STAR COUNT

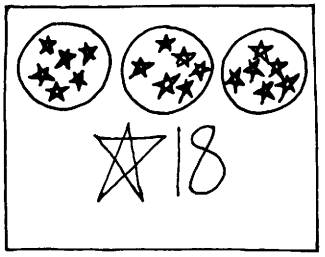
GRADES

one, two, and three

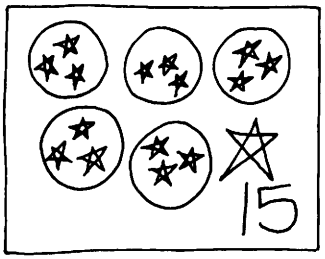
MATERIALS

paper
pencil
one playing die

After one round of STAR COUNT my scorecard looked like this:



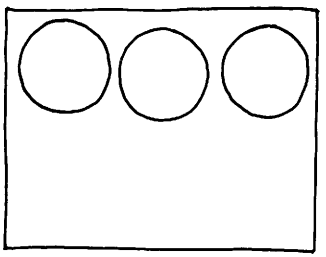
Elise, a first-grade math fan, had a scorecard that looked like this:



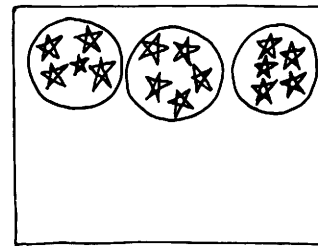
Elise let out a moan. "You won. You have eighteen stars, and I only have fifteen."

"It's only fair," I said. "You won the last round. That means you've won once and I've won once. Let's see who can be first to win five rounds."

Elise was game. She rolled the playing die and got a three. This obliged her to draw three circles on her paper scorecard.

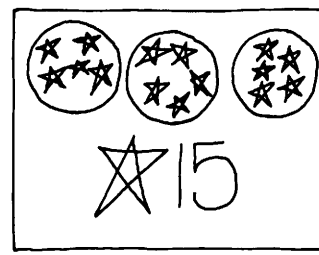


She threw the die again and got a five. That told her to draw five stars inside each circle.

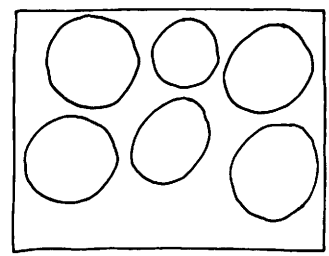


She counted all her stars.

"I have five and five; that's ten. Then I have eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. Hey, that's the same as I had before." She drew a larger star and wrote her score alongside.



Next it was my turn. I rolled a six and drew six circles.

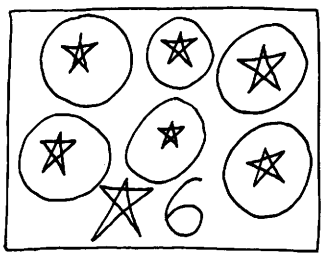


"You're going to win again," grumbled Elise. "You have so many circles."

"Maybe, if I'm lucky, I'll win. I hope I'm lucky. What do you hope?"

"I hope you're unlucky."

On that encouraging note, I threw the die. I got a one. I drew a single star in each of my circles and added up my score.



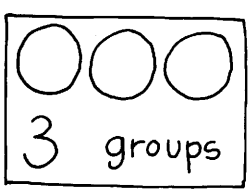
"Only one star in each circle. I have six circles, and I have six stars. Phooey."

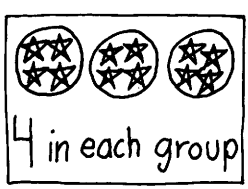
"I won! I won!" Elise shouted.

"You won this time," I chided. "I may be luckier the next time. Do you want to go first or should I?"

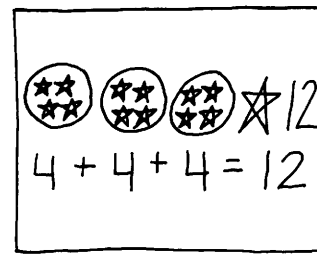
"Me!" Elise said.

What do students learn when they play STAR COUNT? They get a kind of preliminary, pictorial version of how teachers describe multiplication. Teachers say that multiplication is a way of grouping numbers. You can think of the multiplication equation $3 \times 4 = 12$ as three groups with four in each group. STAR COUNT makes a perfect picture of that explanation.





Alternatively, teachers describe multiplication as repeated addition. In this explanation, $3 \times 4 = 12$ is expressed as $4 + 4 + 4 = 12$. STAR COUNT gives children a graphic demonstration of that multiplication explanation as well.



Children who play STAR COUNT may make interesting discoveries about multiplication. In this particular game, Elise noticed that three groups of five stars is the same number as five groups of three stars.

STAR COUNT is simple enough for first-graders. But the concepts it exemplifies are sophisticated enough to be useful to third- and fourth-graders. By the way, if your child has trouble drawing stars, you can substitute *x*'s, or asterisks, or anything.