

**Making Inferences: Unit by Jennifer Palmer, Forest Lakes Elementary, December 2005**

**Lesson #1: Introduction to Making Inferences**

**Enduring Understandings:** The student will learn that inferences are a thinking strategy that requires that they use text clues and background knowledge.

**Essential Question:** What is an inference?

**Teacher Objective(s):** The teacher will use concrete objects and “real-life” demonstrations to model the thinking process behind making inferences.

**Student Outcomes and Indicators:** Standard 1 (General Reading Processes,)

Indicator 4: Use strategies to demonstrate understanding of the text, Objective C:

Identify and explain what is not directly stated in the text by drawing inferences,

Objective D: Draw conclusions and make generalizations about the text,

Objective H: Connect the text to prior knowledge and personal experience

**Materials/Space Requirements:** Two household gadgets that will be unfamiliar to most students in the class (Examples might include a tea ball or infuser to brew loose tea, a jar opener, a tool such as a level or turkey baster ) and another familiar object related to each of the unfamiliar objects. (A tea infuser would require a tea cup or tea pot, a jar opener would be associated with an unopened jar etc), 1 sheet of chart paper with the following headings: “What we know about inferences, When do we make inferences, How do inferences help us?” leaving spaces between each heading for student thinking, markers, enough post-it notes for each student to have 4 for themselves.

**Time required:** About 45 minutes

**Introductory Activities:**

1. Have a student pass out 4 post-it notes to each of his or her classmates.
2. The teacher will write the word *inference* on the chalkboard and will guide the students to pronounce the word. Tell the students that they are going to be “word detectives” and work together as a class to discover the meaning of the word on the board. Show them the chart with the three headings and tell them that this is called an “anchor chart” because it will anchor or hold our thinking about inferences.

### **Student Practice**

3. The teacher will produce the first unfamiliar object and asks the students to figure out what it is and write their idea on the first post-it note. Tell students that they should pay attention to what they thought about when making their decision. (Teachers should NOT use the word guess. Students need to understand that inferences are not wild guesses but are based on text and background knowledge.) The teacher should circulate and observe what students are writing. After giving students a few minutes to think and write, the teacher should call on a few students to share their ideas. (For now, do not call on any students who already know what the object is!) The teacher should NOT acknowledge whether or not the answer is correct or not, but instead should ask why they think that their inference is correct. It is important to start using the word inference here, but it should still NOT be defined. Guide students as they share their thinking to share what clues the object provides and how their background knowledge helps them with their decision.

4. Now pull out the familiar object related to the first object. Do not comment upon it but ask the students to think about how the two might be related. Ask them once again to write on a post-it note what they believe the first object is. As students share their revised responses, continue to draw attention to the clues they found on the objects themselves and how their own background knowledge helped them decide.
5. Reveal the actual function of the mystery object and ask the kids to share why they thought it was easier to infer the second time around. Help kids to understand that they had more information and that helped them connect better to their background knowledge.
6. Repeat the process (lesson steps 3 through 5 above) with a second mystery object. Keep the students focused on their thinking process by asking “How did you know that?” or “Why did you think that?”
7. Tell the students that as they were figuring out the mystery object, they were making inferences. Draw their attention to the word ‘inferences’ on the board and ask them to ponder what the word might mean. Ask them to consider what they were thinking about as they figured out what the function of each object was. Allow at least 45 seconds for individuals to think about your question and then allow them to partner in groups of 2-3 students to share their ideas with each other.

**Assessment:** The teacher should circulate and listen in on group conversations. Listen for evidence that students understand that inferences involve using clues and prior knowledge to come up with a new idea or draw a conclusion.

**Closure:** Regain student attention with a prearranged signal and ask them to share their thinking. Write their ideas under the first heading on the chart: “What we know about inferences.” Be sure that the students understand that their background knowledge along with clues help them to make an inference.

**Accommodations:** Some students with Tactile-Kinesthetic learning styles may need to handle or manipulate the object before making their inferences. Students with difficulties in writing may need assistance from the peer or teacher in writing on the post-it. Larger paper or dry erase boards with lines can be helpful for students with fine motor difficulties. Students with attention problems who can’t sit still can be given the opportunity to pass out materials in the beginning of the lesson, partner with a student across the room during step 7 and/or do the writing on the class anchor chart at the closure of the lesson.

