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Letters

In defense of math

David Bronson's statement that "mathematical thinking is so restricted" and implication that the only need for students of mathematics is "to produce more mathematicians — for the restricted uses we have for them" (Letters, SN:3/7/87, p.147) require comment.

One of the major benefits of studying mathematics is that practice with "mathematical thinking" teaches students to think logically and critically and to pay attention to detail. These are the "critical skills" which Bronson claims are peculiar to reading and writing. Attempts to teach these skills in reading and writing curricula have proved less effective than teaching them within a mathematics curriculum — perhaps because the simplified structure of mathematics (as compared to a natural language) makes it easier to focus on logic.

The beliefs that only mathematicians need

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Cover: The human immunodeficiency virus, shown here in its mature form, is credited with causing AIDS. But many researchers think some other factor — in addition to infection with the virus — is needed before AIDS develops. Genetics or other viruses could be to blame. (Photo: Zaki Salahuddin/National Cancer Institute)
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numeracy seems to be increasing, it is disappointing to see that the need for improved mathematical training is not universally recognized.

Patrick W. Crockett
Ruston, La.

The Rorschach risk

I enjoyed "The Character of Cancer" (SN: 2/21/87, p.120) but wish you had included the Rorschach inkblot so readers could decide what they saw. Would it be possible for you to run the inkblot in an upcoming issue?

J. Morris
Arlington, Va.

I originally wanted to include an inkblot with the article, but was dissuaded by a psychologist who uses the Rorschach test. He argued that people who take the test in the future as part of a psychological assessment will give biased responses if they have already seen the inkblots in a magazine.

— B. Bower

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