

Not Just Another Math Problem

by Sarah Kay (2007)

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How did we get stuck in this MTV generation,
This brand spanking new gangsta nation
Where rap's regurgitation of hip-hop
Leads to a celebration of intelligence constipation,
Where kids are losing all concentration
And trying to suppress their hard-earned education
And planting instead a language mutation
Of slang words and curses to give the sensation
Of pure teenage anger and social frustration
With the stipulation that articulation
Is a dying form of communication,
Submitting to the misconstrued idea
That youth's innovation or inspiration
Can only come in the form of a rap,
Or a rhyme, or angry punk song, or advertisement
Or the label on the back of designer clothes.

It's not that we're shallow. No.
It's that the surface of a lake won't move unless provoked,
But throw in a stone, and see how deep these waters are.
It's not that we are shallow, no.
It's that without something to focus on,
We are left with only empty hearts and angry hormones.

Give us something to fight for, and we will fight.
Because ask the youth of the world today and they will tell you:
We are not scared of dying for a cause;
We are scared of not finding a cause worth dying for.

Idle hands may be the devil's playground,
But idle minds are where peer pressure thrives.
Left alone, we would rather trust each other
Before we trust ourselves.

Who will teach us? United we stand, but divided we
follow anyone in front of us willing to lead the way?
So, what ever happened to 5th grade math?
Will you teach us how not to divide ourselves
Based on skin color or sexual orientation,
Clothing brand or music taste?
Will you teach us how to avoid multiplying
at a rate we can't control?
Dying, trying to console pregnant teenage girls and
stupefied adolescent fathers.

We know so little, yet fear so much.
We aspire not to expire at the hand of some infectious disease.
Please, inspire us - set fire to us - tell us, what you require from
us - just don't let hope retire from us.

Who will teach us? Because guns don't kill people;
ignorance does. Take the youth of the world,
add education, knowledge, and opportunity;
subtract pre-formed prejudices and hatred;
Factorize, but make sure not to cancel out hope.
Don't worry about the will to succeed -
You'll see it's already in the equation.

We do not want to be an annoyance.
We don't want to be in the way. We are not just
another math problem adults have to work around.
We want to be the ones to solve them.

See, I'm the kid at the back of the class
With his hand raised to the sky,
Just begging for a shot at that math problem
Pleading for a shot at that math problem
Just aching for a shot at that math problem
Just praying, for a shot at the future.