

## **“Math Lesson”**

### **Lena Risotto**

Ms. Risotto is a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, preparing for today’s math lesson, practicing negative numbers. Her class begins to trickle in from recess, Ms. Risotto doles out her instructions. “But her gaze [keeps] drifting back to” three students in particular, “always the last to do anything she want[s] them to do and the first to do everything she [does]n’t want. Diego Arboleda and his two accomplic—er, friends.”

As always Diego repeatedly fails to respond to anything that she says, not even bothering to look at her. Ms. Risotto has to hover over him so that he actually sits down and starting working. When it comes time for Ms. Risotto to check on Diego’s progress, she finds he is leaning back in his chair *and* tapping his pencil, *both* actions she has repeatedly told him to stop, at least twice for each since recess. And he’s behind on the problems. That’s it. It’s time to lay down the law.

As she’s about to, a conversation from earlier pops into her head. Diego’s 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher had told her he was pretty sure Diego had ADHD. Dredging up her knowledge on ADHD, Ms. Risotto decides she needs to change her tactics. She lowers herself to Diego’s level, she’ll lay out the exact situation for him. At 5<sup>th</sup> grade he should be old enough that a detailed explanation should suffice. She tells him ‘Diego, “You really need to be able to listen to what people say. I know it can be hard sometimes, but you still need to do it. You’re a bright kid Diego, you just need to listen more.” And what do you know? Seemed to work quite well! Kids with ADHD couldn’t be *that* hard to deal with.

### **Diego Arboleda:**

At recess Diego and his two friends were having a serious discussion about the feasibility of the Naboo electoral system. During their discussion Diego begins to question whether or not the ‘humans’ within the Star Wars universe are in truth ‘humans.’ “We call them humans, but are they *human* humans, or *non-human* humans? What if they actually have *actual* differences that human-humans don’t?”

This thought refuses to leave Diego’s mind. He attempts to get his neighbor’s opinion on the matter, along Ms. Risotto’s, but she just tells him to his math book out. Diego doesn’t like math. Math is boring. Space is much more interesting.

Diego glances at his math. Negative numbers. Again. What was the point? “It’s not like you could have a negative of something anyways, much less a negative of a fraction of something but wait what if you *could*? [...] what if there was somewhere in the universe where you could have negative things oh! Or even better what if there was an *alternate* universe where instead of have positive amounts of things people instead only had negative amounts of objects which would really make things difficult now that Diego thought about it unlike this math which he should probably start before Ms. Risotto got upset again and made things difficult for *him*.”

So Diego gets to work on the problems, focusing as hard as he can. “ $1/6$  minus 6. Denominators had to be the same that meant he had to get 6 over a denominator of 6 to do that he should multiply 6 by 6 right? That was a square number. Squares were cool. That’s why square numbers were cool. Didn’t like math but out of what he didn’t like. Square numbers were the thing he didn’t like the least. 6 squared was 36 also a good number in general he had liked the number 36 even before he had learned about squares so that would be 36 over 6.”

Ms. Risotto keeps interrupting Diego as he’s working, telling him to stop tapping pencil or leaning back in his chair. One time Ms. Risotto even comes over and kneels down next to his

desk. Ms. Risotto tells him that he “really need[s] to be able to listen to what people say.” And “It can be hard sometimes,” but he “just need[s] to listen more,” “he *had* been listening. He *always* listened. Just sometimes people said things and he never heard them. How was he supposed to know every time that they said something? Ms. Risotto in particular seemed to expect him to be able to read minds which would be cool if he could but he couldn’t. But that was what she expected. And if that was what she expected...well, it seemed like it was not going to be a good year.”

### **Morning Coffee:**

#### **Raj Darmadi**

Its way too early in the morning when Raj enters the coffee shop, empty except for a single barista. Might’ve been relaxing if he wasn’t being nagged by his co-worker, Sharon, over on the phone. Raj grumpily orders his coffee, mood worsening from Sharon’s passive-aggressive attitude, which is leaning rather heavily on the aggressive side today.

Raj waits impatiently, mulling over how much he hates his job right now, and how this commission is so not worth the grief it’s causing.

When the barista finally calls out his order, Raj is elated, but as the coffee touches his lips, he wretches in disgust. This is nothing like what he ordered! Raj snaps at the barista when she asks what’s wrong, though he instantly regrets that.

The barista begins an apology, but she doesn’t get past “I’m,” as she starts to choke? That doesn’t make any sense how could she be choking? She hadn’t eaten anything. But, she looks bad, like really bad. And she, she doesn’t seem to be breathing. She can’t respond, something is seriously wrong. Raj hurriedly calls 911, he—he thinks this woman is dying!

**Lindsay Bowman:**

It has not been a good day, she's doing a three-person job alone, opened up late, already had an upset customer, has heard nothing from her manager and is probably going to face the morning rush on her own.

Oh, and she has a midterm at 1.

A customer comes in and places an order. As she's making it her mind is spinning, spitting out unrealistic worst case scenarios. She had to stop overthinking things. This was not *that* bad. Of course, "she was able to say [that] for *now*, but what about in half an hour? Her manager still hadn't called her back [...] What if they didn't listen to the voicemail? What if the voicemail didn't even record properly?! What if something had happened to her manager, and that's why they weren't picking up? [...]"

"No, no, **no**. [...] Her manager would definitely listen to the voicemail. It was just a matter of time. But what if that time was too late? Or if no one came in?" She pushes through, trying to ignore those useless worries.

But then the customer says she messed up his order. She has to apologize. "Yes. Apologize." But "Her—Her words. They—they wouldn't come out. They were stuck—in her throat. Why—why they had—had to come out. Come out. They had—had to."

The world falls away. Her vision blurs, whole body trembling. "It had been four years since she had last felt this. Last felt the gut-wrenching terror. Last felt like she couldn't breathe. [...] Last had a panic attack."

"She really could breathe! [...] She [can't] breathe. She ha[s] to be breathing."

"[...] Lindsay trie[s] to scream [...], shouting [...] with all her might. But her words just pile up, clogging up her throat. Each word she trie[s] to force out just ma[king] it harder to

breathe. [Makes] her body shake more. [Makes] her feel the cold sweat on her skin as her panic  
[rises] higher and higher. And she can't—”