



1 Learn the Skill

Like nonfiction writers, fiction writers do not explain all elements directly. As you learned in Lesson 8, readers sometimes must **make inferences**, or educated guesses based on suggestions and clues found in the text. When making an inference, readers combine what they know about a subject with the information found in the text. Then they make a reasonable guess about what the author intended.

2 Practice the Skill

By practicing the skill of making inferences in fiction, you will improve your study and test-taking abilities, especially as they relate to the GED® Reasoning Through Language Arts Test. Read the passage below. Then answer the question that follows.

FIFTY DEGREES BELOW ZERO

a The first sentence suggests that the man is detached from his surroundings.

b From the explanation that this is the man's first winter in the area, you can infer that the man may lack experience in cold, rugged climates.

But all this—the mysterious, far-reaching hairline trail, the absence of sun from the sky, the tremendous cold, and the strangeness and weirdness of it all—made no impression on the man. It was not because he was long used to it. He was a newcomer in the land, a *chechaquo*, and this was his first winter. The trouble with him was that he was without imagination. He was quick and alert in the things of life, but only in the things, and not in the significances. Fifty degrees below zero meant eighty odd degrees of frost. Such fact impressed him as being cold and uncomfortable, and that was all. It did not lead him to meditate upon his frailty as a creature of temperature, and upon man's frailty in general, able only to live within certain narrow limits of heat and cold; and from there on it did not lead him to the conjectural field of immortality and man's place in the universe. Fifty degrees below zero stood for a bite of frost that hurt and that must be guarded against by the use of mittens, ear-flaps, warm moccasins, and thick socks. Fifty degrees below zero was to him just precisely fifty degrees below zero. That there should be anything more to it than that was a thought that never entered his head.

From TO BUILD A FIRE by Jack London, © 1916

USING LOGIC

Note that the passage suggests that the man's lack of imagination causes him trouble. Use the details in the passage and your knowledge of below-freezing temperatures to determine the possible effect of this cause.

- Why might the man's lack of imagination be a problem?
 - Because the man considers only facts related to the cold weather, he does not contemplate the extent of the danger it poses.
 - Because the man is not impressed by the hairline trail and the absence of sun, he risks getting lost in the frozen wilderness.
 - Because the man does not think about being uncomfortable, he may not have packed the proper gear for his journey.
 - Because the man does not consider the significances of life, he is not intrigued by the strangeness of the frozen wilderness.

3 Apply the Skill

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage, read each question, and choose the **best** answer.

AN INTERRUPTED STANDOFF

1 The two enemies stood glaring at one another for a long silent moment. Each had a rifle in his hand, each had hate in his heart and murder uppermost in his mind. The chance had come to give full play to the passions of a lifetime. But a man who has been brought up under the code of a restraining civilization cannot easily nerve himself to shoot down his neighbor in cold blood and without a word spoken, except for an offense against his hearth and honor. And before the moment of hesitation had given way to action a deed of Nature's own violence overwhelmed them both. A fierce shriek of the storm had been answered by a splitting crash over their heads, and ere they could leap aside a mass of falling beech tree had thundered down on them. Ulrich von Gradwitz found himself stretched on the ground, one arm numb beneath him and the other held almost as helplessly in a tight tangle of forked branches, while both legs were pinned beneath the fallen mass. His heavy shooting boots had saved his feet from being crushed to pieces, but if his fractures were not as serious as they might have been, at least it was evident that he could not move from his present position till someone came to release him. The descending twigs had slashed the skin of his face, and he had to wink away some drops of blood from his eyelashes before he could take in a general view of the disaster. At his side, so near that under ordinary circumstances he could almost have touched him, lay Georg Znaeym, alive and struggling, but obviously as helplessly pinioned down as himself. All around them lay a thick-strewn wreckage of splintered branches and broken twigs.

2 Relief at being alive and exasperation at his captive plight brought a strange medley of pious thank-offerings and sharp curses to Ulrich's lips. Georg, who was nearly blinded with the blood which trickled across his eyes, stopped his struggling for a moment to listen, and then gave a short, snarling laugh.

