

# **Inferring**



**is like**

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**Reading between  
the Lines**

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## 6.8 Look for a Pattern

**Strategy** Often, traits are revealed through behaviors a character repeats again and again. Try looking at the character in multiple parts of the story. Think to yourself, "What actions, or thoughts, or dialogue repeats? Where is there a pattern?" Use that pattern to name trait(s).

**Teaching Tip** In texts at the primary elementary levels, it's often the case that to teach children how to distinguish between traits and feelings of a character—two things that are often confused—you can teach children that feelings change while traits stay the same. The challenge is that beginning around level N, we do start to see new traits emerge by the end of the story. For example, in *Jake Drake, Bully Buster* (Clements 2001), the bully acts consistently mean and cruel toward Jake until the end of the story when he's forced to do a project with Jake. Through their time together, Jake starts to realize a few things about him. For one, he has some artistic talent. Also, he is very shy and is scared to speak in front of the class. There is still a pattern of bullying behavior at the beginning, but the new information about him helps us to craft a more complex picture of him. Because of the shift in complexity of characters around level N, I recommend this strategy for readers up to and including level M.

### Prompts

- Describe the character in the beginning.
- Describe the character now.
- Check your trait list. What words describe the character?
- Do you see a pattern?
- How is the character behaving again and again?
- What's the same from page to page or part to part?

Clementine #3 (H)

Clementine helps out a lot because she has really good ideas and is really generous. Maybe it's because she wants her parent's to pay attention to her. It's important because C could do something bad and her parent's might not care!

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C being pg. 7  
generous by (T.2)  
She said her teacher's name getting wrong and a Polazda. Preset because right away! she did something nice to her dad.  
Pg. 2 (T.2)

*Who is this for?*

LEVELS  
H-M

GENRE / TEXT TYPE  
fiction

SKILLS  
inferring, synthesizing

## 6.14 Interactions Can Lead to Inferences

**Strategy** Notice a place where a secondary character is interacting with a main character. Think about what a secondary character's actions are making the main character feel, think, act. Shift your perspective. Look at how the main character's actions and words are causing the secondary character to feel, think, and act. What ideas do you have about each of them, and about their relationship?

**Lesson Language** Because of *Winn-Dixie* (DiCamillo 2000) is a great example of a book with many different characters interacting in different situations throughout the book. This would be a great book for thinking about how we can try to understand a character's perspective, and look at the interactions between that character and another one in the story to learn more about each of them. Let's think for a moment about an interaction between India Opal and her father, the night when Opal asks her father to tell her about her mother. If I look at this scene through Opal's eyes, I am thinking that she's feeling excited to learn about her mother. She's probably feeling a little sad, too, because her mother isn't with her and some of the things her father says are hard to hear. Still, the fact that her father trusts her with this information probably makes her feel sort of grown up and mature. Now, if I shift my thinking to the father's perspective, I'd say he's probably feeling nervous, and a little sad too. It's hard to bring up old, painful memories. He's also probably realizing that he can't protect Opal from the truth forever, and that may make him feel a sadness for the end of her childhood. When I think about both characters, I think this scene shows what a strong relationship they are starting to have, and that maybe their relationship is not just one of protector dad and innocent child—instead, she's starting to grow up.

### Prompts

- Find a place where the characters are interacting.
- How is (character name) treating (character name)?
- That's a thought about one character. What do you think about their relationship?
- Explain how (character name) is causing (character name) to feel?

Character: Iris  
 Book: Iris and Walter series  
 Iris loves her best friend Walter. She wants them to be best friends forever. Iris is happy when Walter is around. Walter's cousin Howie comes to visit. Howie is mean to Iris. Howie said "Does she have to do every thing with us?" Iris is sad. The next day Walter came to Iris's house. He said "Sorry" Iris said "It is ok!" Iris and Walter are glad Howie is gone.  
 Continue

Who is this for?

