

Minilessons for Operations with Fractions, Decimals, and Percents

A Yearlong Resource

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Contents

$\frac{1}{8}$ of 26 = $3\frac{1}{4}$. We know because we divided by 8, $8 \overline{)26} \begin{array}{r} 3 \\ 24 \\ \hline 2 \end{array}$. Then we divided 5 times. We skipcounted.

Overview 5

Part One: Addition and Subtraction 13

The Money Model 13

Addition using Landmark Fractions; Decimal Equivalence

A1 14

A2 15

A3 16

A4 17

A5 18

Mixed Addition and Subtraction using Landmark Fractions; Decimal Equivalence

A6 19

Mixed Addition and Subtraction using Landmark Fractions and Mixed Numbers; Decimal Equivalence

A7 19

Subtraction using Landmark Fractions and Mixed Numbers; Decimal Equivalence; Making Use of the Whole

A8 20

A9 21

A10 22

The Clock Model 23

Addition using Landmark Fractions of an Hour; Equivalence

B1 24

B2 25

B3 26

B4 28

Addition using Landmark Fractions of an Hour and Mixed Numbers; Equivalence; Splitting

B5 28

Addition using Landmark Fractions of an Hour; Equivalence; Simplifying First

B6 29

Subtraction using Landmark Fractions of an Hour; Equivalence

B7 30

B8 31

Mixed Addition and Subtraction using Landmark Fractions of an Hour; Equivalence

B9 32

Mixed Addition and Subtraction using Landmark Fractions of an Hour and Mixed Numbers; Equivalence; Simplifying First; Making Use of the Whole

B10 32

Subtraction using Landmark Fractions of an Hour and Mixed Numbers; Equivalence; Making Use of the Whole

B11 33

Subtraction using Landmark Fractions of an Hour; Equivalence; Simplifying First

B12 34

Choose a Model: Money, or the Clock? 35

Addition using Landmark Fractions; Equivalence; Choosing a Common Whole; Simplifying First

C1 35

Subtraction using Landmark Fractions; Equivalence; Choosing a Common Whole

C2 36

The Double Number Line 37

Addition of Fractions using Equivalence; Making a Common Whole

D1 38

D2 40

D3 41

D4 41

D5 41

Subtraction of Fractions using Equivalence; Making a Common Whole

D6 42

D7 44

D8 44

Subtraction of Fractions using Equivalence; Simplifying First; Making a Common Whole

D9 44

D10 45

D11 45

D12 46

Choose Your Price 47

Addition of Fractions using Equivalence; Making a Common Whole; Proportional Reasoning

E1 48

E2 49

Mixed Addition and Subtraction of Fractions using Equivalence; Making a Common Whole; Proportional Reasoning

E3 50

Contents *Continued*

Mixed Addition and Subtraction of Fractions and Mixed Numbers using Equivalence; Making a Common Whole; Proportional Reasoning	E4	51
Subtraction of Fractions using Equivalence; Making a Common Whole; Proportional Reasoning	E5	52
	E6	53

Choose Your Model: Money, Clock, Double Number Line, or Price? 54

Look to the Numbers	F1	55
	F2	56
	F3	57

Part Two: Multiplication and Division 59

The Array 59

Fractions as Operators; Equivalence	G1	60
	G2	61
Mixed Numbers as Operators; Equivalent-Area Rectangles that are not Congruent; Doubling and Halving	G3	62
Mixed Numbers as Operators; Equivalent-Area Rectangles that are not Congruent; Eliminating the Fraction; Tripling and Thirthing	G4	64

Fractions and Decimals as Operators; Equivalent-Area Rectangles that are not Congruent, Eliminating the Fraction, Associative Property	G5	65
Mixed Numbers as Operators; Equivalent-Area Rectangles that are not Congruent; Eliminating the Fraction; Associative Property	G6	66
Multiplication of Fractions; Ratio of the Array Produced by the Numerators to the Array Produced by the Denominators (The Standard Algorithm)	G7	67
	G8	70
	G9	70

Multiplication of Fractions; Ratio of the Array Produced by the Numerators to the Array Produced by the Denominators (The Standard Algorithm); Interchanging Numerators, Commutative Property	G10	71
	G11	72
	G12	72
	G13	73
	G14	73

Multiplication with Decimals; Eliminating the Decimal; Maintaining Equivalence; Associative Property	G15	74
--	-----	----

