

Ms. Arithmetickle and the Magnificent Math Minds

By: Leslie A. Davidson

Ms. Arithmetickle loves numbers. She loves numbers more than chocolate marshmallow banana splits. She loves numbers more than basketfuls of poodle puppies. She loves numbers more than almost anything.

On the very first day of school Ms. Arithmetickle stood at the front of the classroom and looked at her new students.

“Twenty-one children! Twenty-one is the perfect number of students for a very best year,” she said.

Roberto shyly put up his hand.

“Why?” he asked

“Look around!” Ms. Arithmetickle said.

All the children looked around and then they looked around some more. No one could figure out just what they were looking around to see.

“Shall I get us started?” Ms. Arithmetickle finally suggested.

Twenty-one heads nodded with relief.

“How many boys?” she called out.

Everyone counted.

“Ten!” cried Yuko

“Nine!” cried Sam.

“Eleven!” cried Jasbir.

“Ten! Nine! Eleven!” echoed Ms. Arithmetickle. “Such BEAUTIFUL numbers, but not the same number. Yuko, Sam, Jasbir, count again, count together...”

And Yuko, Sam and Jasbir counted again. They counted together.

“One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.”

“Ten boys!” they shouted.

“I think I forgot to count myself the first time,” said Sam.

“I think I counted myself twice, the first time,” said Jasbir.

“Ah,” said Ms. Arithmetickle. “Always remember that YOU count. Never forget that you count once, just like everybody else.”

“What next?” wondered Ms. Arithmetickle.

“Count the girls!” called the girls and boys and everyone counted the girls.

Everyone, except Naomi. She didn’t look around. She scrunched up her face and looked at the ceiling. She mumbled under her breath.

“Eleven!” shouted all the kids when they finished counting.

“Naomi! I didn’t see you counting,” Ms. Arithmetickle said.

“I was!” cried Naomi. “I was counting in my head. I can show you!”

“Please do,” said Ms. Arithmetickle and she waved Naomi up to the front of the classroom.

Ms. Arithmetickle handed Naomi a sky blue hardhat. MAGNIFICENT MATH MIND was printed on the hard hat in big black letters. Naomi took the hardhat in her hands and

looked at it with surprise. The rest of the kids were quiet. Ms. Arithmetickle was quiet.
Everyone looked at the hardhat. Everyone looked at Naomi.

“ I knew in my...” Naomi whispered. Her voice shook.

“Put the hat on,” Christopher called softly.

Naomi slowly put the sky blue hardhat on her head.

She tapped the hardhat.

“CLUNK!” went the hat.

Naomi started to smile a teeny tiny smile

“ I knew in my HEAD that ten plus ten is twenty.”

Her voice grew stronger.

“And twenty-one is just one more so I stuck the one more with a ten and that made it an eleven.”

“Ten boys,” she called out confidently.

Naomi was smiling now.

“Ten boys and ELEVEN girls, that makes twenty-one of us!”

“Hurray!” cheered Ms. Arithmetickle.

“Hurray!” cheered the other twenty kids.

“Ten terrific boys plus eleven amazing girls equals twenty-one children for a very best year,” said Ms. Arithmetickle.

“Good, good and good!” said Ms. Arithmetickle while she wrote $10 + 11 = 21$ on the chalkboard.

“Now let’s ask some more questions!”

She whipped over to the corner closet and opened the door. Inside were exactly 20 more sky blue hardhats! Ms. Arithmetickle sent those hardhats sailing across the room and into the waiting hands of every student.

Soon the classroom was a sea of sky blue hardhats. Twenty-one MAGNIFICENT MATH MINDS were ready to work.

“You are so much more than just boys and girls,” announced Ms. Arithmetickle.

She was bouncing around the room, from table to table. She tapped children on the head.

“CLUNK!” went the hardhats.

“ CLUNK!”

“How are you the same?”

“CLUNK!”

“How are you different?”

“CLUNK!”

“Let the numbers tell the story.”

“CLUNK!”

“You all count. So let’s count!”

“CLUNK!”

Ms. Arithmetickle paused to take a breath.

“What else shall we count?” she asked when she stopped puffing.

