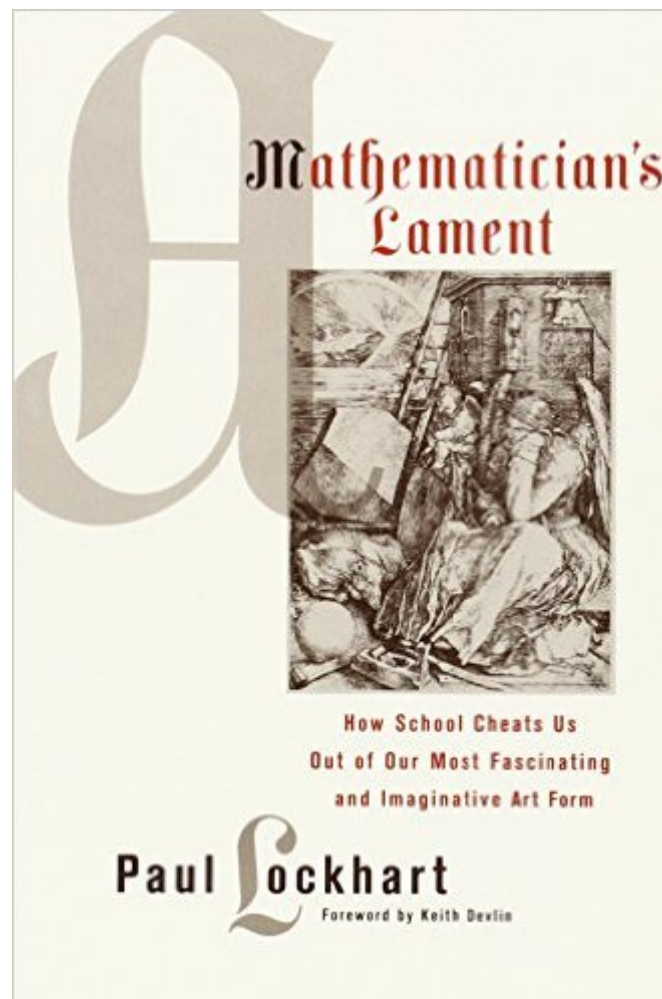


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A Mathematician's Lament: How School Cheats Us Out Of Our Most Fascinating And Imaginative Art Form



Synopsis

“One of the best critiques of current mathematics education I have ever seen.” —Keith Devlin, math columnist on NPR’s Morning Edition
A brilliant research mathematician who has devoted his career to teaching kids reveals math to be creative and beautiful and rejects standard anxiety-producing teaching methods. Witty and accessible, Paul Lockhart’s controversial approach will provoke spirited debate among educators and parents alike and it will alter the way we think about math forever. Paul Lockhart, has taught mathematics at Brown University and UC Santa Cruz. Since 2000, he has dedicated himself to K-12 level students at St. Ann’s School in Brooklyn, New York.

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Customer Reviews

Once in a while we read books that we just know are especially important, and that we know we will be thinking and talking about long after reading them. This book is one of them for me. I am a returning adult student, and I am about to finish my training to become a math teacher. Having gone through my education program, my enthusiasm was just about completely drained, and I’ve been having trouble remembering why I ever wanted to become a math teacher in the first place. Why would anyone? Paul Lockhart knows, and his book has reawakened my desire to help students discover the joy of mathematics. His argument is concise, and he makes it forcefully. His book is a joy to read, mainly because his understanding of the subject and his passion for it are clear in every page. He reinforces ideas I already had about how school sucks the life out of math (and all

subjects), but he also challenges some of my opinions. I think this will happen with most people who read it. Once he finishes making his argument about math education in about the first two-thirds of this short book, he devotes the remaining section to describing what he finds wonderful about mathematics itself. This section should make just about anyone want to become either a mathematician or a math teacher. I want people to read the book for the specifics of his arguments, but I want to discuss one important point that he makes. Many people in math education claim that in order to make math more understandable and interesting to students, we need to show how practical it is and how it is used in everyday life. I've always felt like this idea was wrong, or at least limited in its usefulness in that regard.

This is an interesting indictment of our current system of mathematics education, a subject that I almost always enjoy reading about (I very nearly became a mathematics teacher myself not long ago). Lockhart makes his point clearly, eloquently, and succinctly--this is a very quick read at only 140 pages of fairly large type. I agree with much of what he says, though I do think that his claims sometimes go a bit too far: he doesn't seem to see much point in learning to add in an age of calculators, for example. The main problem I had with this book is that, as far as I'm concerned, Lockhart doesn't offer up a viable alternative to the status quo. It's always easy to criticize, but it's a lot harder to come up with a better way of doing things. Lockhart does offer some ideas about how the ideal mathematics education should function: a mathematics teacher should be a practicing mathematician himself, and should be so engaged in the subject that he has no need for lesson plans or curricula, but can rely solely on his passion for mathematics. Teacher training should be abolished, since someone either is a good teacher or isn't, and nothing can change that. While this sounds nice in theory, it just doesn't seem feasible. I'm not convinced that all these perfect mathematics teachers will suddenly appear, and if they don't, we're left with nothing (which I suppose Lockhart would say is better than the current state of affairs). To me, this doesn't seem like a solution. After reading about how terrible the current system is, I'd like to have seen some real suggestions for how it could be reformed.

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