



What is Math?

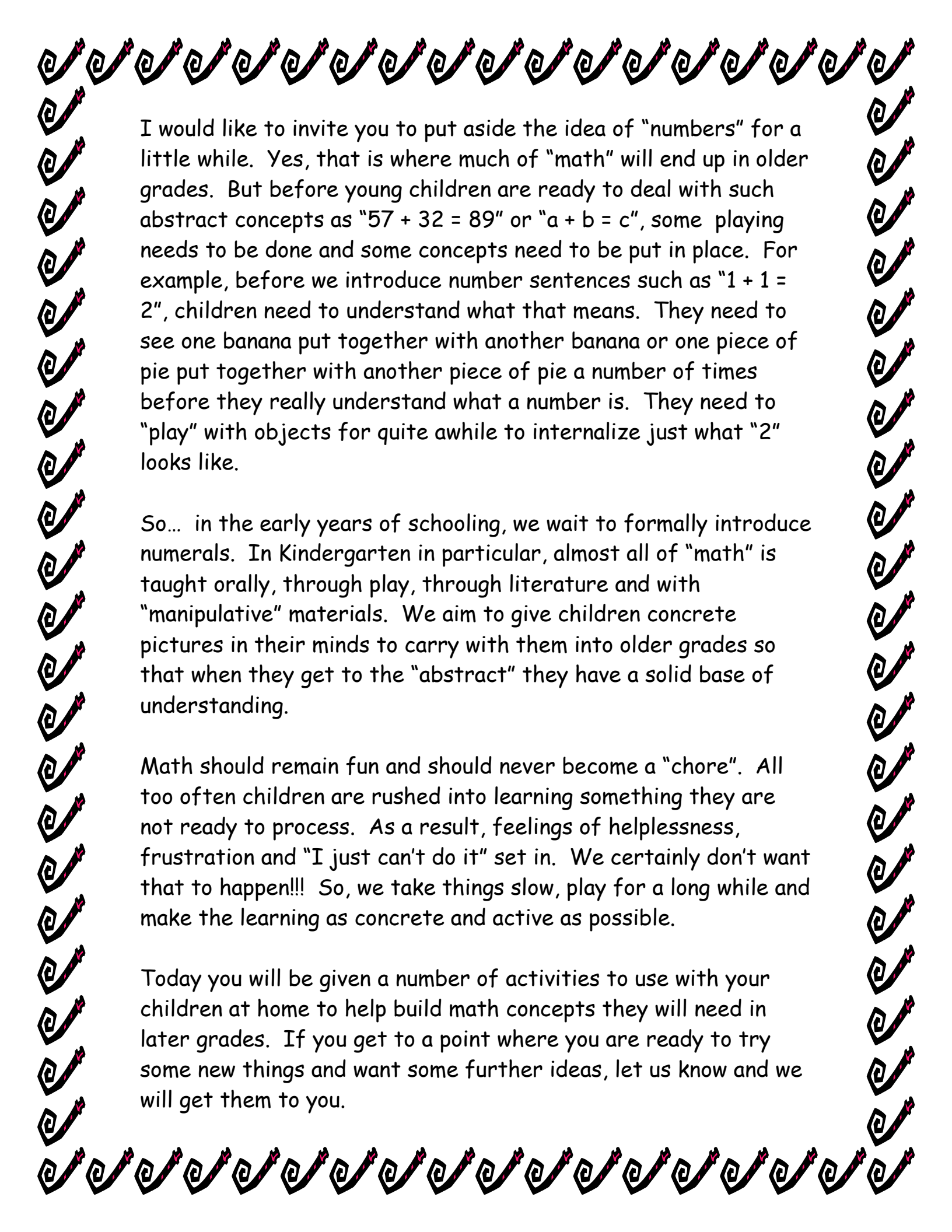
By Gayle Hernandez

Math is all around us. It is in almost everything we do. It includes much more than numbers - it is a state of mind and a way of thinking.

"Math" is:

- Patterning
- Sequencing
- Counting
- One to one correspondence (Being able to point to objects while counting)
- Symbols (such as +, -, =, numbers, etc.)
- Place value (or trading)
- Sorting
- Problem solving (or decision making)
- Measurement (length, weight, capacity, volume, etc.)
- Comparing
- Money
- Time
- Shapes
- Symmetry
- Data analysis
- Graphing
- And more

When adults think of "math", many images come to mind... addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, algebra, calculus... the list goes on! Notice how many of these words bring pictures of numbers to mind...



I would like to invite you to put aside the idea of "numbers" for a little while. Yes, that is where much of "math" will end up in older grades. But before young children are ready to deal with such abstract concepts as " $57 + 32 = 89$ " or " $a + b = c$ ", some playing needs to be done and some concepts need to be put in place. For example, before we introduce number sentences such as " $1 + 1 = 2$ ", children need to understand what that means. They need to see one banana put together with another banana or one piece of pie put together with another piece of pie a number of times before they really understand what a number is. They need to "play" with objects for quite awhile to internalize just what "2" looks like.

So... in the early years of schooling, we wait to formally introduce numerals. In Kindergarten in particular, almost all of "math" is taught orally, through play, through literature and with "manipulative" materials. We aim to give children concrete pictures in their minds to carry with them into older grades so that when they get to the "abstract" they have a solid base of understanding.

Math should remain fun and should never become a "chore". All too often children are rushed into learning something they are not ready to process. As a result, feelings of helplessness, frustration and "I just can't do it" set in. We certainly don't want that to happen!!! So, we take things slow, play for a long while and make the learning as concrete and active as possible.

Today you will be given a number of activities to use with your children at home to help build math concepts they will need in later grades. If you get to a point where you are ready to try some new things and want some further ideas, let us know and we will get them to you.