

# **How Teaching Mathematics as Agape can foster The Hopeful Skeptic**

**Dr. Joel Amidon, University of Mississippi, ICRSME Panel**

# The Hopeful Skeptic

# HOPE FOR CYNICS

THE SURPRISING SCIENCE  
OF HUMAN GOODNESS

**JAMIL ZAKI**

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has “a love for humanity  
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GOOD TALK. REAL LEARNING. BETTER TEACHING.

E090



# AMIDON PLANET

TEACHING, TECHNOLOGY, AND HOPE (W/ ANDY WEIR)

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# ANDY

AUTHOR OF THE MARTIAN

# WEIR

NO. 1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR



PROJECT

# HAIL MARY

NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE FROM AMAZON MGM STUDIOS



## Teaching Mathematics as Agape: Responding to Oppression with Unconditional Love

Joel Amidon  
*University of Mississippi*

*In this essay, encouraged by the critical examination of mathematics education and mathematics teacher education at the Privilege and Oppression in the Mathematics Preparation of Teacher Educators Conference, the author asks the question: What do I do from a position of power and privilege to interrupt oppression and enable everyone the opportunity and expectation of success in mathematics and life? The author proposes a response with agape (pronounced ägäpā), or unconditional love. Starting with the question What would it mean to teach mathematics as an act of unconditional love? the author theorizes an ideal relationship between students and mathematics that is functional, communal, critical, and inspirational, generated from wanting to teach mathematics as agape.*

**KEYWORDS:** equity pedagogy, mathematics education

My decision to pursue a career in mathematics education was immediately affirmed by the images of all my white, middle-class, male, mathematics teachers who looked just like me, even down to the thick-rimmed glasses, and the occasional use of a pocket protector. Given that inequity exists in the world, there is no denying that I am sitting on the side of privilege. In response to this realization and encouraged by the critical examination of mathematics education and mathematics teacher education at the Privilege and Oppression in the Mathematics Preparation of Teacher Educators (PrOMPTE<sup>1</sup>) conference, I ask the question: What do I do from this position of power and privilege as a mathematics teacher, researcher, and teacher educator to interrupt oppression and enable everyone the opportunity and expectation of success in mathematics and in life? In this essay, I propose to respond with agape (pronounced ägäpā), or unconditional love. I theorize an ideal relationship between students and mathematics that is functional, communal, critical, and inspirational, starting with the question: What would it mean to teach mathematics as an act of unconditional love?

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<sup>1</sup> Privilege and Oppression in the Mathematics Preparation of Teacher Educators (PrOMPTE) conference (funded by CREATE for STEM Institute through the Lappan-Phillips-Fitzgerald CMP 2 Innovation Grant program), Michigan State University, Battle Creek, MI, October 2012. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding agency.

