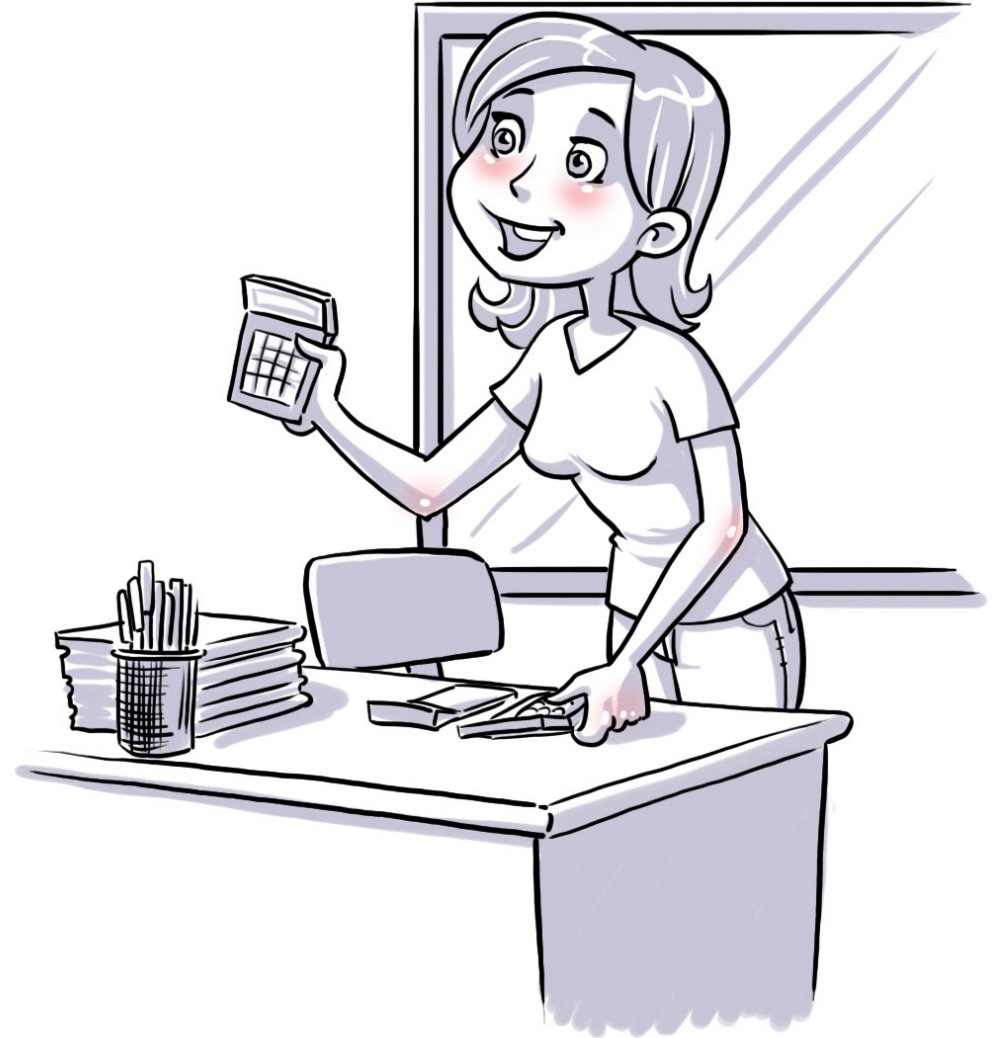


Calculating Challenges

"This morning is our math drill," Shiomi said to her friend Tia. "I've been reviewing my multiplication tables this week, but I still don't think I'll be able to beat Jenkin."

"Yes, Jenkin almost always knows the answer first," Tia said. "But at least I now know most of the answers, even if I can't answer as fast."



"Me too. Though it would be fun to win one math drill."

Shiomi and Tia sat down at their school desks and prepared for the day's lesson.

Just then their teacher, Mrs. Phillips, arrived. "Good morning, children. Are you ready for a math class with a twist?" The kids looked up expectantly. "I have a surprise for each of you—a calculator! Tia, will you pass these out, please? This morning we'll learn to use them."

