Cite the Clues: Informational Text Notes and Practice

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Lesson:

Below you will find notes on citing text evidence, then two short articles: one arguing that middle schools should start later, and one about how astronauts prepare. Read the notes first, then read both articles. Every answer you write should point to a detail from one of the articles and explain how that detail supports your point. Use the RACE pattern: restate, answer, cite, explain.

What counts as evidence

Evidence can be a quote or a paraphrase. It can prove something the article states outright or something you infer. Either way, you still have to explain it.

When you read informational text, look for two kinds of meaning. First, some ideas are stated directly. These are facts the author tells you clearly. Second, some ideas are inferred. An inference is a reasonable idea you build from clues in the text and what you already know. Good readers do not guess wildly; they use evidence to support their thinking.

Text evidence is a detail, fact, or quotation from the passage that supports an answer. Evidence can be a short quote or a paraphrase. A strong response usually follows this pattern: restate the idea, answer it, cite the text, and explain how the evidence proves the point. This helps the reader see both the answer and the reason behind it.

Read carefully for words that show cause, result, opinion, or comparison. For example, if a passage says students are more alert after a later school start time, that is a direct statement. If the passage also says many teens sleep too little because their schedules are packed, you can infer that later starts may help them feel less tired. The inference is stronger when you connect it to the text.

Informational texts often include facts, examples, and statistics that make an argument stronger. In a passage about space exploration, evidence might include training, technology, or safety reasons. In a passage about school start times, evidence might include sleep research, attention, or attendance. When you cite evidence, choose details that clearly match the claim you are making.

Should Middle Schools Start Later?

Most middle schools in the United States open their doors before eight in the morning. That schedule should change, and the reason is simple: it does not match the way teenagers actually sleep.

Sleep researchers have found that during adolescence the body's internal clock shifts later. Teenagers naturally fall asleep later at night, even when they are tired, so an early alarm cuts their rest short at the one end they cannot control. Many teens also get less sleep because their schedules are packed with homework, sports, jobs, and family responsibilities that fill the evening.

The results show up in the classroom. Districts that pushed their start times back by an hour report that longer sleep can improve alertness, and teachers in those schools describe students who are awake enough to take part in a lesson rather than resting their heads on their desks. Attendance improves as well, because students who are not exhausted are less likely to stay home.

There are real costs to changing a schedule. Bus routes have to be rewritten, and after-school practices start and end later. Those are problems of planning, though, and several districts have already solved them.

A school day that begins while students are still asleep wastes the first hour of it. Starting later is a change worth making.

Three pieces of evidence, one claim

> *Districts that pushed their start times back by an hour report that longer sleep can improve alertness, and teachers in those schools describe students who are awake enough to take part in a lesson rather than resting their heads on their desks. Attendance improves as well, because students who are not exhausted are less likely to stay home.*

1. “longer sleep can improve alertness” — Sleep and alertness
2. “awake enough to take part in a lesson” — What teachers see
3. “Attendance improves as well” — Attendance

The writer claims schools should start later. These are the three details that back it up. When you answer, quote one of them and say what it proves.

> Why Astronauts Train for Months
>
> A rocket launch lasts a few minutes, but the preparation behind it takes far longer. Astronauts train for months before a mission, and often for years before their first one.
>
> Much of that time is spent rehearsing tasks until they become automatic. Crew members practice spacewalks in an enormous pool, where floating in water feels something like floating in orbit. They run the same emergency drills again and again, so that a warning light in space produces a trained response instead of panic.
>
> They also learn the machine itself. A modern spacecraft carries thousands of systems, and a crew has to understand enough of them to solve a problem when help is a long radio call away.
>
> None of this preparation is wasted effort. In a place where a small mistake can end a mission, careful planning is the difference between a hard day and a disaster.

Direct statement: The passage says astronauts train for months before a mission. Evidence: This detail shows space travel requires preparation.

Inference: If the passage says teens often get less sleep because their schedules are packed, you can infer that a later start time may give them back some of that lost rest.

RACE model response: Later school start times can help students learn better (Restate and Answer). The passage says, "longer sleep can improve alertness" (Cite). This shows that students who are not sleep-deprived can pay attention and take part in class (Explain).