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**E016**



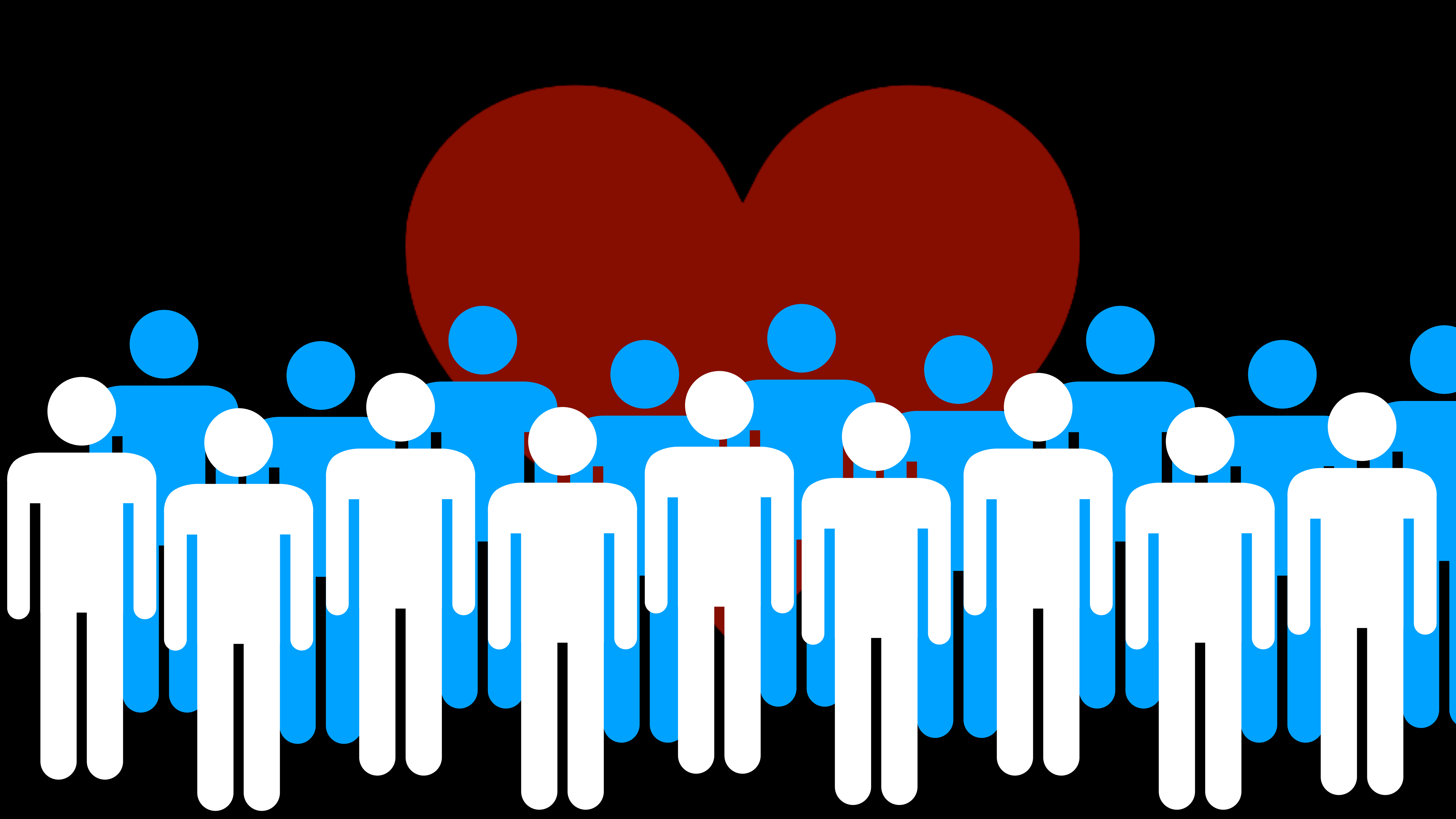
**AMIDON**

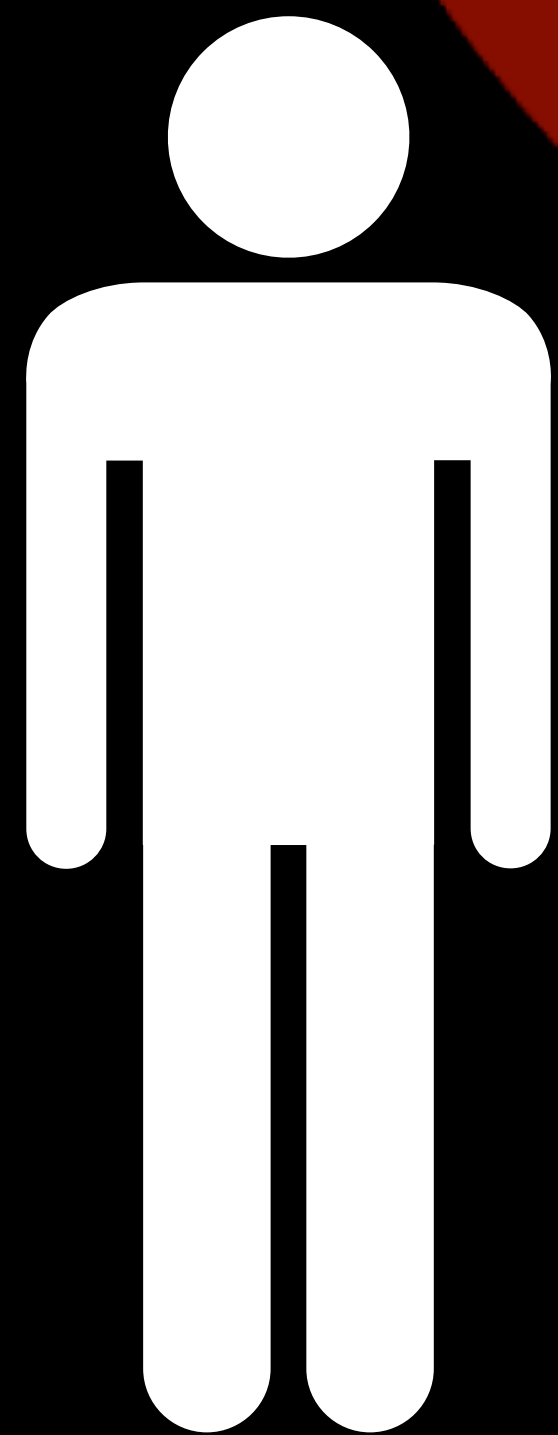
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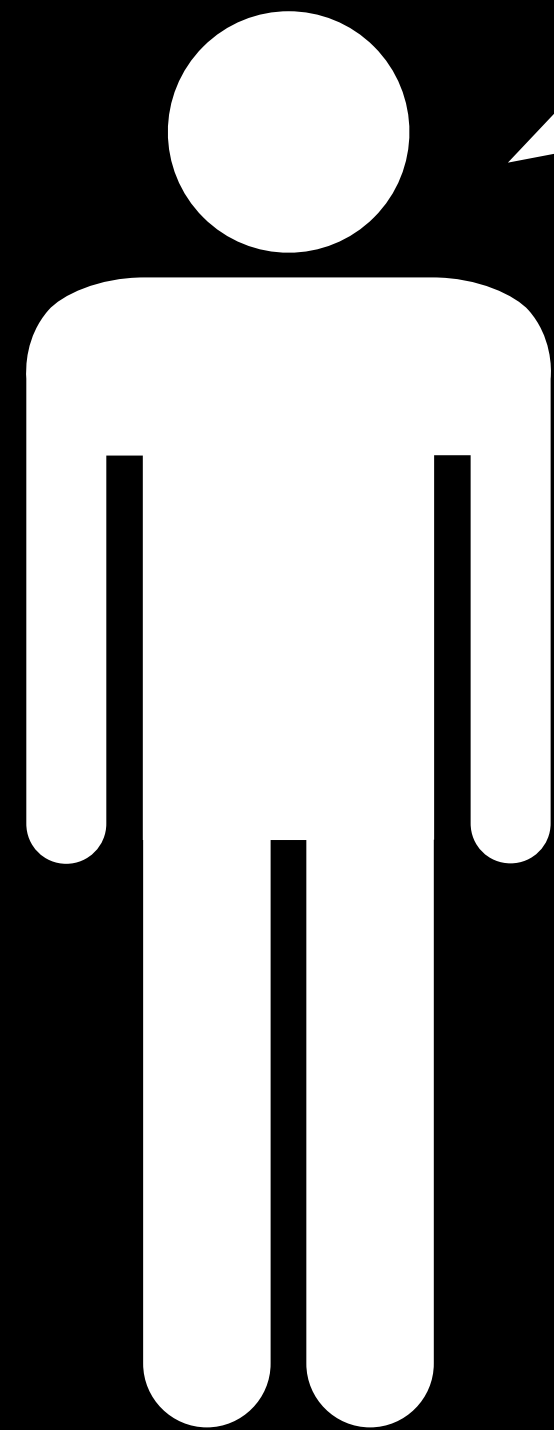
**TEACHING MATHEMATICS AS AGAPE (W/ SAM GILBERT)**

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**Why do we  
have so much  
f#@%ing  
homework?**