## **Lesson #2: Inferential Thinking in Fiction: Answering Questions We Have About Our Reading**

**Enduring Understandings:** Making inferences is required in order to understand what is read. Inferences are a thinking strategy that requires that they use text clues and background knowledge.

**Essential Questions:** What is an inference? When do we make inferences?  
How does making inferences help us as a reader?

**Teacher Objective(s):** The teacher will use the “think-aloud” procedure to model how to make inferences while reading. The teacher will also model how to keep track of his/her thinking while reading using post-it notes.

**Student Outcomes and Indicators:** Standard 1 (General Reading Processes,)

Indicator 4: Use strategies to demonstrate understanding of the text, Objective C:

Identify and explain what is not directly stated in the text by drawing inferences,

Objective D: Draw conclusions and make generalizations about the text,

Objective H: Connect the text to prior knowledge and personal experience

**Materials/Space Requirements:** Anchor Chart and markers from lesson #1, The picture book Grandfather Twilight by Barbara Helen Begen, clipboards for each student and for the teacher, 6 post-it notes for each student and the teacher which are stuck to a sheet of notebook paper, A piece of poster paper divided into 3 sections labeled “Answered in the text”, “Inference” and “Unanswered”.

**Time required:** Two - 45 minute sessions

**Introductory Activities:**

1. Start by asking the students to imagine that the principal walked into the room. Tell them that they notice that the principal is red in the face and they hear the door slam behind him/her upon entering the room. The principal says nothing but points at a student and gestures for him/her to leave the room with the principal. Ask the students to talk with a partner about what questions they have and what they think is going on. At a prearranged signal, stop the conversation and ask a few kids to share first what they were wondering about. (Questions like “Why did the principal come in? Why was he/she angry? What did that kid do to make the principal mad” are typical.) As the students talk about possible reasons why the principal was angry and why a student might be in trouble, ask them how they made these inferences. Point out the clues and how background knowledge

helped them make their inference and write them on the board. Also point out how inferences often result when we ask a question that doesn't have a direct answer.

2. Draw student attention to the anchor chart from the day before and review the students' ideas. Add any additional ideas if the students have them.

3. Tell them that today they are going to watch you make inferences while you read and share your thinking aloud. Tell the students that they are looking to add to the anchor chart today at the end of the lesson. Tell them to try to discover **when** you make inferences while reading and **how** it helps you as a reader.

4. Gather the students on the floor close to the teacher. Tell them that you are glad they are close by so that they can notice the details of the pictures and words in the picture book Grandfather Twilight.

5. Explain to students that some books are difficult because there are hard words in them and other books are difficult because they have difficult ideas.

Grandfather Twilight does not contain difficult words, but it IS tough to understand because the author doesn't tell you everything directly. The reader must make inferences in order to understand this book. Show them a clipboard which has a sheet of notebook paper and 6 sticky notes. Explain that you will use these sticky notes to keep notes about your thinking, writing down a few key words to help you remember what was going on in your mind as you read.

6. Begin to read the first 2-3 pages aloud. Write down a few questions that come to mind as you read on your sticky notes while the students watch. (Good questions to generate inferences often start with "why" or "how". Some questions

could include “Why is this man living in the woods? Why is the book called Grandfather Twilight? Where is he going? What will he be doing with that pearl?”)

7. Stop reading after a few pages and go back to those questions you wrote down. Model for students how to use the clues in the text (words and pictures) and background knowledge to answer these questions.

8. Write on the board the equation “Background Knowledge + Text Clues = Inference” and show them how your background knowledge and text clues helped you make inferences about the story.

9. Stop for Day 1 of lesson 2 and ask students to share ideas to add to the anchor chart about inferences.

10. Start on Day 2 by reviewing the anchor chart and the post-it notes you wrote on the first day. Tape up the new chart labeled “Answered in the Text, Inferences and Unanswered.” Pass out a clipboard with the notebook paper and sticky notes to each student and gather them on the floor close to your feet.

**Student Practice:**

11. Ask the students to listen as you continue to read Grandfather Twilight aloud and prompt them to be aware of questions they have as they listen. Stop every page or two to allow students the time to write a question they have on their post-it notes. Tell students to write only one question per sticky note.

12. Finish reading the book and then ask students to share their post-its with a partner sitting near to them and to come up with answers to any question that they can.

13. Ask a few students to share their questions and answers. Point out any questions that were answered directly from the text...no inferences needed, and stick them on the new poster under the heading “Answered in the Text.”

