

The Contents

The Concept

Chapter 1	Terror in the One-Room School	3
Chapter 2	Imagery: The Sensory-Cognitive Connection for Math	9
Chapter 3	The Visualizing and Verbalizing Program First	15

The Math Ladder

Chapter 4	The On Cloud Nine Guide	23
Chapter 5	Setting the Climate	31
Chapter 6	Imaging Numerals	35
Chapter 7	Visualizing and Verbalizing the Number Line	45
Chapter 8	The Addition Family Facts	63
Chapter 9	The Subtraction Family Facts	97
Chapter 10	Word Problems Made Easy	119
Chapter 11	Place Value for the Big Picture	133
Chapter 12	Jumping with the Tens for Mental Adding and Subtracting	145
Chapter 13	Carry it Over and Borrow it Back	161
Chapter 14	Multiply and Get More	181
Chapter 15	Divide and Get Less	213
Chapter 16	Getting the Point with Decimals	231
Chapter 17	Discovering Fractions	247

The Summary

Chapter 18	A Critical Factor	279
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The Appendix

Summary Pages	283
Math-Ladder	319
Fractions Step-Ladder	321

1

TERROR IN THE ONE-ROOM SCHOOL

It was another sunny California day as I gazed out of my one-room school—just a day to be a fourth grader with the other sixteen children in the school who represented Kindergarten through eighth grade. Alone in my grade, I unsuspectingly thought this was going to be a day like any other. I was wrong.

Most days in our little school consisted of me working independently in my workbooks—reading, spelling, math. And, I was usually through them early and then got to help some of the other children. Life was good. There was the green chalkboard at the front of the room, the alphabet across the top, the windows on the entire left side of the room where, if one dared, one could stare at the mountains and the large swing set with the heavy chains waiting for action; and there were desks with lids that squeaked and banged throughout the day as they opened and closed. There was also the teacher's desk which seemed to have a life of its own, sometimes residing at the back, sometimes the front right, or sometimes the front left. When I wasn't in this comfortable setting, I was outside in clean air, playing in the fields surrounding the school, roller skating on the outdoor concrete basketball court, or swinging as high as I could with my best friend, Karen. Yes, day in and day out, life was good—well, mostly good. There were the days the county nurse came and announced your weight in front of the whole class—but that's another story. For the most part, the days rolled by comfortably.

Today, as usual, I came in from recess, cheeks rosy from another swinging session. Skipping to my desk—second from the front on the right—I sat down. Stealing a look out the window, I could see that the chains on my swing were still moving, to and fro just a little. I thought that recess definitely seemed to be getting shorter and shorter.

The class was quieting down, most in their seats, the desks starting to talk. I turned my gaze from the window—it was math-time. Desk top squeaking as it opened, I looked inside at the array of materials that represented my academic

life and grabbed my math workbook and a pencil. Reluctantly, I shut my desk and opened to the page on "Long Division." My stomach started to feel sort of queasy. Yesterday's page hadn't made much sense to me; it was all about some sort of squiggle like a half moon with a line on top that had numbers outside the moon and numbers under the line, and I was supposed to solve the problem by putting numbers on top of the line.

I read the directions and stared at the example. Nope, nothing there to help me do the pages of problems. I tried again, and still it didn't make any sense to me. What was I supposed to do with all these problems? I just couldn't seem to figure it out. I'd already done the pages on multiplication with ease, why couldn't I get this? I had done simple division, but this new diagram just didn't match anything I knew about previously, nor anything I was apparently going to be able to solve myself. But, now what to do? The teacher, Mrs. Brown, was busy with the first grade children, and there was no one else in my grade to ask.

I turned around and asked handsome Damon, sitting behind me, for help. He looked at the problems quickly and said, "Oh, that's easy Nanci, just divide the blah-blah into the blah-blah, and that'll give you blah, blah, blah. And, sometimes you may have a remainder, and just put that up there."

Thanking him, I turned around in my seat and stared again at the page of problems. Nothing. Nothing he said made sense to me. How did he know how to do these and I didn't? Yes, he was in fifth grade, but still, why could he understand this and I was lost? What should I do now? Mrs. Brown? Where was she?

Looking around the room, I saw her break from the first and second graders, so I raised my hand. This would solve it, surely. I never ever had to ask her for help with anything. This would fix the problem. She could explain it to me, and I'd have an appetite for lunch in about an hour. Lunch, now that was a pleasant thought, maybe this day was going to be all right after all.

Here she came. Medium length straight black hair, pretty, Mrs. Brown ran a very tight ship in this class; no one crossed her. I myself was always a little reluctant to raise my hand. And, if all that wasn't bad enough, she was the mother of my best friend—and handsome Damon.

"What is it, Nanci? Do you need help?"

"On the left side put the heading: *What I Know.*"

"On the right side, put the heading: *What I Need to Know.*"

"...decide which items you don't need in order to answer the Need to Know questions and cross them out."

Kim: "You're giving me some really good descriptions of your images. Then what happens in your picture?"

Tory: "I see one of the boys buying a bunch of yellow daisies, a jar of honey, and leaves of spinach greens. Then I see the other boy with a box of strawberries, a bag of oranges, and some white turnips. He gets some beef ribs and eats them."

Kim: "Good. The next step is to take out a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle. On the left side put the heading: *What I Know.*"

Tory: "OK." (Listing all the details.)

Kim: "Good. Now, on the right side, put the heading: *What I Need to Know.* Then list the questions that belong under that heading."

Tory: "OK." (Listing the questions asked.)

Kim: "Good. Now, decide which items you don't need in order to answer the Need to Know questions and cross them out."

Tory: "Easy." (Comparing, then crossing off.)

What I Know	What I Need to Know
—1 juggler —7 milk bottles —14000 painter —12 kids waiting 1 bunch of daisies 1 jar of honey 1 bag of spinach 1 box of strawberries 1 bag of oranges 1 bag of turnips 1 order of beef ribs	How many things did they buy? How many of those things were they supposed to buy? How many were not on mom's list?