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# Book Review: *Strength in Numbers* by Sherman Stein

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*Strength in Numbers*. Sherman Stein. John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York: 1996.

This is a charming and wonderful book that benefited from the comments of students and teachers of junior high schools. The author leads us along a path of discovering the joy and power of mathematics in everyday life. The presentation is simple and non-threatening. The mysteries of dividing by fractions, why a negative times a negative is positive, cool numbers, hot numbers, false precision, are discussed and commented on. The mathematics that are needed for various occupations are reviewed.

Some misuses or false precision are examined. In 1962 the citizens of the San Francisco Bay Area were asked to vote for the largest municipal bond issue in history to pay for the Bay Area Rapid Transit system. They were told that by 1975 there would be 258,496 riders daily. That number assured a profit of 13 cents a ride, enough to cover all expenses. It turned out that in 1975 there were only 135,000 riders a day, which meant a loss of \$1.31 a ride.

Where did the figure 258,496 come from? That number with its six figure precision reassured and intimidated. How could a number given so precisely not be correct?

Reforms in teaching math are also surveyed, beginning in the early years of the century. "these reforms spring forth even though there is no agreement on the cause of the problem. It is as though a doctor keeps plying patients with a variety of pills without ever figuring out what ails them." Stein reviews the reform efforts of L.P. Benezet in the 1930's and MSG in the 1960's. He also comments on the NCTM Standards and the California Framework. He is not optimistic.

Parts two and three are about the methods of mathematics, infinite series, fractions, finding a curved area, the ratio of the circumference to the diameter of a circle and other interesting concepts.

The author explains the beauty and mysteries of mathematics in a clear manner that will be welcomed by parents and their children.



One plus one	Seven plus seven
two plus two	eight plus eight
Those I can do.	Math is my fate.
Three plus three	Nine plus nine
four plus four	ten plus ten
It's not a bore.	Those I can do in pen.
Five plus five	Addition is easy
six plus six	I'm not being silly
Those I can mix.	I can do them freely
	I'm not joking really.

Mae Talle