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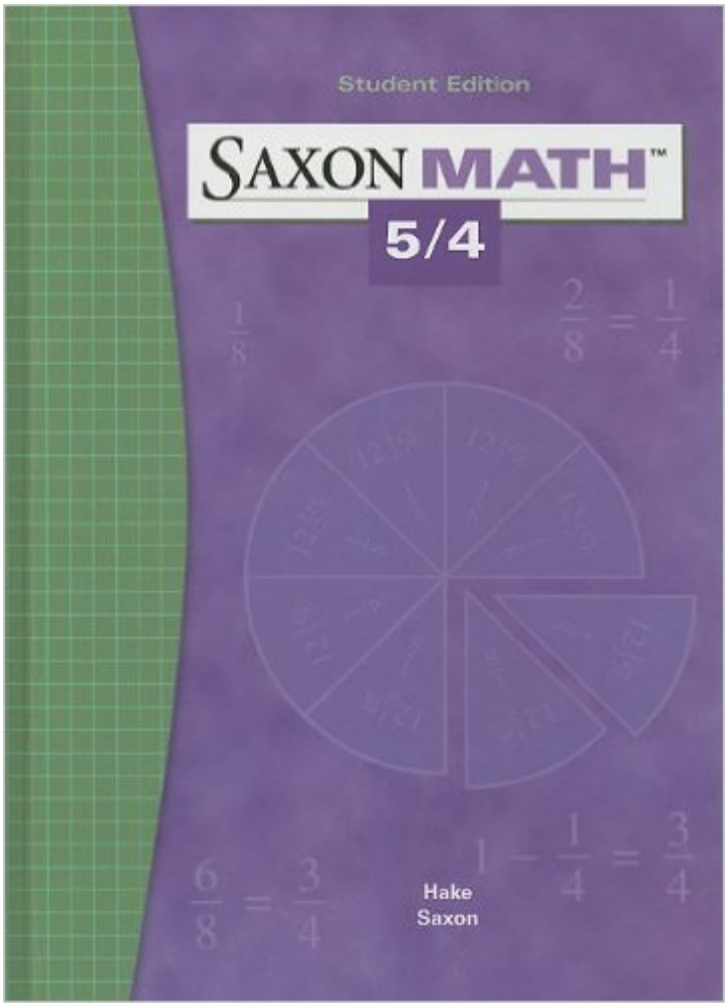

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Synopsis

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Customer Reviews

I'm an engineer with 2 college degrees and a professional engineering license, so I knew what my kid needed to learn. When I went through my education, we learned the great names in math, like Pythagoras, Newton, and Euler, who had made great discoveries contributing to the field. I noted that my kid's name was not among them, so I decided that it was probably best to leave the discoveries to those people, while my kid simply took advantage of the discoveries and had the material taught to him. I knew that it wouldn't be a lot of "fun", but I wasn't particularly interested in trying to make math fun - I have enough common sense to know that kids are learning little, if anything, if they are having a lot of fun. Other than Singapore Math, Saxon is the only method left in the United States that still uses the "Direct Instruction" method (memorizing times tables, etc.), as opposed to the "Discovery" method (where kids can spend 2 weeks coming up with different ways to solve 8 times 7). Direct Instruction is the traditional way to learn math, and I still haven't seen any data show why we, as a country, abandoned it (other than having our math scores drop to the bottom of the world). While our child is not a genius, he was able to complete this book, plus the next 3 books prior to Algebra 1/2 in just over a year (and well before the material covered in school). That pretty much assured him never having to worry about his math education. I will always be indebted to John Saxon for his genius in writing these books.

