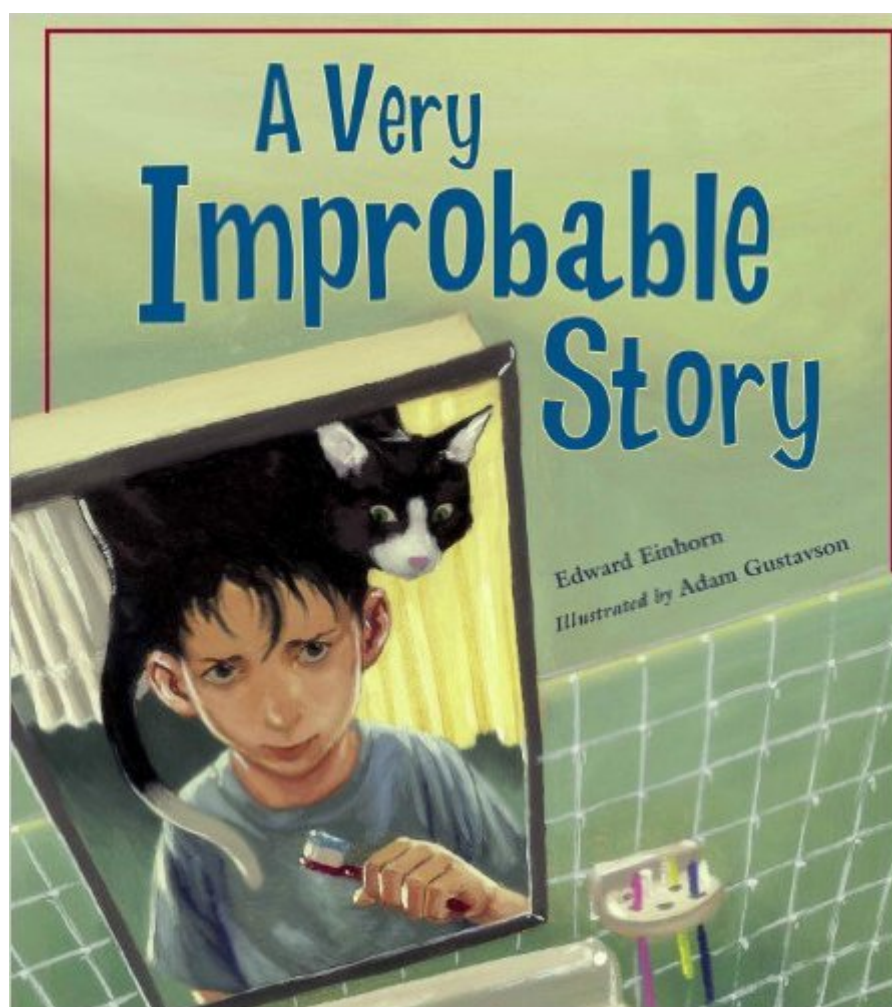# A Very Improbable Story

Synopsis

What are the odds?Ethan wakes up one morning to find a very strange cat stuck on his head. The cat, Odds, refuses to budge until Ethan wins a game of probability. Without looking, Ethan must pick out a dime from his coin collection or two matching socks from his dresser, or do something else improbable. If he doesn't, Odds is there to stay, and Ethan has a 100% chance of missing his big soccer game.A very improbable story about a challenging math concept.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: AD470L (What's this?)

