

Solutions

Twentieth International Olympiad, 1978

1978/1. Since 1978^n and 1978^m agree in their last three digits, the difference

$$1978^n - 1978^m = 1978^m(1978^{n-m} - 1)$$

is divisible by $10^3 = 2^3 \cdot 5^3$; and since the second factor above is odd, 2^3 divides the first. Also

$$1978^m = 2^m \cdot 989^m,$$

so $m \geq 3$.

We can write $m + n = (n - m) + 2m$; to minimize this sum, we take $m = 3$ and seek the smallest value of $d = n - m$, such that $1978^d - 1$ is divisible by $5^3 = 125$, i.e.

$$1978^d \equiv 1 \pmod{125}.$$

We shall twice make use of the following

LEMMA. *Let d be the smallest exponent such that $a^d \equiv 1 \pmod{N}$. Then any other exponent g for which $a^g \equiv 1 \pmod{N}$ is a multiple of d .*

PROOF: If d does not divide g , then $g = qd + r$ with $0 < r < d$, and $a^g \equiv a^{qd}a^r \equiv 1 \pmod{N}$ implies $a^r \equiv 1 \pmod{N}$ with $0 < r < d$, contradicting the minimality of d . So $d|g$.

Fermat's theorem states:† For any prime p and any integer a not divisible by p ,

$$(1) \quad a^{p-1} \equiv 1 \pmod{p}.$$

For example,

$$1978^4 \equiv 1 \pmod{5}.$$

†For a proof, see e.g. p. 126 of S. L. Greitzer, *The International Mathematical Olympiads*, vol. 27 in this NML series.

Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions

Lingjun Ying



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Table of Contents Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions

1. Understanding the eBook Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions
 - The Rise of Digital Reading Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions
 - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions
 - Personalized Recommendations
 - Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions User Reviews and Ratings
 - Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions and Bestseller Lists
5. Accessing Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions Free and Paid eBooks
 - Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions Public Domain eBooks
 - Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions eBook Subscription Services
 - Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions Budget-Friendly Options

6. Navigating Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions eBook Formats
 - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
 - Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions Compatibility with Devices
 - Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions Enhanced eBook Features
7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
 - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions
 - Highlighting and Note-Taking Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions
 - Interactive Elements Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions
8. Staying Engaged with Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions
 - Joining Online Reading Communities
 - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
 - Following Authors and Publishers Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions
9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions
 - Benefits of a Digital Library
 - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions
10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
 - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
 - Minimizing Distractions
 - Managing Screen Time
11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions
 - Setting Reading Goals Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions
 - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions
 - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Math Olympiad Problems And Solutions
 - Distinguishing Credible Sources
13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
 - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
 - Exploring Educational eBooks
14. Embracing eBook Trends
 - Integration of Multimedia Elements

- Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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