



Stuart J. Murphy

TeachingBooks Movie Transcript

Stuart J. Murphy, interviewed in his studio in Boston, Massachusetts on August 15, 2002.

This is a transcript of the movie available on TeachingBooks.net. It is offered here to give you a quick assessment of the program topics, as well as to enable people with auditory disabilities access to the words.

Because this is a transcript of an edited movie, it should not be used as an assessment of Mr. Murphy's writing. Many of the sentences found here were edited, and all editing decisions are the sole responsibility of TeachingBooks.net.

One of the things that's really important to me is helping our kids become more fluent in the language of mathematics. Children are visual learners, and I really want to make sure that kids understand that math is relevant to their lives.

I've spent a lot of my life in classrooms talking with real kids — we talk about what they're having for lunch, we talk about what their favorite things are — all of those kinds of things that kids really care about, and then I find ways to build them into my stories. And that's what MathStart is — it's pictures, words and math — pictures, words and math coming together to tell a story.

Making a MathStart Book

This is my outline for a story: I start working with pictures, words and math right from the beginning. There's a rough sketch of the math, a rough sketch of the words and a rough sketch of the picture — they're all at the same, very sketchy level as I try and get my ideas down on paper. I sketch out all the math models — I think those are really important for the illustrator to be able to see how the mathematics works visually.

The math model for *Less Than Zero* is a line graph. A line graph is an important way to visualize the notion of negative numbers because you can show the horizontal axis for zero very clearly. [While pointing at the graph in the book....] And here we go up above the line and earn some money, and then lose some money and then lose some money again. And you can see right in front of you that he is below zero.

On Elevator Magic

Elevator Magic is a book about subtraction. I wanted to give kids an experience with subtraction from 10 downward using very simple numbers so that they can see what happens when you take a number away from another number and what number you'll arrive at. What I'm really trying to do in this drawing is I'm trying to think through how the model should be presented in the story — what's the best way to show the equation at the end of the thought process. [While pointing at the elevator buttons in the book....] I'm on floor eight...eight to seven to six to five...eight minus three equals five.

On Teaching Math

MathStart is a series of over 50 books. What I'm trying to do in my series is take primary teachers' strong suit — reading, language arts, stories from their life — and find a vehicle for them to be able to use their strong suits to teach mathematical concepts.

In Level 1, I cover topics like spatial opposites in my book called *The Greatest Gymnast of All*. My very first book in the series is called *The Best Bug Parade* about comparing sizes. *Circus Shapes* teaches kids basic shapes and their attributes. In *Henry the Fourth*, I talk about ordinals.

For Level 2, I deal with fairly abstract mathematical topics like probability and percentages. *Bigger, Better, Best!* teaches kids some basics about area. My book, *Racing Around*, teaches kids about perimeter in the context of a bike race.

My higher level books include such books as *Dinosaur Deals* which deals with equivalent values. *Too Many Kangaroo Things to Do!* is an introduction to multiplication. *Lemonade for Sale* teaches kids bar-graph building. *The Grizzly Gazette* introduces kids to percentages. I have two books out on money. *The Penny Pot* deals with making change and all the combinations of fifty cents, and *Sluggers' Car Wash* gets up into dollars and cents.

Some of the reasons why I pick topics come from situations I see in real life that I think people really need to have more grounding in and more help with.

Pictures + Words + Math = Story

All of these books share the basic idea of taking a real-life story and giving good visual support to the mathematics, so kids who are visual learners are able to understand it and take an important mathematical topic — pictures, words and math — and put it together into a story.

Books by Stuart J. Murphy

All titles published by HarperCollins Children's Books

Level 1:

- 3 Little Firefighters — Sorting (illustrated by Bernice Lum), 2003
- Beep, Beep, Vroom Vroom! — Patterns (illustrated by Chris Demarest), 2000
- Best Bug Parade, The — Comparing Sizes (illustrated by Holly Keller), 1996
- Bug Dance — Directions (illustrated by Christopher Santoro), 2002
- Circus Shapes — Recognizing Shapes (illustrated by Edward Miller), 1998
- Double the Ducks — Doubling Numbers (illustrated by Valeria Petrone), 2003
- Every Buddy Counts — Counting (illustrated by Fiona Dunbar), 1997
- Greatest Gymnast of All, The — Opposites (illustrated by Cynthia Jabar), 1998
- Henry the Fourth — Ordinals (illustrated by Scott Nash), 1999
- House for Birdie, A — Capacity (illustrated by Edward Miller), 2004
- It's About Time — Hours (illustrated by John Spiers), 2005
- Just Enough Carrots — Comparing Amounts (illustrated by Frank Remkiewicz), 1997
- Mighty Maddie — Understanding Weight (illustrated by Bernice Lum), 2004
- Missing Mittens — Odd and Even Numbers (illustrated by G. Brian Karas), 2001
- Monster Musical Chairs — Subtracting One (illustrated by Scott Nash), 2000
- One...Two...Three...Sassafras! — Number Order (illustrated by John Wallace), 2002
- Pair of Socks, A — Matching (illustrated by Lois Ehlert), 1996
- Rabbit's Pajama Party — Sequencing (illustrated by Frank Remkiewicz), 1999

