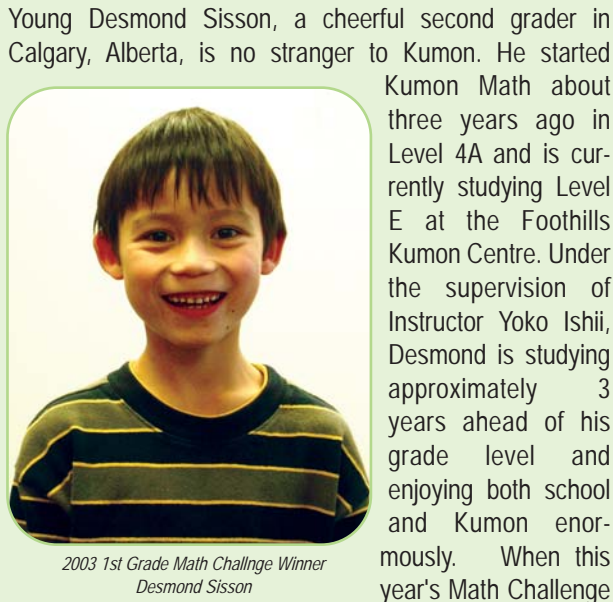


# Straight TALK



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2003 1st Grade Math Challenge Winner  
Desmond Sisson

Young Desmond Sisson, a cheerful second grader in Calgary, Alberta, is no stranger to Kumon. He started Kumon Math about three years ago in Level 4A and is currently studying Level E at the Foothills Kumon Centre. Under the supervision of Instructor Yoko Ishii, Desmond is studying approximately 3 years ahead of his grade level and enjoying both school and Kumon enormously. When this year's Math Challenge approached, he decided that it was time to "take the Challenge." Desmond became the sole 1st place finisher in grade 1 in this year's Kumon Math Challenge with a perfect score, 70/70, or 100%. This achievement entitled Desmond to lay claim to the \$1,000 first place prize.

Desmond was the only student among the 1,091 students in the same grade to score 100%. According to him, the questions at the end of the test were "difficult." In fact, the last ten questions on the first grade test were word problems involving multiplication, division, and probability. "The three-digit and two-digit multiplication was tough." Still, in spite of it all, Desmond had time to finish the test, double check his answers, and even draw pictures on the back.

Even before the test, Desmond felt fairly confident that he would do well. His parents, Shanon and Ross, are very supportive of him and the Kumon program. Shanon, Desmond's mother, believes that learning doesn't stop at the end of the school day. "Kumon has taught Desmond self-discipline, self-learning and [a mastery of] the basic foundations." Ross, Desmond's father, said that because he had trouble with math at an early age, he decided to enroll Desmond in Kumon at a young age to master math, which he says is "so important today." When asked how Desmond

performs in school, the Sissons are quick to point out that he is doing well and that his school has created an individualized study approach for Desmond that keeps him motivated. "His school is a supportive environment that keeps him challenged; once a week he studies with the advanced third graders in math," according to his mother.

When the results were released, accolades were heard all around. "We were ecstatic, as parents," said Shanon, "to learn that Desmond finished first." Desmond's school teacher congratulated him with an enthusiastic "well done." Yoko Ishii, the Instructor at the Foothills Kumon Center, responded with a hearty, "Great Job!" In Desmond's words, "Now I will continue to do well on Mad Minutes at school." Mad Minutes is an exercise that allows students to demonstrate their accuracy when timed in addition, subtraction, and multiplication. If they complete the problems in a set time, they advance to the next level of difficulty. Desmond and his friend, fellow Kumon student, Alexander, compete with each other over this part of the school curriculum where they both always succeed.



