COULD / COULD HAVE

= POSSIBLE, BUT IT DIDN’T HAPPEN

COULDN’T / COULDN’T HAVE

= IMPOSSIBLE

(COULDA)
(COULD’TA)
Possibility / Impossibility in the Past

could have = possible, but didn’t do it

I could have worked overtime. (but I didn’t)
She could have helped me. (but she didn’t)

couldn’t have = impossible

A: I saw your sister at the library.
B: You couldn’t have seen her. She was home all day.
A: I moved that piano by myself.
B: You couldn’t have moved it. It’s too heavy.

Exercise 1

Directions:

Ron and Gloria are talking about a different direction their lives could have taken. They are discussing what they did and what they could have done instead. Fill in the blanks for each sentence.

1. We got married at home, but we ______________________ in a church.

2. We spent our honeymoon in San Francisco, but we ________________ it at Disneyland.

3. We bought a house, but we _____________________ a condo.

4. We bought our house in the city, but we _________________________ one in the suburbs.

5. We ______________________ children, but we decided not to have any.

6. I (Gloria) _________________ a housewife, but I decided to have a career.
Exercise 2

Each of the following sentences is impossible. Why? Use couldn’t have in your response.

1. The Pope (leader of the Catholic Church) gave his wife flowers for her birthday.
2. President Kennedy ran for reelection in 1964.
3. We had an English test on December 25th.
5. It snowed lay May in Seattle.
7. I took the ferry from Seattle to Edmonds Community College.
8. Your teacher did his/her elementary school homework on computer.