

LESSON 5

Making Inferences

Lesson 5: Making Inferences

Rationale

Inference questions are generally some of the hardest questions for students taking reading comprehension tests. Making inferences involves doing a thorough analysis of the ideas in a passage. Unlike detail questions, for which students can usually point to the answer in the passage, inference questions require students to draw logical conclusions about the ideas in the passage. Inference questions may require students to draw conclusions about characters and themes in fiction passages, the ways in which information is connected in nonfiction passages, and authors' attitudes, beliefs, or purposes in both types of passages.

In this lesson, students will learn how to make inferences to draw logical conclusions based on details in the passage. They will learn how to connect details to knowledge they already have, so that they never have to guess when answering inference questions.

Standards Alignment

In this lesson, students will answer questions aligned to these benchmarks:

Word Analysis, Fluency, and Systematic Vocabulary Development

10.RW.1.1: Identify and use the literal and figurative meanings of words and understand word derivations.

Literary Response and Analysis

10.RL.3.3: Analyze interactions between main and subordinate characters in a literary text (e.g., internal and external conflicts, motivations, relationships, influences) and explain the way those interactions affect the plot.

10.RL.3.4: Determine characters' traits by what the characters say about themselves in narration, dialogue, dramatic monologue, and soliloquy.

10.RL.3.6: Analyze and trace an author's development of time and sequence, including the use of complex literary devices (e.g., foreshadowing, flashbacks).

10.RL.3.7: Recognize and understand the significance of various literary devices, including figurative language, imagery, allegory, and symbolism, and explain their appeal.

8.RL.3.7: Analyze a work of literature, showing how it reflects the heritage, traditions, attitudes, and beliefs of its author. (Biographical approach)

Instruction

 approx. 6 min.

Delivery

Explain that making inferences means drawing conclusions that are not directly stated in the passage.

Read the introductory text with students.

- Acknowledge that drawing logical conclusions can be difficult when the passage is confusing or contains unfamiliar words.
- Explain that making inferences accomplishes one main goal: it helps students draw logical conclusions based on details in the passage and on what they already know.
- Basing conclusions, or inferences, on details and prior knowledge will take the guesswork out of answering inference questions.

Introduce the strategy: Making Inferences.

Read through the steps of the strategy with students.

- Let students know that the first bullet point tells them to always use details from the passage to support inferences.
- Point out that the second bullet point reminds students to connect details from the text to what they already know.
- Emphasize that the third bullet point tells students to use the details together with what they already know, which includes prior knowledge and personal experience, to make an inference.

Point out the question and chart below the strategy.

Guide students through the chart as a class.

- Explain that inference questions require students to use more analysis than is often necessary for other types of questions.
- Clarify that certain signal words in a question stem indicate that the student needs to make an inference in order to answer the question.

Teacher's Note

You may wish to define an inference as a logical conclusion based on the details given in the passage. A helpful visual aid for understanding inferences is to compare the act of connecting details in the passage to a connect-the-dots exercise. Linking the details of a passage in the right way is like creating a picture (conclusion or inference) out of a seemingly random group of dots (details).



Instruction

Inside the Test!

In addition to the words listed, inference questions often begin or end with the following words and phrases: *why, think, seem, might, should, led to, and caused*. Look for these words and phrases in questions on the test.

STRATEGY TIP

- Try highlighting or underlining the details in the passage that support your conclusion. This will help you remember to always use textual evidence when making inferences.

Answering Inference Questions

Some questions on the test will ask you to make inferences, or draw conclusions, about the passage. You can make inferences to help you draw conclusions based on what you have read.

Making Inferences

- Identify details from the text.
- Connect details to what you already know.
- Use details and what you already know to draw conclusions.

What signal words can you look for in question stems to identify inference questions?

Inference Question Signal Words	Example Question Stems
suggest(s)	The article <i>suggests</i> that in Japan, a lower and longer bow is—
most likely	Why did Ryan <i>MOST likely</i> decide to buy a magazine?
express(es)	Which sentence BEST <i>expresses</i> the theme of this poem?
illustrate(s)	Which of the statements below BEST <i>illustrates</i> the time sequence of events in the story?
describe(s)	Which of the following BEST <i>describes</i> the camp director?

TRY IT OUT → Make an inference to answer the question below.



BE YOUR OWN BOSS—FREE SEMINAR!

Have you ever wanted to be your own boss? If you are like most people, you cherish the thought of one day breaking free and running your own show, but you have no idea how to make that dream come true.

