

THE SUPERMARKET MYSTERY

YEAR _____

NAME OF MEMBER _____

NAME OF CLUB _____ NAME OF LEADER _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

COUNTY _____ AGE _____

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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
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Joe N. Busby, Dean

THE SUPERMARKET

MYSTERY

Think of the fun you have when you shop for snacks for a party or for yourself. There are so many kinds from which to choose on the supermarket shelves. When mother asks you to go to the store for her, do you complain because you don't think of it as being much fun? Are you afraid that you will buy the wrong thing, or that you can't find everything? It takes a lot of knowledge to be a good shopper. But learning to use your wits to make the best buys can be fun. You will become a detective for this 4-H project and look for clues with which to solve the supermarket mystery.

You will learn to do these things:

- Investigate (products in the store.)
- Look for clues (which tell you about the products.)
- Make smart judgments (in product section.)

Use Leads

All detectives follow obvious leads. In solving the supermarket mystery you will do the same. When you go to the store the first thing you must do is find what you are looking for. Stores are organized around specific plans. The meat department is usually located across the back of the store. This is for easy access to loading platforms and refrigerated storage areas. Usually fresh produce is displayed on either the right or left wall. On the other wall you generally find refrigerated and frozen products.

When entering a food store the traffic pattern usually leads to the right, up and down the aisles until the far left aisle is reached, then back to the check-out counters at the front of the store. Front entrances are used for both entering and leaving.



In most supermarkets the aisles are numbered. This makes it much easier for you to locate quickly the items you wish to buy. The numbers are usually hung above the aisles, but sometimes they are posted at the end of each aisle. Generally a directory is posted. It tells which products are on each aisle. The directory may be placed high on a wall where it is easy to see or hung over the aisle.

Visit a supermarket and look for the directory. Where is it located? _____

Locate the following 4 items. Where did you find them?

1. Soft drinks were in _____ department on aisle number _____
2. Hot dogs were in _____ department on aisle number _____
3. Chili was in the _____ department on aisle number _____
4. Bananas were in the _____ department on aisle number _____

Look for Clues

Just as a good detective looks for clues to help him solve his case, you must look for clues that help you learn which products are the best buys. Here are some of these clues.

Unit Pricing.—Unit pricing means the cost per unit of weight or measure of a product. For example, suppose you have 2 cans of tomatoes, one of which weighs 16 ounces and costs 40 cents while the other can weighs 15 ounces and costs 35 cents. Which one is the better buy?

To answer this question you need to find out the cost per ounce (the unit price) of each. To do this you divide this way:

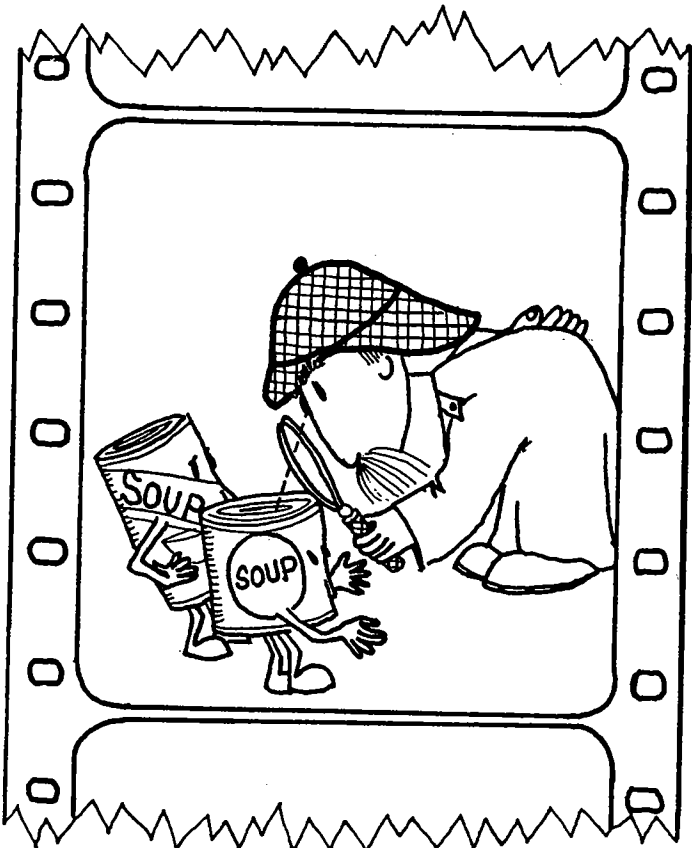
$$40¢ \div 16 \text{ oz.} = 2\frac{1}{2}¢ \text{ per oz.}$$

$$35¢ \div 15 \text{ oz.} = 2\frac{1}{3}¢ \text{ per oz.}$$

Therefore, the 15 ounce can of tomatoes costing 35¢ is the better buy.

