (including *About Teaching Mathematics*), videotapes, talks, and extensive program of Math Solutions courses. A former classroom teacher, she has written twelve books for children (including the best-selling *The I Hate Mathematics! Book* and the recently published *The Greedy Triangle* and *Spaghetti and Meatballs for All!*) and served as the math consultant for Disney's *MathQuest with Aladdin*, an interactive CD-ROM for young children. In 1996, Ms. Burns was the recipient of the Glenn Gilbert National Leadership Award, given by the National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics. In 1997, she received the Louise Hay Award for Contributions to Mathematics Education from the Association for Women in

Mathematics.

Users Review

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Marian Perkins:

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