

Realistic  
Fiction

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Math-lete  
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by Paul Mason  
illustrated by  
Gervasio Benitez



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Graw  
Hill

PAIRED  
READ

Poetry

## STRATEGIES & SKILLS

### Comprehension

**Strategy:** Ask and Answer  
Questions

**Skill:** Theme

### Vocabulary

attain, dangling, hovering,  
triumph

### Vocabulary Strategy

Connotation and Denotation

Word Count: 1,811



**Education**

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**Essential Question**

How do writers look at success in different ways?

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**Chapter 1**  
 Math Team..... 2

**Chapter 2**  
 Practice..... 6

**Chapter 3**  
 The Competition ..... 10

**Chapter 4**  
 “We Have a Winner”..... 13

**Respond to Reading**..... 16

**PAIRED READ** Cross-country Race .....17

**Focus on Literary Elements**.....20

## CHAPTER 1

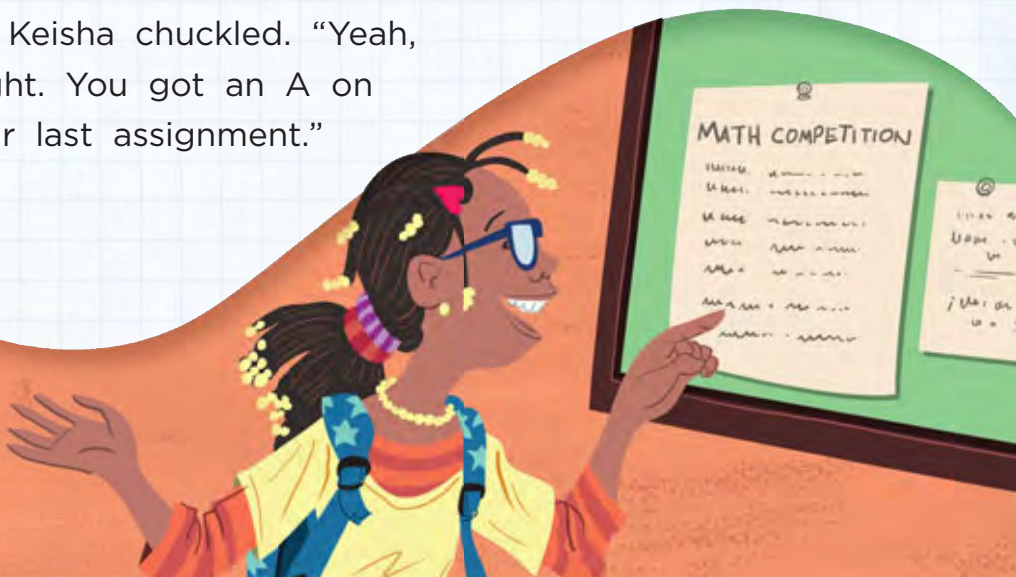
# Math Team

A group of students were hovering around the bulletin board outside Mr. Nelson's office. Word had quickly spread that he'd posted the names of the team who would be representing Parkside Elementary in the district math competition. Keisha wiggled through the small crowd and found her name on the list, right below her best friend Abby's.

Keisha gave a shout and turned to Abby, who was hanging back from the group. "We both made it!" Then she noticed that her friend didn't look very enthusiastic. "What's wrong? I thought you'd be over the moon."

Abby shrugged. "The truth is," her voice dropped as they walked to the cafeteria, "I'm having trouble with math right now."

Keisha chuckled. "Yeah, right. You got an A on our last assignment."





“Only because I spent hours struggling with it,” Abby replied. “It took me every night for a whole week to get it right.” The girls picked up their lunch trays and found a place at a table. “I used to find math a breeze, but not right now. I was kind of hoping I wouldn’t make the team.”

Keisha shook her head. This wasn’t like Abby. “Have you talked to Mr. Nelson?”

“Not yet.”

“Well, you should—maybe you just need some extra help.”

“You’re probably right,” replied Abby.

After lunch, Abby went to talk to Mr. Nelson before class started. “Happy to be on the team?” Mr. Nelson grinned. Abby stared at her feet as she described what she’d just told Keisha.

Mr. Nelson listened patiently. "I've been teaching for a lot of years, and I know a good mathematician when I see one," he said, smiling. "You've worked hard to attain your position on the team. I don't want you to give your place to someone else."

Abby managed a laugh. "Really?"

"Yes," Mr. Nelson replied, chuckling. "Why don't you stay after school today, and I'll work with you. Mrs. Diaz and I are supposed to be planning some lessons, but I'm sure she won't mind."



After school, Mr. Nelson pulled out some different resources, searching for something that would help Abby. Mrs. Diaz was busy working at another desk.