LEVELS

M and above

GENRE / TEXT TYPE

fiction

SKILLS

inferring, determining cause and effect



**Hat Tip:** *Fresh Takes on Teaching Literary Elements: How to Teach What Really Matters About Character, Setting, Point of View, and Theme* (Smith and Wilhelm 2010)

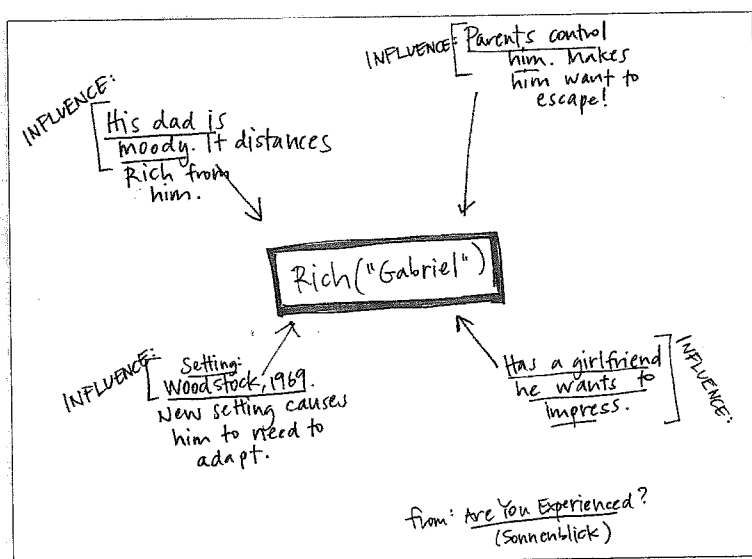
## 6.16 The Influences on Character

**Strategy** Consider all the influences on the character—the problem(s) the character is facing, the other characters with whom he or she comes in contact, and the setting of the story. Notice how the character interacts and reacts to these different forces. What effect(s) do characters, setting, and problems have on how the character acts earlier and later in the story?

**Lesson Language** Studying how a character acts in different situations helps you understand them from different perspectives. This helps you to see them as complete people—with strengths and weaknesses. When I want to think about Rich (also known in the book as “Gabriel”) from Sonnenblick’s *Are You Experienced?* (2013), I can consider the forces at play—his dad’s moods, the problems with feeling like he’s overly controlled by both his parents, wanting to impress his girlfriend, and then the setting when he goes back in time and has to acclimate to the new place and time. The way he acts in response to each of these situations helps me understand him as a more complete, nuanced character. I can track these effects in one spot or over the course of the novel. (Continue modeling by creating a diagram like the one on this page.)

### Prompts

- Think about characters first. What effects do other characters have?
- Think about setting. Name the effects.
- Think through story elements to help you consider what’s impacting the character.
- Explain how the character reacts.
- I agree that person (or place or event) had an impact—we saw a change in the character.
- You thought about a bunch of different things that influence your character. You are really reading carefully!



*Who is this for?*

LEVELS

N and above

GENRE / TEXT TYPE

fiction

SKILLS

determining cause and effect, inferring



**Hat Tip:** *Comprehension Through Conversation: The Power of Purposeful Talk in the Reading Workshop* (Nichols 2006)

## 7.6 What Are You Left With?

**Strategy** Reread the last paragraph or page. Think about what the author leaves you to think about by studying the narrator's or a character's final words. Say it like a lesson.

**Lesson Language** *The end of the book is often where the author wraps it all up. All the problems get resolved, we find out what happens with the character, and we can also, if we're really, really paying attention, find the lesson in the last words. Sometimes it's the narrator, sometimes it's the character, but often somebody says something that helps us think about what the whole story is about. For example, in *Ivy and Bean* (Barrows 2007), the story ends with the two friends, who resisted playing with each other in the beginning of the book, saying this:*

"See you tomorrow."

"See you tomorrow."

