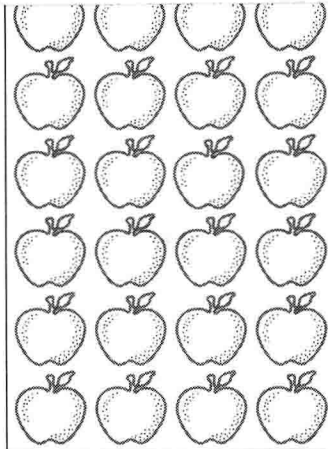


# SOLVING PROBLEMS USING ELEMENTARY MATHEMATICS



DAVID GAY

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**DAVID GAY**

University of Arizona, Tucson

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To  
Lonie, Adam,  
and Katie

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*On the cover:* "Nine" is an oil painting by San Francisco Bay Area artist Deborah Oropallo. The work is from a series inspired by Veronica O'Neill's book *Teaching Arithmetic to Deaf Children*.

Deborah Oropallo's work was presented in the last Biennial Exhibition at New York's Whitney Museum. Her work may be seen in the collections of the Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Maryland; the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, California; the Lannan Foundation, Los Angeles, California; and the Crocker Museum in Sacramento, California. Oropallo is represented by the Stephen Wirtz Gallery in San Francisco, California.

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# FOREWORD

Mathematics is something that is meant to be done and enjoyed. It is a way to solve interesting problems that could not otherwise be solved, or to solve problems much more efficiently than they could otherwise be solved. It is not a spectator sport, nor is it a way to provide dreary, boring activities to keep children busy.

Unfortunately, much of school mathematics gives the impression that we teach it to keep children occupied so they won't have time to get into trouble: a sort of replacement for the nineteenth century practice of making samplers, except in the case of samplers the final product was beautiful and worth saving. A major goal of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics *Standards for Teaching Mathematics*, and other similar reports, is to help students see that mathematics is exciting and useful by allowing them to actually do mathematics.

In this book David Gay makes the learner an active participant in doing mathematics. He helps the reader discover how mathematical thinking can be used to analyze and solve varied problems, some of which should be of interest to almost anybody, no matter what his or her previous background. He brings his extensive knowledge and creative imagination to elementary school mathematics and provides motivated and intellectually honest development of topics that should be taught to young children.

Prospective teachers who study this material and who do a reasonable number of the many problems and laboratory activities suggested in this book and its companion laboratory manual will derive a much better understanding of what mathematics is, why we teach it, and how they can teach it so children will learn and enjoy mathematics. Their pupils will think of mathematics as something to be done and enjoyed—as something they can figure out themselves (without memorizing formulas or procedures), and as something that is useful in solving problems that they wish to solve for their own benefit and for the benefit of others.

Stephen S. Willoughby

# PREFACE

TO THE READER A compelling reason why mathematics holds a central position in our educational system is that it can be useful in solving problems. Everybody, at one time or another, solves problems using mathematics. The more skill you have at solving problems with mathematics, the more options are open to you. The success of an engineer or scientist depends heavily on an ability to solve problems with mathematics. Although not everyone becomes an engineer or scientist, the recent proliferation of high-speed, electronic computers means that there are fewer jobs available to those without mathematical problem-solving skills.

“Skill” does not refer here to a tool to be used routinely or mechanically, without thinking. In the real world, routine problems such as “multiply these two numbers” or “simplify this algebraic expression” do not often appear. A real problem usually must be carried through a number of stages before it can be solved by activities such as “divide this fraction by that one.” Problem-solving skills for the real world involve thinking and active involvement. These are skills of survival, and their use is very human.

The purpose of this book is to get you actively involved in solving problems with mathematics. This will be done in several ways. First, you will be introduced to some useful problem-solving strategies and given the opportunity to work with them. Secondly, you will encounter problems that are not routine, but realistic problems, which I hope you will perceive as really needing solutions. Thirdly, solutions to several of these problems will appear in the text, demonstrating to you (in an informal way) processes that lead to a solution, including the meanderings and dead-ends characteristic of any real problem-solving situation. Finally, you will see how mathematical ideas and techniques develop out of this process: a new idea is usually a consequence of solving a problem (or several problems), a new technique comes about because there is a need for it.