- Seaweed Soup – Matching Sets (illustrated by Frank Remkiewicz), 2001

Level 2

- Animals on Board – Adding (illustrated by R.W. Alley), 1998
- Best Vacation Ever, The – Collecting Data (illustrated by Nadine Bernard Westcott), 1997
- Bigger, Better, Best! – Area (illustrated by Marsha Winborn), 2002
- Captain Invincible and the Space Shapes – Three-dimensional Shapes (illustrated by Remy Simard), 2001
- Coyotes All Around – Rounding (illustrated by Steve Bjorkman), 2003
- Elevator Magic – Subtracting (illustrated by G. Brian Karas), 1997
- Fair Bear Share, A – Regrouping (illustrated by John Speirs), 1998
- Get Up and Go! – Time Lines (illustrated by Diane Greenseed), 1996
- Give Me Half! – Understanding Halves (illustrated by G. Brian Karas), 1996
- Let's Fly a Kite – Symmetry (illustrated by Brian Floca), 2000
- More or Less – Comparing Numbers (illustrated by David Wenzel), 2005
- One Hundred Days of Cool – Numbers 1–100 (illustrated by John Bendall-Brunello), 2004
- Pepper's Journal: A Kitten's First Year – Calendars (illustrated by Marsha Winborn), 2000
- Probably Pistachio – Probability (illustrated by Marsha Winborn), 2001
- Racing Around – Perimeter (illustrated by Mike Reed), 2002
- Spunky Monkeys on Parade – Counting by 2s, 3s, and 4s (illustrated by Lynne Cravath), 1999
- Super Sand Castle Saturday – Measuring (illustrated by Julia Gorton), 1999
- Sundae Scoop, The – Combinations (illustrated by Cynthia Jabar), 2003
- Tally O'Malley – Tallying (illustrated by Cynthia Jabar), 2004

Level 3

- Betcha! – Estimating (illustrated by S.D. Schindler), 1997
- Dave's Down-to-Earth Rock Shop – Classifying (illustrated by Cat Bowman Smith), 2000
- Dinosaur Deals – Equivalent Values (illustrated by Kevin O'Malley), 2001
- Divide and Ride – Dividing (illustrated by George Ulrich), 1997
- Earth Day – Hooray! – Place Value (illustrated by Renee Andriani), 2004
- Game Time! – Time (illustrated by Cynthia Jabar), 2000
- Grizzly Gazette, The – Percentage (illustrated by Steve Bjorkman), 2003
- Jump, Kangaroo, Jump! – Fractions (illustrated by Kevin O'Malley), 1999
- Lemonade for Sale – Bar Graphs (illustrated by Tricia Tusa), 1998
- Less Than Zero – Negative Numbers (illustrated by Frank Remkiewicz), 2003
- Penny Pot, The – Counting Coins (illustrated by Lynne Cravath), 1998
- Polly's Pen Pal – Meters (illustrated by Remy Simard), 2005
- Ready, Set, Hop! – Building Equations (illustrated by Jon Buller), 1996
- Room for Ripley – Capacity (illustrated by Sylvie Wickstrom), 1999
- Safari Park – Finding Unknowns (illustrated by Steve Bjorkman), 2002
- Shark Swimathon – Subtracting Two-Digit Numbers (illustrated by Lynne Cravath), 2001
- Sluggers' Car Wash – Dollars and Cents (illustrated Barney Satzberg), 2002
- Too Many Kangaroo Things To Do! – Multiplying (illustrated by Kevin O'Malley), 1996
- Treasure Map – Mapping (illustrated by Tricia Tusa), 2004

Published Articles of Interest by Stuart J. Murphy

- "Mighty Math Skills: Mathematical thinking in preschool and kindergarten can go far with the help of everyday activities and good books," *Teaching PreK-8*, May 2003, pp. 64–65.

- “Teaching Math, Reaching Kids: Using storybooks to motivate children who are having difficulty with mathematics,” *Teaching PreK-8*, January 2000, pp 50–52.
- “Learning Math Through Stories,” *School Library Journal*, March 1999, pp 122–123.
- “Turning Kids on to Math: Classroom strategies for making mathematics enjoyable for young students,” *Teaching PreK-8*, January 1999, pp 62–63.

Note: Bibliographies created in 2003.

Many thanks to the folks at HarperCollins Children’s Books for their assistance in this production, particularly Jeanne McLellan, Victoria Ingram and Catherine Balkin.

Additional thanks to Gretta Miller, Rich Matheson, MJ Baumann and all at Clotho Advanced Media, Inc for their invaluable, professional help with this production.

Of course, this entire author program occurred because of the kindness and generosity of Stuart and Nancy Murphy, who shared their home, studio, time and energy with me in order to make this production.

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