

Making Inferences — Introduction

Making an inference is a thinking or reasoning skill (see also Drawing Conclusions p. 21). The reader is often only given a limited amount of information. The reader makes inferences from the information given. Readers also use their general knowledge when making inferences.

Read the following short passage.

Claude McGhee was in Year Six. He was the biggest kid in school, and he hadn't got his nickname, Claws, for nothing. He was built like a bear but he could also run.

from *The Big Race*, A. Horsfield

The reader could make several inferences from this passage. What sort of a person is Claude McGhee? How did he *really* get his nickname? From the evidence, the reader could probably **infer** that Claws was a bully, or someone to be frightened of. The reader could also make some **inferences** about the narrator and how he feels.

Sometimes writers will deliberately mislead the reader. They do not give all the information or they add information that gives the reader the wrong ideas or impressions. This happens in mystery stories and some scary (horror) books.

Now read the extract from *The Crystal Key* by Pamela O'Connor.

Emma's heart was in her mouth as they entered the third underground level. It smelled dank and dirty, not at all like the pleasant earthy smell of the two higher levels.

'It even smells evil,' she whispered as they crept in single file along a dark tunnel.

'Yes,' Joel whispered back. 'There are bad vibrations down here. We must be very careful not to think about failure. Our thoughts must remain positive.'

They stumbled through the darkness towards a faint pinpoint of light. They stopped for a moment while Joel went a

little way ahead, trying to get his bearings. In the deep gloom Emma and Chris saw him beckon them forward.

They were just about to move off again when Emma heard a sudden gasp behind her. She swung around.

'Chris!' she whispered hoarsely. There was no answer, and she could see no sign of her brother. 'Chris!'

She felt panic rising and began to run back along the tunnel when a hand reached out and grabbed her tightly around the wrist. 'Shhh!' Joel's voice hissed close to her ear. 'Don't move!'

1. The reader could infer that the children are in a risky situation. What information makes the reader think this? _____

2. What information has Pamela O'Connor given to imply that Joel is a sensible person? _____

3. What happens that helps to create a scary feeling? _____

4. The tunnel is scary. This can be inferred from the fact that (tick one box)

it is deep and dark. there is a pinpoint of light. Emma was grabbed.

Short answers 1. Several answers: Chris doesn't answer; Emma's heart was in her mouth; The tunnel 'smells' evil, 2. Joel remains calm 3. Possible answers: Chris gasps/Chris doesn't answer/ Joel hisses 'Don't move!' 4. it is deep and dark.

Making Inferences — from *Through the web* and other stories

Note: Sometimes a story is written by one of the characters. We call that person the narrator.

Through the web

by Ellen Robertson

My mother tells me I can't live in darkness forever. I keep the curtains drawn so that the mess doesn't look quite so bad. Imagine how I felt when I finally had to open the curtains, and found a massive spider's web spun into one of the corners of the window, directly above my head.

Night after night I have been sleeping just centimetres away from certain death. Do you think my mother knew about it? If she did, why didn't she do something about it?

I reacted very calmly: 'Hey Mum, there's a ginormous spider's web in here!' I screamed.

She was equally calm. 'Get the broom and sweep it away Lyndell.'

Just like that. Sweep it away, she says. I examined it closely — well, as closely as *The Guide to Poisonous Spiders* and I determined to be safe. The strange thing was that although the web was huge, I couldn't see a spider.

Now by my reckoning, that spider would have to be about as big as my fist. I tried telling this to my mother. She told me to stop exaggerating. One of the unfortunate things about being a teenager is that adults rarely believe you.

- Who is the narrator of this extract? _____
- From the extract you can infer that Lyndell (tick as many boxes as you need)

<input type="checkbox"/> reacts without getting all the facts.	<input type="checkbox"/> has to live in a room with no light.
<input type="checkbox"/> doesn't expect her mother to do everything.	<input type="checkbox"/> has a vivid imagination.
- From information in the extract, Lyndell's mother could be best described as (tick one box)

<input type="checkbox"/> demanding.	<input type="checkbox"/> practical.	<input type="checkbox"/> hard working.	<input type="checkbox"/> stressed.
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- Lyndell keeps the curtain closed to keep out spiders. True False
- The sight of the spider really frightened Lyndell. True False
- Why do you think Lyndell was reading *The Guide to Poisonous Spiders*? (Give your reason.) _____
- It can be inferred that Lyndell's mother's reaction to Lyndell is a result of

(A) Lyndell being a teenager.	(C) Lyndell having a messy room.
(B) Lyndell's habit of exaggerating.	(D) Lyndell's screams.