**Agape**



**Agape**

**Eros**

seeks to  
possess

Given to the  
exemplary



**Agape**

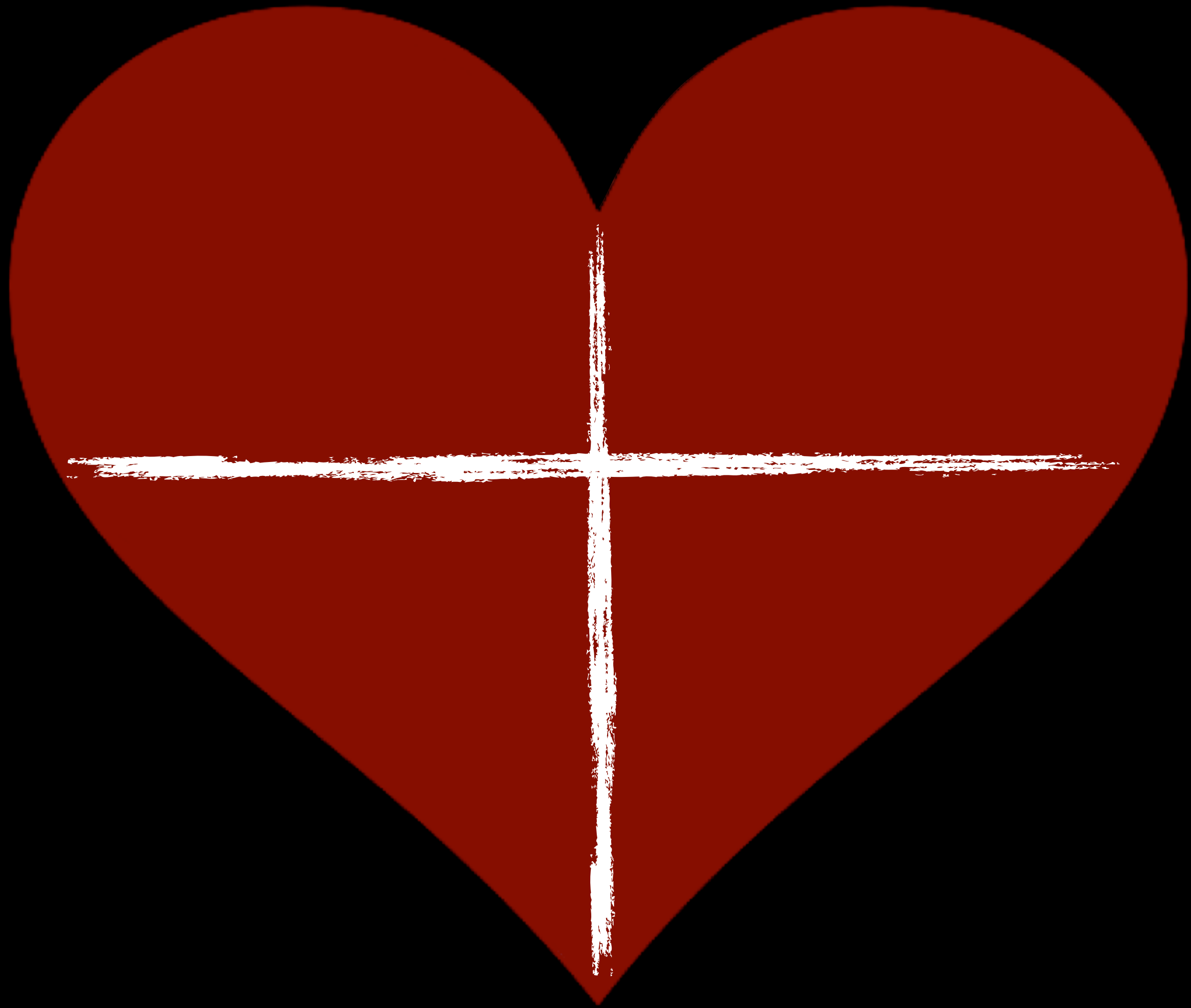
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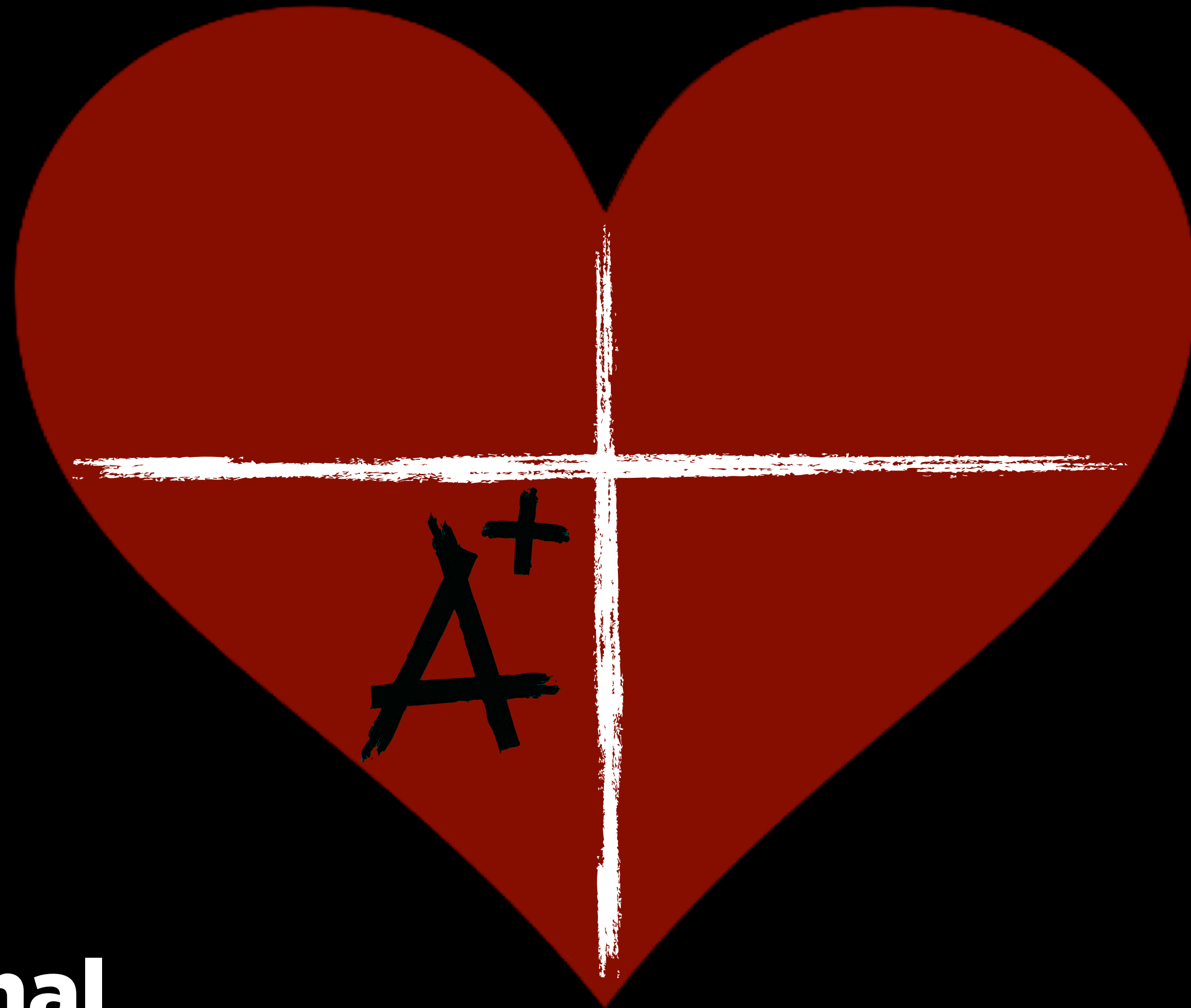
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**Eros**