Most of the students responded enthusiastically as the calculators were passed out. But there was one boy who was unhappy about the new math tool.

Jenkin looked down at the calculator. He was the best in the class when it came to doing sums and multiplications in his mind, but he knew from experience that he wasn't that fast when it came to operating a calculator. Would he ever win another math drill?

"Mrs. Phillips, can we continue to do our drills the way we usually do?" Jenkin asked. "I don't think we need to use a calculator for drills."

"We won't always use the calculators, Jenkin," she replied. "However, it is important for you to practice using a calculator. Being able to figure things out in your mind is good, but sometimes with challenging sums, you'll need to use a calculator. I'm sure you'll do just fine."

But Jenkin didn't. In fact, as the lesson progressed he became increasingly frustrated with how clumsy he felt with a calculator. It seemed that his classmates were much faster at getting the answers than he was, and they all seemed to enjoy using their calculators.

Jenkin went through the calculator drills they were given without being able to finish punching in a single equation before someone had already given the answer. Shiomi, Tia, and Todd all took turns coming in first on calculator drills. Not being the fastest was a new experience for Jenkin, and he was discouraged.



That evening, Jenkin's mother asked him how school had been that day.

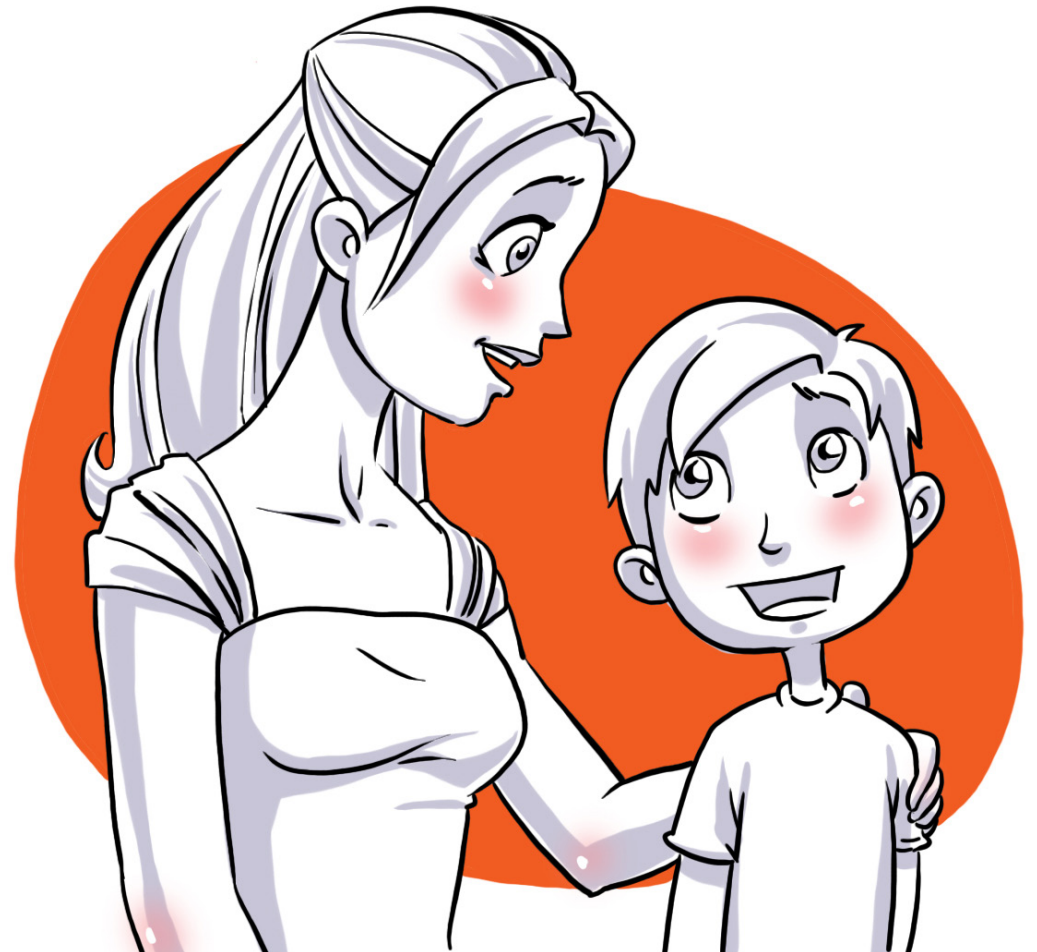
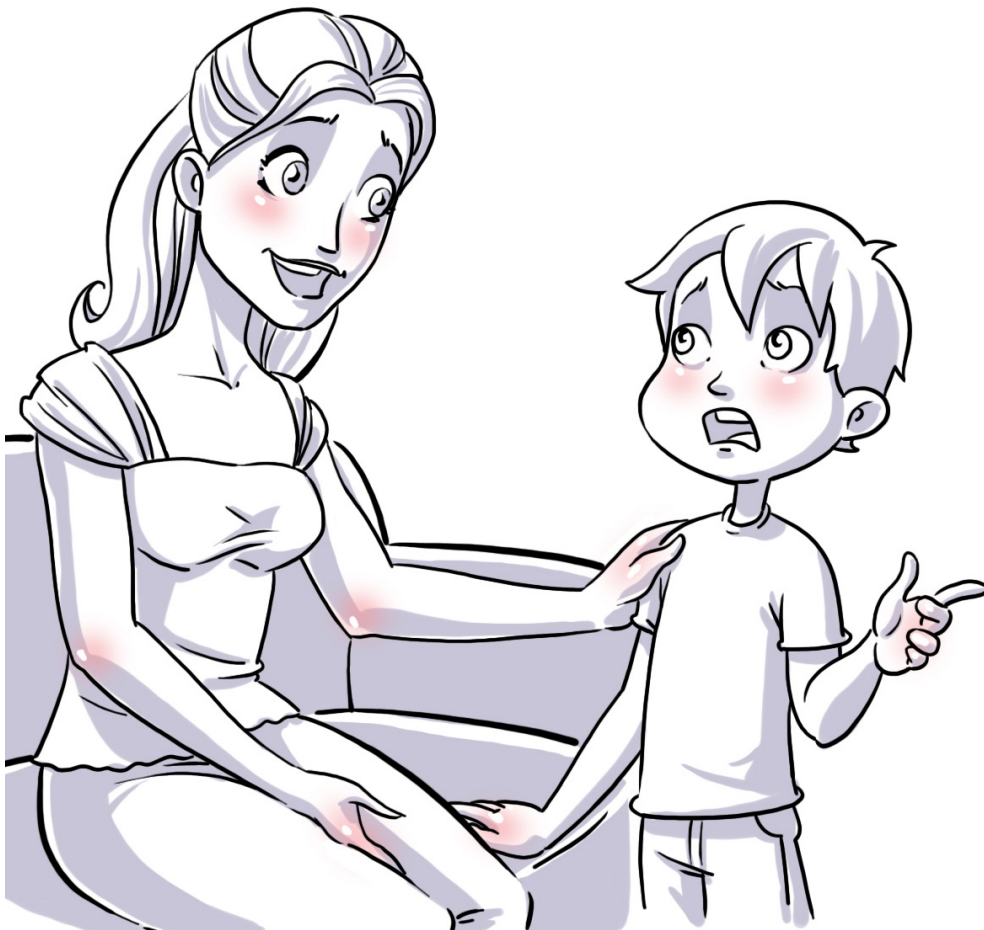
"Mrs. Phillips gave each of us a calculator," Jenkin answered.

"That's useful. Why the glum face?" Jenkin's mother asked.

"I didn't win any of the calculator drills today," replied Jenkin. "The other kids won all the drills. I'm so bad at using a calculator. I wish we'd never gotten them!"

Jenkin's mother put her arm around him to comfort him. "Jenkin, learning new things is a part of life—in fact, it's an important part of life—even things that might seem too difficult at first. Did you know that your dad and I still continue to learn new things?"

"But it's probably easy for you," said Jenkin.



"Not always. For example, as you know, I used to think I didn't have the skill to be a good cook, and our meals were very simple and plain. But a year ago, I realized it was time to expand my cooking repertoire and learn to cook a larger variety of meals. That was a challenge for me, but now I'm able to prepare a wider variety of dishes from several cuisines."

