

Learned Dialog

a short silly play by Divad Snoyl

Cast

S = Supplicant

L₁,...,L_n = Learned ones

The scene: The learned ones in robes seated at a great conference table. Supplicant enters and stands before them.

S: Greetings, oh learned ones.

L₁: What do you wish, oh supplicant?

S: I am designing a curriculum, and seek your collective wisdom. May I ask you some questions?

L₁: You may.

S: Thank you, sages of science and heroes of humanities. I wish to know what is most important. Is it important to read?

L₁,...,L_n: YES! Absolutely! Of course! How could this be in doubt?

S: Is it important to write?

L₁,...,L_n: Undeniably! Without question!

S: Is it at all important to ... think critically?

L₁,...,L_n: Above all other things! How can you even ask this?

S: Is it important to ... develop dexterity in rote, mechanical processes that can be better done by a machine, and which will quickly fade from memory?

(Pandemonium. Yelling finally calms down.)

L₁: No. This is not an enduring or worthy goal.

S: Thank you, thank you, oh sages, for your clarity. I shall design my mathematics curriculum to pursue the goals of reading, writing, and critical thinking.

(Stunned silence.)

L₁: Did you say ... mathematics?

S: Yes ...

L_2: Well, uh, math, uh, you know ... Certainly you are aware that math is ... different!

L_3: Yes, different!

L_4: Like oranges to apples!

L_n: Different, indeed!

S: What do you mean, different? Are you saying that reading, writing and critical thinking are not important in mathematics?

L_1: Grasshopper, let me explain. Math is not something that normal people do. Ordinary people cannot read math, and students should certainly not be expected to even try. Writing math, now that's a real joke. Math is just, well, random symbols! And critical thinking! Please, you really don't mean to suggest that anyone should actually think about these manipulations of abstractions? It's just a bunch of rules, rules to be applied, procedures to be performed. Everyone knows that. Grasshopper, if you want to teach math, just, you know, do a few examples on the board, then give a quiz with the numbers changed a little. That will serve the purpose and everyone will be happy.

S: I shall have to consider your words, oh great sages.

L_2: Yes, do. Be sure not to confuse math with real subjects.

S: Just one last question.

L_3: Yes?

S: The Greek root of the word "mathematics" is "mathein", which means "to understand". The Greeks viewed arithmetic and geometry on an equal footing with logic, rhetoric, music, and astronomy. It seems that mathematics is a fundamental mode of human thought---the pursuit of pure structure---and its applications have made possible all of our technology. How can we treat it differently from other pursuits of learning?

L_4: I feel kind of bad about this.

L_5: Yeah, me too. Maybe we should think of math as not so different.

L_n: Hey, I saw this cool TV show about a math guy who solves crimes for the FBI...

L_1: Oh, shut up.

L_2: But he has a point! Math people can be cool, too!

L_3: My neighbor knew a guy who tried to read math and his head exploded!

L_4: That's ridiculous....

(Camera pulls away into the distance. The learned ones go on talking, absorbed in considering mathematics. The supplicant slowly turns and walks away.)

THE END

