

“MAKING INFERENCES: READING BETWEEN THE LINES”

CLAD Workshop

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Writers often do not explain everything to the reader. For example, in stories, the writer may not tell the reader the time or place. Often readers have to guess these things. This is called **making inferences** or “reading between the lines.” Readers frequently need to find small clues that lead them to infer—understand—things that the author doesn’t explicitly state. They need to use information in the text to guess other things about the text. For example, you might read: “The waves rushed up around his legs and he could feel the coarse sand between his toes.” You would then infer that this person was at the beach.

In this workshop, we will start out simple with making inferences based on conversations. We will then go on to exercises in which you will make inferences based on sentences and then short reading passages.

EXERCISE 1: Read the following conversations and answers the questions.

A: Look at the long line! Do you think we’ll get in?
B: I think so. Some of these people already have tickets.
A: How much are the tickets?
B: Only nine dollars for the first show. I’ll pay.
A: Thanks. I’ll buy the popcorn.

1. Where are these people?
2. What are they talking about?
3. Who are these people?

A: This is one of the reasons I hate working in a big city.
B: I know. Every day, it’s the same thing.
A: This is terrible! We may be here all night! I hope we don’t run out of gas.
B: No, I think there’s enough.
A: Let’s turn on the radio. Maybe there’s some good music.
B: Sorry, the radio’s not working.
A: I think I’ll take the train tomorrow!

1. Where are these people?
2. What are they talking about?
3. What do you think will happen next?

A: When did this happen?
B: Yesterday. I was playing soccer and I fell down.
A: Can you move it at all?
B: Only a little.
A: Can you walk on it?
B: No. It hurts too much.
A: I think we’ll have to take an X-ray.
B: Will I be able to play in the game tomorrow?
A: I’m afraid not.

1. Where are these people?
2. Who are they?
3. What are the people talking about?

EXERCISE 2: Read each sentence; then circle the one answer choice that is a logical inference based upon that sentence.

1. Blood cholesterol used to be thought of as a problem only for adults.
(A) Blood cholesterol is no longer a problem for adults.
(B) Only children have a problem with blood cholesterol.
(C) Blood cholesterol affects both adults and children.
2. When apple growers talk about new varieties of apples, they don't mean something developed last month, last year, or even in the last decade.
(A) Apple growers haven't developed any new varieties in recent decades.
(B) Some varieties of apples can be developed in a short time, but others take a long time.
(C) New varieties of apples take many years to develop.
3. In all cultures, gestures are used as a form of communication, but the same gestures may have very different meanings in different cultures.
(A) No two cultures use the same gestures.
(B) One gesture will never have the same meaning in two cultures.
(C) A person from one culture may misunderstand the gestures used by a person from another culture.
4. Although shepherding is an older and more beloved occupation, shepherds never caught the attention of American filmmakers the way cowboys did.
(A) There have been more American films about cowboys than about shepherds.
(B) Films about shepherds were popular before films about cowboys.
(C) Cowboys are generally younger than shepherds.
5. As an architect, Thomas Jefferson preferred the Roman style, as seen in the buildings of the University of Virginia, to the English style favored by Charles Bullfinch.
(A) The architecture of the University of Virginia was influenced by the Roman style.
(B) Bullfinch was an English architect.
(C) Jefferson preferred to build in the English style of architecture.
6. Even spiders that do not build webs from silk use it for a variety of purposes, such as constructing egg sacs and nursery tents.
(A) All spiders build webs.
(B) Spiders that build webs don't build egg sacs or nursery tents.
(C) Silk is used by all spiders.
7. There is more quartz in the world than any one kind of feldspar, but the feldspars as a group are five times more common than quartz.
(A) One type of quartz is five times more plentiful than feldspar.
(B) Quartz is less common than the feldspars.
(C) The most common type of feldspar is as plentiful as quartz.
8. Illegible handwriting does not indicate weakness of character, as even a quick glance at the penmanship of George Washington, Franklin D. Roosevelt, or John Kennedy reveals.
(A) Washington, Roosevelt, and Kennedy all had handwriting that was difficult to read.
(B) A person's handwriting reveals a lot about that person.
(C) The author believes that Washington, Roosevelt, and Kennedy all had weak characters.

EXERCISE 3: Read the passages. IF the statements following the passages are valid inferences based on those passages, mark the items **I**. If the statements cannot be inferred from the passage, mark those items **X**.

