

## STEVE'S STORY

Steve is a high school freshman who enjoys basketball, hanging out with friends, his iPhone, music, and a girl named Lauren. Steve does alright in school, but does not necessarily “enjoy” math the way he does the previous list. Steve is sitting in math class one day and the teacher introduces the topic of Slope. Steve knows the word slope, as in a ski slope (he likes to snowboard too), but is not sure what it has to do with math. With a teacher like Mr. Bartlett, though, they will no doubt be talking about math, not snowboarding. Steve doesn't understand the first time the subject is introduced but he doesn't have to do it himself in class, which makes him feel relieved. The teacher says they will be practicing more in the next class.

In the next class, the teacher asks for volunteers to perform the task and Steve doesn't volunteer, but a couple other students do and he tries to understand what they're doing, but still doesn't get it because they finish so quickly.

The teacher then puts the students in pairs and Steve ends up with Jose, a student who says the task is easy and because Steve thinks that he doesn't want to seem stupid, he agrees. Jose does their problems while Steve nods his head and says he thinks the calculations look right even though he couldn't do it himself. When the full class works through the problems, Jose raises his hand to do one on the board in front of the class and so he and Steve need to go to the front and put a problem on the board. Steve is worried that Jose will ask him to do something or the teacher will ask him a question, but again he gets by without having to say anything.

The teacher asks if everyone understands the task and says that it's important that they do because they will be moving on next to solving equations that require that students understand slope. The teacher encourages the students to ask him for help if they need it. Even though there has been much discussion about rise over run that Steve did not understand, he assumes that with more practice like he did that day with Jose he will eventually understand the topic so again he doesn't say anything.

The next class, the teacher introduces a new topic that assumes students understand slope. As the teacher begins to put new numbers on the board, Steve's eyes get a bit blurry and his head starts to hurt and he's even breathing faster. He feels like the room is closing in on him or he's falling down a hole. Everyone in the room seems to understand what the teacher is talking about except him. When the teacher distributes a practice worksheet, Steve basically spends the class staring at the numbers like they are Chinese and pretending to use his calculator as a distraction so it looks like he is working. Steve is feeling so discouraged about math that he doesn't even try to do the homework for that class that night.

The next day, the teacher begins the class with a surprise pop quiz to see how many students can do the new skill. The quiz has 10 questions on it and after the quiz students trade papers with another classmate and the other classmate scores their work. Steve gets 1 out of 10 questions correct. “I didn't really try,” he says to his classmate when he gets the paper back. The teacher collects the quizzes at the end of class.

The next day at the start of class, the teacher pulls Steve aside and says he noticed his score on the quiz and asks him to come and see him after school. Steve has to arrange to get extra help, and he calls his mom and tells her he will miss the bus to stay after for help in class and that she will need to come and get him after that.

When Steve gets to his teacher's room that afternoon, the teacher goes back to the beginning and explains it more slowly. Steve sort of gets it when he says it, but when the teacher asks him to do it, Steve gets stuck on some aspect of the problem. When the teacher explains it to him again, Steve starts to

understand. After a few practice problems, Steve feels the light bulb in his head go off and it starts to make sense.

Steve thanks the teacher for his help and the teacher tells him that the next time he doesn't understand something in class, he needs to let him know. The teacher tells him that as he moves up through the grades in high school, teachers will increasingly expect him to monitor his own understanding of what is being taught in class and to ask for help when he needs it. As he leaves, Steve's teacher tells him that in college there were 300 students in some of his classes and there was only a mid-term and a final exam. He said that if you didn't understand something you wouldn't know until those big tests, which counted for your grade and then it was too late to go back and learn what you didn't understand. He tells Steve that in college you have to go to what are called "office hours" for help from your professors, which only happen for a few hours on one or two days each week. Professors don't come to you. Mr. Bartlett encourages him to get good at asking for help now so he won't have trouble when he gets to college.

Steve thanks him and wonders how he can find ways to know when he needs to ask for help so he doesn't find the walls closing in on him or feel like he's falling down a deep hole.