

## DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

### Making Inferences

Each day people communicate with, or pass along information to, one another—both verbally and in writing. Sometimes this information is stated directly. At other times, it is not stated directly but hinted at, or implied. When this happens, a person has to *make inferences* to understand the meaning of the information given. Making inferences means “reading between the lines,” or drawing conclusions based on the facts given.

Part of thinking critically is being able to draw such conclusions. It helps increase *comprehension*, or the ability to understand something fully. There are several steps involved in the skill of making inferences. They include the following:

1. Read or listen carefully. Be sure to understand all the facts in the information presented. Read the following paragraph from Chapter 11 about the Spartan way of life:

*When Spartan boys turned seven, they were sent to live in military camps. There, they were trained in groups under teenage leaders. They learned to read, write, and use weapons. The boys received only small amounts of food. They had to go barefoot and were given only one cloak to wear. They walked in silence, with their eyes to the ground, and spoke only when necessary. They slept outdoors without cover. Every ten days they were lined up and examined to make sure they were not getting fat.*

2. Summarize the information. Read the following summary about the above paragraph:

*Spartan boys left home at a very early age. They were trained to read, write, and use weapons. They were given only the basic necessities to survive and were under strict discipline.*

3. Decide what inferences or conclusions can be made based on what was read or heard but was not stated directly. Read the following inference based on the above summary:

*The military training of Spartan boys was very important. Strict discipline and physical fitness were emphasized to develop well-trained soldiers for Sparta.*

For practice in the skill of making inferences, read the material about the Athenian orator Demosthenes on page 195. Then, use the three steps outlined above to explain which of the following two inferences seems reasonable:

1. Because of his effective public speaking skills, Demosthenes could win anyone to his side of an issue.
2. Even with his effective public speaking skills, Demosthenes could not convince the Greek city-states of what was bound to happen if they continued to listen to Philip II of Macedonia.