LESSON 17

Making Generalizations

A **generalization** is a conclusion that you can make after thinking about a number of examples or facts and what they have in common. Generalizations help you recognize an author's purpose and evaluate possible bias. Clue words that can signal a generalization include *all, none, most, many, always, everyone, never, sometimes, some, usually, seldom, few, generally, in general,* and *overall*.

Generalizations can be valid or faulty. A **valid** generalization is one that is supported by facts or logic. A **faulty** generalization is not completely supported by facts. As you read, look for generalizations the writer makes. Decide whether they are supported by facts.

Read the following paragraphs. As you read, think about generalizations the author makes. Also think about generalizations that you can make.

Crack! Lightning strikes a tree in the middle of the forest. Soon the dry underbrush is aflame. Before the fire can get out of hand, special firefighters are preparing to parachute from a plane. These firefighters, called smokejumpers, are usually in the air within ten minutes of the call.

Once the fire has been located and evaluated, smokejumpers jump to a safe spot nearby. Generally, smokejumpers begin by cutting down nearby sources of fuel for the fire and digging a trail that surrounds the fire. Both of these steps will usually contain the fire. Then the smokejumpers attack the fire itself, cooling it down with dirt and spading the burned area.

Decide whether the following sentence is a generalization. Explain your answer.

These firefighters, called smokejumpers, are usually in the air within ten minutes of the call.

_____

_____

Find a generalization in the second paragraph. Explain how you know it is a generalization.

_____

_____

_____

Tip

Clue words can help you spot generalizations, but some generalizations do not include clue words. If you can mentally add a clue word to a sentence without changing the meaning, then the statement is probably a generalization.

On Your Own

What is it like to be a smokejumper—a firefighter who parachutes to the location of wildfires? Veteran smokejumper Arlen Cravens is manager of the Region 5 Smokejumper Base in Redding, California. As you read the following interview with Mr. Cravens, look for generalizations that he makes, as well as generalizations you can make from what he says.

An Interview with Smokejumper ARLEN CRAVENS

Q: Have you always been a smokejumper?
A: I started out as a hot shot. Hot shot crews are twenty-person firefighting teams. They work as a single unit and are called in to fight the largest, most difficult wilderness fires. The smokejumper mission is the initial attack. Our motto is: "Hit 'em hard and keep 'em small."

Q: What made you want to become a smokejumper?
A: When I was in eighth grade, I was failing English. My teacher said that the only way I would pass was if I wrote a three-page paper on what I wanted to be when I grew up. So I went to the school library for ideas. They had a row of about eight or ten file cabinets. I started at A in the first cabinet. When I got to S, I saw something that looked like a deep-sea diver. I thought, "That looks interesting." It turns out that it was a smokejumper from Redding. I was interested!

Q: Were you a parachutist before you became a smokejumper?
A: No, we look for experienced wildland firefighters. We train them to become parachutists.

Q: What's the best part about being a smokejumper?
A: The camaraderie. There is great camaraderie among our crew and among the other 360 American smokejumpers. Smokejumping also provides a sense of accomplishment. Another exciting part is not knowing where you'll end up at the end of a day. We are based in Redding, but by nightfall we may be fighting a fire anywhere from the southern California Sierras to central Oregon.

Q: Are there any women smokejumpers?
A: Nationally, there are more than 30 female smokejumpers.

Q: How do you feel when you get a call?
A: Excited. When you're not working on a fire, you're maintaining the gear or exercising. You never know when the alarm will sound. When it does, you are ready and eager to answer the call.

Q: How long are you typically at a fire?
A: Normally, we're there two days and two nights. A three-day supply of food and water is dropped by parachute when we jump. Smokejumpers fight fires without water, and that takes time. When we leave, we leave with the fire out. We dig up the dirt, then we get down on our hands and knees and feel every inch to make sure it is cool.

Q: What special equipment do you use?
A: We wear fire-resistant jumpsuits with padding. We use chain saws and crosscut saws. We are probably the last experts in the use of the crosscut saw. That's the one with handles at each end for two people to use.

Q: What qualities do smokejumpers need?
A: Smokejumpers need desire, tenacity, and the ability to set a goal and stick to it.

Checking Comprehension

1. How is a smokejumper's work different from that of a regular firefighter?

_____

_____

2. What physical skills would someone probably need to be a smokejumper?

_____

_____

Practicing Comprehension Skills

Fill in the circle next to each answer. Then explain your choice by writing your answer on the lines.

3. Which of the following is a generalization, not a simple fact?

○ **a.** Normally, smokejumpers are at a fire for two days and two nights.

○ **b.** The smokejumper mission is the initial attack.

○ **c.** Hot shot crews are teams of 20 firefighters.

○ **d.** The smokejumpers in Region 5 cover the territory from the southern Sierras to central Oregon.

4. **Explanation:** _____

_____

5. Which of the following generalizations is valid, based on facts in the interview?

○ **a.** Any parachutist can become a smokejumper.

○ **b.** Smokejumpers usually use water to put out fires.

○ **c.** Smokejumpers always need to be able to work well with others.

○ **d.** All smokejumpers were on hot shot crews before they became smokejumpers.

6. **Explanation:** _____

_____

7. Which of the following generalizations is faulty, judging from the interview?

- ○ **a.** Smokejumping is often unpredictable work.
- ○ **b.** In general, smokejumping is much like deep-sea diving.
- ○ **c.** Some smokejumpers are women.
- ○ **d.** Smokejumpers are usually busy, even when they are not fighting fires.

8. **Explanation:** _____

_____

9. Complete the following statement with a generalization you can make based on facts from the text or your previous knowledge and experience.

All smokejumpers need to be _____

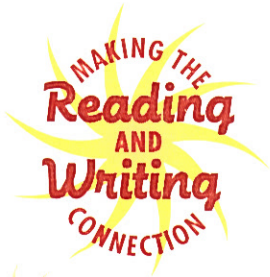
_____

Practicing Vocabulary

Choose the word from the box that best fits each blank in the paragraph. Write the correct words on the blanks.

10. When the request came into the dispatcher's office, the smokejumpers were _____ their equipment. Quickly they suited up for their _____ and boarded the plane. There was a friendly spirit of _____ as they prepared to spend three days together in the rugged _____ . A _____ is both a firefighter and a trained _____ , and soon the crew was parachuting from the plane in small groups. They were ready to fight the fire with great _____ .

camaraderie
maintaining
mission
parachutist
smokejumper
tenacity
wilderness



Writing an Advertisement

Create a recruiting poster for smokejumpers. Include generalizations about the work and about the kind of person who would find this job exciting and fulfilling. Use a separate sheet of paper for your poster.