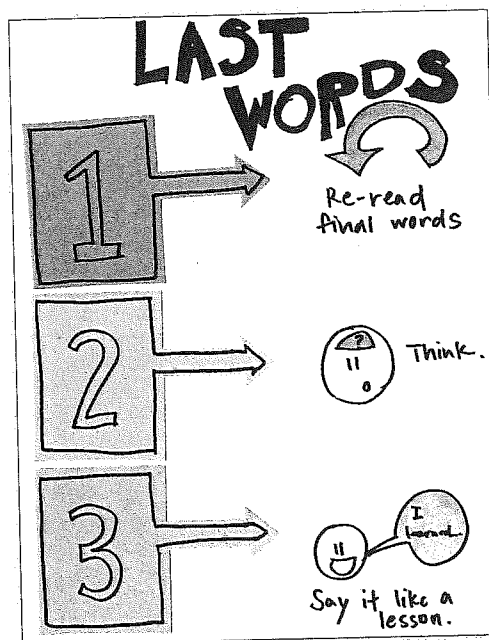
And the day after that, and the day after that, Bean added in her mind.

Ivy, holding her mother's hand in the middle of the street, turned around to look at Bean. "And the day after that," she said. (113)

*I can be the kind of reader who doesn't just breeze past the last words, but stops to think about if they are holding a lesson. What's happening here is that the friends are promising to see each other tomorrow and the next day and the next day. These same two people who didn't want to play together earlier in the book. What this teaches me is that people who are really different can end up being really good friends.*

### Prompts

- Reread the ending.
- Look again at the last paragraph (or page). Does the narrator lead you to a lesson?
- That's what it says at the end. Try to say the lesson in your own words.
- What's the last thought you have after reading the end of the book?
- Explain how the whole story ends up. So what's the lesson?
- Explain how the problem was solved. So what's the lesson?



*Who is this for?*

LEVELS

J and above

GENRE / TEXT TYPE

fiction

SKILLS

inferring, determining importance

# 7.15 The Real World in My Book

*Who is this for?*

LEVELS  
N and above

GENRE / TEXT TYPE  
fiction

SKILLS  
inferring, determining importance

**Strategy** We can uncover the real-world issues in the stories we're reading and use what we read in books to think more deeply about our lives. We can think about what aspect of our world the author might want us to think about, what the author might be trying to say, and then consider what's important.

**Lesson Language** *Writers of stories are often writing about the world, and the real-world social issues that real people grapple with each day—issues such as homelessness, race, class, gender stereotypes, and more. When we find these sorts of issues in our books, we can think about how the author writes about it, and what ideas the story is giving us. For example, in Fourth Grade Rats (Spinelli 1993) we might notice that the main character Suds keeps talking about the kinds of things he should do to “be a man” and what is acceptable behavior for boys versus girls. We might say, “Oh! The author is writing about gender issues.” But it's important to go beyond just naming the real-world issue in your book and to begin to say something about it. In this book, you might say “Suds learns by the end of the book to stop worrying so much about ‘being a man’ and accepts himself for who he is, so maybe what the author is saying is that gender is just one part of who you are, or that it's a mistake to think you need to act a certain way just because you're a boy or a girl.”*

### Prompts

- What real-world issues are you finding in your book?
- Based on what happens in the story, what might the author be saying?
- What ideas are you having based on what happens with this issue in the book?
- Name another issue. Let's think about it together.
- That's something that happens. Think about how it connects to the issue.

Title	Real World Issue?	So what About It?
Fourth Grade Rats	Gender Issues	Stop worrying so much about boy v.s. girl stuff - accept who you are.
One Green Apple	Difference/ Outsider	Everyone has something unique and special to contribute. Differences make our world a better place.



**Hat Tip:** *Comprehension Through Conversation: The Power of Purposeful Talk in the Reading Workshop* (Nichols 2006)

# 10.18 Cracking Open Headings

**Strategy** Read the heading or subheading that's causing confusion. Back up to a title or heading from earlier in the section. Think, "What can I infer this section might be about, based on what the whole book or section is about?" Read on to gather information from that section. Go back and reword the confusing heading in a way that is clearer.