Questions that require inferences should be placed under “Inferences” on the chart. As a group, discuss other possible answers that could be inferred. Ask the students to articulate what text clues and background knowledge led them to make that inference and lead kids to understand that our inferences can be different because our background knowledge differs from person to person.

Point out that occasionally, we’ll finish a book and have unanswered questions. Sometimes we can’t infer the answer because we don’t have enough information. Remind students how hard it was to guess what the mystery objects were during the first lesson when they didn’t have enough clues. We can’t always make inferences if we don’t have any background knowledge to help us understand the clues.

**Assessment:** Ask students to choose one question from their post-it notes on their clipboard, write their name on it and place it on the chart in the appropriate place. The teacher can review these post-its before the next lesson to determine levels of understanding.

**Reteach:** Students who show confusion should be given an opportunity to see the strategy modeled again. Reread Grandfather Twilight and think aloud what questions occur to you. Model how you use text clues and prior knowledge to answer the questions that require inferences and place your post it on the chart under inferences. Demonstrate how some questions you have are answered

directly in the story (Such as “What does Grandfather do with the pearl?”) by showing them exactly where the questions is answered. Also show how some questions cannot be inferred because you don’t have enough information (such as “Why does Grandfather Twilight have a dog?”)

**Closure:** Revisit the anchor chart and ask students to reflect on what they have learned over the past two days. Focus particularly on when you make inferences and how it helps you as a reader and add any new ideas. Ask students to think about other subject areas and how you might make inferences. (For example, compare a hypothesis in science to an inference.)

**Accommodations:** Students with difficulty writing can have a peer or teacher write their post-it notes for them. Students may want to use lined paper with larger space to write if there are fine motor issues. Consider seating students with attention problems toward the front of the room next to the teacher. Students having Language Difficulties may need question starters on their post-it notes like “Why did...I wonder why...How will... etc.”

### **Lesson #3: Inferential Thinking in Non- Fiction: Making Inferences about the Meanings of Unknown Vocabulary**

**Enduring Understanding:** Making inferences is required in order to understand what is read. Inferences are a thinking strategy that requires the use of text clues and background knowledge.

**Essential Questions:** What is an inference? When do we make inferences?

How does making inferences help us as a reader?

**Teacher Objective(s):** The teacher will use the “think-aloud” procedure to model how to infer the meanings of unknown words. The teacher will also model how to keep track of his/her thinking while reading

**Student Outcomes and Indicators:** Standard 1 (General Reading Processes,) Indicator 4: Use strategies to demonstrate understanding of the text, Objective C: Identify and explain what is not directly stated in the text by drawing inferences, Objective H: Connect the text to prior knowledge and personal experience

**Materials/Space Requirements:** Anchor Chart and markers from lesson #1, Graphic Organizer #1 copied for each student and an overhead copy for the teacher, clipboards for each student and for the teacher, Kids Discover Magazine “Rain Forests”- One copy for each student and one for the teacher.

**Time required:** One hour

**Introductory Activities:**

1. Start by asking the students to think about a time they were reading and they came to a word they didn’t understand. Ask the students to turn and talk to a partner about that time. After allowing students a few minutes to talk to each other, elicit a few responses from the class. Point out that sometimes we can’t understand what the author is telling us because we don’t understand some key vocabulary.
2. Draw student attention to the anchor chart from previous lessons and review the students’ ideas.

3. Tell them that today they are going to learn how making inferences can help us to figure out the meanings of unknown vocabulary words. Tell the students that they are looking to add to the anchor chart today at the end of the lesson. Tell them to focus on the essential questions: **When** do you make inferences while reading and **how** does it help you as a reader?
4. Gather the students on the floor close to you in order to focus their attention. Point out that even adults sometimes come across words they don't understand. Assure them that good readers don't always understand everything they read, but can use strategies like making inferences to help them when meaning breaks down.
5. Ask students to turn to pages 4 and 5 and preview the pages. After allowing time for previewing, have the students share with a partner what they think we will learn as we read this together. As they do this, put the transparency of organizer #1 on the overhead.
6. Begin to read the first paragraph aloud. After finishing, think aloud: "Wow...this is really interesting. I didn't know that the rainforest had layers! There was a word I didn't understand though. "(Then the teacher writes the word "vegetation" on the overhead under the category labeled "Vocabulary".) The teacher then points out how he or she can infer the meaning of that word by saying something like: "As I reread, I get a few clues- "leafy upper branches" is one clue I can write under Text Clues. I also see a clue with in the word "vegetation". This word looks a lot like the word 'vegetable.' I know that vegetables are plants we can eat so when I think about the clues "leafy upper branches" and my background knowledge

about 'vegetables' I can write under the category "My inference" that vegetation is plant life! (The teacher may wish to take opportunities to tie in science concepts covered in other parts of the school day as appropriate!)

