Inferential comprehension is often described as the ability to *read between the lines*. The reader relies on prior knowledge, intuition, and context from the text to speculate or hypothesize. Proficient readers are better able to remember and apply what they have read, create new background knowledge for themselves, to respond to text they have read. However, struggling readers have difficulty with some or all these comprehension skills.

Below are some activities that help students develop these comprehension skills by taking them through a guided experience of each concept.

What is It?

1. Introduce an object with which students may be unfamiliar, for example, an apple corer. Ask them to infer the object's purpose.
2. After several guesses, introduce a second object with which the first object is used: for example in this case, an apple. Continue to ask students to make inferences about the purpose of the first object.
3. Show students how the first object is used with the second object – in other words, core the apple.
4. Ask students who correctly guessed the purpose of the first object (the corer) to explain how the introduction of the second object (the apple) helped them infer its purpose. Explain that using information they already know can help students grasp the meaning of information they do not know.

Other suggested object pairs:

- Show a nutcracker. Ask students to make an inference – for what is it used? After several guesses, introduce an unshelled nut.
- Show a watch battery. Ask students to make an inference – for what is it used? After several guesses, introduce a watch.

Cucumber Cues

1. Provide students with sentences in which one word has been replaced by the word cucumber. (The teacher may read each sentence to nonreaders.)
2. Ask students to write or say the sentences, changing cucumber to a word that makes better sense.
   Examples:
   A.   I like to eat peanut cucumber.
   B.   Brush your cucumber with a hairbrush.
   C.   A dog has four cucumbers.
3. As students share their responses, ask them to identify words that gave them clues to the word they substituted. Ask students to relate the clue word to their background experiences and explain how this background information helped them find an appropriate substitute word.

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Backwards Words

1. Provide students with sentences in which one word is spelled backwards.
2. Ask students to read or listen to each sentence, find the word that is spelled backwards, and write or say it correctly.
   Examples:

   A. You are my lap.   D. I hit the ball with a tab.
   B. Look at the pam.   E. Dad put sag in the car.
   C. The meat is in a nap.   F. Dogs are good step.

3. As students share their responses, have them identify words that gave them clues to the word that was spelled backwards. Ask students to relate the clue word to their background experiences and explain how this background information helped them find the backwards word.

Think-Aloud

The teacher reads aloud to students and verbalizes the thinking he or she is doing in order to make inferences that help the teacher comprehend the text. Specifically:

1. Locate the evidence (stated facts) in the text which helps one make conclusions.
2. Think out loud, showing students how to put together prior knowledge and the facts from the text to answer the question.
3. Model the inferencing procedure until the students can begin to take over the necessary steps, finally reasoning successfully on their own.

By modeling this skill, normally invisible thought processes are made clear to students. For example, the teacher reads the following text:

"Grizzly bears are found in western Canada and in Alaska, living in forests on mountain sides. They have shaggy fur, humped shoulders, sharp teeth and long, sharp claws… Grizzlies usually live alone. Each bear has its own area of land, called a home range. It leaves scents on the bark of trees all the way around its home range to let other bears know where it lives."
[Wood, J. (1989). My first book of animals (p. 34). Boston, MA: Little, Brown.]

A portion of the teacher's think-aloud might be:

"Humped shoulders? Hmmm. What do they mean by that?
Oh, maybe when they're down on all fours; yeah, their backs are kind of like a hump then, okay, I get it!"

QAR (Question–Answer Relationships)

1. Use a small passage to form questions of three types:

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a. **Right There** – questions that can be answered by simply locating the words in one sentence (literal comprehension)
b. **Think and Search** – questions that can be found in the passage but not in one sentence (inferential comprehension)
c. **On My Own** – questions that must be answered in the reader's head (critical/creative comprehension)
2. Have the students read the brief passage.
3. Pose questions of the three types.

Have students answer each question and identify the evidence in the passage (unless it is an On My Own question) and explain their reasoning.

This teaching activity can involve manipulative materials by giving students cutouts of a human head and cutouts of a book. For each question, students lay out one or both cutouts to indicate the type of question being asked.

Right There – book | **Think and Search** – book and head | **On My Own** – head

Cloze Procedure

When preparing cloze experiences, follow these two criteria for selecting words to delete:

- Delete words that are *critical to understanding* the text and, therefore, cause readers to *focus* on *important concepts.*
- Delete words whose *position forces* readers to *search previous* and *ensuing text* to infer answers that require them to call upon their *background knowledge*.

Begin in the following manner:

1. Create a simple cloze statement by deleting one word from an informational sentence.
2. Ask students to generate a list of words that would make sense in the cloze blank.

