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As SD 70 literacy resource teacher, Jane is always looking for ways to support teachers with the challenges they experience. Teaching students to infer is one such challenge. Using a sequence that moves from object lesson to drama, wordless picture books and comics to text, teachers will learn ways to support students in making powerful inferences.

Topic: "My Students Simply Cannot Make *Inferences!!!*"

Audience: teachers of late primary to middle school

"My Students Simply Cannot Make Inferences!!!"

"Children infer all the time, every day— but that doesn't necessarily mean they know how to infer with text." (T. McGregor, 2007)

Before you Begin some things to consider:

Make sure students understand that inference is only one of many strategies to help them grow as readers, writers, and thinkers. We're not "doing inferencing", rather we are practicing reading, writing, and thinking *using inference as one strategy* which will help us.

Students must understand the learning intention and WHY it is important to their learning.

Start small-don't ask them to do too many things at once! And start with what they already know!!! Students cannot make inferences with new text/new vocabulary where they have to decode and process, connect, as well as infer. It is TOO MUCH to do to be successful!!

Purposeful Talk time and orally giving evidence/support for their inference are critical pieces. **** It's important right away to get them to understand it is their *schema* (personal background knowledge and experience) that helps them make inferences from clues.

A Critical Step-(AFL) Ongoing assessment using learning Intentions and class-developed criteria If you haven't yet, share the **Performance Standards with your students and build learning intentions and criteria** for what makes a powerful inference as you teach so students have clear goals in their learning.

Scaffolded Instruction to Teach Students to make Inferences:

1. **Sample Anchor Lessons-** without print
 - a) **Object Lessons -**
Use items in a garbage bag or purse, for example, to infer what the person may be like based on the items contained within.
 - b) **Dramatizations - (You model first)**
Put emotions on cards. Have students draw a card and dramatize a scene where they are displaying that emotion. They may use words, or not, but they mustn't use the actual emotion word (Show, Don't Tell). **Build criteria with them based on what they saw you do to support their planning when it is their turn.**
2. **Build a Thinking Stems chart** with them so they recognize and can use the language of inference. Post it visibly.

Possible stems:

 - My guess is...
 - Maybe...
 - Perhaps...
 - It could be that
 - This could mean
 - I infer

3. Introduce the concept of *schema*.

Accurate inferences are often based on schema and students need to understand that their connections and prior knowledge are powerful and necessary tools when making inferences.

Build a visual Inference chart with them and post it visibly: (2 samples below)

for picture clues and text

(a dose of) Schema + (a piece of) Evidence = (a solid) Inference

for text

BK (background knowledge) + TC (text clues) = I (inference)
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4. Continue with simple object lessons, but now cite students' evidence in print.

Inference	Evidence ***schema
<i>"Who Wears This Slipper?"</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Someone who likes to be comfortable and relax Someone who is male 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soft and loose fitting *** (soft shoes are comfy) dads and grandpas wear these *** (my dad has a pair of these.)

(from Comprehension Connections, T. McGregor, p53)

What I See/know	My Schema	My Inference
<i>"Who Wears This Slipper?"</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a soft loose fitting slipper a big man slipper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> soft slippers are so comfy my dad has a pair of these 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> someone who likes to be comfortable and relax a man owns this slipper

(j.kruks'05)

5. Using scaffolded instruction, continue working with **wordless pieces** using one of the templates above.

Ideas: - pictures in old magazines - cartoons and comic strips
 - Art (scenes with characters in them) - Wordless picture books

6. ***Introduce the strategy of using *subtext*. (Adding thinking bubbles to characters to tell what the character is thinking and feeling.)

(**Inferring with Subtext** is excellent for building a 1) reading/writing connection, 2) understanding characterization, 3) empathy and understanding, and 4) building socially responsible behavior.)

7. Move to text when students are ready. It's effective to read a chunk where inferring is required, have them make a **visual picture in their mind**, sketch it, use subtext and make an inference. This builds on what they have been practicing. Some won't need the subtext and sketching support for as long as others.

Lyrics from songs are also powerful tools for teaching inferring and generating them.