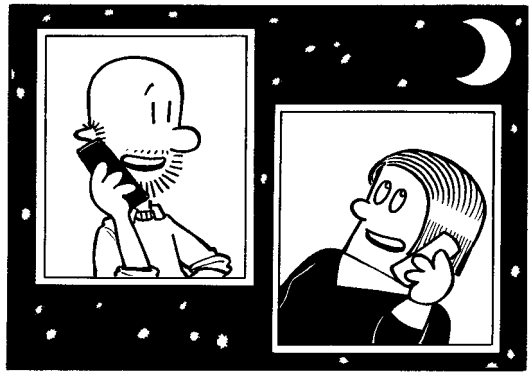
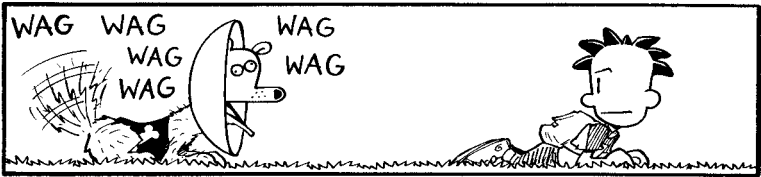
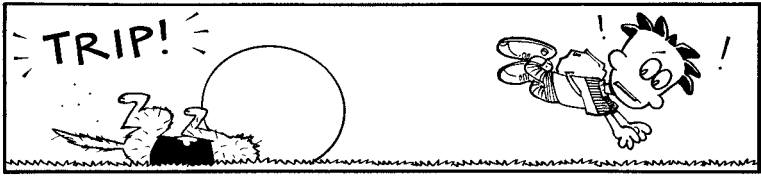


Whew! That was close. He has no idea I could end up in summer school.

Not unless he and Mrs. Godfrey are having secret, late-night phone conversations.

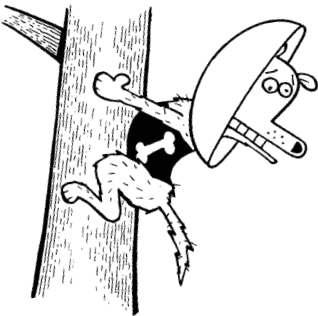




Nice spot for a nap, Spitsy. Shouldn't you be off chasing squirrels or something?

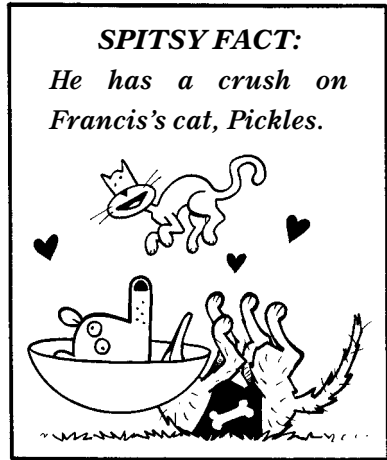
Spitsy belongs to Mr. Eustis, who lives next door. And, in case the doofy-looking dog sweater and giant funnel on his head didn't tip you off, Spitsy

is the ultimate dog nerd. He's afraid of mailmen. He eats his own poop. And don't try throwing him a tennis ball. I did that once and we ended up at the animal

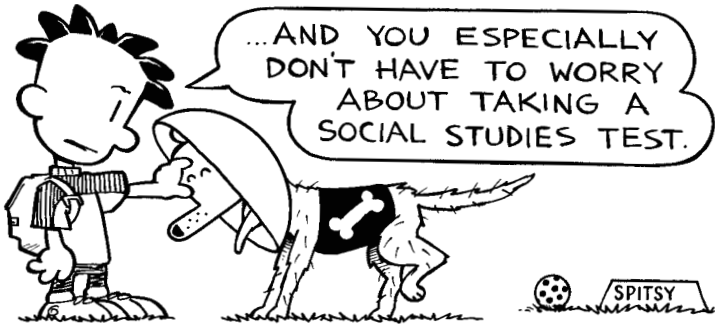


hospital getting his stomach pumped. It's a long story.

