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*Sincerely,
Karen Haag*

Little Inferring Pieces

- Inferring is a strategy used before, during and after reading.
- Predicting is a part of inferring.
- Inferences need to be based on references in the text and then mixed with background knowledge.

We need to teach students how to

- Figure out what words mean
- Determine the setting(s) of the story
- Find answers to questions the reader doesn't understand
- Identify to what pronouns refer
- Use text to understand characters
- Distinguish fact from opinion
- Explain for events
- Explain the underlying message from the author



S T R E T C H those inferring muscles!
Get started inferring today.

Here are some activities you can try tomorrow.

(1) Real-life puzzles: What is the explanation for this event?



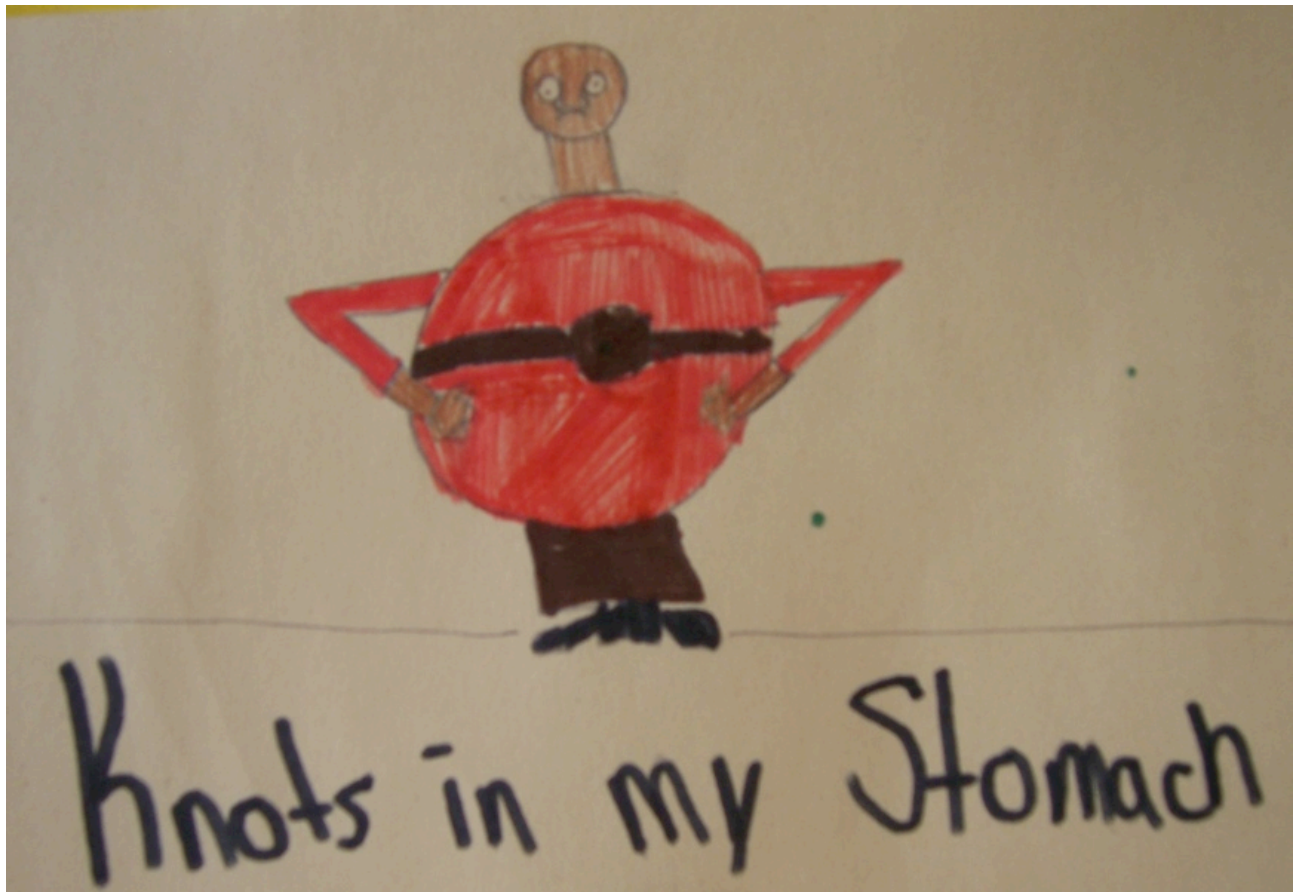
(2) Solve riddles (Monika Beisner's *Book of Riddles* is excellent!)