You intend to teach mathematics in an elementary or middle school; the mathematics of this text is closely related to the mathematics taught in such a school. However, you will have seen much of this before opening this book. How do you become involved when the problems are easy (to you) and the mathematical idea or technique is one that you already know? How do you think about a technique whose use has become routine? How do you think about an idea you may not have been encouraged to think about? When you become a teacher, you will want to be able to put yourself in your students’ shoes; you will want to know what it is like to solve problems with limited knowledge. To turn the difficulty of thinking about something routine into an advantage, the text will ask you to solve a “simple” problem as if you were a person with a certain limited knowledge. For example, to introduce multiplication of several-digit whole numbers, a problem will appear that (you and I know) can be solved by the usual method. You will be asked to assume that you don’t know the method and then to solve the problem using only other skills of arithmetic (addition, subtraction, single-digit multiplication, . . .).

Solving a problem using limited knowledge has positive consequences. First, you will learn directly that there are many ways to solve a problem, that there may be

“unsophisticated” yet successful ways of solving a problem, and that deciding on the best way to solve a problem may depend on the person solving it. Secondly, it should make you aware of things you already know but haven’t thought about lately. Thirdly, it should give you an understanding of how one piece of mathematics follows from another. This approach also makes sense to a future teacher: to nurture a mathematical idea in the mind of a fourth grader, it might be good if it first thrived in the mind of her teacher.

Here is what I want from your use of this book. I want you to begin to own, personally, the mathematical ideas that you once knew unthinkingly or only peripherally (and sometimes anxiously). I want you to begin to believe that mathematics is useful and use it. I want you to become competent and confident using mathematical ideas and techniques. I want you to be ready to learn how to get other persons actively involved in problem solving. I want you to have a blast solving problems.

Learning to solve problems can be frustrating, like learning to swim. Until you get that stroke down, you feel awkward and out of place. But when you grasp it, it’s as if you and the water are one machine working together. Until you get the hang of solving problems, you can feel pretty inept. But when you finally succeed in solving a problem you haven’t solved before, you will have a wonderful feeling of satisfaction. I hope that you will experience the joy of discovering mathematical facts you never knew before and of understanding for the first time how certain mathematical ideas and techniques fit together. As you solve more problems and gain more confidence in your mathematical abilities, you will have these good experiences more and more often.

Good luck and happy problem solving!

HOW EACH CHAPTER IS  
ORGANIZED

**First Part of the Chapter** Each chapter develops ideas and techniques that are related by a common theme. The first part of the chapter develops these in the following format: statement of a problem, solution of the problem, mathematical idea springing from the solution, exercises to try out the new idea. This format may repeat itself several times during a chapter. Each problem is chosen because it needs to be solved and because the techniques acquired up to that point for solving it are clumsy or inefficient. The solution to one problem will typically build on previous solutions and mathematical ideas.

The first part of the chapter is its core. Its style is informal, allowing ideas to germinate and evolve naturally.

**Second Part of the Chapter** The second part of the chapter embellishes the first. Its style is less leisurely and more condensed. It contains one or more sections of the following types. (Many chapters contain all types.)

- **Looking back** This section looks at the ideas of the first part of the chapter in a more rigorous or formal way than the first part does. It should provide you with a different perspective on the earlier material.
- **Looking ahead** This section relates the ideas of the first part to themes developed later in the text.
- **Extending ideas** This section carries some of the ideas of the first part further and puts them in a larger mathematical context. The ideas developed here will probably not be encountered later in the book.

- *Calculators and computers* This section discusses how calculators or computers (or both) can illustrate an idea, carry out a technique, or solve a problem. Chapter 1 has an introduction to calculators as well as to programming a computer in BASIC. (I encourage you to use calculators and computers to help you solve all the problems in this book, especially those that require a lot of computation.)

#### END-OF-CHAPTER FEATURES

- *Important ideas and techniques* This is a summary of the main concepts and techniques of the chapter. This should be useful for study and review.
- *Problem set* This is a collection of problems to solve to test your understanding and hone your problem-solving skills. The ideas and techniques of the chapter should be useful here. The problem set has two parts. Most of the problems in **Practicing Skills** are routine, needing only one or two steps to solve. A problem here may be like a problem solved in the chapter itself—in order to solve, you mimic the solution given in the text. The problems in the **Using Ideas** sections are more involved and may require you to use the ideas and techniques of the chapter in new ways. Or, you may need to develop a new, related idea or technique.
- *Three-chapter review* This is a set of problems for use as a “Sample Test” over the material of the previous three chapters. Solutions to the problems in these Reviews are in the back of the book.

