Inference
Section 7.1
Making Inferences
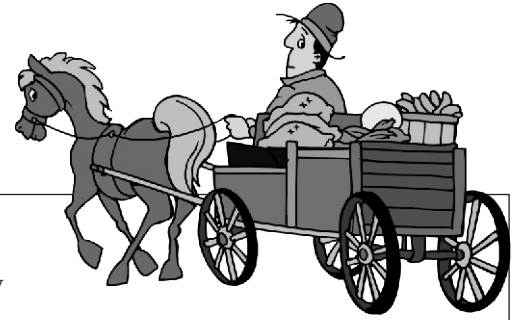
Authors do not usually include every detail when writing about a subject. Readers are expected to "read between the lines" to determine some things. The process of "reading between the lines" is called making an inference. An **inference** is a rational or logical assumption that is based on given facts or circumstances. In other words, to **infer** is to determine something that is unknown based on reasoning and facts. As a reader, you may combine your own knowledge and experiences with the given information to make certain assumptions. Inferring allows you to connect the dots, and this process of making inferences further increases your understanding of the author's intended message.

Inferring the Meaning of a Phrase

In Section 2, you used context clues to help you infer the meaning of unfamiliar words. Let's expand this skill to look at phrases. To determine what an author means, look for clues, just as you did in Section 2.

Read the following excerpt from "What is an American?" by St. Jean de Crevecoeur. What is the author trying to communicate? Use annotation to help you. You may want to paraphrase each sentence using your own words to help you interpret what the author is saying.

excerpt from "**What is an American?**"
by St. Jean de Crevecoeur

There, on a Sunday, he sees a congregation of respectable farmers and their wives, all clad in neat homespun, well mounted, or riding in their own humble waggons. There is not among them an esquire, saving the unlettered magistrate. There he sees <u>a parson as simple as his flock</u>, a farmer who does not riot on the labour of others. We have no princes, for whom we toil, starve, and bleed: we are the most perfect society now existing in the world. Here man is free; as he ought to be; nor is this pleasing equality so transitory as many others are.

What does the author mean by the phrase a <u>parson as simple as his flock</u>? What clues can you identify from the paragraph?

_____

_____

_____

An example of how to annotate this text is given below. How does your annotation compare?

excerpt from "**What is an American?**"
by St. Jean de Crevecoeur

There, on a Sunday, he sees a congregation of respectable farmers and their wives, all clad in neat homespun, well mounted, or riding in their own humble waggons. <u>There is not among them an esquire,</u> saving the unlettered magistrate. There he sees a parson as simple as his flock, <u>a farmer who does not riot on the labour of others</u>. We have no princes, for whom we toil, starve, and bleed: we are the most perfect society now existing in the world. Here man is free; as he ought to be; nor is this pleasing equality so transitory as many others are.

<u>The church members are all farmers and their wives. They all wear simple clothing and ride horses or in simple wagons. Esquire = A person of rank? No one has a higher social rank than another except for maybe a public official. Parson = preacher/minister. The preacher is just a farmer, the same as the others. What does "riot on the labour of others" mean? We don't serve anyone over us. Men live free/equal.</u>

<u>A parson is a preacher or minister. Ministers are often called shepherds, and their congregation (church members) are called the flock. If the parson is as simple as his flock, this would mean the minister is the same as the congregation. This sentence seems to say that the parson is a farmer or like a farmer who works the same as the others.</u>

Now consider the following questions being asked on a multiple-choice test.

Example 1: **What can be inferred by the phrase <u>a parson as simple as his flock</u>?**

    A. The parson is a sheep herder.
    B. The parson is not a smart person.
    C. The parson is the same as the church members.
    D. The parson is culturally above the church members.

From the annotation and notes given above, you should be able to identify **answer choice C** as correct.

Example 2: **Which phrase from the paragraph provides evidence to support the inference in Example 1?**

    A. ". . .all clad in neat homespun . . . "
    B. "Here a man is free . . . "
    C. " . . . we are the most perfect society now existing in the world."
    D. " . . . a farmer who does not riot on the labour of others."

