



*Aftermath:
Focus on Understanding*

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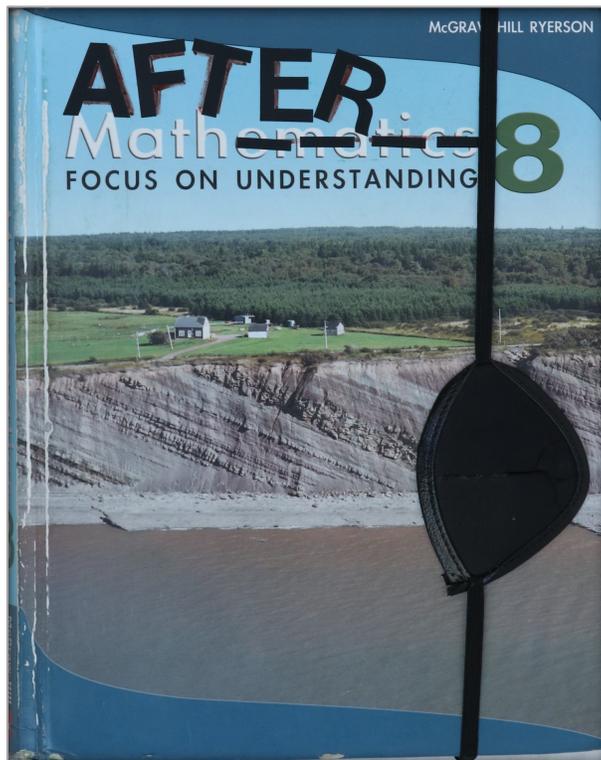


Figure 1. The Eye-Patch Protects the Wound. Mixed media collage. Amanda May (2019).

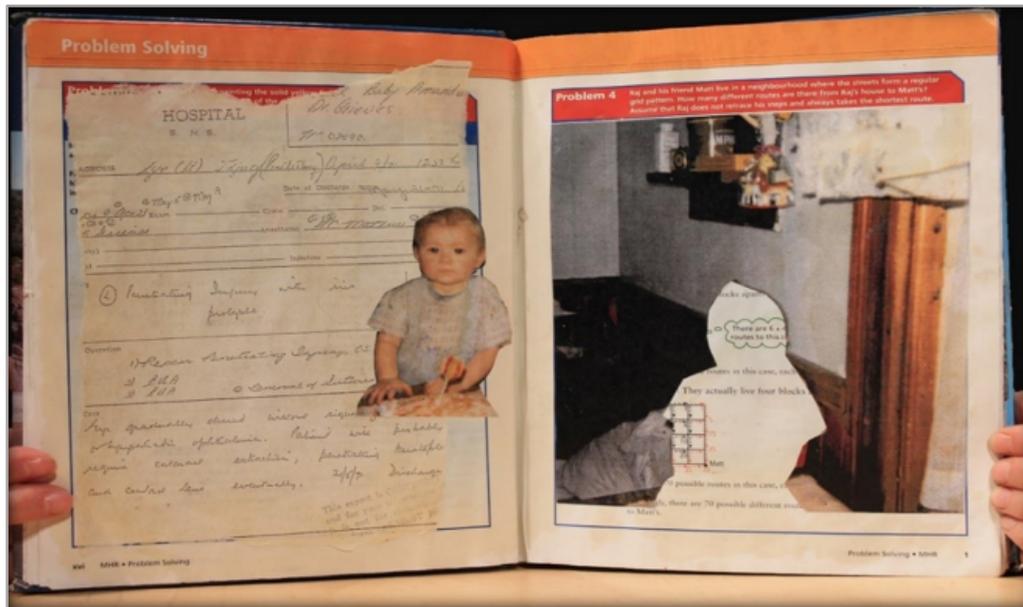


Figure 2. Baby Amanda. Mixed media collage. Amanda May (2019).

Artist Statement

Aftermath: Focus on Understanding, is artwork from my Master of Arts in Education thesis at Mount Saint Vincent University, where I explored the intersection between adversity and learning. Using an arts-informed methodology of altered books, I altered the pages of a discarded math textbook (out of circulation) with evocative images and personal artifacts in order to explore complex ways in which my identity and foster care experience intersect with learning. The artwork consists of many alternations I made to the textbook.

To start, I revised the textbook's original title *Mathematics 8: Focus on Understanding* to read *Aftermath 8: Focus on Understanding* (see Figure 1). This foregrounding of the learner's narrative, which includes my experience as a foster child, creates a tension with the learning narrative proposed by the textbook. Within the pages, I inserted images of my childhood and foster families, hospital reports, layered floor plans representing multiple foster home placements, and a photograph of my wounded left eye (see the cover image of this issue). I also incorporated found objects such as a mirror, embedding it into the pages, as well as an eye patch to bind the book with care. The mirror invites the readers in, allowing them to see the scar resulting from my traumatic eye injury.

A two-page spread from the textbook invites students to solve a problem encountered by Raj and Matt (see Figure 2). These fictional characters' problems presented in the learning narrative contrasted dramatically with my real-life problems as a young learner. How could I solve Matt and Raj's problems when I was burdened with overwhelming adversity? The hospital report (on the left side of Figure 2) describes my six-week stay after a penetrating eye injury allegedly inflicted by my mentally-ill mother. The baby photograph (on the left side of Figure 2), showing myself as a toddler,

has been cut out from the opposite page (right side of Figure 2) to illustrate my removal from the care of my mother and placement into foster care. This child could be any displaced child. Children may be displaced due to war, natural disasters, illness, the death of parents, domestic violence and poverty.

Now obscuring the curriculum, these insertions bring readers to witness the accumulation of adverse lived experiences that impacted my learning. My altered textbook reveals some of the barriers to learning for foster children, in response to which educators, school psychologists and social workers might generate deeply-needed support, love, kindness and understanding.