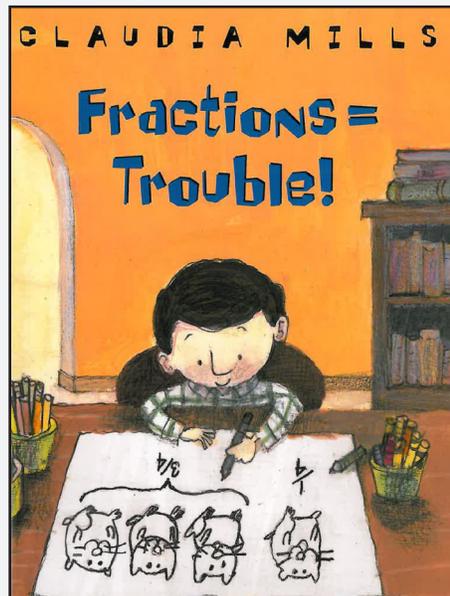


## Second Reaction: Math Can Work in a Children's Book

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

Kim Whitchurch



*Fractions=Trouble!* is a perfect book for third graders. The main character, Wilson, is a third grade boy who struggles to understand math. His parents decide to hire a tutor to give him some additional help. Wilson is embarrassed by the idea of going to a tutor, so he tries to hide the tutor from his friends. Eventually his little brother “spills the beans” and his friend finds out. Wilson is horrified. He actually enjoys the time he spends with the tutor, because she is skilled at incorporating his interests and talents when she works on math concepts.

*Fractions=Trouble!* has several child-friendly ideas. Students love pets, so the hamsters really draw them into the story line. The younger brother is also an example that students can relate to.

As a teacher, there are several reasons that I like this book. It deals with students' strengths and weaknesses in a practical way. Wilson notices that his friend can't spell and that he can. He also sees his own problem with understanding math. I appreciate the way they acknowledge Wilson's embarrassment about the tutor.

I teach a class of lively third graders. Every day I try to connect learning with student's personal interests and strengths. Although, finding the right way to help struggling learners connect with the material is a daily challenge, *Fractions=Trouble!* gave me the opportunity to discuss this process with my students. The tutor represents teaching at its best. She is friendly and cares about Wilson as a person. She draws out his interests and uses them to make learning more interesting. I love the way she uses his drawing to connect him to the math concepts. Wilson feels like he has been sitting around drawing instead of learning a difficult concept in math. She uses strategies from multiple intelligences and differentiated instruction to reach Wilson.

As I read the book to my students, we talked about how Wilson was feeling. We discussed his strengths and challenges, and then we spent some time talking about our own strengths and challenges. It was very enlightening and a great way to begin a personal discussion about our learning styles. We created a strength wall where students offered their strengths to other students. So if you were having trouble in math, you could go to the wall and see if there were any students who were willing to help in that area. It was a nice connection for our classroom community.

The author used some good vocabulary: hypothesis, tutor, scientific questioning. Added examples and definitions of each word enable students to gain the meaning of the words.

The story was well received by the students. I was able to expand on the ideas presented through discussion and added activities. It is a good way to build community as we discover the unique profile of other students in our class and a great way to learn to work together.

### About the Author

**Kim Whitchurch** has been a teacher for 33 years. She has worked in classrooms in Illinois, Indiana, and Zambia, Africa. She loves watching students learn new things. Each student is unique, and she enjoys finding the most effective ways to reach out and connect with her students.