The Ratio Table 75

Equivalent Rates; Proportional Reasoning	H1	76
Division of Fractions; Equivalent Rates; Proportional Reasoning; Eliminating the Fraction as Divisor; Standard Algorithm	H2	78
	H3	79
	H4	80
Multiplication of Decimals: Money; Using Partial Products; Distributive Property	H5	82
	H6	84
Multiplication of Decimals; Place Value; Proportional Reasoning	H7	84
	H8	85
Fractions and Percents as Operators; Using Partial Products; Proportional Reasoning	H9	86
	H10	88
Percents as Operators, Using Partial Products; Distributive Property; Proportional Reasoning	H11	89
	H12	90
	H13	90
Percents and Decimals as Operators; Associative and Commutative Properties	H14	91
	H15	92

Appendix A 93

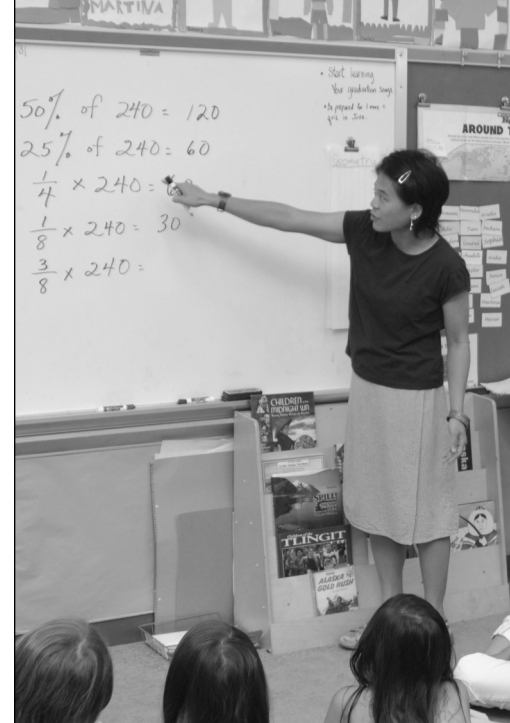
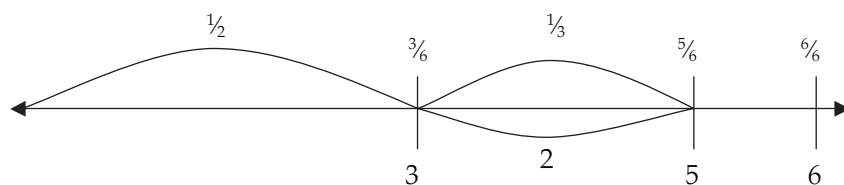
The clock model

Overview

Unlike most of the other units in the *Contexts for Learning Mathematics* series, which consist of two-week sequences of investigations and related minilessons, this unit is meant to be used as a resource throughout the year. It includes 75 minilessons that you can choose from as you consider the needs of your students. Under each title, you will find a list of strategies and big ideas that are the focus of each minilesson. These have been provided to help you choose appropriately.

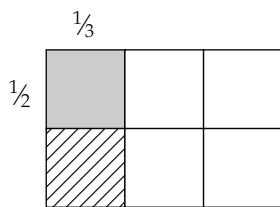
In contrast to investigations, which constitute the heart of the math workshop, the minilesson is more guided and more explicit, designed to be used at the start of math workshop and to last ten to fifteen minutes. Each day, no matter what other unit or materials you are using, you might choose a minilesson from this resource to provide your students with experiences to develop efficient computation. You can also use them with small groups of students as you differentiate instruction.

This guide is structured progressively and there are two sections to it. The first section is on addition and subtraction. The second section is on multiplication and division. Although you do not need to do every minilesson in this guide, be conscious that it has been structured with a developmental progression in mind. It begins with work on landmark fractions using two helpful models: money and the clock. The money and clock models are good models to begin with, as they support strategies for addition and subtraction with landmark fractions by allowing students to move back and forth from whole numbers to fractions (using coins and dollars or minutes and hours). Once students are comfortable with addition and subtraction using the clock and money models, move to the use of the double open number line. The double open number line allows students to do the same conversions (from fractions, to whole numbers, and back to fractions), but with numbers of their own choosing in order to make a common whole. This model is an important step in the development of strategies for making common denominators. The whole numbers are written on the bottom of the number line and the fractional equivalents are written above the line. This number line depicts $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{3}$ when the denominator of 6 is chosen:



With this model, the $\frac{1}{2}$ and the $\frac{1}{3}$ can be envisioned as operators on a whole number. So $\frac{1}{2}$ of 6 is 3; $\frac{1}{3}$ of the 6 is 2. The answer $\frac{5}{6}$ is seen as equivalent to 5 out of the 6 equal segments of the number line.

