

Life of Fred[™]
Beginning Algebra
Expanded Edition

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What Algebra Is All About

When I first started studying algebra in the ninth grade, no one in my family could explain to me what it was all about. My dad had gone through the eighth grade in South Dakota, and my mom never mentioned that she had ever studied algebra before she took a job at Planter's Peanuts in San Francisco.

My school counselor enrolled me in beginning algebra, and I showed up to class on the first day not knowing what to expect. On that day, I couldn't have told you a thing about algebra except that it was some kind of math.

In the first month or so, I found *I liked algebra better than . . .*

- ✓ physical education, because there were never any fist-fights in the algebra class.
- ✓ English, because the teacher couldn't mark me down because he or she didn't like the way I expressed myself or didn't like my handwriting or didn't like my face. In algebra, all I had to do was get the right answer and the teacher had to give me an A.
- ✓ German, because there were a million vocabulary words to learn. I was okay with *der Finger* which means *finger*. But *besetzen*, which means to occupy (a seat or a post) and *besichtigen*, which means to look around, and *besiegen*, which means to defeat, and the zillion other words we had to memorize were just too much. In algebra, I had to learn how to *do stuff* rather than just memorize a bunch of words. (I got C's in German.)
- ✓ biology, because it was too much like German: memorize a bunch of words like mitosis and meiosis. I did enjoy the movies though. It was fun to see the little cells splitting apart—whether it was mitosis or meiosis, I can't remember.

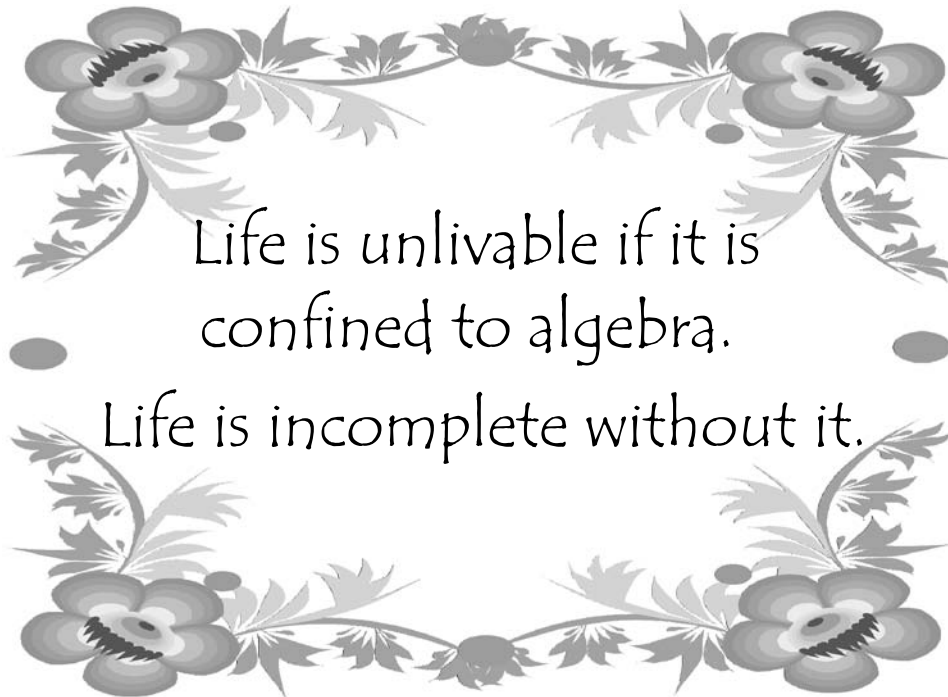
So what's algebra about? Albert Einstein said, "Algebra is a merry science. We go hunting for a little animal whose name we don't know, so we call it x . When we bag our game, we pounce on it and give it its right name."

What I think Einstein was talking about was solving something like $3x - 7 = 11$ and getting an answer of $x = 6$.

But algebra is much more than just solving equations. One way to think of it is to consider all the stuff you learned in six or eight years of studying arithmetic: adding, multiplying, fractions, decimals, etc. Take all of that and stir in one new concept—the idea of an "unknown," which we like to call " x ." It's all of arithmetic *taken one step higher*.

Many, many jobs require the use of algebra. Its use is so widespread that virtually every university requires that you have learned algebra before you get there. Even English majors, like my daughter Margaret, had to learn algebra before going to a university.