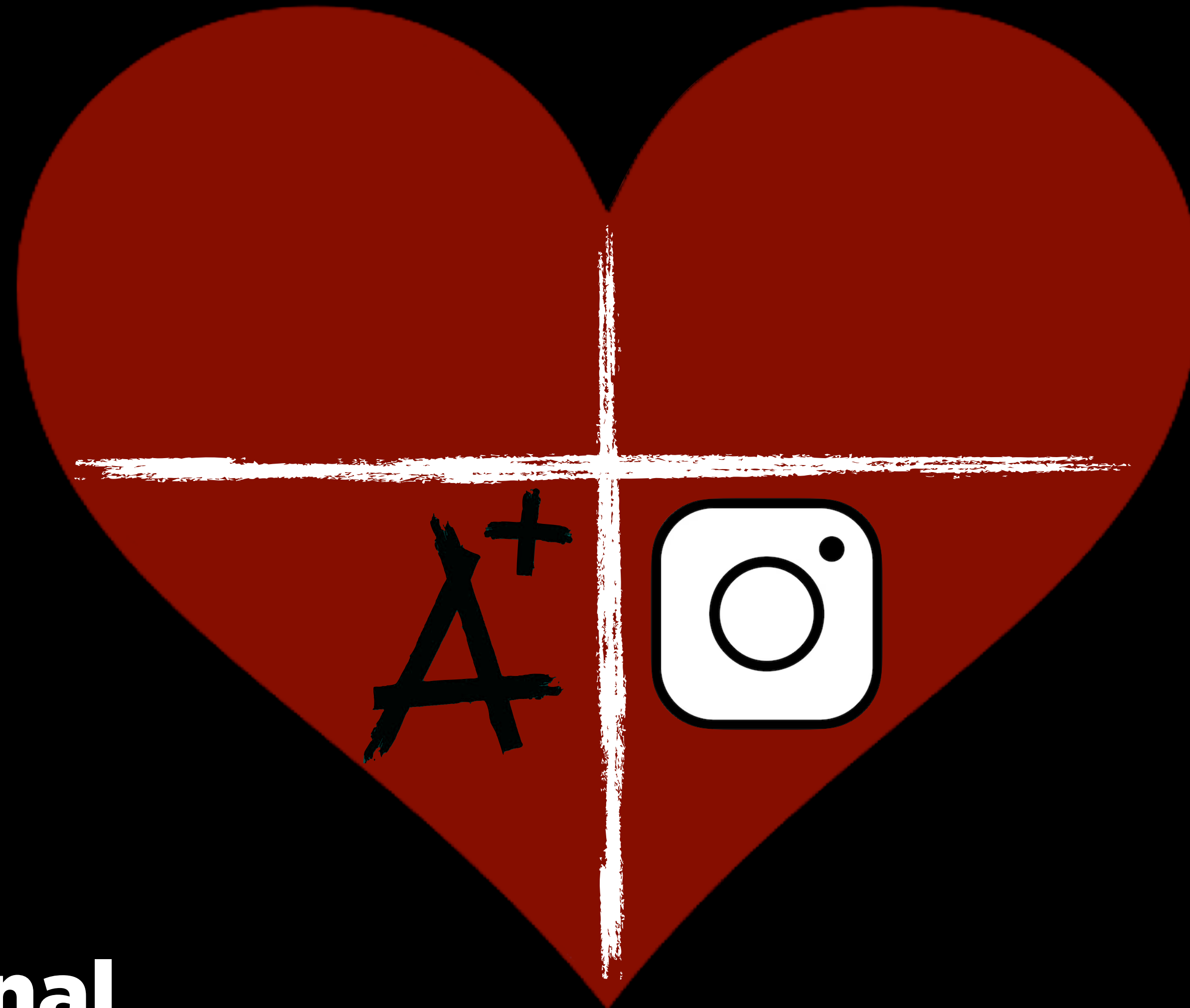
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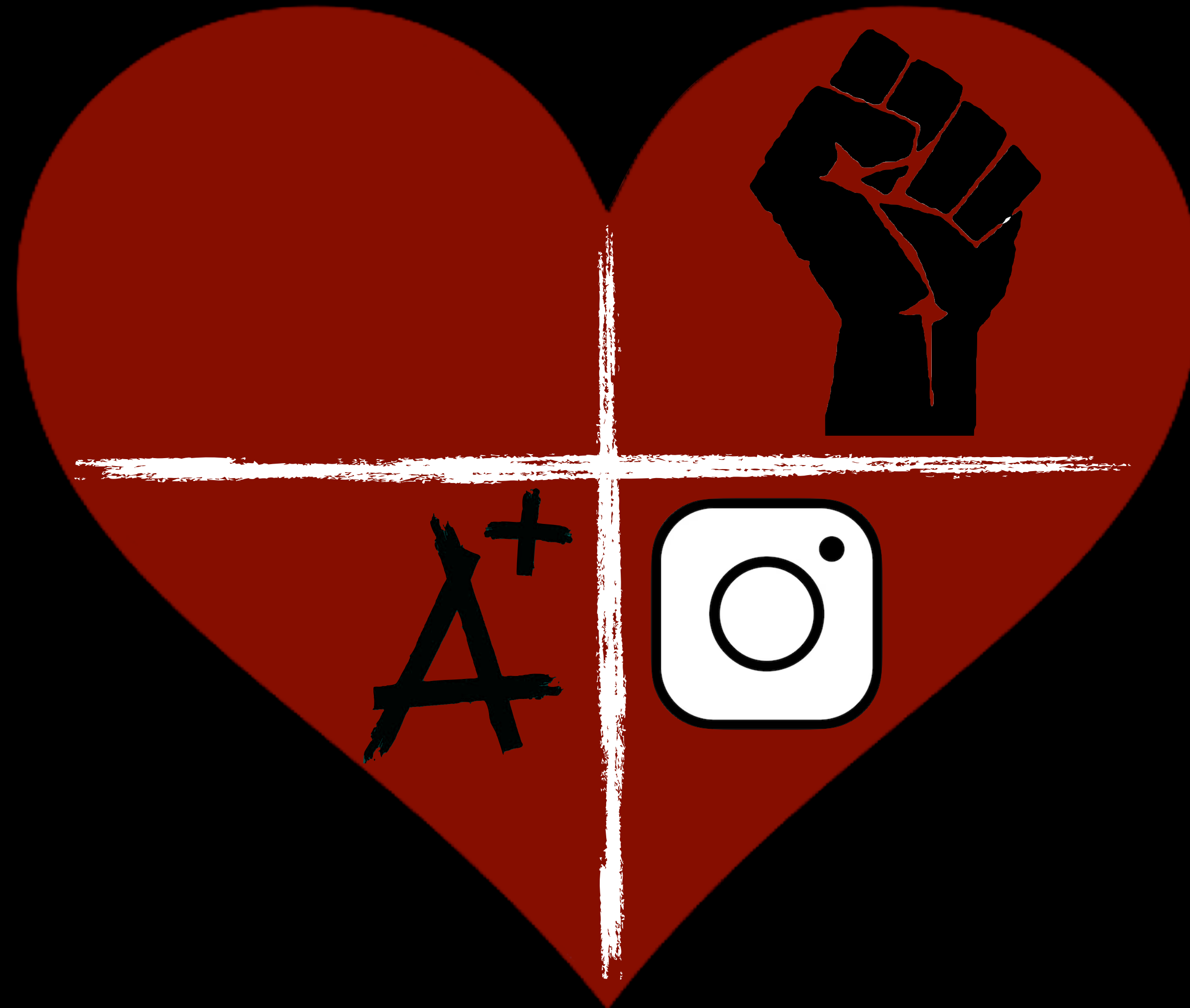


