

## Greater Than, Less Than, and Equal To

Three important mathematical symbols are:  $>$ ,  $<$ , and  $=$ . These symbols are used to discuss the relationship between two numbers or mathematical concepts.

The  $>$  symbol means “greater than”, so the number appearing before it will always be greater than the number appearing after. For example,

- $21 > 7$  means that 21 is greater than 7.

The  $<$  symbol means “less than”, so the number appearing before it will always be less than the number appearing after. For example,

- $2 < 35$  means that 2 is less than 35.

An easy way to remember the meaning of  $>$  and  $<$  is to think of each symbol as being the mouth of an alligator. Alligators are hungry animals, so they always want to eat the most of whatever they can. Think of the open end of the symbol as the open mouth of an alligator trying to eat the bigger number.

$$9 > 5$$

*The alligator's mouth is trying to eat the number 9.*

*This means that the number 9 is greater than the number 5.*

$$47 < 71$$

*The alligator's mouth is trying to eat the number 71.*

*This means that the number 71 is greater than the number 47.*

*We can also say 47 is less than 71.*

These symbols become even more useful when dealing with large numbers or when trying to solve a math problem. For example, if you are told:

$x < 7$  and  $x > 5$  and  $x$  is a whole number, you can know what number  $x$  represents.

$$x = 6$$

because 6 is the only whole number that is less than 7 but also greater than 5.

Sometimes, you may see either the  $<$  or the  $>$  sign with a number on only one side:

$$< 25$$

*You would simply read this as less than 25.*

$$> 25$$

*This would mean greater than 25.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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The = symbol means that the number appearing before the symbol is equal to the number appearing after the symbol. For example:

$$4 = 4$$

This simply means that the number four equals the number four. Four is equal to itself. If you have four candy bars and four pieces of gum, you have an equal number of candy bars and gum.

The = sign is also useful in solving math problems. For example, if you are told

$$x = 2$$

you can answer the following question:  $x + 7$  is what number? The answer is 9.

If  $x$  equals 2, the question is actually asking what is  $2 + 7$ ?  $2 + 7 = 9$

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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## Activities

**Activity A:** Place the correct sign,  $<$  ,  $>$  , or  $=$  in the blank space provided:

1.  $24$  \_\_\_\_  $9$

2.  $42$  \_\_\_\_  $43$

3.  $7$  \_\_\_\_  $3$

4.  $1$  \_\_\_\_  $1$

5.  $2+3$  \_\_\_\_  $3+2$

6.  $33$  \_\_\_\_  $32$

7.  $5$  \_\_\_\_  $9$

8.  $8$  \_\_\_\_  $8$

9.  $13+7$  \_\_\_\_  $21$

10.  $64$  \_\_\_\_  $20$

11.  $51$  \_\_\_\_  $90$

12.  $78$  \_\_\_\_  $87$

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Answer Key

### Activity A

1.  $24 > 9$
2.  $42 < 43$
3.  $7 > 3$
4.  $1 = 1$
5.  $2+3 = 3+2$
6.  $33 > 32$
7.  $5 < 9$
8.  $8 = 8$
9.  $13+7 < 21$
10.  $64 > 20$
11.  $51 < 90$
12.  $78 < 87$