With arrays, multiplicative relationships can be explored. Here is an array representing $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{3}$:



The array section of the guide begins with counters arranged in an array of rows and columns. Students are asked to determine fractional portions of the total. These minilessons serve as nice introductions before students are asked to deal with the open rectangular array, as drawn in the figure above.

The ratio table (or t-chart), another model employed in the second section of the guide, supports explorations of equivalent rates (partitive division problems) and work with percentages. It also encourages proportional reasoning. Three equivalent problems are shown below on a t-chart. The second problem is derived by dividing each fraction in the first problem by 2; the third is the result of multiplying each by 3. A context is helpful: *It took $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour to do $\frac{2}{3}$ of the work. At this rate, how long will it take for the whole job?* This is a case of $\frac{3}{4}$ divided by $\frac{2}{3}$. Since $\frac{3}{8}$ of an hour was needed for $\frac{1}{3}$ of the job, $\frac{9}{8}$ of an hour is needed for the whole job. Emphasizing equivalent rates on a ratio table or t-chart helps to make sense of the traditional algorithm for division of fractions: invert and multiply. In the example below, we have divided by 2 and then multiplied by 3.

	Time Spent	Portion of Work Completed	
$\div 2$	$\frac{3}{4}$	$\frac{2}{3}$	$\div 2$
	$\frac{3}{8}$	$\frac{1}{3}$	
$\times 3$	$\frac{9}{8}$	1	$\times 3$

The minilessons in this unit are crafted as groups of computation problems designed to encourage students to look to the numbers first, before they

decide on a computation strategy. The minilessons will support your students in developing a variety of mental math strategies, and in understanding the traditional algorithms. These tightly structured series, or “strings,” of problems are designed to ensure a discussion of certain strategies and big ideas underlying operations with rational numbers.

The Mathematical Landscape: Developing Numeracy

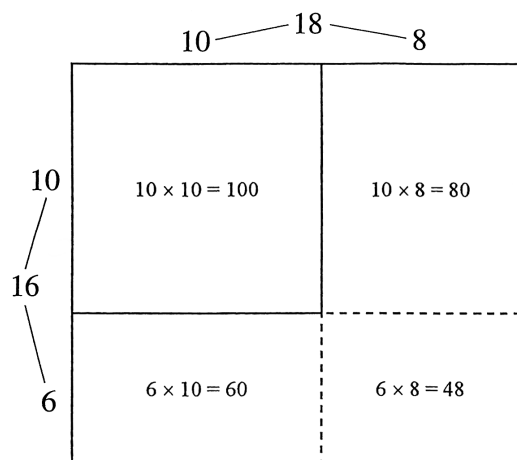
Try an experiment. Calculate $\frac{5}{16} \times \frac{8}{18}$. Don’t read on until you have an answer. If you are like most people who are products of the American school system, you probably got a pencil and paper, wrote the numbers down, and performed the following algorithm for multiplication of fractions. First you multiplied the numerators to get forty-eight. Then you multiplied the denominators (rewriting the multiplication vertically and performing the multiplication algorithm for whole numbers) to get 288. These actions resulted in the fraction $\frac{48}{288}$, which you then simplified to $\frac{1}{6}$ (perhaps even using several steps to do so). To check yourself, you probably went back and repeated the same actions and calculations; if you got the same answer twice, you assumed your calculations were correct.

Now take out a piece of graph paper and draw a rectangle. Use this rectangle to show the multiplication that represents the problem and what you did. See if you can find the rectangular arrays that represent the computations you did as you calculated the 48 and the 288, and then show in this rectangle the equivalence involved in simplifying this fraction to $\frac{1}{6}$. If this is difficult for you, the way the algorithm was taught to you has worked against your own conceptual understanding of multiplication.

The way the algorithms for operations with fractions are usually taught makes them very difficult for students to understand. Why? Just think how nonsensical these steps must seem to them. They are struggling to understand what fractions even mean. Furthermore, they often have insufficient understandings of the operations. For example, they often think of multiplication as repeated addition, and they struggle to apply repeated addition when multiplying fractions. Finally, as they treat the numbers in the numerators and denominators separately to

perform the algorithm, they lose sight of the quantities they are actually multiplying and make any number of errors in calculating each of the separate pieces.