I also liked algebra because there were no term papers to write. After I finished my algebra problems I was free to go outside and play. Margaret had to stay inside and type all night. A lot of English majors seem to have short fingers (die Finger?) because they type so much.



Life is unlivable if it is
confined to algebra.

Life is incomplete without it.

Common Questions that Students Have

MAY I USE MY CALCULATOR?

Yes. It is the addition and multiplication tables that you need to know by heart. Once you have them down cold, and you know that the area of a triangle is one-half times base times height, there is little else that you should have to memorize.

When I taught arithmetic, the tests I gave were always taken without the use of a calculator, but when I taught algebra/geometry/trigonometry/calculus/math for business majors/statistics, the tests were always open-book, open-notes and use-a-calculator-if-you-want-to.

There are a lot of times in life when you may need to know your addition and multiplication facts and won't have access to a calculator, but when you are doing algebra or calculus problems you will almost always have a calculator and reference books handy.

WHAT KIND OF CALCULATOR WOULD BE GOOD?

A basic calculator has these five keys: +, -, \times , \div , $\sqrt{\quad}$. Years ago I saw one of those advertised in a magazine for over \$100. Recently, at one of those stores that sell everything for about a dollar I paid \$1.07 including the sales tax.

Most top-rated universities want their applicants to have four years of high school math. (Beginning algebra is the first of those four years.)

The next three years will be advanced algebra, geometry, and trig. For those courses you will need a "scientific calculator." It will have sin, cos, tan, !, log, and ln keys. The most fun key is the "!" key. If you press 8 and then hit the ! key, it will tell you what $8 \times 7 \times 6 \times 5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1$ is equal to. Recently, I saw one of those calculators on sale for less than \$8. That's the last calculator you'll need to learn all the stuff through calculus.*

You might as well get your scientific calculator now.

* Some schools require their calculus students to buy a fancy graphing calculator that costs between \$80 and \$120. I don't own one and I've never needed one. I spent the money I saved on pizza.

WHAT BACKGROUND DO I NEED TO START ALGEBRA?

If you are feeling unsure, you might try your hand at this quiz. The answers are given on the next page.

The questions are all taken from the four books that precede *Life of Fred: Beginning Algebra*.

Am I Ready for Algebra?

Use just pencil and paper.

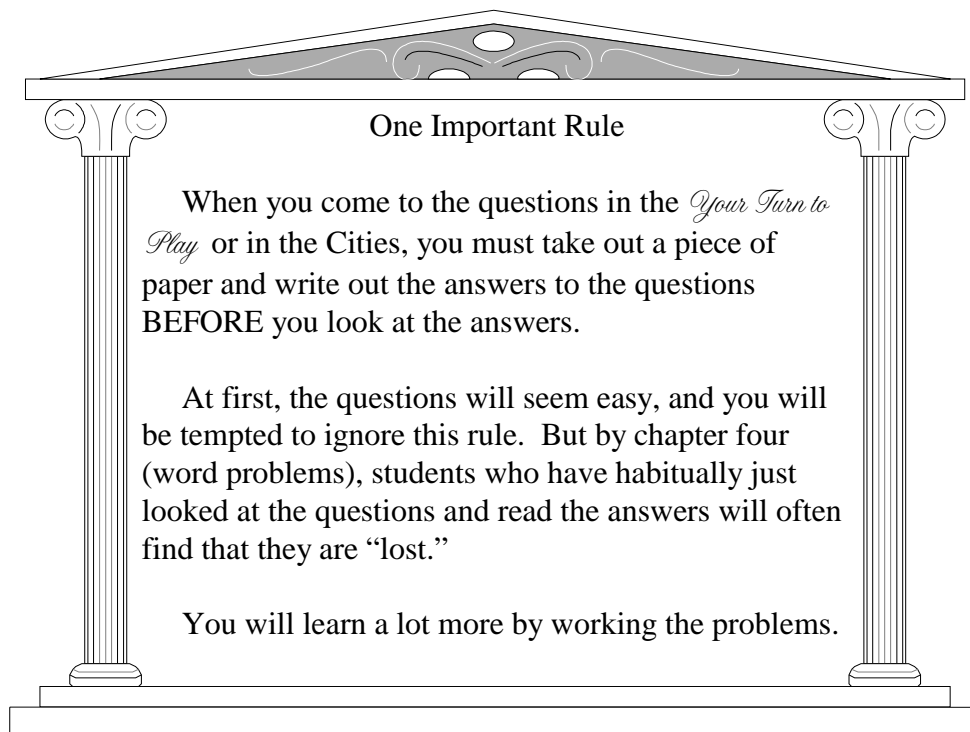
1. $4\frac{2}{5} \div 3\frac{1}{3}$ and simplify your answer
(from *LOF: Fractions*, p. 151)
2. If a 12-inch (diameter) pepperoni pizza costs \$9.48, how much would one square inch cost? Round your answer to the nearest cent. Use 3 for π . (from *LOF: Decimals & Percents*, p. 103)
3. A motorboat normally rents for \$71. If you don't sing a sea chanty in the store, you get a 30% discount. How much will the rental price be after the discount? (*LOF: D&P*, p. 112)
4. Is $\{(2, 3), (1, 4), (3, 3)\}$ a function? (*LOF: D&P*, p. 167)
5. Of six pounds of sandwiches, Joe eats 98%, drops 1% overboard, and uses 0.5% for bait. How many ounces are left for the dog to eat? (*LOF: Pre-Algebra 1 with Biology*, p. 154)
6. If Kim can do 5 bank transactions in 8 minutes, how long would it take Kim to do 18 bank transactions?
(*Life of Fred: Pre-Algebra 2 with Economics*, p. 26)
7. Is it possible for a function whose domain is $\{A, B, C\}$ and whose codomain is $\{Y, Z\}$ to be 1-1?
(*Life of Fred: Pre-Algebra 2 with Economics*, p. 52)

