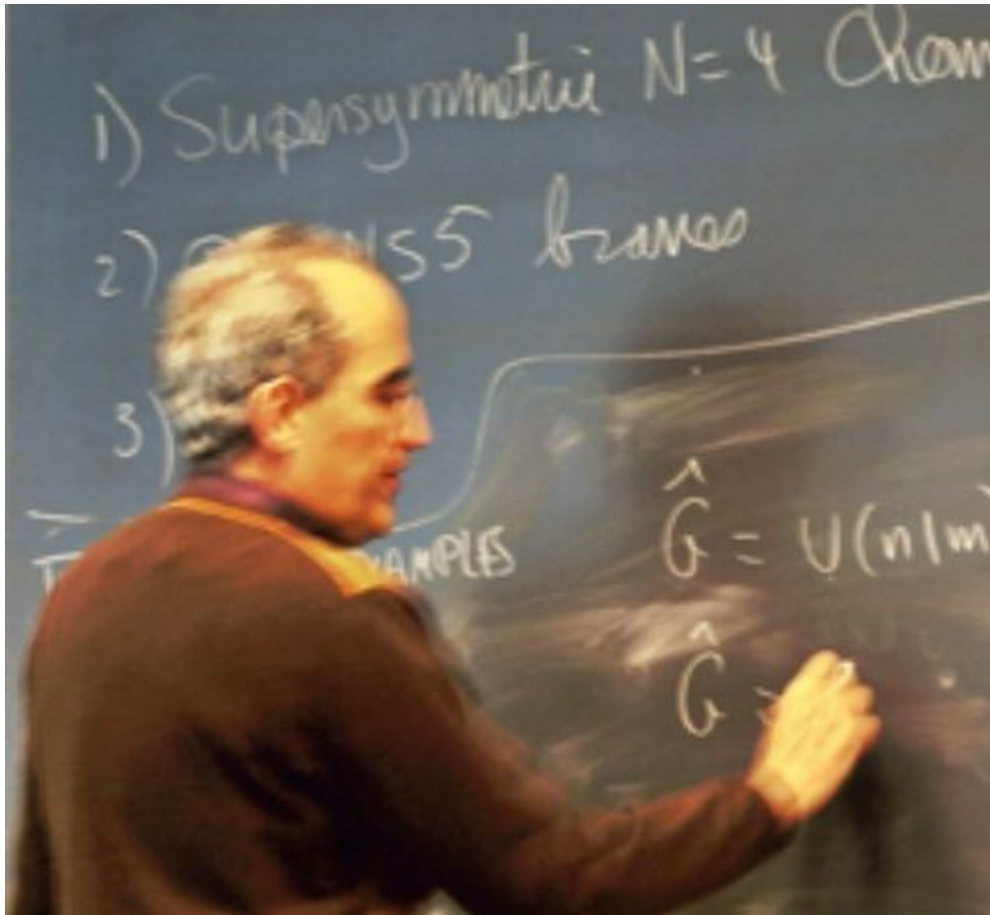


Mr. Max the Math Teacher

by Michael Stahl



When Bobby Richardson graduated from elementary school, he left the 5th grade as the best mathematics student in his class. Bobby had the highest math average of anyone in his grade at the end of every year he was in elementary school. At the graduation ceremony, his principal gave him the Math Award after Bobby had earned a 98.7% average on his math tests that year. His teachers, parents and friends were very proud of him. Bobby was proud of himself, too, because he knew how much hard work he put into getting such high grades. Bobby studied math every day and spent extra time on his math homework. He practiced it any time he had a chance. If his mother needed help cooking, Bobby would measure out the ingredients. When his father drove him somewhere, Bobby figured out the distance they'd traveled in miles, yards, feet and inches. Whenever his little sister needed help with her 3rd grade math homework, Bobby was there to tutor her. He did his fair share of work in all other subjects, too - reading books, keeping up with science, and studying history - but he and everyone else knew that Bobby Richardson was truly a math whiz.

After graduation, Bobby enjoyed his two-month summer vacation. He went to the Olympic-sized pool quite a bit to swim some laps, figuring out how many meters he'd swum and his average times. He would also play a lot of basketball, adding up all his points and assists, and comparing his stats to those of professional players. Like most kids on summer vacation, even though he was practicing his

math, Bobby wasn't thinking too often about school. He did those calculations because he enjoyed it. Before long, though, the new school year would be approaching.

A week before September arrived, Bobby received his first junior high school class schedule, which was emailed to him by the school. Right away he looked to see when he would be in math class, what level and with what teacher. Sure enough, he had earned his way into the honors class, which would be held every school day during 3rd period. His math teacher's name was Mr. Max. Bobby liked the name; it was kind of funny to have what is usually a first name as a last name. Bobby also imagined that it was short for something silly, like "Maximum Effort!"

Bobby and his family gathered around the dinner table that night. His parents expressed that they were happy to find out that in 4th grade, Lindsay, Bobby's little sister, would learn under the same teacher, Mrs. Snedecker, who taught Bobby two years earlier. Bobby's older brother, Tyler, was entering his senior and final year of high school. Tyler had heard all good things about the teachers he would meet the next week. Finally, Bobby shared his schedule with the table. His parents were happy to hear that Bobby would be in 6th grade honors math even though it was the least surprising thing they'd heard in quite some time. Bobby said his teacher's name was Mr. Max. Tyler, who had also attended Broderick Junior High, gave a responsive howl and said, "Mr. Max, eh?"

"Yeah, why?" Bobby asked anxiously and curiously.

