

## Six Word/Encyclopedia

- ① Read intro & have them "infer" 5
- ② These six word stories tell a story about someone's life. This is Narrative writing
- ③ Create own using a character from one of our stories 5
- ④ Share + guess. 5
- ⑤ Another way to write a narrative is like this - Share Encyclopedia #

⑥ Do brainstorm 5

⑦ Create FCAs 5

⑧ Homework:  
Write encyclopedia

## LESSON 4.5

# Inferring Meaning

**TEXT** ▶ Assorted Six-Word Memoirs

**TIME** ▶ 20 Minutes

**GROUPING SEQUENCE** ▶ Whole class, pairs, whole class

**USED IN TEXT SET** ▶ 7

When we were collecting literary selections for this book, we wanted really short stories and poems, so students could read and discuss them in class. And there's no shorter genre than Six-Word Memoirs! Have you run across the books that offer hundreds of these? Or visited one of the websites where you can write and publish your own? Gotta warn you, it's pretty addictive.

Props go out to *Smith* magazine for repopularizing this mini-genre. The idea is to pack a whole life, or at least a major event, into just six words. The classic original is tenuously attributed to Ernest Hemingway:

*For sale. Baby shoes. Never worn.*

See? You really can make up a whole story to go with those six words, which is the point.

As kids move into more and more complex text through the school year, they must hone their ability to infer—to take clues from a text and combine these with their background knowledge to make reasonable guesses, hypotheses, and predictions about what an author means. In this lesson, we start super-simple, inviting kids to make inferences about six words at a time. Later, students can graduate to longer, more complex texts—from this book, from your anthology, or from the Common Core exemplars.

### PREPARATION

Establish partners. Have sample memoirs ready to project or hand out.

## Steps & Teaching Language

**STEP 1 Explain inferring.** *We are always talking about how smart readers think. And one thing they do is make inferences. That's a fancy word for something we do all the time. If we smell pizza in the school hall this morning, we might infer that the cooks are making pizza for lunch today. Without walking down there to check, or looking it up in the bulletin, we can infer from the clue—the smell—that pizza is on the menu today. When we are reading, we do the same thing. We are always combining our background knowledge with what the author offers in the text. It's never just the author telling us—when we read, we make the story together with the writer.*

**STEP 2 Model inferring.** *So I thought it would be fun to practice inferring today with some really weird super-short texts. I've brought some six-word stories with me today. Here's a famous one by Ernest Hemingway. Read aloud. Now watch me try to infer what it means.*

*Of course, do this in your own words, but maybe you'll say something like this: When I read this, I think someone was expecting a baby, but for some reason the baby never wore the shoes. Maybe the baby was never born, or died, or there was a miscarriage. Or maybe the father bought the shoes but the mother ran away or divorced him so he never saw the baby. Or it could be that some friend just gave the mom these shoes at a baby shower and the mother thought they were ugly and put them up for sale (and the baby was fine). But mostly, this just sounds sad and wistful, whatever happened.*

*See how simple? Get with your partner, and let's do several more, one at a time. I'll stop and give you time to try to blend the clues in the text with your own background knowledge and make sense of each "story."*

**STEP 3 Kids infer from memoirs.** Here are a few samples to prime the pump. Improve our list by making up your own (and kids will get to write their own shortly). Pick a handful and have pairs talk through each one.

Homework: odd-numbered problems. 97. Zzzzzzz.

Moving again. Goodbye, strangers. Hello strangers.

Leap! Catch football. Crunch. Goodbye scholarship.

One-horse town? Ride it out!

Mistaken verdict. Life sentence. I'm appealing.

Expensive restaurant. Bad service. Twitter revenge.

Unmarked vehicle. Realization came too late.

I seem shy to some, apparently.

Done with dishes, wild to roam.

Bleached blonde. Everyone knew. Never cared.

Actually, I never had a mother.

Cleaning my room, stomping, stomping, stomping.

Root of evil? Money. Spend wisely!

Have volunteer pairs share their thinking after each memoir. Then invite people with a "different inference" to join in.

