Reading Novels for Math Class

A great way to start your math class for the year is to pull in popular novels. Math is alive in popular culture. There are fiction novels that incorporate mathematics and their storyline. It is important for students to not just skip over these ideas. Students need to understand and make connections to the concepts they learn in math class and how the author is using the concept. There are nonfiction works that discuss mathematics hand-in-hand with another content areas. In assigning a book to read in a math class it is important to give the students choice in selection of the reading material. The big question, “Well what books have math in them?” There are some bestsellers out there that have mathematical material in the story line. Dan Brown has *The Davinci Code* and *The Lost Symbol*. Other books that students have read for my class include *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon, *Zero: The Biography of a Dangerous Idea* by Charles Seife, and *The Sir Cumference Series* by Cindy Neuschwander. A teacher may decide to not give a finite list of books so that students have the flexibility in choosing a book to read. Every year I assign a book reading to a math class the book list expands depending on books that students choose that the teacher may not have been exposed to. It is important to assign a reading in math class to promote literacy.

**The Assignment:** Choose a book to read this year. The book must have at least three math topics. Math topics may include formulas discussed in applications, cryptography used to solve mysteries, or historical references of mathematics like in Seife’s book mentioned above. Once the book is selected, read the book. Identify the three math topics. Write a math book review identifying a connection of the math topics as used in real life or when that mathematical content is taught in the classroom. Students may not use a book that they have already read. Before the student turns in an original draft, the draft must be peer edited. Students may not peer edit a review if they are reading the same book title. As students ask questions, the teacher can clarify additional rules and regulations using the rubric.

**The Rubric:** It is essential to have a rubric that describes all of the aspects that the teacher wants included in the paper. The rubric includes a description for each of the following: a brief summary of the book, three mathematical topics, identified real applications or classroom connections of the mathematics, and a conclusion for the paper with a personal reflection on how the author used the mathematics to enhance the book or characters in the book.

**Peer editing:** Students need to be trained in peer editing and peer editing needs to be tied to the students’ grade for the editing to be taken seriously. A checklist document is not adequate for peer editing tool. The editor must make substantial comments to help the writer revise and edit the paper to be submitted.

**Optional draft submissions:** Some students may appreciate the ability to submit multiple drafts. This allows the teacher to give the student feedback prior to the final submission. Some students need more than one session of teacher feedback.

More information, rubric, and sample documents can be found at roheringgood.weebly.com. Click on the Book Review button.