CHAPTER 2

Inference—Critical Thought

Question
What do you infer from this cartoon?

Answer
A pair of woodpeckers pecked holes in Noah's Ark, and as a result, the boat is sinking. We do not see the woodpeckers, but we know they are a pair because all of the other animals are paired. This tells us that the boat is not just any boat, but is indeed Noah's Ark. The cartoon's caption, combined with the image of the sinking boat, leads us to the conclusion that the woodpeckers are the culprits. We do not see them in action, but on the basis of the evidence, we make an inference.

WHAT IS AN INference?

An inference is a conclusion about the unknown made on the basis of the known. We see a car beside us on the freeway with several new and old dents; we infer that the driver must be a bad one. A close friend hasn't called in several weeks and doesn't return our calls when we leave messages; we infer that she is angry with us. Much of our thinking, whether about casual observations or personal relationships, involves making inferences. Indeed, entire careers are based on the ability to make logical inferences. In Snow Falling on Cedars, a novel by David Guterson, a coroner describes his job:

It's my job to infer. Look, if a night watchman is struck over the head with a crowbar during the course of a robbery, the wounds you're going to see in his head will look like they were made with a crowbar. If they were made by a ball-peen hammer you can see that, too—a ball-peen leaves behind a crescent-shaped injury, a crowbar leaves, well, linear wounds with V-shaped ends. You get hit with a pistol butt, that's one thing; somebody hits you with a bottle, that's another. You fall off a motorcycle at 40 miles an hour and hit your head on gravel, the gravel will leave behind patterned abrasions that don't look like anything else. So yes, I infer from the deceased's wound that something narrow and flat caused his injury. To infer—it's what coroners do.

Such reasoning is the basis for the popular television series CSI: Crime Scene Investigation, in which a team of investigators use cutting-edge scientific tools to examine the evidence, make logical inferences, and catch the killer. Critical thinking has always been an essential part of a good mystery.

How Reliable Is an Inference?

The reliability of inferences covers an enormous range. Some inferences are credible, but inferences based on minimal evidence or on evidence that may support many different interpretations should be treated with skepticism. In fact, the strength of an inference can be tested by the number of different explanations we can draw from the same set of facts. The greater the number of possible interpretations, the less reliable the inference.

In the cartoon, given the woodpeckers and the sinking boat, we can arrive at one inference only: the birds made holes in the boat. But the inferences drawn in the other two cases above are less reliable. The driver of the dented car may not be the owner: she may have borrowed the car from a friend, or she may own the car but have recently bought it "as is." Our friend may not have called us for a number of reasons: a heavy work schedule, three term papers, a family crisis. She may not have received our messages. These alternate explanations weaken the reliability of the original inferences. Clearly, the more evidence we have to support our inferences and the fewer interpretations possible, the more we can trust their accuracy. (For more on inference, see "Blinded by Science" in Additional Readings.)

THE LANGUAGE OF INERENCE

The verbs infer and imply are often confused, but they can be readily distinguished:

to infer: to conclude from evidence

to imply: to suggest, indicate indirectly, hint, intimate; what a writer, speaker, action, or object conveys.
Exercise 2A

Interpreting a Cartoon

Quickly determine the message the following cartoon implies. What inferences do you draw from the evidence given? After writing a short response, compare your interpretation with those of others in the class. Are they the same?

Sahzn Tmirsn smpwe way to EMILTAT thm midzomam,

What is a fact?

You’re neither right nor wrong because others agree with you. You’re right because your facts and reasoning are right.

—INVESTOR AND COLUMBIA PROFESSOR BEN GRAHAM TO CEO WARREN BUFFETT

We make inferences based on our own observations or on the observations of others as they are presented to us through speech or print. These observations often consist of facts—information that can be verified. The boat is sinking. We see dents in the car. You have not spoken to your friend in several weeks. “A crowbar leaves linear wounds with V-shaped ends.” Our own observations attest to the truth of these claims. But often we are dependent on others’ observations about people, places, and events that we cannot directly observe. Take, for example, the claim that in Boston, on September 11, 2001, Mohamed Atta boarded a flight that flew into the World Trade Center. Few of us observed this action firsthand, but those who did reported it, and we trust the veracity of their reports. Books, newspapers, magazines, television programs, and the Internet are filled with reports—facts—giving us information about the world that we are unable to gain from direct observation. If we doubt the truth of these claims, we usually can turn to other sources to verify or discredit them. As former United States senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan stated, “Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts.”

Facts and Journalism

In “The Facts of Media Life,” Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and former New York Times executive editor Max Frankel comments on the growing number of journalists, some of them well known, who have forgotten that verifiable facts are the foundation of good journalism. (For more on the importance of facts in journalism, see “Blinded by Science” in the Additional Readings.)

The Facts of Media Life

In journalism, the highest truth is truth. Period.

The roster of fallen journalists grows apace: Stephen Glass, Mike Barnicle, Patricia Smith, James Hirsch, a whole team of CNN investigators. But the year’s toll is proof not that many reporters often lie; it bespeaks a heroic battle by the news media to preserve the meaning of fact and the sanctity of quotation marks. Reporters have been losing their jobs for committing fiction, a crime that is no crime at all in too many other media venues, notably film and television docudramas.

While news teams root out the tellers of tall tales, the rest of our culture argues that a good yarn justifies cutting corners, imagining dialogue, inventing characters and otherwise torturing truth.

What’s wrong with a little mendacity—so goes the theory—to give a tale velocity? It is unforgivably wrong to give fanciful stories the luster of fact, or to use facts to let fictions parade as truths.

Happily, journalism’s infantry slogs on, struggling to distinguish fact from fiction. It wants to preserve the thrills of reality and believes that readers deserve the honesty implicit in Frank McCourt’s refusal to put quotation marks around the reconstructed dialogue in his memoir of an Irish childhood, “Angela’s Ashes.”

It is a noble but uphill struggle. Admired intellectuals like Joyce Carol Oates have scoffed at the distinction, observing that all language tends by its nature to distort experience and that writing, being an art, “means artifice.” But see how much she, too, values separating fact from fiction: Oates defeats her own defense of artifice with the supporting observation that Thoreau compressed two years into one in “Walden” and “lived a historical life very different from the . . . monastic life he presents in his book.” How could she ever know in a world without fact?

