

Comprehension Strategy - Drawing Inferences

Debbie Miller states in her book, *Reading with Meaning*, "I remember when I wasn't even sure what inferring was, let alone how to go about teaching it."

Hopefully, after reading this section and learning about activities we can do with our students we won't be stuck anymore.

What is Inference? - *Guided Reading the Four Blocks Way*, page 46 states, "When you read, you use all your senses. You see things in your "mind's eye" and hear the sounds you connect to that about which you are reading. When you really get into what you are reading, you can sometimes almost taste, smell, and feel the physical sensations you would actually have if you were in that situation. You get "lost" in the book and may sometimes be startled if someone interrupts your reading. ... As you read, you imagine the situation about which you are reading, and you infer things the author has not told you in the text. You infer why things happen, why characters behave the way they do, and how characters are feeling. You enter the world created by the author, and you create images and inferences based on what the author tells you and your own knowledge and beliefs about that world.

The imaging and inferring thinking process is the perfect complement to the summarizing and concluding thinking process. In order to summarize and conclude, you usually read part-to-whole -- synthesizing word meanings into sentence meanings, sentence meanings into paragraph meanings, and so forth. In order to image and infer, however, you do the opposite - you usually read whole-to-part. You use your background knowledge and your understanding of the sections and paragraphs to image and infer events or features not stated in sentences. You use your background knowledge and understanding of the sentences to image and infer details not given in those sentences."

Strategies That Work, Chapter 8 **Visualizing and Inferring: Strategies That Enhance Understanding**

On page 105 of *Strategies That Work*, inferring is defined, "Inferring is the bedrock of comprehension, not only in reading. We infer in many realms. Our life clicks along more smoothly if we can read the world as well as text. If our boss looks grumpy in the morning, it might not be the best day to ask for a raise. ... Inferring is about reading faces, reading body language, reading expressions, and reading tone as well as reading text.

Mosaic of Thought adds this information regarding defining inference on page 23, "Drawing inferences from text. Proficient readers use their prior knowledge (schema) and textual information to draw conclusions, make critical judgments, and form unique interpretations from text. Inferences may occur in the form of conclusions, predictions, or new ideas."

Prediction or Inference

Stephanie Harvey writes, "To help our students understand the difference, we encourage them to consider the outcome of an event or action each time they make a prediction and notice whether there has been a resolution. After reading notice if a prediction was contradicted (-) or confirmed (+). He left those that were unresolved coded with only I for inference (*Strategies That Work*, pages 108-109)."

According to Keene (*Mosaic of Thought* author)

Readers who infer...

- Draw conclusions about their reading by connecting the text with their background knowledge
- Synthesize new ideas and information
- Create unique understandings of the text they are reading
- Make predictions about the text, confirm or disconfirm those predictions based on textual information, and text their developing comprehension of the text as they read
- Extend their comprehension beyond literal understandings of the printed page

Page 229 of *Mosaic of Thought*

Infers

[Select an event or fact that would call for a conclusion or interpretation. Refer to the event or fact when asking questions under number 2 below.]

1. [For narrative text] Can you predict what is about to happen? Why did you make that prediction? Can you point to (or identify) something in the book that helped you to make that prediction? [Or] What do you already know that helped you to make that prediction?
2. What did the author mean by _____? What in the story (text) helped you to know that? What do you already know that helped you to decide that?
3. We have just discussed (talked about) predicting and inferring. [Restate child's response.] What do you understand now that you didn't understand before?

Page 121 of *Reading With Meaning*

What's Key for Kids?

- Readers determine meanings of unknown words by using the schema, paying attention to textual and picture clues, rereading, and engaging in conversations with others.
- Readers make predictions about text and confirm or contradict their predictions as they read on.
- Readers use their prior knowledge and textual clues to draw conclusions and form unique interpretations of text.
- Readers know to infer when the answers to their questions are not explicitly stated in the text.
- Readers create interpretations to enrich and deepen their experience in a text.

Page 78 of *Guided Reading the Four Blocks Way*

Thinking Strategy: Image / Infer

"Even though it isn't in the picture, I can see the..."

"Mmm, I can almost taste the..."

"It sent chills down my spine when it said..."

"For a minute, I thought I could smell..."

"I could hear the..."

"I can imagine what it is like to ..."

"I can picture the..."

Comprehension and Reasoning

Reading Between and Beyond the Lines

WHY

Comprehension is interactive meaning that what the reader brings to the text (information, ideas, and experiences) and uses during the reading event interacts with the surface level information the author provides. Readers are able to create inferences, or think inferentially, when they are able to connect the language clues an author provides with their own experiences, constructing understandings beyond what is explicitly stated in the text. Inferences are continuous and are the mark of ongoing, meaningful comprehension.

Inferences fall into several categories:

- object
- time
- agent
- location
- feelings / attitudes
- action
- instrument
- cause / effect
- problem / solution

WHO

This strategy is appropriate for all readers, but is especially appropriate for readers who are not yet able to dip into their background knowledge, combine it with textual information or clues, and develop understandings the author assumes we get without actually stating.

