Making Inferences

Reading comprehension is a complex task involving several cognitive skills and processes that work together in order for students to understand the text they read. Students must be able to recall and sequence information, make inferences from insights about the text, and integrate their new learning with previously learned material. In this TIPS in Action, we give suggestions for teachers on how to teach inferencing skills to all learners in an inclusive classroom. Inferential comprehension is often defined as when students "read between the lines" of a given text. Students use prior knowledge and own thoughts to develop meaning or further understanding. The examples presented are reflective of a collaborative process required to plan the use of inferencing strategies in inclusive classrooms through a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework.

Benefits for students with extensive support needs

- Supports instruction beyond literal recall for more complex text

- Increases alignment with grade level instruction and experiences

- Allows students opportunities to make connections with text and communicate their thinking

Planning

1. Determine which subskill students should address- main idea, supporting details, sequence, comparisons, cause and effect, character traits, figurative language or prediction.

2. Determine which strategy to use to support explicit instruction regarding making inferences. See Table 1.

3. Identify barriers and brainstorm solutions when planning for all students. Consider how students will communicate their thoughts and engage with the content within text.

4. Determine what supports are needed for students to make connections between their current knowledge and ideas to the context within the text.

5. Develop any necessary materials.

In Action: Implementation

1. Pre-teach any vocabulary.

2. Review the context of the text as necessary.

3. Implement the strategy to explicitly teach inferencing.

4. Be responsive to student needs within instruction (e.g., add or remove picture supports for response options, decrease scope).

5. Collect data on student performance.

Evaluation

Reflect on instruction for future instruction on inferencing.

1. Did students understand how to engage with the strategy?

2. Were students able to make responses or generate ideas independently with the provided supports?

3. Did the strategy best fit the content of the text?

Making Inferences: Troubleshooting

The ideas presented are examples of ways to apply principles of UDL and are not intended to comprehensive.

If there is a barrier to student engagement in the strategy, you can:

- Provide the student with choices for how to respond within instruction.
- Highlight or isolate the text for consideration to minimize distractions.
- Complete the strategy in a pair or in collaboration with others.

If there is a barrier to student understanding of the expectations within the strategy, you can:

- Practice the strategy with the student using an area of interest prior to in the context of the text.
- Review all necessary vocabulary prior to implementing the strategy.

- Re-read or record for potential replay of the text for consideration.

If there is a barrier to student expression of their ideas within the strategy, you can:

- Adjust and use necessary tools or assistive technologies that best match the student's response mode.
- Consider potential student responses during planning and design supports that may help students explain their ideas.

Table 1

Strategies

Question-Answer Relationships (QAR)	Picture This
Cloze Procedure	Sequencing Text
Directed Reading and Thinking Activity (DRTA)	Open Mind
Graphic Organizers (Link to graphic organizer TIA)	Personality Traits
Justifying Answers	Simple Sentences
What is it?	Think Aloud (link to Think Aloud TIA)

Example 1	Example 2
Describe QAR. Some answers to questions are right there in the text (e.g., who, what, when, where), some answers require the reader to think and search (e.g., compare/contrast; summarize; retell), and some answers to questions are on my own (e.g., how would you feel…; have you ever…; what could be another title for…).	Describe Picture This: Students are provided a picture and make connections between what they see in the picture and their own background knowledge. Students can be asked to describe what they see in the picture, their personal experiences, and the inference that they can make based upon those two things
QAR is a common strategy that can be used with any type of text. Think-aloud can be used with QAR to model the process. For example, students are given a paragraph from Two Roads by Joseph Bruchac regarding a boy and his father who are hobos on a train. Within the QAR, students could be asked, "How would you feel if you were a hobo on a train?". The student could choose from a selection of feelings to include, for example, scared, excited, hungry, bored, etc. Students could refer back to text to support their feeling.	For example, a picture of a dog holding his food bowl is provided to the student. The student selects a matching image for the dog is holding a food bowl. The student can say/select/activate their AAC to communicate: "I know that when my dog holds his food bowl he's hungry. Therefore, I can infer the dog is hungry."