

Tahir Jamil Writes Math Joy, an Activity E-Book, to Make Math Feel Less Intimidating and More Engaging for Students

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Approximately 40% of students around the world report feeling nervous, helpless, or anxious while solving math problems or doing math homework, [according to findings from OECD's PISA 2022 study](#) across participating countries and economies. For Tahir Jamil, math has never felt that way, but he knows a student's relationship with the subject is often shaped early, long before they reach advanced classes. For many young students, math can begin to feel stressful before they ever have the chance to experience the curiosity and creativity that first made Jamil love the subject.



Tahir Jamil

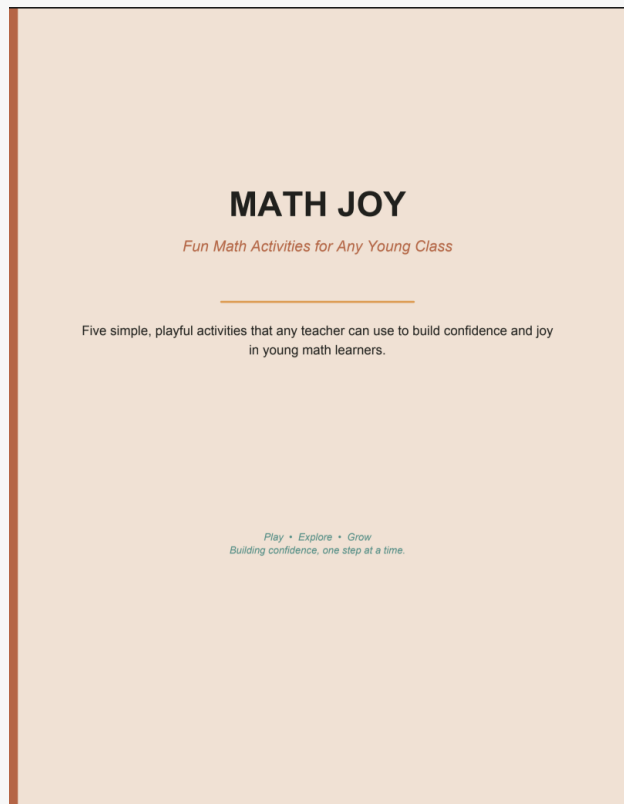
Jamil still remembers the teacher who helped him see math differently. He credits his second grade teacher, Mrs. Clarice Nicol, for shaping his early relationship with math as something playful, engaging, and creative. Her classroom helped foster his love for mathematics, showing him how much a positive early experience can change the way a student sees a subject. He especially remembers participating in "Math Talks," where lessons became interactive conversations filled with games, activities, and student participation. As he grew older, Jamil realized that many of his classmates began to see math as intimidating, frustrating, or difficult to enjoy; so he returned to Mrs. Nicol and the teaching style that first helped him see math as something to explore rather than something to fear.

Jamil's realization inspired him to launch [Math Joy](#), a free e-book of simple, playful activities designed to make mathematics feel more amusing for elementary classrooms, youth groups, and after-school programs. The e-book addresses a larger concern Jamil sees within the

education system, where losing interest in math can weaken students' overall numeracy skills, make the subject feel easier to avoid, and potentially discourage them from pursuing future opportunities in STEM. To keep the resource accessible, Jamil designed the activities to be low-cost or no-cost, using materials such as paper, dice, scissors, or the students themselves, allowing teachers and programs that might not have large budgets for supplemental math resources to use the guide. Through his interactive, approachable exercises, Jamil hopes to help students experience math in a way that feels more digestible and less intimidating.

When asked about his relationship with math, Jamil returned to the reason behind it all. "I think a lot of students start to believe math is only about getting the right answer, but that is not what made me love it," Jamil shared. "For me, math is creative. It is about trying different approaches, making connections, and feeling that moment when a difficult idea finally clicks. I created Math Joy because I wanted younger students to experience math in a way that feels less intimidating and more full of possibility. I know a lot of people who don't have the same view, and that is absolutely fine. But the problem is that many students have been given a false narrative of math, and I wanted to help prevent that from being the reason they turn away from it."

To write Math Joy, Jamil drew from his research on math anxiety, early numeracy, and student engagement, while also seeking guidance from Mrs. Nicol about the kinds of activities that had



Math Joy E-Book



Math Joy Logo

worked in her own classroom. Rather than creating traditional worksheets or lessons, he focused on developing games that would help students participate, move, talk through ideas, and build confidence without feeling like they were being tested.

