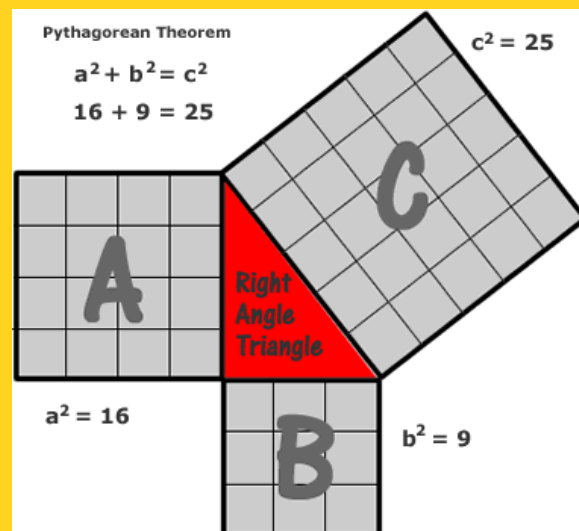


Black history month: HOW MATHEMATICS CAME FROM AFRICA



Mathematics as a science dates back to a book written in ancient Greek in about 300 BC, "*Euclid's Elements*". It was the first-ever book to set out proper mathematical *proofs* - which are still valid 2300 years later - and a systematic range of results in geometry and number theory.

"*The Elements*", or textbooks closely based on it, remained the basis of all mathematical education until the 1960s.

It was written in Greek. But it was written in Alexandria, in Egypt, in Africa.

Other famous Greek-language mathematicians, such as Apollonius and Eudoxus and Pythagoras, also worked in Egypt. We do not know their skin colour; we do not even know whether "Pythagoras" and "Euclid" were actual people, or pen-names for groups of mathematicians.

The ancient mathematician and astronomer Ptolemy was known to writers of his time as black, and what we know of ancient Egypt suggests that its people were a mix of skin colours, many black.

Maybe Euclid was black.