**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

**Variables**

Without them everything would be the same.

Uniformed figures answering to the same name –

clones of clones. Whatever color chosen

would become grey, but there’s no choice

without variables to choose. All patterns? One

All directions? One. All words? One. All all one one.

No X. No Y. All A. Aaaaaaaaa! the word for everything.

One hair color. One skin color. One height. One shoe size.

The sea and the sky? One. The land and water? One.

One. One. One. One. One. One mantra for all to hum.

When the guru goes the hot dog stand he orders one

with everything. All jokes have the same punch line.

Why did the chicken cross the road? To be one

with everything. All poems have the same rhyme.

Rose are red

Violets are red

Sugar is red

and so are you red.

Red is the new grey. Grey is the new orange.

Nothing is the new nothing. Nothing is new.

Pizza? One topping. Chinese menus?

All #1. We're # 1! Everyone's #1

One word! Aaaaaaaa! Aaaaaaa! Aaaaaa!

**Paul Says**

Paul says he hates algebra but

Paul writes an ode to algebra like the ode

Paul wrote to the weight room.

Paul makes graphs slow and perfect

Paul won't eat the donuts

Paul counts his protein and his carbs

He counts his weights in steady reps

He grunts with each push

He multiples the sets by the number of lifts

He divides his time between lifting and sleeping

Paul subtracts the time he needs to eat from the time

Paul spends in class

Paul says he's done but

Nick was done first.