

Distinguish an Inference from a Guess

L03 · v0.1.0 · Teacher guide and answer key

In this 45-minute lesson, learners distinguish a directly stated detail, an inference supported by text, and an unsupported guess; explain how a detail supports an inference; and compare two defensible possibilities while naming what the text does not establish.

Detail, inference, or unsupported guess?

Detail: something the passage states directly. You can point to the words that say it.

Inference: a reasonable idea the passage does not state word-for-word. Support it with an accurate, relevant detail and explain the connection. A detail can make an inference reasonable without proving it.

Unsupported guess: a possible idea for which the passage gives no accurate, relevant support. A guess may turn out to be true, but this passage does not give readers a reason to choose it.

Two readers may offer different inferences when each one fits the text. Check: What does the passage say? What might that suggest? How does the detail connect to the idea? What remains uncertain?

Remy checks the poster

Invented instructional example.

Before the school art show, Remy carried a poster to the display wall. One corner curled away from the tape. Remy pressed two fresh strips over the corner and stepped back to the doorway. Remy tilted their head, then looked once more at the corner.

Modeled

Read “Remy checks the poster.” Identify one detail the passage states directly. What might Remy be checking? Give one inference, point to a detail, and explain the connection. Name a second possible inference that also fits, one unsupported guess, and one thing the passage does not establish. Then compare your thinking with the model.

Direct details: one corner curls away from the tape, Remy adds two strips, and Remy steps back to look again. One inference is that Remy may be checking whether the poster will stay attached: the extra tape follows the curling corner. Another possibility is that Remy is checking how the poster looks from the doorway, because Remy steps back there and looks again. “Remy expects an adult to criticize the poster” is a guess; the passage gives no detail about an adult or Remy’s feelings. We cannot tell which question Remy had in mind.

The leaning bean plant

Invented instructional example.

After recess, Mina and Theo stopped beside a bean plant in the school garden. From the path, Mina noticed one stem leaning toward the edge of its wooden raised bed. A green twist tie still looped around the stem. Theo crouched across the bed and spotted a thin wooden support stick lying on the soil, its pointed end near the rim. A few leaves rested on the soil. A garden log said the table next to the bed had been moved so it could be cleaned after lunch. Mina said, “Maybe the plant needs a new support.” Theo said, “Maybe the plant was bumped when the table moved.” They left the plant in place and asked their teacher to look with them.

Guided

With a partner, use “The leaning bean plant.” First, underline two details that the passage states directly. Classify “one stem is leaning” as a detail, “the plant may need new support” as an inference, and “someone broke it on purpose” as a guess unless you find support in the text. Then compare Mina’s and Theo’s ideas. What detail supports each one? Explain why both may be possible and name one thing the passage does not establish. Use the passage, not the slide illustration, as evidence.

Partner notes

Color choices

Invented instructional example.

At art club, Jalen set two color swatches beside an unfinished mural sketch. A note on the table said, “Compare colors by the window.” Jalen moved the sketch toward the window, held a green swatch beside one section, then tried a blue swatch in the same place. Jalen kept both swatches beside the sketch and wrote “Ask the group” on a sticky note. The mural was still unfinished.

Independent

Read “Color choices” on your own. Write 4–5 sentences. State one inference about what Jalen may be deciding or checking. Use two accurate details and explain how they support it. Give a different possible inference and its supporting detail. Then classify the claim “Jalen plans to remove every green part of the mural” as a detail, supported inference, or unsupported guess; explain what the passage does or does not support and name one thing you still cannot know. You may plan in the organizer on the next page. Use the passage only.

Independent response

Inference planning organizer

Use this optional page to plan your independent response. Record only details and possibilities from “Color choices.” The organizer gives space; it does not choose the inference or evidence for you.

Two details the passage states directly

One inference I can support

How the details support this inference

A different possible inference and its detail

Named claim: detail, supported inference, or unsupported guess? Why?

What the passage still does not establish

Support: If organizing your thinking is difficult, use the optional organizer above. First write two details from the passage; then make your own inference and explain the link. The organizer does not fill in any answer for you.

Teacher directions

Audience: Grade 6 ELA. Provisional Grade 6 ELA authoring target. No wider grade fit or local curriculum alignment is claimed.

Prerequisites: Learners can read or listen to a short fictional passage and point to a sentence or phrase. No prior formal lesson on inference is required.

Materials: Learner pages in print or editable format; the PPTX is optional.; Pencil or another locally approved response method.; Board or display for the model; optional.