**Functional**  
students can work with mathematics to achieve  
success as defined by society



## **Communal**

students can work with mathematics in and with the contexts and practices of the students' and the students' community

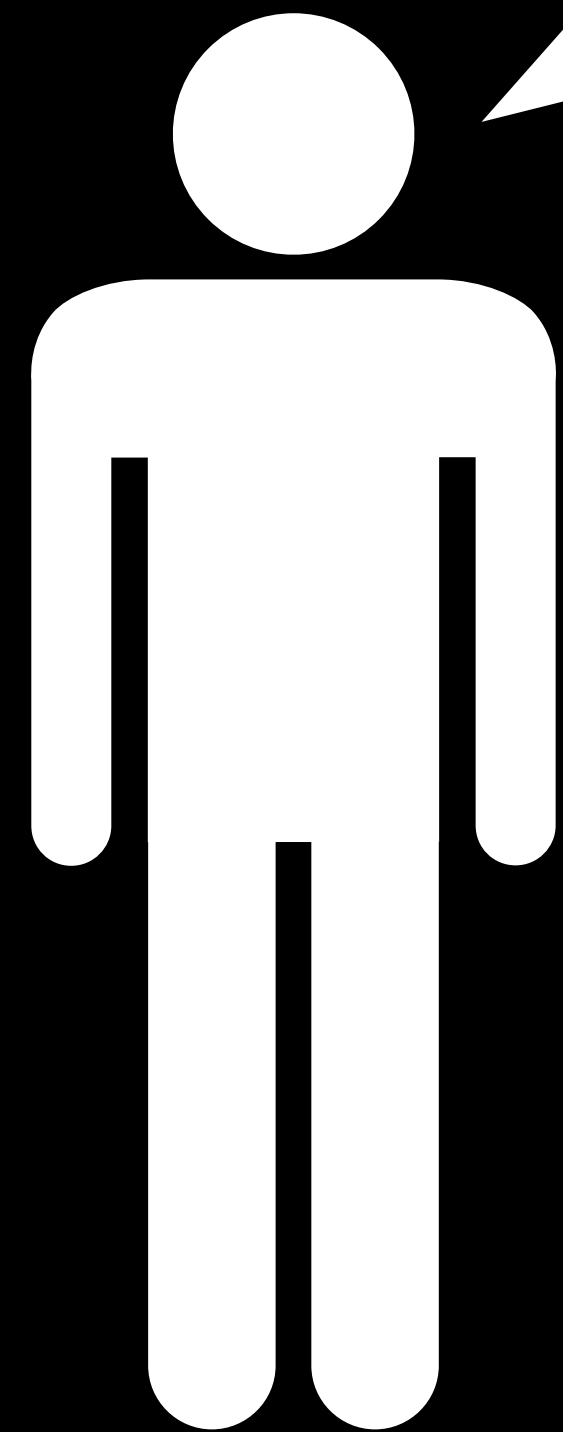


**Critical**  
students can work with mathematics to analyze  
and question the world

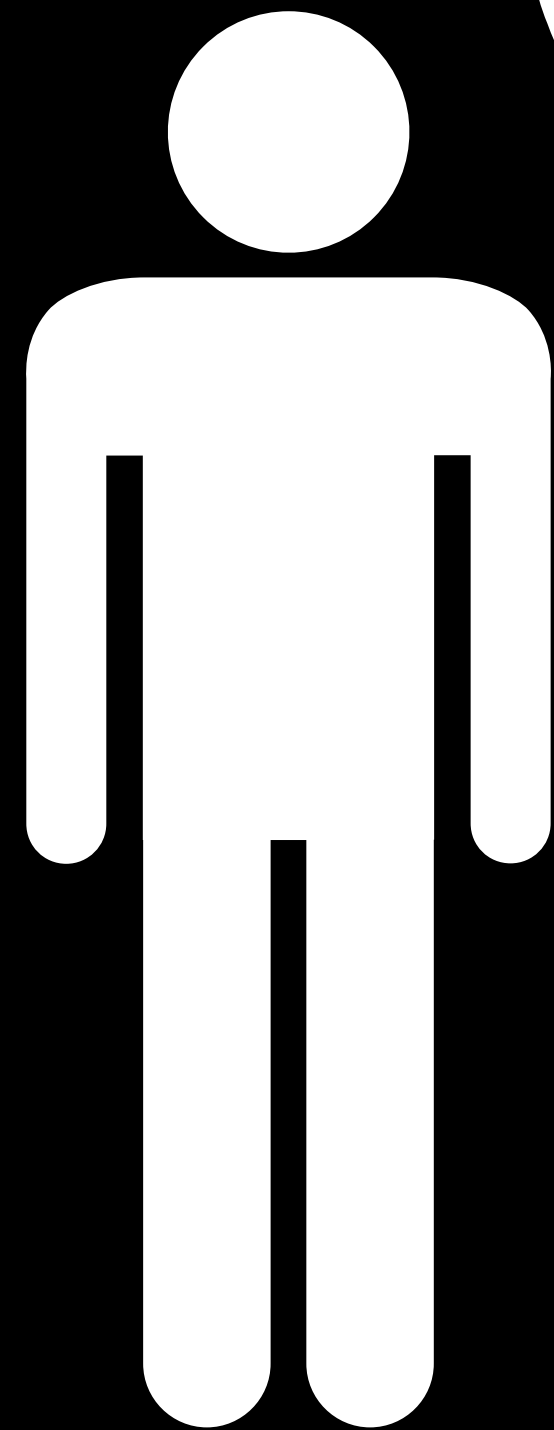


## **Inspirational**

students can work with mathematics to vision and progress toward a better world



**Why do we have so much  
f#@%ing homework?**



**Hopeful Skeptic**

Below is the reported amount of time our class spends doing homework each day, broken up by class.

