THE 2021 YOUNG MATHEMATICAL STORY AUTHOR (YMSA) COMPETITION

THE STUART J. MURPHY AWARD
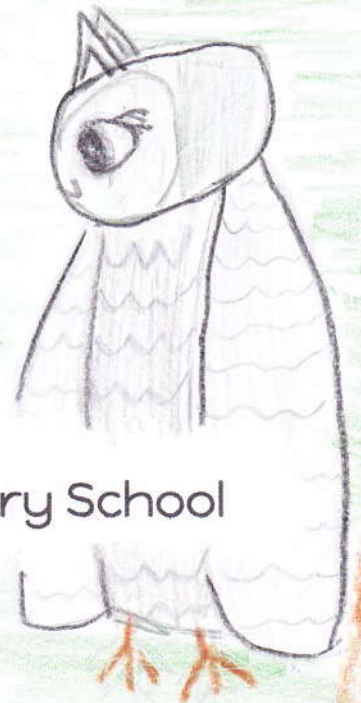
(THE 8-11 YEARS OLD CATEGORY)

WINNER

'The Owl's Curse' by Nayanika Das Roy (10 years old)

at James Dougherty Elementary School (California, USA)

You can read the author's inspiration for the story and the judges' comments on:

www.mathsthroughstories.org/ymsa2021

#YMSAMaths

The Owl's Curse

By: Nayanika Das Roy

School: James Dougherty Elementary School

Our story begins happily (well mostly), every owl in the Owl's Forest is happy and life is great. Now when I said happily, I meant for the owls who lived in the village inside the owl's forest. To them ¨happiness¨ was walking around and being well, what we call bored!

There was a 99-year-old curse that had been put on this poor village of owls.

Ninety-nine years ago a young owl was out in the forest playing with her friends, when the ground suddenly shook. Her friends escaped back to the village where the owls were living, but she was left behind in the forest.

A voice came and said, ¨Owls, all of you inside this village will be cursed. The curse will make you bored and moody forever unless somebody can break this curse after hundred years on this day and then the owls can be happy again.¨

That owl who got separated from her friends was my great grandmother and she heard how to break the curse but nobody else did! She stayed away from the owl village forever to be spared from the curse.She is long gone, but my grandmother tells me the story every year on the day the village was cursed. Tomorrow completes the hundredth year of the curse, tomorrow is the only day to break the horrific curse.

My grandmother said that there are two towers in front of the forest, only owls can see them. The tower with a ground floor area of 6,500 square feet is the tower you need to go inside of. Then, look for a crystal ball inside, but you must watch out for booby traps. Then, you take the crystal ball and go to the cursed village and smash in it the center of the village. The curse will be lifted.

Tower1 Tower2 Find Crystal Ball. Smash it!