This seminar will give you the tools you need to jump-start your new life as a successful entrepreneur. You will learn how to develop a successful business structure, financially plan for your short- and long-term goals, create marketing materials and a Web site, and recruit and manage an effective team of people.

In just one day, you will learn business techniques that will save you time and money as you start your new venture. Do not take orders from your manager any longer. Book your reservation now—you can't afford to wait another day!

1. Which of the following **MOST** accurately expresses the author's attitude toward running a business?

- A It is not suitable for some individuals.
- B It can be frustrating.
- C It is best to work for someone you respect.
- D** It is a rewarding experience.

What details from the passage can you use to answer the question? *(sample answer)*

The author refers to running a business as a "dream come true."

What do you already know that can help you answer the question? *(sample answer)*

The passage is an advertisement, so the author's purpose is most likely to persuade.

Based on the passage and what you already know, what conclusion can you draw?

(sample answer) In order to encourage readers to sign up for the seminar, the author is trying to persuade readers that running a business is a rewarding experience.

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Inside the Test!

Sometimes you will be asked to make an inference about the entire passage. At other times, you will be asked to make an inference only about one specific part of the passage. The strategy, Making Inferences, will help you answer both types of inference questions.

STRATEGY TIP

- Don't rely only on prior knowledge or personal experience to draw conclusions about the passage.
- Support your inferences with evidence from the text. You should be able to point to the details in the passage that support your claim.

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Instruction

approx. 6 min.

Delivery

Guide students through the Try It Out exercise.

Have students complete the exercise independently or in pairs. Then review, focusing on the following points:

- Remind students that they should continue to read the questions (introduced in Lesson 1) as their first strategy when approaching a passage. After reading the question for this passage, students should know that they are looking for the author's attitude or beliefs about running a business.
- The signal word *expresses* in the question stem tells students that this is an inference question.
- The first paragraph of the advertisement provides a helpful detail (i.e., running a business is compared to a "dream come true").
- Using what they already know about the persuasive nature of advertisements helps students make inferences about the author's attitude in this passage.
- Clarify that when asked to make an inference about what an author believes or feels, students may not always agree with the author. Students should not let their personal feelings or opinions distract them from selecting the best answer choice.

Teacher's Note

You may wish to further clarify what an inference is by discussing what an inference *is not*. An inference *is* a logical conclusion, and an inference *is not* a wild guess, and an inference *is not* unsupported by or unrelated to the text.

Independent Practice

approx. 20 min.

Delivery

Have students complete the Independent Practice.

As students work, observe and assist when necessary. Redirect students as needed by asking them questions about their work. Effective questions include the following:

- Which words from the question indicate that it is an inference question?
- Which details from the passage relate to the question?
- What do you already know (from personal experience or prior knowledge) that relates to these details?
- What conclusions can you draw based on the connection between the details from the passage and what you already know?
- Can you point to details in the passage that support your inference?



Universal Access

English Learners

Point out the use of hyphens in several words in the passage, including *hand-me-down*, *new-to-me*, and *four-year-old*. Explain that hyphens are used for a variety of reasons in the English language. In this case, the hyphens are used in compound adjectives that precede a noun. Ask students if they can think of other compound adjectives that also take hyphens. You may even want to create a chart of commonly hyphenated words and phrases to post in the classroom.

Students with Special Needs

Encourage students to underline or highlight the details in the passage that support their conclusions. This will reinforce the need to use textual evidence when making conclusions. If students have difficulty underlining or making notes as they read, or if they have difficulty knowing which key words and sentences to underline, model this skill by displaying a passage on an overhead projector and reading it aloud. Think aloud as you go, explaining why you are stopping to underline or circle. Make sure to verbalize your mental notes as well.

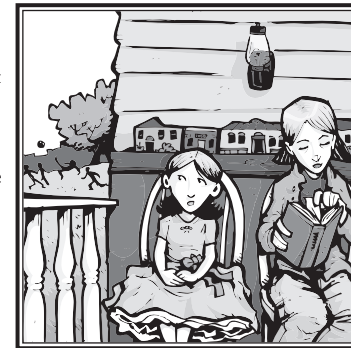


Independent Practice

The following is a story about a girl who receives a new dress. Read the story and answer questions 1 through 10.

