

Grades 11–12 Playlist: Determining Where the Text Leaves Matters Uncertain

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1:

- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Welcome

How does the main character feel about his or her new job? Why did the narrator react the way he or she did? Authors do not always make their meaning clear in stories. Instead, readers must determine when something is left uncertain in a text and draw their own conclusions about what it means. Skilled readers can support their conclusions by explaining how supporting details reveal the text's meaning.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- determine where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- identify and explain how textual evidence supports an inference or analysis about a text, even when the author leaves matters uncertain.

Review

Key Terms

- Something is **explicit** if it is clear and specifically expressed.
- Something is **implicit** if it is understood but not directly expressed.
- An **inference** is an assumption based on evidence and reasoning.
- **Textual evidence** is proof or support for a claim derived from the text itself. Examples of textual evidence include quotations, paraphrases, and summaries.

Exploring the Standard

When an author leaves something uncertain in a text, readers must make inferences about what is left unsaid. They will use textual evidence to support an explanation of what is left uncertain. Thus, textual evidence is an important tool readers use to support their analysis of a text.

Watch!

Watch this video about how to make inferences based on a text:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMgM8T12AVE>



A Closer Look: Citing Textual Evidence

The details an author chooses to include in a text often reveal implicit information about its setting, theme, or characters. For example, descriptions and dialogue help readers draw conclusions without having to be told something explicitly by the narrator. These supporting details are forms of textual evidence that readers use to defend their own conclusions about a story.

Listen!

Listen to an audio recording of *Bartleby, the Scrivener*:

- <https://librivox.org/bartleby-the-scrivener-by-herman-melville/>

Example 1

In this selection from “Bartleby, the Scrivener” by Herman Melville, the narrator, a lawyer who runs a law practice in New York, shares his initial perceptions about one of his employees. Bartleby is a scrivener, or someone who transcribes copies of legal documents. He gets the job after responding to an ad that the narrator placed in the newspaper.

¹At first Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He ran a day and night line, copying by sun-light and by candle-light. I should have been quite delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wrote on silently, palely, mechanically.

The details the author includes show that the narrator is pleased with the quantity of work that Bartleby produces. First, the narrator describes the amount of work as “extraordinary.” Next, he comments on the great speed and long hours that Bartleby puts into his work, saying, “As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion.”

In addition, the reader can also infer that the narrator is not pleased with Bartleby’s attitude. At the end of paragraph 1, the narrator laments that Bartleby is not “cheerfully industrious.” Instead, the narrator uses the words “silently, palely, mechanically” to describe the dreary way in which Bartleby works.

Although the text never explicitly states that Bartleby is a man who works hard but without joy, the reader can make this inference based on the evidence in the text. Melville’s use of detailed descriptions helps the reader better understand the narrator’s mixed feelings about Bartleby.

Practice!

Pick another selection from the story and make an inference about the narrator’s feelings toward Bartleby, based on supporting details in the text.



Teaching Notes: Determining Where the Text Leaves Matters Uncertain

The goal of RL.11-12.1 is for students to understand and be able to explain how **textual evidence** can be used to support **inferences** where the text leaves matters uncertain. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classroom as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities

1. Select an excerpt from *Pride and Prejudice* and have students write a brief analysis of the events and interactions it describes. Ask them to differentiate between the parts of their analysis that are based on implicit and explicit information. Have students work with a partner to compare and contrast their interpretations of the text. Encourage students to defend their claims with textual evidence when needed.
2. Direct students to conduct research, finding a text that contains an example of a place where the author leaves matters uncertain. Divide the class into small groups and ask students to discuss potential textual evidence from which they can infer meaning. Remind students to focus on how descriptions and dialogue can be used to imply or suggest something without saying it explicitly.

Writing Prompts

1. Assign students a grade-appropriate excerpt from a fictional text and ask them to make a claim about one of the main characters. Direct students to answer the following question in a brief essay: What textual evidence can be used to support this claim? Encourage students to find at least two examples of strong textual evidence.
2. Ask students to find an interesting picture and direct them to write a short story about what is happening in the picture. Instruct students to leave some matters uncertain in the story and encourage them to include supporting details from which readers can infer what is happening.

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching RL.11-12.1:

Grade 11–12 Sample Activities

This resource provides two activities on drawing inferences and using textual evidence:

- http://ndcurriculuminitiative.org/media/common_core/ela/g_ela_11-12_ndsd30_ccss_ela_sample_activities_11_12_20120629.pdf

“Common Core Literature Standard 1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence”:

This resource provides a detailed explanation of how to cite strong and thorough textual evidence:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1b7V7xTBLG4>