Facts, unlike literature, do not promise truth. They only record what has been seen and heard somehow, by someone, subject to all the frailties and biases of their observers and interpreters. Yet they must be defended, particularly in a society that values freedom, because by definition, facts can be challenged, tested, cross-examined. Wrong facts and the truths derived from them are always correctable—with more facts. Fictional facts are forever counterfeit.

A film, Shattered Glass, was made about Stephen Glass, one of the “fallen journalists” identified by Frankel. The film depicts the rise and fall of this New Republic reporter who also contributed stories to Rolling Stone. And the list of “fallen journalists” continues to grow with the addition of Jayson Blair of the New York Times, who filed dispatches from various locations when he was actually in New York. He also fabricated comments and scenes as well as taking material from other newspapers and wire services. Needless to say, Blair lost his job as did one of his editors, and the reputation of our country’s most prestigious newspaper was damaged.

Exercise 2B

Questions for Discussion

1. What does Frankel mean by “the sanctity of quotation marks”? For more on this issue, see “Plagiarism” in “A Quick Guide to Integrating Research into Your Own Writing” (page 213).

2. Why did author Frank McCourt refuse to put quotation marks around the dialogue in his childhood memoir, Angela’s Ashes?

What is a Judgment?

When we infer that the woodpeckers are sinking the boat, we laugh but are unlikely to express approval or disapproval. On the other hand, when we infer that the woman in the car in front of us is a poor driver, we express disapproval of her driving skills; we make a judgment, in this case a statement of disapproval. Or, when we infer from a friend’s volunteer work with the homeless that she is an admirable person, we express our approval; that is, make a favorable judgment. A judgment is also an inference, but although many inferences are free of positive or negative connotation, such as “I think it’s going to rain,” a judgment always expresses the writer’s or speaker’s approval or disapproval.

Certain judgments are taken for granted, become part of a culture’s shared belief system, and are unlikely to be challenged under most circumstances. For example, most of us would accept the following statements: “Taking the property of others is wrong” or “People who physically abuse children should be punished.” But many judgments are not universally accepted without considerable well-reasoned support or may be rejected regardless of additional support and cogent reasoning. Frequently, a judgment is further complicated by potentially ambiguous language and even punctuation. Take, for example, the highly controversial wording of the Second Amendment to the Constitution:

Amendment II

A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.

Those in favor of gun control interpret this to mean that only “a well-regulated militia,” not every individual, is guaranteed the right to bear arms. “Well-regulated” implies an official militia, not a private one free of government regulations. But those against gun control believe that the Second Amendment guarantees “the people,” meaning all individuals, the right to bear arms. This interpretation of the Second Amendment led five of the nine United States Supreme Court justices to a recent decision (July 2008) that individuals have a constitutional right to keep a loaded handgun at home for self-defense.

Exercise 2C

Distinguishing Between Facts, Inferences, and Judgments

Determine whether the following statements are facts, inferences, or judgments and explain your reasoning. Note that some may include more than one, and some may be open to interpretation.

Example: I heard on the morning news that the city subway system has ground to a halt this morning; many students will arrive late for class.

“I heard on the morning news that the city subway system has ground to a halt this morning.” [Fact: I did hear it and the information can be verified.]

“Many students will arrive late for class.” [Inference: This is a conclusion drawn from the information about the breakdown of the subway.]

1. The United States invaded Iraq in the spring of 2003.
2. Material on the Internet should not be censored by government or any other organization.
3. For sale: lovely three-bedroom house in forest setting, easy commute, a bargain at $475,000.
4. Forty-one percent of Californians who die are cremated—almost twice the national average of 21 percent.
5. Artist Winslow Homer didn’t begin to paint seriously until 1862.
6. Erie has a drinking problem.
7. Critic Ben Brantley called the latest production of Shakespeare's As You Like It "exhilarating."

8. After I took those vitamin pills recommended by the coach, I scored a touchdown. Those pills sure did the trick.

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**Exercise 2D**

**Drawing Logical Inferences**

Read these "traffic facts" taken from Tom Vanderbilt's Traffic: Why We Drive the Way We Do (and What It Says About Us). What do these facts about how we drive say about us?

**A. Traffic Facts**

TOM VANDERBILT

- "Children at Play" signs don't reduce accidents.
- Drivers honk less on weekends. Men honk more than women, and both men and women honk more at women than at men.
- New cars crash more frequently than older cars.
- Half of all fatalities occur at a speed of less than 35 mph.
- 1 in 5 urban crashes occur when one of the drivers is searching for parking.
- Saturday at 1 p.m. has heavier traffic than weekday rush hours.
- Driving aggressively burns up more gas, increases crash risk and saves one minute on a 27-mile trip.
- Solo motorists drive more aggressively.
- FasTrak lanes have been shown to increase crash rates.
- Fifty percent of American schoolchildren walked or biked to school in 1969. Today it's 16 percent.
- Drivers seated at higher eye heights tend to drive faster. Studies show that SUV and pickup drivers speed more than the average driver.
- Car insurance premiums are tied not only to driving records but also to credit scores. The greater the credit risk, researchers find, the more likely someone is to be involved in a crash.

**B. What inference can you draw from this fact taken from Dry Manhattan by Michael A. Lerner?**

There were 15,000 saloons in New York when Prohibition started; within a few years, there were 32,000.

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**Exercise 2E**

**Solving Riddles, Reading Poetry**

Use your inferential skills to solve these riddles by English poet John Cotton:

1. Insubstantial I can fill lives, Cathedrals, worlds. I can haunt islands, Raise passions Or calm the madness of kings. I've even fed the affectionate. I can't be touched or seen, But I can be noted.

2. We are a crystal zoo, Wielders of fortunes, The top of our professions. Like hard silver nails Hammered into the dark We make charts for mariners.

3. I reveal your secrets. I am your morning enemy, Though I give reassurance of presence. I can be magic, or the judge in beauty contests. Count Dracula has no use for me. When you leave I am left to my own reflections.

4. My tensions and pressures Are precise if transitory. Iridescent, I can float And catch small rainbows. Beauties luxuriate in me. I can inhabit ovens Or sparkle in bottles. I am filled with that Which surrounds me.

5. Containing nothing I can bind people forever,
Or just hold a finger.
Without end or beginning
I go on to appear in fields,
Ensnare enemies,
Or in another guise
Carry in the air
Messages from tower to tower.

