

Review by Alan Catley, Tynemouth College

Maths Lesson Starters Vols. I, II, III & IV

I have used the software with my numeracy class and found it ideal. These are students aged 16 and over who have difficulty with basic arithmetic. Some even have difficulty with things such as dividing by 10. They really struggled with the 'Making 100' task, but it provided excellent motivation and once they had been guided through one example they were keen to try another. They really enjoyed the challenge and the big benefit from my point of view was that I could spend all my time focussing on individual groups and helping them, rather than spending time at the front writing on the board. It is interesting that while I was working with any small group the others were very active working on the problem. I'm convinced this was down to the very nice clear presentation of the problems, they really looked good up there on the board and far better than anything I could have written up, even if I'd had a free lesson before this one!!

I used the Lesson Starters with a GCSE 'resit' class. This group were about to take their Stats. exam and, as they were really struggling with the mean of a frequency distribution, I decided to start the lesson with the 'Money' starter. I asked them to work out the average cost of a bit of fruit as they arrived in class. They were able to calculate the total cost correctly, but some strange answers were given for the mean. The usual mistakes: dividing by the number of different fruits instead of the total number of pieces. The beauty about the software is that the daft answer stares the pupil in the face when it is pointed out!!

I also used the Substitution starter with the GCSE class as an introduction to algebra. It worked a treat and we made it into a 'fun' session (honest!). Once again not having to spend any time writing on the board was a huge benefit. Instead I was able to dedicate all my time to keeping the whole class tuned in to the activity and concentrate on getting correct answers. We use individual small A5 whiteboards, so that every student has to work on the problem. We find that this works better than the traditional method of asking individuals to answer, because there is no hiding place for any student, no matter how hard they try!! This lesson ended up with a discussion about good old BODMAS. The number of students' difficulties that it highlighted and resolved was quite incredible! Written tests set the following week proved to me that understanding had been greatly enhanced.

There are loads of other ideas in the this software that I look forward to using with all my classes (from basic numeracy right through to A/Level). One I haven't tried yet but will do soon is the 'Hidden Digits'. It should be interesting with the numeracy group!