#### OTHER FEATURES OF THE TEXT

**STOP (Try this yourself)** The stop sign occurs in the text after a statement of a problem, followed by an exhortation to try the problem before reading the text’s solution. This is an important message! You need to get actively involved in solving problems in order to get the most out of this text.

**Italics** Key words appear in italics.

**Boxes** Boxed material highlights important definitions, ideas, and techniques. This should be useful for reference and review.

**Boldface Color** When a problem-solving strategy is used to solve a problem, its name will be printed in colored, boldface type. A list of all problem-solving strategies announced in this book is printed in the index under “Strategies for solving problems.”

**Exercises** These occur throughout the text so that you can test your understanding immediately after an idea or technique has been presented. The answers to these exercises are in the back of the book.

**Hands-on Activities** Throughout the text you are encouraged to use objects to solve problems and enhance your understanding. Use these also to become acquainted with materials for teaching mathematics. Some of these items are readily available—stones, rulers, compasses, protractors. I may suggest that you trace others, cut them out, and tape them together.

**Historical Comments** These boxed items are meant to add human interest to the text’s development and enlighten its ideas, without interrupting its flow.

- STUDENT LAB MANUAL The *Lab Manual* is a workbook-sized paperback containing laboratory activities to accompany specific topics in the text. The activities are designed especially to be used with hands-on materials.
- The manual also contains things to cut out and assemble. Some of these can be used to accompany the text; others can be used to carry out the laboratory activities. The pages are perforated for easy removal.
- Three of the lab activities involve the use of a computer spreadsheet.
- STUDENT SOLUTIONS MANUAL The *Solutions Manual* contains worked-out solutions to all exercises interspersed throughout the text and to many of the problems in the chapters' problem sets. This will provide you with more examples of problem solutions.
- TO THE INSTRUCTOR This Book and the NCTM Standards My selection of topics and My approach follow the recommendations made by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics in its *Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics* (1989), commonly referred to as "The NCTM Standards." I feel that this text reinforces the goals of the Standards in the following particularly strong ways:
1. *Learning to value mathematics.* A strong attempt is made to connect the mathematics of this text with its uses in the real world. Real problems are presented that need to be solved. The mathematical ideas and techniques evolve from the need to create efficient solutions to these problems.
  2. *Becoming confident in one's own ability.* To keep from overwhelming the reader with unnecessary terminology and symbolism, I try to introduce just those concepts and techniques that are needed and that emerge naturally from problem situations. I try to make the material appropriate for the reader's background and for how the reader will use it. The writing style is friendly and conversational; it is meant to help the reader become a participant in the development.
  3. *Becoming a mathematical problem solver.* Problem solving is the heart of this book. The text integrates problem solving in its development: concepts emerge from problems and their solutions. I make every attempt to engage the reader in problem-solving activities and to provide all the aids I can for the reader to be successful in them.
  4. *Learning to communicate mathematically.* Readers are encouraged to use certain strategies not only to solve problems but also to communicate ideas: draw a picture, make a model (use hands-on items), organize data in a table, make a graph, draw a histogram, and so on. These form part of a common language for users of this text. In part of each chapter's problem set (*Using Ideas*), the reader is asked to communicate his or her solution to each problem in the form of a written essay. In the *Lab Manual* are activities for several readers to work together solving problems and learning to communicate their ideas with each other.
  5. *Learning to reason mathematically.* I make every effort to have the material make sense and hang together. Not only are there connections between the mathematics of the text and its real world uses, but also there are connections between mathematical ideas developed in the text itself. Making connections is an important aspect of reasoning. I provide arguments appropriate to the reader, plausible arguments that may not always be rigorous to a mathematician. I ask the readers to make similar connections and arguments in writing out the solutions to their problems.



