EXERCISE 1, Making Inferences from Conversations

Practice making inferences from the following dialog. Read the conversation and infer the answers to the questions below.

B: No, this is Maple Avenue.
A: Maple Avenue? . . . Oh, dear. I really don’t understand this! I’m looking for Elm Street and I thought this was it.
B: No, no. Elm Street isn’t anywhere near here.
A: But wasn’t that the high school back there?
B: No, that was the town hall.
A: Oh. Then I really am confused. Can you take a look here and show me where I am?
B: Sure. Let’s see . . . You're over here. See? This is Maple Avenue and here’s the high school. Now, if you want to get to Elm Street, you’d better take the bus…

1. Who are these people?
2. What are they talking about?
3. Are they men or women? How can you tell? It is impossible to tell?

Read the conversation, and infer answers to the questions below.

A: Why is he taking so long?
B: He has to get changed, you know. He's got all that makeup to take off.
A: Well, we've been here forty minutes now. It's cold out here. Are you sure we’re at the right door?
B: Yes. I'm sure. Come on. Let's not give up now. I've just got to see him close up.
A: They say he’s really quite ugly.
B: Oh, no, that's not true. I've seen him on TV a couple of times. He’s got the cutest smile.
A: Well, I don't know. I'm just about frozen. If he doesn’t come out in another two minutes, I'm going home.
B: Oh, look! Here he comes. Quick, where’s your pen?!?

1. Where are these people? 2. What are they doing?
3. Who are they talking about? 4. Are they men or women? How can you tell?
Read the conversation, and infer answers to the questions below.

A: Excuse me. Would you mind turning down the music, please?
B: What’s that?
A: I said, could you please turn the music down! My whole apartment is rattling!
B: Oh. Is that better?
A: A little better. It is after midnight.
B: Oh, come on, man. It’s still early. It’s my birthday, you know, so I asked a few friends over. You want to come in?
A: No, no. I’m not the party type and I’ve got to get up early tomorrow.
B: But it's Sunday tomorrow. What do you have to get up for so early?
A: That's none of your business. The rules say no noise after 11:00 PM. So if you're going to continue, I'll have to call the police.
B: Oh, all right. Don't get so uptight about it all.

1. Where are these people?
2. Who are they?
3. What is the problem?
4. Are they men or women? How can you tell?

Read the conversation, and infer answers to the questions below.

A: Is this the kind of thing you're looking for?
B: It's hard to tell. You see, she’s got very definite ideas about what She likes.
A: How about a nice little item like this?
B: Hmmm. You'd think I'd know by now, but every year I have the same problem! Those do look nice, but they're a bit too old-fashioned. She doesn't think of herself that way.
A: Then what about these. They're more classic.
B: No, no. She’s not the classic type. Something more modern . . . like those over there.
A: The ones with all the colors? We usually sell those to, well . . . to younger women.
B: She’s fond of color. Always has been. Says I'm so dull in my business clothes…..
A: Shall I gift wrap them?
B: No, that's not necessary. I'll just put the box in my pocket.

1. Where are these people?
2. What are they talking about?
3. What did “B” put in his pocket?
4. How old is "B"?

Read the conversation, and infer answers to the questions below.

A: Welcome back! How was it?
B: Terrible.
A: Really? You were so excited about going.
B: I know, but I sure am glad to be back.
A: What happened?
B: First of all, there was the weather. It rained every day. Not just a little, but all day! There we were with these gorgeous beaches and no sun!
A: I guess you didn’t get much of a tan.
B: Look at me! I’m as pale as I was before.
A: At least you must have gotten some rest.
B: Rest! The second day we were there, my husband got sick. He was sneezing and coughing for three days and nights. Then I caught his cold. I felt awful until the day we left.
A: Well, how was the food?
B: That was the only nice thing about the whole week. Except that we were too sick to enjoy' it half the time. Anything new here in the office?
A: Not much. It’s been a slow week.