- **Kids write Six-Word Memoirs:** Have students write their own mini-memoirs, summing up their life (so far) or depicting a major event. To provide an audience, have everyone copy their six-worder anonymously onto an index card and place it in a hat. Then let each class member draw one at random and read aloud. If it feels right, let kids guess whose memoir each one is. Or have kids write six-word synopses about characters in a novel you are studying. For example:

Uncle rules. Mother betrays. Son waffles. (Hamlet)

#### COMMON CORE STANDARDS SUPPORTED

- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it, citing specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. (CCRA.R.1)
- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. (CCRA.R.4)
- Participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations. (CCRA.SL.1)



#### ◀ Variations

- **Go quotable:** This inferring practice also works well with famous quotations. Among our favorites to use with kids:

*The louder he spoke of his honor, the faster we counted our spoons.* (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

*Education is when you read the fine print. Experience is what you get if you don't.* (Pete Seeger)

- **Character inferences:** Studying Six-Word Memoirs is all about making inferences, and this short-short genre is a great way to introduce or reinforce this skill. While nonfiction tends to be more “face value,” most fiction requires tons of inferring. Authors of stories and novels don’t like to spell things out; they want readers to imagine and create based on the clues they’ve given them. And, in fiction, the majority of inferences have to do with character personality and motivation: Why did the character do that? What was he thinking? How does he feel about another character? How do you know? Once students know that making character inferences is normal and necessary when reading fiction, you can introduce the trickier kinds of inferences readers make, such as when a narrator is unreliable or when a character is using irony or sarcasm.

- Writing Six-Word Memoirs is a great way to reflect on characters found in your textbook or curricular selections. Copy the characters you wish to review onto slips of paper and have students choose from “the hat.” Tell kids to keep their characters a secret while they are writing their memoirs. Then have them get into groups of four. In turn, each member reads his memoir and the others guess who it is—while defending their guesses with textual evidence, of course. Afterwards, each group picks the best memoir for the rest of the class to hear and guess.

Six-Word Memoir for Boo Radley in *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

Waited a lifetime for that moment.

# Encyclopedia of An Ordinary Life

## **Amy Rosenthal**

*My father-in-law informed me that my married name could produce two anagrams: Hearty Salmon. Nasty Armhole. I cannot tell you how much I love that. (37)*

## **Anxious, Things That Make Me**

*Vending Machines. I have to double-, triple-check. Okay, it's A5 for the Bugles, right? Is that right? A5? I don't want to read the codes wrong and end up with the Flaming Hot Cheetos. But then, what a relief when the Bugles come tumbling down. Yes! I knew it was A5! (37)*

## **Birthmark**

*I have a birthmark on my left arm. As a child I thought it looked like a bear, or Africa, depending on the angle. I would often draw an eye and a mouth on it; sometimes I would allow a friend to do so. To look at my birthmark was to remind myself that I am me. (41)*

### Commercials

Why is it an unwritten rule of nature that when a commercial comes on, it must be louder than a Lady Gaga outfit? There I am, watching *Grey's Anatomy*, when the patient finally loses her battle with cancer. The screen fades to black, I am sad and in the moment, when jarringly, I am snapped out of my trance by someone belting out, "Viva Viagra!" This is yet another reason why the inventor of the DVR should be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

### Head, My

I have a big head. Not metaphorically. Literally. Size 8. One-size-fits-all baseball caps do not fit me. You know your head is big when you go into a hat shop and they do not have a single hat that fits you. This has happened to me. I was once told that many leading actors have large heads, so maybe it's not a terrible feature. I Googled "actors with large heads," and the following celebrities allegedly have huge noggins:

- \* Mel Gibson
- Kirk Douglas
- Kevin Costner
- Warren Beatty
- Philip Seymour Hoffman
- Clive Owen

So, I am in good company (with the exception, perhaps, of Mel Gibson).

### Parking Spot Greed

I am at the mall, and I want to park close to the entrance. I see that there are no available spots up front, but I don't let that deter me. I begin the slow creep forward in my car, hoping for that one shopper who is finished and on the way home to miraculously appear and make my day. It doesn't happen, of course, so I circle around and try again. After the third lap, I realize that if I had just parked in the back of the lot (where there were available spaces to begin with) I would be in the mall and halfway finished with my shopping by now. Once again, I am victimized by parking lot greed.