



Chapter 4

Evaluating Social Studies Materials

When you must make a major purchase—like a car—you often *evaluate* your financial situation and your transportation needs before you shop. Once you are out in the marketplace, you continue to evaluate. You judge the vehicles you see as to how well you can afford them and how well they are made.

In studying social studies, you also need to evaluate information. You must be able to judge the value or logic of an idea. You also have to be able to understand how and why people make the decisions that they do. Most important, you need to be able to determine when a decision has been based on sound logic. In this section you will learn how to evaluate material in social studies in five ways:

- judging the extent to which information satisfies criteria
- recognizing the role that values play in beliefs and decision making
- judging the adequacy of facts
- comparing and contrasting different viewpoints
- recognizing logical fallacies and identifying faulty reasoning

Judging Information

In order to judge the worth or value of something, you must have standards or reference points to go by. A secretary's typing ability is judged by the **criteria** of speed and accuracy. The value of a movie is measured by its entertainment level, its cinematography, its acting and direction. A newspaper article is evaluated by its adequacy of facts, its style of writing, and its objectivity (the writer's abstention from opinion or bias).

If you know and understand the criteria by which something is judged, you are better prepared to evaluate it. For example, if you know the legal requirements for a good and binding contract, then you are better prepared to enter into one. Some of the criteria for a legally binding contract on the sale of goods include:

1. a clear written offer by the buyer or buyer's representative
2. a clear written acceptance of the offer by the seller or seller's representative
3. a settlement of the deal that is agreeable and clear to both buyer and seller

4. a clear exchange of something valuable between the buyer and seller
5. no illegal activity involved in the deal by either the buyer or the seller

Judge whether the situation described below constitutes a legally binding contract according to the criteria listed above. If it does, write *yes* in the space next to it. If the situation does not, write *no* in the space, and write the number of the criterion that the case does not satisfy.

_____ A husband and wife both shake hands with a neighbor in an agreement to purchase a used car for \$5,000 from him, and the neighbor, in turn, agrees to hand over the title to the automobile upon receipt of the money.

You should have written *No, 1 and 2*. Though an offer to purchase the car is made, and the seller accepts the offer, neither the offer nor the acceptance is in writing. Therefore, no legally binding contract exists.

EXERCISE 1

Directions: In the following cases, judge whether the situation described constitutes a legally binding contract according to the criteria. If it does, write *yes* on the line. If the situation does not, write *no* on the line. For each *no* answer, write the number of the criterion that the case does not satisfy.

_____ 1. A private pilot agrees to pick up 100 pounds of marijuana in Mexico and deliver it to a buyer in Texas.

_____ 2. The lawyer of a woman who owns an apartment approves the lease application for two friends who want to rent the apartment for one year. The lawyer accepts the friends' deposit on the first month's rent with a typed agreement that both the friends and the owner will sign.

_____ 3. After much discussion and haggling over price, an owner of a small bookkeeping business tells a computer salesman that he will seriously consider buying a computer only if he can get it for \$300 less than the salesman's "final" offer.

_____ 4. A poor but diligent farmer signs a note promising to feed and house a laborer in his home in compensation for the work the laborer has agreed, in writing, to do on his land.

Answers are on page 400.

EXERCISE 2

Directions: Read the passage below. Be prepared to judge the theory described in the passage.

In 1964, anthropologist Ashley Montagu edited a startling book entitled *The Concept of Race*. In the book, Montagu and nine other writers stated that the concept of race is a myth that leads to the perpetuation of errors.

According to Montagu, skin color and physical features are not necessarily accurate indicators of a person's ancestry. He believes that the term *ethnic group* might be a better term than *race*.

For each of the facts below, write (1) in the blank if the fact would help support Montagu's theory, (2) if the fact would dispute Montagu's theory, and (3) if the fact would have no bearing on Montagu's theory.

- _____ 1. Ashley Montagu is a white man.
- _____ 2. Montagu has supported this theory since at least 1941.
- _____ 3. The use of the term *race* has had a long history and, in fact, is prevalent even today among many people.
- _____ 4. There are obvious differences among groups of people in the world that seem fairly easy to define and categorize by "race."
- _____ 5. Ashley Montagu is one of America's most distinguished anthropologists, having taught at numerous universities.
- _____ 6. The book *The Concept of Race* contains contributions from nine other distinguished scientists besides Montagu who all support the theory.

Answers are on page 400.