HOW

Inferential thinking can be demonstrated first by using cloze procedures with either portions of texts or entire texts. Begin by creating a simple cloze statement by deleting one word from an informational sentence. Invite readers to combine what they know about the syntactic and semantic knowledge of language with their schema and generate possible words that would make sense in the cloze blank.

NOTE: It is important that the readers have background knowledge about a text they are to read if they are expected to read inferentially. If they do not have the experience portion of the equation (word clues + experience = inferences) no matter how many words the author utilizes, readers will not be able to think inferentially about the text.

I see the Guess The Covered Word Strategy as one way to do this activity.

Strategies That Work

Visualizing and Inferring to Understanding Textbooks

Page 111-114

Read some text.

Write what we know.

Write what we infer or interpret.

Facts (Something We Can See and Observe)	Inferences (Interpretation)
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Strategies That Work

Inference and Questioning

Pages 114-115

Inferring and questioning go hand in hand to build understanding. As they read students asked questions to clarify their uncertainty and made inferences about the thoughts and actions. When students say things like, "Well, maybe it means..." or "I wonder..." we are quick to label these comments as inference, but even when the a question is generated, an inference is rarely far behind. Inferring and questioning are next of kin.

Questions	Inferences

Reading With Meaning

Chapter 8: Inferring

Pages 105-121

See page 108-109 for specific example

What can you do to help yourself figure out the meaning of a word? Read on!

We are learning about inferring as a comprehension strategy proficient readers use to better understand their reading.

Word	What we infer it means	What helped us?

Debbie Miller says, "Think a minute about what you just saw and heard me doing to infer the meanings of words I didn't understand. What did you notice? Children noticed I was:

- rereading
- paying attention to the words
- looking closely at the pictures
- using my schema
- taking my time
- thinking really hard

After reading the book for a second time the children wrote a **C** for confirmed or a **X** on top when our definition is contradicted by the book's glossary.

Debbie Miller continues by setting a purpose for reading today stating on page 109, "In your reading today, if you come across a word and you don't understand what it means, think about what we've

"Why Teach with Poems? As students encounter more complex text, they are often expected to infer setting and other important elements. In many poems and novels, the author begins without explicitly telling the reader when or where the story is taking place. It is important for readers to begin to use the clues in the text to determine setting (Beyond Leveled Books, page 19)"

Materials Suggestion:

Creatures of the Earth, Sea, and Sky written by Georgia Heard

Baseball, Snakes, and Summer Squash written by Donald Graves

Teachers should choose enough poems that lend themselves best to dramatic interpretation so your children will have choice and will be able to work in small groups. Provide the students with their own copies or copy them onto chart papers and post in the front of where you gather the children to read. To build fluency repeated readings are necessary. The children read and reread them until they read all the words fluently. Each child chooses one poem that is the most interesting to him/her. Teacher might say, "What is this poem really about? Choose one that you'd like to understand better." The children work in small groups building on each other's ideas to explain how your group can best interpret the poem you've chosen. Debbie Miller explains, "this allows the children to mark up the text, recording their thinking as it evolves, and in the end come up with what they think the poem or text is about."

Name
Date
Inferring for meaning with poetry

(poem written in this space)	_____

I'm inferring...

Reading With Meaning

Chapter 8: Inferring

Pages 114-115

Readers know to infer when the answers to their questions are not explicitly stated in the text.

Choose a book that provides a lot of questions, most of them requiring readers to infer answers by using clues in the text and their prior knowledge. Choose content that is difficult for students to read independently.

Read a few pages and begin recording some questions that pop into your head. After a few pages invite the children to share their questions and add them to the list the teacher has already started. By the end of the story, there should be a long list of questions.

After school record the questions on chart paper.

Read the text again to figure out the answers. Teacher should model aloud using her schema, the pictures, and the words in the text to help me infer answers; gradually I invite children to do the same, recording our thinking on the chart.

Vocabulary Strategy - **Connect Two**

WHO Students of all ages and reading abilities may benefit from this lesson.

WHY This lesson exposes students to new vocabulary words or phrases before reading a selection. Students aren't given definitions, but are encouraged to use their prior knowledge in order to predict which words could be connected and to give reasons for their predictions. This helps to set a purpose for reading because it arouses student curiosity and at the same time, it stimulates any background knowledge they may have.

WHAT You will need to choose vocabulary words from a selection, a chapter, a unit, etc. The text may be narrative or expository. The number of words is up to a teacher's discretion.

HOW List the words on chart paper. Ask students if they can predict which of these terms might be connected to each other to tell why. Accept all responses, reminding students that these are merely predictions. Words might be used more than once. Keep the chart up and public and in use so that the children can adjust their thinking on the chart. If an additional connection is found during the reading of the text, it can be added to the chart.

WRITING IN RESPONSE TO READING

Have the students write their initial responses in a journal or literature log using the same format:

<p>I would connect _____ and _____ because</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
--

Have the students share their ideas with a partner, small group or whole group.

After reading

An important point to discuss when debriefing this strategy is how the initial vocabulary words were selected. Sharing the thinking behind how a teacher determines challenging vocabulary that is vital to comprehending a text helps to elevate this strategy to a level of independent use for students.

Facts (Something We Can See and Observe)	Inferences (Interpretation)

Questions	Inferences

Word	What we infer it means	What helped us?