

Cook's Corner

November

An Observation is What You See!

An Inference is What You Figure Out!

An inference is a prediction or deduction about something in written text often to do with what the character may see, hear, smell, taste or feel. An inference contrasts sharply with mere observation, or literal language.

For instance, an **observation** may be... *'It was a hot day and Billy sweated, so he stripped to his shorts to get cool.'*

An **inference** would be more like... *'Billy stood in the shade of a tree, that helped beat back some of the heat. He changed into his shorts and put sunscreen on his skin.'*

The observation presents only the facts. We know it's a hot day because it states, *'it was a hot day and Billy sweated.'*

In the above inference example, there is nothing stated *explicitly* about it being a hot day.

But the reader can infer that it's a hot day by the information presented, such as *'the shade of the tree beating back the heat; and Billy changed into his shorts and applied sunscreen.'* All of the language strongly suggests that it is a hot day.



What can parents do?

- ✿ Ask her, “What do you think,” and “What struck you here?”
- ✿ Explain that we make inferences all day long, not just when we read.
- ✿ Encourage a conversation about this. (Dad looks tired tonight — how can we tell? Jennifer knows not to reach for a toy at the checkout counter — it’s the expression on Mom’s face, of course!)
- ✿ Model your own behind-the-scenes thinking: this technique is called a “think-aloud.” Say, “Hmm; I was getting worried when Clifford started to play with the electrical cords because I know that...”
- ✿ Build inference skills with quick word games like twenty questions: children try to guess the identity of a mystery person or thing by asking questions — if they can’t guess, the asker gets a point!
- ✿ Wonder out loud, for example, “Where are the ants hiding?” When the child replies, ask, “What clues helped you figure that out? Show me the words!”

- ✿ Similarly, when they have used context to puzzle out the meaning of an unknown word, inquire, “What helped you figure that out?”
- ✿ Let your child develop and retain or dismiss conclusions; help him to talk about the process he’s using.
- ✿ Predict what the next page will hold; explain why you think so. Let the child agree or not and defend his position.
- ✿ Get at a “big picture” or a possible life lesson intended by the author (if there is one) by talking about the title, or about certain things that happen over and over. Show how understanding evolves bit by bit, depending on the turn of events.

Great Books to use for Teaching Inference

Fireflies by Julie Brinkloe
 Fly Away Home by Eve Bunting
 For the Good of the Earth and Sun by Georgia Heard
 Grandfather Twilight by Barbara Berger
 How Many Days to America? By Eve Bunting
 If You Listen by Charlotte Zolotow
 Miss Maggie by Cynthia Rylant
 Mother Earth, Father Sky selected by Jane Yolen
 Oliver Button Is a Sissy by Tomie dePaola
 The Royal Bee by Frances Park and Ginger Park
 Something Beautiful by Sharon Dennis Wyeth
 Where Are You Going, Manyoni? By Catherin Stock
 Winter Fox by Catherine Stock
 Bull Run by Paul Fleischmen
 Dateline: Troy by Paul Fleischmen
 Dandelion by Eve Bunting
 Encounter by Jane Yolen
 Fables by Arnold Lobel
 June 29, 1999 by David Weisner
 The Rag Coat by Lauren Mills
 Rose Blanche by Roberto Innocenti
 See the Ocean by Estelle Condra
 The Table Where Rich People Sit by Byrd Baylor
 Teammates by Peter Golenbock
 Tight Times by Barbara Shook Hazen
 Creatures of Earth, Sea, and Sky by Georgia Heard