

Sally Strange:

And How She Learned To Stop Worrying
And Love Grade 7 Math



a novel

Nico Rowinsky

foreword by Dr. Marian Small

Sally Strange

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For my Mom, my Dad, and my Hero

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Foreword:

Here's the reality of it. Most students know when the math teacher is trying to trick them.

Nico sent me a version of the manuscript for Sally Strange a couple of years ago, in hopes of some early feedback. He did this because I have published in math and have a long experience in the field. He wondered what I thought of how he had integrated the math into his fictional work. He didn't want it to feel like a trick.

Well, he succeeded.

I was impressed at how easy and enjoyable it was to read, even without thinking about the math. What is so engaging about the book is how Nico has Sally down cold; you can just see her and hear her as you read the words. But what is so particularly creative is how the math is woven in through the story, the math that both he and I enjoy so much.

He clearly knows what young students think and feel about school and life. For students, math does not lie behind a secret door, or on the 3rd and a half floor. For students, math happens in school, along with all the other drama we call life.

A student who reads this will love the story, but will also be introduced to interesting math problems that are provided along the way. It is an opportunity for students to see the pleasure some of us see in math. Parents who read it will

get a better understanding of their children, and will also probably get hooked into solving the problems inside.

The first time I met Nico was in a teacher session I conducted years ago. He stood out in the crowd as a teacher with a unique and creative way of thinking. As I met Nico on subsequent occasions, I could see how right that was.

Hearing Sally Strange's words make it obvious how much fun it would be to be in such a classroom- another great message for young students; a math teacher can make a math class a great place to be!

Marian Small

Dean and Professor Emerita, University of New Brunswick

TERM 1

Chapter 1

I've Got Problems

tuesday september 15th

If I was given the choice between going to math class or going to the orthodontist for a tightening, I'd probably choose the orthodontist. But I'm only 11 and I don't get to make those choices.

Yesterday, I had the painful tightening. Today, I'm here. Math class.

I move through the room towards my seat and say hi to Chin as I squeeze by his chair. Before I get a chance to sit, the bell goes, and the familiar voice of Niles comes on the PA, "Please stand for the National Anthem." I plop my bag down in the little area between my desk and Arial's. The noise of everyone getting up from their chairs carries on into the first few bars.

O Canada!

Our home and native land!

While some decide to stand quietly, others are still kinda moving and continue their morning chat in whispers. I look

over to Lindsay across the room and we make weird faces for a moment until Evan interrupts our friendly game by walking in late.

With glowing hearts we see thee rise,

I watch Lindsay's weird face turn into a cute smile, followed by a tiny, flirty wave pointed towards Evan. He smiles back but continues his march. He passes my desk and gives me a nod. My heart skips a beat. Or does it beat twice as fast? I'm not sure. I can't think for a moment. It's not even 9:05 and I'm already needing some help.

God keep our land glorious and free!

Oh, I'll be fine. Evan and I are close friends. We've known each other since grade one. We like to joke around and tell people we're cousins even though, I don't know, this year—something's different.

O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

I try not to stare at him too obviously,

Ooooo Caaaa-na-da,

as he turns into his aisle,

we stand on guaaaard

and timed perfectly,

foooor

reaches for his chair,

theeeeeeeeeeee

and sits.

Seemingly on *his* cue we all sit down.

“Good morning Winona! Today is Tuesday, September 15th—a Day 6 on our cycle,—and these are your morning announcements.” Niles. Where does he get the energy to be so cheery in the morning?

The announcements continue as I look down and read the graffiti in my desk to see if there is anything new since Friday. I read over Gavin’s name for the millionth time. He left me a few messages last week. One of them was simply, *Good Game!* No *Hello*. No *Sally*. Just, *Good game*. He’d watched me play and wanted me to know. Both Evan and Gavin are trying out for the volleyball team, just like we are, and they’re showing their support for the girls.

I pick at my teeth—the elastics are annoying and everything feels tight in the morning—before I reach for my pencil

case. Today, we're starting something new because yesterday was the last of the so-called "review".

After the announcements end, Mr. Rowe slowly walks from his desk to the front of the room, faces the class, and with way more drama than needed, holds up two pieces of paper. He tries to make math fun. He tries.

I'm half-listening, not ready to fully commit my attention to my overly excited math teacher. It's too early, my mouth feels too tight, and two pieces of paper aren't going to do it for me.

Our room door is open and I see Niles in the hall walking past. He pauses for a split second and looks to see if I'm okay before he continues to his grade 8 homeroom class. He's like that. After the announcements he checks in on me, everyday. I'm not sure why, but maybe it's because it's still September. Maybe it's because I'm in grade 7 and he's in grade 8. Or, maybe it's because this is his second year at Winona Drive Senior School, and it's my first. But most likely, it's just what big brothers do—check on their little sisters.

Back to the action. I missed something. I turn to Chin. "What do we have to do?"