Desmond with parents Ross and Shanon Sisson  
and sister, Myah

Desmond was honest about what motivated him to take the Math Challenge, "50% was the potential reward and 50% was as a challenge to myself." When asked how he might respond to his friends' questions about next year's Math Challenge, he replied that he would tell them to "try their best." He would also tell them about the features of the test, for example, addition, multiplication, etc. Besides, as Desmond puts it, "There is plenty of time to decide [whether or not to take the Challenge.]" Desmond wishes all students good luck next summer.

*Continues on pg.2*

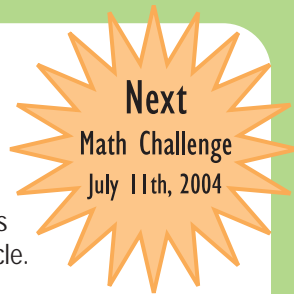
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## THOUGHTS BY TORU KUMON

*"Good teaching is not necessarily a matter of thorough instruction. Good teaching inspires students to make an effort to learn."*

Desmond savored his victory with a family vacation to Disneyland this fall. As for the first place prize money of \$1,000, he plans to use that for college. Desmond is keenly aware of the dynamics involved with cost. Last summer, after his parents bought him a lemonade stand at a local store, he set it up and promptly made a profit. When Desmond's not toiling away at his Kumon worksheets, he can be found at home playing the piano. He also enjoys playing with his friends, biking and playing with his Game Cube. Best of all, he enjoys playing golf with his uncle.



We would like to congratulate all the 2003 Math Challenge winners. Mark your calendars now for next year's event : Sunday July 11, 2004. Visit us at [www.kumon.com](http://www.kumon.com) to view statistics on winners from all ten grades, and for information regarding next year's event.

## Reading Levels 5A/4A/3A Revisions

### New Reading Worksheets for Preschoolers

In the July/August issue of StraightTALK, we told you about the new 7A/6A reading worksheets for preschoolers. Beginning January 2004, the remainder of these revised early reading worksheets, Levels 5A, 4A, 3A, will be released. Throughout these three levels, phonics is introduced in an explicit and systematic fashion. Parents will find more detailed notes designed to assist with the proper way to use the worksheets with their children at home. These new levels also include clear guidelines for oral reading, more vocabulary, less tracing and more copying. All of these changes should help your children proceed through the reading program in a smooth fashion. The fact that the worksheets are more colorful than before adds to the enjoyment of doing Kumon.

**Level 5A** introduces phonics. To be able to learn phonics, children must have sufficient phonemic awareness skills such as those taught in 7A and 6A. Specifically, in 5A your child will learn the sounds of each letter and how to blend these sounds together. The level ends with a "step-by-step" story in which children may wish to try to put words together.

**In 4A**, your child will learn consonant combinations by starting with the blends of letter sounds they previously learned in 5A, such as /b/. Riddles, a format which children find entertaining, are used to allow children to practice what they have learned thus far, e.g. "I am big and gray. I drink from a trunk. What am I?" At the end of 4A, children learn how two letters combined together can make a new sound (diagraph: c/h=ch), how consonants can control the sound of a vowel (e.g. the sound of "a" in far) and how a silent "e" at the end of a word can change the sound of a short vowel to a long vowel, (e.g. "can" changes to "cane" when the silent e is added.) Simple tales at the end of 4A give students the chance to bring together all the skills they learned in this level.

**The new Level 3A** teaches children vowel combinations, such as the /oo/ in book, the soft sounds of the letters "c" and "g", and middle double consonants such as in "happy." This level allows children the opportunity to sound out words. It also introduces compound words and teaches children that some long words can be broken up into shorter words to make reading easier (e.g. *snowman*, *football*). At the end the end of 3A, children are introduced to sentences up to 10 words and tales that are 5 to 10 pages long.