What is it? It stands on one leg with its heart in its head.

(3) Explain proverbs Go to www.manythings.org to find proverbs, puzzles, and many things☺

Laughter is the best medicine.

(4) Draw pictures of Idioms: <http://www.idiomsite.com/>



(5) Solve Jokes

What did the beach say when the tide came in?

(6) Getting Started: Referencing the Text

I made up a game to play with my students called “referencing the text.” I find it’s a good way to introduce inferring.

1. Read the same book or story ahead of time.
2. Begin by explaining, “referencing the text.” I put a sentence on the board. *The boy stared into the dark corner wide-eyed.* I ask, “Is the boy (1) annoyed, (2) scared or (3) angry and how do you know?”
3. Give some time to think and then I ask my students to respond by holding up one, two or three fingers to match the answer they choose. Immediately they see that everyone said scared.
4. “How do you know that’s what the author meant?” I push them. Through a short discussion we arrive at the conclusion that *dark corner* and *wide-eyed* are two clues that the boy was scared. The text never said the boy was scared but we know because dark is almost always associated with scary and wide-eyed gives us a mental picture of a boy who looks more scared than angry or annoyed. The two clues together make us infer “scared.”
5. Compete to see who can get the best score in this game - one point for each right answer.
6. Ask them one question. Anyone can raise their hand and be called on to answer. One point if the answer is correct AND the child can explain how he/she came to that answer by referencing the text.
7. Next, take your turn! Any child can ask me a question. I answer and also reference the text. I challenge them: “I’ve never lost,” I tell them. The game usually lasts 45 minutes and many days after that.



I realized that through this game we were constantly inferring, drawing conclusions, and making predictions through asking effective questions and by making the children point to the parts of the text that made them answer they way they did. (It works for literal questions, as well, obviously.) The kids learn to ask good questions as well. As the students get more confident, I eliminate most literal questions and concentrate on inferential questions.

Over the years, I’ve come to realize that students move towards the wrong inference because they ignore all the clues and concentrate on one. I used this example in class the other day. “He pulled his reindeer coat around his shoulders. He was glad to have his sealskin boots and his heavy trousers to guard him against the stinging wind. He snapped the whip and the dogsled took off with a jolt. Where does the man live?”

One of my students saw reindeer and said, “The man is Santa Claus and he lives at the North Pole.” I find this problem to be true often. It is important to teach students to use every clue and put them together to make the best inference. Otherwise, they will move in some very strange directions.

(7) Lesson Plan: Observe and Infer Humor in Cartoons

Review the word **observation**:

Observation – The facts. Only what you observe. That which cannot be argued.

(Ask students to write this definition in their notebooks.)

Ask students to observe what you are wearing giving you only the facts – what they see, hear, smell, feel or taste. You can do this while they are getting the definition written down. *Example: cloth is denim, there are beads on the cloth, and the beads are red, blue and yellow.*

Review the word **inference**:

Inference – an educated guess as to why, where, when, etc.

(Ask students to write this definition in their notebooks.)

Ask students to infer why you are wearing what you are wearing today. **Point out that inferences** can be different for different people, BUT they should be based on the facts, not just wild guesses. *Example: "I am wearing my beaded jacket because my fairy godmother gave it to me,"* is not an inference based on fact.

Possible true inferences might be:

1. *I'm wearing this jacket because I like it.*
2. *I'm wearing the jacket because it's the only thing left clean in my closet.*
3. *I'm wearing this jacket because it is a gift from my mother-in-law and she is visiting.*

A second example if they need one – a true story.

