How to Help Your Child Become a Better Reader

Inference
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Writers give us clues and it is our job, as readers, to put all those clues together and draw conclusions. We need to put the words in the story together with our own ideas to infer the meaning of the story. This is sometimes called “reading between the lines.” For example:

Mary closed her eyes, thought very hard, opened her eyes, and blew out the candles.

If we just read the words, we can answer the following literal questions:
1. What did Mary do first? (closed her eyes)
2. What did Mary do next? (thought very hard)
3. What did Mary do last? (blew out candles)

However, what about the following inferential questions?
1. What was Mary doing? (making a wish)
2. What day was it? (her birthday)
3. Where were the candles? (on her cake)

None of these answers were in the sentence, but all of them would be important to understand the meaning of the sentence.

Often the deepest meanings from a book go beyond what is simply written on the pages. Children need the challenge of thinking and interpreting what they have read.

One of the simplest ways to teach children to infer is to ask, “What do you think will happen next?” and, more importantly, “What clues from the story and what do you already know that helped you make that prediction?” As children read, they should confirm or contradict their predictions and make new predictions.

We infer to determine the meaning of unknown words. Students need to use their background knowledge, pay attention to clues in the story, reread, confer with other students, and draw conclusions about the meaning of unfamiliar words.

To help your child learn to think beyond the written word, you can play guessing games, predict the end of a TV show, read comics, solve mysteries, rewrite the end of a story, or solve riddles.

Try these inferences:

Mrs. Tibbits bought tickets and some popcorn. Where was she?
Mrs. Verhaalen forgot to set her alarm clock last night. What happened next?
The sun was high in the sky as Mr. Curler’s stomach growled. What time was it?