

New York State of Inferencing: The Key to Deep Reading Comprehension

Of all the skills inherent within the new reading standards, inferencing is the key. It exists within the first standard and affects all that follow. State reading assessments are replete with items requiring this skill, particularly short- and extended-response items. Yet, students continue to be challenged to be able to infer, conclude, surmise, reason, or deduce and how to support these similar actions.

Within Key Ideas and Details domain: the expectation for the reader is to understand how details function as the textual evidence to support an analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferentially. Also within this domain, the reader is expected to state a theme or central idea and how it is conveyed within a text which is dependent on inferencing. This is true of summarizing. Whether reading literary or informational text, the reader's understanding how a story, drama, plot or events unfold requires inferencing. A reasoned response to *Why*-questions or *who*, *when*, or *what* demands the inferencing skill for resolution.

The next domain, Craft and Structure, to determine the meaning of words, phrases, and tone as used in texts is based on inferencing, not to mention figurative language. An understanding of the importance of a sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza in a text and its contribution to development rests squarely on inferencing. How else to understand an author's point of view without the reasoning power of inferencing.

Final and highest domain of reading standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, requires one's perception based on reading and listening of various genres to compare and contrast what is seen or heard. How else may this be done without a deepened understanding of inferencing. To make a claim from one or more texts and support it is challenging and only works with a strong capacity for inferencing.

While our reading standards and the domains within them spiral similarly to a cognitive taxonomy, e.g., Bloom or Webb, the critical skill at each level is inferencing. The basis for conceptual understanding is inferencing. Concepts are ideas which are drawn from text from a careful and deliberate reading, ideally paragraph by paragraph. Readers of all ages are able to infer. This is strengthened with practice to cultivate the skill as text sophistication increases, concept load is heavier, ideas are more abstract, and information load becomes more concentrated.

For readers to connect texts, elaborate, or fill gaps, inferencing is not optional for comprehension; it is demanded.

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Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they “see” and “hear” when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.
8. (Not applicable to literature)
9. Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics.