Name_____

Empty Calories

Story By: Andrew Frinkle

As Gary chewed on a candy bar, he was reading the label. "Is 250 calories a lot, dad?"

Dad smirked. "It's almost like two cans of soda."

Gary frowned, because he liked soda. He glanced at the size of the candy bar, which was tasty, but didn't seem like it was worth two sodas. "That seems unfair."

"It's a candy bar, so of course it's empty calories." Dad replied.

"How can calories be empty? If it was really empty of calories, wouldn't it be zero calories?" Gary asked.

Dad shook his head. "That's not what they mean. What they mean by that, is that you could eat an apple, some steak, or some broccoli or something, and get your calories, but when you do that, you would also get some nutrition."

"You mean like minerals and vitamins? I take chewable vitamins every day."

Dad nodded. "Yeah, but those are harder for your body to use than the ones they get when you eat food. Not all foods have the same amount or kinds of nutrients, either. What kind of vitamins are in that?"

"This has 2% of my iron and 5% of my sodium." Gary read off the label.

"That's awful. You'd have to eat 50 of those to get enough iron or 20 of them to get enough sodium – not that you want much sodium."

Gary frowned at the unfamiliar word. He's seen it, but didn't understand it. "What's sodium?"

"It's salt, and less is better for you. Now, for that 250 calories, you could eat maybe two or three apples, you'd get a great amount of fiber, probably 100% of your vitamin C, and a few other things with it."

"If I'm going to get calories anyway, they should come with extra stuff then?"

"Yeah, it's like buying a nice car, but not getting the stereo, the wheels, and all the extra cool options. It might look and taste nice, but candy has pretty much no nutrition. It's supposed to be an occasional treat, not an everyday snack."
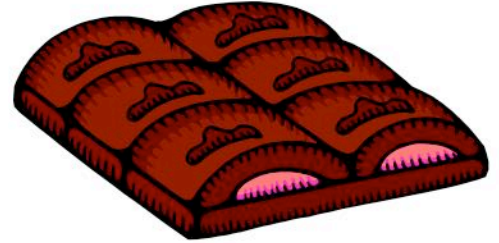
"It tastes *so* good though!" Gary whined.

Dad grinned. "All the worst stuff does, because fat, salt, and sugar are the tastiest things. They just happen to be bad for you in large amounts."

"Well, I'm finishing this candy bar, and I'm going to wash it down with an apple."

"That's better than nothing. You could always save half the candy bar for another day, too." Dad suggested.

"I couldn't do that…" Gary grinned, shoving the last bite in. Terrible or not for him, it was tasty! Next time, he'd think more carefully about his snack choices, though.

Name_____

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

1. How many cans of soda is the calorie count of the candy bar similar to?
    A. 1
    B. 2
    C. 3
    D. 4

2. What kind of calories does dad say the candy bar has?
    A. candy calories
    B. junk calories
    C. snack calories
    D. empty calories

3. What word best describes dad?
    A. cranky
    B. silly
    C. useful
    D. knowledgeable

4. What analogy or comparison does dad use to explain empty calories?
    A. buying a car with no options
    B. getting a game with no extra levels
    C. reading a book with no end
    D. listening to half a song

5. Dad said that what three tasty things were bad for Gary in large amounts?
    A. candy, cake, and pie
    B. pizza, soft drinks, and cookies
    C. fat, salt, and sugar
    D. protein, carbs, and fat

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