Liping Ma (1999) compared the way Chinese and American teachers think about and teach the algorithms. Most Chinese teachers approach the teaching of the standard algorithms conceptually. For the whole number multiplication algorithm, they explain the distributive property and break the problem up into the component problems: $16 \times 18 = (10 + 6) \times (10 + 8) = (6 \times 8) + (6 \times 10) + (10 \times 8) + (10 \times 10) = 48 + 60 + 80 + 100$. Focusing first on the partial products helps students associate the partial products with the component parts in the algorithm. (The diagram below shows these steps as rectangles within the larger array of 16×18 .)



In contrast, 70 percent of American teachers teach this algorithm as a series of procedures and interpret students' errors as a problem with regrouping and lining up (Ma 1999). They remind students of the "rules"—that they are multiplying by tens and therefore have to move their answer to the next column. To help students follow the "rules" correctly, they often use lined paper and suggest that students use zero as a placeholder. This type of instruction focusing on procedures does not lead to understanding.

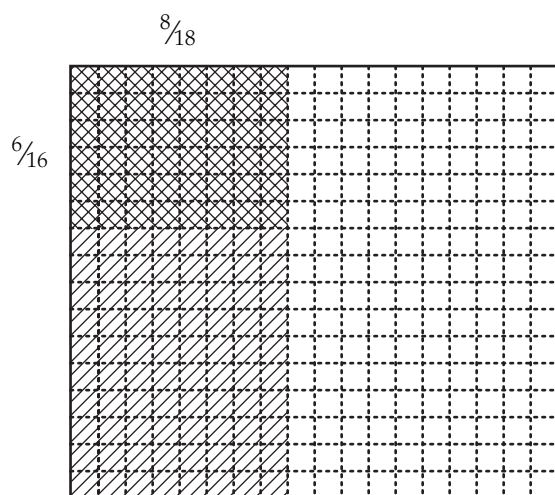
To teach the multiplication algorithm for fractions, Chinese teachers again approach it conceptually, focusing on both the distributive and the associative properties. They might explain that $\frac{6}{16}$ is equivalent to $6 \times \frac{1}{16}$ and $\frac{8}{18}$ is equivalent to $8 \times \frac{1}{18}$ and that

therefore $\frac{6}{16} \times \frac{8}{18}$ is equivalent to $6 \times 8 \times \frac{1}{16} \times \frac{1}{18}$, or $48 \times \frac{1}{288}$. In contrast, American teachers are likely to teach the algorithm procedurally, telling students to multiply the numerators, then multiply the denominators, then simplify.

It is probably true that if American schools taught the algorithms conceptually, as Liping Ma advocates, students would develop a clearer understanding. But should the algorithm be the ultimate goal of computation instruction? In today's world, do we want learners to have to rely on paper and pencil? Is the algorithm the fastest, most efficient way to compute? When are algorithms helpful? When should a student pull out a calculator? What does it mean to compute with number sense? Algorithms can be very helpful when multiplying or dividing large, unfriendly numbers or when working with messy fractions that can't easily be simplified. But in today's world, isn't that when we take out the calculator anyway? If we have to reach for paper and pencil to perform the arithmetic, why not reach for the calculator? In most real-world situations, the handheld calculator has replaced paper-and-pencil algorithms. When operations are taught with understanding and numeracy is the goal, most computations can be performed without paper and pencil or a calculator.

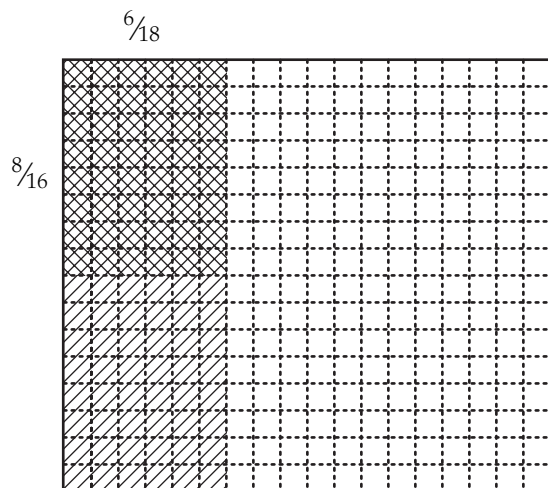
Ann Dowker (1992) asked forty-four mathematicians to estimate the answers to ten multiplication and ten division problems and assessed their strategies. Only 4 percent of the responses used algorithms, and the majority of the estimates were close to the exact answer. The mathematicians looked at the numbers first and then found efficient, elegant strategies that seemed appropriate to the numbers. They made the numbers friendly (often by using landmark numbers), and they played with relationships. Interestingly, they also varied their strategies, sometimes using different strategies to solve the same problems on different days! Most important, they found the process creative and enjoyable.

