**Last to Finish: The Smartest Boy in Math Class**

Last to Finish is about, Max, the *Smartest Boy in Math Class*. This is our second book from the series, *Adventures of Everyday Geniuses*. In the story, third-grader Max loves and is doing well in math until he has to take a timed test on multiplication facts. Before timed tests Max solved problems accurately, but as soon as the teacher sets that timer….. he is unable to focus. He describes the terror this way:

“As soon as Mrs. Topel starts the timer,

my heart begins to pound,

my hands begin to sweat,

and then the worst thing happens……….

my mind frees.”

Max doesn’t understand why, “…. the math facts are erased from his mind while he sleeps,” and “2 x 3 suddenly looks like an alien message that can only be deciphered by scientists.”

Unfortunately, a few of Max’s classmates start to tease him and shout out chants such as,

“Max, Max last in math.”

Then things get worse for Max. His teacher and principal request to meet with his parents to discuss Max’s math ability. Max is sure his parents will be disappointed in him when they hear that Max is the worst math student in the history of the school. Mr. and Mrs. Leonhard and Max are shocked when the principal tells the family the complete opposite. Max is actually very good at math – so good that he is asked to join the school’s math team and work in a program for accelerated math students.

How can this be? Max has failed every timed test. Along with readers, the Leonhard family learns that there are different kinds of intelligence. Max is a learner who has a deep understanding of the way numbers work. Understanding and memorizing are not the same depth of learning. The principal explains how some people are great at memorizing all sorts of information, while others are better at understanding information. He goes on to say,

“If I could choose between the two, I would rather have students understand mathematics rather than just memorize facts.”

Last to Finish lends itself to discussions about:

* Understanding your learning style
* How the brain learns
* Overcoming test anxiety and fear of failure
* Debate between memorization and comprehension
* Myths about gifted children
* Twice exceptional learners

**Learning Styles/Multiple Intelligences**

We highlighted learning styles in a previous book study. (Please see: <http://www.hasd.org/curriculum/2013bookstudyonsocialandemotionalneeds.cfm>

Sometimes it is hard for our gifted learners to recognize and understand that they are “smart” in different ways and that they can’t be “smart” about everything. For some, this realization hits when they hit middle school because concepts and skills came easily to them in the elementary grades. The main theme of, Last to Finish, we all learn differently, can provide a reassuring message for children and even advice for parents and teachers.

Ask your child, what does it mean to be smart? Often time children will say that being smart means you:

* read really well
* get good grades
* do well on tests
* solve math problems quickly
* recite a bunch of facts

True, those are a few of the characteristics of smart people, but there are many other ways to show your intelligence, gifts and talents – through art, music, athletics, nature, working with others, nature and emotions.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Type of Intelligence** | **Examples of Relevant Behaviors** |
| **http://ts2.mm.bing.net/th?id=I.4827952051192565&pid=1.7&w=152&h=154&c=7&rs=1Linguistic Intelligence**Ability to use language effectively | * Making persuasive arguments
* Writing poetry
* Identifying subtle nuances in word meanings
 |
| **http://ts4.mm.bing.net/th?id=I.4539656665106975&pid=1.7&w=189&h=143&c=7&rs=1Logical-Mathematical Intelligence**Ability to reason logically, especially in mathematics and science | * Solving mathematical problems quickly
* Generating mathematical proofs
* Formulating and testing hypotheses about observed phenomena
 |
| **http://ts1.mm.bing.net/th?id=H.4610240153846096&pid=1.7&w=146&h=123&c=7&rs=1Spatial Intelligence**Ability to notice details of what one sees and to imagine and manipulate visual objects in one's mind | * Conjuring up mental images
* Drawing a visual likeness of an object
* Making fine discriminations among very similar objects
 |
| **http://ts3.mm.bing.net/th?id=I.4876923226752986&pid=1.7&w=186&h=143&c=7&rs=1Musical Intelligence**Ability to create, comprehend, and appreciate music | * Playing a musical instrument
* Composing a musical work
* Showing a keen awareness of the underlying structure of music
 |
| **http://ts4.mm.bing.net/th?id=I.4564863841010835&pid=1.7&w=192&h=155&c=7&rs=1Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence**Ability to use one's body skillfully  | * Dancing
* Playing basketball
* Performing pantomime
 |
| **http://ts1.mm.bing.net/th?id=H.4541086877877028&pid=1.7&w=139&h=152&c=7&rs=1Interpersonal Intelligence**Ability to notice subtle aspects of other people's behaviors  | * Correctly perceiving another's mood
* Detecting another's underlying intentions and desires
* Using knowledge of others to influence their thoughts and behaviors
 |
| **http://ts2.mm.bing.net/th?id=I.5031924291731945&pid=1.7&w=156&h=151&c=7&rs=1Intrapersonal Intelligence**Awareness of one's own feelings, motives, and desires  | * Discriminating among such similar emotions as sadness and regret
* Identifying the motives guiding one's own behavior
* Using self-knowledge to relate more effectively with others
 |
| **http://ts3.mm.bing.net/th?id=I.4730731161847614&pid=1.7&w=125&h=143&c=7&rs=1Naturalist Intelligence**Ability to recognize patterns in nature and differences among natural objects and life-forms  | * Identifying members of particular plant or animal species
* Classifying natural forms (e.g., rocks, types of mountains)
* Applying one's knowledge of nature in such activities as farming, landscaping, or animal training
 |

