PARENT TEACHING TIPS
. . . on Learning Inferences
By Bill Welker, EdD

As you learned in a previous column, there are four levels of comprehension or understanding: literal (stated facts), interpretive (implied facts), critical (making judgments), and creative (evoking an emotional response or forming new ideas). Today, we are going to explore the area of interpretation (often referred to as "inference") because your child deals with this level of understanding very often in school.

Let me repeat; applying inference skills involves the interpretive level of comprehension. Often a textbook author does not literally state information. Thus, it is up to the students to infer such implied facts from the information given.

So, in order for students to better understand textbook materials at the inferential level, they must have the ability to thoroughly understand the writer's written words, including in direct messages. In practice, students must learn to combine information from their own background knowledge and experiences with the facts from the textbook for inferential comprehension to occur.

In other words, the more familiar your child is with the textbook information (having past exposure to the topic), the easier it is for him or her to infer unstated facts. Simply stated, a reader who uses inference skills is "reading between the lines" to extract deeper meaning from the textbook selection.

The following are 12 types of inferences that are found in most textbooks. Learning these uses of inference will give the student a more complete awareness of comprehension at the interpretive level. Also, to see how well you can infer, try to

answer the question after each inference example. The correct answers are at the

end of the column.

1. *Location Inferences*: They imply as to where an event takes place.

Example – The taste of salt was in Bob's mouth after swimming and surfing.

Where was Bob?

2. *Agent Inferences*: They imply as to what a person's job or occupation is.

Example – With a mop in one hand and a bucket of soapy water in the other,

Fred prepared to clean the office floor. What is Fred's occupation?

3. *Time Inferences*: They imply as to when an event takes place.

Example – When the street lights went on, the boys headed home on their

bikes. When did the street lights turn on?

4. *Action Inferences*: They imply as to what a person is doing.

Example – The slope was covered with layers of snow, but Margaret knew she

must push off quickly if she wanted to reach the bottom of the mountain first. What

was Margaret doing?

5. *Instrument Inference*: They imply as to what thing is being used.

Example – We heard a buzzing sound, then a gnawing sound, as it cut through

the tree limb. What is being used?

6. *Category Inferences*: They imply that groups of things or experiences are related.

Example – The works picked Macintosh, Greenings, Delicious, and Granny

Smiths. To what category do these names belong?

7. *Object Inferences***: They imply as to what an object is.**

Example – They marched proudly down the street, carrying the "stars and stripes." To what does the phrase "stars and stripes" refer?

8. *Cause-Effect Inferences***: They imply as to what caused something to happen.**

Example – In the hallway closet were old woolen clothes with many holes in them. What caused the holes in the clothing?

9. *Problem-Solving Inferences***: They imply how to solve problems, especially in the areas of mathematics and science.**

Example – John was cutting the grass in his yard when the lawnmower stopped running. What should John do?

10. *Feeling-Attitude Inferences***: They imply how a person is feeling.**

Example – What Larry made the final winning foul shot of the championship game, all his fans began to wildly cheer him. What feelings did Larry experience?

11. *Forward Inferences***: They imply as to what will happen next.**

Example – Tom put his Callaway clubs in the trunk of his car and left. What was Tom planning to do?

12. *Backward Inferences***: They imply as to what happened in the past.**

Example – Mr. Wiley made sure to place smoke detectors in every room of his new three-bedroom house. What happened in the past to Mr. Wiley?

In sum, being able to read literally in a subject area is not enough if students are to engage in serious textbook study. They must also read to identify what the

author meant as well as was stated on the surface. In other words, students need to know how to interpret or "read between the lines."

(Answers to inference questions: 1. The Ocean; 2. A Custodian; 3. Nighttime; 4. Skiing; 5. Chain Saw; 6. Apples; 7. The American Flag; 8. Moths; 9. Check the Gas; 10. Pride and Elation, etc.; 11. Play Golf; 12. Mr. Wiley's old house burned down.)

Parent Proverb

"You must get involved to have an impact. No one is impressed by the win-loss record of the referee."

- John H. Holcomb

Next Month's Column: "The Importance of Context Clues"

(Editor's Note: Dr. Bill Welker is a retired reading specialist who was a K-12 classroom teacher for 40 years. He was selected as a "Teacher of the Year" by the Wheeling Area Chamber of Commerce. Most recently, Dr. Welker was inducted into the West Virginia University College of Education and Human Services' *Jasper N. Deahl Honors Society* for career achievement and community involvement. His e-mail is mattalkwv@hotmail.com.)