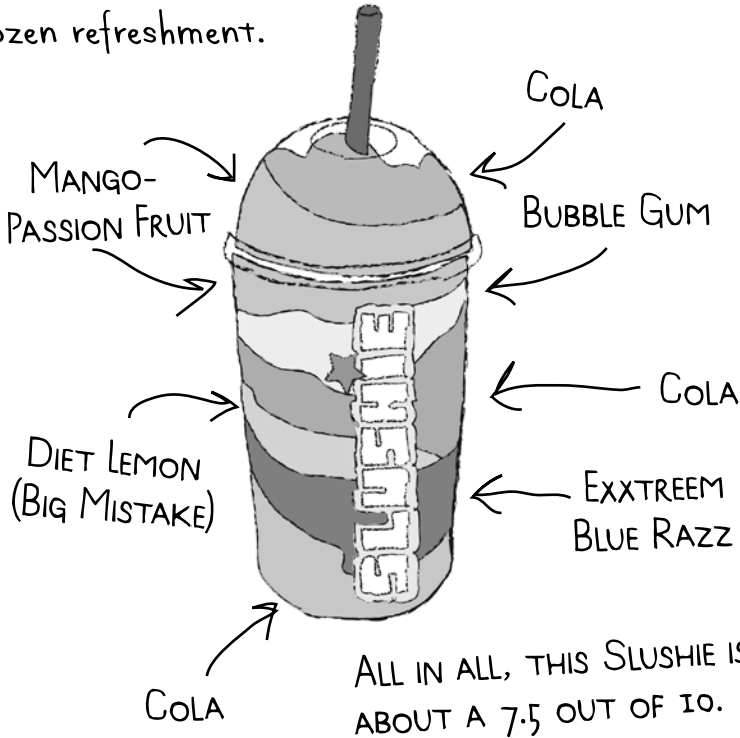


COUCH MONEY

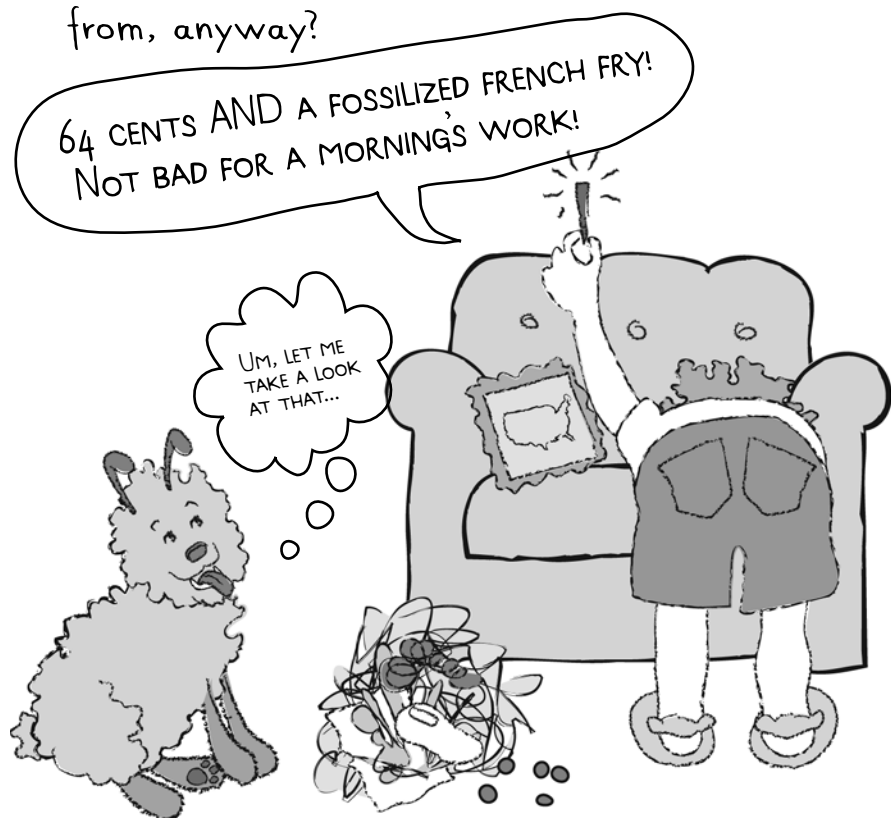
Jack and I are Slushie aficionados.* Almost every day during the summer, we bike to the convenience store down the street for a little frozen refreshment.



My mom and dad give me an allowance on Fridays, and it's enough to buy small Slushies throughout the week—but barely. If I want to get some chips or candy, too, I come up short in just a few days. So I have to augment* my income with couch money.

Couch money is money that falls out of grown-ups' pockets and gets lost in furniture cushions. It's usually coins, but once in a while it's a dollar bill.

To find couch money, you stick your arms deep down into the slots near the arms and backs of chairs and couches, then you pull out whatever you can feel. In my house, lots of times it's trash—candy wrappers, trading card packages, sticky straws. Where does all that stuff come from, anyway?



Usually I find a coin or two in a chair, and maybe five or six in a couch. When I have enough money for a Slushie, I'm done couch-diving for the day. But the next day, I have to find a new spot to try. Junk drawers are good. The car can be a goldmine. And this week, while Timothy is still gone, the floor in his room has LOTS of potential.

THE AIRPLANE POSTER IS ASKEW.*



This afternoon Jack and I went to buy Slushies, and when we got to the convenience store, some girls were in the Slushie line ahead of us.



WHAT DO YOU KNOW...
NOW THAT I'M PAYING ATTENTION,
THEY DON'T REALLY ALL LOOK THE SAME...
WEIRD.

"Do you know any of those girls?" whispered Jack.

"I've seen the one with blackish hair and a pink stripe before," I whispered back. Guess I didn't speak quietly enough. Pink-stripe girl looked back and gave me the evil eye.

After we got our Slushies, we put them in the water bottle holders on our bikes—boy, those sure come in handy—and rode up and down the streets of our neighborhood. We were looking for girls with red hair. We've never looked for girls before. Sheesh. It was appalling.*

We saw girls playing hopscotch, girls running through sprinklers, girls selling lemonade, even one girl climbing high in a tree—but no girls with red hair.

“Where else can we spy on girls?” I asked Jack.

“When we go swimming, there are always girls at the pool,” he said.

“There are?” I said. “OK, let's go swimming.”

So that's where we're going next, after we relax in the fort for a few minutes and finish our Slushies. When I go home to put on my swim trunks, I'll stick the sketchbook back under my bed, where it'll be safe.