



Mustard and Plums
By: Jordan Murphy

I hated math with a passion. Starting in third grade, I would color through math every day and take my book home to learn just enough for the next test. I had always loved learning and school, but sitting through math class was like swallowing cough syrup for an hour every day.

My teachers all tried and failed to convince me that math was worth anything. By the time I was in middle school, I was certain that I would never like math and would simply have to endure the courses that the school system required me to take.

On the first day of sixth grade, I sat in math class with crayons at the ready. There was no doubt in my mind that this class would be just as miserable as all the others. I was fully prepared to ignore another monotonous math teacher who would continuously spout the importance of math. However, before I could settle myself into my math class stupor, Mr. Lonnie Mayberry bounced into the classroom. The mustard yellow polo and plum purple plaid pants he was wearing set the stage for the many surprises waiting for me in Mr. Mayberry's math class.

Mr. Mayberry never asked us to like math. He only asked us to try our best in class, and he tried his best to keep us interested. When we learned functions, he sang us the Glade commercial so we would remember to “plug it in, plug it in.” Mr. Mayberry also refused to get rid of his giant chalkboard, and always wrote with crazy colored chalks. One day, we started prime factorization. It sounded hard and boring, but Mr. Mayberry renamed it “prime fazosazo” and taught us to make number birthday cakes. No matter what he was teaching, Mr. Mayberry made class different and fun. Between his silly songs and bright personality, Mr. Mayberry seemed able to make math magical. I was learning more than I ever had, and to my surprise, I was actually enjoying math.

In only one year, my whole perspective on math had changed, and I knew it was all thanks to Mr. Mayberry. I dreaded the end of the year and the end of the first math class I had ever liked. Unfortunately, like most things, the school year did come to an end. As I got used to seventh grade, I missed Mr. Mayberry’s class. Thankfully, Mr. Mayberry was still part of my daily routine. After my last period of the day, I went to Mr. Mayberry’s room, and he would show me new ways to make the math work for me.

Mr. Mayberry's lessons stretched beyond middle school math. My high school Trigonometry teacher was amazed to watch me sing songs and use numbers to make pictures as I worked. Since I left middle school, math has become one of my strongest subjects, simply because I had learned how to change my point of view. Mr. Mayberry's influence also helped me learn that something I hated could be something I loved if I just changed my approach.

I have carried Mr. Mayberry's ideas with me throughout high school. For example, I learned to take history classes and make the material into stories, which helped me learn and finish my U.S. History course with a 118. Then, when I dreaded taking Spanish, I used what Mr. Mayberry had taught me again. By the end of the year, I had found a subject I was passionate about learning and wanted to pursue later in life. Without Mr. Mayberry's help, I never would have been able to see how passionate I could be about languages. Thanks to the year I spent in sixth grade math, I will walk into the college of my choice knowing that I can handle any course the university throws at me and having a clear idea of who I am and what I want to do with my life.



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