Strong evidence sentence: The author explains that longer sleep can improve alertness, which supports the idea that later school start times may help students focus better.

Instructions:

Read each note, then answer the short-answer question in 1–3 sentences. Use the text evidence given in each item, and explain how it supports your answer. Some items ask you to spot a mistake, compare ideas, or apply the skill in a new situation. Try to use the RACE pattern: restate, answer, cite, explain.

1. A student says, 'The text tells me astronauts train for months before a mission.' What is the text evidence, and what does it show?

2. A student wrote: 'Inference means a wild guess.' What is wrong with that idea?

3. The notes say: 'Text evidence can be a short quote or a paraphrase.' What does that mean?

4. Use RACE to answer this prompt: Why might later school start times help students? Write two or three sentences.

5. A passage says teens often get less sleep because their schedules are packed. What can you infer about a later school start time?

6. Which detail is stronger evidence for a claim that space exploration needs careful planning: 'astronauts train for months' or 'space is interesting'? Explain your choice.

7. A student says, 'The passage says longer sleep can improve alertness, so later school starts may help students focus better.' Is this a fact or an inference? Explain.

8. Fill in the missing part of this response: 'The text says _____, which supports the idea that _____.' Use the school start times notes.

9. A student wrote a response about space exploration: 'Astronauts train for months, so missions need preparation.' What should the student add to make the response stronger using RACE?

10. Two students answer the same question. Student A says, 'Later school start times may help students because longer sleep can improve alertness.' Student B says, 'Later school start times are good because I like sleeping in.' Which response uses better text evidence? Explain.

11. Use RACE to answer: Why is astronaut training worth the months it takes? Cite one detail from the article and explain how it supports your answer. Write two or three sentences.

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(Answer Key)

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1. A student says, 'The text tells me astronauts train for months before a mission.' What is the text evidence, and what does it show?
Hint: Name the detail from the text.

Expected Key Points:
- States the evidence from the text
- Explains what the evidence shows
- Connects the detail to preparation for space travel

Evaluation Criteria: Answer should identify the quoted or paraphrased evidence and explain the meaning it supports.

Explanation: The text evidence is the detail that astronauts train for months before a mission. This shows that space travel requires a lot of preparation.

2. A student wrote: 'Inference means a wild guess.' What is wrong with that idea?
Hint: Think about what the lesson says about clues.

Expected Key Points:
- Corrects the mistake
- Explains that inferences use clues from the text
- Mentions prior knowledge or evidence

Evaluation Criteria: Answer should explain that inferences are supported by text clues, not random guesses.

Explanation: An inference is not a wild guess. It is a reasonable idea built from clues in the text and what the reader already knows.

3. The notes say: 'Text evidence can be a short quote or a paraphrase.' What does that mean?
Hint: Think about two ways to use details from a text.

Expected Key Points:
- Mentions short quote or exact words
- Mentions paraphrase or own words
- Shows both are forms of evidence

Evaluation Criteria: Answer should explain both ways to cite evidence from a text.

Explanation: This means you can support an answer by using the exact words from the text or by restating the idea in your own words.

4. Use RACE to answer this prompt: Why might later school start times help students? Write two or three sentences.
Hint: Restate the question.

Expected Key Points:
- Restates the question/prompt in the first sentence (R: Restate)
- Answers directly why later school start times might help students (A: Answer)
- Includes a specific citation to the passage about longer sleep improving alertness (C: Cite)
- Explains how the cited evidence supports the claim about helping students focus or participate in class (E: Explain)

Evaluation Criteria: Score based on the RACE structure across 2–3 sentences: (1) restate + answer, (2) include a specific citation to the passage about longer sleep improving alertness (use quotation or accurate paraphrase), and (3) explain clearly how the evidence supports the reason later start times help students (focus/participation in class).

Explanation: A strong RACE response includes: a restate the idea, answer it, cite the text, and explain how the evidence proves the point. For this prompt, the article connects longer sleep to improved alertness, which supports why students may focus and take part in class after later start times.