Chin is this tall, friendly giant in our class. I would say fat, but that seems rude. He's just big, I guess. He's not only friendly, he seems to pay attention just a little more than I do, so he's always there when I have one of my 'zone-out' moments.

“Pay attention,” he tries to sound upset. “We have to make a cylinder out of this piece of paper.”

I grab the sheet from Chin and wrap one side onto the other making a tube. “Ta daaaa!” I throw my hands up and announce to my group, “I’m a math genius!”

“Sally, do you want to share with the class?”

Shoot. My hands went up just for show, now I’m booked. I’m totally not a math genius.

“Umm, ya.”

I feel like I’m getting smaller. I hate being on the spot. Reason number 24 to hate math.

“I”	shrinking
“folded it like this...”	shrinking
“to make the thingy...”	shrinking
“like you said.”	Mr. Rowe looks at me.
	Shrunk!

And then says, “Good. Perfect.” And rolls up one of his sheets, just like mine, tapes it together and places on the front ledge.

What? I think to myself.

“What?” Arial says half laughing at me.

“Anyone come up with a different solution?” he asks.

I’m in shock. My short tube sits proudly on the ledge, looking a little fat (not to be rude). Lindsay shoots up her hand and responds with her own solution. Her butt almost

leaves her seat as she shows off her answer. Her tube is the same as mine, just the longer ends coming together.

“Very good Lindsay,” he says as he turns to showcase Lindsay’s solution beside mine.

“So, the question is...”

Here we go, I knew it couldn’t have been that easy.

Mr. Rowe raises his hand slowly as he asks, “Which cylinder would hold the most water?” His hand clearly indicates we’re not supposed to yell this one out.

The usuals raise their hands with confidence *how do they know this already?*, followed by a few stragglers. Then Evan calls out, “They’re the same!”

Our math teacher looks directly at him with no sign of emotion. Keeping his hand up he walks slowly over to Evan.

“Someone with their hand up please,” and he calls on Gloria while whispering something to Evan.

“The taller one holds more,” comes a shy answer from Gloria, sounding more like a question.

“Why?” the math teacher’s favourite response to any unsuspecting student.

“Because,” but she is not the type to just say because, “because, it’s bigger, taller, so it holds more.”

“Good.” He leaves Evan and now moves to the back of the class. Most of us turn to follow him except for Evan who

now might be regretting walking in late AND blurting out his answer.

“Anyone agree with Gloria?” More than half the hands go up.

“Anyone disagree?” No hands.

Wait. One hand. It’s Evan, back from his momentary mental detention.

“Evan,” he calls on him as if to say ‘thank you for putting up your hand this time’.

“Uhh, I think they’re both the same.”

Mr. Rowe nods his head, satisfied that he has our attention. “Good.” He walks back to the front of the class.

Good? What kind of answer is, ‘good’? That doesn’t answer anything. Which tube holds more? I didn’t care before, but now I want to know. The taller tube must hold more right? Gloria agrees. More than half the hands in the class agree. I wait a sec to see what Mr. Rowe is about to say.

Standing in front of the board he begins again, “Good. Now here’s your challenge for today.”

Challenge? What the...? What happened to the tubes?

Before he can continue, it’s Arial who asks (on behalf of most of the class), “So, which cylinder holds more, Mr. Rowe?”

“Oh. Right. Ummm, I don’t know yet. We’ll have to figure that out. Should we have a quick discussion before our

challenge?"

So there's a discussion alright, but it doesn't give us the answer, and neither does our teacher, just some more questions.

Oh, Mr. Rowe. I guess he sets it up this way. It's a week into school and although I haven't figured out any of the math yet, I think I'm beginning to figure him out a little.

This time it's a "challenge" but it's always a different word with teachers. Challenge, task, questions, problems. Problems, really. *I have a problem for you. Work on these problems. Did you finish your math problems?* It all sounds so negative. I clearly have a problem with the word "problem".

HOMEWORK: Write an explanation as to why the shorter, wider tube holds more than the taller, thinner tube.

Sally Strange 7-1

In class you said to find how much a tube holds:

Multiply the size of the circle by the height: circle \times height

You also said that circles size is done in grade 8 so you gave us the size of both circles:

Short tube Long tube

$$\text{circle} = 62 \text{ cm}^2$$

$$\text{circle} = 37 \text{ cm}^2$$

Then I measured the height:

$$\text{height} = 22$$

$$\text{height} = 28$$

circle \times height:

$$\text{Short} = 62 \times 22 = 1364$$

$$\text{Long} = 37 \times 28 = 1036$$

Short tube holds more. Because the number is bigger.

I did most of the math myself (with a calculator), but Niles helped me figure out what to do. He also said that I haven't explained why. I hate "explain why" in math. I would like Mr. Rowe to explain why we need to explain in math. I wrote because the number is bigger, which is right. Don't ask me to explain why!

Chapter 2

It's A Trap

wednesday september 16th

“What do we have next?”

I have no idea.

“I have no idea,” I say again, out loud this time, echoing my confusion to Lindsay.

