

Intelligent Math

by Jeff Goode
copyright © 2008

(LIGHT UP ON: PRINCIPAL MERRITT waiting nervously with MR. and MRS. KENNELLY.)

(Enter TEACH.)

MERRITT Here he is!

TEACH Principal Merritt, you wanted to see me?

MERRITT Come in, Mr. Teach. You know Mr. & Mrs. Kennelly?

TEACH No, I haven't had the pleasure.

POPPA K And you're not going to! Is this the man?

MERRITT Mr. Teach is your son's algebra teacher.

MOMMA K You should be ashamed of yourself.

MERRITT Please have a seat.

TEACH I'm not sure I understand—

MERRITT Mr. & Mrs. Kennelly have asked for this meeting – and I and the School Board have enthusiastically complied – over concerns about what's being taught in your fourth period math class.

TEACH I think there's been some sort of misunderstanding. Your son is doing very well in algebra.

MOMMA K Oh God, I knew it!!

POPPA K Al Jazeera? What is that, Greek? Greek Orthodox?

MERRITT Mr. & Mrs. Kennelly are concerned that what Lenny is learning in his math classes contradicts their own personal religious beliefs.

TEACH Are they numerologists?

POPPA K Hell, no!

MOMMA K No, we're Baptists.

TEACH Then I don't understand.

POPPA K I guess you never heard of the Ten Commandments?

TEACH The Ten Commandments?

MOMMA K Thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not kill—

TEACH I'm sorry, has Lenny killed someone?

POPPA K Is that some sort of sick joke?

MERRITT Mr. Teach, I'm going to have to ask you to take this matter more seriously.

TEACH I don't know what the "matter" is!

MERRITT Then you should know that Mr. & Mrs. Kennelly head up a large and influential parents group, who are concerned that what Lenny and students like him, are taught in the public schools conflicts with what they are taught in Sunday school.

TEACH But I'm the math teacher. I don't teach religion.

POPPA K Oh, here we go again...

MERRITT I'm afraid that's exactly what Mr. Yang the science teacher said last year. And the School Board has made it clear to me that they don't want another fiasco like that on our hands.

TEACH I'm sorry, Mr. & Mrs. Kennelly, no offense, but I don't understand how teaching Lenny basic math could possibly contradict...anything.

MOMMA K Mr. Teach, you have to understand, my husband is a businessman.

MERRITT A very successful businessman, who donates a great deal of money to School Board reelection campaigns.

MOMMA K But he's not so good with numbers and such.

POPPA K *(points at his head)* Keep it all up here.

MOMMA K He's more of a people person.

(He threatens to hit her. She shuts up.)

POPPA K But thanks to your newfangled math, Lenny came home a couple weeks ago, and offered to go over the company books for me.

MOMMA K We thought it was cute at first. But then he started telling us how the business was in the red. And that we were going to have to file for bankruptcy!

POPPA K He called me an incompetent businessman to my face.

MOMMA K Well, we washed his mouth out with soap, but it didn't do any good. He's lost all respect for his father.

POPPA K Sasses me all the time now.

MOMMA K He keeps asking where we're going to get the money to send him to college.

POPPA K And every night I come home from work, he wants to know how much of his inheritance I've blown today.

TEACH But I don't see what your business acumen – or lack – has to do with religion.

POPPA K I knew you didn't know your commandments!

TEACH Thou shalt not steal?

POPPA K No! Honor thy father and mother! It doesn't matter if I'm an idiot, that boy's got to respect us.

MOMMA K Lenny has given us nothing but attitude since he came home with all those progressive ideas about numbers and profits.

POPPA K Honor thy father and mother, Mr. Teach! And your agnostic algebra gabble-de-goop goes completely against that.

TEACH I'm not sure that's true. But for the sake of argument, what do you want us to do? Pull Lenny out of math class?

MERRITT No, now, nobody's saying that. Everybody needs math. Right, Mr. & Mrs. Kennelly?

MOMMA K It's one of the three R's. Reading, writing, and religion. (*puzzled*) And math.

MERRITT School budgets are tight enough, as it is, we don't want to go shooting off at the mouth about cutting the curriculum.

TEACH So what do you want then?

MERRITT Mr. & Mrs. Kennelly have brought in this new textbook they would like you to teach from.

MOMMA K It was developed by our church. It's called Intelligent Math.

TEACH Intelligent Math?

MOMMA K I don't completely understand it—

POPPA K No one does. It's all gabble-de-goop!

MOMMA K But it's very good, and it's approved by our pastor.

MERRITT It basically teaches that the answer to any math equation, can be found by asking your parents, or your spiritual advisor.

MOMMA K Or you can ask God for the answer directly, if you happen to be a spiritual advisor, or if you have children.

TEACH And you want me to teach this instead of real math?

MERRITT No, no, nobody's suggesting that.

POPPA K And we'll thank you not to call it "real math" anymore. It's misleading. "Liberal Math" or "Fuzzy Math", that's what you should call it from now on.

MOMMA K We're not saying you can't teach "Gay Math" in schools.

POPPA K "Terrorist Math".

MOMMA K We just want our children to know that there are alternatives, and they're all equally valid.

POPPA K "Alternative Math"! That's what they oughta call it.

TEACH So you want me to teach all my students that there's no such thing as math, so the two of you don't have to explain to your son why you're bad with money.

MOMMA K We want you to teach Intelligent Math as an alternative to this Alternative Math that's causing all the trouble.

TEACH But that's crazy! There are no alternatives. Math is empirical.

POPPA K I don't even know what that means.

TEACH Of course you don't. Because you're an imbecile.

POPPA K I don't know what that means either, but I'm picking up a tone I don't like.

MOMMA K There are always alternatives, Mr. Teach—Maybe the gay agenda thinks one and one is two, but in a traditional family, baby makes three.

POPPA K And from now on, there's no number 666. It creeps people out.

MOMMA K Anything that has 3 sixes in it adds up to Jesus fish.

MERRITT So, three times six equals Jesus fish.

POPPA K It's easy to remember, because it rhymes.

TEACH Okay, I'm sorry, but if you want to counterprogram what your kids are learning in school, you should do it on the weekend, like it's been done for 2000 years. I think that's a tradition we can all get behind!

MERRITT Well, I'm glad that's resolved. So we'll start with the Intelligent Math on Monday.

TEACH What?!

MERRITT I kinda like it. It even sounds smarter.

TEACH You can't expect me to teach my students this crap, just to please a few crackpots?

MERRITT Mr. Teach, the Kennellys are not a "few". They represent a clear majority of the complaints we receive about our school system. And I didn't hear you complaining last year when Mr. Wang lost his job, and Ms. White, the school nurse had to start teaching abstinence-only health care. Or when the civics classes had to change the way they said the pledge of allegiance. This a public school. Nobody expects you to do your job. But I do expect you to do the math.

(Merritt hands him the textbook and walks out.)

(BLACKOUT)