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Mathematics and the Real World: The Remarkable Role of Evolution in the Making of Mathematics

By Zvi Artstein



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In this accessible and illuminating study of how the science of mathematics developed, a veteran math researcher and educator looks at the ways in which our evolutionary makeup is both a help and a hindrance to the study of math.

Artstein chronicles the discovery of important mathematical connections between mathematics and the real world from ancient times to the present. The author then describes some of the contemporary applications of mathematics—in probability theory, in the study of human behavior, and in combination with computers, which give mathematics unprecedented power.

The author concludes with an insightful discussion of why mathematics, for most people, is so frustrating. He argues that the rigorous logical structure of math goes against the grain of our predisposed ways of thinking as shaped by evolution, presumably because the talent needed to cope with logical mathematics gave the human race as a whole no evolutionary advantage. With this in mind, he offers ways to overcome these innate impediments in the teaching of math.



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By Zvi Artstein Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #568783 in Books
- Published on: 2014-09-02
- Released on: 2014-09-02
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.28" h x 1.34" w x 6.40" l, 1.25 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 426 pages

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Zvi Artstein is the Hettie H. Heineman Professor of Mathematics at The Weizmann Institute of Science, where he has worked for over thirty-eight years as a scientist, a teacher, and an administrator. He is the author of more than 120 scientific articles published in peer-reviewed journals.

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