**Additional Themes Woven into the Text** Several topics occur in several chapters as subsidiary themes.

- *Number line* This device is for visualizing the operations and the order relationships of numbers. Its use appears in chapters 3 through 11.
- *Algebra* This topic occurs in chapters 4 through 11 to show the connections between elementary mathematics and algebra.
- *Graphing* This theme is introduced in chapter 14 and is developed thereafter as a subtopic in the chapters on geometry, chapters 15 to 20.
- *Computational tools* The use of calculators and computers is introduced in chapter 1 and recurs throughout the text. Which tool is appropriate for which problem is frequently discussed.

The use of computers is integrated in the text in a variety of ways. Just enough BASIC commands are introduced in chapter 1 to solve some of the problems there. Additional BASIC commands are introduced as needed in later chapters. A section on *Logo* occurs in chapter 16, an early geometry chapter. The *Lab Manual* contains several activities using a computer spreadsheet. One of these can be used as an alternative to BASIC in chapter 12; this same activity may also be adapted for earlier use with the text. Another can be used with the sections on graphing. A third can be used with chapter 22, which deals with organization of data.

**Possible Courses Using This Book** You can use this text to design several different courses. There are two features of the book that can be particularly helpful to you in doing this.

First of all, the book contains material on a variety of topics, from chapters on whole number numeration and fractions to those on geometry and measurement, from chapters on estimation and graphing to those on probability and statistics.

Secondly, each chapter is designed so that you can choose the degree of informality or formality for treating the covered topics. The essential part of each chapter is the first part in which the main ideas are developed through solving many problems. In the second part there are many options for covering additional material. Some sections of this second part present the earlier material from a more formal or abstract viewpoint. Others present enrichment material. Still others present material that is developed through the themes mentioned above. Of course, you can select as many of these additional sections as you wish. If you want a more informal course, you may want to supplement the first part of the chapter with only one or two sections (or even none) of the second part. If you want a more formal course, you may want to supplement the first part with several sections of the second.

Here are some possible courses in which the first part of each chapter is covered plus an occasional section from the second part:

*One semester (three hours per week) or one quarter (five hours per week) courses.*

- Problem solving, whole numbers, fractions, and number theory: chapters 1–10.
- Problem solving, whole numbers, fractions, and probability: chapters 1–6, 8–10, 21.
- Problem solving, estimating, graphing, and geometry: chapters 1, 12–20.

*Two semester (three hours each per week) or two quarter course (five hours each per week).*

- First semester/quarter: problem solving, whole numbers, fractions, and integers: chapters 1–6, 8–11.
- Second semester/quarter: estimating, geometry, probability, and data presentation: chapters 12–13, 15–22.

*Intense one semester course (four hours per week).*

- Problem solving, whole numbers, fractions, and geometry: chapters 1–6, 8–10, 13, 15–20.

There are, of course, many other possibilities.

**Instructor's Handbook** This is a paperback that contains answers to all exercises and problems in the text that do not already appear at the end of the book.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is the result of twelve years of development. There were two stages. The first consisted of a lot of experimentation with materials for a mathematics course for prospective elementary school teachers at the University of Arizona. During this time, I can't remember having an inkling that a book might evolve from these materials. In the second stage, the text was prepared; it has been used in classes for four years and completely revised three times.

During both stages several persons made contributions to the final outcome of the project. My own students unwittingly encouraged me to experiment with new materials in the first place. I am particularly grateful to those who began their studies with me saying "I don't like mathematics and I was never any good at it" and left with "Hey! I *can* do it; math is neat!" Thanks also to the students who used the first versions of the text and put up with the misprints, omissions, and obscure explanations.

A second group to which I am indebted is the group of teaching assistants at the University of Arizona who worked with me in the experimental first stage or taught with the manuscript in the second stage. These persons were not only willing to try new ideas but also forced me to articulate mine better: Debi Anderson, Fernando Avila-Murillo, Teri Bennett, Jim Cain, Mirian Cuesta, Mark Dougan, Sil diGregorio, Steve Hammel, Gary Hudson, Steve Hughes, Grace Ikanaga, Jill Keller, Donna Krawczyk, Erich Kuball, Harry Miller, Burr Munsell, Diane Riggs, Steve Slonaker, Susan Taylor, Jon Thomsen, Steve Wheaton, and Mary Wheeler. I especially appreciate the assistance of Deborah Yoklic and James Abolt who are part of this group and who wrote new problems.

