

# ▲ BOOK REVIEW: *JAYDEN'S RESCUE*

REVIEWED BY LAURIE MOHER

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Dedicated to the late Bob Wilsher, former Chair of the Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB. It was through his keen observance that this book came to my attention.



A math-phobic's nightmare or a mathematician's dream come true? Technically both. In *Jayden's Rescue*, Vladimir Tumanov's first novel, the main character Alex is a mathphobic. Alex's teacher, Ms. Lund is a stereotypical math teacher who begins every Monday morning with a math test. Her justification for this strategy is,

"You need to wake up your brain cells at the start of a week!" For Alex, these tests are a source of anxiety. His brain "seizes up" from the start of the test until he hears the words, "Turn in your papers, please." The highest grade he was ever able to achieve on these tests was a 'C' and that was a rare achievement. The solution to Alex's math difficulties came "out of nowhere" and landed at his feet, in the form of a magical pencil. Life was good. From that day on it was nothing but 'A's for Alex on his Monday morning tests. However, his success was short lived. The pencil soon disappeared leaving in its place a mysterious book entitled, *Jayden's Rescue*. In this book, Jayden was a young, beautiful queen who ruled a prosperous kingdom called Idyllia.

Jayden was also a well respected scholar and teacher. And, although she had a love of all subject areas, her favourite subject was mathematics. In fact, "no one could explain the trickiest geometry theorems or most complicated algebra equations better than she did." The trouble began in Idyllia when Jayden spurned the marriage request of the evil King Rechner of Lugubria. As Alex began to read the story, he quickly discovered Rechner had kidnapped Jayden. She was being held captive in a castle with 400 rooms and needed his help. For although Jayden was capable of solving the mathematical problems in the book, she was prevented from doing so by Rechner. Alex realized that without solving the problems Jayden was stuck in the room where she was being held and could not move towards freedom. Alex wanted to help Jayden but had no desire to attempt the problems. He simply did not believe he could do the math without the help of the magical pencil. Alex did solve this first problem but with 400 rooms and 400 more problems, he knew he would have to enlist the help of his two friends, Sam and Vanessa. Together the three friends solve puzzle after puzzle and move Jayden safely through the castle. In the end they are successful in rescuing Jayden and Alex learns that he really is a mathematician.

This book is geared towards students in Grades 4 to 6. The mathematical problems in the book involve the strands of measurement, patterning and algebra, and number sense and numeration. Here is one of the problems the friends were faced with:

*King Rechner once a castle built. He used his magic powers.*

*And on the castle's mighty wall he put twelve silver towers.*

*Each one is taller than the last, each one beyond compare.*

*A lofty problem's built for you, so solve it, if you dare.*

*The smallest tower's twenty metres; tower two, five more.*

*The third one's height is thirty-five, and then comes tower four.*

*It is a huge one: fifty-five. So tell me, if you please:*

*What is the height of number twelve? The answer is a breeze. (p.43)*

Shortly after the problems are presented, solutions are offered, with the thinking clearly illustrated. Although the problems themselves have only one correct answer,

students could use a variety of ways to arrive at the answers. The only caution with this book is that some of the problems that are presented involve mathematics that goes beyond the Grades 4-6 level (e.g., some of the patterning and algebra toward the end of the book).

The characters in this book model good mathematics strategies. They reread questions, pull out important pieces of information, discuss ideas, and write solutions. They use different problem solving strategies to solve the problems (e.g., choose an operation, make a chart). The appropriate use of a calculator is modelled.

Aside from the mathematics, this is an interesting book to examine with students. The story of Jayden (story within the story) can be analyzed in terms of the elements of fairy tales and for the themes that run throughout this story. There are also sub-themes that run throughout the story of Alex and his friends; solving social problems with each other, teachers, and with parents. There is an emphasis on acceptable ways to solve social/ethical problems or challenges.

*Jayden's Rescue* was published in 2002 and is available from Scholastic Canada Ltd., ISBN 0-439-98864-0. The price is \$5.99.

When I read this book, I immediately began to envision a variety of ways this book could be used in a primary or junior classroom.

- Read the book and have students solve the problems in groups as the story progresses. The language in the book is better geared to independent reading at the 4/5 level but to have students solve the problems without first seeing the solutions, it would need to be read aloud.
- Use the book in the same way for grade 2/3 students, but substitute different problems for the ones in the book.
- Substitute some problems with multiple solutions for the problems in the book. Accept any solutions that are correct and can be justified.
- Have students use the adventure idea as a springboard and have them create their own math stories.
- Send one or two problems home each week to be solved with a family member.
- Read the book as part of a Reading Buddies or Math Buddies program and have partners solve the problems together. ▲

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**Elementary School** web site is <http://www.nctm.org/elementary/>.

**Middle School** web site is <http://www.nctm.org/middle/>. How Much of Yourself Do You See in a Small Mirror? Explores angles, reflections, lines of sight, triangles, and more at <http://www.figurethis.org/challenges/c09/challenge.htm>.

**High School** web site is <http://www.nctm.org/high/>. This site presents a weekly problem and highlight of the month with past problems and solutions.

## Leadership Messages

Highlights from *Students, Families, Communities, and Mathematics Teachers* by Johnny Lott, NCTM President (NCTM News Bulletin, April 2003).

"An often quoted proverb suggests that it takes a community to raise a child. As a mathematics educator, I am convinced that a teacher is needed to educate a child mathematically. We expect to see children learn when they are in a classroom with an appropriate curriculum, a highly qualified teacher, support materials and technology along with a supportive school administration. But it takes a community and a family for real success.

We have long known that family members are a child's first teachers. It is also frequently true that once a child has entered school, the child becomes more dependent on the school. In school we frequently reteach concepts as if they had never been learned at all. Students do not come to us as blank slates and we educators might be more effective if we capitalized on the education that families and communities provided in preschool learning.

We are running a huge risk of making learning much