“The Dinner Party” by Mona Gardner

I. Pre-Reading Vocabulary

Directions: Write the definition next to each of the following words.

1. Spacious:
2. Impulse:
3. Forfeit:
4. Emerge:
5. Attache:
6. Naturalist:
7. Veranda:
8. Rafters:
9. Arresting:
10. Rupees:
11. Sobers:

II. Plot Development (Please remember that in fiction there is always a conflict AND the conflict “drives” the plot.)

1. Exposition (background information): Paragraph 1
   * setting is India; 1940’s; in a spacious dining room opening to a veranda
   * a colonial official and his wife (Mr. and Mrs. Wynnes) are giving a dinner party
   * many guests are in attendance

2. Rising Action (the first event that gets the action going): Paragraph 2
   *the discussion between the colonel and the young girl

3. Conflict (the problem in the story): Paragraph 3
   *debate: does a woman have as much self-control as a man?

4. Climax/Turning Point (the high point of the story): Paragraph 9
   *when the snake goes for the milk

5. Falling Action/Denouement (tying up “loose” ends) Paragraph 9
   *the American slams the door shut

6. Resolution/Conclusion (the problem is solved): Paragraph 12
   *Mrs. Wynnes knew the cobra was in the room because it crawled across her foot

7. Theme (the main idea of the story, aka, the Author’s Purpose)
   *Perhaps the author is trying to show that self-control is not determined by gender
III. Questions for Thought

Directions: Answer the following questions in complete sentences. Be sure to proofread your answers.

1. What is the American’s true motivation for asking Mrs. Wynnes how she knew about the snake?

2. Why doesn’t the American warn the other guests about the cobra? What can we infer (conclude; deduce; gather) about his character?

3. How does the colonel from India believe women act in the face of a crisis?

4. During the dinner party, what makes the cobra come out?

5. How does the American challenge the guests at the dinner party? Why?

6. Why do people scream as the American slams the door safely shut? How does this prove the American’s theory about the guests was accurate?

7. Why do the guests believe the colonel’s argument was right?

8. How does Mrs. Wynnes’ reaction to the snake and the way she handled the situation prove the colonel’s argument can be challenged?
IV. Critical Thinking

Directions: Choose the letter of the answer that best completes each statement.

1. In “The Dinner Party,” a young girl and a colonel have a difference of opinion. The conclusion of the story suggests that
   a. The colonel was right
   b. The young girl was right
   c. There is no evidence to support either argument

2. Probably, a “strange expression” came over the face of the hostess because she
   a. Saw the cobra in the corner of the room
   b. Was unhappy that two of her guests were arguing
   c. Realized there was a cobra under the table

3. We may infer that the American decided to count to three hundred because he
   a. Wanted to find out which guest had the most control
   b. Thought it would make an amusing party game
   c. Realized it might take five minutes for the cobra to come out

4. Which statement is true of both the American and Mrs. Wynnes?
   a. They were guests at a dinner party
   b. They were attacked by a cobra
   c. They were quick-thinking

V. Writing:

Directions: Write a well-constructed short response to the following questions.

1. People often make assumptions about others. In Mona Gardner’s short story, the colonel from India boasts to others that a woman’s unfailing reaction to any crisis is to scream. What is your opinion of the colonel’s comments? With whom do you think the author agrees? Explain your position.

2. Suppose the American had said nothing at all to the guests. How do you think the story would have ended?