3 "So you're not killed, as you ought to be, but you're caught, anyway," he cried; "caught fast. Ho, what a jest, Ulrich von Gradwitz snared in his stolen forest. There's real justice for you!"

From THE INTERLOPERS by Saki, © 1919

2. Which is the **most** logical inference to make about the men's unwillingness to shoot each other?
 - A. Each man is unwilling to abandon a lifelong passion.
 - B. Human laws and traditions curb an inclination toward violence.
 - C. The act of murder requires a mental, not a heartfelt, hatred.
 - D. Before killing an enemy, an attacker must deliver a statement of wrongs.
3. The narrator states, "Nature's own violence overwhelmed them both." On the basis of this event, the **most** likely inference to make is that Nature
 - A. also holds hatred in its heart.
 - B. cares nothing for hearth and honor.
 - C. is not susceptible to the codes of civilization.
 - D. can reinforce the passions of a lifetime.
4. After the accident, Ulrich von Gradwitz cannot move until someone comes to release him, and Georg Znaeym is helplessly pinned down, as well. In this situation, the two men are **most** likely to
 - A. shoot each other.
 - B. appreciate the importance of their feud.
 - C. tend to each other's wounds.
 - D. stop being enemies.
5. What does the contrast between the men's potential violence and Nature's actual violence imply?
 - A. Nature is more deadly than humans because it lacks feelings.
 - B. Humans are more deadly than Nature because they have feelings.
 - C. Nature is the deadly enemy of humankind.
 - D. Humankind is the deadly enemy of Nature.
6. Which problem does the men's predicament **most** resemble?
 - A. carelessness resulting in forest fires
 - B. violent crime in urban settings
 - C. bullying among schoolchildren
 - D. neglect of storm warnings

1 Review the Skill

Making inferences requires readers to look for suggestions, or small details, that provide clues about events, characters, or other elements in a story. These small details may give information about the story's setting, for example, or about a character's background or motives. By making inferences, you can better understand a character, situation, and other parts of the story that are not explicitly stated.

2 Refine the Skill

By refining the skill of making inferences in fiction, you will improve your study and test-taking abilities, especially as they relate to the GED® Reasoning Through Language Arts Test. Read the passage below. Then answer the questions that follow.

MOTHER IS UPSET

a The details about Sarah Penn indicate that she has been obedient and accepting during her marriage. You can infer that she talks plainly now because she has lost patience.

b From Sarah's comments about the condition of the room and from her comparison with other people's homes, you can infer that Sarah has lost patience with her husband's stinginess.

"Now father, look here"—Sarah Penn had not sat down; she stood before her husband in the humble fashion of a Scripture woman—"I'm going to talk real plain to you; I never have sence I married you, but I'm goin' to now. I ain't never complained, an' I ain't goin' to complain now, but I'm goin' to talk plain. You see this room here, father, you look at it well. You see there ain't no carpet on the floor, an' you see the paper is all dirty and droppin' off the walls. We ain't had no new paper on it for ten year, an' then I put it on myself, an' it didn't cost you but nine-pence a roll. You see this room, father: it's all the one I've had to work in an' eat in an' sit in sence we was married. There ain't another woman in the whole town whose husband ain't got half the means you have but what's got better. It's all the room Nanny's got to have her company in, an' there ain't one of her mates but what's got better, an' their father's not so able as hers is. It's all the room she'll have to be married in. ... Father, ain't you got nothin' to say?" said Mrs. Penn.

"I've got to go off after that load of gravel. I can't stan' here talkin' all day."

From *THE REVOLT OF MOTHER* by Mary E. Wilkins, © 1890

1. What is the **most** logical inference to make about Sarah's eagerness to improve the condition of her home?
 - A. Her daughter will be married in the room.
 - B. Sarah feels cold without a carpet on the floor.
 - C. Her husband will be more comfortable in improved surroundings.
 - D. She has complained about it for years and wants to take action now.
2. The **most** logical inference about Sarah's husband is that he
 - A. likes to entertain friends.
 - B. is reluctant to spend money.
 - C. earns barely enough to live on.
 - D. is willing to discuss problems.