**Math English History Adventures Biology Spanish Gym French Agriculture Art Band Total  
in Print**

10		5		5							20
15		10			5						30
10	5	10		10							35
20	10	5									35
15		15			10						40
15	20	10		10		1					56
15	10	20		20							65
15	20	10		5			15				65
15	15	15		15	15						75
45	10	12		15							82
15	15	15		15			15	15			90
20	15	30		15	10						90
45	25	40									110
15	25	35		10	10				20		115
25	15	30		15	7					30	122
35	15	20	10	30	20						130
25	50	25		35			15				150
25	30	120		30	10						215
15	45	90		45					30		225
15	15	120		120	15						285

The goal of the project is to:

1. Practice the objectives of the unit, which are:

Use various graphical displays to plot data

Interpret patterns seen in graphical displays

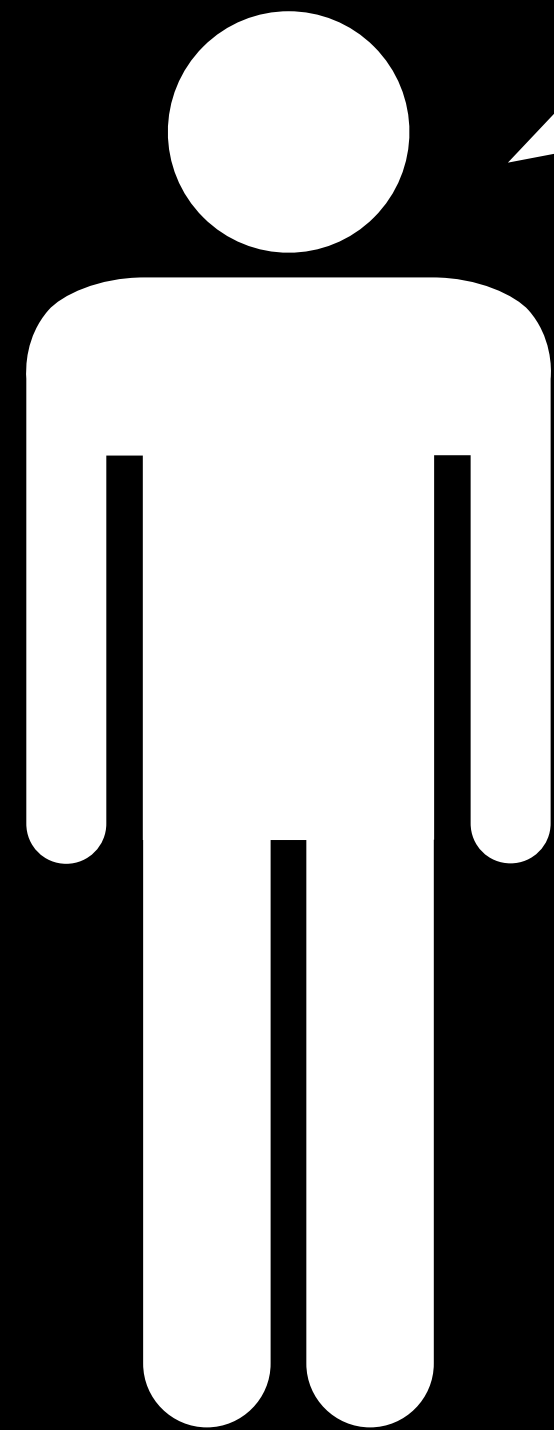
Compute and interpret measures of center and variability for sets of data

2. Answer questions about the data.

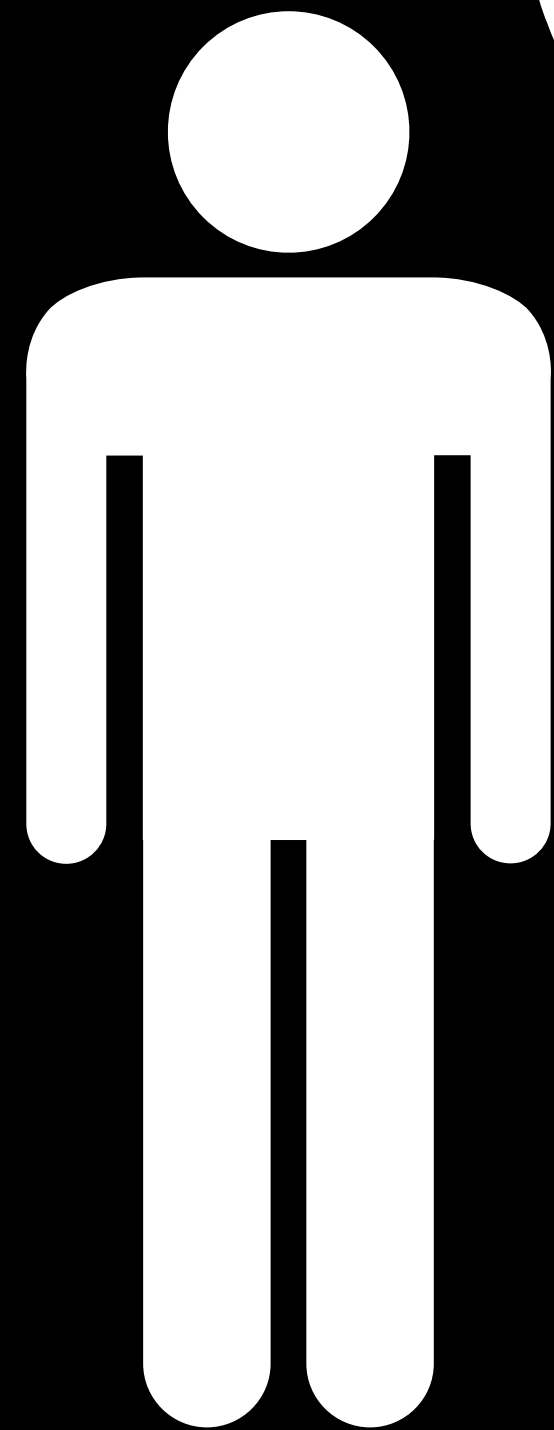
3. Share your answers about the data to make this school a better place. This could be a recommendation for teachers, advice for students, guidelines for principals or parents, etc. The way you choose to share your answers can be of your choosing, letter, chart, pamphlet, computer presentation, poster, etc.

