

Inferential Thinking: Reading Between the Lines

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Inferring is the bedrock of comprehension, not only in reading. We infer in many realms. Our life clicks along more smoothly if we can read the world as well as text. If our boss looks grumpy in the morning, it might not be the best time to ask for a raise. If a kid's lips are quivering, it might be a sign to give him a hug. To help students understand the nature of inferential thinking, we might feign a terrified look and ask them what they can infer from our facial expression. If they mention scared or frightened, they have made an accurate inference. *Inferring is about reading faces, reading body language, reading expressions, and reading tone as well as reading text.*

Tool: It Says -----I Say Chart

Dependent readers often have difficulties making inferences. This strategy, called "It Says---I Say," is simply a visual scaffold that helps students organize their thoughts as they move from considering what is in the text to connecting that to their prior knowledge.

It Says---I Say---And So			
<u>Question</u> <i>One</i> Read the question.	<u>It Says</u> <i>Two</i> Find information from the text that will help you answer the question.	<u>I Say</u> <i>Three</i> Think about what you know about that information.	<u>And So</u> <i>Four</i> Combine what the text says with what you know to come up with the answer.

Example One: Goldilocks and the Three Bears

It Says---I Say---And So

Question

One

**Why did she
break Baby
Bear's chair?**

It Says

Two

**Story says she sits
down in the Baby
Bear's chair but she's
no baby.**

I Say

Three

**Baby chairs aren't
very big because
they are for babies
and she is bigger
and so she weighs
more.**

And So

Four

**And so she is too
heavy for it and
she breaks it.**

Debriefing the Strategy

Seeing how to think. The "It Says---I Say" chart helps students visualize what they think. Many striving readers generally respond to inference questions with comments like:

- How am I supposed to answer this question?
- There is no answer for this question.
- The answer is not here.
- This is a dumb question.
- I am too stupid to answer this question.

These students spend so much effort just getting through the text, just keeping up with the literal details---characters, events, setting---that making an inference as they read is the last thing that happens, if it happens at all. Therefore, when they encounter a question that requires an inference, they do not know where to begin. ***They need a scaffold, something that helps them internalize the process of how to infer.*** The "It Says---I say" chart helps students finally see a structure for making an inference.