

From Math (any gender monologue)

By Don Zolidis

MS. WILLIAMS, an algebra teacher gives a speech in defense of Math.

MS. WILLIAMS

I know that algebra has a bad reputation – people think it’s difficult. People have a hard time understanding it. You probably have some kind of residual resentment out there from being forced to learn it. Earlier this year, a student asked me, “when are we going to use this in real life?” and I didn’t have a great answer for them. But I went home and thought about it, and to be honest, some of you are not going to use algebra in your adult life. You will happily go through existence not caring or knowing what a variable is, or bothering to wonder if you can graph an equation properly. That’s fine.

But you know what algebra is? It’s a system of knowledge. And it’s a system of knowledge that leads to more knowledge. It’s the foundation of every bit of math that comes afterwards. And you might not need that higher math, but if you’re an engineer, or a doctor, or a scientist, you will need that math. The people who built the roads you drive on – the people who built your smartphone – the people who put the satellites into orbit that you use for your GPS system – they’re using that math.

And what I do, as a teacher, is say, you *might* be one of those people one day. My whole job is to make sure that you have the opportunity to do anything you want. I am here to open doors for you - doors that you don’t even realize are in front of you. Algebra is a door. Some of you may go through it. Some of you won’t. But it is not my job to shut that door in your face. And even if you don’t see the path in front of you, I will fight as hard as I can to make sure that path is available if you want it.

A lot of people hate math. A lot of people are scared of math. And maybe you had bad math teachers in the past that made you feel dumb, but I want everyone on this school board to remember that education is about opening doors, not closing them. And I know people are out there saying that this knowledge is harmful, or makes you feel upset, or damages you in some way, but sometimes things are difficult, sometimes learning is painful, sometimes it makes our brains hurt to expand our horizons. Whether or not you want to believe in this, it’s the truth. And sometimes... the truth hurts.