She’s clearly as lost as I am with this new schedule. Winona is not like Maplewood at all. In grade 6 there was no rotating. We just stayed with Ms. Russell the whole day (except for gym). In grade 6 there were no numbered days, just normal days. In grade 6 we didn’t have 9 different teachers, 7 different text books, and 3 different floors; just one teacher, one notebook, and happiness.

“It’s day 7. We have math.” Confident, friendly and likely correct since it’s Chin.

Lindsay and I stop ourselves from reaching for our timetables—mine folded somewhere comfortably in my bag—a piece of paper with Day 1 to Day 7 across the top, and Period 1 to Period 8 along the side. The last two days we’ve had math first period. Today we have math last. Don’t ask me to explain why!

Our class makes its way to math, which is in Room 13 (lucky us). I'm in class 7-1 and there are four grade 7 classes at the school: 7-1, 7-2, 7-3, and 7-4. We each have different homeroom teachers, but we all see Mr. Rowe for math.

Evan is leading the way, but today, he's not his usual charming self. And by charming I mean annoying, in a cute way. He's actually surprisingly quiet. He is the first to get to the room and the first to sit down. *I hope Mr. Rowe doesn't pick on him today.* He sits in the back so maybe Mr. Rowe won't notice. I look back to give him a quick glance from my desk just to make sure, but he's not looking up.

Mr. Rowe collects the homework to be marked and answers a few concerns about the whole "explain why" question. I'm not exactly sure what he means, but basically he is saying, *If you can't explain it, then you don't know it.* I guess I don't know it.

He settles the class and starts the lesson with, "I need your help."

Hmm. Help? I don't think so Mr. Rowe, I really don't think so. It's a trap. There is work nearby and we all know it.

As he walks around the room, dropping off small plastic bags to each group, he continues, "The bags are full of different shapes. Yes, they are colourful. And yes, they look like toys," and half jokingly he adds, "but please don't steal them."

The half-joke gets half-chuckles out of half the class.

"These are called pattern blocks. And I want everyone to

take 3 of the red shaped...umm...shapes, out of the bag, please. Everyone, except Evan."

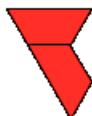
Well, so much for not picking on him. Mr. Rowe's already made his way to the back near Evan.

"Evan is going to help me with something else. You guys, in groups, what I want *you* to do is see if you can figure out how you can make those 3 red shapes, come together," dramatic pause, "to make one triangle." He repeats it one more time, for the benefit of the non-listeners (not me).

We start playing with our new found toys while Evan and Mr. Rowe look like they are plotting something at the back of the class.

3 red shapes need to come together as a triangle.

Well, the first problem is that there's six of us in this group and that's too many people for those cute little red shapes. Apparently, Arial has already considered this and is getting some more from the bag so that her, Chin and me can work on this together. Okay, here's what we came up with. And it wasn't easy.



First we did this with two shapes:



and added the third shape to get this...

nope, not a triangle.

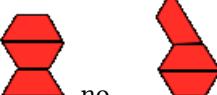


Then we tried:



nope, no good.

and added the third to get...



Then:



uhh...



no...



more no and...



what the heck is that?

Ok. Soooo, this isn't working yet. But I have Arial on my left and Chin on my right; I'm in good hands as far as math is concerned. Meanwhile, it looks like Mr. Rowe and Evan have their hands full moving some desks at the back of the class, including Evan's. They've shifted his table towards the center of the room.

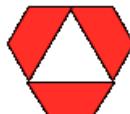
Arial stops us for a sec and slowly begins to move the blocks with some purpose, like she's unlocked some ancient biblical secret. She's got something.



First,



then,



then the third

“Triangle?” she says what we’re thinking.

Skeptical, but nodding approval, Chin says, “Looks like a triangle to me,” and he points at the space between the red shapes. The three of us stare at it, afraid to move what seems to be the solution to the ancient three-red-shapes-make-a-triangle puzzle.

The others in our group, distracted by our lack of movement, are now looking over to see what we’ve got. We’re not hiding it, but they don’t look too convinced we’ve got the right answer. Mark says rudely, “That’s not it.” He’s a little immature and usually hangs out with Andrew who, like him, still acts like they’re in grade 6.

It doesn’t matter. Arial’s hand is already up, seeking approval from a higher power. “We’ll see.” She’s quick.

Looking at the recent furniture rearrangement, Mr. Rowe saw all that He (and Evan) had made, and thought, it was very good. Then He notices Arial’s hand and makes His way over to our desks to take a look. While staring down at *our* creation, we look up...

“Nice,” comes the word from above.

“Is that the answer?” Arial looks for more on our behalf.

“Usually these kinds of problems need a different kind of thinking to get to the solution. And you guys have done that.” Circling his fingers over our shapes he says, “That’s a unique solution.”

We’re smiling. “See!” I defend against Mark’s earlier attack

with the classic *See!* in his direction. I miss grade 6.

