

Drywall and Dominoes

Kemmy C. Lewis

BEFORE YOU READ: What jobs have you had that required you to do math? What games do you play that require math?

Math at School

I started to learn math in school when I was 6 years old. At home, my brother taught me how to do fractions by the fireplace. He told me I was good. From that point, I fell in love with math. I learned a lot when I was young, even though sometimes I fell asleep in class. Sometimes I got a perfect score on the test.

After school, I learned how to hang drywall. When I started hanging drywall, I made 25 cents an hour. That was in 1972. By 1989, I was making \$15 a hour.

Math at Work

To do drywall you have to use inches and fractions. Studs have to be 16 inches apart. You have to put the tip of the measuring tape on the factory end of the sheet to measure, then cut it with the T-square. We used a box cutter to cut the drywall perpendicular to the stud. We used a wire cutter to cut the studs so that the studs can fit in the tracks. And we used metal screws to screw the studs to the track.

Math at Play

After work, we would go to the bar and play dominoes. You get 5 points for every score, so you keep



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score by counting in multiples of five. The game goes to 150. The first one to 150 wins the game.

Math has been a part of my life as far back as I can remember. My brother helped me feel good about math when I was a little boy, and I've used math my whole life.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. See the definition of "perpendicular" below. Use it in a sentence.
2. Go to bls.gov/ooh and find out how much drywall workers can expect to earn today. Make a graph showing the years along one axis and the pay rate along the other axis. Graph the pay that Kenny Lewis earned from 1972 to 1989, and add the current wage rate. What do you notice about the change over time?
3. Bring domino sets to class and play. Ask a student to explain the rules and the scoring. Keep score. Have a tournament!

