

**Reading Activity**  
**Inferring the attitude/feeling/mood\***  
*K Elango*

**Objective** : To enable readers to go beyond the words to sense the writer's attitude/feeling/mood, which a novice reader is likely to miss out.

**Participation** : Individual

**Material** : Any text. The article titled, "New Study: Books don't take you anywhere", from 'The Onion', the satirical news site, would prove the case in point.

[<https://www.theonion.com/new-study-books-dont-take-you-anywhere-1819563809>]

**Preparation** : Attempting to go beyond the literal meaning of the text by a reflective process

**Procedure:**

- Read the title of the article. Does it strike you as unusual?
- Read through the article quickly to get a sense of the content and the manner in which it is expressed.
- Read the first paragraph closely to find out whether the writer attempts to state the widely accepted fact or implies something else. Likewise, keep raising questions to yourself throughout your reading – essentially a monologuing process.
- When you are in the second paragraph, what do you think of expressions, such as 'lengthy study'? What sort of tone does the writer employ when he states, ". . . reading has never been known to transport readers to any place other than the general area in which the reading is actually taking place . . . even the local movements are not in any way attached to the reading process"?

Is there an attempt to ridicule the view?

- As you proceed further, ask yourself the following questions:
  - Why does the writer quote the views of a few case studies? Is it an attempt to substantiate that books don't take one anywhere, or is it a biting criticism of those who don't value books?
  - What purpose does it serve when the writer quotes the report, "people those who read in moving vehicles enjoy reading not because of the books but of the vehicles"?

- The article ends with the remark that many young people question the empty promises of library posters and classroom slogans. Does the writer really mean it, or is he trying to drive home something different?
- After reading the entire article, raise the following questions:
  - How does the writer twist and turn everything to make his point? Does he mean the opposite of what has been written?
  - What might be the result if someone missed out the attitude of the writer?
  - Is it easy to produce a piece of sarcastic writing? What difficulties might one experience in writing an article of this sort?
  - Does the use of sarcasm enhance the interest of the article?

### **Learning Outcomes:**

1. Learners realise that they need to read deep to dig out the implicit messages and to appreciate the rhetorical devices.
2. Learners recognize that those who are used to reading only for factual details may misunderstand the purpose of writing of this sort.

\* **Inferring the attitude/feeling/mood:** The Cambridge Dictionary defines ‘inference’ as a guess that you make or an opinion that you form based on the information that you have in a text. As writers rarely state their opinions explicitly, readers often have to infer them, but the danger is that readers may draw their inferences considering only certain aspects and conveniently ignore what is uncomfortable to them.

This article is obviously sarcastic. (Sarcasm, the Longman Dictionary defines, is a way of speaking or writing that involves saying the opposite of what you really mean in order to make an unkind joke or to show that you are annoyed.) If a reader does not understand it, he would truly believe that reading books is not of much use, but once the attitude of the writer is seen through one could sense the force behind the article.

**Dr. K. Elango**, National Secretary, ELTAI & Professor of English (Formerly), Anna University.  
**Email:** elangoela@rediffmail.com