Make Inferences

When readers make inferences, they combine information in the text or pictures with their background knowledge to understand key ideas and details that are not directly stated. Even though students make inferences every day, such as reading a facial expression to determine someone's mood, they can struggle with knowing how or when to apply it as a reading strategy. Often what is hardest for students is understanding how to link what they already know with details in the text. To improve their ability to make inferences, students need plenty of teacher modeling with think alouds, followed by guided practice.

Step by Step 30–45 minutes

1 Select an appropriate text.

- Select a short, simple read aloud. Make an effort to use texts with topics familiar to your students, so everyone shares the same background knowledge.
- Read the story in advance to identify key ideas and details that are not explicitly stated.
- Find clues in the text and in pictures that can help readers make inferences about these key ideas and details.

2 Introduce making inferences.

- Connect making inferences to the kind of thinking students do in everyday life.

> *You have a delicious sandwich sitting on a plate, waiting to be eaten. You leave the table and when you come back, the sandwich is gone. Your brother doesn't say anything, but he is eating one last crust and wiping his mouth with a napkin.*

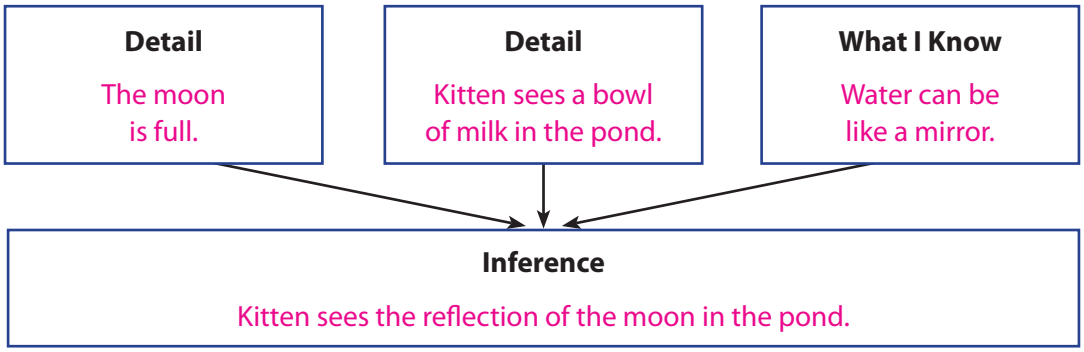
- Ask, *What happened to the sandwich?* (Your brother ate it.) *How do you know?* (one last crust, wiping his mouth with a napkin)
- Point out that your brother did not say he ate the sandwich, but you used clues to figure it out. Explain that this is called making inferences.
- Display the phrase *making inferences,* and read it aloud chorally with students.
- Say, *We also make inferences when we read. Authors don't tell you everything. Sometimes readers have to make inferences about what the author does not say.*

3 Model making inferences.

- Display **Inference Chart** (page 3).
- Read aloud a story, such as *Kitten's First Full Moon* by Kevin Henkes.
- Pause at a place where a key idea or detail is not directly stated. Think aloud as you use clues from the text or pictures, as well as what you know, to figure out what the author meant to say.

> *It says here that Kitten saw a bowl of milk in the pond, but that doesn't make sense. I remember it said the moon was full. I've seen a reflection of the moon on a lake, and I think that's what Kitten was really looking at—the reflection of the moon on the pond.*

- Record the details and your inference on the inference chart.



4 Guide practice in making inferences.

- As you continue reading, ask questions that lead to or support inferences.

> *It says Kitten is racing. Have you ever raced somewhere? Why would you race? What does the author want you to know about Kitten right now?* (Kitten really wants to get the bowl of milk.)

- Record new details and inferences on a blank inference chart.

5 Provide opportunities for independent practice.

- Use read alouds frequently to provide practice making inferences. Have students work in pairs to discuss responses to prompts such as these:

> - *How do you think _____ feels?*
> - *Why does _____ feel that way?*
> - *Why do you think _____ did that?*
> - *What does the author want you to know about _____?*
> - *What clues make you think _____?*

- Encourage students to support their responses with details from the text and things they already know.

Check for Understanding

If you observe...	Then try...
difficulty with academic language and the concept of making inferences	identifying and labeling ordinary inferences that students make every day at school, such as knowing when to line up for lunch.
difficulty making inferences based on a text	providing practice with wordless picture books. Ask students if they can tell you the story as they flip through each page. If not, model noticing details in the illustrations or photos and thinking aloud about what you know to make inferences.

Inference Chart

Name _____

Title _____