5. A passage says teens often get less sleep because their schedules are packed. What can you infer about a later school start time?
Hint: Think about the effect of more sleep.

Expected Key Points:
- Makes a reasonable inference
- Connects later start times to more sleep
- Explains the likely result

Evaluation Criteria: Answer should make a supported inference from the clue about teens getting less sleep.

Explanation: You can infer that a later school start time may help teens get more sleep. More sleep may help them feel less tired during the day.

6. Which detail is stronger evidence for a claim that space exploration needs careful planning: 'astronauts train for months' or 'space is interesting'? Explain your choice.
Hint: Choose the detail that proves the claim.

Expected Key Points:
- Chooses the stronger detail
- Explains why it is stronger
- Notes that the other detail is opinion or less specific

Evaluation Criteria: Answer should identify the stronger textual evidence and explain why it better supports the claim.

Explanation: 'Astronauts train for months' is stronger evidence because it directly shows careful planning and preparation. 'Space is interesting' is only an opinion.

7. A student says, 'The passage says longer sleep can improve alertness, so later school starts may help students focus better.' Is this a fact or an inference? Explain.
Hint: Ask yourself whether the second part is stated directly.

Expected Key Points:
- Identifies inference
- Explains the text clue used
- Shows why the conclusion is reasonable

Evaluation Criteria: Answer should explain that the conclusion is inferred from the stated evidence.

Explanation: This is an inference. The text states that longer sleep can improve alertness, and the student uses that evidence to reason that later school starts may help students focus better.

8. Fill in the missing part of this response: 'The text says _____, which supports the idea that _____.' Use the school start times notes.
Hint: Choose one detail from the notes.

Expected Key Points:
- Includes a text detail
- Includes a supported idea
- Shows a cause-and-effect connection

Evaluation Criteria: Answer should complete the sentence with accurate evidence and a logical supported idea.

Explanation: A good response might be: 'The text says longer sleep can improve alertness, which supports the idea that later school start times may help students focus better.'

9. A student wrote a response about space exploration: 'Astronauts train for months, so missions need preparation.' What should the student add to make the response stronger using RACE?
Hint: Think about the missing RACE parts.

Expected Key Points:
- Mentions explanation or elaboration
- Connects evidence to the claim
- Shows the response needs more than one detail

Evaluation Criteria: Answer should identify what part of RACE is missing and how to strengthen the response.

Explanation: The student should add a restated answer and explain how the evidence proves the point. Strong responses do more than state a detail; they connect it to the idea being proved.

10. Two students answer the same question. Student A says, 'Later school start times may help students because longer sleep can improve alertness.' Student B says, 'Later school start times are good because I like sleeping in.' Which response uses better text evidence? Explain.
Hint: Pick the response that uses the lesson information.

Expected Key Points:
- Chooses the response with text evidence
- Explains why it is stronger
- Distinguishes evidence from opinion

Evaluation Criteria: Answer should compare the two responses and identify the one supported by the text.

Explanation: Student A uses better text evidence because the response connects later start times to longer sleep and alertness. Student B gives a personal opinion, not evidence from the text.

11. Use RACE to answer: Why is astronaut training worth the months it takes? Cite one detail from the article and explain how it supports your answer. Write two or three sentences.
Hint: RACE means restate, answer, cite evidence, and explain.

Expected Key Points:

- States that astronaut training is worth the time because it prepares astronauts for difficult or dangerous missions.
- Cites one accurate detail from the passage, such as practicing spacewalks in a pool, repeating emergency drills, or learning thousands of spacecraft systems.
- Explains how the detail supports the claim, for example by showing that practice helps astronauts respond correctly or avoid disaster.

Evaluation Criteria: Score responses out of 3 points: 1 point for answering the question with a clear claim about why the training is worth the time, 1 point for citing one accurate detail from the article, and 1 point for explaining how that detail supports the claim. Responses must show understanding of the passage and use evidence from it.

Explanation: A strong response should explain that months of training are worth it because astronauts need to practice tasks, learn the spacecraft, and prepare for emergencies where mistakes can be serious. The answer should cite one specific detail from the passage and connect it to the idea that careful preparation helps prevent problems in space.