Before we do anything we need to answer the following question:

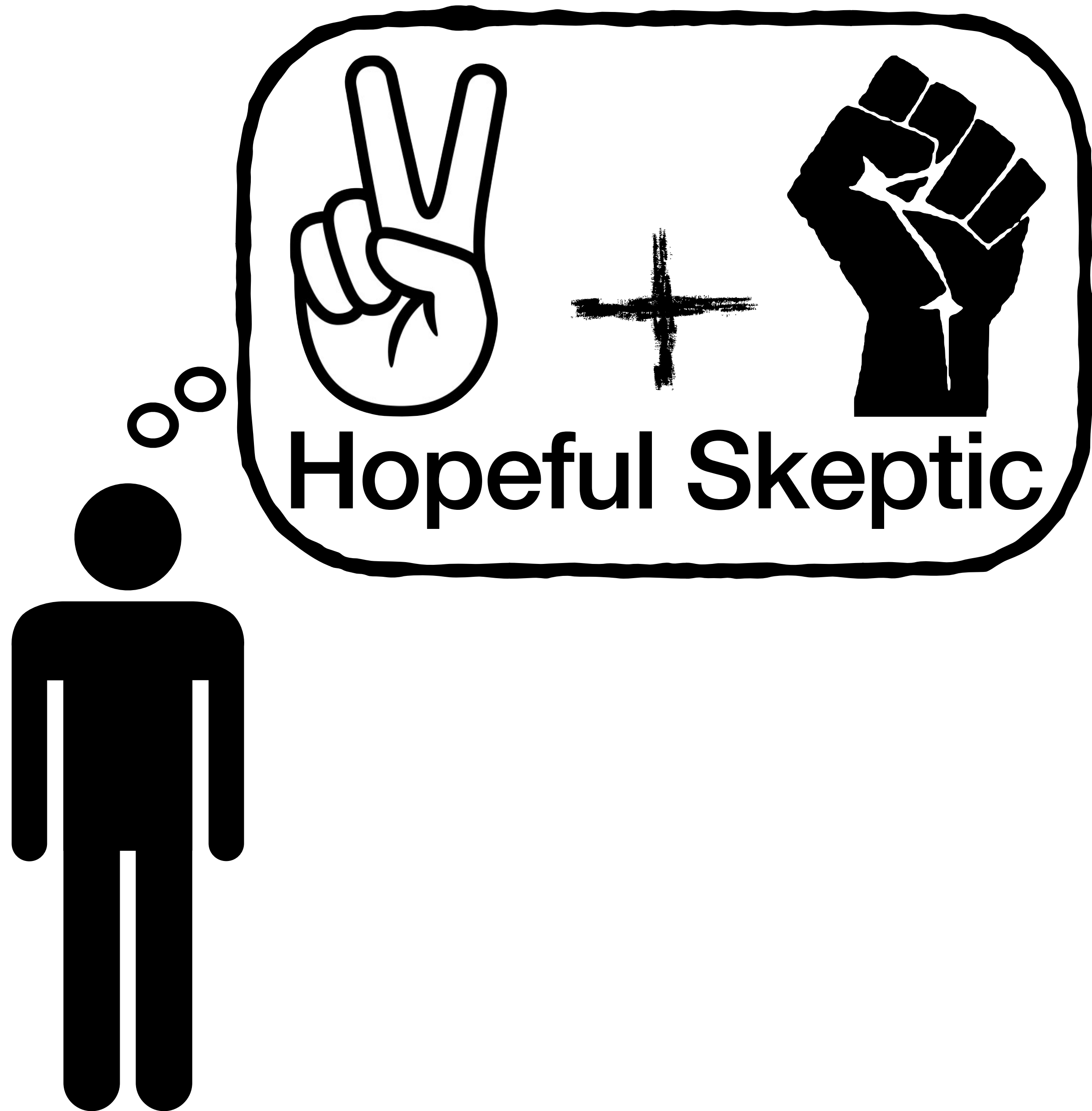
**What is the purpose of homework?**

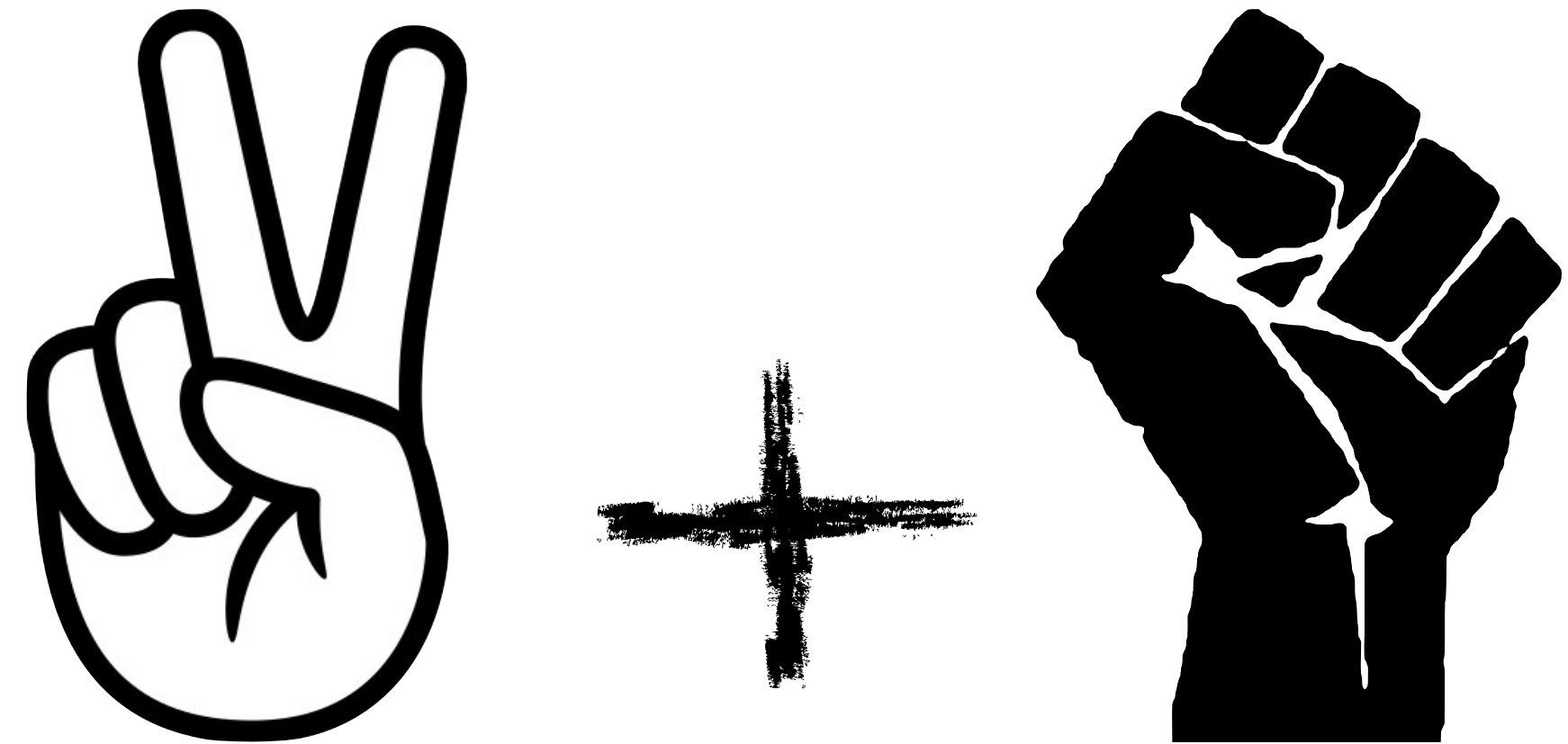


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**Hopeful Skeptic**





**Hopeful Skeptic**

**TeachMath - Case Study Module**



## TeachMath - Case Study Module

Activity 1: Getting to Know You



## TeachMath - Case Study Module

Activity 1: Getting to Know You

