

Inference

Inference is the skill of finding and understanding hidden meaning in text - this could be from an impression given, or the feelings or intuitions of the characters. It is what lies beneath the words.

Featured on curriculum

Inference develops as a skill between the ages of 6 and 12. Explicit exploration of inference is featured in school in years 5 and 6.

What to do

Try to avoid idioms in explanations - explain and discuss hidden messages to aid understanding. Providing question cards and practising summarising text can also help.

Highlight emotive language, and encourage reading aloud for as long as possible.

Encourage reading around a subject to increase background knowledge which a pupil can then bring to a piece of text.

When to raise a concern

Inference skills should be developing as the learner becomes fluent; questions such as how the character is feeling should be answered at a basic level by the end of KS1.

However, there is an argument that introducing inference too early can confuse decoding and fluency skills. Chall and Squires (1991) suggested that direct instruction in metacognitive literacy skills may be inappropriate in early years schooling.

How to assess

There aren't any specific or standardised assessments for inference alone - a test of reading comprehension (or questioning by the teacher) would be the closest standardised assessment.

Try showing the learner a picture or appropriate piece of text and ask them to summarise what's happening, or discuss popular films or video games, and focus on the emotions, feelings and what-ifs.