



5

FIFTH GRADE

# *Creativity* TASK CARDS

*Math Curse*  
by Jon Scieszka  
and Lane Smith

We bring learning to life.

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**REimagining and Accelerating  
Literacy through Arts Integration  
2025-2026**

In this story, the character finds humor and irony in many aspects of daily life.

**Let's read and use sound to bring the story to life!**

## GRADE 5 MATH CURSE MUSIC

### Supplies Needed

- *Math Curse* book
- Items for sound making (pencil, pot, spoon, etc.)

**I CAN  
create sounds  
to demonstrate  
events and details  
in a story.**

### Vocabulary

**Dynamics** - loud and soft sounds; volume

**Steady beat** - the consistent pulse or "heartbeat" of music

**Tempo** - the speed of the beat

**Found sound** - materials in the environment that make sound, including the body

**Timbre** - the distinctive quality of sound

**Character** - a person in a story or play, or an animal or object that has human qualities

**Central message** - the main point or lesson of the story

**Key details** - specific pieces of information that support or add meaning to the story

### Instructions

- 1 Read the book. Notice the many problems the character encounters during his day! Who is the main character? What is the central message of the story? Think about the events and issues the character experienced. What was the sequence of events. What are the details the author adds to make the book interesting?
- 2 Using found sound, experiment with different ways of making sound. Notice the distinct sound (timbre) each makes. Some materials may make several different sounds. When sounds are played together it creates texture. Notice the dynamics of each sound. Practice performing the steady beat using several found sounds.
- 3 Create music to illustrate the events or details in the book. For example, how could the plaid shirt, the blue shirt, and the striped shirt be represented with found sounds? How could you change the found sound to demonstrate the ugly, plaid shirt? What it sound differently? Why did you make those choices? Next, try using your favorite sound at different volumes to represent each type of shirt and show the difference with dynamic changes.
- 4 Find other events or details in the story and add sounds as you reread the pages. What sounds would the character make when he feels trapped in the math curse? What sounds could you create to demonstrate how the character feels when the curse is broken? How do the sounds compare?



### Extensions

- Create rhythms using the sounds you created. Combine the sounds to add texture.
- What would happen if the math curse wasn't broken? Write a new musical ending to the story.

In this book, the main character finds humor and irony in everyday life.

**Let's create a dance that demonstrates how the character reacts to the events of the day.**

### Supplies Needed

- *Math Curse* book
- Music with a steady and clear beat (optional)
- Pencil and paper

**I CAN**  
use dance  
elements to retell a  
story.

### Vocabulary

**8-count** - The way dancers count music in sets of eight beats (1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8)

**Locomotor movement** - a movement that travels through space (walking, skipping)

**Non-locomotor movement** - a movement that does not travel through space (twisting, bending)

**Level** - one of the aspects of movement (there are three basic levels in dance: high, middle, and low)

**Tempo** - refers to the pace or speed of movement

**Irony** - a situation which brings the exact opposite of what one would expect, often resulting in humor or amusement

**Character** - a person in a story or play, or an animal or object that has human qualities

**Central message** - the main point or lesson of the story

### Instructions

- 1 Read *Math Curse*. Notice how the main character sees everything, even the day, as a problem to solve. How does the character react to the problems faced during the day? What happens in the beginning of the story? How did the character change during the story? How does the story end? What is the central message of the story?
- 2 Dancers count in eights (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8). Today, you will create a dance with four different movements. The dance will be 16 counts long expressing the character's feelings from the beginning of the story, through the middle, until the end.
- 3 What were the feelings of the character at the beginning of the story? Create a movement to demonstrate those feelings. During the story, did his emotions change? Create two new movements to demonstrate the change of feelings in the middle of the story. How did the character feel at the end of the story? Create a fourth movement to show how the character felt at the end of the story.
- 4 Your dance should include at least:
  - a. three different levels (high, medium, low)
  - b. one locomotor movement
  - c. one non-locomotor movement
  - d. one fast movement and one slow movement
- 5 Plan and build your sequence carefully so you can fit all of these "dance variables" into your 16 counts. Practice counting out loud in eights as you perform your dance.