Notice that the phrase "a parson as simple as his flock" is followed by "a farmer who does not riot on the labour of others." This phrase "a farmer who does not riot on the labour of others" is acting as an appositive to further describe the phrase before it. (Remember that an *appositive* is a noun or noun phrase that follows another noun and renames it.) Even if you do not understand exactly what it means to "not riot on the labour of others," you should still recognize that the author is saying the parson is a farmer, just like his congregation. Referring to the parson as a farmer supports the inference that he is the same as his church members, so the correct answer is **D**.

Elements of Plot
Section 9.2
Manipulation of Time
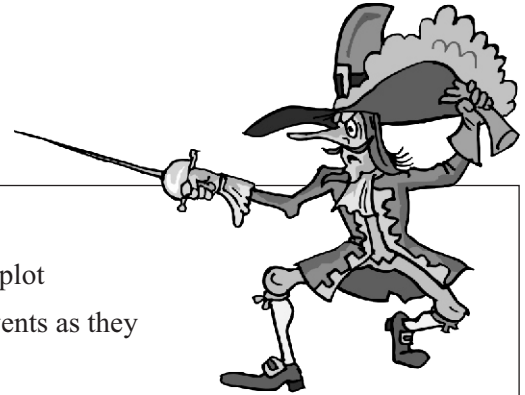
Key Terms 9.2

- **Beginning in medias res** – beginning a story in the middle of the plot
- **Chronological order** – an order that maintains the sequence of events as they happened in time, first, second, third, and so on
- **Flashback** – a break in the story line to show an earlier event
- **Flash-forward** – a future event that interrupts the chronological order of the story
- **Foreshadowing** – hints about the future
- **Mystery** – anything unknown or unexplained
- **Surprise** – a feeling of mild astonishment or shock caused by something unexpected
- **Suspense –** a feeling of anticipation about what may happen; feeling "on the edge of your seat"
- **Tension** – a reader's feeling of anxiety or stress concerning what is happening in a story

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Many of the passages that you have read so far are written in **chronological order**, which gives the natural sequence of events in the actual order in which they took place in time. This order of narration is the simplest way to create the plot. However, not all stories are told in chronological order. Instead, an author may manipulate time to develop the plot. This manipulation of time has various effects on the story and the reader.

Manipulation of Time Techniques

Beginning in Medias Res
To grab the reader's attention immediately, an author may begin a story in the middle or perhaps even towards the end of the plot. Using this order is called **beginning in medias res**, "in medias res" being a Latin term that literally means "into the middle of things." Instead of following the traditional order of plot beginning with introduction/exposition, the author will skip forward into the rising action or even beyond to show events at the end or near the end of the story. For example, the beginning of the story may thrust the reader into the middle of a crisis, into the heat of the action with the characters grasping at the straws of survival or escape. With most *in media res* works, the author will gradually fill in the background using additional manipulation of time techniques or dialogue between characters.

Flashback
One of the most common manipulation of time techniques is the flashback. **Flashback** is a break in the story line to show an earlier event. An author can use flashback in a variety of ways. A character may be thinking about events that led up to the time the story opened. A dialogue between characters may reflect back on those earlier events. Perhaps the narrator will simply look back and give the reader an understanding of the history that impacted the current event. In any case, the reader must pause in the action, turn around, and look back.

Flash-forward
Flash-forward is a future event inserted into the story. This technique is less commonly used but serves the purpose of inserting expected or imagined events into the storyline. Flash-forward may provide the reader with important information to the story that has yet to be brought to light for the characters.

Whatever techniques an author chooses to use in the manipulation of time, he or she uses these techniques intentionally for a desired effect. Each technique builds the story and keeps the reader engaged in it. Have you ever read a book and just could not put it down? That author was successful in reeling you into the story like a fish caught on a hook. It is likely that the author used manipulation of time techniques to "hook you" and to help "reel you in."

Additional Storytelling Techniques

As you have read over and over, authors of stories strive to keep readers interested. Review a few more elements that authors may use to keep the reader turning the pages. Some of these may involve the manipulation of time techniques that you just reviewed.