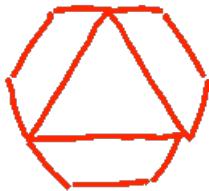
Mr. Rowe makes his way to the front and, “OKAAAAY CLASS, someone has solved the problem.”

The class reacts immediately to Mr. Rowe’s commandment. All the groups are searching for the triangle, looking to see who’s solved it.

“Arial, care to share what your group has found?” All heads turn our way.

“Ya,” she pauses to consider how to share, still not wanting to move our solution. “Can I draw it on the board?”

“Ya, sure,” he turns to get the marker as Arial gets up. Mr. Rowe hands her a red dry-erase marker as she approaches the white board. She draws a rough but effective copy of our solution.



And she motions along the inside to showcase the triangle we’ve made.

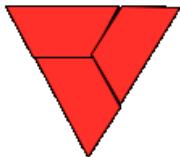
“Good Arial,” he takes the marker as she heads back to us triumphantly. “So, let me re-cap—” He quickly puts the lid back on the red marker. Someone in the back of the class laughs aloud. Mr. Rowe continues, “The problem

was to make a triangle. And although this is—kind of triangular, I can't say that it is a triangle. These three red trapezoids—they're called trapezoids by the way—can come together to make one triangle. But this," he points to the board, "is not the solution."

The class is now confused. He said someone had solved it. He said *Nice*. He said we're unique. He said—

"Evan!" as he crosses his arms and leans back on the front ledge. The class turns to see a now enlightened Evan step on a chair, then step onto the top of the tables they've just moved together. We are all staring at him like he's crazy. Mr. Rowe watches proudly. I guess he must have noticed Evan wasn't feeling good today so he let him off the hook. But I don't get this. *What's he doing on the tables?*

Finding his balance after ascending his own mountain, Evan starts, "I have the solution." And with as much pride as Mr. Rowe, he announces, "I'm standing on it!" Our focus readjusts to look at the three tables they've just secretly arranged. It *was* a trap. Evan's table, previously located by the wall, is a giant trapezoid. And they've put three of them together to make the solution.



Cooooool. I've never seen the desks like that.

Evan gets down and Mr. Rowe takes over. He explains we're going to be working with trapezoids and parallelograms today. I wouldn't say the class reacts with moans or even groans, but there was definitely a sense of disapproval at those two words. It sounds very geometrical, so official. Just as he starts talking and begins to write on the board, I sneak a glance at the clock. 2:31. Another half hour left. Ok, a nicely timed washroom break and I'll get through the rest of the class. Plus, I'm looking forward to after school. Volleyball try-outs!

Last week we had try-outs on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. On Friday we had a scrimmage because the coaches wanted to see us actually play in a game situation. Evan and Gavin stayed to help the coaches and watched us play. 41 girls tried out, including Lindsay and Arial (although Arial was there for fun and has never been very good at volleyball). Lindsay is okay. Lindsay and I were both on the Maplewood grade 6 team but there are a lot of girls trying out at Winona that didn't go to Maplewood. There was one girl that really stood out. Sol.

Sol went to Hillscrest Public School and she's really good. They say she came to Canada from South America last year. Not many of us Maplewooders knew about her until we came to Winona. She's in class 7-4 with a group of other Hillscrest girls. Lindsay used to go to Hillscrest but changed to Maplewood in the middle of grade 4 (she got into some mess with this girl Franny, who's also in 7-4).

From 41 we were cut down to 19 girls for this week. Lindsay and I made the first cut, but Arial didn't. The coaches say they are taking 12 girls for the team and the final list will be up Friday morning. Sol will make the team for sure. I'm not sure about us. I can't wait 'til Friday.

Mr. Rowe continues his lesson on parallelograms, the area of parallelograms and how a parallelogram has the same area as a rectangle. *What?* This is dragging on a bit too much.

Okay, the diagram makes sense. A parallelogram can be cut and made into a rectangle.

Same area:

I get it but I'm not paying attention anymore. It's 2:42. People are asking some questions. Perfect time to raise my hand. Smiling.

Mr. Rowe, having finished with the last question (I'm totally zoned out so I don't even know what the question was let alone what he just answered) calls on me. I'm still smiling. "Yes, Sally?"

"Um, can I go to the washroom?" *Keep smiling, keep smiling.*

He looks up at the clock, looks back at my smiling face—I think I've got him. He frowns—I think I've got him—and says, "Okay, but make it quick." *YES, I GOT HIM!*

Making it quick is clearly an expression that's up for interpretation. If I really had to go, making it quick might

not be an option. Having to go takes as long as it takes. Sometimes, there's no making it quick. But, since I *don't* have to go, I can make it any way I want. I consider all this while walking towards the washroom. I pull out my cell phone (hidden carefully from the view of teachers) to check the time. Cells phones are treated like weapons by teachers. It's almost as bad as having a knife or gun.