How might mathematicians solve $\frac{6}{16} \times \frac{8}{18}$? There are many ways. You could, for example, interchange the numerators. This makes the problem $\frac{8}{16} \times \frac{6}{18}$, which can be simplified to $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{3}$: the answer this way can be arrived at mentally. Why does this work? What does it mean to multiply $\frac{6}{16}$ by $\frac{8}{18}$? Here is a rectangular array showing this multiplication.



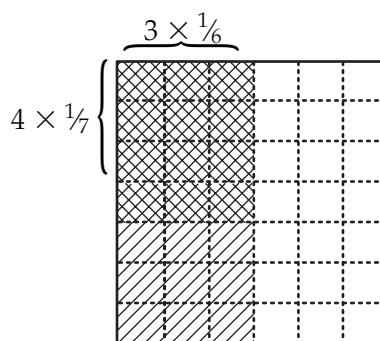
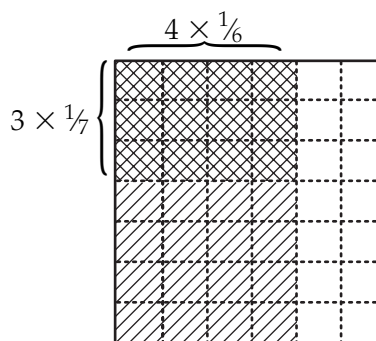
Picture square tiles being laid to build a patio, measuring 16 feet by 18 feet. Next, imagine that $\frac{8}{18}$ of the tiles (8 out of 18 columns) have been laid so far and that $\frac{6}{16}$ of these (6 out of 16 rows) have been mortared in place. The small rectangular area that is now complete is a 6×8 array (48 tiles). This small array fits into the larger 16×18 array (288 tiles) six times. Thus, $\frac{6}{16} \times \frac{8}{18} = \frac{1}{6}$.

Now look at this patio in a different way. Suppose the smaller array is turned 90 degrees: it now has 6 columns and 8 rows (see diagram below). The relationship to the whole is still the same, but the problem is now $\frac{8}{16} \times \frac{6}{18}$, or $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{3}$, which of course is easily calculated mentally.



Interchanging numerators and then simplifying if needed is a powerful mental math strategy that is often helpful. For example, try it with $\frac{4}{6} \times \frac{3}{7}$, or $\frac{4}{5} \times \frac{5}{8}$.

The first problem can now be expressed as $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{4}{7}$, or $\frac{2}{7}$. The second can be expressed as $\frac{5}{5} \times \frac{4}{8}$, or $\frac{1}{2}$. And it is easy to see in arrays how the smaller rectangular array, formed by the numerators, just gets turned: $(3 \times \frac{1}{7}) \times (4 \times \frac{1}{6}) = (3 \times 4) \times (\frac{1}{6} \times \frac{1}{7}) = (4 \times \frac{1}{7}) \times (3 \times \frac{1}{6}) = \frac{4}{7} \times \frac{1}{2}$. See the diagrams below.



This strategy, of course, is helpful only in some cases. But there are many similar mental math strategies that students can use if they have a deep understanding of number and operation. Calculating with number sense, as mathematicians, means having many strategies at their disposal and looking to the numbers first before choosing a strategy. Let's look at a few other strategies.

How about eliminating fractions from the computation altogether? For $3\frac{1}{2} \times 14$, you can double the $3\frac{1}{2}$ to eliminate the fraction and halve the 14, expressing the problem as 7×7 . Now you have the

answer of 49 mentally. For $2\frac{1}{4} \times 16$, you could eliminate the fraction by multiplying $2\frac{1}{4}$ by 4 and dividing the 16 by 4. This lets us express the problem as 9×4 , or 36. Try using this strategy to compute $3\frac{1}{5} \times 45$: eliminate the fraction by multiplying $3\frac{1}{5}$ by 5 and then divide 45 by 5. Now the problem is 16×9 . You could keep on halving and doubling with the whole numbers: $16 \times 9 = 8 \times 18 = 4 \times 36 = 2 \times 72 = 144$. Or, since you know that $16 \times 10 = 160$, all you have to do is subtract the extra 16 to get the answer of 144.