But I don't want to rag on Spitsy. Spitsy's okay. After all, he's a dog, and all dogs are cool in my book. Except maybe those freaky little hairless Chihuahuas.



It must be nice to be you, Spitsy. You get to hang out all day, sleeping in the sun. You don't have to worry about Hairy Eyeballs. Or big sisters. Or teachers.



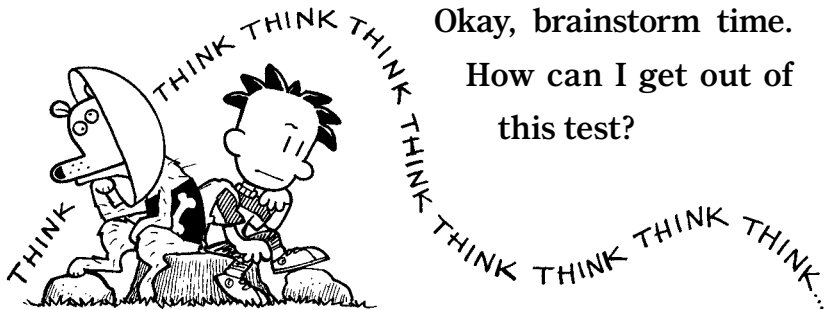
WAIT a minute! Maybe *I* don't have to worry about the test either!

What if I can get out of it?

What if I can convince Mrs. Godfrey to let me take the test tomorrow instead of today? Then I'll borrow Francis's class notes and cram for twenty-four hours. That'll at least give me a CHANCE to pass the stupid thing.



See, that's why dogs are so much better than cats. Cats never help you do ANYTHING. They just lie around the house, scratching up the furniture and licking themselves.



Okay, brainstorm time.  
How can I get out of  
this test?

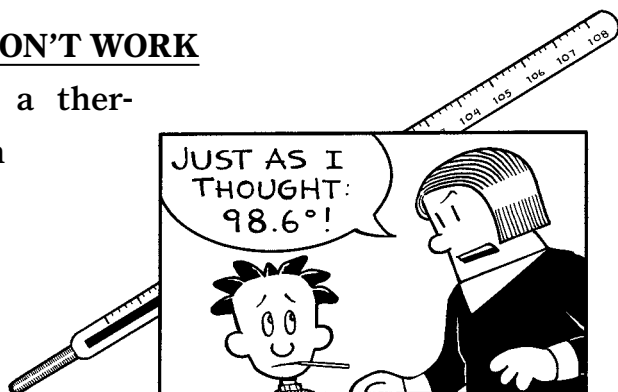
It's easy coming up with a plan. The problem is, almost as soon as I DO come up with a plan, I think of a reason it won't work.

### PLAN A: ILLNESS

As soon as the test starts, I hold my breath until my face turns all red. Then I tell Mrs. Godfrey I feel really, really sick.

### WHY IT WON'T WORK

She keeps a thermometer in her desk.



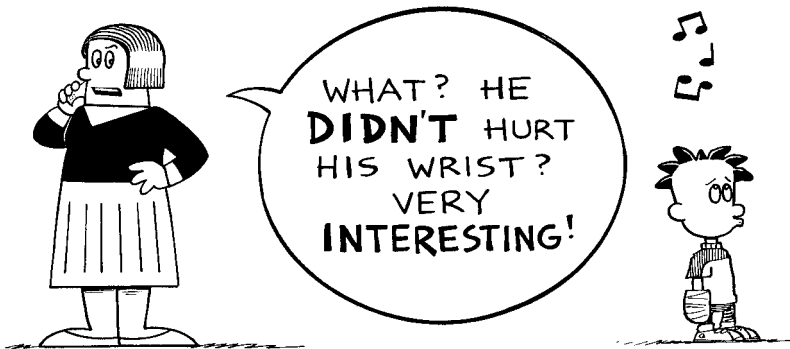
## PLAN B: INJURY

I wrap my hand in bandages, then tell her I can't write because I sprained my wrist.