6. Silent I invade cities,
Blur edges, confuse travelers,
My thumb smudging the light.
I drift from rivers
To loiter in the early morning fields,
Until Constable Sun
Moves me on.
—JOHN COTTON, THE TOTLEIGH RIDDLES, TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

Now apply the same skills to these two poems by Sylvia Plath (1933–1963). What does each describe?

7. I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
Whatever I see I swallow immediately
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.
I am not cruel, only truthful—
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long
I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.
Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,
Searching my reaches for what she really is.
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.
I am important to her. She comes and goes.
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

8. I'm a riddle in nine syllables,
An elephant, a ponderous house,
A melon strolling on two tendrils.
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers.
This loaf's big with its yeasty rising.

Money's new-minted in this fat purse.
I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.
I've eaten a bag of green apples,
Boarded the train there's no getting off.

Turn your inference skills to this more serious poem by Philip Levine. What question did the boy have? What answer does the man find?

ON ME!

In the next room his brothers are asleep,
the two still in school. They just can't wait
to grow up and be men, to make money.
Last night at dinner they sat across from him,
their brother, a man, but a man with nothing,
without money or the prospect of money.
He never pays, never tosses a bill
down on the bar so he can say, "On me!"
At four in the morning when he can't sleep,
he rehearses the stale phrase to himself
with a delicate motion of the wrist
that lets the bill float down. He can't pace
for fear of waking his mom who sleeps
alone downstairs in the old storage room
off the kitchen. When he was a kid, twelve
or fourteen, like his brothers, he never knew
why boys no older than he did the things
they did, the robberies, gang fights, ODs,
rapes, he never understood his father's wordless
rages that would explode in punches
and kicks, bottles, plates, glasses hurled
across the kitchen. The next morning would be
so quiet that from his room upstairs
he'd hear the broom-straws scratching the floor
as his mother swept up the debris and hear
her humming to herself. Now it's so clear,
so obvious he wonders why it took
so long for him to get it and to come of age.

ACHIEVING A BALANCE
BETWEEN INFERENCE AND FACTS

We need to distinguish inferences, facts, and judgments from one another to evaluate as fairly as possible the events in our world. Whether these events are personal or
global, we need to be able to distinguish between facts, verifiable information that we can rely on, and inferences and judgments, which may or may not be reliable.

We also need to evaluate the reliability of our own inferences. Are there other interpretations of the facts? Have we considered all other possible interpretations? Do we need more information before drawing a conclusion? These are useful thinking skills that we need to practice, but how do these skills relate to writing? To answer that question, read the following paragraph and distinguish between statements of fact and inference.

A white player's life in the National Basketball Association is a reverse-image experience all but unique in American culture. Although fewer than 13 percent of United States citizens are African-American, about 80 percent of the N.B.A.'s players are. Of the 357 players on N.B.A. rosters, 290 were African-American, including several of mixed descent. Every one of the league's 20 leading scorers was black, and all but 2 of its leading rebounders. Not one N.B.A. team has as many whites as blacks.

—Adapted from "The Loneliness of Being White" by Bruce Schoenfeld

This paragraph contains one inference while the remaining statements are factual, capable of verification. Notice that the facts support and convince us of the inference.

**INFERENCES**

**FACTS**

A white player's life in the National Basketball Association is a reverse-image experience all but unique in American culture.

Although fewer than 13 percent of United States citizens are African-American, about 80 percent of the N.B.A.'s players are.

Of the 357 players on N.B.A. rosters, 290 were African-American, including several of mixed descent.

Every one of the league's 20 leading scorers was black, and all but 2 of its 20 leading rebounders.

Not one N.B.A. team has as many whites as blacks.

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**Facts Only**

Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!

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So says Thomas Gradgrind in Charles Dickens's novel *Hard Times*, an indictment against Victorian industrial society. Dickens knew that facts alone do not make for a good education nor for good writing and thus gave that speech to an unsympathetic character. Expository writing frequently consists of a blend of inference and fact, with the one supporting the other. If you were to write a paper consisting only of facts, it would be of no interest to the reader because reading facts that lead nowhere, that fail to support a conclusion, is like reading the telephone book. Jeff Jarvis, a book reviewer for the *New York Times Book Review*, comments on the dangers of this kind of writing:

Objectivity, in some quarters, means just the facts, ma'am—names, dates, and quotations dumped from a notebook onto the page. But facts alone, without perspective, do not tell a story. Facts alone, without a conclusion to hold them together, seem unglued. Facts alone force writers to use awkward transitions, unbending formats or simple chronologies to fend off disorganization.

A facts-only approach can also have serious consequences in our schools' textbooks. A recent report on public education cites such facts-only textbooks as one of the causes of students' lack of interest and poor achievement.

Elementary school children are stuck with invidious books that "belabor what is obvious" even to first graders. At the high school level, history—or "social studies"—texts are crammed with facts but omit human motivations or any sense of what events really meant.

Keep the danger of a facts-only approach in mind when you are assigned a research paper. Do not assume that teachers are looking exclusively for well-documented facts; they also want to see what you make of the data, what inferences you draw, what criticisms and recommendations you offer. Do not fall into the trap of one eager young college freshman, Charles Renfrew, who, proud of his photographic memory, expected high praise from a distinguished philosophy professor for a paper on Descartes. He suffered disappointment but learned a lasting lesson when he read the comment "Too much Descartes, not enough Renfrew." A photographic memory for factual information is an asset, but your own inferences and judgments fully explained are also important. Don't leave your readers asking "so what?" when they finish your paper. Tell them.

**Inferences Only**

It is possible to err in another direction as well; a paper consisting only of inferences and judgments would antagonize readers as they search for the basis of our claims, the facts to support our opinions. In his biography of William Shakespeare, *Will in the World*, noted scholar Stephen Greenblatt irritated some Shakespeare authorities and other readers by drawing on a sketchy collection of facts to reconstruct the life of the great playwright about whom little is known. Greenblatt tells a good story, but are his inferences supported by the facts?
For example, in trying to create a childhood love of the theatre for Shakespeare, Greenblatt cites the surviving record of another man of Shakespeare’s time, Willis, who, at a young age, went with his father to the theatre in Gloucester, where the boy stood “between his [father’s] legs.” Greenblatt adds to this testament the fact that Shakespeare’s father, the mayor of Stratford, 30 miles from Gloucester, hired players when his son would have been five, and concludes that Shakespeare, too, must have gone as a child to the theatre. “When the bailiff [or mayor] walked into the hall, everyone would have greeted him. . . . His son, intelligent, quick, and sensitive, would have stood between his father’s legs. For the first time in his life William Shakespeare watched a play.” Notice the shift from the qualifier “would” to direct assertion. But are the facts sufficient to support his inference? One critic would certainly answer in the negative. Oxford professor Richard Jenkyns ridicules Greenblatt’s reasoning: “Some people have birthmarks, and so Shakespeare may have had one.”

