

**From the December 2003 issue of NCTM's Teaching Children Mathematics...**

**Off The Path Math with Tobbs! Vol. 1.** Tom O'Brien, 2003. 60pp., \$14.50 paper. FableVision, 44 Pleasant Street, Watertown MA 02472. (888) 240-3734, [www.fablevision.com/shoppe](http://www.fablevision.com/shoppe).

*Off the Path Math with Tobbs!* is a set of fifty "creative everyday thinking activities" designed for use with children ages three to five. The activities are easily understandable and useful to parents, caregivers and teachers. The booklet is designed like a calendar with one activity per page and plenty of blank space for note taking. The format of the activities is the same throughout the booklet. Each page consists of a suggested age range, basic instructions, a list of required materials, and options for varying the activity. Each activity includes a "What's it all about?" section that identifies the mathematical concepts the activity addresses and explains why they are important for children to learn. Many of the activities include everyday activities such as coins, blocks, macaroni, or other food items to offer hands-on learning opportunities that foster thinking. The use of questioning strategies in all the activities encourages reasoning, communication and creative thought.

Although the activities are simple in execution, they are rich in opportunities for adults to interact with young children in meaningful ways that set the stage for critical thinking skills. This set of activities could be very useful to parents and teachers who seek to prepare children to understand and explain their thinking and strategies in dealing with new ideas. —*Wayne Gable, Austin Independent School District, Austin ,TX 78703*

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*Off the Path Math with Tobbs, Volume 1*

Dr Tom O'Brien

FableVision

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*Off the Path Math* was, according to the front cover, “creatively created” by Tom O'Brien. It is, as you will guess from the title, unashamedly American.

Volume 1 is for 3 – 5 year olds. It is a ring-bound book printed on one side of the page only in black, white and grey. Each page has a mathematical activity using everyday materials designed for use with a small group of children.

I showed the book to a teacher and a classroom assistant who work with foundation stage children. Their reaction was the same as mine was at first. The format seems more suited to playgroups and childminders than those in school. This is a pity as the activities are highly educational. 'Tobbs' is on every page under the heading “What's it all about?” with a speech bubble giving the concept developed in the activity.

For teachers willing to use the ideas, rather than sticking rigidly to the activity as given, for parents and those minding young children out of the school setting, the book would be a godsend. How can you get it? Directly from the publisher's website, price \$14.50.

Tom O'Brien is well known to those who attend ATM conferences. He has recently produced six 'Problem of the Day' books under the title *Problem Solving Yrs 1-6* published by Ginn which are national curriculum 'compatible'.

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~~Review by Jenny Murray, Independent maths consultant, Suffolk~~