You can also use this strategy to eliminate decimal numbers. How about 0.8×350 ? If you multiply the 0.8 by 10 and divide the 350 by 10, you express the problem as 8×35 . Halving and doubling, you get 4×70 , which equals 280. Or you could think of 0.8 as $\frac{4}{5}$, expressing the decimal as a fraction; $\frac{4}{5}$ of 350 = 4×70 . All these strategies work because of the associative property of multiplication. You can group the factors in clever ways first to make the computation easier:

$$\begin{aligned} 0.8 \times 350 &= ? \\ 0.8 \times (10 \times 35) &= (0.8 \times 10) \times 35 = 8 \times 35 \\ (4 \times 2) \times 35 &= 4 \times (2 \times 35) = 280 \\ 0.8 \times 350 &= (4 \times \frac{1}{5}) \times 350 \\ 4 \times (\frac{1}{5} \times 350) &= 4 \times 70 = 280 \end{aligned}$$

Note how quickly all these alternative, creative ways to compute products can be done—in most cases mentally. If paper and pencil are used, it is only to keep track. The ability to explore numbers like this is the result of a deep understanding of number, landmark numbers, properties, and operations. And it characterizes true numeracy. In contrast, students who are asked to practice the algorithm over and over to multiply 0.8×350 stop thinking. They sacrifice the relationships in order to treat the numbers simply as digits. And any teacher of middle school students will attest to the difficulties students have as they try to complete each of the multiplication steps, regroup appropriately, and determine where the decimal point goes in the answer.

Does this mean that students don't need to know how to calculate? Of course not. To be successful in today's world, they need a deep understanding of mathematics. They will be bombarded with numbers, statistics, advertisements, and similar data every day—on the radio, on television, and in newspapers.

They will need good mental ability and good number sense in order to evaluate advertising claims, estimate quantities, efficiently calculate numbers and judge whether these calculations are reasonable, add up restaurant checks and determine equal shares, interpret data and statistics, and so on. They need to be able to move back and forth from fractions to decimals to percents. Students need a much deeper sense of number and operation than ever before—one that includes algorithms, but emphasizes mental arithmetic and a repertoire of strategies that allows them to both estimate and make exact calculations mentally.

How do we, as teachers, develop students' ability to do this? How do we engage them in learning to be young mathematicians at work? The minilessons in this guide will help students to develop a deeper understanding of the computations they perform.

Using Minilessons to Develop Number Sense: An Example

Minilessons are usually done with the whole class together in a meeting area. Young students often sit on a rug; for older students, benches or chairs can be placed in a U-shape. Clustering students together like this, near a chalkboard, is helpful because you will want to encourage pair talk at times, and you will need space to represent the strategies that will become the focus of discussion. The problems are written one at a time and learners are asked to determine an answer. Although the emphasis is on the development of mental arithmetic strategies, this does not mean learners have to solve the problems in their heads—but it is important for them to do the problem with their heads! In other words, encourage students to examine the numbers in the problem and think about clever, efficient ways to solve it. The relationships between the problems in the minilesson will support students in doing this. By developing a repertoire of strategies, an understanding of the big ideas underlying why they work, and a variety of ways to model the relations, students are constructing powerful toolboxes for flexible and efficient computation. Enter a classroom with us and see how this is done.

Each day at the start of math workshop, Dawn Selnes, a fifth-grade teacher in New York City, does a short minilesson on computation strategies. She

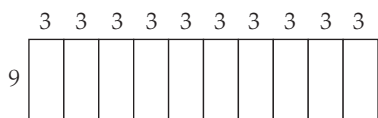
usually chooses a string of five or six related problems (like the ones provided in this resource unit) and asks the students to solve them, one at a time, sharing their strategies with each other. She allows her students to construct their own strategies by decomposing numbers in ways that make sense to them. Posted around the room are signs the students made throughout the year as they developed a repertoire of strategies for operations with fractions. The signs read, "Make use of money," "Use clocks," "Halve and double," "Eliminate the fractions."

On the chalkboard today is the first problem in Dawn's string:

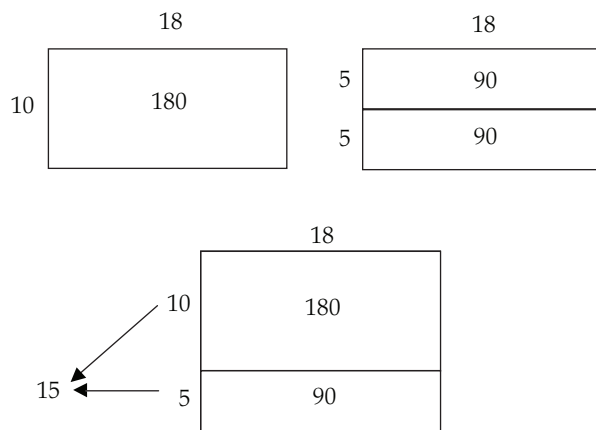
- 9×30
- 15×18
- $4 \frac{1}{2} \times 60$
- $2 \frac{1}{2} \times 120$
- 15×36
- $15 \frac{1}{2} \times 36$
- $5 \frac{1}{4} \times 40$
- 0.8×80