TEST-TAKING TIPS

Look for evidence of characters' references to events that occurred in the past. These clues often can help explain conflicts that take place in the present.

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage, read each question, and choose the **best** answer.

EDIE HAS TEA WITH THE CHILDREN

1 In the middle of an April night in 1919, a plain woman named Edith Fisk, lifted from England to California on a tide of world peace, arrived at the Ransom house to raise five half-orphaned children.

2 A few hours later, at seven in the morning, this Edith, more widely called Edie, invited the three eldest to her room for tea. They were James, seven; Eliza, six; and Jenny, four. Being handed cups of tea, no matter how reduced by milk, made them believe that they had grown up overnight.

3 "Have some sugar," said Edie, and spooned it in. Moments later she said, "Have another cup." But her h's went unspoken and became the first of hundreds, then thousands, which would accumulate in the corners of the house and thicken in the air like sighs.

4 In an adjoining room the twins, entirely responsible for their mother's death, had finished their bottles and fallen back into guiltless sleep. At the far end of the house, the widower, Thomas Ransom, who had spent the night aching for his truant wife, lay across his bed, half awake, half asleep, and dreaming.

From *EDIE: A LIFE* by Harriet Doerr, © 1988

3. Which is the **most** likely inference to make about Edie?
 - A. She is from England.
 - B. She is from California.
 - C. She dislikes tea.
 - D. She dislikes children.
4. On the basis of the information in the passage, what **most** likely has happened to Mrs. Ransom? She has
 - A. moved to England.
 - B. abandoned her children.
 - C. died in childbirth.
 - D. divorced her husband.

5. From the description of Edie in the passage, which is the **best** inference about her character? Edie is
 - A. desperate for attention.
 - B. annoyed and bored.
 - C. stricken with grief.
 - D. kind and capable.
6. What might Edie's relationship be to the Ransom family?
 - A. She is most likely the children's aunt who has come to raise them.
 - B. She is most likely the children's grandmother who has come to raise them.
 - C. She is most likely a governess who has been hired to help raise the children.
 - D. She is most likely Mr. Ransom's new wife.
7. Which is the **most** likely inference to make about Mr. Ransom's emotional state?
 - A. The five children exhaust him.
 - B. He is stricken with grief.
 - C. New responsibilities overwhelm him.
 - D. His dreams comfort him.
8. Which situation is **most** like the situation in this passage?
 - A. A mother-in-law arrives for a summer visit.
 - B. A niece lives with her aunt while attending school.
 - C. A grandfather teaches his grandchildren to play chess.
 - D. A grandmother arrives to help care for a newborn.

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage, read each question, and choose the **best** answer.

A BRIEF FRIENDSHIP

- 1 "... No one living can remember seeing a Znaeym [Georg] and a von Gradwitz [Ulrich] talking to one another in friendship. And what peace there would be among the forester folk if we ended our feud tonight. And if we choose to make peace among our people, there is none other to interfere, no interlopers from outside. ..."
- 2 For a space both men were silent, turning over in their minds the wonderful changes that this dramatic reconciliation would bring about. In the cold, gloomy forest, with the wind tearing in fitful gusts through the naked branches and whistling around the tree trunks, they lay and waited for the help that would now bring release and succor to both parties. ...
- 3 "Let's shout for help," he [Ulrich] said; "in this lull our voices may carry a little way."
- 4 "They won't carry far through the trees and undergrowth," said Georg, "but we can try. Together, then."
- 5 The two raised their voices in a prolonged hunting call.
- 6 "Together again," said Ulrich a few minutes later, after listening in vain for an answer halloo.
- 7 "I heard something that time, I think," said Ulrich.
- 8 "I heard nothing but the pestilential wind," said Georg hoarsely.
- 9 There was silence again for some minutes, and then Ulrich gave a joyful cry. "I can see figures coming through the wood. They are following in the way I came down the hillside."
- 10 Both men raised their voices in as loud a shout as they could muster.
- 11 "They hear us! They've stopped. Now they see us. They're running down the hill towards us," cried Ulrich.
- 12 "How many of them are there?" asked Georg.
- 13 "I can't see distinctly," said Ulrich; "nine or ten."
- 14 "Then they are yours," said Georg; "I had only seven out with me."
- 15 "They are making all the speed they can, brave lads," said Ulrich gladly.
- 16 "Are they your men?" asked Georg. "Are they your men?"
- 17 "No," said Ulrich with a laugh, the idiotic chattering laugh of a man unstrung with hideous fear.