Estimated preparation: 5 minutes. Basis: Estimate to review the passages and keys, prepare learner pages, and open the optional slides; not classroom-timed.

Estimated teaching: 45 minutes. Basis: Planning estimate: opening 3 minutes, strategy 5, model 8, guided practice 10, independent response 14, closure 5. Not classroom-timed or learner-tested.

Before teaching (about 5 minutes, estimate): read the three scenes and keys, print or share the learner pages, and prepare a board or display. The optional PPTX includes one scene illustration; the lesson and tasks work without it.

Opening — 3 minutes (estimate): display the first two sentences of the Remy scene. Ask, “Which part is stated directly? What might it suggest? What does it not tell us?” Take two brief responses without evaluating learners’ general reading ability.

Strategy — 5 minutes (estimate): teach the three labels on the learner page. Model the frame “I infer ____ because the passage says _____. This matters because _____.” Emphasize that a supporting detail makes an inference reasonable but does not prove it. Accept a different interpretation when the learner can support it with accurate text evidence.

Model — 8 minutes (estimate): read the Remy scene and task aloud. Think aloud through one direct detail, one supported inference, the connection, another possibility, an unsupported guess, and one uncertainty. Use cautious words such as “may” or “might.” Do not present the model as the only valid inference.

Guided practice — 10 minutes (estimate): read the bean-plant story. Pairs mark details, discuss Mina’s and Theo’s alternatives, and check the deliberate-damage claim. Prompt “Which words support that?” and “What else could fit?” Avoid confirming a cause the passage leaves open. The slide illustration is scene context, not evidence for the text task.

Independent response — 14 minutes (estimate): learners respond individually to “Color choices.” The organizer is optional and does not select evidence or supply an inference. Collect the response if it will inform the next instructional step; do not treat one short sample as a diagnosis or overall measure of mastery.

Closure — 5 minutes (estimate): ask learners to underline one supporting detail, circle the reasoning link, and mark a statement the text leaves uncertain. Invite a brief share without requiring personal disclosure.

Shortened 30-minute option (estimate): opening 2 minutes; strategy 3; model 5; guided practice 7; independent response 10; closure 3. Keep the independent prompt and its evidence criteria. Reduce discussion time rather than removing the comparison of alternatives. This schedule is a planning estimate, not a tested duration.

Use L03-C01 through L03-C04 as separate evidence checks: mark each “observed,” “emerging,” or “not yet evidenced” for this sample. A supported alternative can meet the criteria even when it differs from the key. Do not score spelling, grammar, or one preferred sentence frame unless meaning is unclear.

Access: offer read-aloud or text-to-speech, a clean enlarged copy, chunked passage sections, vocabulary preview, additional processing time, or oral rehearsal when these fit the learner’s local access plan. Record supports when interpreting a response. If a support changes the written-response evidence, follow the locally authorized plan; a generic option does not replace an individualized plan.

All passages and tasks are original fictional instructional material. The generated illustration is not a source of factual claims and does not show the cause of the leaning stem. No official standard or curriculum alignment is claimed.

L03-TASK-MODEL — intended evidence: The learner sees how a cautious inference is connected to an accurate passage detail, how another interpretation can also fit, and how to separate either inference from a guess without support.

L03-TASK-GUIDED — intended evidence: The learner accurately identifies stated details, explains how the leaning stem and loose stick support a possible need for support, explains how the moved nearby table could support a possible bump, and does not claim the text proves either cause.

L03-TASK-INDEPENDENT — intended evidence: The individual response distinguishes details from inference, links an inference to relevant details, supplies another defensible interpretation grounded in the passage, and identifies an unsupported claim or remaining uncertainty.

L03-KEY-MODEL — key for L03-TASK-MODEL

Direct details: one corner curls away from the tape, Remy adds two strips, and Remy steps back to look again. One inference is that Remy may be checking whether the poster will stay attached: the extra tape follows the curling corner. Another possibility is that Remy is checking how the poster looks from the doorway, because Remy steps back there and looks again. “Remy expects an adult to criticize the poster” is a guess; the passage gives no detail about an adult or Remy’s feelings. We cannot tell which question Remy had in mind.

The answer labels directly stated actions separately from ideas about Remy’s purpose. It connects the extra tape to one possibility and the doorway to another, then marks an unsupported explanation and a limit. Neither supported inference is stated as certain.

Remy could be checking whether the poster stays on the wall because the corner curled and Remy added tape. Remy could also be checking its appearance from the doorway. The scene does not say which purpose is correct.