“Okay, so you’re having problems with fractions, right?” Mr. Nelson said, handing Abby a worksheet. “Try doing a few practice questions. Circle the ones you don’t understand, and we’ll go over them together.”

“Thanks,” Abby said, looking over the problems on the worksheet.

“You know, I remember being totally stumped by this impossible problem on a big math test,” Mr. Nelson said.

“What did you do?”

“I gave up and handed in the test, leaving the tricky question unanswered.” Mr. Nelson shook his head. “When we went over the answers in class afterward, I realized the problem wasn’t that difficult after all. I just needed to look at it from a different angle. I gave up too easily.”

## CHAPTER 2

# Practice

The next day, the math team did some preparation for the competition. Mr. Nelson placed a sheet of paper on the desk in front of each of them. “Today you’re going to hit the ground running,” he said. “We’re going to do some actual questions from past competitions, so you’ll be taking a real test in real test conditions.”

Abby glanced nervously over at Keisha, who was sitting opposite her. Her friend smiled back as if to say, “You’ll do fine.”

“Work together as a team,” Mr. Nelson continued. When you’ve completed a section, hand it in and I’ll give you another one. Each set of questions gets more difficult. Are you ready?” The team looked at each other and nodded.

“Great,” said Mr. Nelson, hitting the stopwatch. “Let’s begin.”





Raj took the first piece of paper off Mr. Nelson's desk and the team huddled around it. "If you take  $\frac{1}{3}$  of ..." the question began. "Great, fractions," Abby thought.

By the end of the session, Abby's head was spinning. Though the team had completed the test and had done reasonably well, Abby knew she hadn't pulled her weight. The first set of questions had knocked her confidence.

"Don't worry," said Keisha, "everyone has off days."

"Tell me about it," Abby agreed. "That was tough—looks like I need practice and plenty of it. Do you want to do some more practice problems after school?"

"Sure," said Keisha.

Each afternoon that week, the two girls went to Abby's apartment to work on their math. Abby showed Keisha the questions Mr. Nelson had given her, which Keisha had to admit were pretty difficult. Keisha showed Abby some new multiplication strategies. Abby paid close attention.

"Splitting the numbers into smaller chunks is a much better way to do it," she said, watching Keisha figure out the last problem.

"My dad showed me that method, actually," admitted Keisha. "I was really stuck and needed help."

Abby thought about what her friend had said. Keisha was right. It had been foolish to struggle along on her own all this time. She should have asked for help earlier.



Keisha searched on an online math Web site and found some more problems for them to tackle together. She raised her eyebrows. “How about this one: ‘Frank makes 15 ice-cream cones in an hour, but two of them melt every 15 minutes. How long will it take him to make 210 cones?’ Ugh.” Keisha wrinkled up her nose. “These are going to be challenging!”

“Wait, I think I know how to do it,” Abby said, and she started scribbling in her notebook.

Keisha glanced at her friend and grinned. Abby was definitely getting her groove back.



## CHAPTER 3

# The Competition

Keisha wasn't the only one who noticed Abby's progress. At the next team practice, their teacher watched as Abby tore into the problems with a new hunger. "You were right, Mr. Nelson," she said. "I just needed to look at the problems differently."

"Do you feel ready for the competition?" he asked.

"I hope so," replied Abby.

On the day of the district math competition, Mr. Nelson led the team into the auditorium. At the sight of the huge hall filled with rows of tables, their jaws dropped. The winner's cup sat in a prominent place on the judges' table, the prize dangling like a carrot before them.

"I had no idea there would be so many other teams here," said Raj.

"And all these math-letes are at the top of their classes in math. Just like you," Mr. Nelson said.

Abby couldn't stop a grin from spreading across her face. "This is going to be great!"

As the team progressed through the pages of problems—with Keisha running them back and forth to the judges’ table—the calculations became more complex. The scores were constantly being updated on a board, and the team noticed they weren’t doing as well as before.

“We must have gotten a few questions on that last one wrong,” Sophie muttered.

“We’ve got to stay focused and positive,” said Abby. “Trust me, I’ve been there.” Keisha brought them the next set of problems, and Abby read out the first equation. The others were grateful that someone was taking charge. Abby guided them through the problem, and before they knew it, they had another problem in front of them, and then another.



“Come on, guys,” said Abby, quickly glancing over at the scoreboard, “we can do this!” They had clawed their way up to second place.

Then the bell rang. Time was up, pencils were put down, and there was a hush as the final answers were scored.

“Mathematicians,” one of the judges announced, “we have two teams tied for first place. This means we’re going to have a tiebreaker!” A loud murmur swept over the auditorium.

Abby and the others cheered as they saw the name “Parkside Elementary” sharing the top slot on the scoreboard. They’d been given one more chance to win the cup—all they needed was to keep their eyes on the prize.

