Essential Unit Guiding Question:

How can readers make inferences to gain more insight into a text?

Lesson Guiding Question:

What are inferences? How do I make inferences about this text?

Lesson Overview

Students cement the definition of inference in their minds as teachers provide them with opportunities to apply inferential reading strategies to various texts. First, students practice making inferences with a short text, then with a teacher-selected longer piece, and finally with passages they have chosen from a novel or nonfiction reading selection. Students are continuously asked to support their conclusions with evidence from the text and, as appropriate, through other pieces of evidence or facts from previous texts.

ELA COMMON CORE Standards

* ***Anchor Standard for Reading 1.*** Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Resources/Materials

* “Hi, Marge! letter” (Figure 8.2)
* “Conclusions: Peg” (Figure 8.3)
* Various texts
* Student journals or large sticky notes (optional)

Timing

Approximately one 50-minute lesson.

Lesson Details

***Preparation for activity:*** Copy Figure 8.3 (“Conclusions: Peg”) onto cardstock, laminate it, cut out strips, and place a set of strips in an envelope. Prepare one set for each pair or small group of students.

1. ***Connect to previous learning.*** Say to students: *“Earlier we reviewed pictures and discussed how we can make inferences through details in images. Today we will take it a step further and practice using textual evidence to make inferences. Making intelligent inferences during and after reading can make you better readers. It is important to note that effective readers use information from an author to draw conclusions and form interpretations so that their inferences are supported by words in the text.”*

2. ***Review definition and practice making inferences.*** Remind students of the definition for inference presented in a previous lesson: **Inference means the process of drawing logical conclusions from factual knowledge, sound reasoning, or evidence. It is an assumption or conclusion that readers logically make based on textual evidence (words on a page) or known facts. To make an inference requires readers to go beyond what the words on the page states to uncover what the author implies.** Explain to students that you will guide them in making inferences first. They will then make inferences on their own with a novel or nonfiction piece they have each been reading. Here is the way to conduct the initial, more guided activity:

* Tell students you will read a letter to a girl named Marge from a classmate whose name is Peg. Distribute a copy of the letter (Figure 8.2) so students can follow along as you read it aloud.
* After reading the letter aloud, distribute a prepared envelope consisting of strips from Figure 8.3 “Conclusions: Peg” to each group. Tell students to empty the contents and read each conclusion together to decide which ones seem most appropriate. Return strips that do not apply to the envelope.
* Students focus on the identified possible conclusions to narrow down the best one. To do this, they answer the questions at the bottom of the letter in Figure 8.2 for each possible conclusion to discover the one or two statements that a reader might infer from the letter. These questions call on students to support an inference using the text, so remind them to center their conversations around the contents of the letter that lead them to their conclusions.
  + ***Differentiation:*** Ask high achieving students to create their own inferences instead of using the ones you have prepared on strips. They still test their conclusions against the same set of questions as the others used. Also, be mindful to distribute an appropriate amount of conclusion strips to students based on their ability levels. Therefore, do not give all 12 strips to struggling learners but rather select four or five for them to study carefully. Provide adult assistance to groups, as necessary.
* When all groups have identified one strip, compare them as a class to isolate the one or two logical inferences. Have students articulate how these inferences are logical because they are based on textual evidence.

