



## CREATIVE MATH WRITING

One of the most powerful and useful strategies to use with mathematics learning is writing. Before becoming the director of CRISS, I taught math to 7 - 12 grade students. I found that when I had them write math problems, their understanding of how problems were crafted and their ability to decode and solve the problems was enhanced.

One of our trainers, Connie Toone, who teaches at Alice C. Harris Intermediate School in Tremonton, Utah, recently sent us a wonderful lesson plan she used with her students to help them write creative and fun problems.

Connie started by reading *The Math Curse* by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith (see reference at the end of this article). This is a story of a young lady who begins to live under a “math curse” when her math teacher, Mrs. Fibonacci, remarks to the class, “You know, you can think of almost everything as a math problem.” From that moment on everything the girl does becomes a problem: “I wake up at 7:15. It takes me 10 minutes to get dressed, 5 minutes to eat my breakfast, and 1 minute to brush my teeth. SUDDENLY, it’s a problem:

- 1) If my bus leaves at 8:00, will I make it on time?
- 2) How many minutes in 1 hour?
- 3) How many teeth in 1 mouth?” and it goes on!

After reading the book, Connie asked her students to discuss daily situations that they could think of as math problems. Each student wrote a list of the activities they do each day, and Connie asked them to think about them in math language. Is their life just one math problem after another?

Then Connie assigned them to write their own Math Curse book which included:

- 1) at least 10 story problems based on their own daily schedules (including multiple choice answers).
- 2) an introduction [How did you get the curse?].
- 3) a conclusion [How did you get rid of the curse?].
- 4) a title page.
- 5) a dedication page.
- 6) an author’s page, which included their picture.

She also provided a rubric for grading.

To help them with their overall plan, Connie gave them a modified story plan. (*Figure S-1*) The following are some sample problems from her class.

### Reference:

Scieszka, Jon & Lane Smith, Math Curse, Viking, a division of Penguin Books USA, 1995.  
ISBN: 0-670-86194-4

## Story Plan – The Math Curse

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Characters

Setting - (Your average day)

The problem - How you got the math curse!

Events – 10 math problems from your own life.

Resolution – How you escape the curse.

Figure S-1

### Sample 1

When I got to school, I went to my Advisory. If I had sold 13 coupons to nine different people and each coupon was \$7 and the school got 15% of the profit, how much would I have earned for our school?

- A: \$ 14.00
- B: \$ 13.36
- C: \$ 13.65
- D: \$ 12.90

### Sample 2

Day Two: The next morning I had another attack of the math curse at breakfast: "AAAUGH!" I screamed. "What's wrong?" asked my mother. "There are twenty bubbles in my milk. There are twenty bubbles in your milk and twenty more bubbles in Seth's milk. How many bubbles in all?"

- A: 60
- B: 86
- C: Infinity, because Seth is blowing more bubbles in his milk.

### Sample 3

Every hour my mom and dad yelled down at us to be quiet.

- 1: From 1:00 A. M. to 8:00 A. M., how many times did they tell us to be quiet?
- 2: How many words did they say in that period of TIME?
- 3: How many earplugs should I buy for them?

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