

# The Global Math Project: Uplifting Mathematics for All

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In October 2017, over 1 million students and teachers from 168 countries and territories were transfixed by a universal story that together, they explored. In Tanzania, a class gathered excitedly around the chalkboard as the teacher began to tell the story. New York City high schoolers drew illustrations on a whiteboard. Ponytailed elementary school girls in Saudi Arabia animatedly explored the key ideas using colorful magnetic dots. In Romania, middle grade students played with the online version on their laptops, exclaiming aloud at each new twist. And in Zimbabwe, students recreated the story for themselves using nothing but pebbles and hollows dug into the ground.



See our brochure [here](#) for the statistics and feedback of the week.

What kind of a story is this, that has the power to engage students all over the world, transcending language, borders, and technology? Why, it's a story of the deeply human endeavor of mathematics! These students and their teachers were all taking part in the world's inaugural [Global Math Week](#), exploring the same mathematical story and sharing their experiences through social media.

Two years ago, a team of [seven people](#) had the bold and audacious vision to bring the world together through a common mathematical experience, in the process transforming perceptions of what mathematics can and should be. Inspired by code.org's wildly successful "Hour of Code" program, which makes computer coding relevant and fun for millions of students each year, we asked the question: Can each and every person on this planet come to see mathematics as human, relevant, meaningful, accessible, creative, joyful, and uplifting?

We believed the answer was "Yes," especially given a compelling, accessible mathematical topic with a cross-grade storyline that is classroom-relevant but curriculum agnostic. For our inaugural topic, a natural choice was *Exploding Dots*, which was developed in 2005 by mathematician and Global Math Project co-founder James Tanton, and uses a simple, appealing visual model to connect arithmetic to algebra and beyond.

Once the topic and dates were chosen and a basic website was in place, we opened up the project to Global Math Ambassadors, who volunteered to help spread the word about Global Math Week. The response was staggering: Over 360 Ambassadors from over 60 countries stepped up to recruit local teachers to participate with their students. At the same time, the mathematics education software company [Scolab.com](#) in Montreal donated their services to make an entire self-contained *Exploding Dots* web experience for those classrooms with access to technology, and the Global Math leadership team wrote teaching guides for those groups across the globe with no access to technology. Partner organizations including GeoGebra, Matific, and Wolfram created other ways to explore the content using their platforms. Ambassadors translated materials into multiple languages.



As Global Math Week (GMW) approached, we began to get nervous. Would we actually achieve our goal of reaching 1 million students this first year? After all, this was an essentially grassroots, almost entirely volunteer effort! The organizing team and Ambassadors set up real-time tracking so we could count registrations as they came in. And come in they did, first in a trickle, then a steady stream, and finally a deluge as the week itself approached! In fact, we hit our 1-million-student goal on October 10, the first official day of GMW!



By the end of GMW, more than 13,500 teachers from 168 countries and territories had registered, pledging to work with 1.77 million students. We were absolutely thrilled! However, we also wanted to know to what extent participating in GMW enriched students' and teachers' perceptions of mathematics. On a follow-up survey, more than 90% of teachers who responded agreed that the Global Math Week topic of *Exploding Dots* helped students to see mathematics as more approachable, more enjoyable and as making sense. Teachers saw students be more confident in mathematics. Commented one teacher, "It was an incredible experience for ALL students! Those who don't typically see themselves as 'math people' engaged deeply with the problem and often explained how *Exploding Dots* worked to their 'more math-y' classmates. It was a great equalizer!"



In addition, three-quarters of teachers who responded to the survey said that *Exploding Dots* had changed their *own* perception of mathematics as well. One teacher wrote, “It made evident that even what we might call ‘basic math’ or ‘elementary math’ is a joyous activity. We don’t have to wait until we reach the upper level math courses in a graduate program to finally find the joy.” Many teachers also remarked on the excitement that global participation brought to the project, for example writing “My students were so excited to be a part of the Global Math Project knowing students all around the world were learning and doing the same math.”

With a tremendously successful debut year behind us, our next steps are to secure the means to take this to the next level: translate our content into many languages, reach over 10 million students and teachers, and further the joy of mathematics throughout the world.



We were greatly humbled and inspired that the first Global Math Week was propelled almost entirely by volunteer efforts and in-kind contributions. (The major exception was an incredible kick-off symposium at NYU's Courant Institute, generously sponsored by the Overdeck Family Foundation, Two Sigma, and others, followed by a festive party at the National Museum of Mathematics.) The countless volunteer hours devoted by people all over the world to make Global Math Week 2017 a success are a testament to the power and beauty of mathematics and its ability to inspire and connect us all.

We can't wait for the story of Global Math Week to continue in 2018. Won't you join us?

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*Please consider making a tax-exempt charitable contribution to support the efforts of the Global Math Project: [GMP Donate](#).*