Mystery
Mystery is anything unknown or unexplained. Stories that contain mystery may focus on a puzzling crime, situation, or circumstance that needs to be solved. To create mystery, an author leaves out certain facts and invites the reader to guess what happened as the story unfolds. How interesting would a murder mystery be if the author told you up front who committed the crime and exactly how he or she did it? The unknown facts drive the story forward and cause the reader to want to know more.

Tension
Tension is the anxiety or stress that a reader feels concerning the conflict, characters, and/or events taking place in the story. An author is able to create tension when readers care about what is happening. Without a certain amount of tension, readers may lose interest and disengage from the story.

Suspense
With the right amount of tension in a story, an author creates **suspense**, that feeling of anticipation of what is going to happen next. Have you ever watched a movie and felt "on the edge of your seat"? That feeling is suspense. You know something is about to happen, but you do not know what or maybe even when. Again, an author uses suspense to keep the reader engaged in the story.

Surprise
Surprise is a feeling of mild astonishment or shock caused when something unexpected happens. With surprise, the reader is caught off guard by an event that occurs. An author may use the element of surprise for various reasons to advance the plot, but the effect on the reader is often one of delight.

Foreshadowing
Foreshadowing is a technique that an author uses to provide a hint about what is going to happen later in the story. The use of foreshadowing is often meant to create suspense. An author can create foreshadowing in a number of ways, including through the title of a chapter, the dialogue between characters, or an observation or event. For example, a raging storm at the beginning of a story may foreshadow the "storm" that is about to begin in the life of the main character. The thunderstorm acts as a warning, or a "heads up," to the reader that something else "stormy" may be about to happen.

Pacing
One last technique that an author uses to keep a reader engaged is pacing, or the speed at which the story is told. When pacing is slow, the plot unfolds slowly over time. When pacing is fast, events occur quickly. An author will often vary the pacing for specific effects. Slow pacing may help to build tension, while fast pacing may quickly build suspense. If the pacing is too slow, a reader may lose interest, and if it is too fast, a reader may feel rushed. An author uses specific words and sentence structure to create pace. For example, words like "quickly," or "suddenly" increase the pace. Short, simple sentences also increase the pace since readers read them faster.

A recognized master in the art of storytelling and the manipulation of time in the development of plot is Charles Dickens in his famous story *A Christmas Carol.* Consider the following excerpts from this story as examples of the concepts you have just reviewed. As you read the following excerpts taken from Stave 1 of the story, annotate elements of foreshadowing. Make notes of how Dickens builds tension and suspense. (In case you are curious, Dickens, in this novel, called chapters "staves," a musical term in keeping with this story being a "Christmas carol," another term for a "Christmas song.")

excerpt from *A Christmas Carol*
by Charles Dickens, 1843

Stave 1: Marley's Ghost

Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it: and Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change, for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

[. . .]

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and sole mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event, but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnised it with an undoubted bargain.

The mention of Marley's funeral brings me back to the point I started from. There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate. . .

Example 1: **Marley's ghost appears later in this stave (chapter). In which two ways does Dickens, the author, foreshadow Marley's future appearance as a ghost?**

A. by implying that Marley was murdered
B. by naming the chapter "Marley's Ghost"
C. by emphasizing that Marley is dead
D. by giving the detail that Scrooge was not overly upset by Marley's death.
E. by including vivid imagery of Marley's funeral

As you were annotating this passage, did you notice the name of the chapter? The chapter title "Marley's Ghost" is a huge hint to the reader that Marley's ghost is going to appear, so **answer choice B** should have been obviously correct. In these first few paragraphs of the chapter, Dickens also foreshadows Marley's appearance by emphasizing three different times that he is dead, so the second correct answer is **answer choice C**. Answer choices A and E are simply not true. There is no implication that Marley was murdered, and these paragraphs give very little information about Marley's funeral. Answer choice D is also incorrect because this detail, in and of itself, does very little to suggest Marley's ghost is going to appear.

