

Nutrition: reading the label

Lesson at a glance

Open by holding up an empty drinks can and taking finger-guesses on hidden teaspoons of sugar. Model reading a nutrition panel and converting grams $\div$ 4 into teaspoons, then drive the sugar-detective interactive so the class predicts and reveals everyday drinks. Groups decode three clean packs each, recording sugar, salt and fair-unit figures on the Investigation Journal page. The class builds two physical sugar lines—drinks per 100 ml and snacks per 100 g—then talks claims versus panel evidence.

Learning objectives

- Read sugar and salt information on food and drink labels
- Convert grams of sugar into teaspoons and rank drinks with drinks and snacks with snacks fairly by sugar using one shared rule

Before the bell – prep

Day before: gather clean dry empties with readable panels for about six groups (three packs each; mix of drinks and snacks). Prefer packs showing sugar per 100 ml or per 100 g; print photo panels if short. Bag of granulated sugar, teaspoon, clear cups, Investigation Journal page, sugar-detective interactive on the IWB.

Materials

Item	Qty	Per	Source	Low-cost substitute
clean empty drinks packaging with readable nutrition labels (mixed everyday brands)	12	class	brought from home	printed photos of real nutrition panels that show sugar per 100 ml (several sets) if empties are scarce
clean empty snack packaging with readable nutrition labels	12	class	brought from home	food cards showing real nutrition panels with per 100 g figures (one set per group)
granulated sugar	1	class	supermarket	a cup of dry rice counted out as 'spoonfuls' for visualisation only (say it stands for sugar)
metal or plastic teaspoon	1	class	classroom	a 5 ml medicine spoon from a basic first-aid kit
small clear cups or saucers for sugar teaspoon piles	4	class	classroom	clean jar lids or small plates
Investigation Journal page	1	pupil	provided printable	ruled paper with a simple results table drawn by the pupil

Safety watch-point

Clean empty packaging only, and no tasting of anything—the sugar is there to be looked at, not eaten. Mind severe food-allergy pupils when handling packs that once held allergens, and wipe sugar grains, wash cups and hands afterwards.

Teaching moves

- **How to read a label:** Model once on the board with neutral numbers only: $20\text{ g} \div 4 = 5$ teaspoons, then practise 12 g together. Tip five level spoons into a clear cup so grams become visible. Sketch a small carton versus a large bottle and lock the later rule: drinks rank by sugar per 100 ml, snacks by per 100 g.
- **Sugar detective:** Run the sugar-detective interactive in guided mode. The class predicts aloud before each reveal, and every gram figure is converted $\div 4$. After cola and the energy drink, tip matching level teaspoons into a clear cup for the wow pile. Point out that pack sizes differ, optionally compare cola with the energy drink per 100 ml, and say that energy drinks are adult products—we only read them, as detectives.
- **Investigate the labels:** Hand out the Investigation Journal page first, then model one pack under the visualiser: find sugars and salt, then lock the ranking units—drinks per 100 ml, snacks per 100 g. Give each group three packs, and tell them the must-finish is name, sugar with unit, teaspoons, fair-unit figure, plus a quick salt find. Take their predictions before they go to the label evidence.
- **Rank least to most:** Build two physical lines on a bench or floor—never one mixed pile. Restate rules before the first pack lands. Groups place standout packs; watchers agree or challenge using journal fair-unit numbers. Park any pack that still lacks a defensible per-100 figure rather than force a false order.
- **Record your findings:** Pupils finish the paper journal: item, sugar with fair unit, salt, teaspoons, rank on the drinks or snacks line, and the rule used. Circulate for $\div 4$ errors and missing units. Fast finishers star one front claim that did not match the panel.
- **Make sense:** Keep the closing talk to three points only: the highest drinks on the per 100 ml line, the highest snacks on the per 100 g line, and one claim-versus-panel mismatch. Add one sentence on Ireland's sugar tax on sweetened drinks as a real-world link, but do not open a policy debate.

What it should show

Water sits at zero sugar; cola and energy drinks land high on teaspoons and often high per 100 ml; juice and smoothies surprise many with several teaspoons despite fruit claims; savoury snacks often lead on salt. A group whose order clashes with the class line usually ranked whole-pack totals instead of per 100—re-check the fair-unit column.



Misconceptions & interventions

- **“It says real fruit / 5-a-day / natural, so it can’t have much sugar.”** — Point back to the nutrition panel on that pack or the smoothie/juice card: fruit can be real and free sugar still high. Both the claim and the grams can be true—evidence is the panel, not the slogan.
- **“The biggest bottle is automatically the sugariest drink.”** — Hold the cola can beside the energy-drink bottle and compare sugar per 100 ml (about 10.6 g vs 11 g). Totals partly reflect pack size; the fair line uses the same unit.
- **Pupils put a drinks carton next to a crisp packet on one sugar line.** — Stop the placement and revoice the agreed rules: millilitres and grams are different units, so drinks and snacks need two separate least-to-most lines.



Differentiation

Emerging	Developing	Proficient
• Pre-highlight the sugars row and per 100 column with a sticky note, or issue larger-print photo panels; sit with the teacher table for the first pack decode.	• After recording, check whether whole-pack order would differ from the per 100 order on one drink and say why.	• Add one journal sentence naming a front claim that did not match the panel numbers, and judge whether salt order on a line matches sugar order.



Cross-curricular hook

Tie to Maths measures and data—÷ 4 conversions, same-unit ranking, and reading the class sugar lines as ordered data.