EXERCISE 2F

Thinking Critically About Your Own Thinking

Write a paragraph or two about a recent inference you’ve made. Include what facts the inference was based on. Discuss with your classmates whether the inference was logical given the facts that led to it and whether others might have made a different inference from the same data.

READING CRITICALLY

Finally, distinguishing between facts, inferences, and judgments and evaluating their reliability allow us to analyze information, to read critically as writers, as consumers, as voters. Whether it is an article we find on the Internet, an auto salesperson, or a political candidate, we need to be able to separate facts from judgments and to ask that the judgments offered be supported by the facts. If we read or listen without these distinctions in mind, we are susceptible to false claims and invalid arguments, often with serious consequences for us as individuals and for society as a whole. (To practice these skills, see Additional Readings.)

EXERCISE 2G

Reading Critically

In this excerpt taken from a newspaper article, carefully distinguish those statements that are factual from those that are not. (Note that the sentences are numbered.)

On Wednesday, March 9, a Los Angeles court dismissed charges against two physicians who allowed a terminally ill patient to die.1 For generations organized medicine has focused on saving lives, no matter what the price in emotional trauma, physical pain, or economic cost, because we are a death denying society.2 But keeping people alive in the face of a painful death should not be inevitable, as Drs. White and Rosenbaum maintained when they shut off artificial life-support for their brain damaged patient at the urging of his family.3 Although doctors and nurses should remain bound by some rules of law and ethics, they should be able to treat their patients in the most humane way possible as long as they have the informed consent of the patient or of his/her family if the patient can’t give it.4 Thus doctors should not be penalized for allowing a terminally ill patient’s life to end mercifully, especially if the patient is clearly “brain dead.”5 The definition of “brain dead” remains a controversial issue but not one which should halt humane medical decisions.6

Overall, do you consider this article to be based on fact or judgment? In what section of the newspaper would you expect to find this article?

WRITING ASSIGNMENT 2

Reconstructing the Lost Tribe

"When we first started seeing each other, we would always use the same word for snow."

The cartoon above refers to the fact that Eskimos have many words for snow, their vocabulary reflecting their environment. Similarly, the Hmong of Laos have many words for mountains—their shapes, slopes, and elevations—to describe their envi-

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The Topic

Write an essay in which you characterize the society that uses this language. (Consider giving a name to this tribe to help focus your sentences.)

As you analyze the language, you will be reconstructing a culture. Obviously, because the data are limited, you will have to make a few educated guesses and qualify conclusions carefully. ("Perhaps," "possibly," "one might conclude," "the evidence suggests," and similar hedges will be useful.)

The Approach

Examine and group the data; look for patterns.

Draw inferences, depending only on the data given.

The Structure

The opening section of any essay must provide readers with the necessary background information. In this case: What information do you have? How have you come by this information? What are you going to attempt to do with this information?

Each supporting paragraph should deal with one distinct aspect of the civilization. Arrange the paragraphs so you can move smoothly from one paragraph to the next.

Some possibilities for the conclusion of the essay: What general conclusion(s) can you come to about this society based on the more specific conclusions you have presented in the supporting paragraphs? Is there any overall point you want to make about this society?

OR

What do you find admirable about this society? Do you have any criticisms of the society?

OR

Do you have any questions about the society?

Of course, the conclusion can deal with more than one of these possibilities.

Audience and Purpose

You have a wide range of possibilities here; we leave the choice to you. Your paper may assume the form of a report, scholarly or simply informative, directed to any audience you choose. It may be a letter to a personal friend or fictional colleague. It may be a traditional essay for an audience unfamiliar with the assignment, explaining what the language tells us about the people who use or used it. What is crucial for success is that you, as the reporter-writer, assume that you have not seen this tribe and have no firsthand evidence of it. You will also assume that your reader does not have a copy of this assignment; it is up to you to cite all the specific evidence (the terms given in the list) to justify your inferences.

MAKING INFERENCES—ANALYZING IMAGES

When you support a judgment with factual evidence and reasoning, you are mounting an argument, as we explain in more detail in Chapter 3. But it is also possible to persuade with visual images. We live in a world of intense visual stimulation.
The Internet, television, print media, billboards—we are surrounded by images designed to persuade, telling us what to buy, what to think, how to vote. Thus it is important that we train ourselves in media literacy—to interpret visual images in much the same way that we develop our skills in making inferences as we read printed texts.

In the cartoons you looked at earlier in this chapter, we discussed the ways in which the illustrator led you to make inferences, to reach a conclusion that was implied by the picture. In a similar way, a news photo on the front page of a newspaper may suggest a particular way to interpret an event or view a political figure. Photos of war scenes often carry an antiwar message or promote one side in the conflict over another. Pictures of starving children may plead for humanitarian aid. An unflattering photo of a political candidate may be chosen to discourage voters.

You may remember a photo of former President Bush published by many newspapers in which he is shown peering from the window of Air Force One as it flies over New Orleans four days after that city had been struck by Hurricane Katrina. Bush was criticized for his late and detached reaction to the crisis, and this photo greatly contributed to that criticism.

During the Vietnam War, pictures of coffins being unloaded at US air bases fueled the war’s unpopularity. Until recently, no such pictures were shown of the soldiers who have died in Iraq. In fact, photojournalists have not had as much freedom to document the war in Iraq as they had in Vietnam. Publication of photos of wounded or dead soldiers is a particularly sensitive issue, as journalist Clark Hoyt points out in the following editorial.

The Painful Images of War

CLARK HOYT

The New York Times

Two hundred twenty-one American soldiers and Marines have been killed in Iraq this year, but until eight days ago, The Times had not published a photo of one of their bodies.

The picture The Times did publish on July 26, of a room full of death after a suicide bombing in June, with a marine in the foreground, his face covered and his uniform riddled with tiny shrapnel holes, accompanied a front-page article about how few such images there are.

