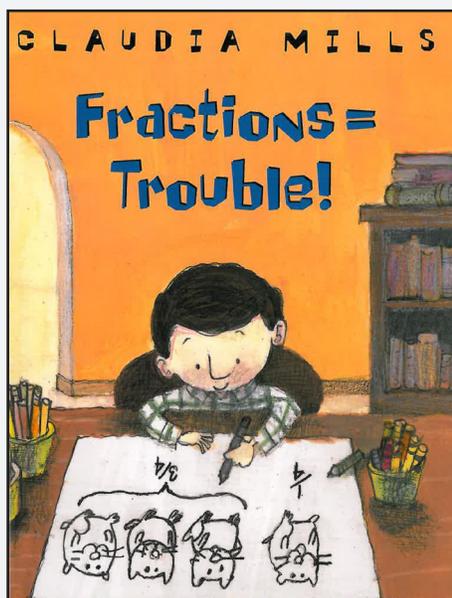


## First Opinion: Math Isn't the End of the World

Mills, Claudia. *Fractions=Trouble!* Illus. G. Brian Karas. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.

*Benjamin Boche*



Did his parents expect him to go a math tutor for the rest of his life? Would he be ninety years old and hobbling off with his cane to see his math tutor, while all the other old people were watching cartoons and playing with their hamsters?(104)

In Claudia Mills's previous novel, *7X9=Trouble*, third grader Wilson Williams overcame his difficulties with multiplication tables and was relieved that he wasn't the only one who struggled with math. The stakes are higher this time, though, as Wilson has moved on to fractions, and there is no way he'll ever be able to figure out how they work. To make matters worse, Wilson's parents have hired a math tutor. Sure, other students in his class struggle with math, but Wilson doesn't know of anyone else who has a math tutor. He'll never be able to tell anyone, especially his best friend Josh.

Learning new material in school is never an easy task, and Wilson is a great representation of kids who are apprehensive but eager to succeed. The sessions with his tutor, Mrs. Tucker, also present realistic, alternative ways to engage students with unfamiliar subject

matter. Mrs. Tucker taps into Wilson's interests immediately and puts little to no pressure on him to understand everything the first time.

Wilson stared at her. He knew his mother wasn't paying Mrs. Tucker so that he could sit at Mrs. Tucker's house drawing hamsters. He could sit drawing hamsters at home for free. But he wasn't about to complain and beg to do fractions instead. And pretty soon he was doing fractions, sort of. (30)

Instead she lets Wilson ask the questions and come up with ways he can navigate the complexity of fractions. Mrs. Tucker also alleviates many kids' fears about tutors in general, something that many teachers and parents would appreciate if using this book in school and at home.

Claudia Mills also doesn't make fractions the focus of the entire book. There are other school topics addressed, such as spelling and science, with an entire subplot involving science fairs and the fun ideas you see from third graders. Wilson also has to deal with his little brother, Kipper, and the responsibility of being a good big brother. There is enough going on to keep readers interested, especially if they would be hesitant to pick up the book because of the math emphasis.

It can be sometimes difficult for teachers to find good, readable books to give to students of this age. *Fractions=Trouble!* provides enough entry points for all types of students and could work well as a read aloud or individual reading. There are enough themes and issues to discuss and translate well over into an everyday school setting. The pencil drawings from G. Brian Karas also add a nice touch to the story Mills has created. Like Wilson, you may be seeing fractions everywhere once you've finished, and that should make you feel very whole inside.

### Work Cited

Mills, Claudia. *7 X 9 = Trouble!* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.

### About the Author

**Benjamin Boche** is a Ph.D. student in the Literacy and Language program at Purdue University. His interests include how literature is an important element in creating successful literacy communities in schools.