   Example: The truck skidded out of control, crashed through the railing, and fell over the _____. (cliff, bridge, road)

3. Emphasize that readers rely primarily on previous knowledge to fill in the blanks when the author provides no obvious clues in the text.
4. Invite readers to examine additional cloze examples in which clues to the possible missing word(s) are included in subsequent text and, in order for the sentence to make sense, a reader would need to read on and gather additional information to infer the missing word.

Example: The truck skidded out of control, crashed through the railing, and fell over the _____. Since the boat was under the bridge, it missed being hit by the truck.

As students become proficient at completing single cloze sentences and short passages, increase the length of the passages using the following procedure:

1. Delete appropriate words from a written passage. (DON'T provide a list this time).

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2. Direct students to work through the passage in the following manner:

- Read through the entire passage to get an understanding of what it is about.
- Think through what is happening in each sentence in which a word is missing.
- Look back at previous sentences, picturing the action and locating words that help in understanding the author's intent for the sentence in question.
- As the passage becomes more complete, reread it and change previous answers, where appropriate.

3. When students have completed the activity, have them share their answers and give reasons for their choices.

Directed Reading and Thinking Activity (DRTA)

DRTA is a comprehension strategy that guides students in asking questions about a text, making predictions, and then reading to confirm or refute their predictions.

Steps include:

BEFORE

1. **Predict** – develop purposes for reading.

Possible Questions:

- What do you think the story might be about?
- What do you think might happen next?
- Why do you think so? (relating prior knowledge to the problem or situation)

DURING

2. **Read** – reason while reading (metacognition).

The teacher sets amount to be read before assessment.

3. **Confirm** – verify predictions.

Possible Questions:

- Were you right?
- Has something been added to your information that rules out your prediction?
- Why won't that work?

AFTER

4. **Reevaluate** – reexamine purposes for reading.

Possible Questions:

- Is your idea still possible?
- Do you wish to change your prediction?

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- What do you think will happen next?

Note: Repeat steps 2-4, stopping at predetermined points, until the story is finished.

5. **Extend** – refine.

- Extend concepts.
- Gather outside evidence or references.
- Redirect students' thinking to a particular portion of the story.
- Add additional guided instruction or practice if needed.

Reciprocal Teaching

(This technique should be taught by having the teacher model each step until students can carry out the four functions – predict, clarify, question, summary – on their own. There is a worksheet attached that could aid in this process.)

Direct students to work together, using a short, interesting passage to complete the four steps listed below.

1. Students read a passage and ask each other questions about what they just read.
2. Students summarize in one or two sentences what the passage was about (main idea).
3. Students clarify what they did not understand, such as a vocabulary word, a phrase, or a statement, by discussing the material with their fellow group members.
4. Students try to predict what will come next.

Use THIS worksheet to complete this process..

Picture This!

1. Place piles of picture cards on tables.
2. Organize students in partners.
3. Ask each partner pair to draw a card and discuss what is implied or inferred by the picture.
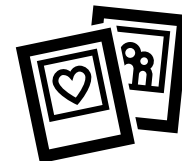
Examples:

- A student yawns several times.
- The teacher has mud on her shoes.
- One student takes a pen from a classmate's desk.
- The teacher hands out a blank sheet of paper.
- A student returns from recess crying.

Simple Sentences

Give sentences to students to practice making inferences.

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Examples:

- Sue blew out the candles and opened her presents.
- John went running into the street without looking.
- We bought tickets and some popcorn.
- When I woke up, there were branches and leaves all over the yard.
- Yesterday we cleaned out or desks and took everything home.

Cartoon Commentary

1. Provide editorial cartoons from recent copies of the local paper for students to examine. Encourage them to notice how the cartoonist wants to influence their thinking, as well as make them chuckle.
2. Ask students to think of a problem in their school about which they should be concerned.
3. Instruct students to create their own editorial cartoons to show what they think about this school problem.
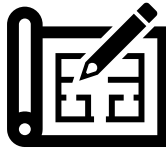
Variation: This could be completed using memes as well. Students could then create a meme that represents the school problem and post around the school. (Garbage, blocking hallways, noise in the hallways, sharing playground space)

Justifying Answers

1. Pose a question that is not answered explicitly in a passage that students will read.
2. Ask students to read the passage to answer the question.
3. Direct students to write down their answers.
4. Instruct students to go back to the passage to find words and ideas that support their answers.
5. Have students discuss how the words and ideas they selected led to their answers.

Sequencing Text

1. Select paragraphs or excerpts from books that describe a sequence of events or activities.
2. Place one of the sentences in the paragraph out of order and ask the students to find the sentence that is scrambled and makes the reading confused.
3. Direct students to correct the position of the sentence so that the sequence makes sense.

Variations:

- Students each hold a sentence strip and rearrange themselves in order.
- Students create sentence sequences based on something they know how to do (e.g., make a sandwich, was their hands) and ask peers to arrange them in chronological order.