The Times reported that the freelance photographer who took the picture, Zoriah Miller, was barred from covering the Marines after he posted it and other graphic pictures of dead Americans and Iraqis on his Web site. A second photo accompanying the article, of a dead Army captain in a pool of blood in 2004, got that photographer in trouble at the time, too.

The article by Michael Kamber, an independent photographer and journalist working in Iraq for The Times, and Tim Arango, who writes about the media, highlighted a longstanding tension between journalists who feel a duty to report war in all its aspects and a military determined to protect its own.

Although the written ground rules for reporters and photographers embedding with military units do not forbid photos of the dead and injured, commanders have used a variety of tactics to prevent them. That, combined with the declining number of Western photographers in Iraq—The Times has two—has meant fewer than half a dozen graphic photos of dead American soldiers in five years of fighting, Kamber and Arango reported.

Gail Buckland, an author and professor of photo history at Cooper Union in New York, said she tells students that because of the lack of a comprehensive photographic record of the war in Iraq, they are “more impoverished today than Americans were in the 19th century,” when battlefield photographs by Timothy O’Sullivan and others documented the Civil War. “The greatest dishonor you can do is to forget,” she told me. “Photographs are monuments.”

But before war photographs pass into history, they are news and records of events that are still raw for everyone involved—soldiers, families and journalists. The experiences of The Times in recent years with searing pictures of injury and, in one case, imminent death, suggest how emotional, complicated and unpredictable the issues can be.

In January 2007, Robert Nickelsberg, an independent photographer working for The Times, and Damien Cave, a Times correspondent, were embedded with an Army company helping an Iraqi unit search for weapons in a dangerous Baghdad neighborhood. Suddenly, there were shots that a man was down: the sergeant whom Nickelsberg and Cave had been chatting with minutes before had been shot in the head. Nickelsberg said he and Cave helped evacuate Hector Leija of Raymondville, Tex., and Nickelsberg followed the stretcher downstairs to an armored vehicle, taking pictures the whole time. Leija died that morning.

The Times waited four days, until Leija’s family had been notified of his death, and then published a photograph of him on the stretcher, with another soldier’s hand covering the wound. The newspaper also posted a moving five-minute video, narrated by Cave, documenting the grief and frustration of Leija’s fellow soldiers and their determination not to leave until, at great peril, they had recovered all his equipment.

Michele McNally, the assistant managing editor in charge of photography, said The Times was trying to both tell the story and be sensitive. But friends said Leija’s family was upset by the coverage, and the Army reacted with outrage, although Nickelsberg said that no one in Leija’s squad tried to prevent him from taking the pictures and soldiers later thanked him and Cave for sticking with them through a tough day. After the photo and video were published, Cave said, the military told him and Nickelsberg that they—and The Times—would be banned from embedding with the military. After lengthy discussions, the ban was lifted.

Bill Keller, the executive editor, wrote a letter to the family expressing regret for their pain, although he said he does not regret publishing the photo and
video. Cave said he sent a message of regret to the family through an intermediary and e-mail to Leija's brother. The family did not respond to any of the communications. My efforts through intermediaries to talk with them were unsuccessful.

The Times reported that Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno was furious and accused the newspaper of violating a ground rule requiring written permission from a wounded soldier before his picture can be published—often an impossibility with seriously injured people who are evacuated within minutes.

Joao Silva, an independent photographer working for The Times, said he did not ask for permission in late 2006 when he took a dramatic series of photographs of Juan Valdez-Castillo, a Marine lance corporal seriously wounded in Karma and heroically rescued by Sgt. Jesse Leach. A graphic shot of Valdez-Castillo lying bloody and bandaged by a muddy lane, with Leach tending to him, ran at the top of the front page. An audio slide show of the full sequence of pictures was posted on The Times Web site.

Far from objecting, the Marines asked for copies of the pictures to support a recommendation that Leach receive a medal. The newspaper provided them, and Leach got his medal. The difference, almost certainly, was life and death. Valdez-Castillo lived. Leija died.

Jim Looram, a retired West Point graduate and Vietnam veteran, feels strongly that images of dead soldiers should never be published during a war. “I cannot describe to you what it is like to see a dead American soldier,” he said. Civilians cannot understand what happens on a battlefield, Looram said, and it dishonors dead soldiers to try to convey through pictures what they went through.

His daughter, Meaghan, is the Times picture editor who handled the photographs that accompanied the article by Kamber and Arango. She loves her dad but disagrees with him on this. “Looking at photographs of grossly wounded or dead is a profoundly affecting and emotional experience,” she said. “However, I do feel that it is my duty as a journalist to see that a truthful account of the consequences of war is given.”

Like Jim Looram, Tom Langseth is a retired Army lieutenant colonel. He wrote last year to thank The Times after a graphic photograph of his severely injured grandson appeared on the front page. The picture—and an audio slide show on The Times Web site—showed how hard everyone worked to save his grandson Tommy, Langseth told me last week. “It eased our minds a whole lot. We would be less without it than we are.”

I asked Langseth if he would have felt differently had his grandson not survived. “I don’t think I would,” he said. “But the first time I looked at it, it would have killed me.”

Painful as these issues are—C. J. Chivers, a Times reporter and former Marine officer who wrote about Valdez-Castillo, told me he is “pretty tortured” about them—I think The Times has an obligation to pursue stories and photographs that report the entire experience of war, including death.

Keller said, “Death and carnage are not the whole story of war—there is also heroism and frustration, success and setback, camaraderie and, on occasion, atrocity—but death and carnage are part of the story, and to launder them out of our account of the war would be a disservice.”

Exercise 2H

1. According to this article, what are the reasons for and against the publication of pictures of dead and injured soldiers? Which position does the writer of the article, Clark Hoyt, support?
2. Write a paragraph or two on your position on this issue. Before doing so, you may want to see some of the pictures described in the article at www.nytimes.com; search “Zoriah Miller.”

Examining an Ad

In advertising, the visual image often provides the evidence leading to an inference that carries a judgment: a product is better than others of its kind. The judgment is sometimes obvious, sometimes implicit. This holds true whether you’re reading a magazine, noting a billboard as you drive, or viewing commercials on television or the Internet. Figuring out the underlying suggestive messages of a product can be fun as well as instructive.

When you see an image of a luxury car speeding up a steep mountain road surrounded by gorgeous scenery, it doesn’t take you long to realize that the auto company is suggesting you should buy their model because it is powerful and beautiful and will take you to dramatic places at a thrilling speed. Most of us drive cars. Most of us would willingly be transported to such a world.