## WHY IT WON'T WORK

She'll make me take the test left-handed.

Yup, she's that mean.



## PLAN C: TRAGIC ACCIDENT

I pretend to hit my head against the door on my way into the classroom, then act like I've got amnesia.



## WHY IT WON'T WORK

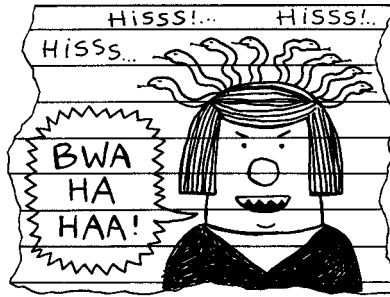
I used that one two weeks ago.

## PLAN D: THE TRUTH

I walk right up to Mrs. Godfrey, look her in the eye, and tell her that I didn't know there was a test today.

## WHY IT WON'T WORK

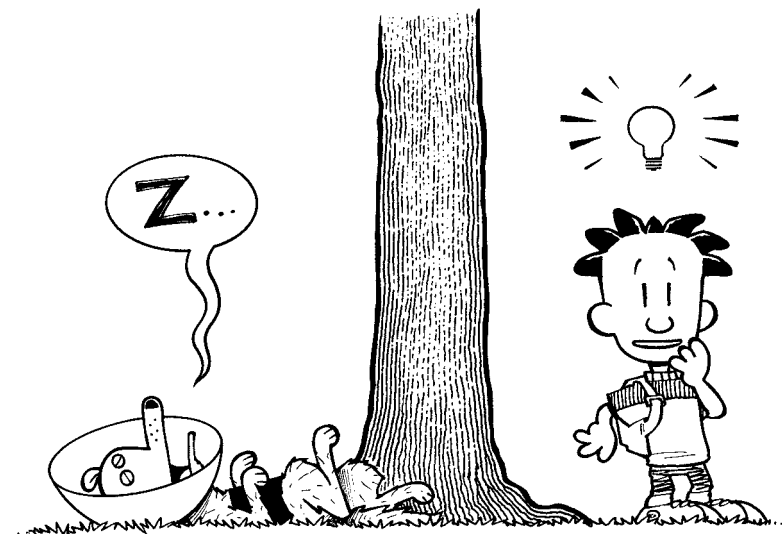
The woman hates me.



Shoot. This is getting me nowhere. I've only got twenty-five minutes until the test. Twenty-five minutes until Mrs. Godfrey brings down the summer school hammer on me.

I glance at my watch. Now it's twenty-FOUR minutes. Yikes.

It's beginning to look like the only way I'll be able to avoid this test is . . . is . . .



. . . is to skip school altogether!



# CHAPTER

## 3

Yes! That's it! I'll skip school! I'll take the day off! I'll pretend somebody just invented a new holiday!



I'll stop right here.

What am I DOING? Nobody gets away with skipping school at P.S. 38. It's impossible.

Why? Two words: "THE MACHINE."

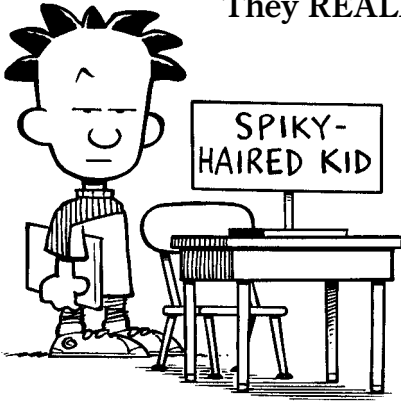
Not a REAL machine, like that funky-looking thing the janitor uses to buff up the floors. The Machine isn't something you can see or touch. But it's there.



The Machine watches you. It knows your every move. And if you're not where you're supposed to be, the Machine tracks you down. Here's how:

### 1. THE SEATING CHART

Teachers always tell you where to sit. They claim it helps them remember kids' names. Right. Like they care what our names are.



They REALLY do it to keep tabs on you. One look at the chart and they know right away if you're not at your desk. Then the Machine starts up.

