

Ethnomathematics

by Fred Osuna

His academic nightmare is set in an examination hall, where the student takes a seat at a folding table in the center of the room. Before him are three No. 2 pencils and a blue book. The moderator writes one essay question — sixty percent of the grade - on the chalkboard. Then she starts the clock.

The room becomes a vacuum in which he hears only the drumming of his own heart. The rest of the room recedes. There is only the blank page, the sweaty palms, and the realization that he has no idea what ethnomathematics is. After five minutes of quiet panic, he turns to the back of the book and scribbles page after page of free association on his own topic: despair.

He hands the instant journal disguised as a blank book to the moderator, avoiding her eyes. Next day, when he visits the graduate lounge to pick up his grade, all of the teaching assistants stop talking and turn toward him.

Are you alright? asks the woman in the modified burka. We were concerned about you.

Yes, he answers, I'm fine.

He sees his instructor coming forward from the back of the room. He approaches the student. Should we call someone for you? I was worried we might not ever see you again.

The student assures him all is well.

The instructor sighs with relief, smiles. He extends his hand to the student. It holds a blue book, marked with a violent red F.

