

Inference lesson teacher quickstart

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Teacher copy | Intended for U.S. Grade 6 ELA; check local curriculum | Version 1.0.0

Distinguish stated details, supported inferences and unsupported guesses; connect evidence to two possible interpretations and identify uncertainty.

Prepare and distribute

Read the keys before teaching. Prepare the teaching pages and a response method. Students need to read or listen to a short scene and point to words; no prior inference lesson is required. No additional purchase, login or slide deck is needed.

This teacher pack: page 1 quickstart; pages 2–3 teaching; page 4 independent response; page 5 reserved later check; pages 6–7 keys and response guidance. Print only pages 2–3 first. Stage files provide the same student content separately in PDF, editable DOCX and HTML.

Teach and observe

Teach the three labels on page 2. Think aloud through Remy, then ask partners to explain the two possibilities in the bean-plant scene. Use "Which words support that?" and "How does that detail connect?" Accept supported alternatives. Give Color choices individually after guided work, without selecting evidence or supplying an inference.

Respond and check later

Record each criterion separately as observed, emerging or not yet evidenced. Use the response routes on page 7 for focused practice with familiar scenes. After another learning opportunity, give the reading-corner check individually. Reserve its passage, task and answers until then. If already seen, use it as practice and record exposure; do not describe it as fresh evidence.

Access and scope

Read aloud, use text-to-speech, enlarge, preview swatch (a color sample), or allow oral/typed/dictated responses when locally appropriate. Record supports and prior exposure; these tasks then show evidence reasoning under those conditions, not necessarily independent decoding or handwriting. Keep a learner's authorized access plan. The HTML can reflow and DOCX can be adapted; no accessibility certification is claimed.

California RL.6.1 asks for textual evidence supporting explicit information and inferences. This is a limited connection, not full coverage or approval. Grade fit, duration and classroom effectiveness are unvalidated. Standard source: <https://www2.cde.ca.gov/cacs/id/web/5779>

All scenes are original fiction. No real event or learner is represented. Source: Mentor Teaching inference lesson plus a new later scene for this version. Print/adapt under <https://mentorteaching.com/terms-of-use/>.

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Distinguish an inference from a guess

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Student teaching | Name _____

Use three labels

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?

Response routine: I infer ____ because the passage says _____. This detail supports my idea because _____. Another possibility is ____ because _____. The passage does not establish _____.

Remy checks the poster

Original fictional scene.

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.

Model task

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.

Compare 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.

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Compare two supported possibilities

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Student guided practice | Name _____

The leaning bean plant

Original fictional scene.

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.

Work with a partner

With a partner, use "The leaning bean plant." Underline two stated details. A leaning stem is directly stated, and the passage directly reports Mina saying the plant may need support. Whether support would help is still an inference to justify. Explain how a detail supports that idea. Then explain how a different detail supports Theo's possible-bump idea. Why can both fit without either being proved? Name one thing the passage does not establish. Explain why "someone broke it on purpose" is unsupported. Use the passage as evidence.

Partner response

Check your response: accurate details; an explanation for each connection; another supported possibility; one limit on what can be known. You may use a separate sheet.

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Independent inference response

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Student independent work | Name _____ Date _____

Color choices

Original fictional scene.

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.

Your task

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 make notes on a separate sheet before writing. Use the passage only.

Your response

Check: Did I explain the evidence links and keep possibilities distinct from facts? Use a separate sheet if needed.

Later inference check

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Student independent work | Name _____ Date _____

The reading corner

Original fictional scene.

Before the book fair, Asha placed a large-print copy of a story beside a small-print copy. A note on the desk said, "Choose a copy for the reading corner." Asha opened both books to the same page and held each at arm's length. Then Asha carried the large-print copy to the chair by the lamp and left a note there: "Try this seat with a reader." Asha returned the book to the desk beside the small-print copy before going to find the librarian.

Your task

Read "The reading corner" independently. In 4–6 sentences, give one inference about what Asha may be checking. Use two accurate details and explain how each supports your inference. Give a different possible inference with a supporting detail. Classify "Asha has decided to throw away every small-print book" as a detail, supported inference, or unsupported guess and explain why. Name one thing the scene still does not establish. Use only the passage; you may make notes on a separate sheet.

Your response

Check: Did I explain the evidence links and keep possibilities distinct from facts? Use a separate sheet if needed.

Teacher keys for practiced scenes

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Teacher only | Accept defensible alternatives with text evidence.

Model task

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.

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.

Guided practice

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. Mina’s spoken suggestion is directly reported; the need for support is not established as a fact.

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.

Independent response key

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.

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.

Use the four criteria separately

Criterion 1: Distinguishes a directly stated detail from an idea readers infer and from an unsupported guess.

Criterion 2: States a plausible inference and points to accurate, relevant text detail(s), explaining how they support the idea.

Criterion 3: Names a different defensible inference and supports it with a relevant detail; the alternative need not match the key.

Criterion 4: Keeps an inference appropriately uncertain and identifies an unsupported claim or something the passage does not establish.

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Teacher later key and response guidance

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Teacher only | Keep later content out of teaching and practice.

Later check

Asha may be checking whether the large print is easier to read from the chair: Asha compares the same page at arm's length and places the large-print copy by the chair. Asha may also be checking whether the seat and lamp work well for a reader, because the note asks someone to try that seat. Throwing away every small-print book is an unsupported guess; both books remain and the scene gives no disposal plan. We do not know the reader's experience or which copy will be chosen.

The comparison and placement support a possible readability check. The trial-seat note supports checking the reading position. Neither is a confirmed motive or result.

Accept other possibilities grounded in precise details, such as gathering options for a librarian or reader. Comparing copies and checking the seat can overlap. Do not require an exact phrase or a single exclusive motive.

Choose a response route

Labels a supplied interpretation as directly stated or uses an inaccurate detail. Return to Remy. Ask the learner to point to words that say the action, then separate those words from an idea about its purpose. Learner: Label one actual detail and one possible inference, and say how the two differ.

Gives relevant details without explaining the connection. Use the practiced bean-plant scene. Ask how the leaning stem or fallen stick makes a need for support reasonable. Learner: Complete "This detail supports my inference because..." using a new explanation in their own words.

Repeats the same inference or gives an alternative without evidence. Compare checking tape with checking appearance in Remy. Ask which different detail fits each possible purpose. Learner: Offer two distinct possibilities with a relevant detail for each; they may overlap.

Treats a possible motive as certain or accepts an unsupported broad claim. Ask what wording or event would be needed to establish that claim. Return to a practiced scene, not the reserved later scene. Learner: Revise the claim with may or might and name one unanswered question.

When the evidence is secure

Have learners write a new neutral fictional scene of 3–4 sentences supporting two interpretations. A partner marks a detail for each possibility and one unresolved point. Use invented people and events, not personal disclosures.

Record and interpret

Record task ID, date, exposure, response method, support and one note for each criterion. Details without a link are emerging evidence for criterion 2. A second unsupported idea does not yet evidence criterion 3. Select the route matching the observed difficulty; do not total these into a mastery score. Compare the later response with earlier work under recorded conditions; one short response cannot establish lasting mastery.

Source and rights

Remy, the bean plant and Color choices are original Mentor Teaching inference lesson fiction and instructional material. The reading corner and its task/key are new original fictional material for this lesson. No third-party media used. Classroom effectiveness has not been established. <https://mentorteaching.com/terms-of-use/>

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