"He was my 6th grade math teacher, too," replied Tyler, who then patted Bobby on the back of the shoulder. "He's, um, interesting," Tyler added.

Bobby kind of shuddered. He certainly was confident that he would perform well in math class just as he always did, but he was not sure whether it would be as easy as it had been during his elementary school days.

During his 6th grade honors math class on the first day of junior high, Bobby met Mr. Max. He didn't seem strange to Bobby at all. Mr. Max was about 6 feet tall, looked physically fit, and wore nice clothes with a tie. He greeted the class with a warm "Good morning!" and went over the syllabus and his expectations for the year, none of which seemed terribly unachievable.

"Just wait," warned Tyler that night with a grin and a nod of the head. "You'll see that Mr. Max is different."

Day two of math class with Mr. Max also felt normal to Bobby. Mr. Max began to teach them a little bit of algebra. For the first time in his life, Bobby saw letters in math problems. When Bobby got home that day, he did his homework and reviewed his notes from the day. He said to Tyler, "I still don't understand why you said that stuff about Mr. Max."

All Tyler did was shake his head and smile again, saying, "Wait."

The next day, at the beginning of math class, Mr. Max walked in with a rocking chair, placing it in the front of the room, next to his huge desk. He sat down and said, "Listen closely to everything I say. Feel free to take notes on some paper." Bobby knew this was the moment Tyler had previewed for him, but at the same time, he tried to forget it and do what Mr. Max had instructed.

Mr. Max sat in his rocking chair and began to rock forward and backward. He told the story about himself when he was a boy. He discussed his relationships with his parents and his sister. He talked

about his town, what it looked like and some of the people he knew there. Mr. Max then went over what foods he liked to eat and a bunch of other things about what he did back then. And that was pretty much it. All of the students in the class looked around in confusion. None of what Mr. Max said seemed to have anything to do with math. Mr. Max finished by saying that the class would have their first quiz the next day, and it would be on what they had learned.

Like the rest of his class, Bobby was anxious about his first quiz. Mr. Max smiled as he gave out the sheets of paper with the questions written on them. Sure enough, the quiz had questions about Mr. Max's boyhood, but they didn't appear to be answerable based on his speech. The first question was about his favorite food, apples, and read: *If I ate 57 apples when I was sixteen and know the total amount of apples I ate when I was sixteen and seventeen is 134, how many apples did I eat when I was seventeen?* All of the other questions, five in total, were similarly about the number of relatives he had, places he had been and sports games he attended. Bobby did his best, but he was not his usual confident self.

The next day was Friday. Bobby and all his schoolmates were tired from their first week of school, but most of them were jittery about the grades on their first math test. To their surprise, Mr. Max gave the tests back, but there were no grades written on them. Mr. Max went to the front of the room and began to go over all the questions. Suddenly, it became clear to Bobby what Mr. Max was up to. Mr. Max did not write one word on the blackboard. Instead he wrote algebraic equations just like those they had gone over on Tuesday. Question number one turned into $x+57=134$ and so on and so forth.

After he was finished going over all the answers, Mr. Max said, "It's time for your second quiz." The whole class groaned. "It's a quick one," Mr. Max insisted. "But this one actually counts. So get serious."

Mr. Max handed out little sheets of paper. When Bobby got his, he read one single question that he had to answer: *What have you learned today?*

Bobby thought for a little while, remembering all the times he used math while cooking with his mother and driving with his father, or when he went swimming and played basketball. Then, he wrote: *Math is everywhere.*

The next week, Mr. Max would tell Bobby that he earned a perfect score of 100% on his first junior high school math quiz, as did the rest of his class, who were all relieved. For the rest of the year, they would give Mr. Max maximum effort because they never knew what surprises would be in store for them.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What school subject is Bobby especially good at?

- A. history
- B. English
- C. math
- D. science

2. What is the resolution of this story?

- A. Bobby earns a perfect score on his first junior high math quiz.
- B. Bobby leaves 5th grade as the best mathematics student in his class.
- C. Bobby receives his first junior high class schedule by email.
- D. Mr. Max brings a rocking chair to class and talks about his childhood.

3. Read these sentences from the story: "Bobby studied math every day and spent extra time on his math homework. He practiced it any time he had a chance. If his mother needed help cooking, Bobby would measure out the ingredients. When his father drove him somewhere, Bobby figured out the distance they'd traveled in miles, yards, feet and inches."

What can be concluded from the information above?

- A. Bobby likes Mr. Max.
- B. Bobby is not good at math.
- C. Bobby enjoys math.
- D. Bobby hates math.

4. How does Bobby feel when his brother describes Mr. Max as "interesting"?

- A. pleased
- B. exhausted
- C. proud
- D. nervous

5. What is a theme of this story?

- A. having too much confidence in yourself can be harmful
- B. trusting the judgment of others is never a good idea
- C. competing with others can make you better at something
- D. math can be found and used in everyday activities

6. Read the following sentence: "For the rest of the year, they would give Mr. Max maximum effort because they never knew what surprises **would be in store** for them."

What does the phrase **would be in store** mean above?

- A. would be waiting
- B. would be sold
- C. would be avoided
- D. would be kept in a closet

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

At first, Mr. Max does not seem strange to Bobby; _____, Mr. Max surprises him.

- A. previously
- B. later on
- C. for example
- D. also

8. What is one example of Bobby using math outside the classroom?

9. What is one example of math in Mr. Max's life outside the classroom?

10. Is math everywhere, as Bobby believes? Support your answer with evidence from the story.