Recognizing Values

What beliefs do you hold nearest and dearest to your heart? What would you die for? If you could be doing anything you wanted to right now, what would it be? These questions all focus on your personal values.

Your beliefs and values influence the big decisions that you must make in life. In understanding social studies material, you must be able to recognize how an individual's values affect the decision he or she makes.

For example, Martin Luther King, Jr. is known to have put great value on civil disobedience as a nonviolent means of resolving conflict. Because of his beliefs, he advised his followers to avoid using violence at all cost during the struggle for civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, even though opponents to the Civil Rights movement at times used excessive physical force to intimidate protesters, there were almost no incidents of violent retaliation, and the success of the movement reflects King's value of nonviolence.

Fill in the words that best summarize the values of the person described in the case below.

A senator does not believe that she could ever have an abortion because it is morally repugnant to her. She personally feels that abortion should not be legalized. A survey shows, however, that her constituency is overwhelmingly in favor of a law permitting abortion. The senator votes "yes" on the bill to legalize abortion.

The senator apparently values _____
over _____

You should have written something similar to *her responsibility to her constituency over her personal beliefs*. In other words, the feelings of those who elected her override her own personal feelings.

EXERCISE 3

Directions: For each of the following statements, supply the most accurate words that reflect the values of the person described in each case.

1. A young man wants very much to settle down and save enough money to get married and to buy a home and a good-running car. However, he has been instilled with a strong belief in the responsibility of every American citizen to serve his country. His decision to join the U.S. Army was affected primarily by his sense of

2. A scientist is asked to work on a prestigious project to develop a neutron bomb, a weapon he despises because it is designed to destroy on impact living things, not buildings. When the scientist refuses the project, it shows that he values his

over his _____

Answers are on page 400.

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EXERCISE 4



Questions 1–4 refer to the following passage.

The derogatory term “Yankee imperialist” has not always been applied to Americans. Prior to the Spanish-American War in 1898, the United States was strongly isolationist and did not concern itself with issues involving other parts of the world.

The Spanish-American War grew out of the American public’s growing desire to expand American territory and interests and out of a general “war fever.”

Several of the larger American newspapers began to capitalize on the Cuban struggle for independence from Spain, sensationalizing abuses Spanish military forces were committing against the Cubans.

Public outrage reached its peak with the sinking of the battleship *Maine*, which was sent to the Havana harbor to protect U.S. citizens and property in Cuba. Though the cause of the explosion was never discovered, President McKinley approved a congressional resolution demanding immediate Spanish withdrawal from Cuba. A few days later Spain declared war.

The congressional resolution stated that the United States was not acting to secure an empire. However, the terms of the Treaty of Paris that officially ended the war required that Spain cede the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam to the United States. For good or ill, the United States had expanded. It had become a world power, admired by some who felt the United States now had an altruistic concern for smaller nations. Others detested the United States for what they believed to be imperialistic bullying of countries in its way.

1. According to this writer, what values of Americans most directly triggered the U.S. decision to enter the war against Spain in 1898?
 - (1) a desire to help and protect the less economically fortunate in this world
 - (2) a belief that democracy is the only fair form of government and that military rule is unjust
 - (3) an overriding desire to maintain peace and harmony in the Western Hemisphere
 - (4) an abhorrence of social injustice and a belief in their responsibility to the oppressed
 - (5) a sense of outrage about danger to American lives and property abroad
2. What change in American values resulted from the Spanish-American War?
 - (1) The public became more wary of electing indecisive candidates for high public office.
 - (2) Nationalism increased as Americans found ways to strengthen their internal society and economy.
 - (3) Standing apart from the rest of the world lost its importance and the United States saw itself as a player in international conflict.
 - (4) The U.S. adopted a materialistic policy of acquiring property and increasing capitalistic ventures inside and outside the United States.
 - (5) The public developed a cautious, wait-and-see attitude toward getting involved in further conflicts with other world powers.
3. Those who use the term “Yankee imperialist” against the United States would most likely also agree with which of the following?
 - (1) The Peace Corps was established to help Third World countries develop their own economic bases.
 - (2) Puerto Rico should be made a permanent colony of the United States.
 - (3) The United States had no right to invade the small Caribbean island of Grenada in 1983.
 - (4) The Philippines can blame its economic woes on the U.S. decision to grant it independence in 1946.
 - (5) The United States entered the Vietnam conflict because of its concern for the well-being of Southeast Asia.
4. From the information presented in the passage, which was not a contributing factor to the start of the Spanish-American War?
 - (1) American newspapers’ sensationalizing reports
 - (2) the sinking of the battleship *Maine*
 - (3) the American public’s “war fever”
 - (4) the United States’ policy of isolationism
 - (5) the demand for Spanish withdrawal from Cuba

Judging the Adequacy of Facts

Have you ever told one of your favorite jokes to a friend, only to have him or her appear bewildered after you delivered the punch line? If you considered why the joke failed, you may have learned that you omitted an important detail. When facts are lacking in a story, confusion or misinterpretation of the story is likely to result.

