



Letters to a Young Mathematician

Ian Stewart

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The first scientific entry in the acclaimed Art of Mentoring series from Basic Books, *Letters to a Young Mathematician* tells readers what Ian Stewart wishes he had known when he was a student and young faculty member. Subjects ranging from the philosophical to the practical--what mathematics is and why it's worth doing, the relationship between logic and proof, the role of beauty in mathematical thinking, the future of mathematics, how to deal with the peculiarities of the mathematical community, and many others--are dealt with in Stewart's much-admired style, which combines subtle, easygoing humor with a talent for cutting to the heart of the matter. In the tradition of G.H. Hardy's classic *A Mathematician's Apology*, this book is sure to be a perennial favorite with students at all levels, as well as with other readers who are curious about the frequently incomprehensible world of mathematics.

Letters to a Young Mathematician Details

Date : Published April 1st 2006 by Perseus Books (first published 2006)

ISBN : 9780465082315

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Format : Hardcover 210 pages

Genre : Science, Mathematics, Nonfiction

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Alastair says

Clever, perceptive, genuine -- and, best of all, my favorite genre of non-fiction, which lies somewhere between memoir and essay but with some expertise behind it. Of course writers write about their own lives. It's also gratifying to get advice, even on a topic in which I'm unlikely to be able to follow it. I wish I'd paid more attention to math, or had more inspiring math teachers -- I would have been able to do interesting things with my developing view of the world if I'd had better math skills, but I didn't. [A nice surprise: Stewart is a friend and colleague to my friend ECG's dad.]

Sarah says

I'm not quite sure when I picked up this book (or if it was possibly a gift at some point?), but it's definitely one that I would use quotations from if I ever went back to teaching in a math classroom. There are some very good lines about what math is and what it means to pursue it, as one would expect in a book based on the premise of giving advice to a mathematician just starting out. It was particularly neat to see the progression across time - how the advice changed as opportunities changed and to understand the growth and changing circumstances of the fictional Meg without ever actually hearing from her. Some parts of this book made me want to go back and take more math classes; others just made me want to be friends with Ian Stewart! In all reality, I'll never be a professional or academic mathematician (it occasionally sounds appealing in theory, but I really don't think I would enjoy it), but I very much appreciated the view of mathematics that is presented within this book and wish that others could learn to see the field in a similar light.

Hamed Zakerzadeh says

"If you publish nothing for five years and then solve the Poincaré conjecture, you'll be set for life, assuming you are allowed to keep your job while you are doing it. If you publish nothing for five years and then fail to solve the Poincaré conjecture, you'll be out on your ear."

Please don't get me wrong, I simply liked it and recommend it to everyone (at least who has some interests in math). But in particular, in the first chapters, the book didn't seem that interesting to me, to get 4/5. It starts with typical mathematical concerns of a Bachelor student and then continues with PhD, post-doc and so on; and it is getting more interesting by the way!

sqrt2 says

a bit childish, but good,
a bit vague but interesting,
could have been better,

what he says in relation to G.H. Hardy I don't agree with at all and he doesn't demonstrate his claim ..at least not with any clarity and definitely not with any conviction.

he de-mystifies certain things when he is actually trying to mystify them.

he tried to write for a broad audience and ended up really talking to no one, or rather, not really really reaching anyone.

it was good, but lacked strong opinion and deep insight.

i STRONGLY recommend reading "letters to a young poet" by Raiker , this is the book in which M.Stewarts title is stolen and partially based on. that book, i feel, is more appropriate for a young anyone ,even a young mathematician.

and i also RECOMMEND reading "a mathematicians apology" by G.H. Hardy. this brief essay combined with M;Raikers book will do for you a lot more then Ian's attempt.

peace ,love & humility.

$\sqrt{2}$

Andrew says

I assigned this book to my Trig class, and they responded mostly well to it. The funniest part is that they were surprised to find that Meg wasn't real. This worked well as a launching point into discovering math all around, and the students still mention how math is everywhere, much to their chagrin/surprise! Sometimes the author was a little long-winded or over their head, but the students sometimes considered actually looking into the strange things mentioned. I hope to adapt portions of this book for future classes, especially the sections on learning math and teaching math. The book is rife with stories and urban legends of mathematicians through history and really goes to show what a profession in mathematics can be like.

Would that I could encourage students like Mr. Stewart has encouraged me!

Angelynn says

This book is amazing! Stewart did a great job in casually describing (to "Meg") what to expect in the life of a mathematician (in academia), as well as the splendor of mathematics. What I really REALLY liked was how the book described the beauty of mathematics in its own right, as well as the beauty of its applications in the real world. As a mathematics PhD candidate, I evidently am aware of the elegance of the subject, so a lot of the description was not new to me. Nevertheless, I ultimately favored how the book answered the common (naive) layperson question, "What is all this math good for?". Lots of people may not realize that math is EVERYWHERE (from the arrangements of an atom, to the biology of animals, to the automobiles we use, to the everyday electronics we cannot live without, etc.). Stewart truly depicted how remarkable the subject is, which was great reading in one paperback. I favored how this book is not written TO mathematicians, but to to ANYONE who is interested in mathematics altogether, and/or the life of a mathematician. Definitely recommended!