In the washroom I do everything except actually go. I look at the mirror, I look at the time on my cell phone, I chat with Tasia who's in the washroom likely wasting time like me, and I send a text to Evan to make sure he's ok. He'll get the text after school, but whatever. Mostly though, I am thinking about volleyball. There are two tryouts left and then Friday—BANG, the list! I'm nervous about the final cut, excited about today, and 2:49—*shoot, I gotta head back.*

I like getting back and seeing 2:50 on the clock. Once it's 2:50 I feel like the day is pretty much done. Less than 10 minutes is easy. More than 10 minutes—well, that depends.

I hurry my last few steps before going in. I can see Mr. Rowe is at his desk working. The whole class seems to have their heads down, working. *What'd I miss?*

I quietly make my way back to my seat and look at Chin, “What'd I miss?” He wastes no time in nodding a couple of times towards the board, encouraging me to read.

IF YOU CAN GET THIS DONE IN CLASS YOU WILL HAVE NO HOMEWORK TONIGHT!!!

2:51. Nine minutes.

DRAW 3 DIFFERENT SHAPED TRAPEZOIDS. SHOW HOW EACH SHAPE CAN BE DOUBLED TO MAKE A LARGER PARALLELOGRAM.

What? I read it again, but it's no use. I don't get the first sentence. *"Different shaped trapezoids"*? If it's a trapezoid, that's the shape. How can it be different? The answer can't be far, but Chin seems to be hugging his homework like a 1st grader who's just found a lost toy. I look left to Arial's sheet. She's a lefty and not as attached to her work as the big baby beside me. It looks like this:



Not getting it, I quickly look up. 2:54.

I look back across the table to the others, but it's more of the same. Mark is making weird, *I'm thinking* noises. I clearly missed something but it's no time to panic. I come up with a quick plan. I'll write something down. I can draw some shapes. Make it look real. Hand it in. And I'm off to volleyball. Easy as that.

I start by copying some of the shapes that are on the board already. 2:56 — volleyball is close.

I continue by copying down the whole question, making it

really neat. 2:58.

I'm nervous about today's tryouts, but even more nervous about Friday.

I wish I could just fast-forward the next two days and see the final cut. 2:59.

That would be so cool if I could just turn the page in my life and it would be Friday.

3:00 bell.

Chapter 3

Making The Cut

friday september 18th

Four doors are pulled open at the sound of the morning bell. Students rush in apparently eager to be in school, or maybe just eager to complain about it. It's 8:45 and the next 15 minutes are going to be spent chatting about whatever happened last night. Not us though. The girls fly past the pulled doors, ignore all distractions, pass their lockers and head right to the back of the school—to the volleyball list. 12 names that will define the first term of our grade 7 year. A list that will change our lives. A list that can ruin your day, your week, or your year. A list of the top 12 volleyball players—in the world!

The girls crowd around the piece of paper, posted near the gym behind a protective plastic screen. It's a bit of a shove and push game to try to get closer. My shoulders are rubbing against the others trying to get the edge in space. After a split second duel with Lindsay I sneak in front.

It's like some sort of precious treasure, art work to be preserved in a gallery. Behold, the:

Grade 7 Girls Volleyball Team

1. Soledad Enrique-Suarez (Class 7-4)
2. Haley Maxwell (Class 7-2)
3. Francesca Tancredi (Class 7-4)
4. ...

But I don't even see the name beside 4 since my eyes glance forward and catch the familiar name on the fifth line. The first word I ever learned how to spell. I remember being 4 and taking a black Sharpie to a lampshade in the living room and writing that word, claiming my mom's newly purchased lamp for my preschool self.

S A L L Y

The giant goofy smile that came over my face after seeing my name in lights could not be turned by my mom's scolding. The name had one simple message: MINE!

I see it on the list. I stare at it for a solid 3 seconds. Look at how beautiful it looks. The confident S, the sharp A, the tall L's—it's perfect and looks so good on there. I am there. On the team. Behind the protective glass showcase. Can't be plastic now. It's art! The giant goofy smile returns.

Do you know what this means? It means trips to other schools on a bus. It means locker room chats before the game. It means hanging out with friends during tournaments. Wait, friends. Where is—

I look forward, searching for Lindsay's name. Nowhere.

I read the fine print underneath the list that had brought me so much joy.

Thank you to all the girls who tried out. This was the hardest team to pick. You're all great players, but we could only take 12. Congratulations to everyone who tried out.

No Lindsay. That means, no trips, no chats, and no hanging out for Lindsay.

I turn around and search for her. Nowhere.

Lindsay and I don't eat lunch together for the first time this year. Come to think about it, in grade 6 we weren't allowed to leave the school for lunch, so this might be the first time in years I have not been with her at lunch. Add the fact that Evan is away and Arial is nowhere to be seen, and I find myself bouncing between groups searching for—friends?

In this state, I have trouble eating anything, but decide on a “patty on a bun” from Rocky’s.

Rocky is the owner of the corner store across the street. It's not actually on a corner, but whatever. The smell of candy fills the small store.