When important facts are omitted, you cannot make an informed decision. Suppose, for example, that you overheard a debate about the purchase of a new fleet of buses for your city's transit system. One group supports the buying of American-made buses. These buses cost more than the foreign-made buses that another group wants. To be able to judge how you feel about the issue, you need to know all the facts. You need to know

- the cost of each fleet of buses
- the city's financial situation
- the level of quality of the bus each company manufactures
- the impact the purchase of a foreign product over an American product is likely to have on American jobs

All of these considerations may have some influence on what your final position will be. Similarly, when you read social studies materials, you must be able to determine whether the facts are adequate to support the writer's conclusion or point of view.

Certain information is missing in each case below. On the line provided, indicate what facts are needed to answer each question.

Case 1

Intelligence (IQ) tests were improved dramatically by French psychologist Alfred Binet when he found a way to measure judgment, comprehension, and reasoning skills. In what ways could Binet have made his test bias-free, also?

You should have written *How are the tests biased?* In order to answer the question, you need to know in what ways the IQ test is biased.

Case 2

The number of registered voters in favor of gun control in a county increased by 50 percent before the last election. However, the defeated candidate for the U.S. Congress, who supported gun control, did not benefit directly from this increase in the number of registered voters. In fact, he lost the election by the same margin of votes as he did the last time he ran. Why didn't the candidate get more votes if the number of registered voters supporting his cause increased by 50%?

You should have written the question *How many of the registered voters in the county who support gun control actually voted in the election?* or

What were some of the other important issues in the election besides gun control? The fact that the information tells you that the number of registered voters increased by 50 percent does not mean they voted. Also, there is the possibility that even if they voted they might have chosen a different candidate on the basis of issues other than gun control.

GED PRACTICE

EXERCISE 5



Questions 1 and 2 are based on the following passage.

“Equality of right under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.” So read the Equal Rights Amendment proposed in 1972. Opponents of the amendment insisted, however, that it meant that anti-family, pro-abortion, pro-homosexual, and anti-privacy laws would be passed.

As a result, the amendment was defeated in 1982. Ten years had passed since the first of 35 states ratified it. Thirty of these states had approved the amendment within the first year of its proposal. By law, three-fourths of the state legislatures, or 38 states, had to approve it to make it a part of the U.S. Constitution.

If there had been more time, the amendment probably would have been ratified. In two major opinion polls just a few weeks before the ERA’s defeat, it was reported that the majority of American citizens supported the amendment.

1. Which of the statements in the article is *not* adequately supported by facts?
 - (1) A majority of Americans supported the ERA at the time of its defeat.
 - (2) Thirty-eight states needed to ratify the amendment to make it law.
 - (3) The ERA might have passed if there had been more time.
 - (4) Its opponents were fearful of the ramifications of the ERA.
 - (5) A clear majority of the states approved of the ERA.
2. Which of the following statements is supported by the information provided in the passage?
 - (1) Organizations working for the ERA had more popular support than governmental support.
 - (2) As a result of the defeat of the ERA, men are given more consideration in parental custody cases than they were before.
 - (3) Since the 1982 defeat of the ERA, single-parent, female-headed families have become more numerous and more poverty-stricken.
 - (4) Gay rights and welfare mothers’ groups supported the ERA and worked for its ratification.
 - (5) More female than male citizens were in favor of the ratification of the ERA.

Judging the Adequacy of Facts in Illustrations

There are many ways to represent facts in social studies. You have evaluated the adequacy of facts given in written materials. Now you will do much the same thing with maps and other illustrations.

Maps are used to represent information visually. “One picture is worth a thousand words,” says the old expression. Of course, different kinds of maps are used to illustrate different kinds of facts.

- *Topographical* maps show geographic land features of an area.
- *Population* maps explain the distribution of people in an area.
- *Political* maps can outline borders between countries or states, show trade relationships among countries, and indicate systems of government.
- *Weather* maps can show current or forecasted weather as well as climate.
- *World* maps include all of the world’s continents in a single picture.