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It may not be traditional to thank one's competitors. However, I have found that several good books have helped me to find out what works for me and what are the important ideas. These are *From Sticks and Stones* by Paul Johnson, *Mathematics for Elementary Teachers* by Eugene Krause, and *Mathematics, an Informal Approach* by Albert Bennett and Leonard Nelson.

A book on solving problems needs good problems to solve. Rich sources of these I have used are *The Math Workshop: Algebra* by Deborah Hughes Hallett, *Using Algebra* by Ethan Bolker, *Make It Simpler* by Carol Meyer and Tom Sallee, *Sourcebook of Applications of School Mathematics* by Donald Bushaw et al., and *When Are We Ever Gonna Have to Use This?* by Hal Saunders. A book that was invaluable to me in the development of chapter 3 is *Number Words and Number Symbols* by Karl Menninger.

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David Gay

# CONTENTS

Foreword xvii  
Preface xix

<b>C H A P T E R <u>1</u></b>	<b>PROBLEM-SOLVING STRATEGIES</b>	<b>1</b>
The Ditch-Digging Problem 2	1.1 Strategies to Get You Started	2
The Problem of Where to Catch the Bus 3	Strategy 1: Draw a Picture	3
The Problem of the Missing Time 6	1.2 Problem Solving in This Book	3
The Birdseed Problem 8	Strategy 2: Make a Guess	5
The Switching Problem 10	Strategy 3: Organizing the Data	7
The Coffee Blend Problem 15	Strategy 4: Break the Problem Up into Smaller Problems	10
The Suitcase Problem 16	Strategy 5: Solve a Simpler, Similar Problem	10
The Mountain-Climb Problem 18	1.3 Getting Out of a Rut	10
The Problem of the Empty Envelope 22	Strategy 6: Building a Model	13
The Second Empty-Envelope Problem 23	Strategy 7: Getting Out of a Rut	13
The Best-Price Problem 26	1.4 The “12 Math Myths”	14
	1.5 Using Several Strategies	15
	Strategy 8: Organize Your Guesses in a Chart	16
	1.6 Making a Plan	18
	Strategy 9: Making a Plan	21
	1.7 Looking for a Pattern	22
	Strategy 10: Looking for a Pattern	25
	1.8 Combining Strategies Once Again: Guesses, Charts, and Patterns	28
	1.9 Looking Back: Polya and the Art of Solving Problems	29
	1.10 Using Calculators to Solve Problems	30
	The K Key or Other Constant Feature of Calculators	31
	1.11 Using Computers to Solve Problems	33
	1.12 Summary of Important Ideas and Techniques	42
	Problem Set	42
<b>C H A P T E R <u>2</u></b>	<b>SOLVING PROBLEMS USING SETS</b>	<b>51</b>
The Lemonmobile Problem 52	2.1 Venn Diagrams	52
The Enrollment Problem 57	The Mathematical Idea: Venn Diagrams and Sets	54
The Desk Problem 69	The Mathematical Idea: The Three-Circle Venn Diagram	66
	2.2 Survey and Inventory Problems with No Exact Answer	69
	2.3 Looking Back	73
	The Language and Symbols of Sets	73

	Description of a Set	74
	Set Membership	74
	Set Equality and Subsets	75
	Operations	76
	Set Complement	77
	Pictures and Symbols	77
	Parentheses and Order of Operations	79
2.4	Looking Ahead: Algebraic Properties of Set Operations	81
2.5	Summary of Important Ideas and Techniques	84
	Problem Set	84