**Please remember** that the main purpose of levels 7A through 3A is to give your child critical **pre-reading** skills; you should not expect your preschool child to read on their own at this stage. Teaching your child to read can only be accomplished when these skills are in place. With the acquisition of these crucial pre-reading skills, your child will be prepared to transition into Level 2A and higher, where they are expected to apply these skills. Finally, since the Kumon Reading Program is a complete Language Arts program where children learn the mechanics of reading and writing, (e.g. grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and syntax) as well as the tools of reading comprehension, children who complete the Kumon Reading Program will gain the skills necessary to read, comprehend, and write in Standard Written English.



# Doctor on Call

Dr. Andi Addresses Today's Parenting Issues

## Good Readers Make Good Writers



**Has the skill of writing become a lost art? Have e-mails and text messages, which often lack capitalization, punctuation, correct spelling and grammar for the sake of brevity, undermined Standard Written English? Yes!** Once the norm, Standard Written English was used by school children, college students, and adults to write essays, term papers, thank-you notes, and letters or memos to friends and co-workers. Somewhere over the past few decades, however, whether due to technology, the drop in the amount of time children spend reading books, the declining importance of writing (the second of the 3R's) in the school curriculum, or all of the above, students' ability to write in Standard Written English has deteriorated. The alarming awareness that even the best students have poor writing skills has made educators take a hard look at the connection between good readers and good writers, school curriculum, graduation requirements, and tests for college admission.

Reading comprehension and writing are reciprocal processes: the better a student's comprehension, the more books he tends to read; the more reading a child does, the more exposure she will have to the elements of good writing. The tools of a good writer will become second nature to a student who reads widely and frequently; thus, when this successful reader writes, he will naturally use the good writing skills which he acquired as a reader.

Additionally, it is true that good writing improves reading comprehension. Why? It is because of a chain of fortuitous events, beginning with the fact that better writers tend to read more. In early elementary school, children who do writing activities along with their learning-to-read program repeatedly demonstrate significant gains in reading achievement, notably in comprehension and vocabulary building. Writing allows students to link their background knowledge to the book that they are reading; therefore, it brings their prior knowledge as well as their personal experiences to the writing process, enabling them to better comprehend what they read.

To ameliorate the problem of poor writing skills, more and more school districts/boards are placing a strong emphasis on Standard Written English, accomplishing this in the following ways:

- requiring a school's curriculum to reinstate writing skills into the reading program,
- stressing the importance of reading books daily,
- instituting a written essay test at various grade levels, and
- including, as a graduation requirement to receive a regular high school diploma, the passing of a written essay.

While parents and teachers are on high alert to see whether or not children improve their writing skills, pass a written essay test to graduate from high school or to be able to be accepted at the college or university of their choice, **Kumon parents can breathe a sigh of relief because the Kumon Reading worksheets include the mechanics of writing - grammar, syntax, punctuation, capitalization - as well as writing concepts such as organization, purpose and supporting details. And we must all keep in mind one important point: if students want to excel in school, they also need to excel in Kumon.** This translates into being above grade level in Kumon to be above average in school. For example, if a 3rd grader is in level CI Reading, he is doing grade level work in Kumon, and this is not a guarantee that he will be excelling in school or on standardized tests.

Hats off to proactive Kumon parents who have their children enrolled in Kumon's Reading Program long term. They know, as we at Kumon know, that good readers make good writers!

## We've got Mail...

You asked. Dr. Andi answered.



Dear Dr. Andi,

Q. Recently my son's standardized test results were released and he scored only average on reading comprehension. He has been studying Kumon Reading for just over 1 year now. Please help me to understand why he did not do better on this test. *Perplexed Parent*

Dear *Perplexed Parent*,

Begin by asking yourself these questions:

- Does your child read the books from the Kumon RRL?
- Have you encouraged extra home reading (even the same book over again)?
- Do you model reading for your child?
- Do you initiate discussion about the book (and even worksheet) that he has read?
- Have you and/or your son met with the Instructor to map out his Kumon study plan over the next year?