Activity 2: Noticing a Student



## TeachMath - Case Study Module

Activity 1: Getting to Know You

Activity 2: Noticing a Student

Activity 3: Problem Solving Interview



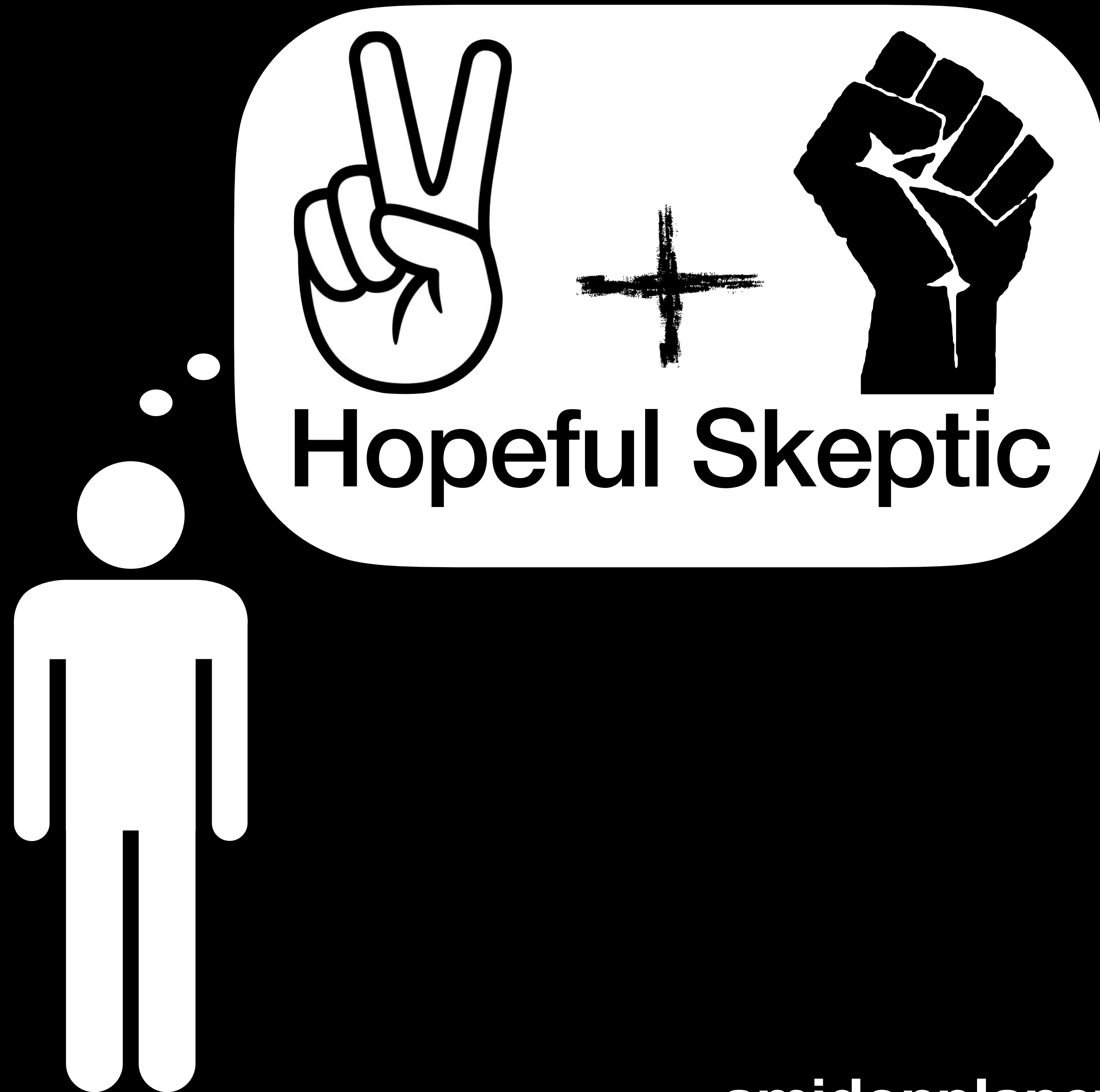
## TeachMath - Case Study Module

Activity 1: Getting to Know You

Activity 2: Noticing a Student

Activity 3: Problem Solving Interview

Activity 4: Mock Teacher Conference



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