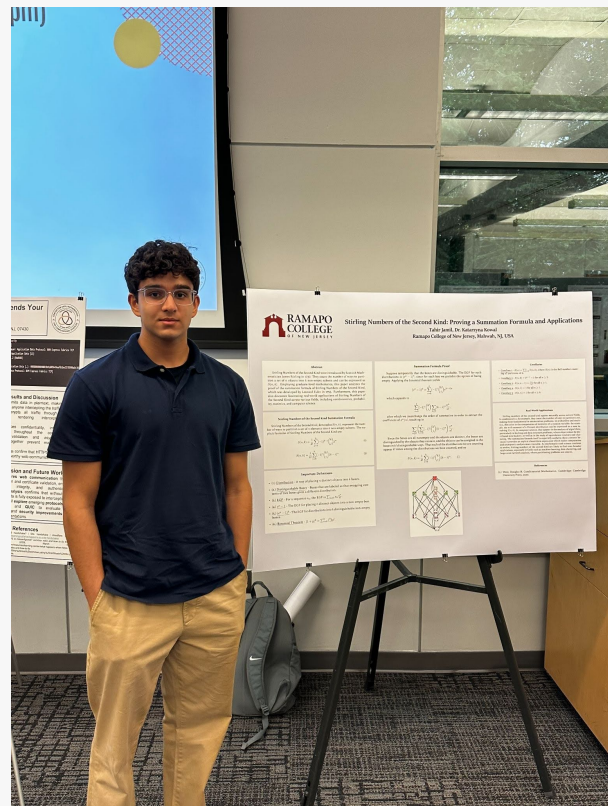
The book currently includes five activities that can be adjusted for different ages, skill levels, and mathematical concepts, allowing students to engage with math in ways that feel appropriate to where they are in their education. Each activity can fit into a standard class period or be used as a quick warm-up, brain break, or transition activity. The e-book includes Find My Shape, a geometry scavenger hunt where students match paper shapes and describe their qualities with a partner; Roll and Race, a dice game that helps students practice combining numbers; Buzz, a counting game that builds skip counting, listening skills, and resilience around mistakes; Numbers of the Day, which helps students explore one number in multiple ways; and Math Simon Says, a movement-based game that combines physical activity with quick math tasks.

After finishing his activities, Jamil began testing them with younger students and sharing the e-book with educational and community programs. Following its initial success, he's already

distributed Math Joy to more than 100 schools, libraries, and community organizations, including his alma mater, Memorial Elementary School. One of his favorite places to test the activities has been with Young Sisters at the Islamic Center of Rockland, a youth group serving students from kindergarten through sixth grade. Saira Siddiqui, a leader with Young Sisters, recognized the activities' value for younger students, sharing, "The activities from Math Joy were perfect for



Tahir Jamil and his undergraduate colleagues accepting an award for their mathematical findings



Tahir Jamil presenting his Ramapo College of New Jersey research

teaching and engaging younger children.”

As Jamil continued sharing the activities, he started to see small changes in how the students responded to math. After one activity, a student told him they “didn't know math could be so fun,” a moment that served as proof to Jamil that he was doing what he hoped he would accomplish. “I feel that I have made a big impact in a small way, which I would not have done if I had just done nothing,” Jamil shared. “To be honest, it feels absolutely amazing.”

As Math Joy continues to grow, Jamil hopes to expand the e-book's reach locally and throughout New Jersey. He also plans to build a student team that can help develop new activities and continue reshaping how students view mathematics as a subject that can spark curiosity rather than frustration.

To support Tahir Jamil and learn more about Math Joy, please share the e-book's activities with students, parents, and early education teachers in your community. For questions about the book or interest in contributing, contact mathjoyproject@gmail.com.

About Tahir Jamil

Tahir Jamil is a student at Don Bosco Preparatory High School in Ramsey, New Jersey, where he is a member of the National Honor Society, a student ambassador, and an athlete on the varsity rugby sevens and fifteens team. Outside of school, Jamil works as a mathematics instructor at Mathnasium and has conducted math research at Ramapo College of New Jersey. He is also a contributor to the American Mathematical Monthly and has proposed problems to the College Mathematics Journal.

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