

From: lwilliam [lwilliam@gt.rr.com]
Sent: Sunday, January 25, 2004 2:26 PM
To: york@cs.pdx.edu
Subject: letter to 4 year olds

Dr. York,

I teach 4 and 5 year olds at Southerland Head Start in Beaumont, Texas. I am compiling information on contemporary African American scientists to share with my students during the month of February and throughout the school year. I found your biography for students to be very inspiring.

I would very much appreciate it if you would write a short note to the students in room 6 at Southerland Head Start and share with them your love for computers and math.

I would also appreciate a short note to them from your son who is also very academically accomplished. Pictures would also be nice if possible.

I often tell my friends and acquaintances, "Nothing stops a failure like a try." So, whatever happens, thank you for reading this.

Sincerely
Lexie M. Williams
classroom teacher
Southerland Head Start
1965 Southerland Street
Beaumont, Texas 77705

January 25, 2004

To: The Students
Room 6
Southerland Head Start
1965 Southerland Street
Beaumont, TX 77705

Dear Boys and Girls of Room 6,

My name is Bryant York and I was once 4 years old, many years ago. It was one of the favorite times in my life, because I was just learning to read and write and do arithmetic. I loved words and I loved numbers. I don't know which I loved more. I was so curious about words that I became a pest. I would spend all day asking my parents and my brothers and sisters the meanings of different words. After some time they got so tired of telling me words that they showed me how to use a dictionary. That dictionary was like a huge ice cream cone to me. I loved ice cream almost as much as I loved words and numbers, so I ate up that dictionary really slowly so that I could enjoy the taste. You know how you slowly lick the ice cream around the edge. That's how I kept the taste of those words in my mouth, and instead of traveling to my stomach they went straight to my brain. Pretty soon I could not remember a time when I did not know a lot of words. The words in my brain sometimes get lonely, so I always learn more words to keep them company.

When I was 4, I also loved numbers. I *really* liked counting. Once I counted all the way to 100 without making any mistakes. Soon I learned to put numbers together in different ways, almost like putting words together into sentences. In my family we didn't have a book of numbers like the dictionary, so I became a pest again – always asking about numbers. Although my parents were patient with me, they would give me problems to do in my head to keep me silent for a little while. My favorite joke about numbers is: Why was 6 afraid of seven? Because 7 ate 9 (7 8 9).

One of the cool things about numbers and words is that you can play secret games with them inside your head and nobody else knows those games. You don't need a bat or a jump rope or other people in order to play. I still play those secret games in my head, even today.

As I grew older I began to think about what I would do as a job. Although I always wanted to be a poet and a baseball player, I thought: Why not get a job playing with my old friends - words and numbers? I decided to study more mathematics and then my interest in mathematics grew into an interest in computers, and before I knew it I was a professor at a university hoping to share my love of math and computers with others.

Now that I am 4 years old again, I love playing computer games. I like to study computer games to see how they can help people to learn math better. Right now, my favorite

computer game is Zoombinis. It's fun because I get to solve all kinds of puzzles while I'm playing the game.

I hope you enjoyed the story of my life.

Sincerely,

Bryant W. York

From: lwilliam [lwilliam@gt.rr.com]
Sent: Monday, January 26, 2004 3:50 PM
To: Bryant W. York
Subject: Re: letter to 4 year olds

Hi Bryant,

I don't think I can adequately express the joy I felt as I read your letter to my group of friends. Thank you so much. Your love of learning is obvious and they will understand and can relate to the examples you gave.

I Humbly thank you.

Lexie M.