### Extension

- Challenge yourself to create a 32-count sequence in a new order. Can you keep all the same movement elements (levels, tempo, locomotor/non-locomotor), but change when they happen in the sequence? You could add more movements to demonstrate what happened in the story

## ABOUT

The REimagining and Accelerating Literacy through Arts Integration (REALAI) grant supports the literacy achievement of 3,200 students and 170 teachers, media specialists, and literacy coaches across six schools in Georgia and South Carolina.

In addition to professional learning for educators, this project contributes significantly to school library collections through the purchase of developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant books.

This grant also includes events to provide families with access to books and other content about how to support their child's reading development.

These materials and the accompanying book, *A Chair for My Mother*, are made possible through the  
**United States Department of Education**  
and  
**ArtsNOW.**



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Be creative and explore how a dreaded *Math Curse* can be so wonderfully funny!

Let's create humorous facial expressions and voices to reflect the character in the story.

### Supplies Needed

- *Math Curse* book
- Paper and pencil

I CAN use facial expressions and my voice to bring a character to life.

### Vocabulary

**Humor** - the quality of being amusing or comical, inspiring delight and laughter, usually resulting from a surprise, a shift of meaning or the flipping of expectations

**Irony** - a situation which brings the exact opposite of what one would expect, often resulting in humor or amusement

**Non-sequitur** (from the Latin for "not following") - an idea or comment that seems to have no reasonable connection to what came before it

**Word play** - the clever and witty use of words, often involving double meanings, puns, or other devices that go beyond literal meanings to create humor

### Instructions

- 1 Read the book. Who is the main character? What is happening when he begins to see everything as a math problem? Find several of your favorite pages of *Math Curse*.
- 2 Look for the ways Jon Scieszka (pronounced "SHESS-kah") and Lane Smith use to create humor. Note that each change in the setting usually starts out as a straightforward problem. Then the character sees other problems. Look for surprises, shifts in meaning, irony, non-sequiturs, and word play. How does the character react to each situation? What emotions is the character feeling when faced with a new problem or question?
- 3 Actors use their bodies, face, and voice to create characters. What voice would the character have? Would it have a high pitch or low pitch? Would it be fast or slow? How would it change as the character encounters the events of the day?
- 4 Now create facial expressions to go along with the events of the story. What would your face look like if you were surprised, angry, frustrated or happy? Try your different facial expressions to reflect the character in the book.
- 5 Reread some of the story, using the voice and facial expressions you used to create the character in the book. Reread the book out loud with rising emotion. Like the character in the book, start simple and calm, then become more frustrated, hysterical, or silly as you go.

### Extensions

- Draw a picture of a problem and solution in your life. Try to reflect the visual style of the book in your illustration.
- As you encounter humor, in talking with friends or in watching TV or films, look for the humor techniques that the authors demonstrate in *Math Curse*.

*Math Curse* makes everyday problems fun to solve.

Let's turn a silly math moment from your day into a creative comic, just like the main character in *Math Curse*!

### Supplies Needed

- *Math Curse* book
- Paper
- Pencil and eraser
- Markers or colored pencils (optional)

I CAN use the elements of art to design and create a comic strip based on a text.

### Vocabulary

**Comic** - a story told through pictures and speech bubbles in a horizontal line, template below

**Panel** - a box in a comic that shows one part of the story

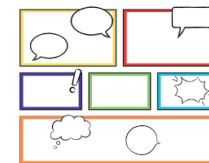
**Exaggeration** - making something seem bigger or funnier than it is

**Expression** - a way to show feelings through faces and body language

**Visual storytelling** - using pictures to tell a story or explain an idea

### Instructions

- 1 Read *Math Curse*. Think about the character and the problems that occurred during the day. What humorous moments occurred in the story? How was the character feeling during the story? Did those feelings change? Why or why not? Was the character able to overcome the "math curse"?
- 2 Think of a new ending to the story. Did the character encounter other issues during the day? Did the character encounter any other people in the new ending to help solve the problems?
- 3 Sketch a short comic (3–6 panels) that retells the story or create a comic strip with a new ending. Each panel could be a different event from the story. Use speech bubbles to share the characters' thoughts and questions.
- 4 Add color, details, and expressions to bring it to life. The author uses a lot of humor and irony in the book. Can you include more panels to add humorous moments?



### Extensions

- Trade comics with a friend, or family member, and discuss your alternate endings.
- Turn your comic into a short animated video using a stop-motion or drawing app such as Ninja brush or autodraw.