Good Old Clothes

1 As the youngest in a family with lots of kids and little money, I spent the first eight years of my life wearing clothes that had seen much love before they got to me. During cold winters, I kept toasty warm in my sister Jennifer's puffy down coat, my brother



my four-year-old sneakers under my desk. But money was scarce in our family, and besides, it did seem wasteful to buy new pants when I already had five perfectly good pairs of old pants just my size. Still, just once, I wanted to walk into a store and choose something, to try on a

Doug's wool hat and scarf, and the sturdy boots that had, in their lifetime, embraced the feet of Callie, Miles, Jennifer, Doug, and our cousin Sylvia. In the summer I wore T-shirts with siblings' names written on the tags and shorts that came to me soft from many washings. "Shopping" for me involved opening a musty cardboard box every season. *New* meant *new-to-me*.

shirt and say, "No thanks, I think I'll take a different one."

2 Needless to say, I wanted something of my own. At school, I enviously eyed my classmates' crisp dark blue jeans and tucked

3 Finally my chance arrived. My Aunt Stephanie was getting married, and I had nothing to wear. My sisters' party dresses still fit them, but I had grown over the summer, and the sleeves on my favorite dress now stopped just below my elbows. So one Tuesday, my mother picked me up right after school and we drove directly to the department store.

4 I had been to this store a million times with Callie, Jennifer, and my mother, but

the lights and colors had never seemed as dazzling as they did now. My heart ballooned in my chest. I stroked the soft fabrics—velvets, satins, tulle—and admired their novelty. These clothes had no worn patches, no mended tears, and no bleached-out stains. They almost sparkled.

- 5 Suddenly a dress caught my eye, all soft yellow satin, the color of butter. I pulled it toward me and pressed it against my front. It was perfect, and I would be the only one in my family to wear it.
- 6 As soon as we got home, I passed my brothers and sisters playing in the yard, ran inside, and changed into my dress, relishing the touch of the cool, smooth fabric against my skin. I preened in front of the mirror and admired my reflection. Then I fastened the buckles of my hand-me-down white patent leather Mary Janes and walked out on to the porch where my mother was reading a book.
- 7 “Lillian, what are you doing?” exclaimed my mother. “Go change! You’ll mess up that gorgeous dress.”
- 8 “Oh, but Mom, she looks so pretty!” Callie and Jennifer encircled me, admiring the way the golden fabric shimmered in the sun. “Lily, you look like a little doll!”

- 9 My mother shook her head. “Lillian, I really think you should save that dress for the wedding. We’re not going to be able to get you another one if anything happens to it.” She watched me bask in my sisters’ attention, and hesitated. “Oh, all right. I won’t force you to change. But be careful!”
- 10 “Thanks, Mom! I promise I won’t mess it up.” To prove my point, I sat stiffly in the chair right next to her, gingerly smoothing the skirt over my legs.
- 11 “Hey, come play soccer with us!” shouted Miles from the yard, where he was kicking a ball around with a group of kids from the neighborhood. Callie and Jennifer ran to join him, but I looked down at my dress and stayed put.
- 12 “Lily, hurry up,” Miles called. “We’re picking teams, and we need an even number! You can be on my team.”
- 13 “She’s not coming,” interrupted Jennifer. “She doesn’t want to mess up her dress.” Miles shrugged and turned to the group. I strained to hear the conversation as they huddled, but the players’ words evaded me like a bird dodging a child’s grasp.
- 14 I looked at my mother, lost in her book, then

Answers

1 B

Supporting evidence for (B) is in paragraph 1—“During cold winters, I kept toasty warm in my sister Jennifer’s puffy down coat, my brother Doug’s wool hat and scarf...”

Related Content Standard: 10.RL.3.6

2 C

Supporting evidence for (C) is in paragraph 2—“Still, just once, I wanted to walk into a store and choose something, to try on a shirt and say, ‘No thanks, I think I’ll take a different one.’”

Related Content Standard: 10.RL.3.4

3 D

Supporting evidence for (D) is at the end of the passage, where the author stops sitting calmly in her formal dress and runs upstairs to change her clothes.

Related Content Standard: 10.RW.1.1

peered back toward the players. They had stationed themselves in positions around the yard. I could hear laughter and shouts as they passed the ball back and forth. My dress began to itch.

- 15 I folded my hands in my lap and adjusted my position, flattening out the skirt that was beginning to bunch underneath me. I watched Callie kick the ball hard and knew that I could have stopped her from scoring that goal. My neighbor Curtis, who was supposed to be goalie, was staring off into space. The ball careened overhead and flew right past Curtis, landing between the bushes that we always designated as goal posts.
- 16 “That’s it!” I said, losing my composure. I ran upstairs, carefully slipped out of my dress, and hung it gently on a hanger in my closet. Then I threw on a hooded sweatshirt, a pair of jeans, and Doug’s old sneakers and tore outside, glancing back one last time at the buttercup satin.
- 17 As I booted the ball over my siblings’ heads and scored the winning goal of the game, I tripped and skidded on the grass. Sometimes, I realized, wiping the mud off of my jeans and watching my teammates celebrate, there are perks to pre-loved clothes.