(Definition of Area: Area is the term to show the amount of space filled by a 2D shape or surface. To find the area of a rectangle or square, you must multiply length times width)
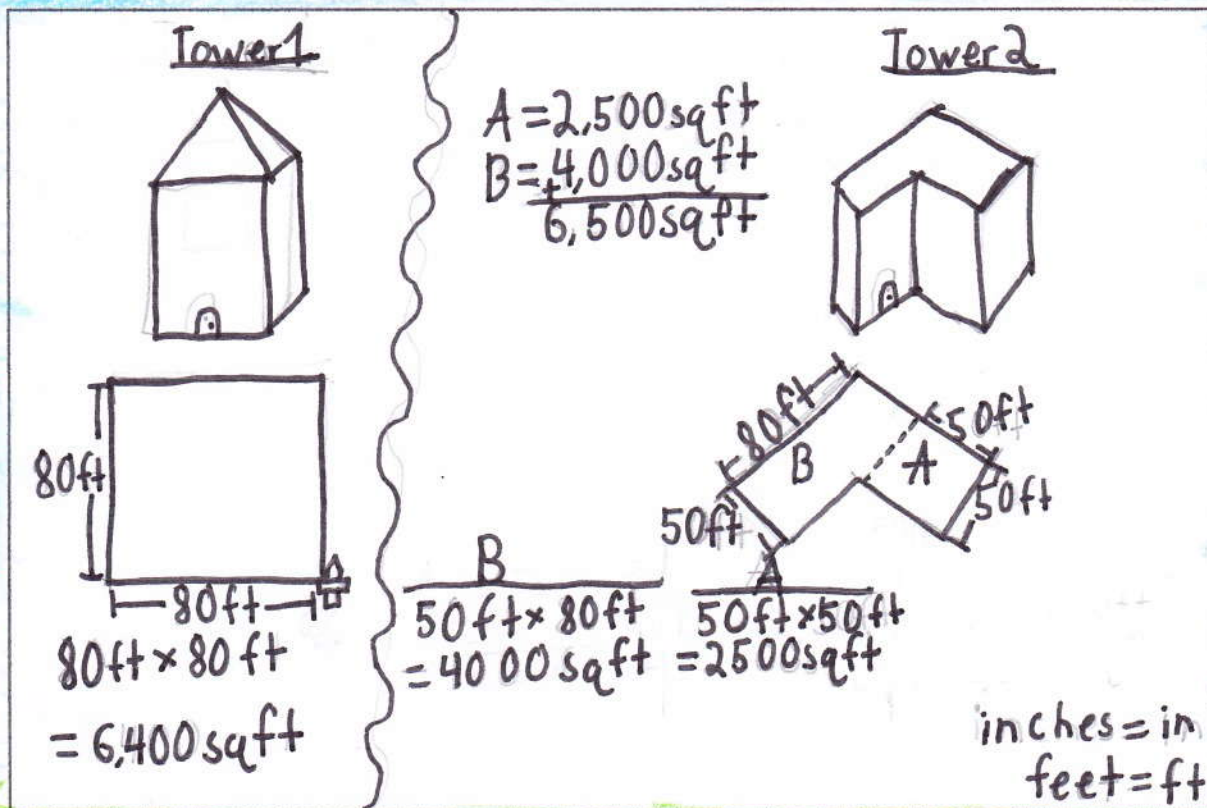
I decided to take the risk and go there. It can not be that hard. I set out at dawn, but my grandmother saw me. To my surprise, she did not get upset at me; instead, she pointed towards the edge of the forest and said, "Over there". Then she gave me our family's good luck charm, the ruler-sword (A sword with ruler-like features).

I followed the direction of her finger and

found myself at the foot of two towers. The first one was a square and the second one was a 6 sided polygon.

I measured the square tower, (with the ruler-sword) and it was 80*80 ft. That equaled 6,400 sqft.

Even though I knew that the second tower was the one, I still wanted to check. So I split the shape and got two rectangles.
(Concept: To find the area of an odd-looking shape you can split it into smaller rectangles and triangles)

I labeled them A and B. The length and width of A were 50ft by 50ft, and the length and width of B were 50ft by 80ft. The area by A was 2500sqft. The area of B was 4000sqft. When I added the floor areas together, it was 6,500!

"JACKPOT!" I shouted.

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Then, I approached the 6 sided polygon. I checked for open windows to fly in through, but there were absolutely none. "Looks like I have to use the door" I muttered to myself. As I pulled open the creaky door, bats and other pests plummeted out. MMMMM... BUGS! I love eating bugs, so I snatched a few out of the air. The path finally cleared. I flew inside. I thought the door would close as they do in movies, and obviously it did.

I walked around curiously inspecting ancient glasses and sculptures.

"Crystal ball, crystal ball," I said as I searched the tower.