7. Repeat the think-aloud process with the word "dim", writing on the organizer how the text clues "very little light" and background knowledge helps you understand that dim means it is pretty dark on the rain forest floor.

**Student Practice:**

11. Ask the students choose a partner to read with for about 15-20 minutes. Ask them to continue to explore this issue of Kids Discover and use the organizer on a clipboard to record vocabulary that is difficult. Students need to work with their partner to identify text clues and prior knowledge that would help them understand the meanings of the new words. Circulate as they work to answer questions and assist students.

13. Gather the students together again and ask a few students to share their new vocabulary and how they inferred the meaning. Point out that sometimes we can't infer the answer because we don't have enough information. We can't always make inferences if we don't have any background knowledge to help us understand the clues. Remind students that the dictionary is a useful tool for those instances.

**Assessment:** Collect the student organizers and observe levels of understanding. Ask students to complete worksheet #1. Use the results to decide what level of understanding each student has.

**Re-teach:** Students who show confusion should be given an opportunity to see the strategy modeled again. Read pages 16 and 17 with the students and think aloud how text clues and prior knowledge help you learn the meanings of words like “slash and burn farming” and “grazing”.

**Closure:** Revisit the anchor chart and ask students to reflect on what they have learned today. Focus particularly on when you make inferences and how it helps you as a reader and add any new ideas the students may come up with.

**Accommodations:** Students with difficulty reading the Kids Discover magazine can use an alternative text or if none is available a peer or teacher read the text to them. Weekly Readers or Scholastic News from the previous grade level provides a good source of nonfiction text for below level readers. Teachers may want to choose partners for their students if readability of the text is an issue for many students. Comic books provide a great text for English language learners since the pictures provide extra support for students who know little English. There are science-related graphic novels that would be useful for this purpose.

Organizer 1

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

New Vocabulary Word	Clues in the Text and my Background Knowledge	Inferred Meaning

Worksheet #1

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Here is what I know about making inferences:

I have these questions:

My goal is to:

#### **Lesson #4: Comparing Making Predictions to Making Inferences**

**Enduring Understanding:** Making inferences is required in order to understand what is read. Inferences are a thinking strategy that requires the use of text clues and background knowledge.

**Essential Questions:** What is an inference? How does making inferences compare to other comprehension strategies such as predicting?

**Teacher Objective(s):** Teacher will guide students to make comparisons between making predictions and making inferences in order to deepen student understanding of both strategies.

**Student Outcomes and Indicators:** Standard 1 (General Reading Processes,) Indicator 4: Use strategies to demonstrate understanding of the text, Objective C: Identify and explain what is not directly stated in the text by drawing inferences, Objective H: Connect the text to prior knowledge and personal experience

**Materials/Space Requirements:** Anchor Chart and markers from lesson #1, A copy of the picture book Fly Away Home by Eve Bunting, An overhead transparency of a Venn Diagram, A variety of reading materials at appropriate levels for each student (perhaps 4-5 stories or magazine articles that each student can choose to read), A copy of Organizer #2 for each student.

**Time required:** One hour

**Introductory Activities:** 1. Review the anchor chart from the previous lessons.

2. Explain that one of the best ways to deeply understand something is to compare and contrast it with something else. Tell the students that today they are going to be thinking about what they have learned about the strategy of making inferences and compare it with a strategy they have used for years: making predictions.

3. Gather students on the floor close to you and share with them the pictures and title of the picture book Fly Away Home and ask them to think about what this story will be about.

4. Ask students to turn to a neighbor and share their predictions with a neighbor.

5. Ask a few students to share their predictions and ask them to explain how they came up with their prediction and how their thinking process compares with what they have learned about inferences.

6. Complete the Venn Diagram with the class identifying both similarities and differences between the two strategies. Help kids to see that both predicting and making inferences requires them to connect their background knowledge with text and picture clues but that predictions are usually verifiable when you read on. Inferences cannot always be completely verified upon reading further.

Inferences and predictions can start with questions (Predictions start with “What will this book be about? or What will happen next?”)