The famous patty-on-a-bun is the creation of a legendary student. Jamaican meat patties have always been a favourite, but apparently, it didn't contain enough bread for a former

student's liking. As the story goes, a few years ago, this student, now part of Winona folklore, requested a bun to be cut and a meat patty to be placed in-between. The patty-on-a-bun was created. However, it should be noted that this is strictly a child delicacy, as I have never seen an adult order it. But then again, most things at Rocky's are for us.

The two counters shaped in an "L" hold rows of chocolate bars, boxes of 5-cent candies, and stacks of chips. The fridge by the door is full of pop. Classics such as pixie sticks and sour keys are very popular and give the 5 minute buzz necessary for any kid getting ready for afternoon class. Sadly, there are a few grade 8 students that take advantage of Rocky's age and the lunchtime crowds to lift a few things for themselves.

While I eat, I decide to slowly make my way to the back of the school in search of Lindsay. I made the effort this morning but she avoided me, choosing to take Arial as consolation instead.

Having eaten maybe two of the food groups I find myself alone staring across the backfield to where Arial and Lindsay are chatting. I can see Arial's arm around Lindsay. They are leaning on the fence near home plate. Between them and me, I can see students everywhere. Sol is playing basketball with Franny and some boys on the courts. Mark and Andrew are lying on the smaller paved area close to one of the nets set up for hockey. They appear to be watching some ants. There are also hundreds of Maplewood students roaming aimlessly since our lunches coincide with one of

their supervised backyard breaks. Maplewood is attached to Winona and so the two schools have always shared the backyard. 6 to 11 year-olds dodging their 12 to 13 year-old giant neighbours.

I decide to navigate through the field of students and make my way over to my friends. Passing Andrew and Mark on their stomachs, I confirm, they are watching ants. Ms. Barry's class on insect scientists must have really inspired them. I pass center field heading for second and my ultimate goal of home base, but as I get closer it looks like coach Arial is not waving me in. Arial looks up and shakes her head in warning. Lindsay's head is down and in her arms.

“No?” I only mouth the word. She shakes her head once more.

I turn around and walk back towards the entomologists.

The bell to end lunch goes, giving us only 5 minutes to get to class. I walk into math class on time but feeling a little off. When Lindsay comes in a minute later, her face is noticeably swollen and Mr. Rowe tells her to get a quick drink and splash some water on her face before we start.

It will be hard to focus in Math today.

Mr. Rowe gives us two small pieces of paper, some scissors and tape to be shared in our group. We are gently encouraged to follow some instructions on the board.

Step 1: Fold one corner diagonally until it reaches the side making a 45-degree angle with the opposite corner.



Step 2: Make the cut along the fold.

Step 3: Take the cut piece and tape it to the other side to make a trapezoid.



Step 4: Repeat step 1 and 2 with the second piece of paper.

I look over to Lindsay, back from her break. She's still devastated, just staring down at her work, like she's looking right through it. I start making my fold, keeping an eye on my friend. I move to step 2 but I can't be bothered to borrow the scissors, so I decide to tear. Lindsay seems completely disinterested and plays distractedly with her paper. I grab my freshly torn piece and place it down to make my first trapezoid and move on to step 4. Lindsay is not working. I can see her slowly folding the paper but she can only do the first step. She can't do step 2.

Mr. Rowe notices Lindsay's "situation" and begins a friendly approach. He crouches down, sitting back on his heels, his eyes almost level with her work and he begins to encourage her. I felt so good this morning after seeing my name on that list. Now I don't know how to feel.

My cell phone starts to buzz. I can feel it vibrating on my

hip. I forgot to turn it off after lunch. Mr. Rowe is distracted by Lindsay so I take it out of its pouch and have a look.

- 1 new message

Evan

He must be texting from home.

sry 4 not writing sooner.
I got ur msg, thx. my
cell phone was taken
away by mom. rents r
fighting. can't talk.
this suks. g2g ttyl.

12:38pm 18-Sep

I have to reply. He is clearly not doing well. My fingers were trained for moments like these. Mr. Rowe is busy talking and I should be able to pull this off. I stare blankly towards the board while I focus on what buttons I have to push. Without looking, like a trained gunslinger, I manage to shoot out the following message from my unholstered cell phone:

np ttys ;)

With my hands deep into my desk I hit send.

WEEKEND HOMEWORK:

Using your a parallelogram find the following:

What is the area of the Parallelogram?

How many Trapezoids are in the Parallelogram?

What is the area of the Trapezoid?

And remember to study for your test on Tuesday

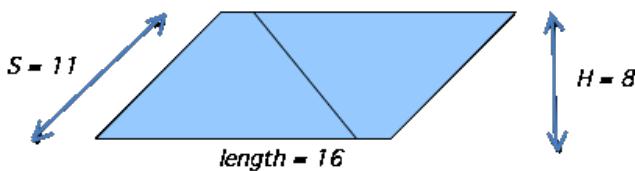
Sally Strange 7-1

What is the area of the parallelogram?

