Recognizing Sarcasm and Irony

Sarcasm: a type of humor that involves saying the opposite of what is meant or expected.

Examples of Sarcasm:

Thanks for all the help.
What someone might say after doing all the work by themselves with no help from others.

Oh, what lovely weather.
On walking outside and finding that it was cold and rainy.

Would you like a little cereal with your milk?
What my husband said after I poured a very large glass of milk over my small bowl of cereal.

Great outfit!
Said to someone who was dressed in an outlandish way with mismatched clothing.

I’m sure he’ll love that.
You answer this when I say I’m going to make my husband go shopping with me this weekend.

That was a quick wait. Your office really works efficiently.
When you wait over an hour to be seen by your doctor and are finally called in to his office.

Sometimes Americans can be sarcastic by adding the word “NOT” after a sentence. Example: You asked me if I would like to babysit your three children. I answer, “Oh yes, I would love to spend all day Saturday with your triplets. NOT!”

Sometimes we say, “yeah, right” to indicate that we don’t agree. Example:
Joe: If you exercise just 5 minutes a day on this new machine, I guarantee you’ll lose twenty pounds a week.
Jan: Yeah, right. I believe that.

Tony: Mrs. Jones if you excuse me for being late this time, I promise I’ll never be late again.
Mrs. Jones: Yeah, right. I’ve heard that before, Tony.

Irony is very similar to sarcasm, but irony can be applied to situations that are not at all humorous. For example:

A small town invested in a new ambulance so that patients could get to the hospital quicker. But in the first traffic accident where the new ambulance would have been useful, it could not be used because the ambulance was involved in the wreck.

The irony is that the ambulance was supposed to be the cure for a problem and ended up being part of the problem.

It is ironic when the town’s fire station burns down.
It is ironic when an Olympic swimmer drowns in his bathtub.
It is ironic when a bridge is built to an island to allow the people to reach the mainland easily. But by the time the bridge is built, everyone on the island has moved to the mainland. So the bridge is no longer needed.
A teacher writes a note home to the parent complaining of their son’s spelling mistakes. In the note, the teacher misspelled several words. This is ironic.
**Conversation 1:**
Jill: Look at these photographs. Aren’t they hysterical?
Brenda: Who are these people and why are they dressed so funny?
Jill: These are my great grandparents. They came from Austria. That’s the way people dressed in the old days.
Brenda: Do you remember them?
Jill: No, they died before I was born.
Brenda: Look at that top hat. Was your great granddad in the circus?
Jill: No, he was a banker. People wore hats like that in those days.
Brenda: Look how long the women’s dresses were. Those must have been really hot.
Jill: I suppose you got used to them.
Brenda: I think I would probably step on the hem all the time. And think how muddy the bottoms of your skirt would get when it rained.
Jill: There’s no question fashions are more comfortable now.
Brenda: I wonder if our great grand kids will laugh at our pictures in a hundred years.
Jill: How could they. We look so cool.

Is Jill’s last comment sarcastic?
Pretend you are looking at a family album with a friend. Comment on what you see.

**Conversation 2:**
John: Hey, Ben what’s up?
Ben: Not too much. Just killing time. Waiting for my sister to get out of class.
John: Have you met my cousin, Greg?
Ben: No, nice to meet you. You look like you’re ready for a tennis game.
Greg: Yes I play whenever I get a chance. Do you play?
Ben: It’s been years. I used to play in high school, but haven’t touched a racket lately. Do you live here now?
Greg: No, I’m just spending a few days with my aunt and uncle.
John: We’d better get moving, Greg. The tennis courts are several blocks away.
Greg: Nice to have met you, Ben. Maybe we can get together for a game of tennis while I’m here.
Ben: Sure, that would be great.

Now, without looking at this lesson, try to repeat the gist of this conversation.

**Conversation 3:**
Andy: I hear you’re going on vacation tomorrow?
Pat: Yes, I’m taking the family to Disney World in Orlando.
Andy: Have you been before?
Pat: No, I’ve always wanted to go. The kids are the perfect age now to enjoy all the rides.
Andy: Are you flying or driving?
Pat: We’re flying. It takes too long to drive and my kids really get bored after hours in the car. It’s expensive to fly, but worth it. We will get to spend more time enjoying the vacation and less time getting there.
Andy: When I took my kids there, it was so crowded that we spent hours standing in lines.
Pat: That’s why we are going in the fall. I hear it’s really bad in the summertime. I’m taking the kids out of school.
Andy: Is that a good idea? Won’t they miss a lot?
Pat: The teacher has agreed to send their lessons along. The kids can work on them on the plane.
Andy: I’m sure they’ll love that!

Is Andy being sarcastic? Talk about a vacation you’ve been on recently.