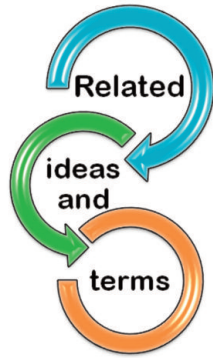Name: _____ Date: _____

INFERENCE

Inference occurs when you know something, but nobody ever told you about it, and you never read it anywhere. You used your knowledge and your experience to **infer** what you know.

Related ideas and terms

infer (verb)
when you use inference to come to a conclusion
Usage example: *Now that you know the facts, what can you infer?*

inferential question
a question that requires inference to answer

literal question
a question that doesn't require inference to answer

WHY learn about inference?

Inference is an important way that we figure out and understand the truth.

Let's say you bought a cake for your sister's birthday party tonight, and the cake is in the refrigerator. The cake is covered in blue frosting. The cake is the only blue thing in the house. An hour later, you notice your little brother Ray has a smear of blue frosting on his cheek. You say, "Ray, did you touch the birthday cake? Ray answers, "NO! I didn't touch it!"

You know Ray is lying. You inferred it from the evidence: blue frosting on his face. Nobody told you he touched the cake. You didn't see him touch the cake. But you knew that he did. That's inference.

There's an old saying that might help:
we smell smoke, and we infer fire.

recognizing visual
inference

Take a look at this picture. You immediately know what's going on. Did you know that most of your understanding of this picture comes from inference?

Your literal knowledge of the picture is what you see with your eyes.

But, your inferential knowledge of the picture is much bigger—it's what you know to be true, based on your knowledge and experience.

Here are some examples of literal and inferential statements and questions about the picture:

Inferential (not in the picture)	How do you know?	Literal (in the picture)
STATEMENTS:		**STATEMENTS:**
✓ The women are members of a team.	They're all wearing the same color and type of uniform.	✗ The women are wearing green uniforms.
✓ They have just won a race or some sort of competition.	They're smiling and hugging, and they're all wearing sports clothing.	✗ They are from Nigeria.
✓ They have trained very hard for a long time before this event.	Since they won a big race, they must have trained hard for it.	✗ The track they're running on has white lines between the lanes.
✓ The women's friends and family are extremely proud of them.	People are proud when their loved ones are successful at something.	✗ All four women are smiling.
✓ This moment is one of the happiest of their lives.	Their smiles are very wide and they're hugging and jumping.	✗ The picture was taken in Barcelona in 1992.
		✗ One woman has a gold cross around her neck.
QUESTIONS:		**QUESTIONS:**
✓ Have these women spent a lot of time together over the past six months?	Yes. They are all members of a team, and team members train together.	✗ What is the three-letter abbreviation for Nigeria?
✓ Would these women encourage young athletes to practice consistently and try their best?	Yes. They practiced a lot and tried their best, and it paid off, so they'd encourage others to do the same.	✗ What colors are the middle woman's running shoes?
		✗ Are any of the women hugging?

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inference

First, read this story. Then you'll read and complete the section below.

"You're going to have to move a lot faster, son," the foreman said, frowning, and Javier's stomach sank. The foreman walked away, muttering, leaving Javier to finish sanding the walls in the living room. Beads of sweat streaked gray down the white plaster dust that thickly powdered his forehead, his hair, and the inside of his nostrils. He thought of his daughter, Amelia, home now in the crib, and the cost of diapers, and he sanded faster.

Here are two inferential statements about the story—statements that you know are true, even though they're not literally on the page. The blue sentence explains the clue that tells you why the statement is true. Once you read them, write in two more inferential statements:

✓ **Javier's child is very young. (The story said that his child was in a crib.)**

✓ **Javier's supervisor is not happy with how fast Javier is working. (The foreman was frowning.)**

✓ _____.

✓ _____.

Here are two inferential questions—questions that aren't literally on the page, but that you have to think about to answer. The answers, along with the explanations, are in blue. Write in two more inferential questions.

✓ **Did Javier just start sanding? (No: the story said that plaster dust "thickly powdered" him.)**

✓ **Was Javier worried about being fired? (Yes: When the foreman expressed displeasure, the story said that Javier's stomach "sank.")**

✓ _____?

✓ _____?

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Name: _____ Date: _____

SHOW THAT YOU KNOW

Complete all ten questions and show that you understand inference.

10

Circle True/False

True   False   Inference is when you look for the words on the page to find the answer to a question.   1

True   False   A literal question requires you to think about your own experience to answer it.   1

True   False   You see a water stain on your bedroom ceiling. You think, "Hmm, there's a water stain." That's inference.   1

True   False   You see a water stain on your bedroom ceiling. You think, "Hmm, there must be a roof leak." That's inference.   1

True   False   You walk in the door, soaking wet. Your brother says, "Some people use umbrellas when it rains, you know." He inferred that it was raining from your wet clothes.   1

True   False   You walk in the door, soaking wet. Your brother says, "Your clothes are soaking wet, you know." His statement is literal.   1

True   False   You suddenly smell a strong odor of smoke in your house. You say, "Dad! I think the house is on fire!" Your dad says, "Why do you say that?" You say, "Don't you smell the smoke?" Your dad says, "Yes. So what?" Your dad is good at inferring things.   1

True   False   You're a cop. You get a report of a blue Toyota with a dented front fender that's just been involved in a hit-and-run five minutes ago. You cruise around the corner and see a blue Toyota with a dented front fender, parked. You pull up, get out, and feel the hood of the car. It's cold. You radio in that you think you found the car involved in the crime. Are you good at inferring things?   1

True False   True or false: this is an inferential question:
What color clothing is the oldest woman wearing? 1

True False   True or false: this is an inferential question:
How many people are in this photograph? 1