On Wednesday you said that the area of a parallelogram is the same as a rectangle:

$$\text{length} \times \text{width} = L \times W$$

Here is my parallelogram from today:



$$L = 16 \text{ cm}$$

$$W = \text{????} \quad \text{I don't know the width.}$$

It could be 8 if I measure straight up. It could be 11 if I measure the side. I don't know which to use. If it is like a rectangle then it is the side, but I don't know.

So I have two answers:

$$16 \times 8 = 128 \quad \text{or} \quad 16 \times 11 = 176$$

How many trapezoids are in the parallelogram?

Easy: there are two trapezoids in there.

What is the area of the trapezoids?

The two trapezoids together are 128 or 176. So one trapezoid

is half of that.

$$\text{So, half} = 128 / 2 = 64 \quad \text{or} \quad \text{half} = 176 / 2 = 88$$

I got as far as taping my parallelogram down. Niles helped me again but only a bit this time. He didn't even give me the answer, but he told me to write down what I thought the answer was. That's why I have two answers for number 1 and 3.

Chapter 4

Cellular

sunday september 20th

- 1 new message
Arial

I don't know how long
she'll be mad for...
you get back from
the cottage maybe you'll
talk to her
ily
A

11:02am 20-Sep-09

REPLY

ok but I hate this feeling and
i'm hating the cottage right
now. going back home after
dinner. should I txt her?

SEND

- 1 new message

Arial

No, but its ur choice

11:05am 20-Sep-09

REPLY

ok I dnt no wat to do but
thanks for understanding my side
ilysm
S

- 1 new message

Evan

Ive been here dealing with
them fighting thats what.
Yes im ok.
Wat did I miss?

7:39pm 20-Sep-09

REPLY

you missed some drama with
lindsay. I made the team she
didnt. shes mad at me ???
im in the car going home. ttyl
Luv
S

- 1 new message

Evan

congrats. ok. c u tmr

7:46pm 20-Sep-09

CREATE MESSAGE TO LINDSAY

ok, I know ur upset but I
want you to know that when
you want to talk to me i'll be
here. kk?

Ily

S

SEND

message sent: 12:01am 21-Sep -09

Chapter 5

A Test

tuesday september 22nd

When I was in grade 6, Ms. Russell told me that Learning is not what the teacher teaches you, but what you choose to learn. I was an ok student, and I think Ms. Russell liked me, so she would share that sort of “life wisdom” with me. An ok student, meaning ok in most subjects, not that good in math, but I really liked reading and writing.

One day when we were choosing books for a report, I couldn’t decide from any of the options she had for us. Books like “Dragons in the Clouds” and “Finders Keepers” didn’t call out to me.

Ms. Russell pulled me aside and asked me if she could help. I told her my problem that none of the books “called out to me”. She thought for a second and asked me if I liked Harry Potter. I said, “Ya, I did, but,” and I went on to explain, “I read the first one, Ms. Russell, that’s it. I liked it, but I felt like Harry was the best at everything. When he was just a baby, he defeated the evil guy, I think. Then, ya, he struggled underneath the staircase with his muggle stepfamily, or whatever (which makes no sense), but he was rescued and went to the best wizard school. He ended up being the best

broom flyer without any struggle. And when he played that quidich game—I was talking so fast, and got so excited.

“You mean quidditch.”

“Ya, quidditch, and the game was supposed to be hard, and take days, but two pages later, he won and it was over like in minutes.”

“You feel like he needed to struggle more?” she asked.

“Ya, I guess so. He was always the best, always famous, always loved by everyone. Even his scar was cool. Oh, and he was never really alone. Okay, except for the strange family that kept him under the stairs. But that made no sense. Why was he under the stairs? Does that happen to people? I can’t relate to that.”

“Can you relate to struggling, and being alone?” asking a tougher question.

“Um. Yes? I don’t know. Can’t everyone?”

She smiled at me. I think it meant, yes. It made her happy that I said that. But I was nervous and kept going.

“I think I can relate to it more than—magic talking hats. Right?” *I felt she was on my side on this one so there was no reason to stop. “My dad says, If there’s no struggle, there’s no reward. He only says that when we (Niles and me) are asking for something and haven’t worked for it, if you know what I mean.”*

“I think I do.” *She smiled at me for a second and then said, “Follow me.” She went to her desk and opened a drawer.*

It was full of confiscated toys and test answers, forbidden to children. She slowly pulled out a lone book. Not like the stacked copies we had to choose from. This one was all by itself—buried treasure. She said, “I want you to read this. It’s a grade 7 book, but I think you’ll like it. It’s mostly about these boys, but the story was written by a girl. It’s called, The Outsiders.”

I held it in complete awe. Like I had been given passage into the world of grade 7 in advance. I don’t remember if I said thank you. I always have a problem with that.

I ended up loving the book. It was about these characters who were all struggling and in their own way, they were all alone. All outsiders. There was love, life, struggles, and even death in the end, but mostly it was about growing up. Ms. Russell told me that the young author, Susan Hinton, had to use her initials when publishing the book so that reviewers wouldn’t laugh at the fact that she was a girl. 15 year-old S.E. Hinton.

