Make Inferences

Authors expect readers to make inferences—combining what they know with details in the text to figure out what is not said explicitly. Authors also assume that readers have the background knowledge they need to make those inferences. Yet as students encounter more challenging reading material, and in greater volume, they become more likely to lack the background knowledge that authors assume. Help students prepare for reading by introducing the subject and teaching or providing relevant information about it. As they develop their ability to make inferences, students should be taught to re-examine their observations, checking facts where possible, and evaluate how the details in the text support their conclusions.

Three Ways to Teach

Make Inferences About Print Advertisements   15–20 minutes

Print advertisements typically deliver clear messages using very little text. They expect readers to make inferences based on widely-shared background knowledge. For this reason, they can be a useful resource for teaching the importance of background knowledge in making inferences.

- Clip appropriate print advertisements from newspapers or magazines.
- Review the concept of making inferences. Say, *Authors don't tell you everything. Sometimes readers have to use details from the text and what they already know to make inferences about what the author leaves out. We are going to make inferences from these advertisements.*
- Distribute different advertisements, along with one copy of **Inference Chart** (page 3), to pairs of students.
- Have partners work together to complete an inference chart for each advertisement. As they share results, focus the discussion on the background knowledge that students used to make each inference.

Support Special Education Students You might consider extending this activity to appropriate video advertisements online. Discuss how students used clues in the advertisements and what they already knew to make inferences. Then work with them to transfer these developing skills to text.

Support Inferences with Text   30–45 minutes

To prevent students from overcompensating with background knowledge about a topic, guide them to support inferences by pointing directly to information in a text.

- Choose a level-appropriate article from the local news. Preread and record three to five inferences you can make based on details in the text.
- Distribute the article to students, and display **Inference Chart** (page 3). Read the article aloud as students follow along, and pause to model as you make an inference and fill in the chart.

> *It says that finding a place and raising funds for construction of the skate park is taking a long time. I wonder why? Earlier in the article, it said that when some people wanted to build a community swimming pool, there was a lot of opposition. Some people thought it cost too much money. Others thought people should just swim in the lake. The author doesn't say so, but this may be what is stalling the skate park. Many people may be against it.*

- Display the inferences you prepared, and assign them to students. Direct students to complete their charts by finding the evidence that supports each inference. Encourage them to quote accurately from the text.

Write a Caption   10–15 minutes

Connect to Writing Explain that a caption is a brief line of text that explains or titles a picture. If a picture did not have a caption, the person looking at it would have to make an inference about what was happening based on clues in the picture and what they know about the subject.

- Clip a selection of pictures from newspaper and magazine articles about which students are likely to have some background knowledge. Distribute one each to student pairs.
- Have them study the picture, using the following question prompts.

  - *What do you see?*
  - *What do you know about what you see?*
  - *What background knowledge do you have about this picture?*

- Have them write a list of inferences they can make about the picture. Then challenge them to write a caption.
- Display all of the pictures, and read each caption aloud. Challenge the class to match the caption to its picture.
- Once the class has matched a caption to its picture, have the partners who wrote it share how they used clues and what they already knew to make their inferences.

Check for Understanding

If you observe...	Then try...
difficulty identifying textual clues that point to inferences	modeling and providing practice with texts that relate to students' background knowledge and experiences. With content area texts, fill in gaps in students' background knowledge to support inferential thinking.

Name_____

Inference Chart

Title

Detail	Detail	What I Know

Inference

Detail	Detail	What I Know

Inference