We can’t be good at EVERYTHING, but we do have some ability in each of the areas described in the table. Thomas Armstrong shares some good news:

* All of the intelligences are different, but they are also equal. No intelligence is more important than another.
* No matter what kind of ability you have in a given area, you can explore, grow and develop it. Whether you have trouble spelling the word “dictionary” without looking it up in the dictionary or you’re a future best-selling author, you can become more Word Smart.
* There are many different ways of being smart in each intelligence. For example if you are Word Smart, you might discover that you’re a top-notch speaker but not such a terrific writer. Or for Body Smart, you might excel in soccer, but you can’t swim one lap. With some work, you can build on your strengths and improve your weaknesses.
* You may know what you are best at, but that doesn’t mean you are limited to one type of intelligence. Maybe you are Body Smart. Don’t let that stop you from reading lots of books or learn to paint.
* The different smarts work together in almost everything you do.

Armstrong, Thomas. You’re Smarter Than You Think – A Kid’s Guide to the Multiple Intelligences. 2003. Minneapolis, MN.

Help your child understand his/her learning style by taking one or two of the online surveys below.

<http://www.literacyworks.org/mi/assessment/findyourstrengths.html>

<http://www.bgfl.org/bgfl/custom/resources_ftp/client_ftp/ks3/ict/multiple_int/questions/questions.cfm>

**What the Kids Have to Say**

Last to Finish also brings up the topic, what are our gifted and talented students saying about school, friends and other people’s perceptions. The following are some interesting perspectives:

**Myths About Gifted Children**

* Gifted kids have it made and will succeed in life no what.
* Gifted kids like school, always get good grades and greet each new school day with enthusiasm.
* Gifted children only come from white, middle to upper class families.
* Gifted kids are good at everything.
* Teachers can easily identify gifted students and like to work with them better than any other student.
* If gifted students are grouped together, they will become snobs or elitists.
* All gifted kids have trouble adjusting to school and friends.

**Eight Gripes of Gifted Kids**

1. The stuff we do in school is too easy and it’s boring.
2. Parents, teachers and friends expect us to be perfect and to do our best ALL the time.
3. Friends who really understand us are few and far between.
4. Lots of our coursework is irrelevant.
5. Peers often tease us about being smart.
6. We feel overwhelmed by the number of things we can do in life.
7. We feel too different and alienated.
8. We worry a lot about world problems and feel helpless to do anything about them.

Galbraith, Judy, The Gifted Kids’ Survival Guide. 2001. Minneapolis, MN.