Ever since then, I’ve always wanted to write a story and then change my name so people wouldn’t know it was me.

I learned a lot from that book and from Ms. Russell. But I don’t think I totally understood when she said, Learning is not what the teacher teaches you, but what you choose to learn.

It's Day 4. Math first period, again. We stand for the anthem

and sit for the announcements, and the morning events are going as normal. The door is closed for some reason, so I suspect Niles might not see me as easily through the door window. Lindsay and I still haven't really talked, although things are less stressful I think. I wanted to chat after school yesterday but she went over to Arial's house to study for the—

“7-1, please clear your desks.”

I look up and see Mr. Rowe standing in the front of the class with a stack of...*oh no!*

I look around at all my classmates—they're so prepared. Pencils and paper armed and ready. Am I the only one who isn't? Niles would later ask me why I looked so panicked, although I didn't notice him looking in.

I had the cottage, the drama with Lindsay, that lack of friends yesterday. I have a lot of excuses as to why I totally forgot to study for,

THE TEST!!!

I feel like one of those TV husbands who forgot an anniversary. I've been busy at work honey, I'm sorry. September 22nd or September 23rd, what's the difference really? Who knows...It doesn't matter now. My fate is in the hands of Mr. Rowe. I'm about to get a piece of paper that will likely be a complete mystery.

He hands them out. I look down and see questions I know I can't answer, shapes I recognize but can't name, and words

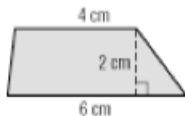
like trapezoid and parallelogram (reason number 19 to hate math).

The worst part is, I don't know what I'm going to do for the next 50 minutes while everyone is busy writing the test. I can't do it.

I think back to Ms. Russell's words, *Learning is not what the teacher teaches you*. Wow. Now I get it. I didn't learn this trapezoidal math because I was too busy with all the stuff in my life. Mr. Rowe taught it, but I just didn't learn it.

I look around the room for a way out. The door is closed. It might as well be locked. It's a test. There's no way out. I can't ask to go to the washroom, it's too early. Mr. Rowe would never allow that, smile or no smile. I look down and scan the test for anything I might be able to answer. Question four doesn't look too long.

4. Find the area of the trapezoid.





And there it is. The box. The infamous answer box. All I have to do is fill that thing, and I'll be okay. Even if I fill it with something random, I'll feel better than if it is completely blank. I scan the rest of the test for less intimidating boxes.

It feels like time has stopped. I look up at the clock only to notice the minute hand is not moving, confirming my feelings, my worst fear. I look back to the test and hear the clock grinding its gears. I look up again and notice the minute hand has moved...backwards?

Oh my God, I'm panicking.

I don't know why I worry so much about math. I don't for any other subject. I want to cry but Grade 7's don't cry in front of the class. Maybe in grade 6, but this is middle school.

I look down at my desk still searching for a way out, a sign, a message, anything that will save me and that's when I see it. Gavin has left me another message. This time it is only one word. Not even. All it says is:

CONGRATS!

A momentary calm comes over me. *I made the team.* Slow deep breaths bring me back. *I'm going to be okay. So what if I don't know the answers. It's not the end of the world, is it?*

I look over to see Lindsay with her head down, working hard. Last night, team Arial and Lindsay studied like the *Two Amigas* they are.

Glancing left I confirm that the second amiga looks like she knows what she is doing. But then again, she always does. Arial has always had this way of being silly and looking dumb during class. The way she answers questions, the way she laughs when she talks. It's like she doesn't want people to know how smart she is. *Ditsy*. That's the word. She acts *ditsy*. It's a reasonable way to act I guess. Who's going to like a know-it-all, smart girl? Plus, she's Arial Zener. Daughter of Ian Zener. Yes, *the* Ian Zener, president of Zener International Motor Company. It's not easy being the daughter of the president of a company that is making what may be the future of car travel. So she's a little ditsy, so what? It doesn't matter. During the test however, there is no doubt she knows exactly what she is doing.

She hangs over her test, protecting it.

Chin is doing the same. Or is he?

There's an opening! Chin has relaxed his grip on his long lost toy. I can see his test. I see the light. It's question 4. Clear as day. Exposed to my eyes. And without thinking I begin to do what any grade 7, eleven year-old girl named

Sally would do in this position. I copy.

$$\begin{array}{ll} \text{I'm sorry, Ms.Russell...} & A = h(b + B)/2 \\ \text{I didn't mean to...} & A = (2)(4 + 6)/2 \\ \text{it just sort of...} & A = (2)(10)/2 \\ \text{happened.} & A = 10 \end{array}$$

And with that, the box for question number 4 is now full. I look at my answer. Oh jeeze, I'm already calling it mine. *I'm sorry Chin. I'm sorry Mr. Rowe. I'm sorry Ms. Russell.*

I work my way through the rest of the test. But I think I've already failed. Most of the boxes get filled (only using Chin's unknowing help for one other question).

By 9:49, both me and my test end the class, face down.