Many people are surprised to find out I teach math at a local high school. The reactions I get tend to range from fear, hate, loathing, to sheer reluctance.

People take pride in hating math and love to share their horror stories as if trading stories about old war injuries.

"I hate math because I don't get anything!" said one irritated student at the beginning of the year.

As a teacher, I am constantly trying to figure out what can be done for the students who see little meaning in school and even less meaning in math class. So far, the most important thing I can do is make sure our curriculum is engaging and make sure learning is fun so that they want to be there and participate.

Come visit my class and you might see that math doesn't have to be this rigid set of rules and regulations going by the book. Math can be what my students make sense of it to be.

In fact, creative ways of getting to solutions needs to be encouraged rather than stifled.

The reality is that both reading and math are skills-based activities.

It is more than just memorizing facts.

It doesn't help that many math classes are teaching students to regurgitate what's going to be on some standardized test rather than how to think. Teaching the tricks to get the easy answer rather than trying to understand the concepts is not true learning.

Writing helps demonstrate that math is a part of our everyday lives.

Just look at our slumping economy and rising oil prices to see that we face math every day in terms of budgeting and living frugally.

Writing will help our students understand our global economy, teach them how to think outside the box, interpret the vast array of available information, develop good citizenship and build communication and people skills.

Writing gives a more personal connection to learning in general, helps students feel connected rather than disconnected to education and academics, and leads to understanding and memory retention across the curriculum.

Writing helps you explain steps to others, add depth, and imprint the lesson to long-term memory rather than short-term memory.

Students can no longer be force-fed material when they need to be taught how to think and problem-solve. Sharing in writing allows students to appreciate thinking in all classes, especially math.

Writing is the key to teaching effectively, not just preparing students for a state-mandated test, but going back to our mission, which is to prepare students for life.

If we truly want to teach our children to think, we must have interdisciplinary knowledge. We have to be a jack-of-all-trades, and a master of many.

We must be able to explain the content, not just spew factoids to be repeated in unison by those who happen to be sitting in the classroom. There is a huge difference in knowledge and understanding.

So, mastery of the subject matter is crucial, focusing on delivery methods is vital, and tying it into the real world will make it stick because it makes sense.

Writing and reflective activities can be fun and memorable. Writing can teach kids to think and express what they have learned. The magic panacea with which to solve the math crisis is to make math class fun, interesting and relevant to students by using WRITING!

A student wrote me a letter at the end of the year saying, "I never did well in math until I learned math in your class."

That makes it all worthwhile.

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