

# 3<sup>rd</sup> PLACE LEVEL II

Dear Mr. H.M. Enzensberger,

I am writing to thank you for writing the incredible book that is *The Number Devil*. I was not really a math type person, but reading your book sparked my curiosity to take a deeper look at the surprising but useful things one can do with numbers. In your story, Robert had problems doing math with Mr. Bockel and his pretzels. While I found that hilarious, I could relate to him. In third grade, I dreaded those awful mornings with Mrs. Jennings and her obsession with farm animal math. A typical problem would involve her telling you how many feet there were on the farm, and asking you to figure out how many of each animal there was. Those questions drove me nuts, and my enthusiasm for mathematics was flagging. Looking for a way to boost my interest, my mom found out about this book from a friend and she quickly procured a copy for me to read.

At first, the fact that the word “number” was in the title made me want to take it and bury it in a corner where it couldn’t do any damage. The somewhat menacing image of a devil on the cover wasn’t helping things at all. Still, the brightly colored diagrams inside called out invitingly, almost as if to say, “Cameron, Cameron! Read this and you’ll ace math!” Finally, I decided that I would read a chapter or two and continue if I liked it. The way you explained the concepts such as square roots were easy to understand and quite funny. Referring to square roots as “rutabagas” was a good way to make a scary looking math term seem more innocent and manageable. I was captivated from the start, and read the whole book right then and there. Some of the diagrams I copied out for reference in

math class. Once I applied tools from your book like the Fibonacci Number Sequence and Factorials, those annoying farm animal problems became considerably easier to solve.

Other than just educating me in many new concepts, your book taught me other things. Math wasn't as complicated as it seemed, you just had to break it down bit by bit so that you could understand it better. With this in mind, I looked at my math lessons as small pieces of a puzzle and as time passed, the pieces began to connect. Before reading your book, I would barely make the goal score on the state standardized test. Ever since then, I've been scoring in the advanced range. Your book taught me that anything can be accomplished when you take it step by step.

However, the effect of your book was not to end in school. Last year in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I decided to join the school MathCounts team. In all of the competitions, there were always a few problems that were solved very easily by using the methods in your book. Since my opponents had probably never even heard of this book before, I defeated them easily in the speed round competition. I placed second in the city in a local competition, and managed to qualify for the state competition. There is no doubt that I would not have been there had I not read your book.

At the end of the book, you stated that you were not a numbers person, and that this book was made possible by the many brilliant professors that aided you. Yet, you managed to explain very complicated subjects in a way that made one very lousy student a state-level mathematician.

Thank you,

Cameron Yick

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