Study the geographical map below and see how adequately it shows facts about the continent of Asia. Then read the statement following the map. Place an X in the space below to indicate whether the map is adequate or inadequate to support the fact. If the information is not adequate, write what kind of map from the list above would best show the kind of information needed.



Asia is the world’s largest continent and covers over one-third of the earth’s surface.

_____ adequate

_____ inadequate: a _____ map would show this.

You should have marked that the information on the map was *inadequate* and that a *world* map would be more appropriate.

EXERCISE 6

Directions: Use the map of Asia on the preceding page. Answer the following questions in the same way as in the preceding exercise.

- (1) The continent of Asia extends north and south of the Arctic Circle.
_____ adequate
_____ inadequate: a _____ map would show this better.
- (2) Asia contains many mountains, plains, plateaus, and river basins.
_____ adequate
_____ inadequate: a _____ map would show this better.
- (3) Some parts of Asia receive more than 80 inches of rain a year.
_____ adequate
_____ inadequate: a _____ map would show this better.
- (4) Asia is bordered by three oceans.
_____ adequate
_____ inadequate: a _____ map would show this better.
- (5) The countries that have the largest population and the greatest land masses are in Asia.
_____ adequate
_____ inadequate: a _____ map would show this better.
- (6) China is the largest Communist country in Asia.
_____ adequate
_____ inadequate: a _____ map would show this better.

Answers are on page 400.