**Lesson Language** Some headings and subheadings are like the boldest, clearest traffic signs: They tell us exactly what's to come and help us navigate the text. Other headings and subheadings, however, are worded in a less clear way. The author may have been clever or creative, but it's leaving us a bit confused! When you notice that the heading or subheading is written in a way that can't literally mean what it says, you'll have to infer the meaning. Often, you won't be able to fully infer the meaning until you read the whole section and then go back to the heading to think about it. For example, in Bobbie Kalman's *What Is a Primate?* (1999), I came to the section called "Thumbs Up!" and thought, "What could this section be about?" I backed up to the larger section that this smaller section was in—the title was "A Primate's Body." So then, I started thinking that "Thumbs Up!" must be about how thumbs are important to primates. I then read the section to check to see if the details matched.

## Prompts

- Read the heading. What do you think it means?
- Based on what you read in this section, try renaming the heading.
- Use the information in the section to say the heading in a less clever way than the author did.
- Go back to the heading.
- What's this section mostly about?
- List back what you learned. Now can you explain the heading?
- The way you just said that heading was simple and clear!

CLEVER HEADING:	SECTION IS ABOUT:	my NEW READING
Ready for Action	moving... how our bodies move when we play sports	MUSCLES
Power Up	how we get more energy or more power when we play sports	STRENGTH, POWER, ENDURANCE, SPEED
Dressed for Success	clothing or uniforms that people wear when playing sports	INCREASING SPEED, PREVENTING AIR RESISTANCE

From: Spring Into Action

*Who is this for?*

LEVELS  
P and above

GENRE / TEXT TYPE  
expository nonfiction

SKILL  
inferring



**Hat Tip:** *The Comprehension Toolkit: Language and Lessons for Active Literacy, Grades 3–6* (Harvey and Goudvis 2005)

# 11.4 Categorize Context with Connectors

**Strategy** Notice words that connect things like *and* or *but*. Think, "Is the word being used here linking to a word that means the same thing or something different than the rest of the sentence?"

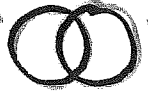
**Teaching Tip** The language in the above strategy is intentionally simplified so that it will work with even a first grader reading a book at level J. As texts get more complex, so do the "linking words," or conjunctions. Modify this lesson by giving level-appropriate examples in the strategy and by providing a chart that supports understanding the meaning of those words. For a slight spin on this strategy, see the strategy on page 320, "Find Similarities (and Differences) Within Groups" in this chapter.

### Prompts

- Do you see any connector words in this sentence?
- Are there any other words in this same sentence that might mean the same as this word?
- Because the linking word is \_\_\_\_\_, you should think that this word is opposite (or same) as what's in the rest of the sentence.
- The author gave you a clue about this word right in the sentence. Check the linking words.

## Look At Linking Words

different



Similar

**different**

*unlike* **Unlike** Melissa who was patient and kind, her mother had a quick temper.

*but* Carbohydrates give you energy, **but** fats can make you sluggish.

*not*

*opposite of*

*different*

*If the mother is unlike a patient and kind person, "temper" must be something negative.*

*"But" sets up an opposite, so sluggish must mean the opposite of energy.*

**Similar**

*Such as* Those who were diligent, **such as** Isabelle and Marcus, seemed to never tire of doing more and working harder.

*and* Overlapping of senses is **called** synesthesia.

*is* Saliva, **in** the watery stuff in your mouth, helps you digest food.

*or*

*also*

*The definition of synesthesia is right here!*

*Saliva means the same thing as what's in the sentence - "watery stuff."*

*Who is this for?*

LEVELS

J and above

GENRE / TEXT TYPE  
any

SKILLS

inferring, synthesizing



**Hat Tip:** *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*, second edition (Beck, McKeown, and Kucan 2013)