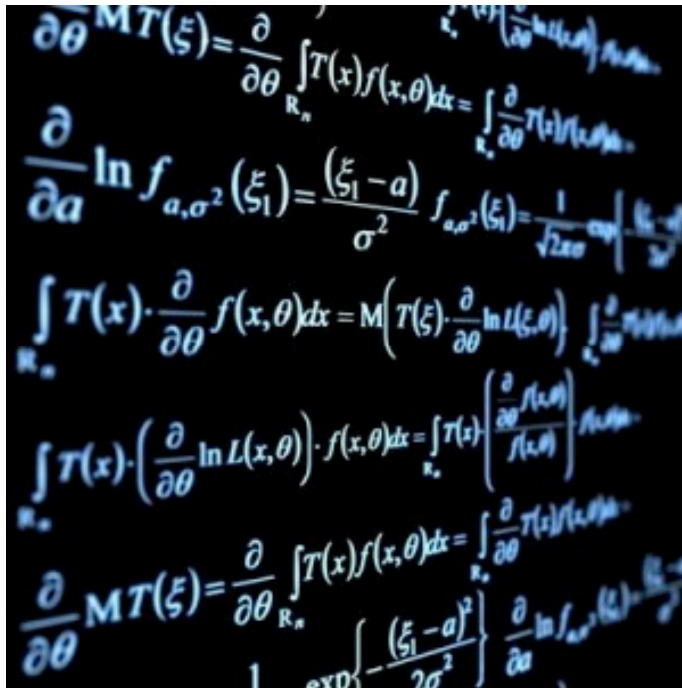


Acalculia: My Misadventures in Mathematics

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My mother is an extremely smart woman. If she wasn't my mother, but just some other girl I went to high school with, she'd be the kind of person who'd sit in the front row with her hand perpetually super-glued to the air above her skull, as I sat in the corner glaring menacingly at her back, trying to look cool. Her passions primarily lie tangent with math, a difficult subject in which she combined dedication, intelligence and supreme study-skills to obtain mighty arithmetic victory. Unfortunately, her success is my demise.

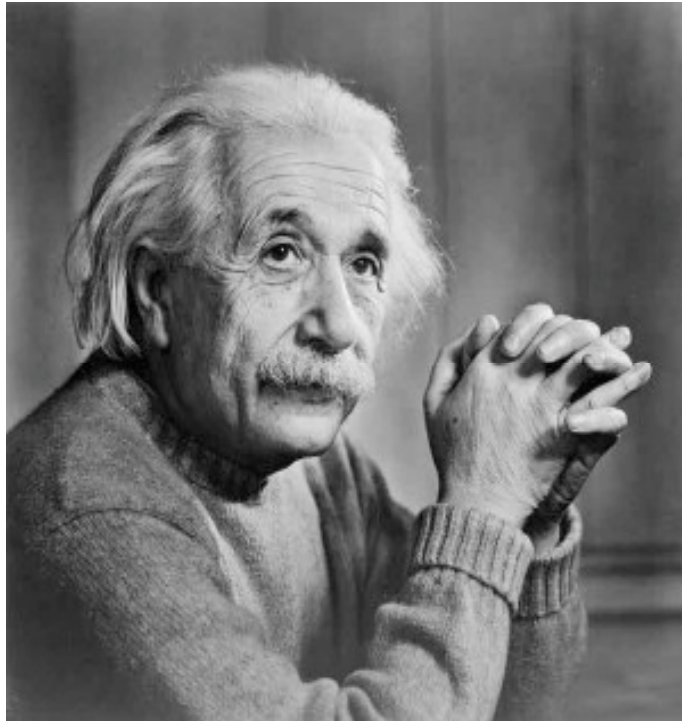
Don't get the wrong impression; I respect and revere my mom's math skills, however when it came to the genetic distribution of qualities, along with my dance moves and love of Swedish garage-rock, I inherited my right brain from my mathematically-challenged dad.

My mother's success in math is my demise.

I'd always had an inkling that I was a substandard mathematician, but my suspicions were confirmed beyond doubt sometime around the fifth grade, when it became apparent that whenever my teacher asked me to long-divide, I either had a convulsion or wet myself. I didn't see the point in creating sprawling, page-filling scribbles when as humans had already created a machine that could do it much more efficiently and without killing as many trees in the process.

The odd combinations of numbers and letters incited a resentful confusion in me; I didn't know why any of the formulas created their patterns, I disliked the absence of all creativity, and to this day, when asked by my patient and well-meaning tutor, "Adrienne, do you know why we just used the factoring theorem?" I generally respond with "Because you hate me."

I've accepted the fact that when it comes to math I am a rare and exotic type of stupid. I'm sure I'd be a better writer or artist than engineer or accountant anyway. Heck, I'd probably be a better Rabbi or vampire hunter too. However, my relentless mother has my own benefit in mind and doesn't want me to wind up spending my life painting mythical creatures and living in a studio above an adult video store with a boy named Cricket.



