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Math 2008

I am a senior in college, so one can assume that I have been in school for quite some time. I have taken many courses throughout the years. One main thing I remember the most is hearing my classmates complain about how we would see or use math problems outside of the classroom. It seemed to be to true back then. When I look back on it now, I find it funny. Math is seen and used in our everyday lives, so much to the point that we tend to overlook it. I’m a teacher’s assistant so I use mathematics at work. I also use it at home. What’s even more fascinating is how they use it in movies all the time. As a future elementary school teacher, I am going to make sure my students believe the opposite of what me and my classmates thought.

Growing up, I watched a lot of movies with my family. My dad loved to call us all into the living room and sit us down to watch something we had not seen together before. One of my father’s favorite movies was *Rain Man*. It starred Dustin Hoffman (Raymond) and Tom Cruise (Charlie). There is a scene in this movie where Charlie is on the phone in the store, and he tells the store clerk that he needs toothpicks. Just as she is getting ready to hand the box of toothpicks over to Raymond, she drops them on the floor. Raymond begins to repeat, “Eighty-two. Eighty-two. Eighty-two”, while looking down at the toothpicks on the floor. He then goes on to say, “246 total”. Ignoring Raymond, Charlie asks the clerk how many toothpicks are in the box, so he can pay for them. The clerk responds, “250”. Charlie says, “Pretty close. Let’s go, Raymond”. Raymond starts walking out of the store and says, “246”. Both the clerk and Raymond looked at him. The clerk looked down at the box on the floor and says, “There’s four left in the box”. It’s easy for some to overlook the fact that Raymond calculated how many toothpicks spilled out of the box because the scene happens so quick and we’re focused on everyone’s actions and behavior. When you think about it the scene and break it down, you realize that Raymond isn’t just some overgrown child, you see that he is actually pretty intelligent. He used mental computation, a topic we have learned in this course, to solve the problem of how many toothpicks fell. The math Raymond used was 82 \* 3 = 246. Four were left in the box so he either did 246 + 4 = 250 or 250 – 4 = 246. Either way, neither the clerk or Charlie thought to do the math, so Charlie could pay the clerk the right amount of money. Raymond was a human calculator in this particular scene.

We either see mathematics or use mathematics in our everyday lives. We tend to fail to notice it because it is common. When I become an elementary school teacher, I am going to explain to my students the importance of math. I despised it. However, I make sure my students learn to love it and help them understand how it can be applied beyond the classroom. Something as simple as watching a movie with your family can prove that what you learn in class will be seen again outside of the classroom. I will use the example of how I learned about mental computation in my Foundations of Numbers and Operations college course and was able to connect it with a movie that came out in 1988. That correlation alone will be enough to convince my students to believe the opposite of what I believed when I was their age.