Many stores now have the unit prices posted on stickers or tags attached to the shelves beneath each item. All the math has been done for you. All you need to do is compare the unit price of one item with that of another. A smart detective looks for these helpful clues when comparing prices.

Cents Off.—Sometimes you see packages marked with “cents off.” The manufacturer is trying to get you to buy his product by giving you a discount. He thinks you will probably buy the product at regular price after you have tried it.



Visit a supermarket that has unit pricing. Compare 2 sizes or 2 brands of chili. You may just look at the cans, you need not buy them. Look on the front of each can for the weight. Now fill in the next 2 lines telling about the chili.

1. The _____ chili weighed _____ ounces. The cost per can is _____¢.
(brand name)
The unit price is _____¢ per ounce.
2. The _____ chili weighed _____ ounces. It cost _____¢ per can. The unit price is _____¢ per ounce.
(brand name)
3. Which can of chili is the better buy? _____ Why? _____

Look for a product that has “cents off” marked on the package. This can be a food item, laundry product, dish washing compound, soft drinks, or some other product. Answer these questions about the product with the “cents off” label.

4. What product did you find with a “cents off” label? _____
(name of product) (brand)
5. It was reduced _____ cents from the regular price of _____ to _____.
6. Would the reduced price encourage you to buy a product? _____

Caution—Bribes

Smart detectives quickly spot anyone trying to bribe them. As a super-sleuth you must learn to recognize efforts to pressure you into buying things you don't particularly want or need. This is done by playing on your greediness or fears, or appealing to your ego. Here are some examples::

Greediness

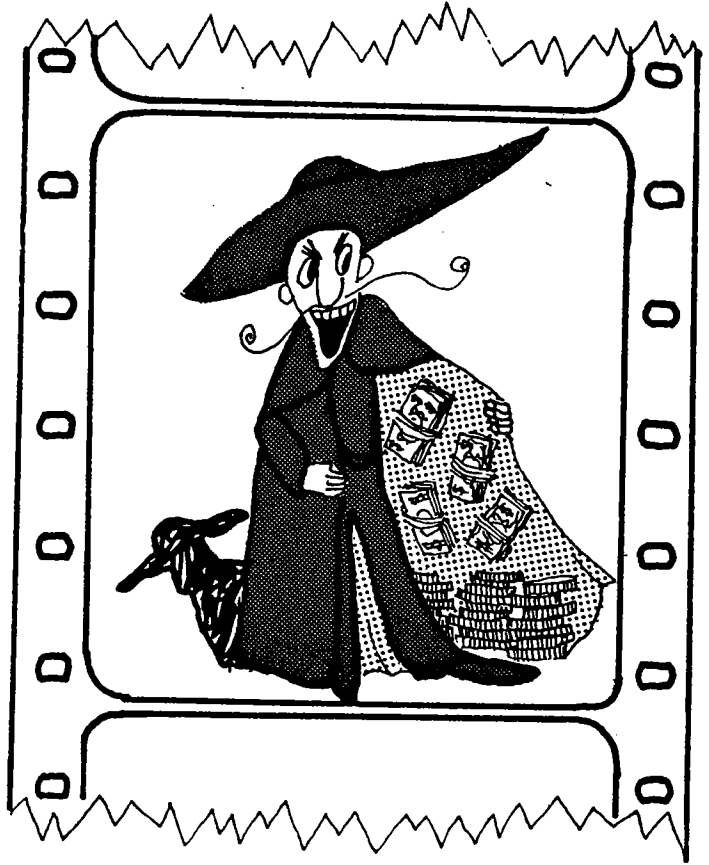
- Buying something with the hope of winning a contest or getting a big prize.
 - Buying just to get a free gift.
 - Expecting something for nothing, shopping just for cheap prices without regard to quality or service.
-
- Buying more than you need of a product that is in short supply. Hoarding scarce items.