When a beer commercial excites your interest with glamorous models having fun and scarcely mentions the brand, the argument is more subtly suggestive. Some ads are so subtle that you are left wondering what the product is or exactly how the image relates to the product. The hope here is usually that the inference is subliminal, below the viewer’s conscious reasoning, the argument indirect. But with careful analysis, you can evaluate the visual clues and infer the message. A number of companies refused our requests to use their ads in this text. Can you figure out why? We appreciate those who cooperated and wonder why others wouldn’t rejoice over multiple copies of free advertising.

In the ad on the next page, note how the product name, Pirelli (tires made in Italy), is reduced to a small corner. It is the image that carries the message. Even if you don’t recognize Rio de Janeiro, or Brazil’s famous soccer player, Ronaldo, standing in for the statue of Christ the Redeemer, which presides on the mountain top above the city, you can see a figure of tremendous power filling the foreground, towering over an impressive landscape. With arms outspread, he suggests control of this landscape, a godlike figure dominating the world, as reassuring as
he is powerful. The picture catches a reader's attention even before he has a chance to read the caption. Were you able to see the picture in color, you would recognize a mystical light emanating from the figure, the whole scene bathed in a warm reddish glow. The image is one of inspiration—inspiring both power and control, underscoring the combination of power and control any driver would want in a tire.

EXERCISE 21
Making Inferences About Visual Images

1. Using the analysis of the Pirelli ad above as your model, select one of the two ads that follow (the first for Paul Mitchell hair products, the second for Guess clothing) to analyze in a paragraph or two. Fully explain exactly how the advertisers are using the visual image to make their argument and sell their product. Do you find the ad effective? Why or why not?

2. Find a magazine or Internet ad that persuades with visual images and write an analysis of it. (A possible source: www.advertisingarchives.co.uk/) Attach the ad or a copy of it to your response. You may have a chance in class to try out your choice on classmates and see if they reach the same conclusion you do. If they don’t, what does it say about the effectiveness of the ad?

3. Select a news photo that implies a judgment of an event or a prominent political or sports figure. Write a paragraph in which you discuss the editor’s choice of photo. What is he implying with this choice?
MAKING INFERENCES—WRITING ABOUT FICTION

Many students are intimidated by assignments that require them to write about a poem, play, short story, or novel. What can they say about a piece of literature? Isn't there a right answer known to the author and the teacher but not to them?

Fiction is implicit; it does not explain explicitly. Writers of fiction—through character, plot, setting, theme, point of view, symbolism, irony, and imagery—imply meaning. Fiction is oblique. The work implies meaning; you infer what that meaning is. As you can see, interpreting literature requires critical thinking; it asks you to make inferences about the meaning of the work and to support these inferences with details from it as you have done with cartoons, statistics, poems, and ads earlier in this chapter.

Reading is the making of meaning, and the meaning we make depends on who we are. Our sex, age, ethnicity, culture, and experience all create the context for our reading. Given the multiple interpretations possible, there is not a single right answer but only well-supported inferences that add up to a logical interpretation.

A final point: a critical essay is not a continuation of class discussion but a formal piece of writing that can stand on its own apart from the class. To accomplish this, you may think of your audience as one who is not familiar with the work you are writing about. This does not require you to retell every detail of the piece, but it ensures that you include the relevant details, the facts, on which your inferences are based rather than assume your reader knows them.

The next three assignments will give you ample opportunity to practice the skills of reading closely and thinking critically while making and supporting inferences about literature. The three stories on which the assignments are based are quite short, so regardless of the one chosen by your instructor, you may want to read both and see how you do.

EXERCISE 2

Making Inferences About Fiction

Read Grace Period by Will Baker and then explain the meaning of the title. Support your answer, your judgment, with facts, details taken from the story.

Grace Period

WILL BAKER

You notice first a difference in the quality of space. The sunlight is still golden through the dust hanging in the driveway, where your wife pulled out a few minutes ago in the Celica on a run to the mailbox, and the sky is still a regular blue, but it feels as if for an instant everything stretched just slightly, a few millimeters, then contracted again.

You shut off the electric hedge trimmers, thinking maybe vibration is affecting your inner ear. Then you are aware that the dog is whining from under the porch. On the other hand you don't hear a single bird song. A semi shifts down with a long backrap of exhaust on the state highway a quarter mile away. A few inches above one horizon an invisible jet is drawing a thin white line across the sky.

You are about to turn the trims on again when you have the startling sense that the earth under your feet has taken on a charge. It is not quite a trembling, but something like the deep throb of a very large dynamo at a great distance. Simultaneously there is a fluctuation of light, a tiny pulse, coming from behind the hills. In a moment another, and then another. Again and more strongly you have the absurd sense that everything inflates for a moment, then shrinks.

Your heart strikes you in the chest then, and you think instantly aneurysm! You are 13 1/2 over 80, and should have had a checkup two months ago. But no, the dog is howling now, and he's not alone. The neighbors' black lab is also in full cry, and in the distance a dozen others have begun yammering.

You stride into the house, not hurrying but not dawdling either, and punch in the number of a friend who lives in the city on the other side of the hills, the county seat. After the tone dance a long pause, then a busy signal. You consider for a moment, then dial the local volunteer fire chief, whom you know. Also busy.

Stretching the twenty-foot cord, you peer out the window. This time the pulse is unmistakable, a definite brightening of the sky to the west, and along with it a timber somewhere in the house creaks. You punch the Sheriff. Busy. Highway Patrol. Busy. 911. Busy. A recorded voice erupts, strident and edged with static, telling you all circuits are busy.

You look outside again and now there is a faint shimmering in the air. On the windowsill outside, against the glass, a few flakes of ash have settled. KVTX. Busy. The Courier. Busy. On some inexplicable frantic whim you dial out of state, to your father-in-law (Where is your wife, she should have the mail by now?) who happens to be a professor of geology on a distinguished faculty. The ringing signal this time.


"Physical plant."

Doctor Abendsachs, you babble, you wanted Doctor Abendsachs.

"This is physical plant, buddy. We can't connect you here."

What's going on, you shout, what is happening with the atmosphere—

He doesn't know. They are in a windowless basement. Everything fine there.

It's lunchtime and they are making up the weekly football pool.