Analysis of Literature
Section 10.1
Theme

Key Terms 10.1

- **Theme** – the underlying message of a literary work that reflects the writer's view of the world or humanity

- **Universal theme** – a theme that is common and understood by all humans regardless of culture

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In Sections 8 and 9, you have reviewed various elements that are parts of a story. Now take a step back and look at another element that is woven throughout a story, the *theme*. The **theme** of a literary work is the central idea or the underlying message of the story. The theme communicates the writer's belief about the world or about human nature. Theme is the part of the story that binds together the other elements you have already studied. It is woven throughout these other elements, especially the plot, the conflict, and the development of the characters.

Theme is not to be confused with *subject*. Subject is a topic that acts as the foundation for the literary work, while theme is an opinion expressed about the subject. A novel may be written about the Civil War, so the Civil War is the subject. However, the actual story, plot, conflict, and characters of that novel may revolve around a theme of patriotism, or courage, or loss. Can you see the difference? It is up to you the reader to search for the theme and connect the obvious facts of the story with what these facts say about humanity or about these characters in particular. The theme grows out of the plot and conflict and is expressed through the characters — their dialogue, their actions, and their reactions.

Universal Themes

Universal themes are most common within literary works and are fairly clear-cut. These themes are viewed within the context of the human experience. They are generally understood and are considered true for all humans regardless of their specific cultures. (A person's culture refers to his or her beliefs and behaviors and is largely affected by the society in which he or she lives.) To identify a universal theme, ask yourself what the story has to say about the universal human experience. While there are dozens of possibilities, the topics of universal themes fall into three broad categories: feelings; relationships; and social structures. Each of these broad categories relates to a specific aspect of universal human life.

Universal Theme Topics

Feelings	Relationships	Social Structure
fear	friendship	prejudice
love	motherhood	war
hate	fatherhood	peace
embarrassment	power	crime
joy	weakness	altruism
anger	honesty	slavery
nervousness	loyalty	justice
excitement	deceitfulness	leadership

Source Materials
Section 12.1
Allusions

Key Terms 12.1

- **Allusion** – a brief and indirect reference to a person, place, thing, or idea of historical, cultural, literary, or political significance

- **Primary text** (or **primary source**)– authentic first-hand account or original document

- **Secondary source** – material that analyzes, builds on, comments on, or references a primary source

- **Source material** – previously written texts used as information to create something new

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Have you known of someone that took apart an old barn, then utilized those materials to build something new? This same concept often applies to authors. Authors will frequently use material from another source in order to create something of their own. Any publication that an author uses for information is called **source material**. Source materials are previously written texts that authors use to create something new.

Source materials fall into two major categories: primary texts or secondary sources. A **primary text** (also called a *primary source*) is an authentic first-hand account or an original document. A primary text is written by a person who experienced the event or has created the text from scratch. An autobiography is an example of a primary text. Other examples include an eyewitness account, a manuscript from a speech, or even an original novel. A **secondary source**, on the other hand, may analyze, build on, or otherwise reference a primary source. For example, a book report written to analyze an autobiography or an original novel would be considered a secondary source.

An author often uses source material, whether primary or secondary, and transforms it into a new creative work.

Allusions

An **allusion** is a brief and indirect reference to a person, place, thing, or idea of historical, cultural, literary, or political significance. When an author uses an allusion, he or she is referencing a primary or secondary source and expecting the reader to make the connection. An allusion can add emotion or significance to a passage, or it can create a sense of cultural kinship between author and reader. The success of an allusion, however, is totally dependent upon the reader's familiarity with the reference. If the reader is unfamiliar with the reference, then the allusion fails. In many works, the use of allusion is a cultural or historical literacy test. If a reader is not well read and therefore not familiar with various literary works and historical events, then allusions will not have the intended impact.

You probably use allusions in your own speech and writing, possibly without realizing what you are doing. Consider the following simple examples of allusion.

Example 1:   That car salesman reminded me of the snake in the Garden of Eden.