The answers: (1) $1\frac{8}{25}$ (2) \$0.0877 which rounds to 9¢ (3) \$49.70
(4) Yes (5) 0.48 ounces (6) 28.8 minutes or $28\frac{4}{5}$ (7) No because
functions that are 1-1 must have at least as many elements in the codomain
as in the domain.

If you didn't get at least 70% (5 out of 7) right, the intelligent thing
to do might be to start with one of the earlier books in the series.

WHERE ARE **THE BRIDGES**?

At the end of each chapter are three Cities. They are not tests.
There is a lot of math to learn in this first year of high school math. The
Cities offer a much-needed chance to practice your algebra. Do not skip
any of them. By the time you do the third City in each chapter, you will be
doing the problems much more easily.



Just before the Index is the **A.R.T.** section, which very briefly summarizes much of beginning algebra. If you have to review for a final exam or you want to quickly look up some topic eleven years after you've read this book, the **A.R.T.** section is the place to go.

A Note to Parents

Your children are now on “automatic pilot.” Each day they do one (or more) lessons. The reading in *Life of Fred: Beginning Algebra* is fun. And because it is fun, they will learn mathematics much more easily.

Five-year-old Fred *first* encounters the need for mathematics in his everyday life, and *then* we do the math. This is true for all of the books in the series. The math is *relevant*. This is different than most math books.

I believe that mathematics should not be taught in a vacuum. It should not be compartmentalized. We are teaching children first, not just math. Other subjects are integrated into the text. I have not taken the oath: “Algebra, the whole algebra, and nothing but the algebra.”

In this book we include some **English**. Do you know the complete “i before e” rule with its four classes of exceptions? It’s in this book. The army chaplain is at a private library and he pulls a leather-bound book of poetry off the shelf and begins to read a poem. He thinks to himself, “A good example of enjambment.” This word is then defined in a footnote.

Health. Fred and Jack LaRoad decided to head out for an afternoon jog. The other eleven decided to watch TV for five hours. On another occasion, when Fred and Jack were on a six-hour army leave in a town they had never been in before, they headed to a carrot juice bar.

Reading. But before that, they went to the public library. “He loved books and had heard of this library from the chaplain on the army base. It has more than 22,000 books, magazines, and audio tapes. Fred’s eyes and fingers were itching to examine them all.”

Vocabulary. In telling the story of Fred’s life, I use a full adult vocabulary, for example, the words *eponymous*, *hebdomadad*, and *faux pas*. However, the vocabulary is kept simple when I’m explaining the math.

