**OLYMPIADS SCHOOL - SAT PREP - HOMEWORK 14**

**NAME (FIRST AND LAST):____________________________________ GRADE:___**

**DAY, TIME, TEACHER:_______________________________________**

**Prompt**

**As you read the passage below, consider how Jacquelyn Martin uses**

- **evidence, such as facts or examples, to support claims.**
- **reasoning to develop ideas and to connect claims and evidence.**
- **stylistic or persuasive elements, such as word choice or appeals to emotion, to add power to the ideas expressed.**

**From Jacquelyn Martin's, "The Number to Avoid on the New Nutrition Labels" ©2016. From the official website of *The Atlantic Magazine*. Published May 2016.**

Beginning in July of this year, most everywhere we look, there will be a giant number on our food. The change will affect hundreds of thousands of edible products, and, so, hundreds of millions of people. It will affect the way we think about food for decades. (This update is the first in more than 20 years—so long ago that the FDA earnestly describes its current label design as "iconic.")

Current nutrition labels, legally required on all packaged foods, are to be replaced with the explicit purpose of improving people's health. As Michelle Obama said at the unveiling of the new labels on Friday, "Very soon, you will no longer need a microscope, a calculator, or a degree in nutrition to figure out whether the food you're buying is actually good for our kids."

The first two are jokes, but the new labels won't obviate the need for a nutrition degree. Learning to read them, and to contextualize them, is a critical undertaking. The labels stand to be enormously consequential—maybe more so than any other recent public-health initiative. Poor nutrition (mostly overnutrition) causes more death and disability than any other single factor. Celebrities and gurus can write a billion books on what to do about this, and they'll all sell very well, but nothing reaches people like the words and numbers written directly on the boxes and bags that stand between humans and food.

But this label stands to be consequential rather for what it fails to accomplish—the opportunity it squanders, and the people who are hurt by it. In that regard, one metric looms far above all others.

"The calorie count is bigger—a bigger font—so you can actually see it," said Obama.

This is understatement, in that the calorie count number on the new labels is objectively enormous. It's roughly three times the size of all other numbers.

If this is for purposes of legibility, then nothing else is meant to be legible. No, the giant calorie count is meant to make us feel something deep. It seems meant to bypass the cerebral cortex and hit us in the part of the brain where things stick forever, like memories of being attacked by a goose or hit by a golf ball.

But is emphasizing calories so uniquely really a good idea?

Calories are one metric to consider among many—they tell us nothing other than, if we were to set fire to this food, how much energy would be released? It's 2016, and that's the metric we're giving people to help them with this epidemic, which is the primary driver of the leading cause of death. We are doing this even while we know that imploring people to simply eat less has repeatedly proven to be an ineffective approach to obesity. Logical on paper, it becomes extremely difficult to do so when what you eat is junk (as I've written about before. Junk begets ever more hunger; junk is made specifically to stimulate further cravings.) Calorie counts are helpful in some ways, but emphasizing them above all else is essentially saying, simply, eat less.

What's effective is changing what people eat, moving from junk to food.

Companies that produce junk know this, and to prevent it, they manipulate the calorie concept. They've made 100-calorie packs of iconic junk like Chips Ahoy and Oreos, and shrunken some Coke cans, and artificially-sweetened everything. When people choose foods based primarily on a giant calorie number, all of these products seem totally reasonable. More reasonable, even, than a serving of almonds or olive oil (respectively 140 and 120 calories).

Of course, the giant calorie number comes in the context of other, minor changes to the label. For one, as Obama said on Friday, "The serving sizes are more realistic." The labels will increase many serving sizes—to reflect, as required in the 1993 Nutrition Labelling and Education Act— "what people actually eat."

The FDA offers, as an example, that larger globs of ice cream are now considered to be just one serving. Which means that the giant calorie number will be now larger in magnitude as well as size, in some cases. But this approach ultimately validates the notion that a big cream glob, or whole pack of Skittles, or girthy bottle of Coke, is a reasonable amount for anyone to ingest. A product can contain a week's worth of sugar and also be just one serving.

Which brings us to the third major change that Obama noted: "Most importantly, this label will tell you how much sugar in your snack was added during processing, and how much comes from ingredients like fruit."

That also sounds chill at first, but may be the most confusing element. Eating whole fruit is better than eating the sugar from that fruit in isolation. But the sugar that comes from fruit is just not healthier—not different in any substantive way—from the sugar that comes from sugarcane. And this misunderstanding is exactly how food producers will exploit this rule. They will add apple juice or agave to everything that kids (especially kids) eat, and then their product will technically have no “added sugars,” even when they have a lot of added sugars.

A glass of orange juice and a glass of cranberry juice that contain the same amount of sugar will have drastically different labels. Oranges are naturally sweeter, so orange juice will have no added sugars. Cranberry juice will have tons of added sugar. (Ocean Spray pushed back hard against the new labels.)

This seems to play into our arbitrary tendency to prioritize the origins of products over products themselves. Food origins are valuable when it comes to fair trade and environmentally-conscientious production, but useless in the realm of nutrition.

When you pick up most food in most groceries, there’s only one spot on the package you can look to know what you’re actually buying. The rest is advertising, often meticulously crafted to send specific messages about the health-conveying, longevity-inducing, skin-illuminating, or other qualities of the edible product.

Reprieve exists only in the bland eyesore of a black and white box that we call the nutrition label and the ingredients listed below. These labels could’ve been … anything. They could’ve been stoplights, easily signaling to people what food was green (go!), yellow (meh), or red (chill on this). As researchers at Johns Hopkins suggested, the labels could’ve told people how far they’d have to run to burn the energy from the food. Researchers even proved that this label did deter some people from buying soda.

But instead, we got a minor upgrade that has no evidence to suggest it will be better, and is arguably worse. As the former FDA director for social sciences at the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition Richard Williams—who helped in creating the current (iconic) label—wrote yesterday on Politico, “We thought we would see about 40,000 fewer cases of cancer and heart disease over the next 20 years and prevent 13,000 deaths. Sadly, as nearly a quarter of a century of experience has revealed, pretty much none of that occurred.”

“The health of 320 million people is far too important to leave to outdated policies and practices,” he continues. “The Nutrition Facts Panel is certainly not improving our health—and more and more tinkering is just poor policy.”

Of course, in the face of a food industry so politically powerful, expecting a radical overhaul is impractical. It’s easy to be critical. People ask me what my ideal nutrition label would look like. I think the most important thing is the list of ingredients. If anything deserves to be larger, it’s that. I’d also look at sugars and fiber, and try to regard the giant calorie stamp as nothing more than just another number. Ultimately, the best advice is to prioritize foods that don’t come with nutrition labels.

**Write an essay in which you explain how Jacquelyn Martin builds an argument to persuade her audience that the new food labels are ineffective in improving people's health. In your essay, analyze how Martin uses one or more of the features in the directions that precede the passage (or features of your own choice) to strengthen the logic and persuasiveness of her argument. Be sure that your analysis focuses on the most relevant features of the passage.**

**Your essay should not explain whether you agree with Martin's claims, but rather explain how Martin builds an argument to persuade her audience.**

**THE END**