



Berel and the Math Wall

Ages 6-9
A story and 9 activities



Berel and the Math Wall

Berel loves reading. He loves science, and he loves drawing. He does not love math.

On Monday, the class starts fractions. Morah Ruchama draws a pizza on the board and cuts it into eight slices.

"If you eat three slices," she says, "what fraction of the pizza did you eat?"

Berel stares at the pizza. The numbers swim in front of his eyes. His heart begins to thump.

Three out of eight, he thinks. But then he hears Yoni call out, "Three eighths!" and he realizes he wasn't fast enough.

By Wednesday, the class has moved on to adding fractions. Berel looks at the page and feels like he'll run into a wall. A tall, brick wall that goes all the way up to the sky.

"I'm just bad at math," he tells his mother. "It's not my thing."

"Is it that you're bad at math?" asks Mommy. "Or is it that you haven't figured out this one part yet?"

Berel pokes at his rice. "I don't know."

"Show me one problem."

He opens his notebook. The problem says: $\frac{1}{4} + \frac{2}{4}$.

"Okay," says Mommy. "What does one-fourth mean?"

"One piece out of four equal pieces."

"Great. Can you draw it?"

Berel sketches a rectangle and divides it into four boxes. He colors in one.

"And two-fourths?"

He draws another rectangle. He colors two boxes.

"Now put them together. How many boxes are colored?"

Berel counts. "Three. Out of four."

"So what's the answer?"

His eyes widen. "Three-fourths!"

"You did it," says Mommy.

"I did it with pictures," says Berel.

"Pictures count."

The next day, he draws pictures for every problem. It is slow, but he gets them right. When he can't draw it, he whispers to himself, "What's one piece? How many pieces?"

On Thursday, he raises his hand. "Morah, can I ask something? I get it when I draw it, but I don't get why the denominators stay the same."

Morah Ruchama looks pleased. "That's a wonderful question. Come up and I'll show you."

She draws two chocolate bars on the board, one cut into four pieces and one cut into six. "When the pieces are different sizes, you can't just add them. You have to make them the same size first."

"Ohhh," says Berel. "That's why."

On Friday, there is a quiz. Berel takes a deep breath. He draws a little picture next to every problem. When he finishes, he looks it over, and then looks it over again.

On Sunday night, Berel can't sleep, but it is the good kind of nervous, the kind that feels like a lollipop in your stomach. He runs through the problems in his head, with pictures.

On Monday, Morah hands back the papers. Berel's says 92, with a gold star. He stares at it for a long time. He can't stop smiling.

"Look!" he says to Yoni. "I got a ninety-two."

"Nice," says Yoni. "You've been working hard."

At home, he tells Mommy. She hugs him so tight that his glasses slide down his nose.

"I thought there was a wall," he says.

"There was," says Mommy. "And you climbed it, one brick at a time."

That night, Berel tapes a drawing to his wall: a tall brick wall, with a little stick-figure boy at the top, waving.



Activity 1 of 9

Remember the story

1. What topic does the class start on Monday?

2. How does Berel solve $\frac{1}{4} + \frac{2}{4}$ at home?

3. What does Berel ask Morah on Thursday?

4. What grade does Berel get on the quiz?



Activity 2 of 9

Fact or guess? (circle one)

1. Morah Ruchama draws a pizza on the board. Fact / Guess
2. Berel is bad at everything. Fact / Guess
3. Berel draws a picture next to every problem. Fact / Guess
4. Berel tapes a drawing of a wall to his room. Fact / Guess



Activity 3 of 9

Think and write

1. What subject feels like a wall to you?

2. What helps Berel climb it?

3. Who could you ask for help with something hard?



Activity 4 of 9

Word search (find all 6)

Words: FRACTION, PIZZA, WALL, DRAW, QUIZ, STAR

F	P	P	I	U	R	B	H	V	R	O
V	R	I	R	J	A	O	C	H	J	G
T	F	A	Z	F	T	C	H	L	N	Y
S	A	U	C	Z	S	M	L	L	P	F
S	T	I	C	T	A	D	L	V	O	G
H	Y	L	W	E	I	E	A	F	S	V
C	P	I	A	I	J	O	W	A	Q	S
J	Y	S	R	B	J	B	N	P	U	C
M	W	D	D	J	N	M	F	I	I	K
G	E	J	O	N	D	V	F	D	Z	E
O	W	J	J	S	O	B	T	F	M	C



Activity 5 of 9

Scrambled words (from the story)

1. SNAOFIRTC = _____

2. PZZIA = _____

3. LAWL = _____

4. SRTIUPEC = _____

5. IUZQ = _____



Activity 6 of 9

Say it out loud

Practice each line in a calm, steady voice:

"I don't get it yet. Can you show me?"

"Let me draw it."

"I did it!"

Activity 7 of 9

My chart

My Climbing Chart

#	Hard thing	What helped	What I did next
Subject 1			
Subject 2			
Subject 3			



Activity 8 of 9

Draw it

Draw a tall brick wall with a little boy at the top, waving.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for drawing a tall brick wall with a little boy at the top waving.



Activity 9 of 9

Answers

Remember the story:

1. Fractions
2. He draws pictures
3. Why the denominators stay the same
4. Ninety-two with a gold star

Fact or guess: 1 Fact; 2 Guess; 3 Fact; 4 Fact

Scrambled words: FRACTIONS, PIZZA, WALL, PICTURES, QUIZ

Think and write: answers will vary; talk them over together.