Students are expected to do ALL of the problems. It is really better for them if you don’t help them with any of the problems. It is so important that they learn how to learn by reading. If it takes them two days to figure out a particular problem, that is perfectly fine.

There is an old story of someone who saw a butterfly trying to break out of its chrysalis. He felt sorry for the effort that the butterfly was making and tried to “help” it by breaking open the chrysalis. The butterfly could never fly. It needed to struggle and exercise to develop its wings. (In *Life of Fred: Butterflies* we learned that butterflies do not use cocoons.)

Contents

Chapter 1 Numbers and Sets.....	17
<i>Lesson 1:</i> Finite/Infinite, Exponents and Counting	
<i>Lesson 2:</i> Natural Numbers, Whole Numbers, Parentheses, Braces, and Brackets	
<i>Lesson 3:</i> Negative Numbers and Integers	
<i>Lesson 4:</i> Ratios and Adding Signed Numbers	
<i>Lesson 5:</i> The First City Aly, Arkansas	
<i>Lesson 6:</i> The Second City Elk, Washington	
<i>Lesson 7:</i> The Third City Ulm, Wyoming	
Chapter 2 The Integers.	45
<i>Lesson 8:</i> How to Show Multiplication	
<i>Lesson 9:</i> Multiplying Signed Numbers	
<i>Lesson 10:</i> Proportion and Inequalities in the Integers	
<i>Lesson 11:</i> Circumference of a Circle	
<i>Lesson 12:</i> The First City Troy, New York	
<i>Lesson 13:</i> The Second City Zion, Illinois	
<i>Lesson 14:</i> The Third City Weed, California	
Chapter 3 Equations.	82
<i>Lesson 15:</i> Continued Ratios	
<i>Lesson 16:</i> Adding $3x + 3x + 4x + 6x + 2x$	
<i>Lesson 17:</i> Rectangles, Trapezoids, Sectors, Symmetric Law of Equality, and Order of Operations	
<i>Lesson 18:</i> Consecutive Numbers and Solving Equations	
<i>Lesson 19:</i> Rational Numbers and Set Builder Notation	
<i>Lesson 20:</i> Distance-Rate-Time and Distributive Property	
<i>Lesson 21:</i> Reflexive Law of Equality	
<i>Lesson 22:</i> The First City Ogden, Utah	
<i>Lesson 23:</i> The Second City Peetz, Colorado	
<i>Lesson 24:</i> The Third City Xenia, Ohio	

<i>Lesson 79: The First City</i> Scottsbluff, Nebraska	
<i>Lesson 80: The Second City</i> Chamberlain, South Dakota	
<i>Lesson 81: The Third City</i> Bloomington, Illinois	
Chapter 10 Quadratic Equations.....	421
<i>Lesson 82: Quadratic Equations in Everyday Life</i>	
<i>Lesson 83: Solving Quadratics by Completing the Square</i>	
<i>Lesson 84: The Quadratic Formula</i>	
<i>Lesson 85: Long Division of Polynomials</i>	
<i>Lesson 86: The First City</i> Marshalltown, Iowa	
<i>Lesson 87: The Second City</i> Copperopolis, California	
<i>Lesson 88: The Third City</i> Silver Spring, Maryland	
Chapter 11 Functions and Slope.....	459
<i>Lesson 89: Functions</i>	
<i>Lesson 90: Slope</i>	
<i>Lesson 91: Finding Slopes from Equations</i>	
<i>Lesson 92: Slope-Intercept Form of a Line</i>	
<i>Lesson 93: Range of a Function, Graphing $y = mx + b$</i>	
<i>Lesson 94: The First City</i> Pleasantville, New York	
<i>Lesson 95: The Second City</i> Upper Sandusky, Ohio	
<i>Lesson 96: The Third City</i> Elizabethtown, Kentucky	
Chapter 12 Inequalities and Absolute Value.....	499
<i>Lesson 97: Fahrenheit-Celsius Conversion</i>	
<i>Lesson 98: Graphing Inequalities</i>	
<i>Lesson 99: Why You Can't Divide by Zero</i>	
<i>Lesson 100: Absolute Value</i>	
<i>Lesson 101: Solving Inequalities in One Unknown</i>	
<i>Lesson 102: The First City</i> Mechanicsville, Virginia	
<i>Lesson 103: The Second City</i> Saint Augustine, Florida	
<i>Lesson 104: The Third City</i> Fort Lauderdale, Florida	
A.R.T. section (quick summary of all of beginning algebra).....	531
Index.....	541