Accept another plausible inference grounded in the curling corner, new tape, stepping back, or looking again. Do not require the model's exact phrasing. The unsupported guess must lack text support; the answer must not claim the passage reveals Remy's feelings or intention.

Scoring criteria: L03-C01, L03-C02, L03-C03, L03-C04

L03-KEY-GUIDED — key for L03-TASK-GUIDED

Direct details include the leaning stem, the tie still looped around it, the stick on the soil, and the log saying the nearby table was moved. Mina's idea that the plant may need new support fits the leaning stem, tie, and loose support stick. Theo's idea that it may have been bumped fits the leaning plant and the moved table beside it. The story does not prove either cause. "Someone broke it on purpose" is unsupported because no person is described damaging the plant.

The task assesses whether learners can locate details, link different details to two alternatives, and avoid turning either possible explanation into a fact. The passage ends with the students asking a teacher to look, leaving the cause unresolved.

The plant could need support because it leans and the support stick is on the soil. It also could have been bumped when the nearby table moved. The story does not tell which happened.

Accept a different interpretation only when the learner points to accurate, relevant words in the passage and explains the link. Accept other unsupported guesses as examples when the learner shows that the text supplies no evidence for them. The prompt's intentional-damage example is not established.

Scoring criteria: L03-C01, L03-C02, L03-C03, L03-C04

L03-KEY-INDEPENDENT — key for L03-TASK-INDEPENDENT

Jalen may be comparing green and blue to decide which color could fit one mural section. The note says to compare colors by the window, and Jalen tries each swatch in the same place. Another possibility is that Jalen is preparing choices to discuss with the group; Jalen keeps both swatches and writes "Ask the group." The claim about removing every green part is an unsupported guess: the passage does not say Jalen dislikes green or plans to change the whole mural. We cannot know which color the group will choose or what the finished mural will look like.

The first inference uses the comparison note and the two swatches tested in the same place. The alternative uses the retained choices and note to ask the group. The passage supports a small comparison, not a decision about every green section or the finished mural.

Jalen may be deciding which color works in that section because both swatches are tried in the same place and the note says to compare them by the window. Jalen might also be collecting options for the group, since both swatches stay and the sticky note says to ask the group. The passage does not say what is chosen. Removing every green part is not supported.

Accept a different text-supported possibility with an explanation. The passage does not support removing every green part of the mural; exact wording may vary.

Scoring criteria: L03-C01, L03-C02, L03-C03, L03-C04

L03-C01 — scoring criterion

Distinguishes a directly stated detail from an idea readers infer and from an unsupported guess.

“The support stick is on the soil” is a detail; “the plant may need support” is an inference.

Accept equivalent labels and explanations. A guess is unsupported by this passage; do not penalize a learner for saying it could be true in real life.

L03-C02 — scoring criterion

States a plausible inference and points to accurate, relevant text detail(s), explaining how they support the idea.

The stem leans and the support stick lies on the soil, so the plant may need support.

Accept cautious paraphrase, quotation, or a clear oral rehearsal when the local plan allows it. Details without an explained connection show partial evidence.

L03-C03 — scoring criterion

Names a different defensible inference and supports it with a relevant detail; the alternative need not match the key.

Jalen may be collecting color choices for the group because both swatches remain and the note says “Ask the group.”

Accept only possibilities that fit actual passage details. Do not require two readers to choose the same inference.

L03-C04 — scoring criterion

Keeps an inference appropriately uncertain and identifies an unsupported claim or something the passage does not establish.

The text does not say which plant explanation is true.

Accept any accurate limit on what can be known from the passage. A reader may state an inference confidently as a possibility, but not as a proven cause or unstated fact.

Support (L03-TASK-INDEPENDENT): For access, consider read-aloud or text-to-speech, chunked text, a clean enlarged copy, vocabulary preview, extra processing time, or oral rehearsal when locally appropriate. Keep interpretation tied to the passage and the learner’s actual access plan. Record any support that changes what the response can show.

Extension (L03-TASK-INDEPENDENT): Write a new neutral 3–4 sentence fictional scene with details that could support two different explanations. Trade scenes with a partner. The partner underlines one supporting detail for each possibility and notes one thing the scene does not establish. Do not use a real person or personal experience.

Three original fictional instructional scenes by MentorTeaching; no real learner or classroom event is represented.

Original AI-generated garden illustration made for L03. The prompt and image description are recorded with the resource.