But, I could not find it anywhere. I had only checked the first floor though so I couldn't be sure that the crystal ball wasn't here.
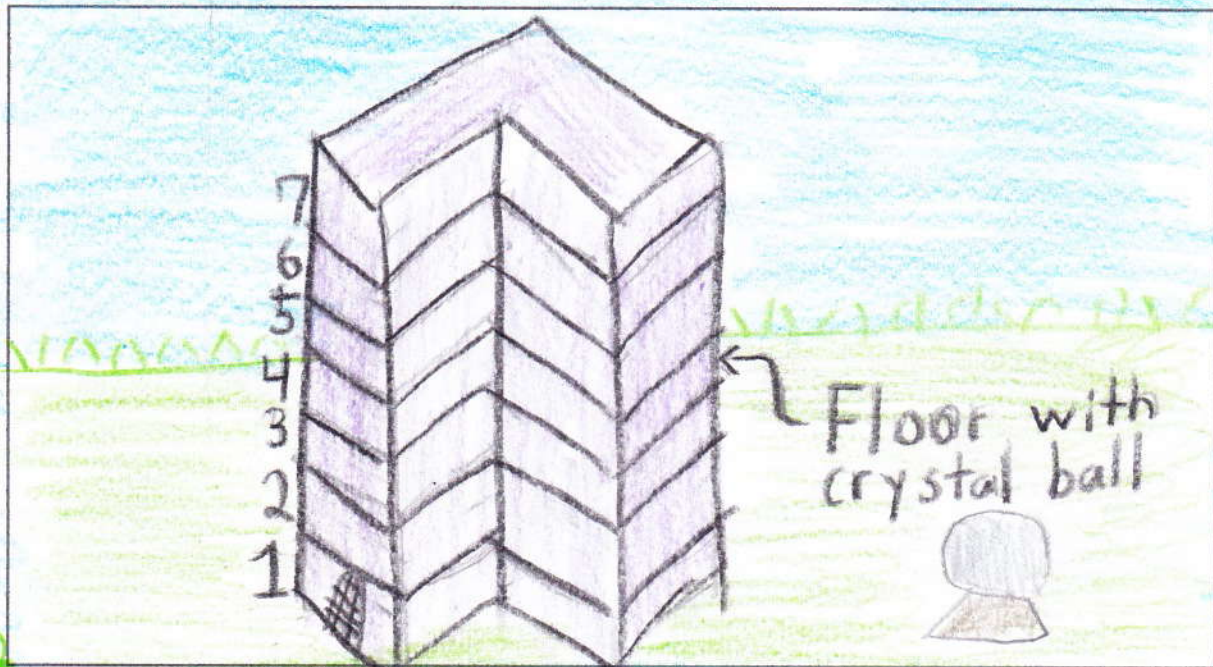

I stayed away from what I thought were booby traps, but I thought to myself, "What if the crystal ball is down there?".

I forced myself to step on one booby trap, but it wasn't a booby trap. I tried all of the other ones but they weren't booby traps either.

"So you're looking for booby traps," said a snide voice in my head.

