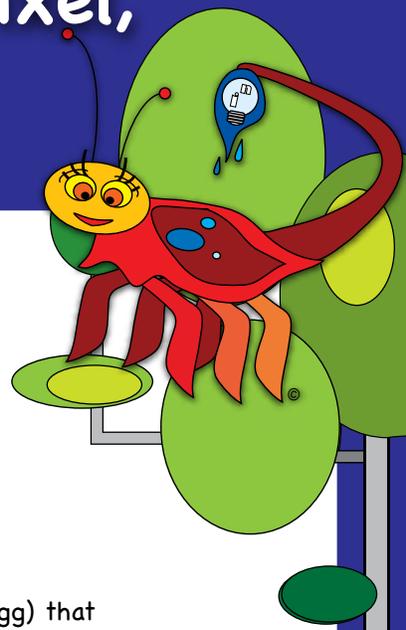




The Adventures of Pixel, the Stowaway



Mermaid's Purse



Mermaid's Purse (black skate egg) that Al found when beachcombing.

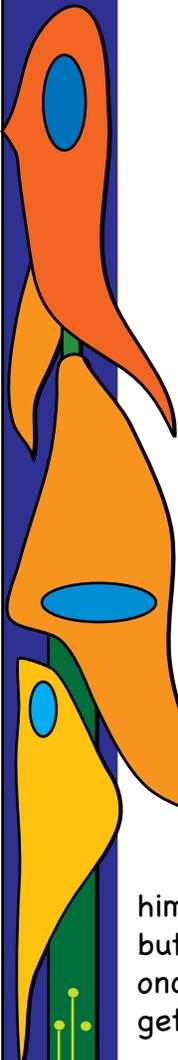
"Hi, everybody! Pixel, the Stowaway, here.

My family has a grown-up Kid-Bit friend named Al who we met one day when he was loading some of his digital pictures into his computer. Since Al has become a family friend, my parents gave me permission to travel with him inside his camera because we both have strong Image Smarts and love to take pictures. I learn a lot of photographic skills when traveling with Al. That's one way I strengthen my Image Smarts. He sends me back home when he transfers his pictures to his computer. Al lets me travel with him on all his adventures, and I always learn something new!

Al gave me my nickname, 'The Stowaway,' but do you know where the word stowaway comes from? A stowaway is a term from the days when people traveled by ship.

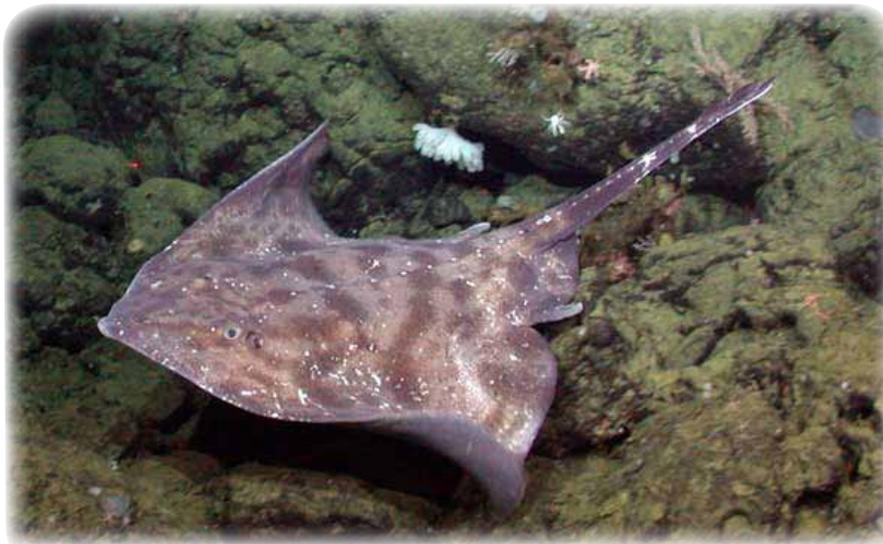
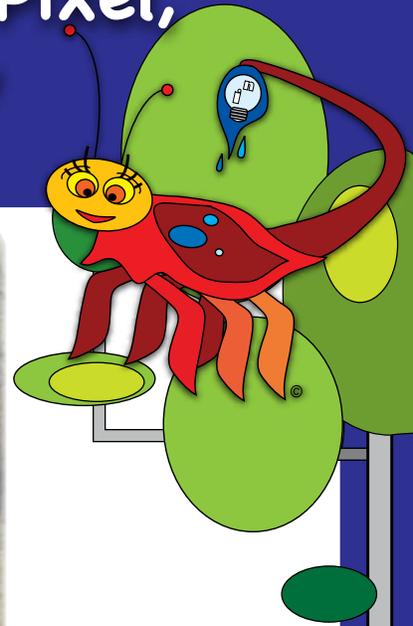
A stowaway was a person who hid on board without paying for a ticket. If the stowaway didn't get caught, he got a free ride. If he did get caught, the captain put him to work. Since I'm a pixel, I can stowaway in my friend Al's camera. He knows I'm there, but he's really nice and doesn't give me too much work. He did get my sprouts all in a tangle once, though, when he dropped his camera. But, the good thing is, when he takes a picture, I get to see it first and hear the story behind it. Every picture has a story behind it, you know.

Al says he loves the beach - sun and sand and waves that can roll you right over if you're not careful! One of the cool things about being at the beach is beachcombing. Beachcombing is just walking along the beach and finding neat stuff that the ocean has put up on the beach. The ocean never gives the same stuff twice. You may find a feather from a seagull or a gold





The Adventures of Pixel, the Stowaway



Skate (courtesy of Wikipedia)

coin washed up from a shipwreck. My friend Al has been a beachcomber since he was little. I haven't seen him find any pirates' coins yet, but he did find a penny once. He usually finds lots of shells and other cool stuff. One of the neatest things he finds at the beach almost every time he goes walking is 'a mermaid's purse.' That's what it's called, even though it's really the empty egg shell of a skate.

Skates are flat fishes that are related to sharks and sting rays. Skates don't sting (they can't), and they don't bite either. They have wide flat teeth that they use to grind up clams and small crabs, shell and all. When they lay their eggs, they choose a place where seaweed is growing on the bottom. Each baby skate is in its very own egg case. The egg cases are about two inches long and an inch across. They have long skinny ends so they can get tangled in the seaweed and stay put. When the baby skate hatches, it swims away and the empty case drifts toward the beach and washes up in the surf. If you pick one up, you will see it's not like a chicken egg shell. It's made from something called keratin. Keratin is the same stuff that your fingernails are made of. Fingernails are clear, but mermaids' purses are black. I wonder why that is?

Mermaids' purses are always empty. Al never finds any mermaid money in them! Maybe the mermaids spent it all on combs for their long beautiful hair or maybe they spent it at the seahorse races!"

Discuss a time when you found something interesting while beachcombing or walking outside.