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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

2007 Volume VI: Keeping the Meaning in Mathematics: The Craft of Word Problems

Word Problems in Picture Books: Literature as a Source of Math Word Problems

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This curriculum unit will look at math word problems from a language arts point of view. Many times students are able to do the math computation but get stumped by the wording in the problem. This unit can show them how to read the problem the same way they might read a novel or a non-fiction passage, they will then have greater success at solving the word problem correctly.

The unit is divided into two sections; however these two sections are designed to be used together. The first section involves the use of math picture books. Look at these picture story books as one giant word problem. By beginning with these books we can show the students that a word problem is simply a story that involves math. The second section of the unit involves the collaboration of efforts between the Language Arts teachers and the Math teachers. Call it Word Problem(s) of the Week. The students will receive a word problem on Monday or day one. The students take the problem to the Reading teacher, English teacher and then Math teacher over the course of a couple of days. Each teacher helps the students with a different aspect of reading and solving the problem. In merging these two sections, it would be ideal to use the word problems created specifically for the picture books as problems of the week. Although the unit utilizes picture books, the word problems are leveled for middle school students.

(Developed for Reading, grade 8; recommended for Mathematics, Reading, and English, grades 6-8)

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