1. Where are these people?
2. What is their relationship?
3. What are they talking about?

4. Are they men or women? How can you tell?

**EXERCISE 2: Making Inferences from Descriptions**

*In each of these paragraphs, someone is talking about his or her underline the words is. Infer what the job is and write it be or phrases that helped you guess.*

1. "The minute you climb in, you start feeling excited. There’s nothing so exciting for me, not even a jet plane. You get in and start up and off you go. And then you’ve got to pay attention every minute. There’s always someone doing something crazy who’s likely to end up under your wheels. I sometimes think it’s a miracle if I can get all the way there with no accidents. You’ve always got to be thinking ahead. That's hard when' you have to keep going for so many hours alone. There’s a lot of people in this job who have stomach problems from the tension. They lose their hearing, too, because of the noise. You've got to be tough on this job, you know."

   Job: ________________________________________________

2. "My day starts at four o'clock in the morning. That’s when my feet hit the floor. I’m at work at five-thirty, and I finish at two in the afternoon. In between I do a lot of walking. I wear out a lot of shoes each year—maybe four or five pairs. And my poor feet, at the end of the day they’re really hurting. The other problem is the dogs. Sometimes you can make friends with them and they'll follow you around. But other times, they can be mean. I’ve been bitten a couple of times. I can't say as I care much for dogs any more. But it's not all bad, my job. One thing I like is the way you meet a lot of people. You learn all about their private lives, too. It never gets boring."

   Job: ________________________________________________

3. "The most important thing is to understand people. You've got to know what they're thinking. If you can figure that out, you can get them to do anything. They come in with an idea about what they want. You get them talking about themselves, about what they like. If it's a man, you talk about baseball, or something like that. If it’s a woman, you ask her about fashions. That way they get comfortable with you. You ask them a lot of questions and get them saying yes. Then they just get into the habit of saying yes. In the end, you can put them into anything you want, if you're really good- They need a little car for the City; you send them home with a truck. Of wouldn’t really do that. It wouldn't be right. You've got to sell on this job, but you also have to be fair. It’s not fair to take advantage of people too much. There are some people in this business who’d do anything. But I don’t believe in that."

   Job: ________________________________________________
EXERCISE 3: Making Inferences from Stories and Plays

Read this scene from Red Carnations, a play by Glenn Hughes. Infer the answers to the questions below. Underline the words or phrases that helped you.

Red Carnations

Boy: (crossing to bench) I think I will sit down, if you don't mind. It's a devil of a bore standing first on one foot and then on the other. (He sits down on the opposite end of bench.)

Man: Have a cigar?

Boy: No, thanks; I'll just finish this cigarette. (He turns directly to the MAN, and as he does, his eye lights on the carnation in the other's lapel. He shows annoyance. He takes one from his own lapel, hesitates a moment, then replaces it. The MAN, noticing the action smells his.)

Man: Pretty flowers, carnations, aren't they? Wonderful fragrance they have, too. I am very fond of them, and I see your taste runs in the same direction.

Boy: (disturbed) Yes, indeed. Very fine flower. But I—well, I hope you won't think me silly, but as a matter of fact, if it doesn't make any difference to you, Would you mind keeping your carnation out of sight for a while, until—well, just to be a good sport, if you would hide it for a few minutes, I'd be very grateful.

Man: (good-naturedly) Now, I'd like nothing better than to do you a favor, Mr.--- Mr.---

Boy: Smith.

Man: Thank you, Mr. Smith. That's strange. Very strange.

Boy: What is strange? The name of Smith?

Man: Yes, strange that you should have it, when that is my name, too.

Boy: Oh, your name is Smith, too? Well, after all, there are lots of us in the world --- lots of us Smiths, I mean—so there is no reason why such a coincidence.

Man: Of course not of course not—only, I was thinking about the red carnations.

Boy: Well. I don’t see—

Man: I may be mistaken, Of course. But two Smiths, meeting in the same spot at the same hour, both wearing red carnations! You must confess it's a bit——

Boy: By Jove! So it is! (He looks intently, suspiciously, at the MAN.) I wish you could move to another spot, or take that flower out of your lapel, or---it isn’t absolutely necessary for you to wear it, is it?

Man: But it is! Absolutely! And you are going to cause me all sorts of trouble if you don’t move, or change your name, or at least throw away your carnation.
Boy: I shall do nothing of the kind. I can’t! My Lord, man, she doesn’t know me! That is, she doesn't know what I look like. That is why she asked me to wear a red carnation.