I shook out the voice and remembered that my grandmother said that there were 7 floors. She had also said that the crystal ball was hidden on the fourth floor, which was the middle floor.
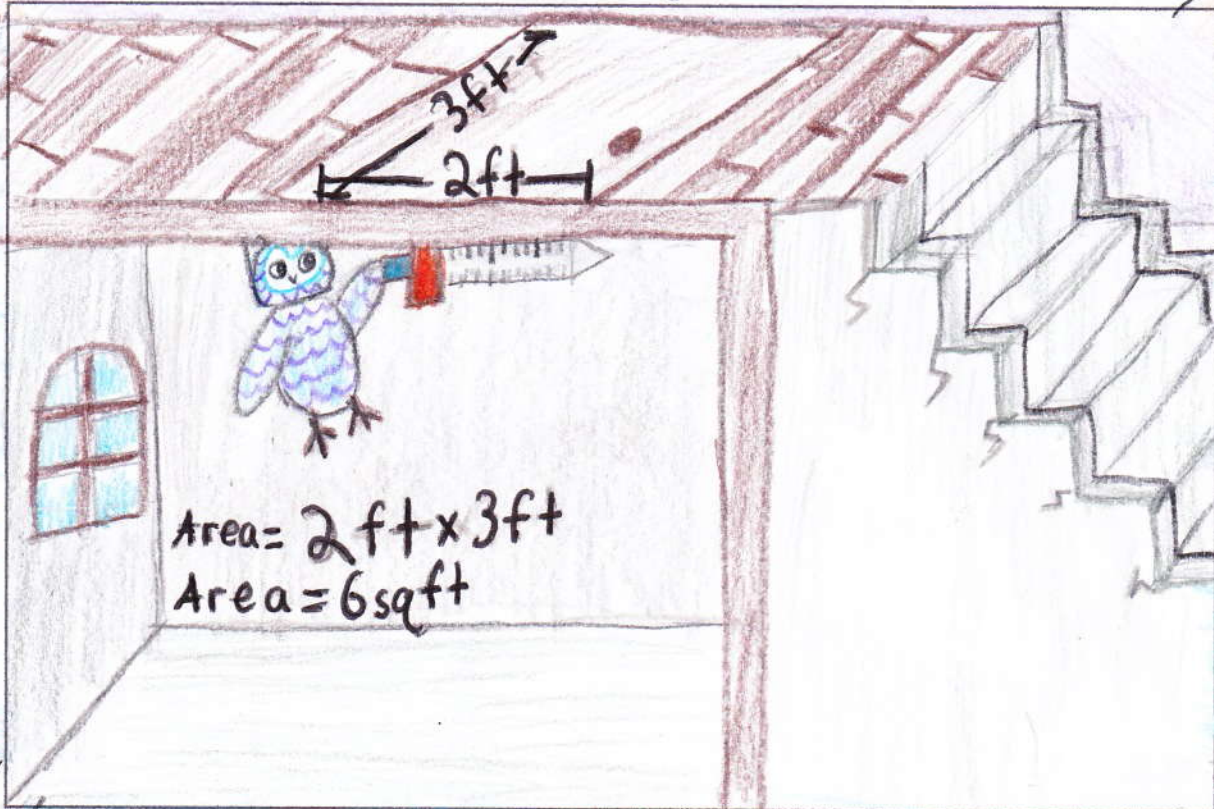

Floor with crystal ball

I rushed up the stairs. As soon as I reached the second floor, I went plummeting down into a big dark pit. The trap door, which I had fallen through closed. The shape of it was rectangular. I could use the ruler sword to cut it open!

My grandmother said that to use the ruler-sword you had to first measure the area in square inches then say, "Cut…" and then say whatever the area is.

I measured the area with the inch marks on the sword and it was 2ft by 3ft. Do the math and that's 6 square feet.

"Cut 6 square feet!" I shouted and pointed at the trap door with the ruler-sword.

The trap door broke open and I flew out.

