



## Predict and Infer An Instructional Model

Predict and Infer is an instructional unit concept designed by Kim Heckart of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Kim is a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher in the Prairie Independent School District, and the lead teacher mentor for the Bringing History Home project (BHH). She has been part of the project since the pilot was funded in 2001, and has contributed many essential activities and adaptations to the curriculum.

The Predict and Infer design is simple and powerful. It gives students experience in developing historical comprehension skills. When reading for history comprehension, we accumulate, compare and evaluate information from various texts or sources of information. Children begin this process by learning there are various sources of information about the same events in history. In the Predict and Infer model, students first work together in small groups to analyze a set of primary sources. Using KWL's as their guides, the children examine the sources closely and try to deduce, or predict, what is happening in each one.

In the second step of the process, the class as a whole gathers in a reading circle. The focal point of the circle is a poster board on which the images and documents hang. The groups share their predictions about the sources, and the teacher combines these predictions on one large self-adhesive note or recipe card that she posts next to each source.

With the predictions shared and in place for the entire class to read, the teacher begins reading aloud a book, either historical fiction or non-fiction, on a topic that aligns with the set of primary sources. At strategic points in the reading, s/he pauses to ask the class if they have made any connections between the narrative, the images and documents on the poster board, or any other sources of information or prior knowledge the children may have. When the reading provides information that directly informs one of the sources, the children make inferences about the source, with the understanding that an inference is more defensible than is a prediction. An inference requires some sort of external corroborating evidence, while a prediction is based on prior knowledge, and so is a guess of sorts. The teacher records the inferences for each source on "Infer" notes or cards and adds these to the poster board.

Because inferences sometimes change as more or better information emerges, the teacher may wish to make the inference process two stages. 1) During the connections, student updates to predictions may be written and posted on "connection" cards. 2) At the conclusion of the read-aloud book, the connections are considered and the class forms inferences that are written and posted on a third card for each source.

To conclude the activity, the class inventories remaining questions.



This activity seems to impact student learning in the following ways:

1. Motivates children to learn; predicting the meanings of the sources invests the children in discovering their meaning, in finding the information that will help them make sense of the sources, to confirm or alter their initial guesses.
2. Engages children in a beginning form of corroboration; “the ability to...create intertextual connections across multiple texts.”<sup>i</sup> As one of their literacy strategies, students make connections between texts (text-to-text), between their own experience and texts (text-to-self) and between their knowledge of something in the world and texts (text-to-world). Text-to-text connections are a beginning form of corroboration, of clarifying the information in one source by connecting it with another source. While the children only rarely engage in critical comparison, perhaps they are not taught to do so, they often make connections between the information in various sources, and use varied sources to confirm or refute information.
3. Engages children in contextualizing new information as they encounter it; the class develops a sense of historic context because they don’t just encounter the themes explored in a Predict and Infer exploration during that activity alone. Predict and Infer units can be taught during daily classroom reading sessions. By choosing a chapter book and sources that complement the Bringing History Home unit s/he is teaching, a teacher may engage students in a deeper exploration of that topic. Because the children are learning about the larger context in which the Predict and Infer story and sources occurred, they learn to situate events and people within large historical movements, as well as in relation to other events and individuals. Sometimes students draw parallels between events or topics, sometimes they identify causal connections, sometimes they simply note that various events took place in the same time period or involved the same people or places.
4. Helps children begin to connect evidence with accounts. Various research studies have found that children tend not to recognize that accounts are evidence-based, that historic accounts are based on primary sources and other secondary accounts.<sup>ii</sup> By making explicit the connection between various types of sources, Predict and Infer engages students in what Linda Levstik termed “emergent inquiry” when she viewed the model.<sup>iii</sup> By choosing a read aloud account that includes source citations, a teacher could take the next step and use this activity format to make explicit the direct connection between sources and accounts. Written sources would almost certainly require some adaptation and simplification to successfully engage children, but if they are actual sources cited, they would provide students the opportunity to identify the direct connection between evidence and account.



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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Wineburg, S. (2001) *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

<sup>ii</sup> Barton, K. (1997) "I just kinda know": Elementary students' ideas about historical evidence. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, v.25, n.4, pp. 407-430.

Shemilt, D. (1983) The Devil's Locomotive. *History and Theory*, Vol. 22, No. 4, Beiheft 22: The Philosophy of History Teaching, pp. 1-18.

VanSledright, B. (2002) *In Search of America's Past: Learning to Read History in Elementary School*. New York and London: Teachers College Press.

<sup>iii</sup> Levstik, L. (2010) Ms. Heckart's Third Grade: Instruction Using Sociocultural Tools. Paper in AERA repository for 2010 Annual Conference session, Teaching history for the common good: A common lens on learning?