Man: But that is exactly my predicament. The woman I am to meet does not know me by sight. She asked me to wear a red carnation. So you see, I can’t help you out. After all, a man must look to his own affairs first.

Boy: What a beastly coincidence! (brightening) Oh, well, it may not matter. One of them will arrive before the other does. If you recognize her as your—ah—friend, you can speak up at once, and get on out of the way. If mine should arrive first, I shall do the same.

1. What is the relationship between the two characters in this scene from the play?

2. Where are they?

3. What happened before this passage in the play?

4. Who are the women they are meeting?

5. What do you think will happen after this in the play?

Read this scene from The Cactus Flower, a play by Abe Burrows. Infer the answers to the questions below. Underline the words or phrases that helped you.

The Cactus Flower

TONI: [From the ladder] May I help you, Madam?

STEPHANIE: [Every inch the upper middle class lady] I’m really not looking for anything in particular. I just thought I’d browse a bit.

TONI: Fine. I’m here if you want me.

STEPHANIE: I’ve heard there’s a marvelous recording of uh [Trying to think of something] of Horowitz’s last concert. Do you have it?

TONI: Horowitz? We’re all out, but I can send it to you.

STEPHANIE: That will be fine. I believe my husband has a charge account here. Send the record to . . . [Laying it on] Mrs. . . . Julian . . . Winston.

[TONI has been putting records away as she talks. Now when she hears JULIAN’S name, she misses the shelf with a record and it drops.]

TONI: [Coming down ladder and crossing to STEPHANIE] You?

STEPHANIE: [Nodding] Me.

TONI: You didn’t come on account of Horowitz?

[Editor’s note: This scene from The Cactus Flower is a classic example of how dialogue and character interactions can be used to create humorous misunderstandings and miscommunications. The play follows a series of such exchanges as the characters try to meet their prospective partners while also trying to navigate the complexities of romance and personal identity.]
STEPHANIE: No. You see, Miss Simmons—

TONI: Call me Toni.

STEPHANIE: [Graciously] Thank you. Toni . . . Dr. Winston, my husband, said that you were most anxious to meet me. Well, here I am. [She sits and crosses her legs.]

TONI: [After a moment, a bit impatiently] Did he . . . did he tell you about his—our plans?

STEPHANIE: [Same gracious smile] The divorce? Naturally.

TONI: [After another pause] Well?

STEPHANIE: Well what?

TONI: You don’t mind?

STEPHANIE: My husband and I are in complete agreement about the divorce

TONI: [Letting out a sharp breath of relief] Whew! That makes me very happy!

STEPHANIE: [As sweetly as possible] I'm glad.

TONI: You see, Mrs. Winston—[Sudden thought] You know, I don’t know your first name.

STEPHANIE: [Thinks for a moment] Mrs. Winston will do very nicely. Of course, I won’t be Mrs. Winston very much longer. [There is a slight touch of real and fake sadness in that last phrase.]

TONI: [Suddenly] Then you do mind.

STEPHANIE: Of course I don't. Things between the doctor and me have become… impossible.

TONI: I can't tell you how good that makes me feel.

STEPHANIE: [Looking at her with a smile] I've really made your day.

TONI: It’s just that I didn’t want to be the cause of your divorce. I never pushed Julian into it. I am no home wrecker.

STEPHANIE: I'll remember that. [Rises, speaks gravely] Now, Toni, may I ask you a question?

TONI: Anything.

STEPHANIE: Are you absolutely sure you love Julian?

TONI: You can’t ask that!

STEPHANIE: I just did. Do you love him?

TONI: Madly! Wildly! Desperately!

STEPHANIE: Just so long as you're fond of him. I don't want him to end up unhappy and bitter.

TONI: Oh, I understand, especially after he's just had such a terrible marriage.
STEPHANIE: [Stiffening] Not so terrible! Our marriage, after all, lasted Ten years and we still have a very deep respect for each other.

TONI: Of course.

STEPHANIE: We always had to look after Dr. Winston, my husband. You know, aside from his profession, at which he's a master, the doctor is a very vulnerable man. An idealist . . . a child . . . a silly child . . . damned silly child.

TONI: Also an adorable child.