It is snowing lightly now outside, on the driveway and lawn and garage. You can see your clippers propped pathetically against the hedge. Once more, at top speed, you punch your father-in-law's number. Again a ringing. A click.

This time a recording tells you that all operators are busy and your call will be answered by the first available. The voice track ends and a burst of music begins. It is a large studio orchestra, heavy on violins, playing a version of "Hard Day's Night." At the point where the lyrics would be "sleeping like a log" the sound skips, wobbles, and skips again as if an old-fashioned needle has been bumped from a record groove.

You look out the window once more, as the house begins to shudder, and see that it is growing brighter and brighter and brighter.
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WRITING ASSIGNMENT 3

Interpreting Fiction

Read the short story “Hostess,” by Donald Mangum, and write an essay based on the inferences you make about the hostess, the narrator of the story. Include the facts on which these inferences are based and an explanation of why you made such inferences.

Audience
Someone who has not read the story.

Purpose
To read closely and characterize the hostess—what kind of woman is she?

Hostess
DONALD MANGUM

My husband was promoted to crew chief, and with the raise we moved into a double-wide, just up the drive. Half the park came to the house-warming. Well, Meg drank herself to tears and holed up on the toilet, poor thing. “Meg? Hon?” I said from the hall. “You going to live?” She groaned something. It was seeing R.L. with that tramp down in 18 that made her do this to herself. Now there was a whole line of beer drinkers doing the rain dance out in the hall, this being a single-bath unit. I was the hostess, and I had to do something. “Sweetheart,” I said, knocking. “I’m going to put you a bowl on the floor in the utility room.” The rest of the trailer was carpeted.

Dale, my husband, was in the kitchen with an egg in his hand, squeezing it for all he was worth. Veins stuck out everywhere on his arm. Paul and Eric were laughing. “What’s going on in here?” I said.

Dale stopped squeezing and breathed. “I got to admit,” he said, “I never knew that about eggs.” I could have kicked him when he handed Paul five dollars. I found the bowl I was after, plus a blanket, and took care of Meg.

Then Hank and Boyce almost got into a fight over a remark Hank made about somebody named Linda. They had already squashed off outside when it came out that Hank was talking about a Linda Stillman, when Boyce thought he meant a Linda Page. Well, by that time everybody was ready for something, so the guys agreed to arm-wrestle. Hank won, but only because Boyce started laughing when Kathy Sueanne sat in Jason’s laps and Jason got madder than Kathy Sueanne did because there wasn’t any more potato salad left.

You won’t believe who showed up then. R.L. I said he was looking for Meg. “You think she wants to see you, R.L.?” I said. “After what you did to her with that trash Elaine?” So he said he’d only kissed Elaine a couple of times. “Or not even that,” he said. “She was the one kissed me.”

“You know what you can kiss,” I said. He stood there looking like some dog you’d just hauled off and kicked for no good reason. “Well, come on,” I said, taking him by the shirt. I led him to the utility room to show him the condition he’d driven his darling to. I’m here to say, when R.L. saw that precious thing curled up in front of the hot-water heater he sank to his knees in shame. I just closed the door.

Back in the den, there was this Australian kangaroo giving birth on the television. The little baby kangaroo, which looked sort of like an anchovy with legs, had just made it out of its mama and was crawling around looking for her pouch. The man on the show said it had about ten minutes to get in there and find a teat or it would die. He said a lot of them don’t make it. I got so wrought up watching that trembly little fellow that I started cheering him on. So did everyone else. Well, to everyone’s relief, the little thing made it. Then Gus wanted to know why everyone over there always called each other Mike. Nobody had any idea.

Eric ate a whole bunch of dried cat food before figuring out what it was and that somebody had put it in the party dish as a joke. He tried to act like it didn’t bother him, but he didn’t stay too long after that. Melinda went out to her car for cigarettes, and a yellow jacket swung her behind the knee, so when she came in howling, Rod slapped this wad of chewing tobacco on the spot to draw out the poison, which made her howl even louder, till I washed it off and applied meat tenderizer and let her go lie in the guest bed for a while.

That’s when something strange happened. The phone started ringing, and I ran back to get it in Dale’s and my bedroom, which was the closest to quiet in the trailer. I answered and just got this hollow sound at first, like you get with a bad connection over long-distance.

There was a mumble, then a woman’s voice said, “She’s gone.” I didn’t recognize the voice, but I could tell she must be saying “gone” meant by the way she said it. It meant someone had died. Then she said—and she almost screamed it—“Someone should have been here. Why weren’t you and Clarence here?”

Now, I don’t know a soul in this world named Clarence, and this was clearly a case of the wrong number. “Ma’am,” I said as gently as I knew how.

“You’ll have to talk louder,” she said. “I can hardly hear you.”

I curled my hand around my lips and said, “Ma’am, you have dialed the wrong number.”

“Oh, God, I’m sorry,” she said. “Oh dear God.” And here was the strange thing. The woman did not hang up. She just kept saying, “Dear God” and crying.

I sat there listening to that woman and to all the happy noise coming from everywhere in the trailer and through the window from outside, and when she finally brought it down to a sniffle I said, “Honey, who was it that passed away?”

“My sister,” she said. “My sister, Beatrice.” And it was like saying the name started her to sobbing again.

“And none of your people are there?” I said.

“Just me,” she said.

“Sweetheart, you listen to me,” I said, trying to close the window for more quiet. Sweet Christ, I thought. Dear sweet Christ in Heaven. “Are you listening, angel? You should not be alone right now. You understand what I’m telling you?” I said, “Now, I am right here.”
WRITING ASSIGNMENT 4

Analyzing Fiction

One critic said of Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) that his writing is like an iceberg—nine-tenths of it is beneath the surface. A writer having difficulty adapting one of Hemingway’s novels for the screen complained that the novelist wrote in the white spaces between the lines. Hemingway’s elliptical style stems, in part, from his frequent use of the objective point of view. A writer employing this point of view is like a video camera that only records what it sees and hears: It cannot comment or interpret or enter a character’s mind. This point of view demands that the reader make inferences about the characters’ behavior and motivations. Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants” is just such a story. After reading the story and answering the questions that follow it, write an essay about the conflict at the heart of this story.

Audience

Someone unfamiliar with the story.

Purpose

To infer the meaning of the story.

