



Make Inferences: Grades 6–8

OVERVIEW:

Making inferences helps students read between the lines, allowing them to understand the underlying messages or suggested meanings of texts. It teaches them to answer the question, “What can you conclude based on the information in the text and what you know?” The ability to make inferences is important for understanding the patterns, context, and tone of complex social studies texts and images, helping students delve deeper than surface-level information to grasp broader implications. Students are better prepared to analyze, interpret, and understand complex information when they develop the skill to make inferences.

The following mini-lessons provide students with explicit instruction in paying attention to nuanced ideas found in social studies. Students practice analyzing images and vocabulary with context and consider multiple perspectives, emotions, and motivations.

Mini-Lesson I

Previewing to Make Predictions (15 minutes)

Background: The following strategy introduces students to the process of making predictions (a type of inference) by using an image, captions, and vocabulary. It allows them to practice identifying visual, textual, and contextual evidence to draw conclusions about information that is not explicitly stated. Note the teaching suggestions are based on the *Expedition: Learn!* lesson “The Civil Rights Movement.”

- Introduce the lesson topic and vocabulary words, providing students with a brief background of what they will be learning about.
- Reinforce for students that much of what we learn from texts requires us to read between the lines and make inferences, as most of the key ideas an author is trying to communicate are not explicitly stated.
- Share with students that critical readers preview texts before they read to ensure the text is relevant to what they are learning about and to set a purpose for reading. One type of inference critical readers make is a “prediction.”
- Share with students that prior to reading, they will preview the vocabulary, images, and text of the lesson to make a prediction (or inference) about what the text is about, its purpose, and what they expect to learn.
- Invite students to access page 1-Spark and preview the image and vocabulary words. Reinforce that when we make an inference, we combine information we gain from the text with our background knowledge to make a guess.

- Model making a prediction about what you think you will learn in the lesson, combining information from the title and section headers with your background knowledge. Record the prediction for students to see. For example:
 - *The title of the passage is “The Civil Rights Movement,” and I see that the passage is divided into sections titled “Laws After Slavery” and “Segregation.” I know that the civil rights movement was a social movement that took place during the 1950s and 1960s. It was about African Americans working toward equal rights and justice. Based on the section headers and what I know about the movement, I think the passage will focus on laws and social practices that were at the core of inequality and inspired the civil rights movement.*
- Invite students to study the first image on page 2-Build, “The March on Washington,” and ask them to turn and talk to make an inference about the image and why they think the author included it in the passage. Remind students that when they make an inference, they are combining information from the image with their background knowledge.
- Monitor student conversations and strategically call on pairs to share their inferences. Synthesize responses and record. For example:
 - *The image shows a number of civil rights leaders. It also shows people marching with signs demanding jobs and new laws. I know that protesting through marches was a way Martin Luther King, Jr., encouraged people to fight during the civil rights movement. I think the author included this image to illustrate who some of the most important people of the civil rights movement were and show one of the most common ways they advocated for change.*
- Draw students’ attention to the next image on the page, “Jim Crow Laws,” and invite students to independently practice making an inference about the image and why it is included. Reinforce that inferences combine text evidence with background knowledge.
- Call on students to share. Synthesize responses and record alongside the other predictions. For example:
 - *The image shows a sign that highlights how public places, like bus stations, were segregated based on race. I know that ending segregation was a big part of the civil rights movement. I think the author included the image to highlight the discriminatory laws that existed.*

Mini-Lesson II

Inferring Perspectives (30 minutes)

Background: According to the National Council of Social Studies, the primary purpose of social studies instruction is to help students become informed global citizens who make decisions that benefit the public good in our interdependent world. One of the key factors to making reasoned decisions is students’ seeing themselves beyond the community in which they live. This helps them understand how they are connected to people worldwide. To do this, students must learn to consider perspectives different from their own and learn to combine various perspectives. Perspective is influenced by a variety of factors we cannot always see, including experiences, values, and beliefs. Therefore, students often have to infer the perspective of the author based on the information contained in the text plus what they know about when and where the author is writing and the event about which they are writing. Note the teaching suggestions are based on the *Expedition: Learn!* lesson “The Labor Reform Movement.”

- As needed, refresh students’ understanding of what it means to make an inference. For example:
 - *Making an inference involves using clues from the text and images and combining them with what you already know to figure out something that isn’t directly stated.*
- Emphasize for students the importance of recognizing perspectives and points of view when studying history. Reinforce that all people have their own backgrounds, beliefs, and values, which influence how they experience events in history. Share that learning how to infer perspectives can help us better understand the context surrounding the historical events we study.