## 2. THE ATTENDANCE SHEET

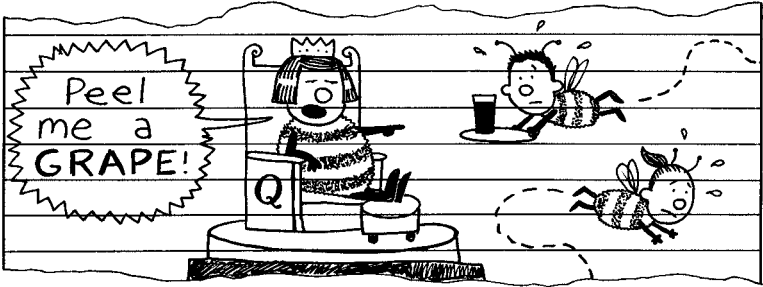
Teachers write everything down. Who knows why.



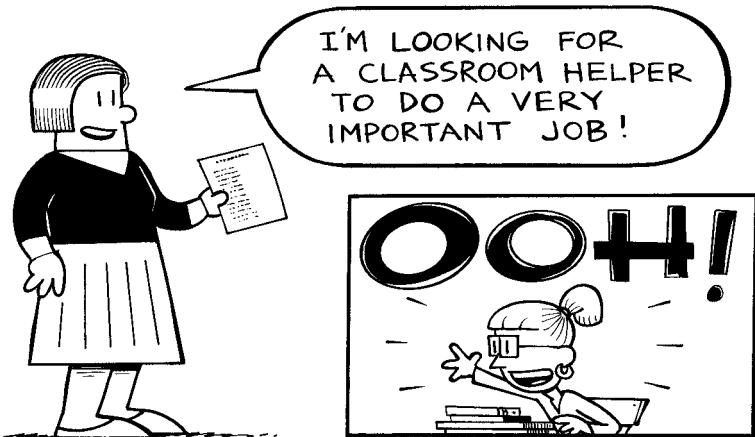
They fill out an attendance sheet in every class. If you're missing, a big red "X" goes next to your name. Congratulations. You're absent.

### 3. THE CLASSROOM HELPER

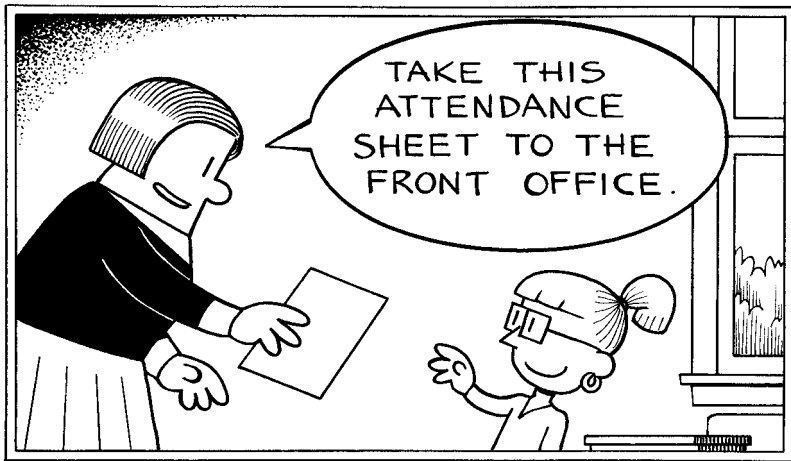
We saw a movie about bees in science. This big fat queen bee sat around the hive doing nothing while the little drones did all the work. Sound familiar?



Teachers are the queen bees. Guess who the drones are.



It's always a suck-up like Gina who volunteers, because she's so desperate to earn extra credit. Good for you, Gina. I'm sure your career as a sixth-grade classroom helper will get you into some fancy-pants college.



