



Make Inferences: Grades 3–5

Overview:

In early elementary grades, most of what students learn comes from explicit information. This begins to shift sometime around third grade, as students encounter more complex texts. At this stage, students not only have to sort through more information, but they also have to consider information that is not explicitly stated in order to infer and draw conclusions. When we ask students to make an inference, we are asking them to draw conclusions based on evidence and reasoning. To do this, students need to combine information provided by the author with their own knowledge and experiences. Inference is a complex skill that takes time and practice to develop. It is also an essential prerequisite skill for the higher-level critical thinking that is required of students in the content areas as they move through their schooling career.

Mini-Lesson I

Review How to Make Inferences (15 Minutes)

Background: The first step in teaching students to make inferences is explaining what an inference is and teaching them the difference between implied and directly stated information. The following lesson introduces students to the inference process while also exposing them to the academic language used when making inferences. This lesson uses an image of an igloo from the *Expedition: Learn!* lesson “Peoples of the Far North: The Inuit.” While students can be introduced to the process of making an inference using written text, it is often beneficial to begin with images. This lessens the cognitive load of decoding and comprehension, allowing students to focus on the inference process. The following lesson is based on students having been introduced to the term inference before. However, some students may benefit from a review of the definition in a way that helps them conceptualize what an inference is.

- Display the [Making Inferences anchor chart](#) and review the definition of inference with students.
- Emphasize that when reading informational texts, not all of the information students need to know will be explicitly stated. Therefore, it is their job as critical readers to make inferences as needed.
- Display the image “Staying Warm in the Cold” on page 3-Build in the Expedition: Learn! lesson. Invite students to study the image. Ask: Why do you think igloos were important to the Inuit and other Indigenous peoples of the far north? Invite students to record their answer where they can reference it later in the lesson.
- Emphasize that since the image does not tell them why igloos are important, this question is asking students to make an inference.
- Draw attention to the anchor chart and introduce Step 1. Emphasize that the first step of the inference process is recognizing when you are making an inference. Record your inference where students can see it. For example:
 - *Igloos were important to the people of the far north because they probably protected them from the cold and snow.*

- Introduce Step 2 on the anchor chart. Share that when making an inference, it is important for students to pay attention to the information they use to make their inference. Invite students to turn and talk to share their inference and what information they used.
- After students have had a chance to discuss, synthesize their responses, sharing what you heard. Highlight the distinction between information from the text and information from their prior knowledge or experiences. For example:
 - *The image provides the following information: the title, "Staying Warm in the Cold," as well as text in the call-outs, including that the packed snow trapped heat, the entrance kept wind from entering, oil lamps helped heat the igloo, and the sleeping area was raised to be higher and warmer.*
 - *You are familiar with the geography of the far north. To make this inference, you drew on your knowledge that snow covers the ground for most of the year, there is little wood available for making shelters, and that packed snow is sturdy and hard to topple.*
- Introduce Step 3 on the anchor chart. Share that once we know what information we used, we want to consider if the evidence supports our conclusions. Emphasize that there is a lot of information in the picture, including the title, that supports the inference that igloos kept the people of the far north warm.
- Introduce Step 4 on the anchor chart. Highlight that one of the most important steps to the inference process is continually reviewing your inference as you learn more information. Share that it is not that our initial inference is wrong, but rather that as we learn more, our thinking changes.
- Model revising your prediction using the following steps:
 - Read aloud the introduction and the section "Seasonal Living" on page 2-Build.
 - Think aloud after reading to model verifying and revising your prediction. For example:
 - *The information from the text verified my thinking that the Arctic is cold and snowy with few resources for the people who lived there. This means that my inference, that igloos keep people warm, was correct. However, I learned something new: not all people in the far north lived in igloos; it was only people who lived along the coast. To make my inference more accurate, I want to revise it to include this new information.*
 - Model rewriting your inference:
 - *For the Indigenous people who lived along the coast in the far north, igloos were important, because they protected them from the cold and windy weather.*
- Invite students to review and revise their predictions.
- Debrief, emphasizing the importance of making inferences and revisiting those inferences as we learn more.

Mini-Lesson II

Learning to Make Inferences with Informational Texts (20 minutes)

Background: Students are often first introduced to making inferences while reading fictional texts. However, it is important for students to be explicitly taught how to make inferences regarding informational texts, as so much of their learning comes from non-fiction texts. In this lesson, students practice making inferences while reading an informational text. They learn to pay attention to both the information in the written text and other features that are specific to informational texts, including images, text boxes, diagrams, and maps. Note that the teaching suggestions are based on the article "Life in the Southeast" from the *Expedition: Learn!* lesson "American Indian Nations of the Southeast Before Colonization."

- As needed, review what it means to make an inference, emphasizing the importance of making inferences while reading informational texts.
- Reinforce that making an inference is similar to being a detective. You have to pay attention to details and clues, and your own knowledge, to make a conclusion about something that isn't directly said or shown.