Fears

- Buying items because you are afraid friends will criticize you if you don't.

Ego

- Buying highly advertised and prestigious items just to impress friends.
- Buying something just because it is expensive, thinking cost is a guarantee of quality.
- Buying "name brand" items only, never considering store brands or lesser known brands which often are less expensive and of comparable quality.



1. See if you can find sales appeals or "bribes" that play upon your emotions. Check the grocery ads in your newspaper for exaggerated claims. Foreexample:
 - claims that a store's prices are always the lowest on everything.
 - offering gifts, or prizes for buying.

Describe the advertisement that you consider to be a "bribe." _____

What is your opinion of the ad? _____

2. Visit a supermarket. Compare the cost of a store brand soft drink (or some other product) with a national brand. Be sure it is for the same product and in the same size container.
 - The store brand was _____ and cost _____¢ for _____ ounces.
 - The national brand was _____ and cost _____¢ for _____ ounces.

Use Informers

The smart detective uses information from many sources. He even has informers who gather and bring information to him! As a smart shopper you must learn to recognize sources of information and to know which sources are reliable. Some sources of information are:

Advertising

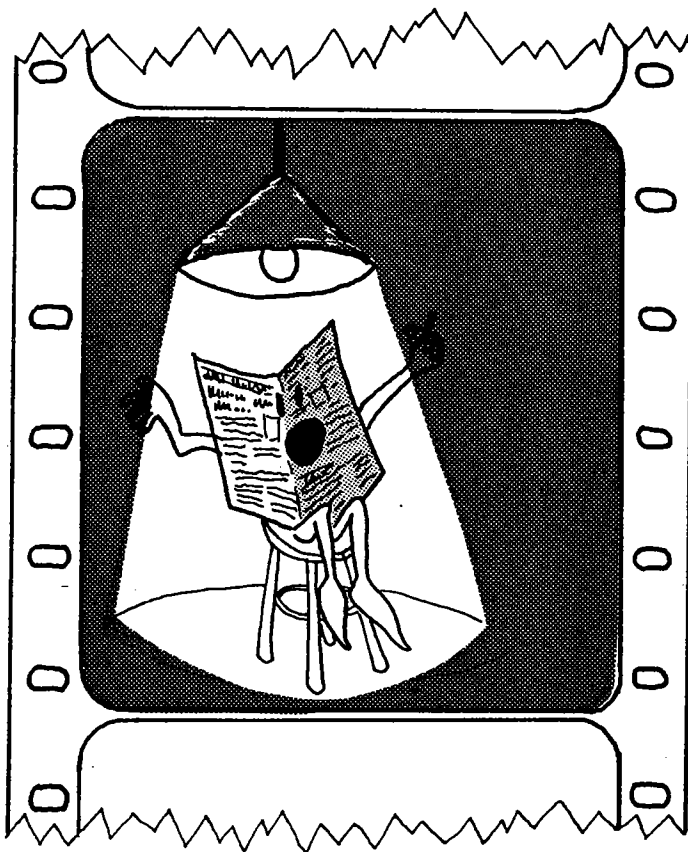
Most food stores advertise. Many have full page ads in newspapers each week. Some also use radio and T.V. advertising. Ads usually tell you the name, brand, size and price of a product. By comparing the ads of several stores you often can tell which store offers the best buys for certain items during that particular week.

There are some things which ads do not tell you. For example, suppose 2 stores are advertising chuck roast on special. One store may trim more of the fat off the roast than does the other store. In such cases the cheapest price may not be the best buy.

Be sure to look for conditions which affect the sale of a product. Suppose the same brand of frozen turkeys are advertised by several stores. Remember to look for and compare the size of turkeys covered by the ad. If the same brand of soft drinks are advertised, be sure they are the same size. Also some stores limit the quantity that you can buy. In other cases you must bring a coupon out of the newspaper or buy a certain amount of groceries to get the special price.

Personal Assistance

Several sources can provide you with helpful suggestions. For example, a butcher or salesperson may suggest which cut of meat is best for grilling. Your mother certainly can help you with your shopping. Your 4-H leader and Extension agent are excellent sources of information.