I planted a bean plant in a cup and put it in the window. I planted a bean plant in a cup and put it in the closet. After one month, I **observed** that the plant in the window was dark green, 12 cm. tall, full, and straight. The plant in the closet was thin, spindly, yellow and 21 cm. tall and leaning toward the closet door.

Based on the facts, what can we **infer** about the two plants?

Both plants grew, interestingly enough. (Observation)

The one in the window got sunlight and grew as would be expected. It got enough light to allow the plant to make food. (Inference)

The plant in the closet needed light desperately. It grew toward the light let in by the closet door. It grew taller but looked less healthy. It became pale and yellow because it did not have enough sunlight to make food. (Inference)

Eventually, the plant in the closet would die. (Prediction)

These INFERENCES are educated inferences based on OBSERVED FACTS.

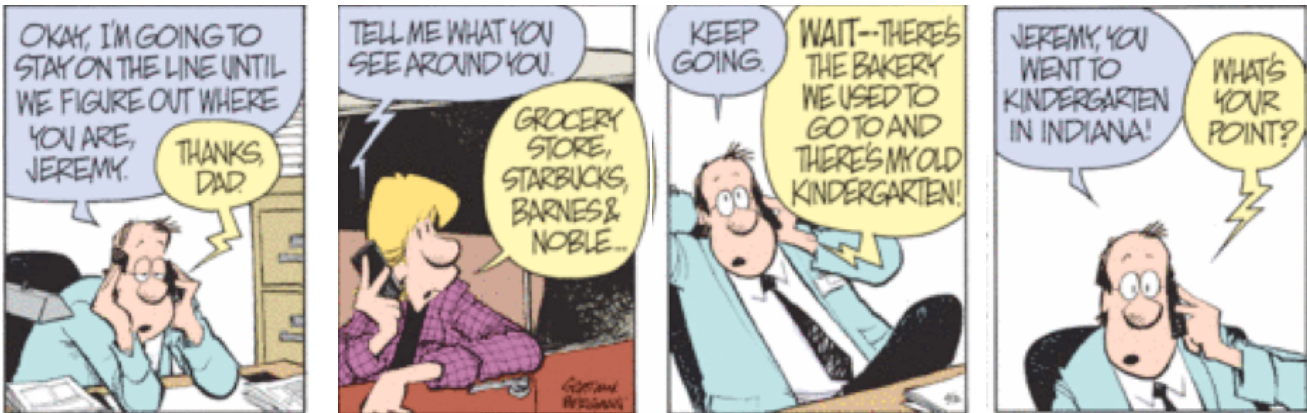
The same holds true in reading. We read for facts but our mind is constantly jumping to conclusions about what we are reading – some wrong, some right. As we read ahead, we *confirm* or *disconfirm* our inferences.

Try observing and inferring with a cartoon cut from the paper first. It's fun and informative!

Read one frame at a time. TOGETHER, write possible observations and possible inferences. Allow children to write their own IF they are believable and based on facts. By the third frame they should be writing their own observation and inferences with a partner and discussing as a group or class.

Possible Double Entry Journal for Zits

Frame	Possible Observations	Possible Inferences
1	Dad talking to Jeremy on phone. Dad holding his head. Jeremy thanks Dad.	Jeremy is lost. Dad is tired, exasperated, bored? Jeremy is thankful his dad is going to help.
2	Dad asks Jeremy to say what he sees around him. Jeremy sees a grocery store, Starbucks, Barnes & Noble.	Jeremy doesn't know where he is. Jeremy is telling dad landmarks that could be anywhere.
3	Dad asks Jeremy to keep talking about what he sees around him. Jeremy tells dad he sees the bakery and his old elementary school.	Dad still doesn't know where Jeremy is. Jeremy hasn't realized where he is.
4	Dad looks surprised? Dumbfounded? Dad tells Jeremy that he went to school in Indiana. Jeremy says, "What's your point?"	Dad knows Jeremy is far away. Jeremy doesn't understand how lost he is or how far away he is.



Answers:

What is it? It stands on one leg with its heart in its head.

Lettuce

What did the beach say when the tide came in? Hi, Tide!

Have fun inferring!