

Math Explorations

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Despite my awful history with mathematics throughout my years as a student, I'm nevertheless glad that books like Mathematician's Lament exist. I never would have thought that there was actually an artistic approach to something like math. In fact, looking back at some of the course I've taken, all I can recall is nameless jumbles of black and white numbers, lines, and grids floating aimlessly around a classroom. To put it very mildly, that was the magical essence of mathematics and, quite frankly, I feel cheated out something that could have been more interesting and gripping.

Although I fairly enjoyed geometry in high school (I had an excellent teacher who was very patient with my slow-moving grasp on math in its entirety), I was relying entirely on the equations and patterns that I saw. There was no glamour or alternative route of seeing things because the answer was always a single, mundane thing. I felt like things could be fixed by following the equation, but it makes me wonder why doing so worked well in geometry, but ravaged me in algebra 2. The equations were way more complex, which did take a bit of adjustment, but nothing would really click. All these concepts that my teacher threw at me felt less important than actually getting the answer correct because the concepts tossed me under the bus. They didn't help me succeed or find any deeper, beautiful secret that overarched the problem. No one told or enlightened me that there was beauty behind a problem. I just thought they were colorless puzzles.

Lockhart's explanations of what proofs are meant to be should have been introduced to me sooner. I didn't really know there was such a thing until I took this course and, because I'm so late in understanding what they are, I haven't been able to pull them together correctly. I

always feel like proofs are these complex, clever things to explain why things work. All this time, my previous have ignored the whys. I never questioned anything because they just worked on their own or fell apart if I didn't know what I was doing.

Lockhart tries very valiantly to convince that math and art are two sides of the same coin, but I have yet to be fully persuaded. He makes very fine points and laments over the fact that students are being robbed of what math was meant to be, but the damage to me has been done. I'm too used how things are now to accept math as an art form and that's a real shame because I'm an artistic person. I love art and I understand things for effectively when art is involved, but it has failed me when it's forced to combine with math. It explains why doing all of those shape cuts in class were so challenging. I had no patience, care, or need for them. I always needed help and I couldn't figure out how to solve any of them individually. They were just another math problem to solve in the end, so all the work put in by my professors to help me connect art and math are in vain.

They certainly tried their best and I appreciate their work. Surely, they have changed the minds of students and got them to realize that math and art are more similar than they ever thought. But neither my confidence nor desire for the subject has been increased. It has lowered, actually, primarily because whatever link between art and math was severed a very long time ago, I can't connect the two without getting frustrated, anxious, and fearful of the same failures all over again. The only redeeming thing that could have helped me was the string art project, but the math failed me more so than the art and I ended up relying on a faulty pattern like I always have. But, at the very least, I know now that there is a possibility that the message has gone through for some people. As long as some kind of reform of the curriculum is spearheaded by people who know the truth of math, I can rest easy.