Chapter One

Lesson One—Finite/Infinite, Exponents and Counting

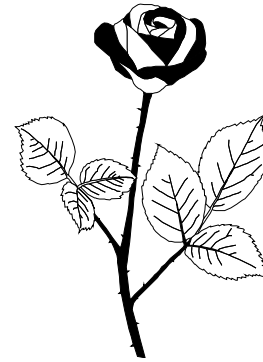


He stood in the middle of the largest rose garden he'd ever seen. The sun was warm and the smell of the roses made his head spin a little. Roses of every kind surrounded him. On his left was a patch of red roses: *Chrysler Imperial* (a dark crimson); *Grand Masterpiece* (bright red); *Mikado* (cherry red). On his right were yellow roses: *Gold Medal* (golden yellow); *Lemon Spice* (soft yellow). Yellow roses were his favorite.

Up ahead on the path were white roses, lavender roses, orange roses and even a blue rose.

Fred ran down the path. In the sheer joy of being alive, he ran as any healthy five-year-old might do. He ran and ran and ran.

At the edge of a large green lawn, he lay down in the shade of some tall roses. He rolled his coat up in a ball to make a pillow.



Listening to the robins singing, he figured it was time for a little snooze. He tried to shut his eyes.

They wouldn't shut.

Hey! Anybody can shut their eyes. But Fred couldn't. What was going on? He saw the roses, the birds, the lawn, but couldn't close his eyes and make them disappear. And if he couldn't shut his eyes, he couldn't fall asleep.

You see, Fred was dreaming. He had read somewhere that the only thing you can't do in a dream is shut your eyes and fall asleep. So Fred *knew* that he was dreaming and that gave him a lot of power.

He got to his feet and waved his hand at the sky. It turned purple with orange polka dots. He giggled. He flapped his arms and began to fly. He settled on the lawn again and made a pepperoni pizza appear.

In short, he did all the things that five-year-olds might do when they find themselves King or Queen of the Universe.

following. **THIS IS IMPORTANT.** They've done the studies and have found that you learn and retain a lot more if you are actively involved in the learning process rather than just reading passively

Your Turn to Play

1. Are there a finite or infinite number of grains of sand on all the beaches in the world?
2. 10^{79} means 10 times 10 times 10 . . . seventy-nine times. What does 3^4 equal?
3. Which is larger: 2^5 or 5^2 ?
4. In Fred's dream the set (collection) of roses was infinite. The set of even natural numbers, $\{2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, \dots\}$, is infinite. The set of all possible melodies is infinite.

You don't find infinite sets at the grocery store.

You don't find infinite sets in your laundry basket.

Where *is* a good place to find infinite sets?

5. What does 1^{8369} equal?
6. What would you multiply 10^2 by in order to get 10^5 ?

Intermission

Some people like to argue that infinite sets don't really exist. "After all," they say, "they're just a figment of your imagination. It's all in your head."

By that same argument I could prove that pain doesn't exist. When you cut your finger, the pain is experienced in your brain.

And the pleasure of a bite of warm pizza doesn't exist.

And the number three doesn't exist.

And truth doesn't exist.

Just because it is happening inside your skull doesn't mean that it doesn't exist.

7. When you want to count something, one of the easiest ways is to line them up in a row and count.



A hard question: Why doesn't it make a difference which order you line them up? Why do you always get the same answer?

..... COMPLETE SOLUTIONS

1. Nothing in the physical universe is infinite. There are a finite number of grains of sand.
2. $3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 3$ which is 81.
3. 2^5 is $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ which is 32. 5^2 is 5×5 which is 25. So 2^5 is larger.
4. The set of roses in a dream, the set of even natural numbers, and the set of all possible melodies are all things that we can conceive. They are not things we can touch. To find infinite sets, one of the best places to look is your mind.
5. If you keep multiplying 1 times itself, you will always get an answer equal to 1.
6. $10^2 \times ? = 10^5$ is a restatement of the question.
 $100 \times ? = 100,000$
 $100 \times 1000 = 100,000$
 $10^2 \times 10^3 = 10^5$
7. Wow. That is something that most people never think about. They would say that it's *obvious* that the way you line up the items won't affect how many there are.

