

Taxes!

Story By: Andrew Frinkle

Tommy made his selection in the toy aisle, smiling at a pack of army men that only cost 99 cents. With a broad grin on his face, he marched up to the cashier's line and waited for his turn right behind a granny who was stocking up on canned goods and prune juice.

While he waited, he surveyed the rainbow of candy and mints arrayed before him. He wouldn't waste money on something he chewed up and spit out. There was very little play value in gum, other than sticking it in one's sister's hair, and that was strangely frowned-upon by his parents. Then, he perused a tabloid magazine that proclaimed the end of the world was coming and also declared that the chupacabra had finally been caught, playing poker with Bigfoot, no less! People would apparently believe anything printed. He sighed and waited.

When it was his turn, he put his army men on the conveyer belt, all the way at the end, of course. He watched the toy approach the end of the belt and the cashier's waiting hands. He followed the item to the end of the belt while she scooped it up unceremoniously, which seemed sad considering his high spirits. Without any delay, she ran it across the red crisscross of laser beams that scanned the barcode. The machine beeped, and the amber digits \$1.05 flashed on the readout monitor right in front of him.

He blinked at it once, twice, and then frowned. There was a sinking feeling in his gut, sort of like the time the mean kid on the bus had punched him in the belly. He drew out his wallet with dread, because he already knew the contents were insufficient. With his breathe held tightly, as if that might help increase his bankroll, he opened his wallet and peered into the folds. There was a crisp dollar bill, and the change compartment couldn't even rattle with the one penny it held.

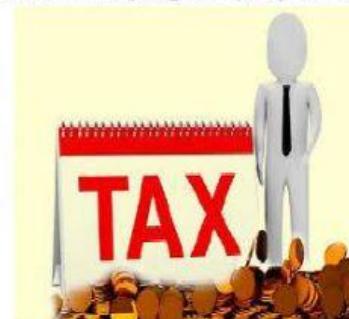
He took out the dollar and then shook out the solitary penny, still hoping more might fall out from an unseen locale deep in his wallet. Nothing fell out. He handed over the one penny and grinned sheepishly.

"There are six cents of taxes on non-food items, kid." The teenage cashier announced boredly, rolling her green eyes and toying with a blonde curl of hair that sat on her shoulder.

"I don't have any more." He replied, not knowing what else to do, but hoping he projected enough patheticness that someone would rescue him.

She cracked her gum, took the money he proffered, and scooped four more pennies from the 'give a penny, take a penny' dish. "There, \$1.05. Don't forget next time."

Tommy nodded and accepted his receipt and his army men with wide, thankful eyes. And you know what? He didn't forget next time. Next time he brought an extra nickel or so for every dollar he spent.





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Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

- 1. What is Tommy buying today?
 - A. gum
 - B. candy
 - C. comic books
 - D. army men

- 2. Who does Tommy stand behind in line?
 - A. his mom
 - B. a granny
 - C. an old guy
 - D. some weird fellow

- 3. Tommy is a kid, but how does he act and feel while he goes to pay?
 - A. He is scared, like a little kid.
 - B. He seems to act cool, like he's older than he really is.
 - C. He doesn't act any special way.
 - D. He acts like an old person.

- 4. What problem does Tommy have with the cashier?
 - A. She accuses him of theft.
 - B. She is mean to him, because his mom isn't there.
 - C. He doesn't have enough money.
 - D. The product won't scan.

- 5. How does Tommy get through this situation?
 - A. The cashier takes a few free pennies to pay the tax.
 - B. The granny in front of him offers him a nickel.
 - C. His mom comes to pay the difference.
 - D. He runs out of the store with the toy without paying.