Hills Like White Elephants

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

The hills across the valley of the Ebro were long and white. On this side there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun. Close against the side of the station there was the warm shadow of the building and a curtain, made of strings of bamboo beads, hung across the open door into the bar, to keep out flies. The American and the girl with him sat at a table in the shade, outside the building. It was very hot and the express from Barcelona would come in forty minutes. It stopped at this junction for two minutes and went on to Madrid.

“What should we drink?” the girl asked. She had taken off her hat and put it on the table.

“It’s pretty hot,” the man said.

“Let’s drink beer.”

“Dos cervezas,” the man said into the curtain.

“Big ones?” a woman asked from the doorway.

“Yes. Two big ones.”

The woman brought two glasses of beer and two felt pads. She put the felt pads and the beer glasses on the table and looked at the man and the girl. The girl was looking off at the line of hills. They were white in the sun and the country was brown and dry.

“They look like white elephants,” she said.

“I’ve never seen one,” the man drank his beer.

“No, you wouldn’t have.”

“I might have,” the man said. “Just because you say I wouldn’t have doesn’t prove anything.”

The girl look at the bead curtain. “They’ve painted something on it,” she said.

“What does it say?”

“Anis del Toro. It’s a drink.”

“Could we try it?”

The man called “Listen” through the curtain. The woman came out from the bar.

“Four reales.”

“We want two Anis del Toro.”

“With water?”

“Do you want it with water?”

“I don’t know,” the girl said. “Is it good with water?”

“It’s all right.”

“You want them with water?” asked the woman.

“Yes, with water.”

“It tastes like licorice,” the girl said and put the glass down.

“That’s the way with everything.”

“Yes,” said the girl. “Everything tastes of licorice. Especially all the things you’ve waited so long for, like absinthe.”

“Oh, cut it out.”

“You started it,” the girl said. “I was being amused. I was having a fine time.”

“Well, let’s try and have a fine time.”

“All right. I was trying. I said the mountains looked like white elephants. Wasn’t that bright?”

“That was bright.”

“I wanted to try this new drink. That’s all we do, isn’t it—look at things and try new drinks?”

“I guess so.”

The girl looked across at the hills.

“They’re lovely hills,” she said. “They don’t really look like white elephants. I just meant the coloring of their skin through the trees.”

“Should we have another drink?”

“All right.”

The warm wind blew the bead curtain against the table.

“The beer’s nice and cool,” the man said.

“It’s lovely,” the girl said.

“It’s really an awfully simple operation, Jig,” the man said. “It’s not really an operation at all.”

The girl looked at the ground the table legs rested on.

“I know you wouldn’t mind it, Jig. It’s really not anything. It’s just to let the air in.”

The girl did not say anything.

“I’ll go with you and I’ll stay with you all the time. They just let the air in and then it’s all perfectly natural.”

“Then what will we do afterward?”

“We’ll be fine afterward. Just like we were before.”

“What makes you think so?”

“I want to try this new drink. That’s all we do, isn’t it—look at things and try new drinks?”
"That's the only thing that bothers us. It's the only thing that's made us unhappy."

The girl looked at the bead curtain, put her hand out and took hold of two of the strings of beads.

"And you think then we'll be all right and be happy."

"I know we will. You don't have to be afraid. I've known lots of people that have done it.

"So have I," said the girl. "And afterward they were all so happy."

"Well," the man said, "if you don't want to you don't have to. I wouldn't have you do it if you didn't want to. But I know it's perfectly simple."

"And you really want to?"

"I think it's the best thing to do. But I don't want you to do it if you don't really want to."

"And if I do it you'll be happy and things will be like they were and you'll love me?"

"I love you now. You know I love you."

"I know. But if I do it, then it will be nice again if I say things are like white elephants, and you'll like it?"

"I'll love it. I love it now but I just can't think about it. You know how I get when I worry."

"If I do it you won't ever worry?"

"I won't worry about that because it's perfectly simple."

"Then I'll do it. Because I don't care about me."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't care about me."

"Well, I care about you."

"Oh, yes. But I don't care about me. And I'll do it and then everything will be fine."

"I don't want you to do it if you feel that way."

The girl stood up and walked to the end of the station. Across, on the other side, were fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro. Far away, beyond the river, were mountains. The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees.

"And we could have all this," she said. "And we could have everything and every day we make it more impossible."

"What did you say?"

"I said we could have everything."

"We can have everything."

"No, we can't."

"We can have the whole world."

"No, we can't."

"We can go everywhere."

"No, we can't. It isn't ours any more."

"It's ours."

"No, it isn't. And once they take it away, you never get it back."

"But they haven't taken it away."

"We'll wait and see."
3. What do you know about their life together? What is the relevance of the woman's comments about absinthe?
4. What is the significance of Jig comparing the hills across the valley to white elephants? Why does Hemingway use that comparison for his title?
5. How is the conflict between the couple resolved?

**EXERCISE 2L**

Analyzing a Film

As a final exercise in making and supporting inferences, rent the John Sayles film *Limbo*. The conclusion of the movie is open to interpretation; members of the audience are left to decide for themselves if the three individuals stranded on the island are rescued or murdered. What do you think? Write a short paper explaining your answer, citing as evidence specific details from the movie.

**SUMMARY**

In order to interpret the world around us and write effectively about it, we need to be able to distinguish **facts**, **inferences**, and **judgments** from one another and to evaluate the reliability of our inferences.

In written exposition and argument, and in the interpretation of visual images, literature, and film, it is important to achieve a balance between fact and inference, to support our inferences with facts and reasoning.

**KEY TERMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explicit</th>
<th>clearly stated or explained, distinctly expressed.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Facts</td>
<td>information that can be verified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicit</td>
<td>suggested or hinted at, not directly expressed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inference</td>
<td>a conclusion about something we don't know based on what we do know.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judgment</td>
<td>an inference that expresses either approval or disapproval.</td>
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In logic, an argument is not a fight but a rational piece of discourse, written or spoken, that attempts to persuade the reader or listener to believe something. For instance, we can attempt to persuade others that an individual's carbon footprint contributes to global warming or that a vote for a particular candidate will ensure a better society. Though many arguments are concerned with political issues, arguments are not limited to such topics. We can argue about books, movies, athletic teams, and cars, as well as about abstractions found in philosophy and politics. Whenever we want to convince someone else of the "rightness" of our position by offering reasons for that position, we are presenting an argument.

What is the difference between an argument and an opinion? When we offer our own views on an issue, we are expressing an **opinion**. We all have them. We a