Area = $2ft \times 3ft$
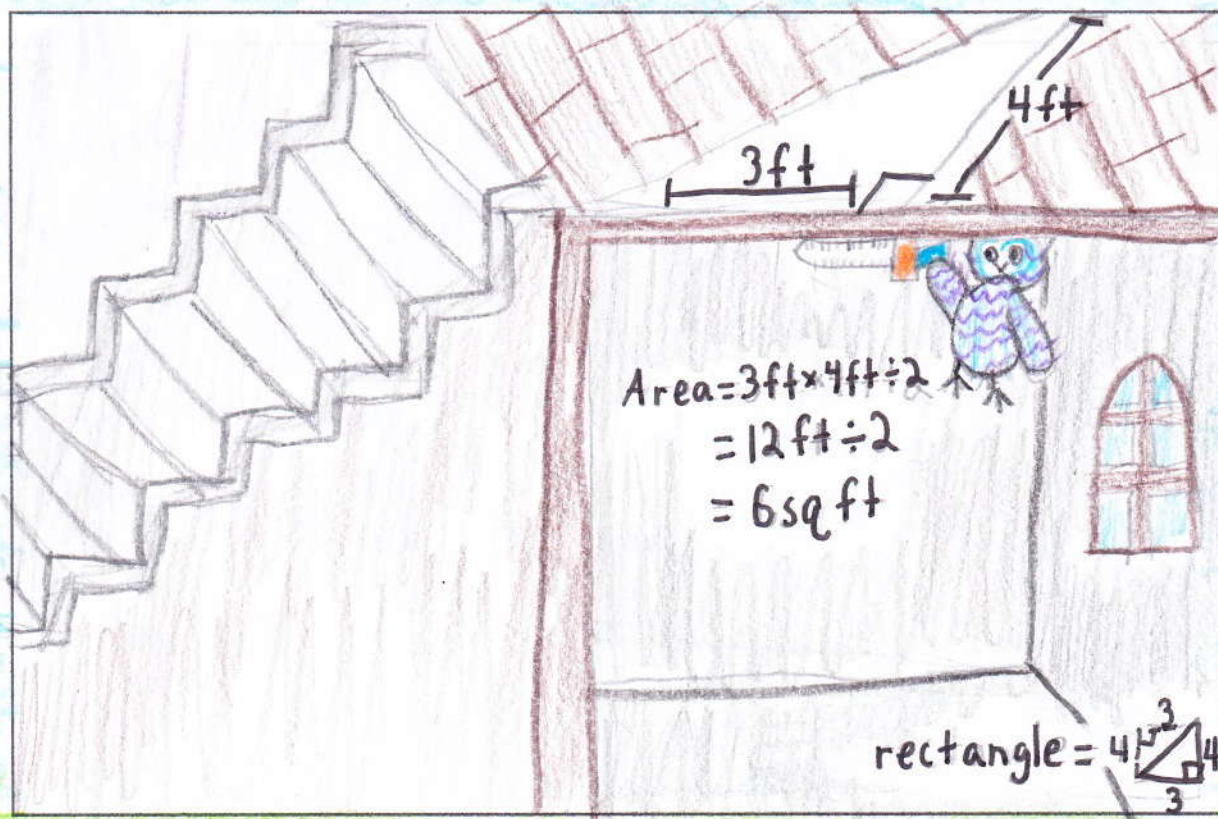Area = $6sqft$

"Whew!" I said with relief.

I dashed through the hall and up the 2nd flight of stairs. It wasn't long before I reached the third floor. Like the second floor, I fell into another booby trap.

This time the trap door was a right triangle. I knew how to find the area of a right triangle. All you needed to do is multiply the width and length, then divide the product in half. This is because the double of a right triangle is a rectangle. To get the

area of a rectangle you have to do length times width. So to get half of that you need to divide the length times width in half.

I measured the length and width of the triangle and they were 4ft and 3ft respectively. I multiplied them and it was 12 sqft. Then I divided 12sqft in half and it was 6 sqft.

"Cut 6 square feet" I tweeted.

