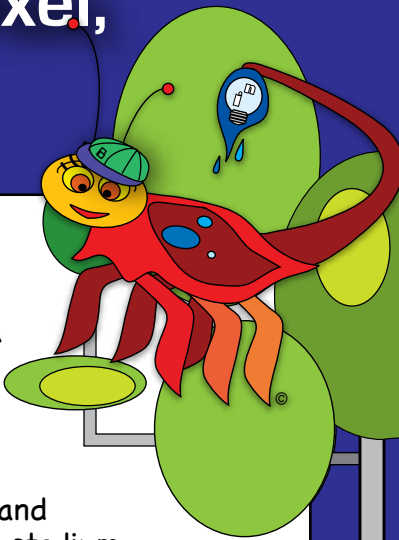




The Adventures of Pixel, the Stowaway



BATS!

"Hi, everybody! Pixel, the Stowaway, here! My friend Al took his camera to a baseball game, and I went along for the ride. We love to use our Image Smarts to take pictures so you can see what we see on our adventures.

We went to a stadium and walked through lots of tunnels and corridors and came out into the greenest green I've ever seen. When it gets dark, the stadium has big banks of bright lights that are switched on. The stadium looks like daylight, and the night game can go on.

We saw two different kinds of bats at the baseball game. One kind, the players take with them, the other kind gets to the stadium on its own. But both kinds can go flying! (That's the first riddle!)



Maybe you or someone you know plays baseball. In school and in Little League, the bats that players take with them are made from aluminum, a lightweight metal, but in the Big Leagues, they're made from wood. In fact the rules say that players must use bats made of wood, not longer than 42 inches and not bigger than 2 inches across at the fattest part. Most Big League players use bats made of wood from the ash tree because it is light and springy. The official bat of Major League Baseball is the Louisville Slugger made by the Hillerich & Bradsby Co. The companies that make bats for Big Leaguers own huge tree farms, mostly in New York and Pennsylvania. A big ash tree can make up to 60 bats and a player can use up nearly 120 bats in a season. (How many trees does each player use up?) Al says he can tell the difference between wooden bats and aluminum bats just by the sound they make when they hit a baseball. Aluminum bats go 'ping,' but wooden bats go 'crack!'



Sometimes, when a player has used a bat too much, the bat becomes weak and breaks when the ball is hit. The pieces go flying out onto the field. I bet it's hard for a player to watch the ball when a broken bat is spinning through the air.

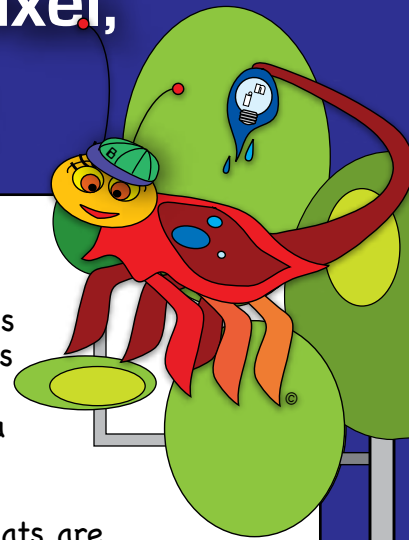


Courtesy of Wikipedia

The other kind of bat isn't as easy to see as the ones the players use. But, if you look up into the lights and get lucky, you might see them. They are brown and furry and fly, dodging and weaving around all over the place. These bats are mammals. Some people think they are like flying mice, but Al says they are more like moles, except they don't live underground, and... they fly.



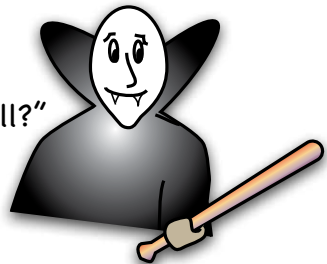
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The bats are chasing bugs that are attracted by the lights. Bats use something called echolocation to find bugs. Bats make a lot of squeaks that we can't hear, and listen for the echoes. The echoes tell the bats where the bug is, how fast it is flying, and where it is going. The bats can track down the bug and catch it in their wings, sort of like a baseball player catching a ball in his glove.

Lots of folks think bats are ugly, but I think they are kind of cute. Bats are nocturnal, coming out at night to find bugs, but during the day, they find a quiet corner, hang upside-down by their toes, and go to sleep. Long ago, people were afraid of bats because they thought bats were really vampires who had turned into bats. Al told me a riddle about it:

Why don't vampires play baseball?"



"Because the bats fly away!"

Some people think animal bats are ugly,
and others think they are cute.

What do you think and why?



If you had your choice of a wooden bat
or a living bat, which would you take?

Why?