Good Old Clothes, by Lillian Santorelli. © 2003 by Lillian Santorelli

1. What does the author mean when she says that the clothes she wore had “seen much love before they got to me”?
- A They represent the most popular fashions.
 - B** Many people have worn them.
 - C Her family members made them.
 - D They have been all over the world.
2. What does the yellow dress MOST likely represent for the author?
- A a way to get attention from her classmates at school
 - B a strategy for avoiding the soccer game
 - C** something new that she gets to pick out herself
 - D something private that indicates she is her mother’s favorite child
3. What does the word *composure* mean in this sentence from paragraph 16 of the passage?

“That’s it!” I said, losing my composure.

- A a strong attachment to a particular outcome
- B an unbiased position in a conflict
- C a carefully constructed piece of writing
- D** a calm, self-possessed state of being

Answers

4 A

Supporting evidence for (A) is in the excerpt, which suggests that just as a child cannot quite catch a bird, the author cannot quite hear what the other children are saying.

Related Content Standard: 10.RL.3.7

5 C

Supporting evidence for (C) is in paragraph 4—“the lights and colors had never seemed as dazzling as they did now” and “I stroked the soft fabrics...and admired their novelty.”

Related Content Standard: 10.RL.3.7

6 D

Supporting evidence for (D) is in paragraph 17—“Sometimes, I realized, wiping the mud off of my jeans and watching my teammates celebrate, there are perks to pre-loved clothes.”

Related Content Standard: 10.RL.3.4

7 D

Supporting evidence for (D) is in paragraph 15—“I watched Callie kick the ball hard and knew that I could have stopped her from scoring that goal”— and paragraph 16—“That’s it! I said....”

Related Content Standard: 10.RL.3.4

4. Read this sentence from the passage.

I strained to hear the conversation as they huddled, but the players’ words evaded me like a bird dodging a child’s grasp.

In this sentence, the author is suggesting that—

- A she can’t quite hear what the other children are saying.
- B she feels like her brothers and sisters are ignoring her.
- C the children are passing the soccer ball very quickly to keep her from catching it.
- D the children are staying away from her because they don’t want to damage her dress.

5. Read this sentence from the passage.

My heart ballooned in my chest.

What does the author convey in the above sentence?

- A She shows how anxious she is about making the right decision.
- B She emphasizes how sad she is that she is unable to buy all of the dresses.
- C She depicts how excited she is by what she sees in the store.
- D She demonstrates how much she loves her family members.

6. Which of the following MOST accurately indicates the author’s attitude about her sweatshirt and jeans in the last paragraph?

- A highly self-conscious
- B tragically resigned
- C defiantly proud
- D cheerfully at ease

7. Which statement below BEST explains the author’s response when her sister scores the goal?

- A She expresses pride because her sister is such a good soccer player.
- B She becomes concerned that her outfit will be stained or torn.
- C She chooses not to play because she doesn’t want to compete with her sister.
- D She becomes frustrated because she wants to join the game.

Answers

8 C

Supporting evidence for (C) is in paragraph 1—“As the youngest in a family with lots of kids and little money” and in paragraph 9—“We’re not going to be able to get you another one if anything happens to it.”

Related Content Standard: 10.RL.3.3

9 A

(A) relates most closely to the theme (i.e., new clothes are nice to have, but old clothes allow people to be themselves).

Related Content Standard: 8.RL.3.7

10 B

Supporting evidence for (B) is in paragraph 1—“As the youngest in a family with lots of kids and little money” and in the second half of the passage, in which the author’s brothers and sisters enjoy playing together in the yard.

Related Content Standard: 10.RL.3.3

8. What kind of person is the author’s mother in the story?

- A determined
- B fashionable
- C frugal
- D sociable

9. Which sentence BEST expresses a theme of the passage?

- A The beauty of informality is the freedom that it gives us.
- B Family loyalties can be powerful forces.
- C Good intentions without wisdom can do great harm.
- D The outcome of a game is not as important as the skill with which it is played.

10. The author suggests that her siblings and her mother—

- A love sports more than any other pastime.
- B care more about one another than about possessions.
- C enjoy visiting the department store to browse.
- D take pleasure in attending special family events.