- Introduce the lesson, sharing that the labor reform movement was a time in history from the late 1800s to the 1930s when workers united to fight for better wages, safer working conditions, and fairer treatment in the workplace. These efforts led to significant changes in labor laws and protections.
- Emphasize that how we learn about the events and laws passed during this time is likely to vary based on who is sharing the information. Factory workers, factory owners, other citizens, and the government all had different perspectives about this time in history.
- Have students create a three-column chart on a sheet of paper or through a digital platform, labeling the columns "Event," "Factory Workers' Perspective," "Factory Owners' Perspective."
- Invite students to pair up, and then divide the pairs evenly into two groups: factory workers and factory owners. Share that as they read the lesson with a partner, students will identify the major events that happened during the labor reform movement. Explain that as students identify an event, they will record the event and what happened on their chart. Then they will discuss with their partner how they think a person with their assigned perspective may have felt about that event, recording their inference on their chart.
- After students have had a chance to read the lesson and complete the chart for their assigned perspective, debrief the task, inviting pairs to share. Consider displaying a chart and recording student responses. For example:
 - **Event and what happened:** *Homestead Strike of 1892. Wages were cut and a violent strike occurred that led to deaths. Carnegie fired 500 people and disbanded the union.*
 - **Inference about factory workers' perspective:** *They were worried about wage cuts and not being able to support their families. They were frustrated that even though they worked hard, they were going to earn less.*
 - **Inference about factory owners' perspective:** *They wanted to increase their profits and were angry when the factory workers went on strike.*
 - **Event and what happened:** *Triangle shirtwaist factory fire of 1911. The factory caught on fire because there was no fire alarm and the hose didn't work. 146 people died.*
 - **Inference about factory workers' perspective:** *They were likely angry about not being protected and worried that it could happen again. Many probably felt sad that so many people died.*
 - **Inference about factory owners' perspective:** *They may have been defensive about what happened, claiming that it wasn't their fault. They may have been worried about the cost of improvements to the factories.*
 - **Event and what happened:** *Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. It established a minimum wage and restricted child labor.*
 - **Inference about factory workers' perspective:** *Some may have been hopeful about the changes creating better jobs and working conditions.*
 - **Inference about factory owners' perspective:** *Some may have been worried about how they would find workers to replace the children. Others may have worried about a change in profit.*
- Invite students to reflect on the information shared. Facilitate a discussion about the difference in perspectives and how inferring perspectives helped students better understand the topic. Consider the following questions for discussion:
 - Why would the factory workers and factory owners feel differently about the events?
 - Why is it important to infer the perspective of individuals whom the events affected when studying historical topics?
 - How did hearing the other perspective deepen your understanding of the event?

Mini-Lesson III

Identify, Infer, Inquire (30 minutes)

Background: In social studies, we don't always know the thoughts, emotions, and ideas of the individuals who lived in the past. Analyzing historical events often requires students to infer the context and motivations behind actions and decisions. Teaching students to read between the lines and make inferences regarding possible motivations helps them understand the complexities and nuances of history. It lets them recognize that influential figures often had to navigate difficult choices and uncertain circumstances. Note that the following teaching suggestions are based on the article "Washington's Early Years" from the *Expedition: Learn!* lesson "Booker T. Washington."

- As needed, review the definition of inference, reinforcing that as critical readers we often need to read between the lines and consider information that is not presented by the author.
- Share that when studying historical figures and events it is important for us to consider the context surrounding the person and event. We need to consider what was happening in the world and what may have influenced their actions and decisions. Emphasize that part of our job as readers is to infer how the information presented connects to the author's claim and how it connects to the broader historical context.
- Invite students to divide a piece of paper into three columns labeled "Identify," "Infer," and "Inquire." Explain that as students read about Booker T. Washington, they will use this strategy to infer the motivations and context behind Washington's actions and beliefs. Emphasize that while we can never truly understand the experiences individuals had, we can learn to consider their perspective and try to view history through their eyes.
- Read the introduction to students, and stop to think aloud and introduce the strategy. For example:
 - *The author emphasizes that Washington believed in hard work and self reliance and says that Washington's childhood influenced his beliefs. This helps me know that as I read, I should look for details that highlight this idea. Then I can infer how his childhood experiences influenced his actions and beliefs.*
- Continue reading, stopping at the end of the section "Born into Enslavement." Think aloud and model completing the organizer. For example:
 - *The first column is "Identify," which is where I will identify the event, action, or belief. This section discusses how slavery was abolished when Booker T Washington was 9 and how he wanted to go to school, but since his family needed money, he couldn't. So, he taught himself the alphabet.*
 - *The second column is "Infer." This asks me to consider his motivations based on what the text says and what I know about this time in history. I know that education was often seen as a way to a better life, and enslaved individuals had long been denied the opportunity to attend school. I can infer that while Booker T. Washington was committed to helping his family, he also wanted to take advantage of the changing laws and learn to read and write.*
 - *The third column is "Inquire." For this column, I want to consider what questions I have that would help me know more about Washington's decisions and motivations. I wonder if his mom knew how to read and write, since the text says she bought him the books.*
- Continue reading, stopping at the end of the section "Heading to High School." Invite students to turn and talk to discuss what they learned in this section, including what they can infer and any questions they have, recording their thoughts on their chart. Invite students to share their responses with the class. Highlight how Washington was influenced by Samuel Chapman Armstrong's belief in hard work and self-reliance. Emphasize that we can infer that seeing someone successful like Armstrong likely led Washington to view Armstrong's actions as positive. This is likely where Washington developed his belief in hard work and self-reliance.
- Invite students to independently read the rest of the passage, adding to their organizer as they do.
- Debrief the task, calling on students to share what they learned about Washington and what they can infer about how his experiences influenced his beliefs.
- Emphasize how inferring the motivations behind Washington's actions and beliefs deepens our understanding of him and his importance to history.

Check for Understanding

If you observe ...**Then try ...**

students having difficulty determining the perspective

prior to teaching the lesson provide students with additional background information about the topic. After providing additional content have students work in a group to brainstorm key players and why the event, idea, or action would have been important to them. By providing additional context, students are better able to see the event through the person or group's eyes.

students having trouble inferring motivations

provide additional probing questions to scaffold students thinking regarding a person's motivation. For example:

- What was the person trying to accomplish?
- Why did they want to achieve this?
- What in their community, the United States, or the world did they want to change?
- Why was it important to them to make that change?