Although the string progresses to fractions and decimals, it begins with a few whole number multiplication problems, and one student, Alice, describes how she solved 9×30 . "I just used all the factors," she explains. "I thought of it as 9 times 3 times 10. I knew that 9 times 3 is 27, and 27 times 10 is 270."

Dawn draws ten 9×3 arrays (showing how they fit together to make a 9×30) to represent her strategy and then asks for other strategies.

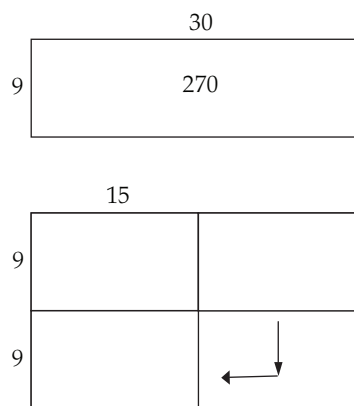


Most of the students have treated the problem similarly, so Dawn goes to the next problem in the string, 15×18 . Several students use the distributive property here. Tom's strategy is representative of many, and several students nod in agreement as he explains how he multiplied 10×18 and got 180 and then took half of that to figure out the answer to 5×18 . He completes the calculation by adding 180 to 90, for an answer of 270. Dawn draws these arrays:



Lara's strategy is similar, perhaps not as elegant, but it makes sense to her. She multiplies using tens, too, but she breaks up the 18 instead of the 15 and multiplies 10×15 , and then 8×15 . These two products together also result in 270, and Dawn represents them with an array model.

Ned agrees with that answer but with a smile he says, "Yeah, but you didn't even have to calculate. It's the same as 9×30 , because the 30 is halved, and the 9 is doubled!" Dawn draws an array, cuts it in half, and the students discuss how the pieces can be moved to show the equivalence.



Although all the students in the class are comfortable with this doubling and halving strategy and understand why it works, they have not all thought to use it, because Dawn has turned the numbers around. It might have been more obvious if she had written 18×15 directly underneath 9×30 . But she wants to challenge them to think.

Now Dawn moves to fractions. She writes $4 \frac{1}{2} \times 60$ as the third problem. Several students immediately

raise their hands, but Dawn waits for those still working to finish. Alice is one of them, so she asks her to share first. "I split it into 4×60 first," Alice begins, "and I did that by doing $4 \times 6 = 24$. Then 24 times 10 is 240. Then I knew that a half of 60 is 30. So 30 plus 240 is 270."

"My way is kind of like yours," another classmate, Daniel, responds, "but I subtracted."

"But then you would get the wrong answer," Alice tells him, looking puzzled.

"No, what I mean is I did $5 \times 6 \times 10$. That was 300. Then I subtracted the 30."

"Where did you get the 5?" Several of his classmates are also now puzzled.

"That was easier for me than $4\frac{1}{2}$. But that's why I took 30 away at the end," Daniel explains, very proud of his strategy.

Dawn draws the array and checks to see whether everyone understands by asking who can explain Daniel's strategy in their own words. Several students do so, and Dawn seems satisfied that the group understands. "That's a really neat strategy, isn't it?" Daniel beams, and Dawn turns to Ned, "And what did you do, Ned? Your hand was up so quickly. Did you see a relationship to another problem again?"

Ned laughs and says, "Yep. Just doubling and halving again. It's the same as 9×30 . The 9 was halved and the 30 was doubled."

Several students exclaim in surprise. Dawn smiles and goes to the next problem: $2\frac{1}{2} \times 120$. This time everyone's hand is up quickly, and Dawn calls on Tanya, who has not yet spoken. Tanya, like the rest of the class, has made use of the doubling and halving relationships in this string of problems.

The other strategies that have previously been discussed are also powerful strategies, and Dawn does not want to imply that they should be replaced by doubling and halving. She is only trying to help her students think about relationships in problems, to look to the numbers first before calculating. To ensure that this happens, she follows with the next two problems: 15×36 , then $15\frac{1}{2} \times 36$. Most students see the relationship between the first one and 30×18 . Since they have already calculated 15×18 , they know they just need to double that answer. A few students solve it by doing 10×36 to get 360, halving that to get 180, and then adding these partial products for an answer of 540. For $15\frac{1}{2} \times 36$ everyone uses the distributive property, adding 18 more for an answer of 558.

