Andile Mji is an expert in mathematics.

This is a story about the time when Andile was a boy, and how he learned to love numbers.

Andile was born in the city of Gqeberha, in the Eastern Cape.

He lived with his mother and father. They stayed in New Brighton.

Nearby, there was a village named Tyeni. His granddad stayed there.

Andile loved to visit his granddad, who owned a cattle shed.

Granddad would ask him, "How many males? How many females? How many cattle altogether?"

Andile first learned how to count to 10 on his fingers. Then to 20, on his toes! He could also count in 5s.

In the early morning, the cock crowed. It was 5 o'clock when they woke up. They got ready to milk the cows.

Later, they went to the nearby mountain to graze the cows.

They read the time by the sun in the sky.

During the day, his granddad would call him at 12 o'clock to come and eat. The sun was high in the middle of the sky.

He knew it was time to go home when the sun set.

He would count the cows to check that all had returned.

When Andile started school, his father bought him a watch.

He used his watch to count in 2s, 3s, and 4s.

His watch had numbers from 1 to 12.

Andile could read the arrows on the watch to tell the hour, half past the hour, and the minutes.

Andile could count numbers in his mind. He could count forward and backward in his head.

He could count and name the days of the week and the months of the year, in their order.
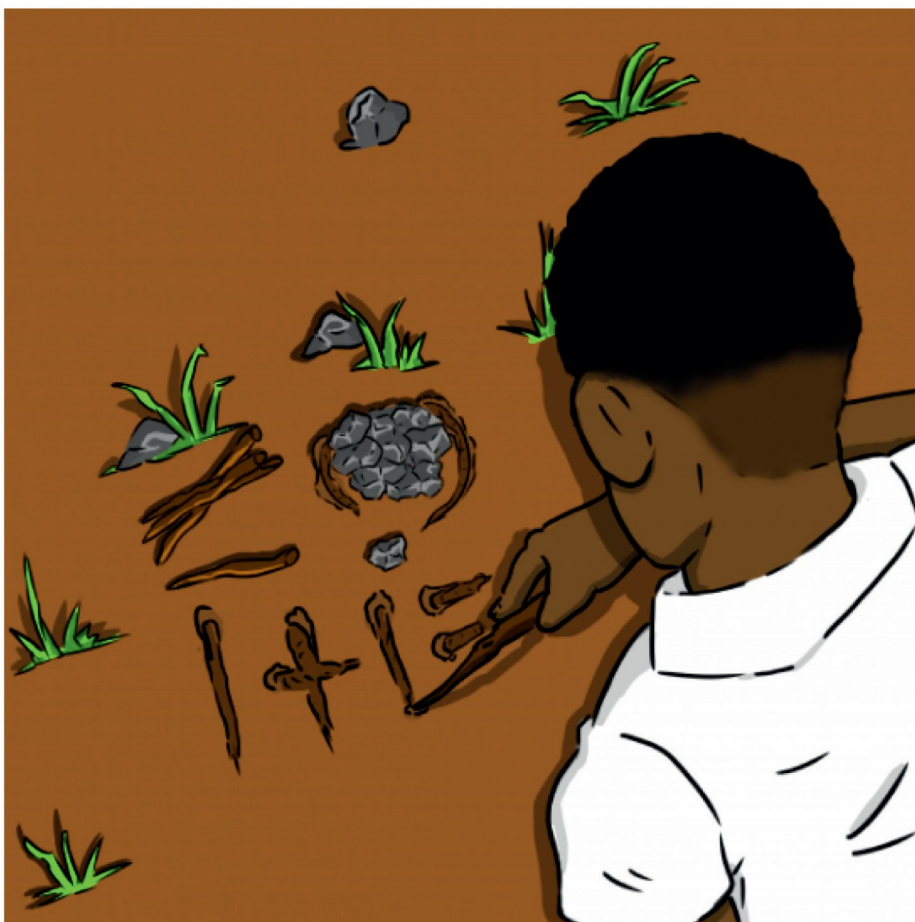
When the cows gave birth, Andile would multiply and count the young ones.

On Fridays, he would pack his bag to visit granddad. He stayed there Saturday and Sunday.

On Monday, he would go home and back to school.

When school closed, he visited granddad.

When Andile first went to school, they counted with stones and sticks.

He used his fingers to write on the ground. He practiced adding numbers in the dust.

The classroom was under the tree. When it rained, they could not go to school.

When the boy from Brighton grew up, he went to university to study mathematics. He studied for many years.

Today, Andile Mji works in a field of mathematics called statistics.

He can still tell time like in the past, using the sun.

Today, Andile is Professor Mji. He uses his fingers to type on a computer.

He uses numbers and graphs to tell stories. He uses mathematics to solve problems.

He uses statistics to answer questions like, 'What is the average age of children at this school?'

Professor Mji works with computers and numbers.

He says, "Computers are very useful, but sometimes they crash! My knowledge stays with me in my head until the end.

In mathematics, nothing changes. The numbers stay the same."

Professor Mji has a message for you:

"To know mathematics, you must practice working with numbers.

Mathematics is knowing 'how to'. Mathematics is methods.

You must learn to think with numbers. Then, you will be a hero!"

——Questions

1. How did Andile first learn about numbers and counting?

2. Is it necessary to know how to do maths without a computer or calculator? Explain your answer.

3. Count to 12 in multiples of 2, then 3 and then 4. Then, count backwards!

——Books in this series

- Andile Mji
- Asnath Mahapa
- Bongani Mayosi
- Charlotte Maxeke
- Mmantsane Moche Diale
- Mulalo Doyoyo
- Tebello Nyokong
- Tshilidzi Marwala

This story was created and written in Setswana, as part of the Zenex Ulwazi Lwethu reading materials project in 2020.