Baby Adam says

I found the beginning a little basic, but of course I'm not really the target audience, especially the first half or

so of the book. I think this would've been really helpful to have as a companion for advice over the various stages of my education.

The book is very good at giving an accurate account of what it's like on the road to becoming a mathematician. I enjoyed how everything was very relatable, but I do think Stewart was maybe a bit cynical about academia politics, which could be potentially off-putting for youngsters. Still, he clearly loves his work, and that comes across very well, even if he does complain about a few things.

And I do have a grump about the book. I'm not really sure why the book was written in American English, and that was kind of annoying, especially knowing the author is English.

Holmes says

Being no mathematician myself (and certainly lacking in talent), I don't think I have ever been this engrossed in reading a book about math. I basically devoured it. In fact, I believe anyone can devour it: there are no exotic symbols or scary formulas to put one off; the focus is on the humanistic side rather than the technical side; the book reads almost like a story as the imagined "Meg" (to which the book is supposed to be addressed) grows from a curious youngster to an established mathematician. On top of all that, Professor Ian Stewart (author) provides quite a bit of interesting inside information about the field, and doesn't forget to use humour to engage the reader. This little book really is a page turner.

Andrea AE says

230 de 230. Me hubiera gustado leer Cartas a una Joven Matemática cuando estudiaba la prepa, de seguro me hubiera dedicado a las matemáticas y es que Ian Stewart te presenta todo ese mundo que va desde las mismas matemáticas hasta los matemáticos de una forma tan extraordinaria y fácil de comprender, abriéndote los ojos y borrando estereotipos que se tiene sobre ellas.

Sin embargo hay veces que se muestra más de un lado que le del otro, no es imparcial en algunos aspectos que debería serlo haciendo suponer que su opiniones son las ideales y correctas (tal vez lo sean). Pero en general es un buen libro y le servirá de mucha ayuda a esas personas que quieran hacer una carrera formal en las matemáticas pero los típicos comentarios mal infundados los hacen dudar.

Ron Joniak says

Lovely read to prepare the early mathematician for the future. Unfortunately, this book suffers from lack of deep insight and is often very vague. Meg is indeed, not real.

Xuan says

In the end of this book, I wish I would have known this book when I started college. But it's never too late to

begin. The book is written in a nice polish style, with a lot of examples and precious personal experiences as well as good advices. It gives an insight of becoming and being mathematicians and it's inspiring.

I recommend it to anyone who loves mathematics, who wants to become mathematicians, especially young people.

Cynthia says

I liked this book, because it points out a lot of things people don't realize about math. At parts, it would be too complicated for a "non math" person to enjoy.

It struck me about halfway through how privileged his whole experience has been. Toward the end he states that math is a talent that some people just don't have. That's where I stopped enjoying this book. It improved again at the end, but I lost a lot of love for this book.

In general, he is very math-positive, suggests keeping an open mind, and touches on a lot of important ideas. I would love to see someone else attempt this style of book, with a slightly better lens.

Sofia Lazaridou says

OK,I was out of my element here.My math teacher lend me the book and though it's recommended to high school students but I think if you're a high school student should really like maths and you read books about them then you should read this.I as mostly romance reader couldn't exactly follow the idea of the book because it's plotless.Stewart just talks about maths all by himself.It might had helped if Meg's letters were also inside the book since sometime he answered things to her that I did not know she had asked.If you like maths you will find this book interesting.If you want to read about maths but you're a newbie I would suggest to start with another book before you read this.

Charbel says

Letters To A Young Mathematician is a great book if you're looking for a general idea of what it's like to do mathematics for a living. It answers many questions, including the old wondering: what is mathematics exactly?

The book is a series of letters addressed to an aspiring mathematician called Meg. This is a fresh and interesting way to deliver factual information to the reader, and even a better way to keep track of the author's thinking process.

Jean says

This book attempts to answer the following questions. 1) Is mathematics a worthwhile career? 2) What being a mathematician is like. 3) What type of jobs/careers are available? The main strength of Ian Stewart's book is the way he addresses these questions in an entertaining manner. He manages to keep his explicit advice

witty and brief.

Stewart reviews mathematics from high school to daily life to post docs. He also discusses the importance of mathematic teachers and the valuable role they play. Stewart encourages women to enter the field of math. Stewarts goal is opening the door into the world of mathematics and enticing the reader inside; he accomplishes this goal.

I read this as an audiobook downloaded from Audible. It is about five and half hours long. Jason Huggins does a good job narrating the book. Huggins is from Wales. He is an actor and audiobook narrator.
