

Strategies for Inferring when we read



Using what we already know AND evidence when we read.

In everyday life, observations occur when we can see something happening. In contrast, inferences are what we figure out based on an experience. Helping students understand when information is implied, or not directly stated, will improve their skill in drawing conclusions and making inferences. Inferential thinking is a complex skill that will develop over time and with experience.

The comprehension strategy of “inferring” is usually referred to as “reading between the lines”. This strategy usually involves:

- Forming a best guess using evidence -- context clues, picture clues, etc.
- Making predictions
- Drawing conclusions
- Finding meaning of unknown words

Why teach inference?

- Inference is a “foundational skill” — a prerequisite for higher-order thinking and 21st century skills (Marzano, 2010)
- Inference skills are used across the curriculum, including English language arts, science and social studies.
- Because inferring requires higher order thinking skills, it can be difficult for many students. However, it can be taught through explicit instruction in inferential strategies

Most of us are constantly inferring things about the world around us and have been since a fairly young age. The trick is to help kids learn how to do it with text. Here are some suggestions for helping your child to learn this skill.

Be Sure your child knows what inference is (and what it isn't)

Inference is using facts, observations, and logic or reasoning to come to an assumption or conclusion. It is not stating the obvious (stating the obvious: that girl is wearing a fancy dress and carrying a bouquet of flowers. inference: that girl is a flower girl in a wedding). It is not prediction, though the two are definitely related. Remind your children that inference asks,

“What conclusions can you draw about what is happening now?” Prediction asks, “What will happen next?”

Let them know they are already experts

Find ways to show how they infer things all the time. Here are some fun suggestions for demonstrating this idea:

- Show a picture of a person with a t-shirt on from an event such as a charity run, concert, or theater performance. Ask your child what they can infer from the clothing choice. You could also try a picture of a person in exercise clothing, or dressed up for a certain occasion etc.
- Show your child a [photograph of a person they do not know and ask them what could tell about him if they did not already know him, just by looking. For example, his eyesight is not very good (he is wearing glasses). He likes the Seahawks (he is wearing a Seahawks T-shirt). He walked in some mud on his way to school (there is some mud caked on his shoes).

Use pictures

Picture books are, of course, a wonderful source for pictures that can be used for inference. They make a terrific bridge from pictures to text. Here is a list of [Inference Picture Books](#) from Amazon. You may have one of these at home. Before you read the text, ask your child what they can learn from the pictures. Comics are another great source for inference pictures. Cut or block out the captions and speech bubbles, and have your child discuss what they see.

Ask questions

Ask inference questions while reading aloud from both literature and nonfiction selections. Guide your child to use inference questions when reading independently. Perhaps start with these two simple questions:

- What is my inference?
- What information did I use to make the inference?

Make it a challenge

Have children practice creating inferences as well as identifying them by issuing an Inference Challenge. You could do this orally, but it would make a terrific writing task as well. Basically, an Inference Challenge is another way to “Show, don’t tell.” Some examples of Inference Challenges:

- Create a character who is very smart without actually saying he or she is smart.
- Write about a very cold afternoon without saying that it is cold.
- Write about an old car without saying that it is old.
- Write about somewhere that is scary without saying that it is a scary place.

Make it fun

Coming up with inferences is a bit like solving a puzzle or a mystery. Older children will enjoy [Two-Minute Mysteries](#) by Donald J. Sobel. For younger children, check out this set of [101 Online Inference Riddles](#) from Phil Tulga.