Look through the grocery ads in a newspaper. Find a product that is advertised by two or more stores. Answer the following questions about it:

—What product did you select? _____
name brand size

or other information _____

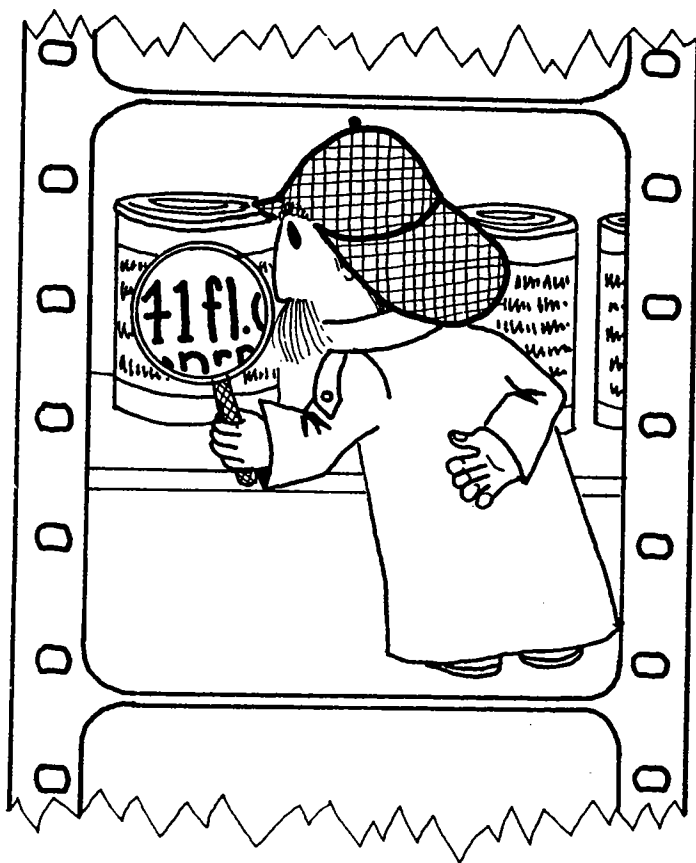
It was advertised for _____ by _____ and
cost store

for _____ by _____
cost store

Collect Evidence

Evidence gives facts about a situation or occurrence. As a supermarket detective you need to know the truth about the foods you are buying. Federal and state laws require certain true information about foods to be stated on the labels so that you can have the facts needed in shopping. If you are a smart detective you will read and use this information. Look for:

- The name of the product. It must tell you what you are buying. Suppose the product is a combination of meat and gravy, or of spaghetti and meatballs. If there is more gravy than meat, then it must be labeled "gravy and meat." If there is more spaghetti than meatballs, it will be labeled "spaghetti with meatballs."
- The list of ingredients used to make the product. Ingredients are listed in the order of their importance with the ingredient listed first being used in the largest amount and the one listed last used in the smallest quantity. There are a few items that are exempt from listing their ingredients. For example, mayonnaise. These products have a "standard of identity." That means all mayonnaise is made by the same basic recipe. If any extra spices are added, then these must be listed on the label.
- The amount of food in the container. The weight or measure is listed on the front of the label.
- Who made the product or distributes it. Both the name and address must be given on the label.
- There may be other information on many labels which you will learn more about in other 4-H projects. For example, nutritional labeling.



Select a can of food and answer the following questions about it.