STEPHANIE: I guess you do love him. Well, now that you’ve heard what you wanted to hear, be running along. [Holds out her hand to TONI. TONI takes it.] I do hope you have better luck with Julian than I did.

TONI: Mrs. Winston. . . . What about you? What are you going to do?

STEPHANIE: Forget about me. I’ll ride off into the sunset . . . or something.

TONI: It’s just that . . . I want to be sure you’re all right.

STEPHANIE: I’ll write you every day. [She starts for street door.]

TONI: [flurrying after her and stopping her] Mrs. Winston, who's going to tel the children?

1. What is the relationship between the two characters in this scene of the play?
2. Where are they?
3. What happened before this passage in the play?
4. What do you think will happen after this in the play?

Read this passage from "Til Death Do Us Part" a story by Becky Hagenston- and infer the answers to the questions that follow. Underline the words or phrases that helped you.

Til Death Do Us Part

Joyce watched Adam and his father playing horseshoes with Jerry and the Reverend, under the gold-washed trees. Adam's parents had insisted on having the rehearsal dinner at their house, and there were cubed cheeses, baby quiches, and shrimp cocktail laid out on picnic tables on their wooden patio.

Adam hadn’t swept Joyce off her feet or made her forget herself. She would not describe herself as “crazy, wacko in love." She loved him—not madly, not crazily, but saner and contentedly. It didn't matter that certain young men made her feel woozy, like Cousin Charlie had, or that she sometimes fell in love in elevators. That, she decided, was a sickness similar to
the flu. It passed soon enough, and then you recovered and went on with things. It was what got people like Kathy and her mother into trouble.

Joyce's mother was pleased because Adam came from a “healthy family environment.” His parents had been married for thirty-four years, and he’d grown up in this farmhouse on a country road that was still unpaved, five miles from Nathan Hale's house. Joyce couldn’t remember what Nathan Hale had done, but she liked that his house was still there, after so many years. There was something reassuring and permanent about it.

Adam had grown up climbing these same trees, playing with the horseshoes that were now thudding and clanging across the lawn. In this place, Joyce had the same feeling she sometimes got when she went back to Ebenezer Church—that it could be ten years ago, or sixty, or a hundred. That every moment was present and intact, swirling seamlessly into right now. Sometimes it seemed to her that she had left pieces of her-self that had never belonged to her, and in schoolyards with children who have never learned her name. made’l7her"s‘ad"," as if there were small ghosts that looked like her wandering lost in places they didn’t recognize. She had tried to explain this to Adam once, when he was showing her the remains of a rocket he and his brothers had built in the barn when he was nine.

“I don’t have any relics of my childhood to show you,” she’d said. “I couldn’t take you to any tree houses or point out any tire swings I used to play on. It was like, with every new father, everything just began again. My mother would give a lot of stuff away, so she wouldn't be reminded of whoever it was she had just divorced. And she threw away a lot of photo albums, so I’m not even sure what certain people looked like anymore.”

“Well, you’ve turned out great,” Adam had told her. “And maybe if your life hadn’t that way, you wouldn’t be the person you are now.”

“Maybe,” said Joyce, doubtfully. “Besides, we've got about sixty years ahead of us to collect relics.” Joyce was always relieved when he said things like that, even if she herself was not entirely convinced. Now, pulling a cube of cheddar cheese from its red-frilled toothpick’, she squinted toward the lawn and imagined her sons and daughters playing on this same grass. It was much easier to picture these people who didn’t exist than to imagine the older version of herself who would be right here, watching them.

1. What is the relationship between Joyce and Adam? Does the title of Y to infer this? Why?
2. Where are they?
3. What can you tell about Joyce's past?
4. Which character do you think expresses the way the author feels?
5. What do you think will happen after this in the story?
Read the following passage from “A Domestic Dilemma” a story by Carson McCullers (A dilemma is a problem with no easy solution.) and infer the answers to the questions that follow. Then underline the words or phrases that helped you.

