8.2.1 What are imaginary numbers?

Introducing Imaginary Numbers

In the past, you have not been able to solve some quadratic equations like $x^2 + 4 = 0$ and $x^2 + 1 = 0$, because there are no real numbers you can square to get a negative answer. To solve this issue, mathematicians created a new, expanded number system based on one new number. However, this was not the first time mathematicians had invented new numbers! To read about other such inventions, refer to the Historical Note that follows problem 8-63.

In this lesson, you will learn about imaginary numbers and how you can use them to solve equations you were previously unable to solve.

8-63. Consider the equation $x^2 = 2$.

a. How do you "undo" squaring a number?

b. When you solve $x^2 = 2$, how many solutions should you get?

c. How many x-intercepts does the graph of $y = x^2 - 2$ have?

d. Solve the equation $x^2 = 2$. Write your solutions both as radicals and as decimal approximations.

Historical Note: Irrational Numbers

In Ancient Greece, people believed that all numbers could be written as fractions of whole numbers (what are now called **rational numbers**). Many individuals realized later that some numbers could not be written as fractions (such as $\sqrt{2}$), and these individuals challenged the accepted beliefs. Some of the people who challenged the beliefs were exiled or outright killed over these challenges!

The Greeks knew that for a one-unit square, the length of the diagonal, squared, yielded 2. When it was shown that no rational number could do that, the existence of what are called **irrational numbers** was accepted and symbols like $\sqrt{2}$ were invented to represent them.

The problem $x^2 = 3$ also has no rational solutions; fractions can never work exactly. The rational (i.e., decimal) solutions that calculators and computers provide are only approximations; the exact

answer can only be represented in radical form, namely, $\pm\sqrt{3}$.

8-64. Mathematicians throughout history have resisted the idea that some equations may not be solvable. Still, it makes sense that $x^2 + 1 = 0$ cannot be solved because the graph of $y = x^2 + 1$ has no x-intercepts. What happens when you try to solve $x^2 + 1 = 0$?

Historical Note: Imaginary Numbers

In some ways, each person's math education parallels the history of mathematical discovery. When you were much younger, if you were asked, *"How many times does 3 go into 8?"* or *"What is 8 divided by 3?"* you might have said, *"3 doesn't go into 8."* Then you learned about numbers other than whole numbers, and the question had an answer. Later, if you were asked, *"What number squared makes 5?"* you might have said, *"No number squared makes 5."* Then you learned about numbers other than rational numbers, and you could answer that question.

Similarly, until about 500 years ago, the answer to the question, *"What number squared makes −1?"* was, *"No number squared makes −1."* Then something remarkable happened. An Italian mathematician named Bombelli used a formula for finding the roots of third-degree polynomials. Within the formula was a square root, and when he applied the formula to a particular equation, the number under the square root came out negative. Instead of giving up, he had a brilliant idea. He had already figured out that the equation had a solution, so he decided to see what would happen if he pretended that there *was* a number he could square to make a negative. Remarkably, he was able to continue the calculation, and eventually the "imaginary" number disappeared from the solution. More importantly, the resulting answer worked; it solved his original equation. This led to the acceptance of these so-called **imaginary numbers**. The name stuck, and mathematicians became convinced that all quadratic equations do have solutions. Of course, in some situations you will only be interested in real number solutions (that is, solutions not having an imaginary part).

8-65. In the 1500s, an Italian mathematician named Rafael Bombelli invented the imaginary number $\sqrt{-1}$, which is now called i. $\sqrt{-1} = i$ implies that $i^2 = -1$. After this invention, it became possible to find solutions for $x^2 + 1 = 0$; they are i and $-i$. The value of $\sqrt{-16} = \sqrt{16(-1)} = \sqrt{16i^2} = 4i$. Use the definition of i to rewrite each of the following expressions.

   a. $\sqrt{-4}$

   b. $(2i)(3i)$

   c. $(2i)^2(-5i)$

d. $\sqrt{-25}$

8-66. Graph the function $y = x^2 - 4x + 5$.

   a. Does the graph cross the x-axis? Should the equation $x^2 - 4x + 5 = 0$ have real solutions?

   b. Use the Quadratic Formula to solve $x^2 - 4x + 5 = 0$. Use your new understanding of imaginary numbers to simplify your results as much as possible.

   c. A real number plus (or minus) a multiple of i, like each of the solutions to $x^2 - 4x + 5 = 0$, is called a **complex number**. Check one of your solutions from part (b) by substituting it into the equation for x and simplifying the result.