3. ***Identify types of inferences readers can make.***

* Now that students have practiced making inferences with a short piece, use the think aloud strategy on a more challenging text to prepare them for making inferences on their own with a longer work. Select an appropriately challenging text that lends itself to making inferences. It does not have to be a literary selection as readers can make inferences with nonfiction, as well. Make sure students have a copy of what you are reading.
* First, explain that making inferences can be tricky because the author is not hand-delivering readers information explicitly. Rather, readers draw inferences using the information from the text to draw conclusions and make knowledgeable interpretations. As you conduct this exercise, think aloud to not only explain your thought process as you make inferences, but also how you select portions of the text that are conducive to making inferences. It is helpful for students to have concrete ways to make inferences which is what Kylene Beers’ has listed in her book *When Kids Can’t Read.* Following are some of her suggestions of types of inferences that skilled readers might make (Beers, pg. 65). I’ve added parenthetical notations for use with nonfiction text. Introduce these items and zero in on pertinent ones when you are thinking aloud and your rationale behind your choices.
* Understand intonation of characters’ words (or identify tone the author takes)
* Identify characters’ (historical figures’, leaders’, noteworthy individuals’) beliefs, personalities, and motivations
* Understand characters’ (historical figures’, leaders’, noteworthy individuals’) relationships to one another
* Provide details about the setting (environment, historical setting)
* Provide explanations for events or ideas that are presented in the text
* Understand the author’s view of the world
* Recognize the author’s biases
* Offer conclusions from facts presented in the text
* Close this activity with a discussion around the question: How do inferences help readers gain insight ***into a text?*** The art of making inferences enriches readers’ experiences because it enables them to arrive at new insights after examining the text critically. Re-emphasize the point that one way readers infer is through making reasonable conclusions drawn from hints the author provides.

4. ***Make inferences independently.*** Ask students to make inferences on their own or with a partner who is reading the same text. Instruct them to complete a graphic organizer that shows the quotes they have pulled and the associated inferences they have made. This could be in the form of a T-chart or double-entry journal. Or you might have students place large sticky notes next to text they feel is worthy of making inferences and then write their inferences on these sticky notes.

* + ***Differentiation:*** Differentiate by readiness level so that students are reading appropriately complex material from which to make inferences. If you are using a class text, then scaffold appropriately by helping struggling students choose portions of the text that are worthy of making inferences. Also, you might provide them with a shortened list of ways to make inferences (see second bullet in 3 above).

Assessments

* Participation in discussions and activity
* Written inferences

Hi, Marge!

I’m awfully sorry to hear you’ve been sick and in the hospital for two weeks. I’ve been meaning to come see you – I really have – but I’ve been terribly, *terribly* busy. Did you know I replaced you in the school play? Rehearsals are a blast!

I suppose you’re living a life of luxury – nurses to wait on you hand and foot, good-looking doctors to watch over you. Gee, some people have all the luck! I guess a healthy little nobody like me just doesn’t rate.

I hope you don’t mind, but Eddie asked me to the prom. I saw him the other day and asked him who he was taking – I knew you couldn’t go. You probably won’t be able to do much more than resting and taking it easy for months. Anyway, he said he’d asked Gloria. Now, I know you wouldn’t want him to take *her* – you’d probably never see him again (ha, ha). So, I convinced him to take me. I’m sure you’d prefer that he took a friend of yours.

Could I ask you a tiny little favor? Could I wear the dress you bought for the prom? After all, it won’t do you any good just hanging in the closet. And pink is the color that looks best on me.

Seriously, I hope you get better soon.

Do you think you’ll be able to rejoin the cheerleading squad this year?

Love,

***Peg***

**After Reading…**

1. Is the conclusion statement clearly supported in the letter?
2. Is this conclusion statement something a reader would guess from reading the letter?
3. Does this conclusion statement seem untrue from reading the letter?
4. Is there anything in the letter to support whether or not this conclusion statement is true or false?
5. What is a character trait to describe Peg? What evidence do you have from the letter to support this trait?

Figure 8.2 SOURCE: Pooley, R. C., Daniel, E., Farrell, E. J., Grommon, A. H., & Niles, O. S. (1967). *Projection in literature.* Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, page 526.

**Conclusions: Peg**

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| 1. Peg is really concerned about Marge’s illness. |
| 1. Peg is jealous of Marge. |
| 1. Peg has probably never been in a hospital. |
| 1. Peg has no sympathy for others. |
| 1. Peg would like to be in a hospital herself. |
| 1. Peg is very shy with people. |
| 1. Peg is forward with other people. |
| 1. Peg thinks of herself as not very important. |
| 1. Peg would like to be important. |
| 1. Peg is very practical and doesn’t like to see anything go to waste. |
| 1. Peg takes advantage of her friends. |
| 1. Peg would like to replace Marge as a cheerleader. |

Figure 8.3 SOURCE: Pooley, R. C., Daniel, E., Farrell, E. J., Grommon, A. H., & Niles, O. S. (1967). *Projection in literature.* Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, page 526.