The term “neon light” was originally applied to a particular type of vapor lamp using the inert, colorless gas neon. A long tube was filled with neon, which then became luminous at low pressure when an electric current was passed through it. The lamp then emitted the characteristic reddish-orange light of neon. Today, the term “neon light” is given to lamps of this general type which may be filled with a variety of gases, depending on the color that is desired. Argon, for example, is used to produce blue light. Colors can also be altered by changing the color of the glass tube. The tubes must be quite long in all these lamps to produce light efficiently. As a result, high voltages are required. Neon tube lamps are not practical for indoor illumination, but they have found widespread outdoor use in glowing, colorful advertising signs.

- _____ 1. The inert gas neon is reddish-orange in color.
- _____ 2. The meaning of the term “neon light” has changed over time.
- _____ 3. Today’s “neon lights” never actually contain neon.
- _____ 4. All types of “neon lights” work on the same general principles.
- _____ 5. When stimulated by electricity, different types of gas may produce different colors.
- _____ 6. Modern “neon lights: are more efficient than those used in the past.
- _____ 7. The primary market for neon lights is businesses rather than private households.

A legend is a popular type of folk tale. In some ways, legends resemble myths, another type of folk tale. But myths describe events from antiquity and usually deal with religious subjects, such as the birth of a god. Legends tell of recognizable people, places and events and often take place in comparatively recent times. Some legends are based on real persons or events, but many are entirely fictional. The legends of the superhuman accomplishments of Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill are imaginary, while the legends about Washington and Lincoln are mostly exaggerations of real qualities those two presidents had.

All societies have legends. Most legends began as stories about the heroes of a particular region, occupation, or ethnic group. For example, John Henry was a legendary hero of black Americans, and Casey Jones of railroad workers. Over time, however, these figures have become national heroes.

- _____ 8. Both legends and myths can be classified as folk tales.
- _____ 9. Myths generally take place in comparatively recent times.
- _____ 10. The stories of Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill are not true, but they are based on actual people.
- _____ 11. Legends about Washington and Lincoln are not entirely fictional.
- _____ 12. John Henry and Casey Jones are today well-known only by small groups of people.

Natural flavorings and fragrances are often costly and limited in supply. For example, the vital ingredient in a rose fragrance is extracted from natural rose oil at a cost of thousands of dollars a pound; an identical synthetic substance can be made for 1% of this cost. Since the early twentieth century, success in reproducing these substances has created a new industry that today produces hundreds of artificial flavors and fragrances.

Some natural fragrances are easily synthesized; these include vanillin, the aromatic ingredient in vanilla, and benzaldehyde, the aromatic ingredient in wild cherries. Other fragrances, however, have dozens, even hundreds of components. Only recently has it been possible to separate and identify these ingredients by the use of gas chromatography and spectroscopy. Once the chemical identity is known, it is often possible to synthesize them. Nevertheless, some complex substances, such as the aroma of fresh coffee, have still not been duplicated satisfactorily.

Many of the chemical compounds making up these synthetics are identical to those found in nature, and are as harmless or harmful as the natural substances. New products must be tested for safety, and when used in food, must be approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

The availability of synthetic flavors and fragrances has made possible a large variety of products, from inexpensive beverages to perfumed soap to used cars with applied “new car odor.”

- _____ 13. Natural rose fragrance is 100 times more expensive to produce than artificial rose fragrance.
- _____ 14. Vanillin is easier to synthesize than benzaldehyde.
- _____ 15. In general, the more components there are in a fragrance, the harder it is to synthesize.
- _____ 16. Once a substance has been chemically analyzed, it can always be easily synthesized.
- _____ 17. Only recently has it been possible to satisfactorily synthesize the aroma of fresh coffee.
- _____ 18. Not all synthetic flavors are harmless.
- _____ 19. Synthesized substances must be tested for safety only if they are used in food.
- _____ 20. Synthetic fragrances can be used to make a used car smell like a new one.

Answer Key

EXERCISE 1

Dialogue One

1. Outside a movie theater
2. Getting tickets to see a movie.
3. Two people who know each other ie. Friends, boyfriend and girlfriend, etc.

Dialogue Two

1. In a car.
2. The bad traffic
3. Not sure but maybe they will run out of gas, start to fight or decide to pull over and wait for the traffic to get better.

Dialogue Three

1. Hospital or doctor's office
2. Patient and a doctor or nurse
3. An injured leg, ankle or foot

EXERCISE 2

1. C
2. A
3. C
4. A
5. A
6. C
7. B
8. A

EXERCISE 3

1. X
2. I
3. X
4. I
5. I
6. X
7. I
8. I
9. X
10. X
11. I
12. X
13. I
14. X
15. I
16. X
17. X
18. I
19. X
20. I