She is convinced (bless her heart) that if I try just that little bit harder I'll somehow tap into my hidden stores of arithmetic genius, and is dedicated to making me pass Principals of Math 11, no matter how many teachers she needs to yell at in the process.

So I try, I really do, with her beaming, expectant face looming over me and my homework, I try and I try and I try, but frankly guys, I can't get no satisfaction.

Despite the amount of effort I put in, my results are, let's say, substandard. It's like going through all the pain of labor just to discover that instead of a beautiful baby, somehow you squeezed out a small sperm whale. It's embarrassing, weird, and just not worth the effort.

Recently, I thought a solution to my problems was in sight. I discovered if I took Essentials of Math 11, I could be in a class in which if I occasionally claimed that the square root of 36 was paprika, the other kids wouldn't mock me, but would understand my confusion completely.

Alas, it was too perfect. Universities in British Columbia, Canada, where I live, don't consider Essentials to be a "real" course, which is kind of snooty if you ask me, especially since we're the only province even offering it.

It's almost like the Ministry of Education has been conspiring with my mother, and the two have reached an agreement about my future; if I can't shape up and pass Principals of Math, they don't want to bother having me around here anymore. Instead I'll go elsewhere, constantly searching for something or someone to fill the gaping void that my inadequacy has left in my heart.

Things could be worse, but when my favorite part of learning about polynomials was that if I drew stick legs under the equations I discovered they looked like little caterpillars, things could definitely be better as well.

I basically can only take solace by reassuring myself that my talents lie elsewhere, and accepting that when it comes to math, I'll always be just a few sandwiches short of a picnic.

All joking aside, the day is aging and there's a math test in my near future, so it's time for me to get out the hammer and see just how much I can pound into my ambivalent skull.

$$\begin{array}{r}
 a^2 - 3a^2x + 3ax^2 - x^3 \\
 a^2 - 2ax + x^2 \overline{) a^5 - 5a^4x + 10a^3x^2 - 10a^2x^3 + 5ax^4 - x^5} \\
 \underline{-a^5 + 2a^4x - a^3x^2} \\
 0 - 3a^4x + 9a^3x^2 - 10a^2x^3 + 5ax^4 - x^5 \\
 \underline{+ 3a^4x - 6a^3x^2 + 3a^2x^3} \\
 0 + 3a^3x^2 - 7a^2x^3 + 5ax^4 - x^5 \\
 \underline{-3a^3x^2 + 6a^2x^3 - 3ax^4} \\
 0 - a^2x^3 + a^2x^4 - x^5 \\
 \underline{+ a^2x^3 - 2a^2x^4 + a^5} \\
 0
 \end{array}$$

$$\frac{a^5}{a^2} = \frac{a^5}{a^2} = \frac{-a^5 + 2a^4x + x^2}{a^5 - 2a^4x + a^2x^2}$$

$$\frac{-3a^4x}{a^2} = \frac{-3a^4x}{a^2} = \frac{-a^2 - 2ax + x^2}{-3a^4x + 6a^3x^2 - 3a^2x^3}$$

$$\frac{3a^3x^2}{a^2} = \frac{3a^3x^2}{a^2} = \frac{-a^2 - 2ax + x^2}{-3a^4x + 6a^3x^2 + 3ax^4}$$

$$\frac{-a^2x^3}{a^2} = \frac{-a^2x^3}{a^2} = \frac{-x^3 \cdot a^2 - 2ax^4}{-a^2x^3 + 2ax^4 - x^5}$$

I'm more likely to squeeze out a small sperm whale than a correct answer.

Name _____
Date _____

Reading Assessment

Acalculia: My Misadventures in Mathematics

Select the most appropriate response to each question below.

1. Which side of the brain do we use for math computation?
 - A. Left
 - B. Right
 - C. Central
 - D. My brain doesn't do it

2. Who pushed the author to be better at math?
 - A. Mother
 - B. Family Dog
 - C. Father
 - D. Grandmother

3. What does the author mean by "a few sandwiches short of a picnic"?
 - A. Need a full stomach to be able to do math
 - B. Too many fruits and vegetables and not enough meat
 - C. Not smart enough to do the work
 - D. Breakfast is the most important meal

4. According to the author, what is the square root of thirty-six?
 - a. Paprika
 - b. 6
 - c. ± 6
 - d. Christopher Columbus

5. The short sentences that appear the graphics in the article are called:
 - a. Subtitles
 - b. Polymers
 - c. Captions
 - d. Footnotes

6. In the article the author said, "I'll always be a few sandwiches short of a picnic." What is the name of the writing technique is she using?
 - A. Metaphor
 - B. Simile
 - C. Idiom
 - D. Analogy