

MAKING INFERENCES

Authors do not always tell readers everything they want them to know. Good readers infer when they want to understand more than what the author has written. Inferring occurs when you understand something that is not stated directly. We infer when we try to read facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. For example, if you saw a friend looking upset and holding his arm at recess, you might infer that he hurt himself on the playground. We infer in many ways in our lives.

Inferring when we read is like putting a puzzle together in our minds. Readers combine their own background experience and what the author has written like pieces of a puzzle. They use their own background knowledge and clues from the text to create new meaning. Putting the pieces of the puzzle together helps readers draw conclusions based on clues from the text, make predictions about what will come, understand underlying themes, and construct new meaning. Inferring makes reading much more interesting!

Readers also infer because sometimes we have lots of questions that are not answered in the text. Sometimes authors want readers to think of different possible answers. Sometimes we change our inferences as we read on and find out more information. Good readers ask themselves questions and make inferences based on their prior knowledge and clues from the text.

When inferring, readers say things to themselves like, *“I think”* *“This must mean that ...”* *“Based on this, I’m guessing that ...”* *“I predict ... because ...”* *“I think that happened because...”*

Inferences are conclusions that the reader makes based on evidence from the text and his or her own experience. Here is how you infer:

- Ask yourself questions as you read
- Think about what the author tells you
- Think about your own experiences
- Make a conclusion (an inference) based on the information you thought about

INFERENCE LESSON

LESSON INTRODUCTION

Explain what the strategy is and explain how, when and why readers use this strategy. Pick a picture book, poem, or short excerpt to model this strategy.

It is important to learn how to infer meaning when we are reading. Inferring means to understand something that the author does not tell you directly. We sometimes call this "reading between the lines." Successful readers use this strategy because authors don't always tell you everything they want you to know. They give you clues, but you sometimes need to put those clues together to get meaning.

We infer in many ways in our lives. For example, we read facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice to figure out how people are feeling. If you saw a friend looking upset and holding his arm at recess, you might infer that he hurt himself on the playground. Making inferences in reading is a lot like other inferences that we make.

Inferring in reading is like putting a puzzle together in our minds. Readers combine their own background knowledge and what the author has written like pieces of a puzzle. They use their background knowledge and clues from the text to create new meaning. Putting the pieces of the puzzle together in their minds helps readers draw conclusions based on clues from the text, make predictions about what will come next, understand underlying themes, and construct new meaning. Inferring makes reading much more interesting!

Readers also make inferences because sometimes we have lots of questions that are not answered in the text. Sometimes authors want readers to think of different possible answers or explanations. Sometimes we change our inferences when we read on and find out more information. Successful readers ask themselves questions and make inferences based on their prior knowledge and clues from the text.

Inferences are conclusions that you make based on evidence from the text and your own experience. Here is how you infer:

- 1. Ask yourself questions as you read.*
- 2. Think about what the author tells you.*
- 3. Think about your own experience.*
- 4. Make an inference based on the information you thought about.*

MODELING THE STRATEGY

Demonstrate how you use the strategy while reading the sample text and stopping to think aloud as you read. Explain to students that you will be sharing what you are thinking as you read. This lets your students see and hear the invisible, cognitive processes of reading. Select a piece of text to use as you model.

Now I am going to model how I infer information that is not given to me directly. I want you to listen for how what goes on in my head as I do this. I will read the text aloud and

I will stop reading at certain points to tell you exactly what I am thinking as I read. It will be like a tape recording has captured my thoughts so that you can hear them.

First, I look at the title and cover. I also might look at the illustrations as I'm reading. I think of questions that I have in my mind before I start reading and as I'm reading. I wonder ... (write down things you wonder on a chart titled, "I wonder...").

Now I will read the text and I will stop when I think that I have come to something that is important. I will write that down on a sticky note and place it next to that part of the text. [or whatever teaching tool you are using, such as the Making Inferences handout -- See Independent Practice below]. Read aloud and stop at crucial points and make notes, continuing to think aloud to explain why you stopped where you did and why you think the information is important.

As you model, be sure to articulate what you are doing inside your head. Be as specific as you can so that students hear not only *what* you are doing, but also *why* it helps you as you read. This is the most critical component of modeling.

For example, when you come to a part where you can make an inference, stop and say, *Since the author told me _____ and I know from my background knowledge _____, I infer that _____. I use clues from the text and combine those with what I already know to make an inference. Even though the author has not explicitly stated this, I can infer that this is true. Inferring makes reading more interesting, and I understand a lot more from what I read.*

Continue modeling how to make inferences. Explain to students that when inferring, readers say things to themselves like, *"I think"* *"This must mean that ..."* *"Based on this, I'm guessing that ..."* *"I predict ... because ..."* *"I think that happened because..."*

GUIDED PRACTICE

After you have explicitly modeled the strategy, guide students to practice. For this part of the lesson, use an overhead transparency or provide a copy so that all students can see the text. Guide to help you with the strategy. They can think in pairs or small groups and then share their ideas with the entire class.

Just as you demonstrated in the modeling, the purpose of guided practice is to guide students to use the strategy as well as to be able to think aloud about what they are doing in their heads.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Provide an opportunity for students to practice this strategy on their own. The class should all be using the same text so that you can informally assess how they are applying the strategy.

You can use a variety of "teaching tools" to help students refine their ability to infer:

INFERENCES ABOUT CHARACTERS: See below

EVIDENCE/EXPERIENCE/INFERENCE: See below

PREDICTING OUTCOMES: See below

Additional teaching tools and lesson ideas:

http://classes.seattleu.edu/masters_in_teaching/teed521/professor/Literacy/stratinstruct.html

DEBRIEFING

Ask students to explain the strategy in their own words. See if they can explain why they need to use it and how they use it while reading. In the debriefing, it is important for students to be able to articulate what they say inside their heads as they use the strategy.

Name _____

Date _____

INFERENCES ABOUT CHARACTERS

Authors do not always tell the reader everything about a character. Readers must use clues from the story and their own background knowledge (what you already know) to fill in the rest of the picture. Combining what you know with clues from the story helps you to infer.

When making an inference, remember to

- Think about evidence from the story
- Think about your own experiences that fit with that evidence

NAME OF CHARACTER _____

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE CHARACTER

What the author tells us:

What we can infer: