

By grade four, students are required to identify key ideas in a text, noting details that support those ideas and draw inferences from them. The importance of understanding how to make inferences is reflected in the Common Core State Standards (see, for example, Literature, RL.4.1).

What can you infer about the main character after reading this passage?



By the time they are in high school, students are asked to “cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as in inferences drawn from the text” (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1). To satisfy the requirements of assignments stemming from this standard, students must understand what an inference is, as well as how to make an inference and how to identify details (or clues) in the text to support an inference.

When you are ready to review or relay for the first time information about inferences and textual evidence, display the following page and discuss the information. Print out a copy and encourage students to refer to this reference.

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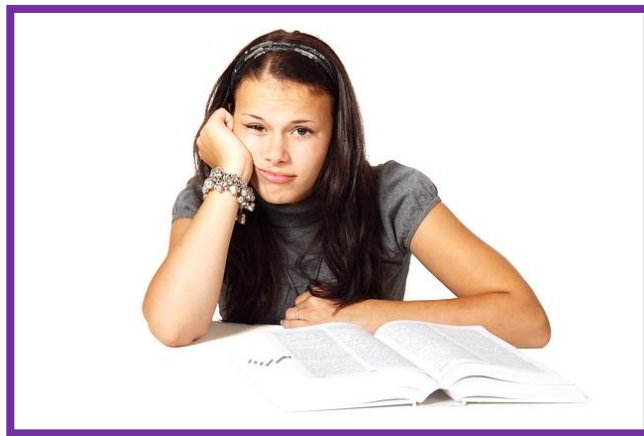


Making Inferences

You are confronted with a question on a test that asks you to make an inference. Don't panic. You may not realize it, but you make inferences all the time. An inference is an educated guess that is based on your experience in combination with the information you have in front of you. You make inferences when you are talking with others, reading, watching television, or listening to music. You make inferences when you interact with other people and even your pets. For example, if your mother looks at you sternly, you may infer that she is angry or upset with you. Or if your cat cuddles in your lap and purrs, you may infer that the cat is very content.

Gathering Clues

Look at the photograph below. What inferences you can make about the person in this picture?



There's not a right/wrong answer to this question, but you may have inferred that she is bored or frustrated. Based on her age, you may have inferred that she is a student in high school or maybe college. What evidence do you have for your inferences? She looks to be in her middle or late teens and she has a large book in front of her. This suggests that she is a high school or college student. You could point to her facial expression, her stooped posture, and her head resting in her hand to support the inference that she is bored or frustrated. These are indications—or evidence—of boredom or frustration.

Readers continually make inferences as they read literature or informational text. They make these inferences because writers don't always spell out everything for readers. They want readers to think about what they are reading. The text on the next page is an example of a writer not explicitly revealing information. This writer makes you infer to gain meaning from the text.

All her friends seemed excited and happy about having a day off school. The weather was already getting cooler, but it hadn't snowed yet so there were still things to do. For Araceli, the day was always a mix of sadness and pride. She got dressed slowly, thinking about what she wanted to wear to see her dad. Her mom was already dressed and urging Araceli to hurry up. "We have a long drive, sweetheart, let's get going," her mom urged gently. She was trying to be cheerful, but Araceli knew this was a hard day for her mom, too. "I want to stop and get some flowers on the way," Araceli said, but her mother was already in the car.

They drove silently, stopping to get a small bouquet of roses. Araceli's dad had always said roses were his favorite flower. They had to show their ID cards to the soldier at the gate of the military base. From there, they parked the car and walked to a field with hundreds of tiny flags. Clutching the roses, Araceli stopped in front a white stone marker and said, "Hi Dad. I'm proud of you. You are my hero."

After reading this passage, what do you infer Araceli and her mother are going to do? You probably made an educated guess—an inference—that Araceli is going to a cemetery to put flowers on her father's grave. You may have inferred that it is Veterans Day, a holiday celebrated each November 11 to remember the men and women who served in the United States military. While the writer didn't say that specifically, most Americans probably draw that inference because of the details the author provided in the text.

Textual Evidence to Support an Inference

The writer provided details such as the following to support the inference that Araceli is going to visit her father's grave:

- It's a holiday in the late fall; Araceli's friends are happy not to go to school, but she's feeling sadness and pride. (*It's probably not Halloween because that's not a school holiday; it's probably not Thanksgiving because schools are usually closed for two days.*)
- She's going to see her dad. (*She doesn't seem happy—the text says she feels sadness and pride.*)
- The day is hard for her mom, too, and she tries to be gentle. (*This day affects the family and the mother is very sensitive to Araceli's feelings.*)
- They are getting flowers for him. (*She talks about her father in the past tense.*)
- They go to a military base and see a field of tiny flags; Araceli stops in front of a marker and talks to it. (*Most Americans know that a military cemetery is where veterans are buried; putting together all the clues about the field of tiny flags, they can figure out that it's probably Veterans Day, a holiday celebrated each year on November 11.*)

The details in the text that lead readers to such a conclusion are called *textual evidence*. Textual evidence is the specific information we use from a text to support our inferences.