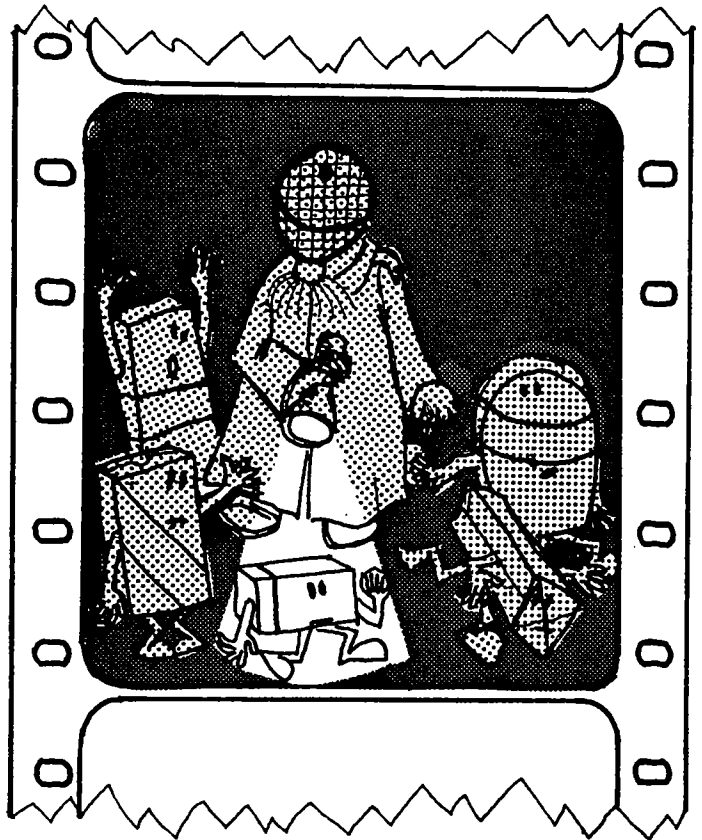
1. The can of _____
name of food
contains _____
amount
2. It contains the following ingredients _____

3. The food processor was _____
name
_____, _____
address

Look for Suspects

As any detective knows you can often spot a suspect by watching carefully. He does not look or act just right. As a supermarket sleuth you too look for suspects. Look for:

- Odd shaped containers that appear larger than they are. This could be bottles with heavy or curved bottoms, tall bottles with sides that slant inward.
- Fancy packages using false or built up bottoms. These are often used as gift items with cheese, seafoods, etc. covering the top of a large box filled with a shaped plastic or cardboard liner.
- Over packaging, which is a waste of money and packaging materials. This might be something like sliced cheese with each slice individually wrapped.



If you are observant you aren't likely to be deceived. Weights and measures are required by law to be on containers. Use this information, not appearance, for comparison when shopping.

Look through the store for a "suspect" (container that is misleading in appearance.) Describe it and tell why you think it is misleading.

Paying a Fine

Why do you pay a fine? It's because of some foolish action where you broke a rule or law. The some principle is true with shopping. There are good shopping rules or laws. When you do not observe them, you pay a fine. This means you spend more money than you need to spend or that you do not get the service and satisfaction from your purchases that you could have gotten. Some of the shopping rules that you should remember are:

- If you are to buy several items, carry a list with you so that you won't forget something.
- Compare the price of different brands and products so you can get the most for your money.
- Know how much you are spending. It's no fun to get to the checkout counter and not have enough money.



- Have a definite need or use for things you buy.
- Avoid impulse buying. This means buying something on the spur-of-the-moment without any special need or use for it. It is an unplanned purchase.
- Learn from your mistakes. Think about “fines you have paid” and don’t make the same mistakes again.

Think for a moment. What did you buy recently that either was a spur-of-the-moment purchase or that you paid too much for? _____

Why did you buy it? _____

Would you make the same purchase again? _____ Why? _____



That Wanted List

All good detectives live up to a strict code of ethics—to be honest, truthful and trustworthy. As a supermarket detective you have the responsibility of living up to the same code of ethics. Some shoppers abuse the privilege of moving freely through a store and inspecting unpurchased merchandise.

Some of the abuses that add to the prices that you and I pay are:

- Theft. This includes outright stealing. It also includes sampling of such things as grapes, candy, etc. It is against the law.
- Opening sealed containers. If you want to know what is inside the package, read the label. Broken packages must be sold at reduced prices or discarded. It is a form of vandalism.
- Abusing equipment. For example, riding a shopping cart or taking it away from the store. It costs money to repair or replace damaged carts.
- Littering the floor or parking lot. Clean-up crews are expensive.

As a supermarket detective watch for abuses. When you see some misdeed, quietly report the incident to a store employee.

When you are in the supermarket look for some evidences of abuse, such as opened packages, misplaced items, litter, or shopping cart abuse.

What did you observe? _____

How could people be discouraged from such thoughtless acts? _____

MY STORY

List some of the things you learned from this project. _____

Did you give a demonstration using information learned in this project? _____
If so, what was your demonstration about? _____

What are some of the things that you learned which you shared with others? _____

Who? _____

What was your favorite assignment in the project? _____

Give your evaluation of the project _____