“Right-handed kids and left-handed kids?” suggested Jamal. “I’m a leftie.”

“Me, too,” Tim called from across the room.

“Me, three,” added Anna Maria.

“Start counting, lefties. Be sure to write it down.”

“Good, good and good,” said Ms. Arithmetickle as Jamal, Tim and Anna Maria ran to gather their paper and felt pens.

And before you could say “Magnificent Math Minds” the classroom was buzzing with busy kids counting. They counted blue eyes and brown eyes, grey eyes and hazel eyes. They counted, blonde hair and brown hair and red hair and black. They even counted rainbow hair because Orion had pink and green stripes in her ponytail. They counted the pets people owned. They counted cats and dogs, fish and hamsters, budgies and bunnies.

“We can’t have any pets,” said Arno sadly. “My sister is allergic to EVERYTHING!”

“Let’s count the pets people would like to have!” suggested Ling.

And the Magnificent Math Minds counted orangutans and alligators, timber wolves and tarantulas, leopards and lemurs and...

“Good, good and good,” said Ms. Arithmetickle as she looked around the classroom.

Sohaila touched Ms. Arithmetickle’s arm as she walked by her desk.

“Teacher,” she said, “please, could we count the languages we speak?”

Ms. Arithmetickle knelt right down beside Sohaila.

“Sohaila, that is a splendid idea,” she smiled.

She straightened the sky blue hardhat that had slipped sideways on Sohaila’s hijab. She gave it a gentle tap. CLUNK!

Sohaila grinned. She looked around. Sun Lee was watching her. So were Max and Micah.

“Come,” Sohaila called softly. “Come.”

“I speak Cantonese and a little Mandarin,” said Sun Lee.

“I’m learning Dutch from my Opa, my grandpa,” said Max proudly.

“I only speak English,” sighed Micah. And then he brightened. “And pig latin!”

Sohaila, Max and Sun Lee laughed.

“We need to ask everyone.”

“And make a list.”

“And then make a chart.”

“We could ow-shay on an ap-may...”

Their voices rose like happy birds and Ms. Arithmetickle, watching from the corner, nodded happily.

“Good, good and good,” she thought to herself.

Then her smile faded.

In the last desk, in the last row William sat. He sat with his head down. His sky blue hardhat sat, too, upside down on his desk.

“William,” asked Ms. Arithmetickle gently, “you’re not counting?”

William looked up at Ms. Arithmetickle.

“I don’t know anyone in this class,” he mumbled. “And I’m no good at numbers. I just want to go home.”

“Ah,” said Ms. Arithmetickle. “I wonder what we can do about that?”

She pulled up a chair and sat down beside William. She rested her chin on her fists. She made a thinking face. William looked at Ms. Arithmetickle. He rested his chin on his fists. He made a thinking face, too.

William and Ms. Arithmetickle were still sitting there, at William’s desk, when Naomi walked by.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“William and I are having a think,” said Ms. Arithmetickle.

“I don’t know anyone in this class,” sighed William.

“I’m Naomi,” Naomi grinned at him. “Now you know me.”

“And I’m not good at numbers,” William added.

“Then put the hardhat on,” laughed Naomi. “You’d be amazed at how much it helps!”

Naomi picked up the hardhat and handed it to William.

“Put it on!” she urged.

“Now,” she asked, “what shall we count?”

Then Naomi and William had a think.

“How about favourite hockey teams?” William said finally.

Then he looked at Naomi.

“Is that OK with you?” asked William.

“ ‘Course it is! I love hockey. I’m the goalie on my team,” laughed Naomi.

Nobody noticed when Ms. Arithmetickle slipped silently out of the chair and walked away from William’s desk. Ms. Arithmetickle looked over her shoulder. William’s eyes were shining. William and Naomi were talking excitedly together.

“Good, good and good,” said Ms. Arithmetickle.

Yes, Ms. Arithmetickle loves numbers. She loves numbers more than chocolate-marshmallow banana splits. She loves numbers more than basketfuls of poodle puppies. She loves numbers more than almost anything. In fact, the only things Ms. Arithmetickle loves more than numbers are... the twenty-one Magnificent Math Minds in her class.