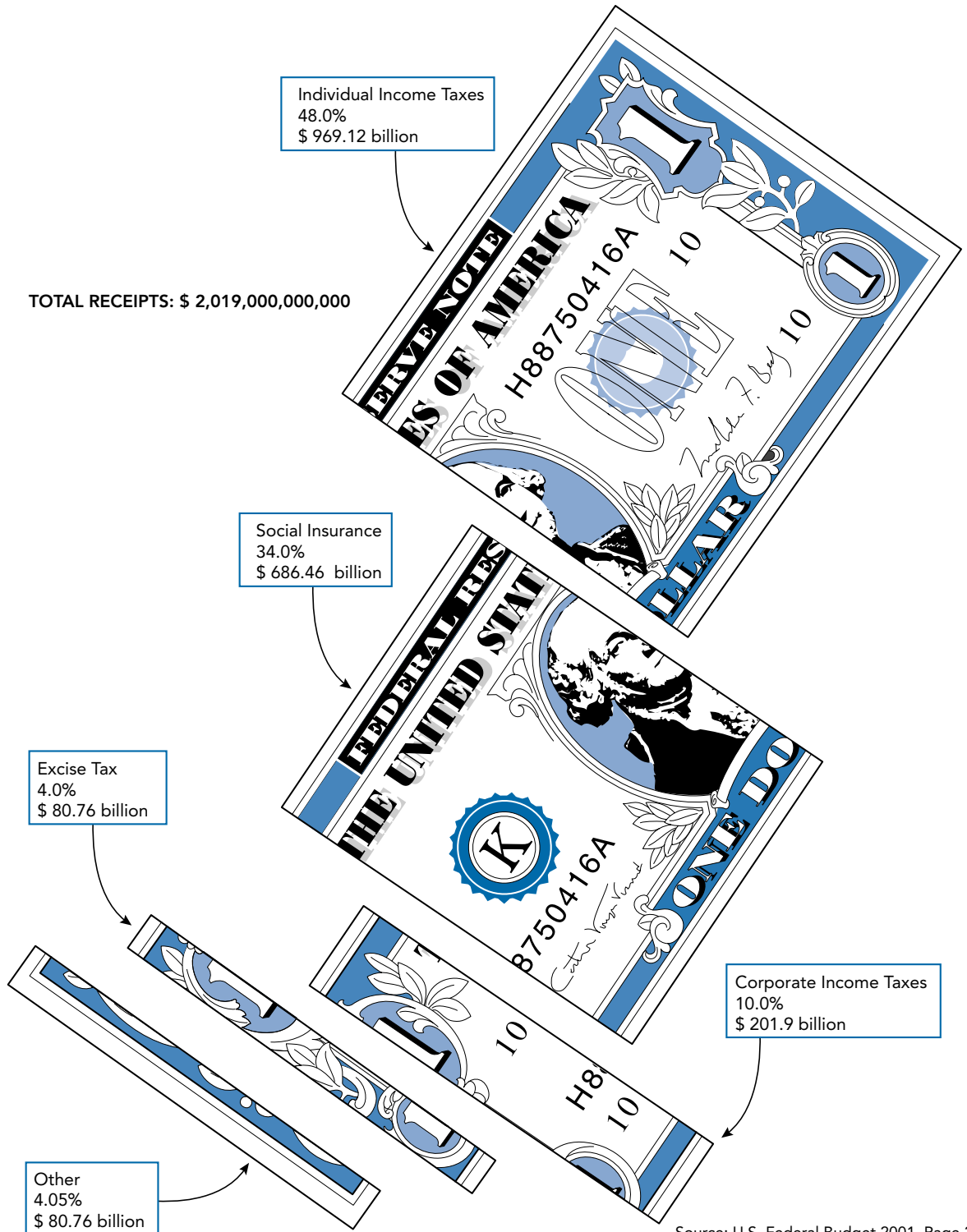
GED PRACTICE

EXERCISE 7



Questions 1 and 2 are based on the picture below.

The U.S. Federal Dollar —Fiscal Year 2001: Where the Money Comes From



Source: U.S. Federal Budget 2001, Page 2

1. Which of the following aspects of federal revenue is *not* shown adequately in this illustration?
 - (1) There were five major sources of money for the federal government in 2001.
 - (2) There are three types of taxes that help to support the federal government.
 - (3) The largest single source of money for the federal government is individual income taxes.
 - (4) The U.S. Congress decides how much money comes from each revenue source.
 - (5) Social insurance accounts for approximately one-third of government money.

2. Which of the following statements is supported adequately by the data provided by the illustration?
 - (1) Most of U.S. government revenue comes from corporate taxes, excise taxes, and other sources.
 - (2) Individuals contribute as much to the budget as corporations and social insurance put together.
 - (3) There is a strong anti-tax movement that is trying to give individual taxpayers a break.
 - (4) The U.S. government is looking for additional sources of revenue, since it currently does not have enough.
 - (5) The corporate lobby pressures Congress to keep corporate taxes low by saying that the economy will do better that way.

Answers are on page 400.

Comparing and Contrasting Different Viewpoints

Have you ever been startled to hear someone who witnessed the same event as you did describe it in a completely different way? In such moments you may ask yourself, Did we just see the same thing?

Earlier in this chapter you encountered the term *criteria* as it related to judging information. It is important to understand that the viewpoint and subsequent opinion someone has about something is often determined by the set of criteria that person has consciously or unconsciously set. For example, maybe you once went with a friend to see a movie. Afterwards you shared your opinions. You thought it was a good movie because it was the kind you liked. It made you laugh and you found it exciting. Your friend, however, gave it a “thumbs down” review because the acting was poor and the editing was unsophisticated and lacking in creativity. The two evaluations of the movie were completely different because you and your friend were judging it on the basis of different sets of criteria. Your criteria were based on the movie’s entertainment value for you as someone who likes the type of movie it was. Your friend’s criteria, on the other hand, involved the artistic qualities of the film.

Everyone perceives things differently, whether on the basis of criteria or because a person’s background and culture have such a powerful impact on how a person interprets the world and its events. Whenever you read or hear about a historical event, it is essential to keep this fact in mind.

We can learn about events of history in two ways: First, there are the accounts of people who experienced them. In this case we need to be aware of what the political and cultural environment was at the time of the event because that context influenced the way the event was both perceived and documented. Take, for example, the events concerning Native Americans during the course of European settlement in America.

Over a period of 200 years the native peoples of this country were routinely dispossessed of their land and ways of life. The U.S. government and white settlers frequently justified this treatment by portraying Indians as dangerous, uncivilized savages. Their desire for control of more and more land within the white culture of exploration and expansion established this perspective. The Indians, on the other hand, were of cultures that sought harmony with the natural world and had no ambitions for dominance, over either nature or over their new neighbors.

If you were an Iroquois tribesman existing peacefully in the northeastern forests, what would be your concern if you witnessed white trappers looting the woods of the animals on which your survival depended?

If you were a white frontiersman with a spirit of adventure and a belief that the seemingly endless expanses of forests, mountains, and plains were yours for the taking, how would you view the clusters of Indians, with their mysterious languages and customs, you continually encountered in your journey?

Clearly the perspective you would have as each of these people would be different from the other, although there might be a feeling of mistrust held in common. Which person would be likely to label the subsequent events of frontier expansion “heroic” and which one “devastating”? Which one would call it “progress” and which one “exploitation”?

Pontiac, Chief of the Ottawa people in the mid 1700s, led an armed struggle for Indian independence.