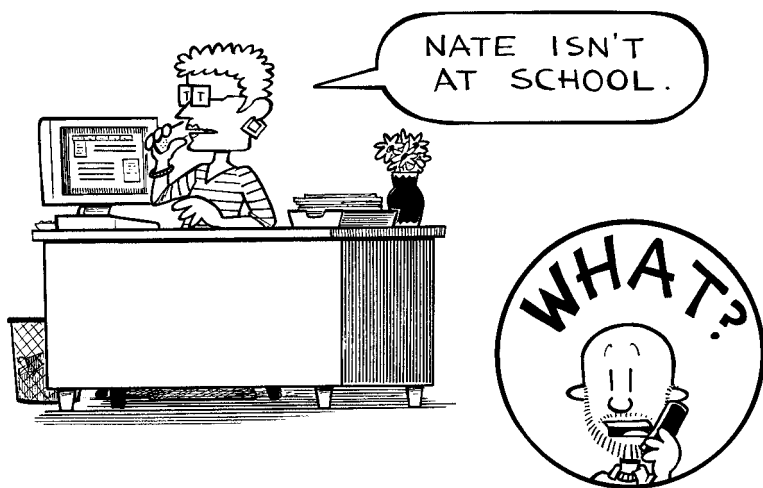
The front office. The engine that runs the Machine. And right in the middle of it is . . .

#### **4. THE SCHOOL SECRETARY**

Mrs. Shipulski's not so bad. It isn't HER fault they make her keep track of attendance. (I also

don't blame her for all the times she says, "Nate, the principal will see you now.")

She's fast for an old lady. She looks over all those attendance sheets in no time. The second she spots that red "X" next to your name, she's on the phone to your parents.



There. You see how the Machine works? See how efficient it is? You can't win. There's no way to beat it.

That's my predicament. If I run off to the woods to hang out with Spitsy, it'll take about five minutes for Mrs. Shipulski to fire up the Dad

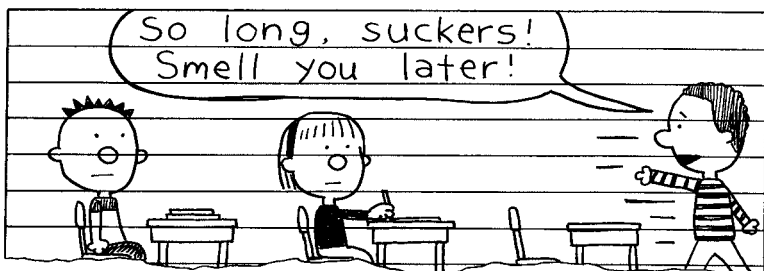
hotline. Then summer school would be the LEAST of my problems. I'd probably get suspended. Or expelled. Maybe shipped to some military academy where they slap a uniform on you, give you a buzz cut, and make you say "sir" at the end of every sentence.



That settles it. Skipping school is out. I need to be a little more creative about this. What I need is an excused absence.



An excused absence means you go to school just like normal, but you've got a parent note saying that you need to be somewhere else at a certain time. Bingo. You're free. Yesterday, Alan Olquist left halfway through science because he had to go get a wart zapped. How lucky can you get?



So all I need to do is stroll into social studies with a note from Dad saying I've got an excuse—let's say a dentist appointment—and I'm off the hook. Genius!

Yeah, yeah. I know what you're thinking. I don't have a note from Dad. But I can take care of that.







Dear Mrs. Godfrey,

Please excuse  
Nate from Social  
Studies at 8:45  
this morning.

He has a very  
important dentist app

Whoa. Nope, that won't cut it. That looks too much like my handwriting. Mrs. Godfrey will sniff that out right away. She may be loud and nasty, but the woman's not stupid.

I've got to make it look more like a grown-up's handwriting. Like DAD's. And his is wicked messy.



Whoops. Not THAT messy. Even *I* can't read that.

This is tougher than I thought it would be. And I'm running out of time.



*Dear Mrs. Godfrey,  
Please excuse Nate from  
Social Studies at 8:45 this  
morning. He has a very  
important dentist appointment.*

Hey, HEY! THAT looks like the real thing! Pretty convincing!

Hello, excused absence! Good-bye, social studies test! All that's left to do is forge Dad's signature.