Could it be that it's obvious to them because that's what they've always experienced? But suppose the world were created a little differently. Suppose that the order in which you lined up the objects affected how many there were? Then everyone would go around saying that it's obvious that the way you line up objects affects how many there are. One of the enduring mysteries of mathematics is how well the stuff that goes on in our heads reflects what goes on out there in the "real world." *That didn't have to happen.*

One of the fun things I sometimes do in a calculus class (when we're studying infinite series) is to write on the board: $1 - 1 + 1 - 1 + 1 - 1 \dots$ and ask the students what the sum is.

If I add together the pairs I get $(1 - 1) + (1 - 1) + (1 - 1) + \dots$ which is $0 + 0 + 0 + \dots$ which equals zero.

If I combine the second and third numbers together, the fourth and fifth numbers together, etc., I get $1 - \underline{1 + 1} - \underline{1 + 1} - \dots = 1 + 0 + 0 + 0 + \dots$ which equals one.

Index

- abscissa 203
absolute value. 515-517, 519
adding fractions. 340-343, 346
adding integers. 35, 36
Aesop's fable of the grasshopper
and the ant. 207
age problems. 159-161, 163,
164, 170, 176, 177, 191
alliteration. 159
area of a square. 258
area of a trapezoid. 95
Article 114 of the Weimar
Constitution of Germany
. 104
associative law of addition.
. 24, 29
atomic weight. 248
Avogadro's number. 248
bases 262
binomial 287
braces. 21, 23, 24, 39
brackets. 21-23
cancel crazy. 373, 374
centimeter. 342
Christina Rossetti 336
circumference 24, 62, 241
codomain. 461, 481
coefficient 63
combining like terms. 87
commutative law of addition
. 356
commutative law of multiplication
. 264
completing the square. 428, 429
complex fractions. 352, 353
conjugate. 409
consecutive even integers. 99
consecutive numbers. 98
consecutive odd integers. 99
continued ratio. 83-85, 120,
. 131, 139, 153
conversion factor. 342, 375, 394
coordinates 203
cube root. 400, 401
dependent equations. 252
developing your mental strength
. 414
diameter. 24, 62, 241
distance-rate-time problems.
. 109, 111, 120, 121,
123, 124, 130, 131,
141-143, 163, 164,
169, 312, 315
distributive law. 23, 29, 109
distributive law—the proof.
. 137, 138
dividing by zero. 510-512
dividing fractions. 351-354
division of signed numbers. 51
domain. 461, 463, 481
eliding a word. 284
empty set. 23, 29, 37
enjambment. 479
epinephrine 108
eponymous. 422
Erasmus. 82
exponents. 18-20, 29, 33, 47, 247
exponents—all the laws in one
chart. 269
extraneous roots. 332, 408
factorial. 73, 254
factoring
common factor. 296, 297
difference of squares.
. 301, 302
easy trinomials. 298-300
grouping. 303-305
harder trinomials. 306-311

Index

- factors..... 339
 Fadiman's *Lifetime Reading Plan*
 266
 Fahrenheit (the man). 25
 Fahrenheit and Celsius.. 499-501,
 526, 529
 fenestration 137
 finite 18, 29, 111
 fractional equations. 328-332
 fractional exponents..... 400
 function—definition.... 460, 462
 function—examples.....
 460-463, 466, 467
 gram. 57
 graph $y = \log x$ by point-plotting
 228
 graphing any equation. . . 221, 222
 graphing inequalities in two
 unknowns.. . 503-509, 527
 greater than $>$ 53, 59
 Greek alphabet 219
 Guess the Function game.....
 463, 464, 489, 492,
 493, 496, 514, 515
 hebdomadal. 214
 heptathlon 74
 Heron's formula..... 418
 hyperbola 224, 518
 hyperbole. 102
 hypotenuse. 396
 i before e, except after c.... 380,
 381
 iatrogenic injuries. 434
 identity function..... 491
 image. 461
 inconsistent equations. . . 252, 255
 index..... 400
 inequalities in one unknown.
 520-522
 infinite. 18, 29, 111
 infinite geometric progression
 523
 infinite numbers..... 398
 infinite sets..... 19
 integers..... 22, 29
 interior decorating—adding
 fractions..... 340
 Invent a Function game. 463,
 483, 485, 490, 492, 497
 irony 183, 403
 irrational numbers. 392
 job problems. . . 324-326, 386, 423
 less than $<$ 51, 59
 limit—as defined in calculus
 516
 linear equations. 217, 218
 long division of polynomials
 442-446
 Marx Brothers movies..... 57
 mean average..... 211, 213
 median average. 211, 213
 Mencius. 529
 mixture problems.. 154, 169, 170,
 176, 177
 mnemonics 345, 356
 mode average..... 211, 213
 monomials. 287, 288
 Mt. Everest..... 26
 multiplying binomials. . . 285, 286
 multiplying fractions. . . . 351, 352
 multiplying signed numbers.....
 48, 50, 51, 60
 natural numbers. 21, 29
 negative exponents.....
 267-269, 399
 negative numbers..... 22
 negative times a negative equal a
 positive—the proof.
 115, 116, 119
 null set. 23, 24, 29

