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Category: Personal Essay & Memoir

Quadratic Formula

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"negative b plus/minus square root of b squared minus four ac all over two a"

I could never understand why my school emphasized the importance of the Quadratic Formula. Yes, it is useful in figuring out the roots of an equation and on the ACT; however, in the grand scheme, when will I use this formula? Will it be in ten years as I pay off my student loans, or will it be in twenty-five years as I give birth to my firstborn? Will I spontaneously recite the Quadratic Formula in the long,check out line of Walmart? Will I be offered a role in Hamiliton for my spectacular recitation of this equation? I have tried to think of every real-world scenario where the Quadratic Formula would be applicable, but I simply cannot imagine one. Why is the quadratic formula so important? More importantly, shouldn't school teach more significant things?

After nearly sixteen years of education, all-nighters, and rigorous curriculums, I can proudly stand here and tell you that I can recite the quadratic formula by heart. *(yes, I visualize you applauding).* I can differentiate between who and whom and give you a whole lecture on the differences between the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution. I can puff up my chest and proudly tell you that I take all Advanced Placement classes, and I prioritize the stack of homework on my desk over social interactions. If you documented my knowledge and ability throughout the years, you would see that my aptitude to think critically, analyze, and solve problems has advanced; yet, this is all I know: A world of solving mathematical equations and writing rhetorical strategy essays. A world of learning *what* to think instead of *how* to think. A world where I face the challenges on paper rather than the ones that coexist with me.

The system that builds my foundation taught me how to memorize every inch of the textbook in a single night, a skill that I have perfected over the years. The system that has proudly told me, "this is a place where mistakes are allowed," only to color my test in blood-red ink and award grades rather than actual learning. I am the product of a system as I stand here- a less confident, loving person who is afraid to make choices. I stand here looking tall as I recite to you my formulas, only to return slouched in a fetal position under my bed covers to find comfort among my failing grades. This is who I am, and any ounce of 100's and A's will never wash away the deep hatred and insecurity that lies beneath the surface.

Here I am, someone who has had sixteen years of privileged curriculum and grown to endure to soak in rigid materials, yet she cowers back in fear of humiliation, rejection, and failure. Someone who can meticulously find the needed information to pass an exam but cannot find love, peace, and beauty within. After nearly sixteen years of this, I can tell you that I lack self-confidence, self-worth, self-love- all the attributes stressed at an early age but lost as we mature. So many years of education, yet not a single person has taught me how to love myself, but who cares? Everyone wins, right? I get the diploma, and the system receives another "star student" to market off of.

Frankly I'm exhausted, and all I wish is to find happiness within. However, through the sixteen years of existence, I have solely placed my worth in the letters of my report card, and I know it destroys me. It utterly shatters the image that I consistently try to rebuild, and no one can understand the amount of pure disgust and hatred I feel for myself. All I can do is pick up the tiny pieces scattered and hope that the world does not expect more out of me besides reciting the quadratic formula.

Oh,16 years of the system. Sixteen years of prioritizing work over mental health, but what's the big issue? I can tell you the quadratic formula by heart; that's all that matters anyway. Right?

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