Please remember that schools typically consider students to be "at grade level" if they are solid "C" or "average" students who score at approximately the 50th percentile on standardized tests, or receive scores of "proficient" on tests to determine how much of the school curriculum they have mastered. Remember, a score at the 50th percentile on a standardized test **does not mean** that a student received a score of 50%. Scoring at the 50th percentile means that a student scored as well as, or better than, half the students in the norm group who took this same test. However, it does not tell us how much a student knows. To excel in school - to be an "A" student - a child typically needs to aim to be a skilled and avid reader.

If your son is a struggling reader or not reading above grade level, it is difficult to imagine that he would perform any better than "average" in reading comprehension on a standardized test.

In Kumon we suggest that students need to work hard and eventually aim to study levels beyond their grade level to do well on these tests. And to be an "A" student throughout Jr. high and high school, a student must consistently stay ahead of grade level in Kumon and aim to complete the reading program and read the books on the Reading List. This is because **it is in the upper levels of the Kumon Reading Program, G and higher, that students will learn all the core concepts needed to go beyond literal comprehension and to answer the typical reading comprehension questions on standardized tests.** Literal comprehension simply requires the recall of ideas, information and details that are explicitly stated in the materials read, but through a process called summarization, which is taught in levels G, H, I, Kumon teaches students reading comprehension on a much deeper level. They are taught to extract the meaning from a passage, and in the highest levels of Kumon, J, K, and L, they are taught to critique a passage. Completing the Reading Program will give students the opportunity to excel throughout their academic careers, including on the reading comprehension subtests of standardized tests.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Andi

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**Maitreyi**  
This eight-year-old honor roll math student has improved her studies. The skills she has acquired from Kumon have helped her in activities like playing the violin.



**Lauryn**  
This fifth grade student loves working with numbers and has been in the Kumon Math Program since she was five. Lauryn is a talented and gifted student. She also likes to study dance.



**Timothy**  
Nine-year-old Timothy was recently one of the second grade Math Challenge 2003 winners. He also has won spelling bees and speech competitions. This bright and dedicated student also loves to play sports .



**Bram**  
This seven-year-old math and reading student enrolled in Kumon when he was only 2.5 years old. He has earned many trophies and certificates for his accomplishments. Bram also enjoys playing the piano.



**Maria**  
Maria has been a Kumon student for over five years. Currently in the fifth grade, she has become an advanced student and hopes to attain G5 status soon.



**Jake**  
This advanced ninth-grade student's goal is to complete all levels of the Kumon math program by graduation. He is currently studying Level K. Jake also contributes to his community by volunteering at a local nursing home.



**Emeline**  
This well-rounded, third grade student enjoys reading, playing the violin and doing karate. Kumon has helped her build confidence. Her parents are very proud of her achievements.



**Donovan**  
Recently chosen as the most outstanding student in his school, Donovan has always been a very hard working and serious student. He comes to Kumon ready and eager to learn.



**Rishabh**  
After just one year of studying Kumon, this five-year-old has already reached A.S.H.R status in both math and reading. He is very motivated and wants to continue with Kumon so he can achieve G5.



**Yasmin**  
With hard work and dedication this eighth grade student achieved G5. She has been able to reach above and beyond her goals thanks to the Kumon program.



**Chelsea**  
This seventh-grade student has been enrolled in Kumon since kindergarten. She is an A+ student in her school and never gives up. This attitude helped her achieve A.S.H.R.



**Soorya**  
This ten-year-old understands the importance of being persistent. He is excited to do his Kumon work and never complains about it. Soorya also enjoys swimming and playing the piano.

A.S.H.R: Advanced Student Honor Roll  
G5: Level G by end of Grade 5  
G.A.T.E: Gifted and Talented Education Program  
**Interested in having your child featured?**

All Photos **MUST** be accompanied by a completed and signed **Student Profile Form**. Photos sent without a completed form will not be considered. To request a form please ask your Instructor or email us at [straighttalk@kumon.com](mailto:straighttalk@kumon.com)

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