Dawn moves next to a more difficult problem, challenging her students to generalize: $5\frac{1}{4} \times 40$. She asks the students to write their strategy and solution in their math journal, and then to turn to the person sitting next to them and share it. Most of the students use the distributive property, but a few double and halve to make $10\frac{1}{2} \times 20$, and then double and halve again: $21 \times 10 = 210$. "Do you think there is any way we could have done something like that but with one step only? Could we eliminate the fraction in one step?" Dawn asks them to ponder with pair talk. After a few minutes, she starts the discussion: "Lynn?"

"Maybe we could times the $5\frac{1}{4}$ by 4, and then take a quarter of the 40?" Lynn offers somewhat tentatively.

Dawn writes, $5\frac{1}{4} \times 4 \times 10$. "Hmm...let's look at what Lynn is saying." Adding parentheses, she writes $(5\frac{1}{4} \times 4) \times 10 = 5\frac{1}{4} \times (4 \times 10)$.

Rich discussion ensues until a consensus is reached that Lynn's strategy works, and then Dawn asks the class to consider whether it might work for decimals, too. She writes the last problem in the string: 0.8×80 . With elegant efficiency, many of the students write: $0.8 \times 10 \times 8 = 8 \times 8$. At the end of the minilesson, a new sign is made for the wall of strategies. Dawn asks the students to describe the strategy in their own words and they decide to write, "Group the factors in pretty ways."

These young mathematicians are composing and decomposing numbers flexibly as they multiply rational numbers. They are inventing their own strategies. They are looking for relationships among the problems. They are looking carefully at the numbers first before they decide on a strategy.

Students don't do this automatically. Dawn has developed this ability in her students by focusing on computation during minilessons, with strings of related problems every day. She has developed the big ideas and models through investigations, but once this understanding has been constructed, she promotes fluency with computation strategies in minilessons such as this one.

Using Models during Minilessons

As you work with the minilessons from this unit, you will want to use the related models to depict students' strategies. The money, clock, and double open

number line models are helpful for addition and subtraction. Arrays and ratio tables are most helpful for multiplication and division. Representing computation strategies with mathematical models provides students with images of their strategies for discussion, and supports the development of the various strategies for computational fluency, but only if the models are understood. Modeling is developed through three stages. Initially models are introduced as a model of a realistic situation. In the second stage you can use it to model the computation strategies as students explain. Later, in stage three, it will become an important tool to think with.

Note: This unit assumes that the models have already been developed with realistic situations and rich investigations. In this series, the Field Trips and Fund-Raisers unit can be used to develop the double open number line (particularly the fund-raiser investigation in the second week); Exploring Parks and Playgrounds develops the array model for multiplication of fractions; and Best Buys, Ratios, and Rates develops the ratio table and provides further experiences with the double open number line. If your students do not have well developed understandings of these models, you may find it beneficial to use these units first. Representations like these give students a chance to discuss and envision each other's strategies. Eventually students become able to use these models as tools to think with, to model, prove and explore their ideas.

A Few Words of Caution

As you work with the minilessons in this resource book, it is very important to remember two things. First, honor students' strategies. Accept alternative solutions and explore why they work. Use the models to represent students' strategies and facilitate discussion and reflection on the strategies shared. Sample classroom episodes (titled "Inside One Classroom") are interspersed throughout the unit to help you anticipate what learners might say and do and to provide images of teachers and students at work. The intent is not to get all learners to use the same strategy at the end of the string. That would simply be discovery learning. The strings are crafted

to support development, to encourage students to look to the numbers and to use a variety of strategies helpful for those numbers.

Secondly, do not use the string as a recipe that cannot be varied. You will need to be flexible. The strings are designed to encourage discussion and reflection on various strategies important for numeracy. Although the strings have been carefully crafted to support the development of these strategies, they are not foolproof: if the numbers in the strings are not sufficient to produce the results intended, you will need to insert additional problems, depending on your students' responses, to support them further to develop the intended ideas. For this reason, most of the strings are accompanied by a section titled "Behind the Numbers" describing the string's purpose and how the numbers were chosen. Being aware of the purpose of each string will guide you in determining what additional types of problems to add. The Behind the Numbers sections should also be helpful in developing your ability to craft your own strings. Strings are fun both to craft and to solve.

References and Resources

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