

The Picture Detective

K-2 with adult support | 15-20 minutes | Prep: 2 minutes

What children practice

Children identify one visible detail, offer an explanation that fits it, and consider another possibility.

Gather and set up

One picture-book illustration with something to wonder about, a sheet of paper to cover part of it, and optional pencils. Use a book you already have; no particular title is required. Choose a picture where an action or feeling can be inferred from at least two visible details. Preview it first. Teach any essential unfamiliar word before asking children to reason. Keep the story text available for the final check.

0-3 min • Notice

Show the whole illustration. Give everyone quiet looking time, then ask: 'What can you point to that is actually in the picture?' Name two details without explaining them yet.

3-6 min • Model

Say: 'I notice _____. I know _____. So I think _____ might be happening.' Explain that an inference is an idea built from clues and what we know, and that it can change.

6-11 min • Make a case

Partners choose a detail and offer an explanation. Ask 'What in this picture makes you think that?' Accept different ideas that fit the available evidence.

11-15 min • Zoom out

Cover all but one detail, then reveal the full picture again. Does the extra information change anyone's idea? Read the accompanying text and compare it with the ideas.

15-20 min • Show your thinking

Children use the detective page or tell you one clue and one possible explanation. Finish with a new picture detail: can they use the same routine without your full model?

Free 30-minute introductory workshop

Live on Zoom: the whole book + voices + a turn directing C. J.

Adults: cjmcguirebooks.com/visit

Subject to availability. School/library groups; a teacher or librarian hosts.

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Keep the thinking going

‘Your first idea does not have to win. Show me the clue that helped you think.’

What a response might sound like

If a picture shows an open umbrella and drops on a coat, ‘It may be raining’ fits those details. ‘It is Tuesday’ is not supported by that picture. A wet coat could have another explanation; check the surrounding text before settling it.

Make the first step smaller

Kindergarten or children needing a smaller step: offer two spoken possibilities, model the important vocabulary, and let a child point while an adult records their explanation. Use familiar experiences instead of assuming everyone shares the same background knowledge.

Add a challenge when ready

Grades 1-2 when ready: ask for two clues, a second possible explanation and one piece of information that would help decide. Separate an inference about now from a prediction about what happens next.

A quick check for understanding

Listen for a connection between a visible detail and an idea. A child who gives only a guess gets ‘Which part helped you?’ A child who names only a detail gets ‘What might that mean?’

No printer? No problem.

Use one projected picture, an adult’s book or a shared drawing. Children point, tell, sign or use their familiar communication supports; the worksheet is optional.

Print only what you need

Pages 1-2: adult reference. Page 3: one set of cards per group, or read aloud without cutting. Page 4: optional child response. US Letter: actual size. A4: Fit. Student pages use black lines and white backgrounds.

Developed for C. J. McGuire Books with AI assistance. Suggested activities for educator review, not an independently evaluated curriculum. Feedback: hello@cjmccguirebooks.com.

The detective's three moves



A grown-up can read these. Point, tell, sign or use your usual communication supports.

NOTICE

I can point to...

CONNECT

I know... so it might mean...

CHECK

Another idea is... What else would help us decide?

My picture has a secret



Draw, tell, dictate or write. An adult can put your words on the page.

Draw a detail you can really see.

It might mean... because...

It could also mean...