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Inferential Comprehension

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To be effective readers, and to fully understand an author's message, students need good inferencing skills. Inference skill, and by association, vocabulary knowledge, is the foundation upon which effective language and reading comprehension is built. To infer is the ability of individuals to identify missing information in written language using cognitive abilities and background knowledge. That is, students need to recall previously learnt information and use it as a foundation to evaluate *hidden* information embedded in text. Inference is a higher-level language and cognitive skill.

Inference Example

'The mighty bull mammoth trumpeted just a few feet from where Guff lay hidden. Guff covered his ears with his hands.'

Question: Why did Guff cover his ears with his hands?

Answer: The mammoth's trumpeting was *extremely* loud and hurt Guff's ears. We can *infer* this based on both the animal's immense size and its similarity to modern elephants, which trumpet loudly to frighten any potential predators.

The questions in chapter 8 offer students the opportunity to practice thinking about hidden information in text and unlocking some of the story's deeper meanings and exploring complex themes and imagery. The questions are not just focused on the *Guff's Journey* narrative but also to the wider world that Guff lives in, and introduces new characters from Guff's tribe and offers situations to offer more variety.

Task A: *Inference Exercises*

Task A: *Inference – Level 1*

1. When Guff heard his father calling, he stopped what he was doing, wrapped up his fishing line, put away the fish, and returned to the camp.

What had Guff been doing?

2. After the rain, Asa could not relight the fire.

Why could Asa not relight the fire?

3. When the tribal elder signaled to Guff to quicken his pace, Guff pointed to his foot, which was bandaged with fur skin.

Why was Guff having difficulty keeping up?

4. High in the sky, the great eagles were battered by heavy winds as they struggled to maintain their altitude in the icy rain.

What was the weather like?

5. It fell silently throughout the night. Guff awoke in the morning to find the entire camp covered in white.

What had fallen silently throughout the night?

6. Mid-way through the day, Guff removed his heavy furs and had to wipe sweat from his forehead.

What type of day is it most likely to be?

7. Utha cut a notch at one end of the long wooden staff and jammed the chiseled stone into the notch. He then secured the stone in place with heavy twine. Utha was now ready to hunt.

What had Utha been making?

8. After a long climb, Guff finally reached the top. From up here he could see all the way to the blue water of the ocean.

Where was Guff?

9. While it was still dark, Guff, with fishing line in hand, made his way to the creek. Light was just starting to break over the horizon as he cast the line into the water.

What part of the day is it? How do you know that?

10. The light poked through the clouds and briefly bathed Asa's face with a welcome warmth.

What is the source of the light?

11. Guff sat down in his favorite spot and cast the line out into the flowing water. He looked across to the opposite bank and watched as a deer bent its slender neck to drink.

Where is Guff? What is he doing?

12. Asa whistled happily as she removed the slippery scales. She then placed the day's catch in large wet leaves. Asa then placed the leaves in the flames of the fire. The aroma wafting up from within the leaves was enticing.

What was Asa cooking?

Task B: *Inference Exercises*

Task B: *Inference – Level 2*

1. Although Guff felt confident, as the tribe, with stealth, approached the mammoth herd, he felt fear in his stomach. Guff had been included in a large hunting party made up of the men of the tribe. They were hunting a mammoth herd. The tribe needed meat before the winter snows set in. The frosty ground beneath Guff's feet made a scrunching sound as he shuffled forward with little steps.

a. Why did Guff feel “fear in his stomach” ?

b. Why did the tribe approach the herd with stealth?

c. Why is it important the tribe find meat before the winter snows set in?

d. Why did the ground make a ‘scrunching’ sound?

2. As the first fat drops of rain started to patter down, Asa pulled in her fishing line and rushed from the river toward the camp. When she arrived at the camp, she was out of breath. She frantically helped her mother secure all the tanning animal hides and place them in the safety of the shelter. They had barely done this when the rain thundered down in sheets of driving hail, while balls of flashing light arced across the sky.

a. Why was Asa out of breath?

b. Why did the tanning hides need to be secured?

c. Why did Asa rush back to the camp?

d. What were the *balls of flashing light*?

3. Guff stood very still while the water surged strongly past his knees. He held his light, two-pronged spear high above his head. His eyes scanned the water carefully as the swift, dark forms darted between his feet. He had been standing still for some time and his teeth had begun to chatter. Suddenly, Guff's spear sliced through the water. Guff hauled the silver creature out of the water and flicked it onto the rocks near the riverbank.

a. Why was Guff standing very still?

b. What were the *swift, dark forms*?

c. Why did Guff's teeth begin to chatter?

d. What was the silver creature that Guff hauled from the water?

4. Utha took the small plank of hardwood from his bag. The wood was stained a dark brown from use. He produced another piece of wood from his bag. This wood was a medium length stick with a rounded nub on its tip. Utha carefully placed thin, dry grass on the hardwood and rubbed the tip along a shallow groove in the hardwood, near the grass. Soon, small wisps of smoke appeared. Utha gently blew on the dry grass until a tiny flame appeared.

a. What was Utha doing?

b. Had Utha often used the hardwood? How do you know this?

c. Why did Utha choose thin, dry grass?

d. Why did Utha blow gently on the dry grass?

5. The first sign of trouble was the birds all taking flight, their wings fluttering rapidly as they surged into the sky. Then Utha heard a low, threatening snarl and saw movement in the bushes to his left. Utha gripped his spear tightly, and crouched forward in a posture of defense. His muscles were tight and tense as if carved from wood. Utha's eyes glinted as the great feline emerged from the bushes. The huge upper jaw of the great beast opened to reveal long curved teeth. Utha was ready.

a. Why did the birds suddenly take flight?

b. What caused the movement in the bushes?

c. Why did Utha's muscles feel as if carved from wood?

d. What could the great feline be?
