First Paycheck: Choose Your Path

Name _____ Date _____

Start at Step 1. Pick A or B and follow the arrow. Your choices lead to one of four endings.

STEP 1

Your first paycheck from your summer job: $200!

A: Buy the $150 sneakers today. → Go to Step 2
B: Save $100 and keep $100 to spend. → Go to Step 3

STEP 2

You have $50 left. A week later your phone screen cracks. The repair costs $80.

A: Borrow $30 from a parent. → Ending 1
B: Live with the cracked screen. → Ending 2

STEP 3

You have $100 to spend and $100 saved. A week later your phone screen cracks. The repair costs $80.

A: Pay from your spending money. → Ending 3
B: Pay from your savings. → Ending 4

ENDING 1
Phone fixed. You have $0 and owe a parent $30. Great sneakers, though!

ENDING 2
No debt and $50 left, but a month of squinting at a cracked screen.

ENDING 3
Phone fixed. $20 left to spend and $100 still saved.

ENDING 4
Phone fixed. $100 to spend, $20 saved. Time to rebuild your savings.

1. My path: Step 1 → _____ → Step _____ → _____ → Ending _____

2. For each ending, how much money is left (spending + savings − anything owed)?

E1: $ _____ **E2: $** _____ **E3: $** _____ **E4: $** _____

3. Why do endings 3 and 4 feel calmer than endings 1 and 2?

MY MONEY CHOICE

Which ending did you get? Would you choose differently next time? Why?

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The quick lesson (read aloud, about 1 minute)

> Life sends surprise costs: a cracked phone, a flat tire. An **emergency fund** is money saved for exactly those moments. Saving part of each paycheck *first* means a surprise is a small problem, not a crisis or a debt.

Two teaching points

1. Pay yourself first: save before you spend.
2. An emergency fund protects your plans from surprises.

Answer key

Money left: **E1 −$30** ($0 and owes $30) · **E2 $50** · **E3 $120** ($20 + $100 saved) · **E4 $120** ($100 + $20 saved).
3. Paths 3 and 4 started by saving, so the $80 surprise was covered without debt or a broken phone. Endings 3 and 4 have the same total; ending 4 just needs savings rebuilt.

10-minute run

1. Each student plays one path (3 min).
2. Fill in question 2 for all four endings.
3. Compare: who chose savings first?

Ask

"Was the sneaker choice wrong, or just early?"

Goal

Saving part of every paycheck turns a surprise cost into a small problem instead of a crisis.

Take it further

Ask: how much would you want in an emergency fund at your age? Why?

Standard: National Standards for Personal Financial Education (Council for Economic Education and Jump$tart), area: **Spending and Saving**. Print double-sided: the activity on the front, this teaching side on the back.

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