8-67. When a graph crosses the x-axis, the x-intercepts are often referred to as the **real roots** of the equation that results when $y = 0$. You have seen that solutions to equations can be real or complex, so it follows that roots can also be real or complex. Compare and contrast what happens with the graphs and equations for the three cases in parts (a) through (c) below.

   a. Sketch the graph of $y = (x + 3)^2 - 4$. What are the roots?

   b. Sketch the graph of $y = (x + 3)^2$. What are the roots?

   c. Sketch the graph of $y = (x + 3)^2 + 4$. Can you find the roots by looking at the graph? Why or why not? Find the roots by solving $(x + 3)^2 + 4 = 0$.

   d. Make general statements about the relationship between graphs of parabolas and the kinds of roots their equations have.

8-68. Consider the equations $y = x^2$ and $y = 2x - 5$.

   a. On one set of axes, sketch the graphs and label the intersection.

   b. Use algebra to solve the system of equations.

   c. Discuss your results with your team. What could these solutions mean?

8-69. Do the graphs of $y = \frac{1}{x}$ and $y = -x + 1$ intersect? What kind of algebraic solutions will this system have? Verify your answer by solving the system.

Ⓜ ETHODS AND MEANINGS

MATH NOTES

Imaginary and Complex Numbers

The **imaginary number** that solves the equation $x^2 = -1$ is i, so $i^2 = -1$, and the two solutions of the equation are i and $-i$.

In general, i follows the rules of real number arithmetic. The sum of two imaginary numbers is imaginary (unless it is 0). Multiplying the imaginary number i by every possible real number would yield the set of all the imaginary numbers.

The set of numbers that solve equations of the form $x^2 = $ (a negative real number) is called the set of **imaginary numbers**. Imaginary numbers are not positive, negative, or zero. The collection (set) of positive and negative numbers (integers, rational numbers (fractions), and irrational numbers), are referred to as the **real numbers**.

The sum of a real number (other than zero) and an imaginary number, such as $2 + i$, is generally neither real nor imaginary. Numbers such as these, which can be written in the form $a + bi$, where a and b are real numbers, are called **complex numbers**. Each complex number has a real component, a, and an imaginary component, bi. The real numbers are considered to be complex numbers with $b = 0$, and the imaginary numbers are complex numbers with $a = 0$.

Review & Preview

8-70. Write each of the following expressions in the form $a + bi$. Homework Help ✎

   a. $-18 - \sqrt{-25}$

   b. $\dfrac{2 \pm \sqrt{-16}}{2}$

   c. $5 + \sqrt{-6}$

8-71. Explain why $i^3 = -i$. What does i^4 equal? Homework Help ✎

8-72. If $f(x) = x^2 + 7x - 9$, calculate the values in parts (a) through (c) below. Homework Help ✎

   a. $f(-3)$

   b. $f(i)$

   c. $f(-3 + i)$

8-73. Is $5 + 2i$ a solution to $x^2 - 10x = -29$? How can you be sure? Homework Help ✎

8-74. Solve $16^{(x+2)} = 8^x$. <u>Homework Help</u> ✎

8-75. Is $(x - 5)^2$ equivalent to $(5 - x)^2$? Explain why or why not. <u>Homework Help</u> ✎

8-76. Calculate the value of each expression below. <u>Homework Help</u> ✎

   a. $\sqrt{-49}$

   b. $\sqrt{-2}$

   c. $(4i)^2$

   d. $(3i)^3$

8-77. Find the inverse functions below. <u>Homework Help</u> ✎

   a. If $f(x) = 2x - 3$, then what does $f^{-1}(x)$ equal?

   b. If $h(x) = (x - 3)^2 + 2$, then what does $h^{-1}(x)$ equal?

8-78. Solve each equation. <u>Homework Help</u> ✎

   a. $5.2(3.75)^x = 100$

   b. $4 + 3x^4 = 81$