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CREATIVE INFERRING ACTIVITIES

Figure It Out!

Instruct students to draw a "silly" picture showing what a given idiom seems to mean. Then write a sentence explaining what the idiom really means.

Examples:

- We thought it was going to sprinkle, but it rained cats and dogs.
- Jose' had such a bad cold that he coughed his head off.
- When Mary said my brother was stupid, I made her eat her words.

Figurative Language Ads

1. Instruct students to create an ad for a new product that incorporates a form of figurative speech they have been studying (in the advertising text).
2. Provide an opportunity for students to share their ads with classmates.

Figurative Language Artwork

1. Have students select a figurative speech phrase such as,
   > *"That person is 'as smart as a whip'"*
2. Create a drawing that illustrates it. Write the figurative speech phrase on the illustration but cover with a flap so it is hidden.
3. Provide a place for students to display their artwork and do a gallery walk with the students guessing each other's phrases from the illustrations.

Variation: Have students find cartoons or draw their own that depict figurative language. Have students create a [meme](#) that depict figurative language.

Open Mind

1. Prior to the lesson, create a handout that depicts the silhouette of a student's head. Label the [handout "Open Mind."](#) *Have one ready to project from computer.*
2. Have students think of a book character with which the entire class is familiar. Ask students to identify what that character might have been thinking and/or feeling during one event from the story. Invite students to come to the computer to draw symbols in the "open mind" to represent their responses.
3. Read a new story aloud to the students.
4. Ask students to identify the story's main characters.
5. Instruct students to select one of these characters and write his or her name on their copies of the ["Open Mind" handout](#) as it is distributed to each of them.

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6. Have students complete the "Open Mind" handout using symbols and words to depict the character's motives and character traits. Ask them to make notes below their silhouettes to explain and support their responses.

Personality Traits

1. Prior to the lesson draw on large chart paper a table that is labeled for names of characters in the far-left column and personality traits across the top row.
2. Have students name favorite characters from stories they have read, and state at least one trait that describes each character. List these traits on the whiteboard or computer. Then ask students to classify each as either a *physical descriptor* or a *personality descriptor*.
3. Tell students that they will listen to a story and identify the personality traits of characters in the story. Encourage students to take notes as they listen if that will help them to remember details of the characters.
4. Read the story out loud.
5. Ask students to identify several characters in the story, including the main character. List these characters' names on the left-hand column of the chart.
6. Tell students to give personality descriptions of various characters in the story. List these descriptions in the top row. *(There are many references to character traits on the internet to visit if students need to be prompted)*.
7. Have students identify and discuss which of these traits each character has, and mark the row and column for that character and trait with an X. Be sure students provide an explanation for their choices.

Where on Earth?

Play the "Where on Google Earth is Carmen Sandiego"

1. Access link HERE
2. Students read each clue that is provided to them. These clues inter hints about where Carmen Sandiego has travelled to.
3. Encourage students to compare their lists of clues (evidence). Once they've gathered enough evidence, they travel to each city following Carmen Sandiego until she is caught.

Variation: Teachers can set up a Mystery Skype with another class. The process is similar where the students can ask questions and are provided clues as to where the class is located.

What's Going on in This Caption

1. Visit the NY Times "What's Going on in this Caption" site.
2. Have the students make some predictions or inferences based on what they are seeing in the picture.
3. Questions to ask:

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- What is going on in this picture?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can you find?
4. View the conversation (teacher directed) of what others have predicted the picture is about.
5. Make a prediction – construct a caption.
6. Read the "reveal" to determine if the prediction was correct OR how close it was to the actual description.

Watch Video Snippets
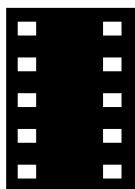
1. Show a video snippet (MANY available from YouTube).
2. Ask students questions regarding the snippet that help them make predictions/inferences about the video. Tailor the questions to fit each video's content.
3. Students explain clues from the video connecting with prior knowledge when presenting their answers. (Play again if needed)
4. Play the rest of the video. Determine if the predictions/inferences were correct.

Acting Out

rhetorical use	simile	metaphor	irony	proverb	poetry
riddle	idiom	cliché	slang	alliteration	mood
personification	overstatement	paradox	apostrophe	image	symbolism
hyperbole	understatement	anaphora	anastrophe	isocolon	parable
oxymoron	onomatopoeia	analogy	personification	extended metaphor	allegory
imagery	idiom	verbal picture	figure of speech	symbol	language
understatement	overstatement	irony	allusion	extended simile	

1. Ask small groups of students to select three phrases or sentences, each an example of a different type of figurative language (see chart above) such as, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks."
2. Have each group act out its three phrases, using a camera (iPhone or iPad) to record them.
3. Provide an opportunity for each group to share its videos with other groups.

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