

THINKING ALOUD WITH MAKING INFERENCES

Good readers make inferences. An inference is something that is probably true. The author doesn't tell us exactly, but good readers take clues from the text and combine them with what they already know. An inference is made when a reader says, "This is probably true."

Teaching Making Inferences in Grades K–2

Miss Nelson Is Missing! by Harry Allard

Overview and Rationale

In my opinion, there is no better text to model making inferences than Harry Allard's *Miss Nelson Is Missing!* This back-to-school classic tells about a classroom full of misbehaving students, who blatantly disregard their good-natured teacher Miss Nelson. When a witch substitute Miss Viola Swamp appears, the children begin to regret their behavior. A savvy reader is able to use multiple clues from the text to infer that Miss Nelson and Miss Viola Swamp are the same person. The coincidental timing of Miss Nelson's disappearance and the appearance of Miss Swamp, a sighting of Miss Swamp by Miss Nelson's house, and a black dress hanging in Miss Nelson's closet lead to this inference. The humor of this book lies in its inferences. Without this important inference, the humor of the story and the message of appreciating the people we value are lost on young readers.

Lexile Framework: 340L

Grade-Level Equivalent: 3.1

Guided Reading Level: L

What the Text Says	What I Say
"Now settle down," said Miss Nelson in a sweet voice. (p. 4)	<i>Spit balls, paper airplanes—the author is giving me details to show me the kids are misbehaving. I can picture it! Hmmm, "sweet voice." Based on this detail, I wonder if Miss Nelson is too gentle to get this class to listen to her. Maybe her plea to "settle down" won't work!</i>
They were even rude during story hour. (p. 6)	<i>The author is giving me a clue with the word even. It suggests that story time is their favorite part of the day, but even during that, the kids will not listen!</i>
And they always refused to do their lessons. (p. 7)	<i>I wonder why these students are misbehaving. I'll keep reading to see if the author tells me why.</i>
"Something will have to be done," said Miss Nelson. (p. 7)	<i>Wow. I bet Miss Nelson is cooking up a plan. I know when a character says something, the author wants me to pay attention. I'm getting clues that Miss Nelson is planning something.</i>
Miss Nelson did not come to school. (p. 8)	<i>Maybe Miss Nelson is taking a day off because she's sick of dealing with a disruptive class. Perhaps she's staying home.</i>
A woman in an ugly black dress stood before them. (p. 10)	<i>The ugly dress, this person hissing, and her unpleasant voice make me think that somebody mean and strict is not going to tolerate these students misbehaving. Maybe this is the principal of the school. Maybe this is a substitute teacher.</i>
Miss Nelson's kids did as they were told. (p. 10)	<i>Wow! She rapped the desk and hissed. That behavior is a lot different from Miss Nelson's sweet approach. And the kids did what they were told. That's different too! I'm going to conclude that these kids are scared of Miss Swamp.</i>

What the Text Says	What I Say
"We'll have no story hour today," said Miss Swamp. (p. 14)	<i>Earlier I guessed that the kids really liked story time, and here I'm getting proof that my thinking was right. Maybe Miss Swamp knows how much they love story hour, and she takes it away as a punishment.</i>
The kids in Room 207 had never worked so hard. (p. 14)	<i>Earlier I made an inference that the kids were scared of Miss Swamp. I'm getting more evidence here to support that inference. The author suggests to me that they are working really hard so that Miss Swamp won't punish them more.</i>
The kids missed Miss Nelson! (p. 15)	<i>I'm getting the sense that the kids are starting to realize how good they had it with Miss Nelson.</i>
"Hmmm. I think Miss Nelson is missing." (p. 17)	<i>The words and actions of Detective McSmogg make me think that he's not the smartest detective. I'm getting the sense that the kids are on their own to find Miss Nelson.</i>
... and no one answered the door. (p. 18)	<i>I'm getting clues that Miss Nelson is hiding and does not want to be found!</i>
But that was the least likely of all. (p. 24)	<i>The author is giving me more hints to make me think about how much the kids miss Miss Nelson. They are coming up with all sorts of possibilities for where she could be, and that makes me think that they are curious about where she went or that they are concerned about her.</i>
It was Miss Nelson! (p. 28)	<i>I'm making the inference here that the kids must be very excited about Miss Nelson's return. Just when they're thinking they'll be stuck with Miss Viola Swamp forever, they hear Miss Nelson's sweet voice. The author also uses an exclamation point to show that something exciting or important is happening.</i>
... during story hour no one was rude or silly. (p. 28)	<i>It could be that the kids are on their best behavior because they are so excited Miss Nelson has returned. Perhaps they've realized their behavior for Miss Nelson before was bad.</i>
"That's our little secret," said the kids. (p. 28)	<i>Miss Nelson won't tell her secret of where she was, and the kids won't tell their secret about the change in their behavior. The author also used italics on the word our to show that the kids are in on the secret.</i>
"I'll never tell," she said to herself with a smile. (p. 30)	<i>Throughout the end of the story, the author has given me some important clues. I'm going to add up those clues to make an inference about the identity of Miss Viola Swamp. I know that Miss Nelson disappeared at the same time Miss Swamp appeared. I know the kids saw Miss Swamp right by Miss Nelson's house. Now I know that Miss Nelson has a black dress in her closet and a secret she won't tell. All of this evidence makes me think that Miss Nelson and Miss Swamp are the same person. I'm making an inference that Miss Nelson dressed up in a disguise to teach her kids a lesson about their behavior.</i>
He is now looking for Miss Viola Swamp. (p. 32)	<i>Earlier I inferred that Detective McSmogg wasn't that bright, and I've got even more evidence of that here. I was able to make the inference that Miss Nelson and Miss Swamp were the same person—but Detective McSmogg couldn't figure that out. This makes me think he won't be successful looking for Miss Swamp!</i>