**Inferential Reading**

**Background**

Teaching students to "read inferentially" helps them learn how to read more strategically. This technique is derived from the teaching model that learners develop knowledge via the process of interpreting new information in light of past experiences and rethinking past knowledge based on new information.

**Benefits**

Inferences are the conclusions we draw based on what one already knows and judgments we make based on given information. This strategy helps students make connections between their personal experiences and their comprehension of a text. Rather than stopping students during the reading process to comment on specific points, this strategy focuses on their thinking and how new information reshapes their prior knowledge. Inferential reading can be taught using a variety of reading material beyond assigned textbooks (i.e. cartoons and bumper stickers can be used as a way to help students think about what authors imply). As students develop inferential reading skills they learn to:

* understand the intonation of characters' words and relationships to one another
* provide explanations for ideas that are presented in the text
* offer details for events or their own explanations of the events
* recognize the author's view of the world including the author's biases
* offer conclusions from facts presented in the text
* relate what is happening in the text to their own knowledge of the world

Students can also use inferential reading to help them with new or difficult vocabulary by figuring out 1) antecedents for pronouns, 2) the meaning of unknown words from context clues, and/or 3) the grammatical function of an unknown word.

**Create and use the strategy**

Teachers should begin by reading the assigned passage before presenting it to students. The next step is to identify 3 or 4 main ideas in the reading selection. Teachers then develop a series of pre-reading questions for the reading assignment. The questions should 1) elicit previous knowledge of the topic (e.g., "What are your own attitudes and experiences about [idea]?"), and 2) point beyond past knowledge and encourage students to make predictions about the reading (e.g., "What do you think the article will say about [idea]?"). Teachers may wish to model this strategy using a short read aloud.

1. Have students first think about inferences they make every day in their lives.
2. Encourage students to discuss both their prior knowledge of the topic and their predictions about the reading selection.
3. Have students write predictions and speculations prior to reading the selection.
4. Ask students to read the selection as a whole without interruption.
5. After reading, have the students review their written predictions about the passage.
6. Ask students how the new information changed/reshaped their prior knowledge.

**Sample prompts**

Include comments like those listed below to help students learn to make various types of inferences:

1. "Look for pronouns and figure out what to connect them to."
2. "Figure out explanations for these events."
3. "Think about the setting and see what details you can add."
4. "Think about something that you know about this (insert topic) and see how that fits with what's in the text."
5. "After you read this section, see if you can explain why the character acted this way."
6. "Look at how the character said (insert a specific quote). How would you have interpreted what that character said if he had said (change how it was said or stress different words)?"
7. "Look for words that you don't know and see whether other words in the sentence or surrounding sentences can give you an idea what those unknown words mean."
8. "As you read this section, look for clues that would tell you how the author might feel about (insert a topic or character's name)."