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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2004 Volume V: The Craft of Word Problems

Solving Word Problems Using Subtraction

Guide for Curriculum Unit 04.05.03
by Roberta Mazzucco

This unit was written for use in a third-grade classroom, but it can be helpful to those teaching second-, fourth- and perhaps even fifth-graders. The unit is concerned with a persistent problem that children have in dealing with subtraction: renaming. In reading some of the research done on teaching math it is apparent that mastering a skill in math like renaming is predicated on a number of other tasks like understanding place value, addition and subtraction of numbers under 20, understanding the reciprocity that addition and subtraction share, as well as being able to differentiate among types of problems and figure out possible solutions. The unit suggests a scaffolding of skills that students need reinforced if they are to be successful with renaming. The unit also offers a few sample lessons and a bibliography for teachers. Problems are offered as one possible path for the teacher and students to follow. The unit also lists the math standards it covers.

(Recommended for Mathematics, grades 2-4.)

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