

The Math Kids: A Knotty Problem

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The Math Kids, an intrepid problem-solving quartet, have cracked mysteries both large and small. In their latest adventure, *A Knotty Problem*, they come up against their steepest challenge yet: the possibility that they could break up.

When Stephanie's state soccer tournament is scheduled on the same day as the all-important district math competition, an argument with Justin over priorities results in Stephanie and Catherine quitting the Math Kids in a huff. While Jordan tries to patch things up, Justin learns his family is planning to relocate across the country, a move that might splinter the group forever. For once, the Kids must use their skills not to foil criminals, but to find a way to stick together.

A Knotty Problem features all of the scintillating brain-twisters that one associates with the series, while its more personal stakes have a grounding effect. The Kids' abilities may be extraordinary, but the challenges they face are much the same as those that average fifth-graders face, whether over maintaining the bonds of friendship in difficult times, or learning the value of teamwork on a soccer field or during a high-pressure quiz.

As always, the book supplies plenty of useful math knowledge, ranging from the concept of the Gordian Knot, which plays a key role in the resolution of Justin's dilemma, to a biography of George Polya, the "father of problem-solving." And its characterizations are deft, so that the Kids' squabbles and efforts to do what's right are heartwarming. Charming illustrations complement the book's friendly tone.

Capped off with a tense final math showdown (the full solutions for which are included in the book's informative appendix), *A Knotty Problem* continues the Math Kids series' streak of providing entertainment and enlightenment.

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