- Introduce the article, emphasizing that as we read, we not only have to pay attention to the explicit details the author gives but we also have to consider the information that is implied. Share that in informational texts, this information comes from the words that are written. It also comes from images, diagrams, maps, and other text features.
- Distribute the [The Text Says--I Say--And So](#) organizer to students. Share that as they read, it is important for them to pay attention to the information they are learning and the inferences they can make from it.
- Model the process, reading aloud the introduction. After reading, think aloud to summarize what you read, identify your prior knowledge about the topic, and make an inference about why the information is important. For example:
 - *This article introduces us to the nations and geography of the Southeast. The text tells me that there were more than two dozen nations in the Southeast and that the region has an abundance of natural resources. Record your summary on a displayed organizer.*
 - *Next, I am going to think about what I know about the regions of the United States and how they relate to Indigenous settlements. I have learned that the more natural resources available in an area, the more people could be supported there. This often led to larger communities. Model synthesizing and recording.*
 - *I am going to combine the information with my knowledge to make an inference about why this information is important. My inference is that because the Southeast had an abundance of natural resources, the nations that settled there likely had large communities, which required more organization and cooperation. Model synthesizing and recording.*
- Draw student's attention to the map titled "Different Nations, Shared Practices." Emphasize that when reading informational texts, we have to pay attention to more than just the written words. We also need to analyze the text features to consider what they teach us and why the author included them. Model the process. For example:
 - *After studying the map and reading the caption and title, I know that the Southeast region includes the present-day states of Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. I also learned the names of eight nations that lived there. I can see that the region includes the Mississippi River, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Gulf of Mexico. Synthesize and record.*
 - *Next, I am going to think about what I already know about the Southeast, as well as how geography impacts people. I know that areas near rivers and oceans tend to be more populated because they provide food and water. I also know that this area of the country tends to have a lot of plants because of the climate. Synthesize and record.*
 - *I think the author included the map to help us visualize where the southeastern region is while also emphasizing its natural features, such as rivers and oceans, that led people to settle there. Synthesize and record.*
- Invite students to work with a partner to practice this strategy. Ask them to read the section "Farming, Hunting, and Fishing" and then work through the steps to make an inference about what they read.
- After students have had time to read, discuss, and record, facilitate a discussion inviting pairs to share out. Note that inferences will vary based on the background knowledge students have. The goal is to have students notice when they are making inferences and how they have to combine information from the text and their own thinking. To support pairs, consider providing a guiding question to help focus their discussions. For example:
 - How did the location of the region contribute to the thriving civilizations?
- Invite students to continue reading, stopping after each section and text feature to make an inference about the nations, the region, and how geography impacted these peoples.

Mini-Lesson III

Evidence-Based Inferences in Social Studies

Background: History is the study of facts, dates, places, events, and ideas. Historical understanding requires students to go beyond the explicit facts and details and read between the lines as they analyze the relationships, perspectives, and connections presented. Ultimately, historical thinking is about evidence-based inferences. It is about students drawing conclusions to determine relationships between events, ideas, people, and places. Once students have learned how to make inferences and have practiced the thinking steps, they should be provided with ample opportunities for structured practice making the types of inferences required in social studies. Inference connects to many of the other skills students are learning simultaneously. For additional information about each of these skills, refer to their corresponding *Expedition: Learn!* Toolkit.

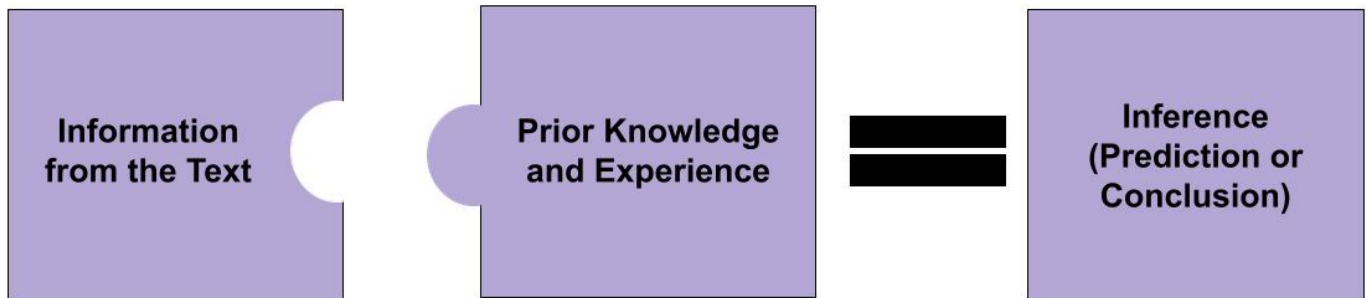
- **Main Ideas and Details:** As students become more proficient readers and are exposed to more complex texts, main ideas are often no longer explicitly stated. This means that students have to use the details in the text to make evidence-based inferences about the author's main idea.
- **Cause and Effect:** One of the most important historical thinking skills is the ability to identify, analyze, and evaluate causal relationships. This requires students to make evidence-based inferences as they explain how and why things happened.
- **Author's Perspective:** In order to build an understanding of the past, it is important that students consider the historical perspective of what they are learning. Historical perspective is the social, cultural, intellectual, and emotional settings that shaped people's lives and actions in the past, including those who created the texts and artifacts that we study. Determining their perspective is about making evidence-based conclusions and inferences.

Check for Understanding

If you observe ...	Then try ...
students making inferences that are not based on text evidence	having students annotate the text while they read to engage more actively with the text.
students not making inferences while they read	providing guiding questions to help them learn to recognize when an inference is required.
students making inferences that do not seem logical or reasonable	building background knowledge about the topic prior to reading. Since inference draws on students' prior knowledge, the more they know about the topic, the more logical their inferences will be.

Making Inferences

An inference is a conclusion we make based on information in a text that is not explicitly stated.



Step 1: Ask yourself: What inference am I making?

- Notice when you are making a prediction or inference.

Step 2: Ask yourself: What information did I use?

- Pay attention to the information from the text you are using as well as information from prior learning or your own experiences.

Step 3: Evaluate your thinking

- After you have identified the information used to make your inference, ask yourself if it is valid. Consider if the information in the text connects to what you already know.

Step 4: Refine your thinking

- As you learn more, revisit your inference and consider possible changes. As we learn more, we often need to update our thinking.



The Text Say...I Say....And So

[illegible]