From the other side of the hall, one of their rivals waved at them, and Abby returned the gesture. “May the best team win,” she thought.

## CHAPTER 4

# "We Have a Winner"

The judges reset the clock, allowing five minutes to complete the final question and then the starting bell sounded. Keisha and the runner from the other team dashed over to the judges' table and grabbed the sheets.

Abby read the problem aloud. As they listened, the others groaned. "Any ideas?" asked Raj. Keisha and Sophie both shook their heads.

Abby was thinking silently. Then it hit her: this problem was similar to the one about making ice-cream cones that Keisha had found the other day. Abby reread the question, then furiously started solving it.







In a flash, Abby finished, and she sprinted to the judges' table just as the bell sounded. She got there in the nick of time.

As the judges reviewed the two teams' answers, Abby shrugged at her teammates. "I'm not sure if I got it right," she said.

One of the judges stepped up to the microphone. "We have a winner," he paused, keeping them in suspense ... "Parkside Elementary!" he said at last.

The sound of loud applause filled the hall as the Parkside team collected the cup together in triumph. Abby beamed at Mr. Nelson who was sitting at the back of the hall, and he gave her a look that said, "I told you so."

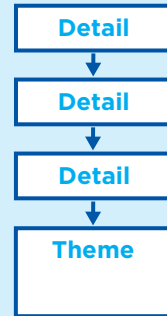
"Looks like you had an on day today," said Keisha.

"I guess I did," Abby said with a grin.

# Respond to Reading

## Summarize

Summarize how Abby achieves success in *The Math-lete*. Your graphic organizer may help you.



## Text Evidence

1. What features of the story tell you it is realistic fiction? **GENRE**
2. What does Abby achieve in the story? **THEME**
3. On page 9, Abby “started scribbling in her notebook.” What other words could the author have used instead of *scribbling*? Why do you think the author used the word *scribbling* instead of another word? **CONNOTATION AND DENOTATION**
4. Write about how Abby becomes successful at math. Use details from the story in your answer.

**WRITE ABOUT READING**

**Compare Texts**

Read about how a runner feels having finished a race.

# Cross-country Race

The course stretches out before me,  
Like a stony mountain I must climb.  
I've never reached the top before,  
But I'm determined to do it this time, this time  
I will finish the race this time.

With a blast of the horn we're off,  
Twenty sharp-eyed runners and me,  
I've already fallen behind  
to the tail,  
But I'll cross that line,  
they'll see, they'll see,  
I'll run to the end,  
they'll see.



My heavy shoes slog in the field,  
Sweat trickling down like a stream,  
I gulp for breath, my face scalds red  
But my eyes have a gleam, a gleam,  
My eyes have a hopeful gleam.

Soon arrives the clatter of hands,  
The first of the runners is through,  
Over the line, in record quick time,  
And pinned with a medal of blue, of blue,  
They were pinned with a medal of blue.

Not for me such a moment of glory,  
But I won't give up without a fight,  
And though I'm the last one running,  
I've got the end in my sight, my sight,  
The end of the race is in sight.



I stumble across the finish line,  
The crowd roars as loud as a storm,  
They know that I've never finished before,  
And want to make me feel warm, feel warm,  
Like sunshine their cheers feel warm.



## Make Connections

How do the words the writer uses in *Cross-country Race* help you to understand how the runner feels?

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What do Abby in *The Math-lete* and the runner in *Cross-country Race* have to do to achieve their personal goals? **TEXT TO TEXT**

# Focus on Literary Elements

**Repetition** Poets use repetition to make readers slow down and take notice. This encourages them to focus on the meaning of the words. Repetition also helps poets achieve a rhythm.

**Read and Find** In *Cross-country Race* the repetition in the last two lines of each verse helps us understand the effort the narrator is putting into the race and her determination to complete it “this time.” If you read the poem aloud, the rhythm of the repeated words is similar to the rhythm of a runner’s breathing, or of feet pounding the ground.

## Your Turn

Work with a group to create a multimedia version of the poem. Practice reading the poem aloud several times until you can feel the rhythm. Make a recording of your reading. Create a soundtrack, a series of drawings, or a set of physical movements to accompany the recording. Share your work with the class.

## Literature Circles

### Fiction

# Thinkmark

### Characters

Who are the main characters in *The Math-lete*?

What are the main characters like?

### Sequence of Events

What happened during *The Math-lete*?

### Plot

What was Abby's problem in the story?

How did she solve it?

### Conclusions

What conclusions can you draw about the importance of personal and group achievement?

### Make Connections

How is *Cross-country Race* like other poems you have read?

# Achievements

GR R • Benchmark 40 • Lexile TK

Grade 4 • Unit 4 Week 5

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