1.6 LIMITS INVOLVING INFINITY

EXAMPLE A Sketch the graph of $y = (x - 2)^4(x + 1)^3(x - 1)$ by finding its intercepts and its limits as $x \to \infty$ and as $x \to -\infty$.

SOLUTION The y-intercept is $f(0) = (-2)^4(1)^3(-1) = -16$ and the x-intercepts are found by setting $y = 0$: $x = 2, -1, 1$. Notice that since $(x - 2)^4$ is positive, the function doesn't change sign at 2; thus, the graph doesn't cross the x-axis at 2. The graph crosses the axis at -1 and 1.

When x is large positive, all three factors are large, so

$$\lim_{x \to \infty} (x - 2)^4(x + 1)^3(x - 1) = \infty$$

When x is large negative, the first factor is large positive and the second and third factors are both large negative, so

$$\lim_{x \to -\infty} (x - 2)^4(x + 1)^3(x - 1) = \infty$$

Combining this information, we give a rough sketch of the graph in Figure 1.

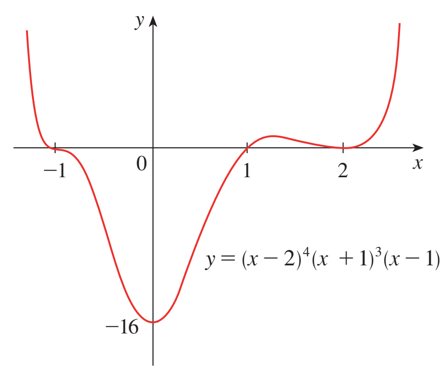

FIGURE 1 ■

EXAMPLE B Use a graph to find a number N such that

$$\text{if} \quad x > N \quad \text{then} \quad \left| \frac{3x^2 - x - 2}{5x^2 + 4x + 1} - 0.6 \right| < 0.1$$

SOLUTION We rewrite the given inequality as

$$0.5 < \frac{3x^2 - x - 2}{5x^2 + 4x + 1} < 0.7$$

We need to determine the values of x for which the given curve lies between the horizontal lines $y = 0.5$ and $y = 0.7$. So we graph the curve and these lines in Figure 2. Then we use the cursor to estimate that the curve crosses the line $y = 0.5$ when $x \approx 6.7$. To the right of this number the curve stays between the lines $y = 0.5$ and $y = 0.7$. Rounding to be safe, we can say that

$$\text{if} \quad x > 7 \quad \text{then} \quad \left| \frac{3x^2 - x - 2}{5x^2 + 4x + 1} - 0.6 \right| < 0.1$$

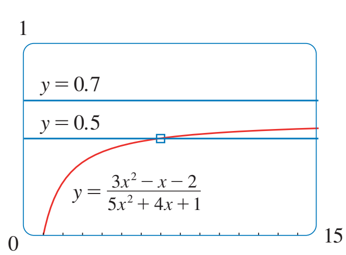

FIGURE 2

In other words, for $\varepsilon = 0.1$ we can choose $N = 7$ (or any larger number) in Definition 7. ■