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Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (17 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #95,301 in Books (See Top 100 in Books)   #30 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > Math > Fractions   #496 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Animals > Cats #1778 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Science, Nature & How It Works

Age Range: 7 - 10 years

Grade Level: 2 - 5

Customer Reviews

Einhorn, Edward. A Very Improbable Story. Illustrated by Adam Gustavson. Charlesbridge. 2008.This is a very humorous story that is sometimes slightly slowed by a valiant effort to explain the mathematical concept of probability. "One morning, Ethan woke up with a cat on his head. There was nothing improbable about that. Ethan's cat, Snowy, sometimes curled up there to sleep. But this was different. The cat on Ethan's head wasn't his cat!" This strange cat challenges Ethan to play "games of probability" with him and win, if Ethan wants the cat to get off his head so he can go and play a soccer match. Odds, the cat, tells Ethan to see if he can "pull out 2 matching socks without looking" from his drawer. "It's not as easy as it sounds," he warned, "With 10 pairs of socks, you have a very low probability of finding a match." Of course, Ethan loses this game since as Odds points out, "After you pulled out the first sock there were 19 single socks left. So there was only 1

sock out of 19 that would have let you win." Ethan responds with, "Is that what they call bad odds?" It takes several more games before Ethan finally wins thus enabling the concept of probability to be more fully explained. A paragraph on the final page names the two French mathematicians who developed the concept of probability, and then leaves the reader with a probability problem to solve. This clever well-done book that should appeal to children in grades K-4 may lose some readers as the details of probability are explained; however, others will enjoy playing along with the games.

This charming and educational story is the perfect introduction to mathematics as it delves into the adventures of problem solving, the process of deductive reasoning and everyday decision making. All of which are basic life skills. The cat is a bit haunting, but he adds a fun drama to the piece and continues to challenge Ethan. It's a wonderful book for young readers to embrace with uncomplicated language and provides even a more indepth terminology section for any addition questions children might have. I completely recommend it as my little one is a HUGE fan!

The plot and the examples are engaging enough but the author makes the egregious mathematical error of equating the concepts of probability and odds. On page 16 Ethan says, "I'll pick out a white one. I have only a 25 in 100 chance of doing that." That is a correct statement of probability. But the cat replies, "That's the same as odds of 1 in 4." Odds is the ratio of the number of ways an event can occur compared to the number of ways the event does not occur. In this instance that would be 25 white marbles compared to 75 non-white marbles. If we reduce that ratio the odds are 1 to 3. It's too bad this wasn't fixed in the editing stage of production.

My five year old really enjoys this book and it has been very useful in teaching her the challenging concept of probability. Also, the art work is terrific! I highly recommend it!

Great read, my son is a very early reader, he taught himself to read at a ripe old age of 2.5! I am just now truly amazed at his ability, as my daughter is that age now and cannot see past a handful of sight words. Son also enjoys math, he was sort of obsessed with numbers (we decorated his room with numbers!), and to some point still is. This book is perfect for him, as he is always begging us to teach him more about fractions. In this book, the boy wakes up with a black cat on his head... the cat depicted on the book, looks exactly like our cat, Princess, so that was another bonus. Anyway the cat asks the boy to do some probability and fractions in return for getting off the boys head! The story is funny, and it teaches my son in a funny, easy to understand way, about probability.

I didn't dig math as a kid, so I'm trying to come up with all sorts of reasons why it's awesome now. At least, I'm trying to convince my kids that it's awesome. This book is a favorite of my 9 year old son, so much so that I had to ask his teachers if they knew what it was, because all he could tell me was that it involved a "cat sitting on a kid's head and not getting off until he answered some math questions". That is my kind of cat. I'm actually deathly allergic to cats, but I like this guy's style if he can get a kid to think about probability and/or want to read a book.So there you go. The probability of your kid liking this book is pretty high, I'd say.

Our six year old asks us for word-problems at bedtime. We get silly and creative. Then its his turn to ask us one. This book provides another way for us to share our knowledge without either party getting bored.

Using literature to introduce mathematical subjects is an excellent technique in classrooms throughout the school years. Almost all people like to be read to. Fortunately, building a library of introductory books is not a great expense and can be done over a number of years. This book is one that belongs in the teacher's resources. A Very Improbable Story is an excellent introduction to probability. I tutor a 1 & 3 grader. We used the book and then worked with dice games. They soon developed a keen sense of what numbers had a greater chance of occurring than others.

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