How to Make Inferences While Listening

Have you ever had a conversation in which someone got really angry but you thought they were just fooling around? If so, you know how important it is to make inferences while listening. Usually, there is a lot more going on when someone speaks than just what you can hear (or see in the speaker’s expressions, posture, or gestures). You need to make inferences by putting together all the clues in the text with what you already know.

- Use your prior knowledge of the speaker and topic to help you make inferences.
- Think about the speaker’s tone and what his/her expressions, posture, or gestures tell you about that tone. Ask yourself: What emotion can I identify in his/her voice? What does that tell me about the speaker’s mood or about the meaning of the text?
- Use clues, like the speaker’s tone or word choice, to identify the implicit message.
- As you listen, think about the inferences you’ve made. Confirm, change, or disregard inferences as you get more information.

Transfer Your Learning

Across the Strands

Media: You also need to make inferences as you listen to media texts (news or songs on the radio, TV shows, or movies). What do you think might make that task harder? What might make it easier?

Across the Curriculum

History: In history class, you sometimes listen to important speeches or debates. Why do you think it’s important to make inferences while listening to this type of text?