## CHAPTER **3** ANSWERING QUESTIONS OF HOW MANY? OUR SYSTEM OF WRITTEN NUMERALS 93

The Pencil Problem	94	3.1	Answering Questions of How Many?	94
The Birthday Hat Problem	96		The Mathematical Idea: Questions of How Many? Decided by Pairing	94
The Eraser Problem	96		The Mathematical Idea: Pairing Using an Intermediate Set	96
The Ranchers' Trade Problem	98		The Mathematical Idea: Convenient Sets for Pairing	98
Farida's Wheat Problem	104		The Mathematical Idea: Grouping	99
The Comparison Problem	131	3.2	The Development of Our Hindu-Arabic, Decimal Numeral System	100
			The Counting Board	100
			Numbers and Numerals	102
			Representing a Number Uniquely on a Counting Board	102
			Written Numerals Corresponding to Counting Board Numerals	106
			The Mathematical Idea: Egyptian Numerals, the Counting Board, and Our Own Decimal Numerals	108
			Place Value Blocks	111
			The Abacus	113
			Base Systems	117
			Stick Numerals	117
			Why Stick Numerals?	119
			Modeling Standard Numerals	121
		3.3	Looking Back: Whole Numbers	122
			Exponential Notation	122
		3.4	Extending the Ideas: Other Numeral Systems	123
			Bases Other than 10	123
			Converting from One Base to Another	125
			Numeral Systems of Historical Importance	126
			Babylonian Numerals	128
		3.5	Looking Ahead: The Number Line and Order Properties of the Whole Numbers	131
			The Mathematical Idea: The Number Line	131
			Order of Whole Numbers	132
		3.6	Summary of Important Ideas and Techniques	134
			Problem Set	135
			Review Test for Chapters 1, 2, and 3	144

## CHAPTER 4 ADDITION AND SUBTRACTION OF WHOLE NUMBERS 149

Ugboo and Lagor's Problem 150	4.1	Addition of Whole Numbers	150
		The Mathematical Idea: Primitive Addition	150
The Birthday Favor Problem 151		The Mathematical Ideas: Addition and Addition Facts	151
		The Mathematical Idea: From the Concrete to the Abstract	154
The Math Book Problem 152	4.2	Subtraction of Whole Numbers	158
		The Mathematical Idea: Primitive Subtraction	159
		The Mathematical Ideas: Subtraction and Subtraction Facts	159
The PTA Problem 153		The Mathematical Idea: Trading Systematically	162
Ugboo's Horse Problem 158		We Know How to Subtract but <i>When</i> Do We Subtract?	166
		The Mathematical Idea: Subtraction as Finding the Solution to a Missing Addend Problem	167
The Toy Problem 159		More Problems in which Subtraction Is Used to Find Solutions	167
The Paper Pad Problem 160		Why Do We Need to Do All This?	167
		The Method of Complements for Subtraction	168
The Assembly Ticket Problem 161	4.3	Looking Back: Formal Properties of Addition and Subtraction	169
		Commutative Property of Addition	170
		Associative Property of Addition	170
The Egg Problem 166	4.4	Looking Ahead: Addition and Subtraction in Algebra	171
		The Cashier Method of Subtraction	172
		Parentheses and the Order of Operations	173
	4.5	Extending the Ideas: Order, Addition, and Subtraction on the Number Line	174
		Using Order Properties of Addition and Subtraction to Estimate Answers or Check Their Reasonableness	176
	4.6	Summary of Important Ideas and Techniques	177
		Problem Set	178

## CHAPTER 5 MULTIPLICATION OF WHOLE NUMBERS 185

The Hotel Problem 186	5.1	What Is Multiplication?	186
		Too Much Work to Solve the Problem?	188
The Book Problem 188		The Mathematical Idea: Multiplication as Repeated Addition	189
The Classroom Seat Problem 190	5.2	Development of the Standard Method for Multiplication	190
		The Mathematical Idea: Arrays and Multiplication	190
The Motel Problem 192		The Mathematical Idea: Multiplication Is Commutative	195
The Floor Tile Problem 197		The Mathematical Idea: Multiplication Is Distributive over Addition	197
The Second Floor Tile Problem 198		The Mathematical Idea: Using the Distributive Law Several Times	199
		The Mathematical Idea: Multiplication by 10	202
The Computer Handbook Problem 201		The Mathematical Idea: Multiplication Is Associative	203
		The Mathematical Idea: Multiplication by 100, 1000, . . .	205
The Auditorium Seat Problem 202		The Mathematical Idea: Organizing the Array into Sub-Arrays of Dots, Dashes, and Squares	208
The School Cafeteria Floor Problem 204		The Method of Sub-Arrays with Expanded Form, the Method of Partial Products with Zeros, and the Standard Method	209
		An Anatomy of a Multiplication Problem	211