Index

- number line. 22, 23
- oral literature. 263
- order of operations. 96, 273
- ordered pair. 201
- ordinate. 203
- origin. 207, 226
- parabola 224
- parentheses. 21
- passing a law today that made
 what you did yesterday
 illegal. 46
- perfect square numbers. 392
- perimeter. 94, 127, 415
- Phillips screws. 25
- pi 64-66, 295
- plotting a point. 201, 205, 210
- point plotting. 221, 222, 506
- polynomial. 287, 288
- principal square root. 380, 472
- proportion 59
- pure quadratic. 378, 379, 386
- Pythagorean theorem. 385, 386,
 450
- quadrants. 202
- quadratic 291
- quadratic formula. 435-437
- radical equation. 404, 406, 408
- radicand. 396
- range of a function.
 484, 485, 491
- ratio. 31, 58
- rational expressions. 337
 - adding. 340-342, 346
 - dividing. 351-354
 - multiplying. 351, 352
 - simplifying. 337-339
- rational numbers. 103, 104, 112
- rationalizing the denominator
 406, 407
- real number line. 392
- real numbers. 391
- reciprocal 373
- rectangle. 94
- rectangular coordinate system
 257
- rectangular parallelepiped. 378
- reflexive property of equality
 115
- right triangle. 385
- sector 94
- set 21, 39
- set builder notation. 104
- sets are equal—definition. 39
- seven famous words for
 simplifying fractions
 339
- simplify a square root. 397
- six pretty boxes. 123-126, 130,
 133, 134, 142, 157, 164,
 167, 171, 174, 209
- slide rule. 63
- slope. 468-472
- slope-intercept form of the line
 480, 481
- solving quadratic equations
 - by completing the square
 426-430, 435
 - by factoring. 291-293
 - quadratic formula. 435-437
- solving systems of equations
 - by graphing. 239-241
 - elimination method. 189-193,
 196, 197, 228, 236
 - substitution method. 243, 244
- stamps problem. 153
- Stanthony 57
- subset 485
- subtracting fractions.
 346-348, 351

Index

subtracting negative numbers.	
.	30, 31
surface area of a sphere.	424
symmetric law of equality.	
.	95, 113, 386
terms	339
the <i>Iliad</i>	263
theorem.	385, 387
three signs in a fraction.	334,
	335
transposing.	183
trapezoid.	94
trigonometric	
equations—graphing by	
point-plotting.	224
trinomial	288
Trojan War.	263
union of two sets.	191, 236
Venn diagram.	106, 107
volume of a cone.	276
volume of a cube.	259
volume of a cylinder.	185, 246,
	252, 294, 424
volume of a sphere.	260
whole numbers.	21, 29
word problems into	
equations—the four steps	
.	85
$x - 4$ and $4 - x$	356, 376
x-coordinate.	203
$y = mx + b$	480
y-intercept.	479, 481
zero exponent.	268
zero-sum game.	56



You have mastered all of beginning algebra. Next comes:

- *Life of Fred: Advanced Algebra*
- *Life of Fred: Geometry*
- *Life of Fred: Trig.*

After two years of college calculus, you will be a junior and ready to declare that you are a math major.

Being a math major! Yes. That's a lot more fun than being:

- an English major—and writing long term papers
- a chemistry major—and getting acid burns in the lab
- a psychology major—and dealing with all the abnormals
- a history major—and learning all those dates.



It's your choice.

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