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Inferring Word Meaning

Often when you read, you come across words you don't know. You can keep a dictionary by your side and look up the meaning of an unfamiliar word. But often you can **infer the meaning** from context clues. To find the meaning of an unknown word, look how it is used in the sentence and in the whole passage. Look for clues that will help you guess the meaning. Synonyms, antonyms, examples, and descriptions may be context clues. Sometimes a definition may even be given somewhere in the passage.

Read the passage. Then answer the question that follows.

We needed a new leader for our club. There was so much *discord*. People argued over everything. They couldn't seem to get along or work together smoothly. Some members wanted one thing, and others wanted something different. No one could agree, and so every meeting ended with hard feelings.



As used in the article, the word *discord* means—

- A happiness
- B communication
- C disagreement
- D harmony

Inferring
Word Meaning

The correct answer is choice C. Look at the clues in the paragraph. You can infer that the members of the group were not happy. They did not communicate, and they couldn't work together. Replace the word *discord* with *disagreement* in the sentence. This new word makes sense in the context of this paragraph. The other words do not make as much sense.

PART II

Practice Exercises

Read each selection. Then answer the questions about making inferences.

A miller and his son were leading their donkey into town to sell it. Some girls asked the boy, “Why don’t you ride the donkey?” The miller ordered his son to hop up on the donkey’s back. Shortly after that, the miller and his son met some old men. They pointed to the miller’s son and shouted, “See how that lazy boy rides while his poor old father walks.” The boy and the miller exchanged places.

Farther on down the road, the miller and his son came upon some women and children. They *criticized* the miller for riding while his son had to walk. The miller reached down, picked up his son, and sat him in front of him. Just outside the town, an old man shouted at them, “You should be ashamed of yourselves, letting that little donkey carry the two of you. You should carry the poor little beast.” The miller and his son started carrying the beast over the bridge. Seeing the strange sight, the townspeople began laughing. Upset by the noise, the donkey started kicking and fell into the water.

- 1 The word *criticized* in paragraph 2 means—
 - A approved
 - B cared about
 - C disapproved of
 - D did not care about
- 2 The story takes place—
 - A in the country
 - B in a big city
 - C on the sea
 - D on another planet
- 3 What is the author trying to teach?
 - A Good advice is not easy to follow.
 - B Don’t be too proud to listen to advice.
 - C In trying to please everyone, you may please no one.
 - D Never listen to other people who tell you what to do.

Inferring
Word Meaning

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Mother's Helper Needed!

Do you love kids? Do you want a job during the summer? Mother of twin preschoolers needs help. Mother will teach you everything you need to know for this job. The right person for the job must be at least 12 years old and have lots of energy. *Responsibilities* include helping to feed, clothe, and play with kids. If you are interested, please call 555-3121 and ask for Meg.

- 1 Who would be *most likely* to apply for this job?
 - A a 12-year-old who loves kids
 - B a mother who loves her own two kids
 - C an adult who wants a full-time job
 - D a set of adult twins who want to help out
- 2 You can conclude that the job *mostly* involves—
 - A taking care of animals
 - B taking care of kids
 - C cleaning houses
 - D changing diapers
- 3 The word *responsibilities* means—
 - A seeks
 - B plans
 - C tasks
 - D goals

After starring in several Tarzan films, a chimpanzee started a new career. Cheeta, a 75-year-old chimp, now lives as an artist. He lives in California with other chimps. But this chimp is just a little different. He is a painter of *abstract* art. He uses all kinds of colors in strange patterns.

Cheeta uses a paintbrush like a pro. This is possible because chimps have a special thumb that allows them to paint like humans. The special thumb helps them create and grasp tools that help them get food, such as termites and ants. Cheeta always signs his paintings. But he has a special way of signing—with his thumbprint.