

Inference Explanation Study Sheet

Inferences

Inferences are ideas that are not stated directly, but are implied by the content of the material.

Understanding how to make accurate inferences is key to the ability of fully understanding what an author means. Making inferences is the same as drawing conclusions about what you read. Your inferences are statements about the unknown based on the known. Here are some helpful tips for making accurate inferences about what you read.

Tip 1: Identify an Inference Question

First, determine whether or not an inference question is being asked. The most obvious questions will have the words “suggest,” “imply” or “infer” within the sentence, such as the following:

- “According to the passage, we can reasonably infer...”
- “Based on the passage, we can suggest that...”
- “Which of the following statements is best supported by the passage?”
- “Which answer is most logically supported by the information given?”
- “The passage suggests that this primary problem...”
- “The author seems to imply that...”

Some questions, however, will not directly ask an inference question. You will have to actually infer that you need to make an inference about the passage. Here are a few questions that require inferring skills, but don’t use these words exactly:

- “With which of the following statements would the author most likely agree?”
- “Which of the following sentences would the author most likely use to add additional support to the passage?”

Tip 2: Trust the information given. Do not add on information

Once you know exactly what an inference is and you have identified an inference question you will need to trust and use only the details in the passage to make a correct inference to answer the question. To infer correctly, you will need to use the information or clues in the passage to reason out the answer. Use the supporting details, vocabulary, character’s actions, descriptions, dialogue, and more to help you infer correctly. However, be careful not to add on your own opinions or information to the passage. Use only what information is given.

Let's practice:

Based on the information given, what can you infer about the following scenarios?

1. I wouldn't touch that plant if I were you!
 - a. The plant is edible.
 - b. The plant has died.
 - c. The plant is poisonous.
2. The car rushed past several other cars on the highway and even ran a red light!
 - a. The driver of the car is stuck in traffic
 - b. The driver of the car is following a funeral procession.
 - c. The driver of the car is headed to the hospital.

Based on the information given in the passage, answer the inference question that follows.

The widow Elsa was as complete a contrast to her third bridegroom, in everything but age, as can be conceived. Compelled to relinquish her first marriage after her husband died in the war, she married a man twice her years to whom she became an exemplary wife despite their having nothing in common, and by whose death she was left in possession of a splendid fortune, though she gave it away to the church. Next, a Southern gentleman, considerably younger than herself, succeeded to her hand and carried her to Charleston, where, after many uncomfortable years, she found herself again a widow. It would have been remarkable if any feeling had survived through such a life as Elsa's; it could not but be crushed and killed by the early disappointment of her first groom's demise, the icy duty of her second marriage, and the unkindness of her third husband, which had inevitably driven her to connect the idea of his death with that of her comfort.

1. Based on the information in the passage, it could be suggested that the narrator believes Elsa's prior marriages to be
 - a. uncomfortable, but well-suited to Elsa
 - b. satisfactory and dull to Elsa
 - c. cold and damaging to Elsa
 - d. awful, but worth it to Elsa

To find clues that point to the correct answer, look for descriptions that would support your inference in the answer choices. Here are some of descriptions of her marriages in the passage:

- "...she became an exemplary wife despite their having nothing in common..."
- "...after many uncomfortable years, she found herself again a widow."
- "...the icy duty of her second marriage and the unkindness of her third husband which had inevitably driven her to connect the idea of his death with that of her comfort."

Narrow the choices

Using the clues from the passage, we can infer that nothing much was “satisfactory” to Elsa about her marriages, which gets rid of Choice B.

Choice A is also incorrect because although the marriages certainly seem uncomfortable based on the clues, they were not well-suited to her as she had nothing in common with her second husband and wanted her third husband to die.

Choice D is also incorrect because nothing is stated or implied in the passage to prove that Elsa believed her marriages to be worth it in some way; in fact, we can infer that it wasn’t worth it to her at all because she gave away the money from her second husband.

Finally, we have to believe that Choice C is the best – the marriages were cold and damaging. The passage states explicitly that her marriage was an “icy duty” and her third husband was “unkind.” We also know that they were damaging because her feelings had been “crushed.”