The trap door blasted open. I joyfully fluttered through the right triangle space in the roof. I finally reached the fourth floor, no booby traps.
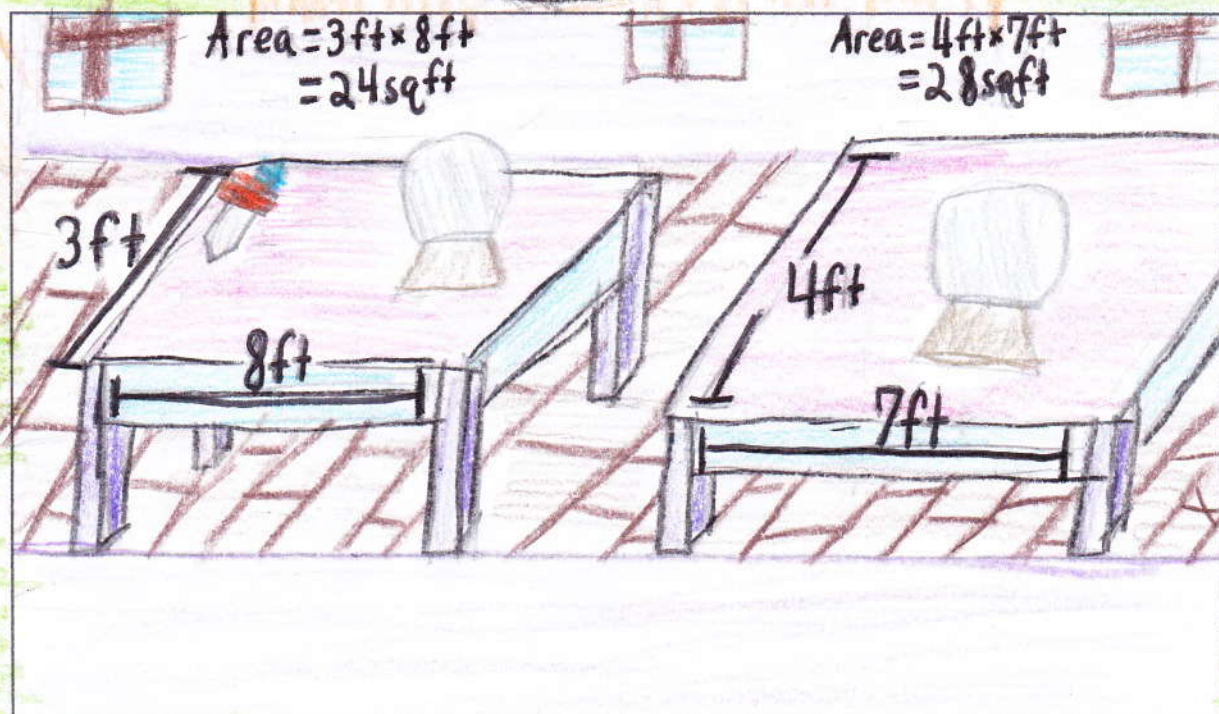
Then I saw two glass tables each with a crystal ball on them.

A note sat on the table closest to me.
It read:

"Dear brave soul, the correct crystal ball sits on a table with a surface area of 28sqft. If you touch the incorrect ball, don't even ask what happens.

I would turn back if I were you! "

I quickly measured the glass tables, the 1st one was 8ft by 3 ft, and the 2nd one was 7ft by 4ft. So, The surface of the 1st was 24sqft and the surface area of the 2nd was 28sqft.

As I picked the crystal ball on the 2nd table up, a disgusting dragon-ish creature appeared. I quickly took a medium-sized stone and threw it at the window and it shattered. Quicker than a bumblebee, I zoomed out of the window. The dragon-like creature gave chase. My heart was beating faster than how much a hummingbird's wings flap in a second (that's a lot: 80 times per sec).

Despite this, I quickly but safely landed in the center of the bored village. I had never seen it before, it was very dull and glum, but this was no time to look around.

I stepped on the circle that marked the center of the town and smashed the crystal ball directly in the center of the village.
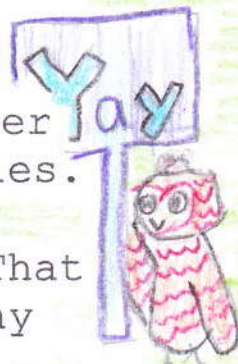

The dragon disappeared. Life and colors flowed through the village, awakening everyone from the curse.

Suddenly, I heard a faint cry of "No this village was supposed to be cursed forever!"

But, the cheers of the villagers overpowered the voice and remained for the rest of that wonderful day.

Now I may say happily ever after, but remember "happily ever after" isn't the end of troubles. Troubles will never leave us. I mean, just imagine life without difficult challenges. That isn't how life should be. So, I will just say happily ever after for a while……

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BLURB

A little owl is told of her great-grandmother's cursed owl village. On the only day to break the curse, she ventures off, not knowing about the problems she will face. Can she save the village, without fail?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am Nayanika Das Roy, a 10-year-old girl in James Dougherty Elementary, located in the USA. The inspiration for my book comes from the fact that I love doing math and that owls are my favorite animal. I also love writing fantasy stories, full of adventure.