**Ten Common Concerns Gifted Students Have About Their Friends**

1. I have trouble getting them to understand me.
2. It’s hard to get along with kids my own age.
3. I hate being labeled “gifted” by kids. It makes me feel too different.
4. I hate being teased about being smart.
5. Kids tease me when I DON’T get A’s all the time.
6. Kids tease me when I DO get A’s all the time.
7. My friends don’t really understand me. Sometimes I feel like I’m way over their heads.
8. I don’t like it when somebody gives me the brush-off from doing better than they do.
9. I have trouble coping with the way peers act. Sometimes they seem so silly.
10. It’s hard to ignore peer pressure without your friends thinking that you are ignoring them.

Galbraith, Judy, The Gifted Kids’ Survival Guide. 2001. Minneapolis, MN.

**How the Brain Learns**

Last year’s book study focused on how the gifted brain learns. (<http://www.hasd.org/curriculum/gatebookstudy2012-2013.cfm>)

This month I would like to share an interesting and informative website with you. Brain Rules offers interactive tutorials, summaries of the “12 Things We Need to Know About the Brain,” (no need to purchase the book) and short videos about understanding and improving brain power. (<http://www.brainrules.net/THE-RULES>)

**Twice Exceptional Learners**

Share some interesting facts about other “famous” gifted learners who weren’t always considered smart.

**A Few Gifted Students Who Made Them Eat Crow**

1. Beethoven’s music teacher once said of him, “As a composer, he is hopeless.”
2. Winston Churchill failed the 6th grade and finished last in his class.
3. Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor because, “he had no good ideas.”
4. Louisa May Alcott was told by an editor that she could never write anything that had popular appeal.
5. Charles Darwin, who originated the theory, “Origin of the Species,” quit medical school.
6. Isaac Newton did poorly in school.
7. Thomas Edison’s teacher called him, “addled.”
8. Bill Gates was banned from his high school’s computer lab.

|  |
| --- |
| **Famous people who are dyslexic** |
| Hans Christian Andersen | Author of children's fairy tales  |
| Cher | Entertainer, actress  |
| Tom Cruise | Actor  |
| Leonardo Da Vinci | Renaissance artist, sculptor, painter  |
| Walt Disney | Cartoonist, visionary founder of Disneyland/Disneyworld |
| Albert Einstein | Scientist, philosopher  |
| Tracey Gold | Actress  |
| Whoopi Goldberg | Actress  |
| Bruce Jenner | U.S. Olympic Gold Medalist |
| Magic Johnson | Professional athlete  |
| Greg Louganis | U.S. Olympic Gold Medalist  |
| George Patton | Military General  |
| Patricia Polacco | Author, illustrator of children's books  |
| Nelson Rockefeller | Former governor of New York, former vice president of the United States  |
| Nolan Ryan | Professional athlete  |
| Lindsay Wagner | Actress, author, "The Bionic Woman" |
| Woodrow Wilson | Former president of the United States |
| Henry Winkler | Actor, director, humanitarian, "The Fonz" |
| **Famous people with appearance differences** |
| Helen Keller | Author  |
| Stevie Wonder | Singer  |
| **Famous people with movement differences** |
| Muhammad Ali | Former professional athlete  |
| Michael J. Fox | Actor  |
| Annette Funicello | Actress  |
| Billy Graham | Religious leader  |
| Stephen Hawking | Astrophysicist  |
| Pope John Paul II | Religious leader  |
| Christopher Reeve | Actor  |
| Janet Reno | U.S. Attorney General  |
| Franklin Delano Roosevelt | Former president of the United States  |
| **Famous people with speech differences** |
| Ludwig von Beethoven | German composer  |
| Joseph Biden | U.S. Congressman  |
| Lewis Carroll | Author  |
| Bill Clinton | U.S. President  |
| Winston Churchill | Former Prime Minister of Britain  |
| Walter Cronkite | Journalist  |
| Kirk Douglas | Actor  |
| Stephen Hawking | Astrophysicist  |
| Florence Henderson | Actress  |
| James Earl Jones | Actor |
| Helen Keller | Author  |
| Marlee Matlin | Actress  |
| Marilyn Monroe | Actress  |
| Carly Simon | Singer  |
| Richard Thomas | Actor  |
| John Updike | Author  |