18 "Who are they?" asked Georg quickly, straining to see what the other would gladly not have seen.

19 "Wolves."

From THE INTERLOPERS by Saki, © 1919

9. What is the **most** logical inference to make about the relationship between Ulrich and Georg?
 - A. They have been good friends for many years.
 - B. Their families have long been enemies.
 - C. Their families have been business associates.
 - D. They have been on many adventures together.
10. Ulrich and Georg do not leave the forest because they are probably
 - A. cold.
 - B. hunting.
 - C. injured.
 - D. feuding.
11. How do Ulrich and Georg feel about their present situation?
 - A. annoyed with their men for lagging behind
 - B. thankful for their newfound friendship
 - C. angry about the continuing feud
 - D. hopeful for a peaceful future
12. Georg tells Ulrich that "there is none other to interfere, no interlopers from outside" to stall the changes to come from their reconciliation. From the information in the passage, you can infer that Georg is incorrect because the men are likely to
 - A. break their pact once rescued.
 - B. be killed by wolves.
 - C. feud with the forester folk.
 - D. freeze to death in the forest.
13. Why does Ulrich's joy to turn to fear?
 - A. Ulrich sees wolves approaching him and Georg.
 - B. Georg's men will soon threaten Ulrich.
 - C. Ulrich realizes the danger of walking alone in the forest.
 - D. Georg believes that they will not be rescued.

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage. Then fill in your answers in the boxes below.

A VISIT FROM PAULINE

- 1 I don't know what to do about my husband's new wife. She won't come in. She sits on the front porch and smokes. She won't knock or ring the bell, and the only way I know she's there at all is because the dog points in the living room. The minute I see Stray standing with one paw up and his tail straight out I say, "Shhh. It's Pauline." I stroke his coarse fur and lean on the broom and we wait. We hear the creak of a board, the click of a purse, a cigarette being lit, a sad, tiny cough. At last I give up and open the door. "Pauline?" The afternoon light hurts my eyes. "Would you like to come in?"
- 2 "No," says Pauline.
- 3 Sometimes she sits on the stoop, picking at the paint, and sometimes she sits on the edge of an empty planter box. Today she's perched on the railing. She frowns when she sees me and lifts her small chin. She wears the same black velvet jacket she always wears, the same formal silk blouse, the same huge dark glasses. "Just passing by," she explains.
- 4 I nod. Pauline lives thirty miles to the east, in the city, with Konrad. "Passing by" would take her one toll bridge, one freeway, and two backcountry roads from their flat. But lies are the least of our problems, Pauline's and mine, so I nod again, bunch my bathrobe a little tighter around my waist, try to cover one bare foot with the other, and repeat my invitation. She shakes her head so vigorously the railing lurches. "Konrad," she says in her high young voice, "expects me. You know how he is."

From PIE DANCE by Molly Giles, © 1985

14. The narrator describes Pauline as having a "high young voice." This information implies that Pauline

is most likely than the narrator.

15. Who is Konrad?

16. On the basis of the narrator's tone and actions, what is the **most** logical inference about how the narrator feels about Pauline's visits? The narrator does not seem angry. Instead, she seems

17. Pauline says of Konrad, "You know how he is," and the narrator understands. The **most** logical

inference to make from this statement is that Konrad is