A Harder Problem	206	Why Do We Need to Do All This?	213
The Sandwich Problem	215	The Mathematical Idea: The Egyptian Method for Multiplication	214
The Truck Problem	223	5.3 Looking Back: Paradigms for Multiplication	214
		5.4 Extending the Ideas: Estimating Products	221
		5.5 Looking Ahead: Multiplication and Algebra	222
		The Mathematical Idea: Cancellation Laws, Unknowns, and Solving Equations	224
		5.6 Calculators and Computers: Multiplication	225
		5.7 Summary of Important Ideas and Techniques	227
		Problem Set	227

## CHAPTER 6 DIVISION OF WHOLE NUMBERS 237

The Rose Garden Problem	238	6.1 What Is Division of Whole Numbers?	238
The Science Book Problem	239	The Mathematical Idea: Division as the Solution to a Missing Factor Problem	238
The Cabbage Patch Problem	241	The Mathematical Idea: Division as Repeated Subtraction	240
The Loaves of Bread Problem	242	The Mathematical Idea: Division with Quotient and Remainder	241
The Science Experiment Kit Problem	247	6.2 The Standard Method of Long Division	242
The Orphanage Problem	249	The Mathematical Idea: Division as Equal Distribution	243
The Cooler Production Problem	259	The Standard Method of Long Division with Single-Digit Division	244
		6.3 The Scaffold Method of Division	247
		The Mathematical Idea: The Scaffold Method of Division	251
		6.4 Looking Back: Division—Its Definition, Ways of Thinking about It, and Methods for Carrying It Out	254
		The Definition of Division	254
		Ways of Thinking about Division and Methods for Dividing	255
		Division by Organizing an Array Using Place Value Blocks	256
		6.5 Looking Ahead: Division in Algebra	259
		6.6 Calculators and Computers in Division	260
		6.7 Summary of Important Ideas and Techniques	263
		Problem Set	263
		Review Test for Chapters 4, 5, and 6	269

## CHAPTER 7 MULTIPLES, DIVISORS AND PRIMES 273

The House Painter Problem	274	7.1 Common Multiples and Divisors of Two Numbers	274
The Gear Timing Problem	284	The Mathematical Idea: Common Multiples Multiples and Divisors	275
The Second Gear Timing Problem	287	7.2 More Tests for Divisibility	277
The Postage Stamp Problem	301	A Test for Divisibility by 4	277
		A Test for Divisibility by 9	278
		7.3 Prime Numbers and Factor Trees	279
		Composite Numbers and Factor Trees	280
		A Test for Divisibility by 6	283
		7.4 The Least Common Multiple (LCM) of Two Numbers	284

	Finding the LCM of 420 and 198	285
	The Mathematical Idea: A Method for Computing the LCM	287
7.5	The Greatest Common Division (GCD) of Two Numbers	287
	The Mathematical Idea: The Greatest Common Divisor (GCD) of Two Numbers	289
	Computing the GCD Using Prime Factorizations	289
7.6	Looking Back: Exponential Notation and Prime Factorization in Standard Form	291
7.7	Extending the Ideas: Casting out 9s	291
	Some Final Remarks about Casting out 9s	295
7.8	Looking Back: The Divisibility Relationship	295
	The Test for Divisibility by 4 Revisited	297
	A Test for Divisibility by 11	297
7.9	Looking Ahead: Number Theory	298
7.10	Computers: Searching for Solutions	301
7.11	Summary of Important Ideas and Techniques	302
	Problem Set	303