The speaker of this statement gives no description of the salesman, his actions, or his conversation. However, if you understand that "the snake in the Garden of Eden" is an allusion from the Bible, the book of Genesis, Chapter 3, you make an immediate connection between the snake's characteristics and the car salesman's characteristics. The snake (or serpent) in the Garden of Eden is sneaky and deceptive, intent on doing evil by convincing Eve to do something she shouldn't. By associating the car salesman to the snake, the reader perceives the car salesman as being sneaky and deceptive, intent on tricking potential buyers into a bad deal.

Example 2: My mother was a real Scrooge when I asked her for the money to buy a new iPhone.

Again, the speaker gives no description of her mother except for referring to her as "Scrooge." The comparison to Scrooge is an allusion to the main character in the novel *The Christmas Carol* written by Charles Dickens. As long as you know who Scrooge is in Dicken's novel, you immediately make a connection and understand that the mother is being accused of being cheap, selfish, and mean-spirited.

Example 3: As far as those four parents are concerned, they consider their kids as the original Romeo and Juliet!

You have no idea what is happening to this young couple, but the allusion to Romeo and Juliet (the ill-fated couple in Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*) paints a vivid picture that the parents are against the couple's relationship.

Now that you are more familiar with allusions, think about the literary works that you have read in the last year or two of school and consider how many allusions you came across. Can you see how each allusion gave you far more information than the actual words on the page? Each allusion increases your capacity to understand the author's full message.

Practice

For each excerpt, underline the allusions. In the space provided, identify the previous work that is being alluded to, and then explain how each allusion adds to the meaning of the passage. If you are unsure of the origin of the allusion, you can research it using the internet or the library.

1. from *The Return of the Native* by Thomas Hardy, 1880

    That night was an eventful one to Eustacia's brain, and one which she hardly ever forgot. She dreamt a dream; and few human beings, from Nebuchadnezzar to the Swaffham tinker, ever dreamt a more remarkable one.

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    _____

    _____

    _____

2. from *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1774

    "Oh! you people of sound understandings," I replied, smiling, "are ever ready to exclaim 'Extravagance, and madness, and intoxication!' You moral men are so calm and so subdued! You abhor the drunken man, and detest the extravagant; you pass by, like the Levite, and thank God, like the Pharisee, that you are not like one of them. I have been more than once intoxicated, my passions have always bordered on extravagance: I am not ashamed to confess it; for I have learned, by my own experience, that all extraordinary men, who have accomplished great and astonishing actions, have ever been decried by the world as drunken or insane. And in private life, too, is it not intolerable that no one can undertake the execution of a noble or generous deed, without giving rise to the exclamation that the doer is intoxicated or mad? Shame upon you, ye sages!"

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    _____

    _____

Organization of Informational Texts

Section 13.1
Headings and Subheadings
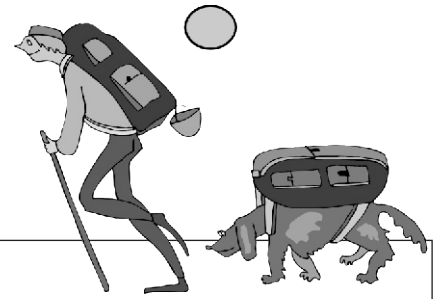
Key Terms 13.1

- **Heading** – a short line of text that briefly describes the topic of the text that follows

- **Subheading** – a short line of text that briefly describes the topic of text under a heading

- **Text feature**s – elements used in informational texts that help a reader to find information; include titles, headings, subheadings, captions, page numbers, table of contents, index, etc.

For the past several sections, you have been focusing on narrative texts, ones that essentially tell a story, whether fiction or nonfiction. In those previous sections, you have strengthened your skills in identifying features related to narratives — plot, characters, and storytelling dynamics. In the next two sections, you will focus on informational texts, which are exclusively nonfiction. These texts include expository, descriptive, and argumentative texts. However, for the moment, set aside argumentative texts. You will review those in Section 15.

