**Numbers**

28 desks in the classroom

11 of them filled

17 empty

10 students

1 teacher

1 phone out

2 typing thumbs

36 text messages sent

0 work done

Jake Lynch

**Met-a-Four”**

I “met a four”

when I was three

and oh the things

it did to me

and fingers counting

one-two- three.

When the four

brought in a five

all my counting fingers

came alive.

Reaching for the

other hand

said “times two”

is oh so grand.

They ran through

six, then seven – eight

danced with the nine

to celebrate.

Then the quantum leap

to ten

and shouts of

let’s do it again.

Somehow the

ones and two and threes

increase in size

exponentially.

Still, my fingers are

mathematically smitten

seeking warmth

within a mitten.

John G. Lawless

**Standard Deviations**

If you looked at the range of me

and took the mean of me

then subtracted every me

from that mean

and squared my differences,

would you think

you were done with me?

Or would you find the mean

of those squared me's

and go to the root of me?

Would you know me then?

Or only the normal me?

Would you blink twice

at the me's who stray so far

from that mean of me?

Those rare me's?

Would you be with me

once you've seen

the meaner me,

and the best of me,

so far, so close

to who I fear is me

to who I hope to be?

JPowers

from: **Treatise on Infinite Series**

Even as the finite encloses an infinite series

And in the unlimited limits appear,

So the soul of immensity dwells in minutia

And in narrowest limits no limits inhere.

What joy to discern the minute in infinity!

The vast to perceive in the small, what divinity!

Jacob Bernoulli

**Fermat's Last Theorem Poetry Challenge**

With an integer greater than 2

It's something one simply can't do.

If this margin were fat,

I'd show you all that,

But it's not, so the proof is on you!

Ted Munger

**Directions:** Read these math poems and write on of your own

**THE MATHEMATICS OF YOUR LEAVING**  
Today I remembered my algebra book  
flying across the room,  
my father shouting I was stupid,  
a dumb girl, because I couldn’t do math–  
and all because you are leaving,  
I’m calculating numbers,  
totaling years, even  
working out equations:  
If x + 1 = 2, what is the value of x alone?

All day I’ve been thinking about  
word problems: If a train travels west  
at the speed of 60 miles per hour  
against a thirty mile per hour wind, how fast  
will you be gone?

Today I’ve added and subtracted,  
multiplied and divided. I’ve mastered  
fractions. Even that theorem  
I could never understand–plus 1  
plus minus 1 equals zero–is perfectly clear.

Then just when I think I’ve finally  
caught on, a whiz kid now, a regular  
Einstein, suddenly the numbers  
betray me. No matter how many times  
I count the beads on the abacus, work it out  
on the calculator, everything comes  
to nothing.

Mute and fractured, a dumb girl again,  
I sit alone at my desk, staring  
out the window, homework  
incomplete. A square root unrooted,  
I contemplate infinity.

Diane Lockward

Rattle #11, Summer 1999

## Numbers

I like the generosity of numbers.

The way, for example,

they are willing to count

anything or anyone:

two pickles, one door to the room,

eight dancers dressed as swans.

I like the domesticity of addition—

add two cups of milk and stir—

the sense of plenty: six plums

on the ground, three more

falling from the tree.

And multiplication's school

of fish times fish,

whose silver bodies breed

beneath the shadow

of a boat.

Even subtraction is never loss,

just addition somewhere else:

five sparrows take away two,

the two in someone else's

garden now.

There's an amplitude to long division,

as it opens Chinese take-out

box by paper box,

inside every folded cookie

a new fortune.

And I never fail to be surprised

by the gift of an odd remainder,

footloose at the end:

forty-seven divided by eleven equals four,

with three remaining.

Three boys beyond their mothers' call,

two Italians off to the sea,

one sock that isn't anywhere you look.

—Mary Cornish