**Inference** (reading between the lines)

Sometimes you will have to work out what is meant in a text. The technical term for this is **inference**, although it is also referred to as **'reading between the lines'**. This is where you will need to look for what is suggested, or **implied**, rather than just what is being stated clearly or obviously. Detective skills are required.

Depending on what you are reading, you will find different things inferred. It could be:

* a general fact or a precise piece of information
* emotions and feelings
* the author's opinions or feelings

To infer successfully there are a number of things you should do. For example:

* Look for clues or references in the text.
* Think about the meanings and suggestions of words used in the text.
* Match something in the text to your own understanding, experience or knowledge.

Read the following extract.

*The men walked down the streets to the mine with their heads bent close to their chests. In groups of five or six they scurried on. It was impossible to recognise individuals from the small gaps between their caps, pulled down over their eyes, and the tightly bound scarves tied tightly over the bottom half of their faces.*

You should be able to work out that it was cold and windy. You probably arrived at this answer because you associated hats pulled down and scarves with winter or cold weather. You know from personal experience that people keep their heads down when walking against the wind and the author gave you another clue with the word scurried which suggests the men were hurrying to reach their destination.

**Inference - example**

Read the following extract and try to infer the information required to answer the questions.

*Rain lashed against the windows as Jane stamped up and down the room stopping only to check the time on the mantle clock every five minutes. Her book, bought with such enthusiasm the day before, was flung carelessly in the corner beside the abandoned picnic basket. Jane stamped her feet and began to repeat her earlier tedious complaints against nature. Emily merely smiled to herself and carried on reading the newspaper without as much as a nod of the head."*

1. What plans had Jane had for the day?
2. How would you describe Jane's mood?
3. What expression does the author use to suggest her disapproval of the main character?

Read more on this subject and test yourself at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/guides/z89p34j/revision>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/guides/z89p34j/test>

Answers

1. A picnic.

Hint - notice the reference to an abandoned picnic basket.

1. Angry, frustrated, bad-tempered and disappointed.

Hint - she is unable to sit still, watches the clock, fed-up with reading, complaining.

1. The expression tedious complaints suggests her disapproval.

Hint - the word "tedious" has negative connotations and suggests disapproval of Jane's tiresome behaviour.