Saxon is thorough. Compare it to any other math text and virtually everything covered in other texts is covered here.Saxon provides an enormous amount of practice. Some other curricula we've used simply have to be supplemented somehow; on their own, they simply don't provide enough practice for children to master the concepts.If you use Saxon according to instructions and you stick with it, the student will become really proficient, and continually proficient, in every aspect of math. Because of the constant practice of all concepts, the student is basically always ready to do well on a test over the subject matter.Saxon's approach to mental math is awesome. Of course, other systems sometimes provide mental math, but Saxon builds systematically a toolkit enabling students to tackle some impressively difficult problems in their heads. I'm sure many adults wouldn't be able to solve mentally some problems Saxon has 4th graders doing.Sometimes people complain that there isn't enough explanation of how to do problems. I find this complaint misplaced, at least with regard to Saxon Math 5/4. To the contrary, in fact, we find the explanations somewhat long-winded, but extremely clear and thorough. Taken by themselves, perhaps they aren't that clear sometimes; but they are meant to be done after doing all the previous lessons successfully, which provide necessary scaffolding. More typically, we find the explanations to be rather obvious and easy to get through, if a little dry.I'm not familiar (except second-hand) with the research on the effectiveness of Saxon in general. But for what it's worth, my son certainly understands math at his level much better now than he did when we were using other systems. If we continue down this path, I expect he'll have a much firmer grasp of math that I had (I made it through calculus).Another criticism of Saxon one sees is that it allegedly emphasizes "recipes" for doing problems, math "mechanics," rather than the higher-order logical thinking behind math. This is absurd. I say this as someone who has used two of the more logic-oriented systems, Singapore and MEP (both are excellent...but we like Saxon more). Saxon does have students work a lot of basic problems. But it also has a lot of head-scratchers that require that the student think fairly creatively and apply what they've learned. You shouldn't confuse a lot of practice, which is Saxon's stock in trade, with an exclusive emphasis on mechanics.There are quite a few word problems and with every lesson, i.e., every day, there is one particularly difficult "problem solving" item that comes right after mental math. It is true that something like MEP has more problem-solving, but that's an extreme; Singapore doesn't have more.In short, Saxon provides explicit exposure to and a real mastery of virtually every concept that makes up fourth grade math.Now the bad. Unless the student is remarkably focused and has completely mastered how to do all the problems, the notion that they can get through the entire lesson in under an hour is fanciful. as we're past the halfway mark in Saxon Math 5/4, but still

taking a long time to get through lessons, I'm holding out hope that with more practice, my student will be able to start going through the problems faster.Of course, as far as this problem goes, the bottom line is that if your student hates math after doing Saxon, you should probably pick something else. But that's assuming that your student doesn't hate math with every program. There are, after all, a lot of people who hate math, period, and it can't be blamed on any one method. They just don't like the subject.Let's put it this way: you can find programs that aren't as "boring" and are more "fun," simply because they're easier. But probably, students won't learn math as well as Saxon students do; they won't be able to do such a variety of problems as Saxon students can; and they won't have as thorough an understanding as Saxon students have.And that's pretty much all of the bad: to really master math in the way Saxon provides, it kind of makes sense that it would require students to do a lot of math. So here's the deal: if you value thoroughness and mastery and you're willing to make students work a lot to get it, then you'll like Saxon. If you want things to be easy for your students more than you want them to master math, then you won't like it.

I do not home school nor do I have any advanced degrees in mathematics. I have, however, been unhappy with my daughter's mathematics curriculum at school which seems to focus on the mechanics of math rather than problem-solving/logic. I believe the mechanics of math as well as problem-solving/logic are critical to understanding math. The Saxon book is divided into Lessons and each lesson is divided into Warm-Up, New Concepts, Lesson Practice and Mixed Practice. We typically only do the Mental Math section of the Warm-Up because I think mental math is very important. I might introduce the concept explanation as one of many explanations because I do not think Saxon necessarily does the best job of describing concepts. Lesson Practice section is limited. Even if your child learns very quickly, I would recommend introducing problems from other book sources. I do like the Mixed Problem Set in each chapter because it allows me to pull certain problems for reviewing material while still moving forward. I do not think the Saxon Math book has the best organization of topics and I do not proceed sequentially through the book. I determine the order and I use the book as a reference or as another source for problems. I also use Singapore Mathematics for better explanation of concepts/word problems and Spectrum Math for practice in the mechanics of math. I have not found a single series that I think does it all, but a combination of books serves my purpose. If your child learns quickly, I would tend to recommend using multiple sources to teach math. I have yet to find a series that does it all--just my 'humble' opinion :)

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