## CHAPTER 8

	INTRODUCTION TO FRACTIONS AND RATIOS	309
The Apple Problem 310	8.1 What Are Fractions and What Are They Good For?	310
The Apple Comparison Problem 315	The Mathematical Idea: Concept of Fraction	310
	The Mathematical Idea: Mixed Numbers	311
The Recipe Problem 317	The Mathematical Idea: Equal Fractions	313
The Crepe Problem 319	8.2 Comparing the Sizes of Fractions	315
The Pie Problem 320	The Mathematical Idea: Finding Common Denominators in Order to Compare Fractions	316
The Ratio Comparison Problem 322	8.3 Adding and Subtracting Fractions	317
	The Mathematical Idea: Adding and Subtracting Fractions	317
The Ratio Comparison Problem, Continued 323	8.4 Improper Fractions	319
	The Mathematical Idea: Improper Fractions	320
The Reading Contest Problem 325	The Mathematical Idea: A Fraction as an Answer to a Whole Number Division Problem	321
The City-Wide Reading Contest Problem 327	8.5 Ratios	322
	The Mathematical Idea: When Two Ratios Are the Same	323
	The Mathematical Idea: Comparing Ratios; Ratios and Fractions	324
	The Mathematical Idea: You Can't Add Ratios in the Same Way You Add Fractions	327
	8.6 Visualizing Fractions on a Number Line	327
	The Mathematical Idea: Fractions on a Number Line	329
	8.7 Looking Back: GCDs, LCMs, and Fractions	330
	LCMs and Common Denominators	331
	8.8 Looking Ahead: Formal Properties of Addition of Fractions	332
	8.9 Extending the Ideas: Order, Addition, and Subtraction of Fractions on a Number Line	333
	Density of Fractions on a Number Line	336
	8.10 Summary of Important Ideas and Techniques	338
	Problem Set	339



## CHAPTER **9** MULTIPLICATION AND DIVISION OF FRACTIONS 345

The Book Pack Problem	346	9.1	Multiplication of Fractions	346
The Graduation Prediction Problem	347		The Mathematical Idea: Repeated Addition of Fractions	346
The Gold Leaf Problem	348		The Mathematical Idea: A Fraction of a Whole Number	347
The Alcohol/Tobacco Consumption Problem	349		The Mathematical Idea: Multiplication of Fractions	350
The Gas Tank Problem	352		The Mathematical Idea: Some Properties of Multiplication of Fractions	353
1. The Shirt Problem	354	9.2	Division of Fractions	354
2. The Fence Problem	354		Four Partially Solved Missing Factor Problems	354
3. The Bilingual Problem	355		The Mathematical Idea: Solving Missing Factor Problems	356
4. The Artichoke Problem	355		Reciprocals and Division of Fractions	357
The Enlargement Problem	362		Something to Watch Out For in Division of Fractions	359
A Ratio of Lengths Problem	363	9.3	More on Ratios: Scale Drawings and Ratios of Lengths	360
			Scale Drawings: The Choice of the Unit Length	362
		9.4	The Mathematical Idea: Ratios of Lengths and Division of Fractions	364
			Looking Back: Formal Properties of Multiplication and Order of Fractions	365
			Solving Equations Involving Fractions	366
			Using the Rules to Estimate Answers to Fraction Problems	366
		9.5	Looking Ahead: Generalized and Algebraic Fractions	368
			Examples	370
		9.6	Extending the Ideas: Holes in the Number Line	372
		9.7	Summary of Important Ideas and Techniques	374
			Problem Set	375
			Review Test for Chapters 7, 8, and 9	379

## CHAPTER **10** DECIMAL FRACTIONS AND PERCENTS 383

The Height Problem	384	10.1	Addition and Subtraction of Fractions with Denominators of Powers of 10	384
The Floor Repair Problem	393		The Mathematical Idea: Using a Counting Board to Add Certain Fractions	387
The Kitchen Cabinet Problem	394		From Counting Board to Decimals	388
The Fraction Approximation Problem	399	10.2	Multiplication of Decimal Fractions	390
The Alloy Problem	402		Multiplication by 10 and $1/10$	390
The Medication Problem	407	10.3	The Mathematical Idea: Multiplication of Decimal Fractions	393
The Money Investment Problem	407		Finding a Decimal Fraction “Close to” an Ordinary Fraction	394
The Toothpaste Profit Problem (Rate of Profits over Investments)	409		The Mathematical Idea: Decimal Fractions Can Do a Lot of the Work for All Fractions	396
The Book Price Increase Problem	409		Common Fractions Equal to Decimal Fractions	396
			Common Fractions that Are Not Equal to Decimal Fractions	399
			The Mathematical Idea: The Standard Method for Approximating a Common Fraction by Decimal Fractions	400
		10.4	Division of Decimals	402
			The Mathematical Idea: Division of Decimals	403
		10.5	Rounding and Calculators	403
		10.6	Percent and the Language of Fractions in the Marketplace	405