

How the Other Half Thinks: Adventures in Mathematical Reasoning

Book Review

How the Other Half Thinks: Adventures in Mathematical Reasoning and Mathematics Galore! Masterclasses, Workshops, and Team Projects in Mathematics and Its Applications

Reviewed by Edward J. Barbeau

How the Other Half Thinks: Adventures in Mathematical Reasoning
Sherman Stein
McGraw-Hill, 2001
xi + 177 pages
ISBN 0-07-137339-X

Mathematics Galore! Masterclasses, Workshops, and Team Projects in Mathematics and Its Applications
C. J. Budd and C. J. Sangwin
Oxford University Press, 2001
viii + 254 pages
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How does it happen that there are people who do not understand mathematics? If mathematics invokes only the rules of logic, such as are accepted by all normal minds; if its evidence is based on principles common to all men, and that none could deny it without being mad, how does it come about that so many persons are here refractory? ... [T]hat not everyone can understand mathematical reasoning when explained appears very surprising when we think of it.

—Henri Poincaré, *Mathematical Creation* [49]

I am often aware of a deep cultural divide between me as a mathematician and members of the

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general public, even those who are well educated in other respects. It is not so much a difference of knowledge and technical background as of distinct patterns of thought and analysis. Over the past two centuries many mathematical writers have sought to bridge this gap.

Early authors like Lewis Carroll [8], Courant and Robbins [14], and Hilbert and Cohn-Vossen [22] presumed upon some mathematical background and experience. Much of the literature consists of collections of problems for amateurs (such as [8], [12], [13], [27]). The prolific Martin Gardner [9], [10] has probably done more than anyone to keep the amateur abreast of the most interesting and elegant mathematical problems and results. Other books have been written for a wider audience. The classics of W. W. Rouse Ball and H. S. M. Coxeter [7], Hugo Steinhaus [40], George Gamow [19], and Hans Rademacher and Otto Toeplitz [33], for example, showed that the scope of mathematics goes far beyond what is learned in school. Recent writers such as Ian Stewart [41], Ivars Peterson [30], [31], and A. K. Dewdney [18] follow in this tradition. One of the first attempts to reach a very broad audience was the publication of the 1956 anthology *The World of Mathematics* [28], which drew together a variety of essays touching different aspects of mathematics by many authors, including some nonmathematicians. History and biography are other ways of conveying the significance of mathematics and what it feels like to be a mathematician [1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [6], [24], [45]. A growing and receptive public has accounted for the popularity of such recent books as *Gödel, Escher,*

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