**Student Practice:**

7: Give students an opportunity to read independently and keep track of their thinking using organizer #2. Tell them that they will be asked to create questions,

make predictions and inferences as they read and that you will collect their work to evaluate their understanding of making inferences.

**Assessment:** Conference with individual students as they read and collect organizers at the end of the period. Look for students who are confused about what the differences are between predicting and inferring. Also watch for students who seem unable to make inferences.

**Re-teach:** As you conference with individual students who are having difficulty, guide them toward making inferences on their own. Encourage them to ask themselves questions and use background knowledge and text clues to infer. Also encourage them to think about what they are doing well, what is still confusing to them and set a goal for the next time they read.

**Closure:** Ask a few students to share their inferences and explain their thinking. Revisit the anchor chart and add anything new the students have learned.

**Accommodations:** Allow students who have difficulty staying focused on their reading to read and complete the organizer with a partner. Provide question starters for English Language Learners or students with language delays.

*Organizer 2*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Question	Prediction	Text Clues	Background Knowledge

Questions	Inference	Text Clues	Background Knowledge

### **Lesson #5 : Inferring the Theme**

**Enduring Understanding:** Making inferences is required in order to understand what is read. Inferences are a thinking strategy that requires the use of text clues and background knowledge.

**Essential Questions:** What is an inference? How does making inferences help us understand the author's message?

**Teacher Objective(s):** Teacher will model how to infer the theme or the author's message in the story Fly Away Home.

**Student Outcomes and Indicators:** Standard 1 (General Reading Processes,) Indicator 4: Use strategies to demonstrate understanding of the text, Objective C: Identify and explain what is not directly stated in the text by drawing inferences, Objective H: Connect the text to prior knowledge and personal experience

**Materials/Space Requirements:** Anchor Chart and markers from lesson #1, A copy of the picture book Fly Away Home by Eve Bunting, a blank chart labeled "Possible Big Ideas from Fly Away Home." A fresh copy of Organizer #2 from lesson 4 for each student and an enlarged copy of Organizer 2 on chart paper for the teacher.

**Time required:** Two - One hour periods over two days

**Introductory Activities:**

1. Review the anchor chart from the previous lessons.
2. Explain that authors write books for a reason. Many times, there is a message a moral behind their writing. Other times, we can infer a theme or a big idea of what the text is all about
3. Gather students on the floor close to you and share again with them the pictures and title of the picture book Fly Away Home and ask them to revisit some of the predictions made the day before.
4. Begin reading to the students and model for them some questions that you have as you read. Some good questions might be, "Why are the boy and the father sleeping in an airport? Why can't they lie down to sleep? Why are they trying not to be noticed?" Read about 1/2 of the book aloud and stop. Go back to

the questions you have written on the chart and answer them by identifying background knowledge and text clues that helped you to infer.

5. Revisit some of the initial predictions and ask students to share what they think the book is all about now that they have listened to some of it. Stop and record some of these thoughts on a separate piece of chart paper labeled: "Possible Big Ideas from Fly Away Home." Save for tomorrow.

## **Day 2**

6. Revisit the charts from yesterday. Pass out to each student a clipboard and an organizer and seat them close to you on the floor.

### **Student Practice:**

7: Give students an opportunity to listen to you read the rest of the story and keep track of their thinking using organizer #2. Tell them that they will be asked to create questions, and make inferences as they listen.

8. As teacher, continue to share your own thinking occasionally and provide opportunities every few pages for students to share their thinking with a partner nearby.

9. After finishing the book, ask student to think through what they have heard and consider what may be some big ideas that the author was trying to help us understand. Themes such as "Hope", "Being homeless is hard," "We should try to help the homeless," are typical student responses. Help students to see how text clues and background knowledge helped them to determine the big ideas including what the author's message might be. Point out how one needs to think

about text clues throughout the story to determine the big ideas. Record these “big ideas” on the chart labeled “Possible Big Ideas from Fly Away Home.”

**Assessment:** Collect student worksheets to determine whether or not they are able to make inferences as they listen. Monitor student discussions about big ideas to determine levels of understanding. Teachers may wish to give a summative assessment and the MPIR (attached) is recommended. It should be given on a separate day since it is somewhat lengthy.

**Re-teach:** It will be very important to revisit this idea of ‘theme’ over and over as students read and react to a variety of texts. Identifying author’s message and theme are the most difficult of inferences because it requires students to make connections between and among ideas throughout the text.

**Closure:** Ask students to revisit the anchor chart and add what they have learned about theme.