Informational texts include a wide variety of types of writing. Letters, journals, diaries, speeches, essays, and procedures are some examples. Remember that the author's purpose of informational text will often be different from an author's purpose of narrative text. The purpose of informational text is often to inform, instruct, or to persuade. This book you are holding is an example of informational text. Its purpose is to instruct you about reading and comprehension.

Headings and Subheadings

All texts, no matter the type, share certain structural segments. All types of texts use words to form sentences and sentences to form one or more paragraphs. In narratives, paragraphs may then make up larger sections in the form of chapters. Informational texts may also be organized into chapters, but paragraphs within a chapter are often organized into smaller sections. These sections often contain their own "title" in the form of a **heading**, a short line of text that briefly describes the topic of each section. Headings are often bolded or italicized so that the reader can see them easily.

Headings are a type of *text feature*. **Text features** are often added to informational texts to help the reader find specific information. Other types of text features include titles, subheadings, captions, page numbers, a table of contents, or an index. A **subheading**, similar to a heading, is a word or line that describes information under a heading.

You have previously seen how titles can be beneficial to understanding a passage. Titles often give the reader a general idea of the overall topic of the text. Headings serve the same purpose. A heading will either categorize or summarize the information that follows in the section below it. The heading gives the reader a general idea about the type of information the author is about to cover. A reader can use headings to more easily find specific information within a longer text. Subheadings are likewise beneficial as categories or summaries of information under a heading. Subheadings give the reader more specific ideas about the information being covered.

Think about hiking a nature trail. Headings and subheadings are like trail signs along the path. Trail signs can give you information about the length of a trail, the types of plants and/or animals you are likely to see along the trail, or warnings about trail hazards or difficulties. Each of these signs lets you know what to expect just up ahead.

Organization of Informational Texts

Section 13.3
Reverse Outlining
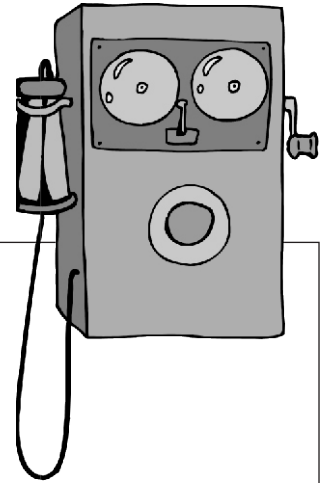
Key Terms 13.3

- **Outline** – an organized list of the main ideas or main topics of a text without all the details; often created by a writer before writing the actual text

- **Reverse outlining** – the process of creating an outline of main ideas or topics from an existing text

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Before writing an informational passage, an author will often create an outline, an organized list of the main ideas or topics he or she plans to cover in the text. The author will then write one or more paragraphs or sections to explain or describe each item in the outline. An outline does not contain complete sentences, but instead, includes summary words or phrases. Each item in the outline summarizes an idea that the author will expand in the informational passage.

Consider that an author is writing an informational article on the how phone technology has changed over time. The author's outline may look something like the following:

Evolution of Phone Technology

    I.   The first telephones
        A.   Major inventors
            1.   Alexander Graham Bell
            2.   Thomas Edison
        B.   Formation of telephone networks

    II. Improvements in the 1900s

    III. Modern technologies
        A.   Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP)
        B.   Satellite phones
        B.   Mobile/cellular phones

In longer passages, the author may choose to use phrases from the outline as headings and subheadings in the actual text. As you saw in Section 13.1, headings and subheadings are like titles within sections of text that summarize the information that follows.

Whereas outlining is a tool used by authors, reverse outlining is a tool used by readers to analyze what has already been written. **Reverse outlining** is a process of summarizing paragraphs or sections of text in order to create an organized list of main ideas or topics covered in a passage. This process is "reverse" because it creates the outline *after* something has already been written, which is the "reverse" of what authors do when outlining *before* they write.

When a passage contains headings and subheadings, the author has basically given you a reverse outline. Simply list the headings and subheadings in the passage, and the result is at least a general reverse outline. However, not all passages contain headings and subheadings. Reverse outlining, in a sense, creates headings and subheadings when they are not otherwise given.