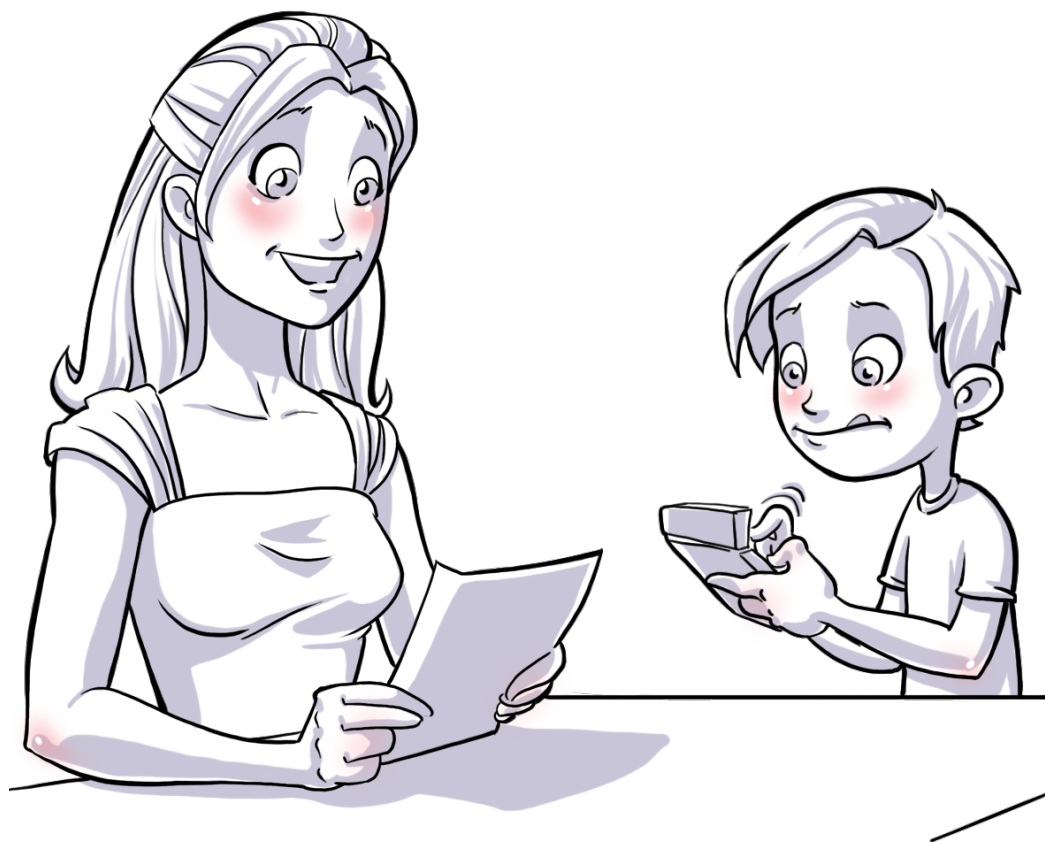
"My friends are always saying how they love your baking!" exclaimed Jenkin.

"That's encouraging," his mother said, "but that would have never happened if I had given up and said it was too hard for me."

"When you step out to learn new things, you grow as a person. It's important for us to stretch and expand our skills because it helps to make our lives fuller, which makes us happier as a result, and gives Jesus further opportunities to use us in new ways."

"If you like, I can help you practice using a calculator after school. I think once you become accustomed to using a calculator, you'll be faster and then you'll be able to enjoy it. Would you like that?"

Jenkin was happy for this opportunity for his mother's help. They prayed together, and then Jenkin and his mother spent time practicing working out math problems on the calculator. In a few days Jenkin was finding it easier to use, and even enjoyed exploring some of the extra features on the calculator with his dad. Jenkin saw that it would be a very useful tool for when he'd need to perform long and complicated equations.



Jenkin still likes to do math memory drills in his head and usually wins. Even though he's not the fastest in the class at using the calculator, he's pleased now to use one. And he's discovered the joy that comes from encouraging others when they succeed, such as those winning the calculator drills.

- Is there a subject or skill you have difficulty learning, or wish you didn't need to study?
- Can you think of any historical characters who did great things as a result of learning and mastering challenging subjects, situations, or skills?