

Mary Gets a 32?!

by Jeff Valure

Mary crossed her fingers as her math teacher made his way around the room handing back the tests. She had started to worry this morning in science class when, while doodling in her notebook, she caught a glimpse of the formula sheet she was supposed to have memorized for the test. She had mixed them all up. How could she not? There were all these little tiny letters and symbols; none of it made any sense.

Mr. Liotti was coming up the next row over. Soon he would be standing at her desk, handing back her paper. "What happened?" he would say. He knew darn well what happened. She choked. It wasn't the first time.

Mary stared down at her desk, trying not to make eye contact with anybody. She heard groans to the left, a sigh of relief behind her, then the foot steps stopped. Slowly she raised her head.

"I know what you're gonna say--" Mary began but stopped short. Mr Liotti was smiling. He put her test face down on her desk and continued up the aisle. Mary was afraid to look. She lifted up a corner and took a peek. A few red marks, not too bad. The rest of the test was probably worse. Mary choked a lot. In class she could do everything. She just didn't "test well". That's what the guidance counselor told her parents. "Mary has a lot of anxiety during tests." Boy, did she. On test days, they had to get a janitor to mop up all the sweat around her desk.

She caught another glimpse of Mr. Liotti. He smiled at her again. She decided it couldn't be that bad and to just bite the bullet. She flipped the test over and pried her eyes open.

32!? No way she got a 32! Why would Mr. Liotti smile at that? 32 was a terrible grade. Even if it was doubled, it still wouldn't be passing. How could he smile? He must like seeing his students fail. Mary was shocked and miserable. Had he come to expect this of her? She tried so hard to do well. Maybe too hard, her counselor had said.

That's it, Mary was giving up. She tried her best and it got her a 32. She had had it. She leaned back in her chair, not picking up her pencil for the whole class. "It isn't worth it," she thought. But it was. It was always worth it to try your best and to stand up to adversity. She knew that. She also knew that this adversity was Mr. Liotti, a teacher who smiled at his failing students. Boy!

She stewed in those juices for the rest of the period. She waited until the rest of the class left before she stormed up to his desk. Smile at her! Boy! He smiled again. Mary started talking a mile a minute. She told about her counselor and the janitor and the formulas and the homework and on and on. That is until she took a closer look at her test. The grade was a 32 out of 38. Boy, she felt dumb... and smart.

The Question.

1. What was Mary's grade as a percentage? Each of her six points off would be worth how many points in that respect?