A Domestic Dilemma

The children were in the living room, so intent on play that the opening of the front door was at first unnoticed. Martin stood looking at his safe, lovely children. They had opened the bottom drawer of the secretary and taken out the Christmas decorations. Andy had managed to plug in the Christmas tree lights and the green and red bulbs glowed with out-of-season festivity on the rug of the living room. At the moment he was trying to trail the bright cord over Marianne’s rocking horse. Marianne sat on the floor pulling off an angel’s wings. The children wailed a startling welcome. Martin swung the fat little baby girl up to his shoulder and Andy threw himself against his father’s legs.

“Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!”

Martin set down the little girl carefully and swung Andy a few times like a pendulum. Then he picked up the Christmas tree cord.

“What’s all this stuff doing out? Help me put it back in the drawer. You’re not to fool with the light socket. Remember I told you that before. I mean it, Andy.”

The six-year-old child nodded and shut the secretary drawer. Martin stroked his fair soft hair and his hand lingered tenderly on the nape of the child’s frail neck.

“Had supper yet, Bumpkin?”

“It hurt. The toast was hot.”

The baby girl stumbled on the rug and, after the first surprise of the fall, began to cry; Martin picked her up and carried her in his arms back to the kitchen.

“See, Daddy,” said Andy. “The toast —”

Emily had laid the children’s supper on the uncovered porcelain table. There were two plates with the remains of cream-of-wheat and eggs and silver mugs that had held milk. There was also a platter of cinnamon toast, untouched except for one tooth-marked bite. Martin sniffed the bitten piece and nibbled gingerly. Then he put the toast into the garbage pail.

“Hoo — phui — What on earth!”

Emily had mistaken the tin of cayenne for the cinnamon.

“I like to have burnt up,” Andy said. “Drank water and ran outdoors and opened my mouth. Marianne didn’t eat none.”

“Any,” corrected Martin. He stood helpless, looking around the walls of the kitchen. “Well, that’s that, I guess,” he said finally. “Where is your mother now?”
“She’s up in you alls’ room.”

Martin left the children in the kitchen and went up to his wife. Outside the door he waited for a moment to still his anger. He did not knock and once inside the room he closed the door behind him.

Emily sat in the rocking chair by the window of the pleasant room. She had been drinking something from a tumbler and as he entered she put the glass hurriedly on the floor behind the chair. In her attitude there was confusion and guilt which she tried to hide by a show of spurious vivacity.

“Oh, Marty! You home already? The time slipped up on me. I was just going down –”

1. What are the relationships among the four characters in the story?
2. Where are they?
3. What has happened just before this passage?
4. Which character do you think expresses the way the author feels?
5. What do you think will happen after this in the story?

EXERCISE 4 Making inferences about Opinions

Read the short book reviews below and infer the answers to the questions that follow.

Review 1

A Tale of Texas

_by Kurt Wheeler_

This modern cowboy story is set in 1949. It follows three young men on a wild ride on horseback out of Texas and into northern Mexico. Their adventure takes them out of twentieth-century America and into a totally different world, where it is still possible to live with horses and nature. There are the bad guys and good guys, as in the classic films, but the book is not just a rewrite of a John Wayne movie. The characters are convincing and the descriptions of the natural world are truly brilliant. The style is ambitious—we are reminded of Faulkner—and it could easily have become terribly stylized. But this author has the skill to make it work. The masterful writing and action-filled plot keep the reader’s attention throughout. We hope the second volume that the author promises will be as satisfying as this.

1. What is the reviewer’s opinion of this book?
2. How can you tell?
3. From what you have read in this review, do you think that you would like to read this book?
Review 2

After Hours

by Samantha Trout

This novel, about three people who work for an Internet company in New York, offers a modern twist on one of the oldest themes in literature: the love triangle. The setting is just what you might expect at a "dotcom" company: a large, open office building, equipped with a gym. Almost the whole novel takes place in this office building or at a nearby café. The characters don't seem to have any other life beyond the office, where they talk endlessly about themselves and their grand expectations for the company. In fact, the performance of the company is an important element in the plot. Unfortunately, we can guess from the beginning what the outcome is going to be: This will be another story of a "dot-com" failure as well as romantic failure. Furthermore, the characters are quite predictable and not very likable. All in all, the author never manages to get us interested or involved in their fate, so when the book comes to a tragic ending, we really don't care.

1. What is the reviewer’s opinion of this book? How can you tell?

2. From what you have read in this review, do you think that you would like to read this book?