Making Inferences

A Reading Strategy

You might be asking, "what is an **inference**?"

The fact is you make inferences every single day, usually without even realizing it.

For example:

If you sit down next to your best friend at lunch and she moves to another table, you might *infer* that she is angry with you.

For example:

When you get home from school and your dog jumps up and starts licking your face at the door, you might *infer* that your pet is happy to see you.

Basically, an **inference** is an educated guess that we make based on the information that is right in front of us, combined with our past experience or prior knowledge.

Inferences are definitely required in everyday life, but they are also required when we are reading, watching movies, and even listening to music.
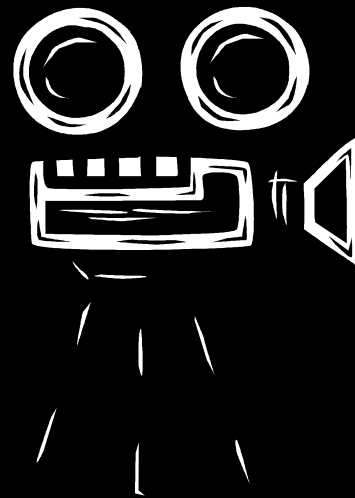
What are three inferences you can make from this picture?

Inferences are **NOT**:

Simply stating the obvious.

"The girl is wearing a fancy dress and carrying a basket of flowers."

Inferences are **NOT**:

Stating the ridiculous.

"The little girl must be a magicians assistant and she is about to turn the flowers into giant rabbits that will attack the audience."

Inferences are **NOT**:

Predictions
(although they are
closely related)

"That girl will walk
down the aisle in the
wedding and take
pictures later."

Good readers are constantly making **inferences** as they read literature or informational texts.

This is because writers don't always tell us everything explicitly. They want us to think a little bit about what we are reading.

For example:

Katie was excited about tonight. Happily, she put on her big, red shoes and bright, yellow outfit. Her mom helped Katie paint her face white with a big, red circle on each cheek. Just before Katie ran out the door to meet her friends, she attached her large, squeaky nose and placed a bright blue, pointy hat on top of her head. She grabbed and empty bag and went out into the night.

Notice that this paragraph never tells us explicitly that Katie is going out trick or treating for Halloween, but we immediately make that **inference** because of the details the author has provided.

These details that lead us to that conclusion are what we call **textual evidence**.

Textual evidence is specific information from a text that we use to support our inferences.

For example:

*Katie was excited about tonight. Happily, she put on her big, red shoes and bright, yellow outfit. Her mom helped Katie **paint her face white** with a big, red circle on each cheek. Just before Katie **ran out the door** to meet her friends, she attached her large, squeaky nose and placed a bright blue, pointy hat on top of her head. She **grabbed an empty bag** and **went out into the night**.*

Using the Strategy

1. Observe all the facts, arguments, and information given by the author

2. Consider what you already know from your own experiences

3. Think about causes and effects and try using "If… Then" statements

Practice

The woman waited nervously in line. When the counter was empty, she carefully unloaded her items from her cart. Lines creased her forehead as if to show the calculations ringing up in her head. Finally, the cashier began ringing up the items as the woman clutched her purse.

Practice

The child stood on the sidewalk clenching her ice cream cone. Beads of sweat collected on her little nose as she furiously licked at the ice cream dripping down her hand.

Practice

Bill and Jessica were almost done taking turns choosing players for their teams. It was Jessica's turn to choose, and only Kurt was left. Jessica said, "Kurt." We can infer that:

   a. Kurt is not a very good player.

   b. Jessica was pleased to have Kurt on her team.

   c. Kurt was the best player on either team.

   d. Jessica was inconsiderate of Kurt's feelings.

Defective Detective

Pigeon: Impossible