Francis Parkman judged Pontiac's efforts as a "conspiracy" and created a generalized portrait of Indians as savage and treacherous.



EXERCISE 8

Each of the quotations in the following items is from someone commenting on the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and represents a different view and set of concerns. Identify the likely speaker from the list below.

Possible Speakers:

- (a) an African American who refused the draft
- (b) an anti-war Vietnam veteran
- (c) a U.S. army officer
- (d) an American political leader
- (e) a soldier's widow

1. _____ "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?"
2. _____ "America wants peace with victory."
3. _____ "No Viet Cong ever enslaved me or my family."
4. _____ "It became necessary to destroy the town to save it."

Answers are on page 400.

Recognizing Logical Fallacies and Identifying Faulty Reasoning

You have practiced distinguishing conclusions from supporting details in a passage. An extension of that skill is the ability to identify logical fallacies in arguments or conclusions. People often draw illogical conclusions from the information they receive. Look at the following example.

Neighbor #1: What kind of trouble have you gotten yourself into?

Neighbor #2: I'm not in any trouble. What gave you that idea?

Neighbor #1: Come on, tell the truth! I saw the cops at your door last night.

Neighbor #2: Oh, those police officers. They weren't after me. I called them because it looks like some stuff has been stolen out of my garage.

Obviously, Neighbor #1 assumes that if police officers are talking to someone, that person has probably done something wrong. He does not consider that there could be other reasons for the officers' presence at his neighbor's door.

Read the following story. Find two logical fallacies in Marlena and Donnell's thinking.

Marlena Jackson is a working wife and mother. She works because she needs to help support her family financially. Her days are very hectic because she has to keep up with both work and home schedules. Marlena shops primarily at one chain grocery store because it sponsors games with prizes for customers. The prizes provide extras for the house, such as towels, cookware, and small appliances.

The food at this grocery store generally costs more than the food at a discount store a few miles away. This fact, however, just proves to Marlena that the more expensive store has better food.

Marlena drives an old, gas-guzzling car that is always in need of repair. Her husband, Donnell, knows how to fix it, though, so the repair costs are low. Insurance costs on the car are not high either, so Marlena assumes that the car is safe.

Despite all the money they spend on gas and repairs for the old car, it is still cheaper to keep it than it would be to buy a newer, smaller, more fuel-efficient car.

What logical fallacies did you find in the passage?

In the second paragraph above, the logical fallacy is concluding that *a more expensive store is a better store*. The cost of food can be affected by quality, but it can also be affected by other things, such as more lavish surroundings, higher-paid clerks, or more games and gimmicks that draw in customers.

In the third paragraph, it is not a logical argument that *lower insurance costs indicate safer cars*. That could be a reason for the lower premiums, but other factors such as low book value or lower replacement cost on the vehicle could also keep the cost low.

GED PRACTICE

EXERCISE 9



Questions 1 and 2 refer to the following passage.

Some African Americans can claim ancestors who arrived on the continent before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. Unfortunately, this just means that racial bias has always existed in the Americas, for most of the first African arrivals were slaves.

Slavery and indentured servitude were both employed initially because of an acute shortage of labor in the Americas. But there were glaring differences between the two systems from the beginning. Most indentured servants were white, and most served only four or five years. Most slaves were black, and most served for their entire lives. Inter-marriage between slaves and white servants, considered risky for the slave owner, was prohibited. The few free Negroes living in those early years had their liberties severely restricted, a practice sanctioned by the law. If it had not been for such laws, white Europeans immigrating to the United States would not have become so biased against blacks.

1. Which of the following is an illogical conclusion that is contained in the passage?
 - (1) Laws restricting the freedoms of the non-slave blacks in the early years of this country fostered the bias against them by the European immigrants.
 - (2) Some American blacks can claim ancestry on the continent for many more generations than many American whites can.
 - (3) Slavery and indentured servitude were both reactions to an economic need in the early development of the United States.
 - (4) The most glaring difference between indentured servants and slaves is that the servants usually served for just four or five years, whereas slaves served for a lifetime.
 - (5) Inter-marriage between blacks and whites was made illegal in the early years of the country because of a fear that slaves might run away and claim their freedom.

2. Why is the conclusion at the end of the passage illogical?

Because it

 - (1) is the opposite of what is shown to be true
 - (2) compares events of different generations
 - (3) is not based on supporting facts
 - (4) is unrelated to the topic being developed
 - (5) is true for only a limited number of cases

Answers are on page 401.