

What is it Made of?

Story By: Andrew Frinkle

Harry was a curious boy, and his dad was pretty smart. So, when Harry saw a tree next to the porch, he asked him, "What is that tree made of?"

Dad grunted his answer, "Wood... branches... leaves."

"What's that rock over there made of?"

"Rocks." Dad answered quickly.

Harry wasn't done yet, "How about the car? What is it made of?"

Dad thought for a moment on this one. "Plastic, metal, and glass mostly, and maybe some rubber."

"How about the air?"

"It's made of air, or kinds of air."

Harry frowned, "There are kinds of air?"

Dad sighed. He'd been trying to read the paper on the porch, but he could see his son wasn't going to let him. "There are many kinds of air, but we can't see them."

"Then how do we know they are there?"

"Scientists have studied this stuff. They have found many kinds of air and mixtures of those kinds of air."

"Like what?" Harry asked.

Dad shrugged, "There are gases like oxygen, nitrogen, helium, and others. They mix to make ozone, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, and other things."

Harry regarded his father as if he'd started speaking another language. "What?"

Dad groaned, "Look, everything is made up of stuff, okay?" Harry nodded, so his father continued. "Think of it like mom's pantry, but we're not baking bread and cookies here, we're making stuff. There are about 100 ingredients called elements that can be used in different amounts to make everything, but most things are only made of a few of them."

"Even me?" Harry asked in surprise.

"Yes, you're mostly carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, and oxygen, but there are lots of little bits of other elements – ingredients – in you. Each piece is so very tiny that we can't even see it."

"So what are rocks made of then, for real this time?" Harry watched his father carefully.

"Rocks are made of minerals, which are made of elements like silicon and other stuff."

Harry nodded, finally satisfied, at least for the moment. Dad resumed reading his paper, only to be interrupted a few minutes later with another question, "And the trees then?"

Dad gave up and went inside to hide in den to read his paper.

