

# READING, INFERENCE, AND MEANING CONSTRUCTION: THE SONG GENRE AS A DIDACTIC RESOURCE FOR READING COMPREHENSION

LEITURA, INFERÊNCIA E CONSTRUÇÃO DE SENTIDOS: O GÊNERO CANÇÃO  
COMO RECURSO DIDÁTICO PARA A COMPREENSÃO LEITORA

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of inference in reading comprehension from Psycholinguistic and textual-linguistic perspectives. Reading is understood as an active meaning-making process resulting from the interaction between text, reader, and context. Based on this framework, the study presents a theoretically grounded didactic proposal using the song genre to exemplify how guided reading practices can foster inferential competence in school contexts. Rather than reporting empirical data, the article offers a formative pedagogical activity that integrates reading, listening, and reflection, emphasizing teacher mediation and the potential of music as a meaningful resource for developing active, reflective readers.

**Keywords:** Reading comprehension; Inference; Song genre; Reading instruction; Teacher mediation.

## RESUMO

Este artigo discute o papel da inferência no processo de compreensão leitora, à luz de pressupostos da psicolinguística e da linguística textual. A leitura é concebida como um processo ativo de construção de sentidos, resultante da interação entre texto, leitor e contexto. Com base nesse referencial teórico, apresenta-se uma proposta didática fundamentada no gênero canção, com o objetivo de exemplificar como práticas de leitura orientadas podem favorecer o desenvolvimento da competência inferencial em contextos escolares. Trata-se de um estudo de natureza teórico-reflexiva, que não se apoia em dados empíricos, mas propõe uma atividade pedagógica de caráter formativo, integrando leitura, escuta e reflexão. Destaca-se o papel da mediação docente e o potencial da música como recurso significativo para a formação de leitores ativos e reflexivos.

**Palavras-chave:** Compreensão leitora; Inferência; Gênero canção; Ensino da leitura; Mediação docente.

## Introduction

Reading is a complex practice involving cognitive, linguistic, and sociocultural processes that go beyond simple decoding. Reading, according to Kato (1999), is an act of integration between the new and the already known, in which the reader mobilizes prior knowledge to construct meaning from the text. This integration does not occur automatically; on the contrary, it requires the reader to activate previously constituted mental representations, organize information, compare, relate, and update knowledge possessed before the encounter with the text.

From this perspective, comprehension goes beyond word recognition. It involves formulating hypotheses, establishing relationships between different parts of the text, connecting dispersed ideas, and making inferences that fill gaps and allow the interpretation of implicit meanings. This conception of reading as an inferential activity moves away from a mechanistic view of decoding, which reduces the reader to a passive receiver, and approaches a constructive and active perspective of the subject, making them the agent of their own comprehension and a participant in the process of meaning production. Reading comprehension, therefore, is the result of the interaction between author, text, and reader, as proposed by Kleiman (1989, 1993). When creating a text, the author does not present all information explicitly; they organize linguistic, discursive, and structural cues that function as markers to be followed by the reader. The reader, upon contacting the text, explores these cues, creates suppositions, selects relevant information, and, from this, constructs mental models coherent with their experience and world knowledge. The reader assumes an active role, reinterpreting and reconstructing the author's intended message, using the text both as a starting point and as an interpretive horizon. Giasson (2000) expands this perspective by highlighting that comprehension depends on the intersection of three variables: reader, text, and context, which do not act in isolation but articulate dynamically. This interaction is fundamental for inferences to emerge: the text provides clues, the context guides interpretation, and the reader mobilizes linguistic, cultural, and cognitive repertoires to fill in what is not directly stated.

In the school context, developing inferential competence is essential for reading to be meaningful and become a practice of meaning construction. Inferring is a procedure aimed at filling the gaps present in the original text; during reading, the reader retrieves, reorganizes, and articulates information from both the text and previously built knowledge, activating them to a greater or lesser degree depending on the complexity of the task (Lussani, 2021). This process demands reasoning, reflection, and constant monitoring of one's own comprehension. Furthermore, Lussani and Carvalho (2021) argue that Portuguese language teaching should prioritize the actual use of language and conceive of reading as a social practice of sense-making, so that the student perceives language as a living, dynamic, and situated phenomenon. Similarly, Marcuschi (2008) understands language as a form of action and interaction, stating that reading implies inserting oneself into meaningful discursive contexts in which the subject acts, interprets, and takes a stand.

Based on this expanded conception, it is assumed that reading instruction should seek a balance between theory and practice to provide reading experiences that involve the student cognitively, sensorially, and emotionally. A strategy especially pertinent to the school environment is the use of the song genre, which offers fertile ground for the exercise of inference. By articulating verbal language, sound elements, and imagery aspects, the song requires the reader-listener to activate inferences, understand metaphors, identify implicit intentions, and establish relationships between different layers of meaning. The mobilization of these skills broadens comprehension levels and allows the student to

perceive reading as a complex but also pleasurable practice. Moreover, the poetic and expressive nature of music favors reflection on language, its effects of meaning, and its aesthetic power, bringing teaching closer to the students' cultural experience, a factor that contributes to greater engagement in reading activities.

This article is characterized as a theoretical-reflective study with a didactic proposal. Rather than presenting empirical data, it seeks to contribute to the field of reading instruction by articulating Psycholinguistic and textual-linguistic theories with an exemplary pedagogical activity aimed at developing inferential reading. The didactic proposal presented in this article was not implemented in a classroom setting; instead, it was designed on the basis of principles drawn from Psycholinguistics and Text Linguistics.

The article is organized into four sections. First, it discusses inference and its contributions to reading comprehension. Next, it examines reading comprehension and the use of the song genre as a resource for fostering meaningful and comprehensive reading. The section entitled "Methodology of the Didactic Proposal" presents guidelines for the implementation of the proposed activity, including recommendations for teachers regarding classroom mediation and the guidance of students' reading processes. Finally, the article concludes by revisiting its central theme: the relationship between reading, inference, and reading comprehension.

## **1. Inference and its function in reading comprehension**

Reading comprehension is a complex cognitive and linguistic process involving the interaction between text, reader, and context (Giasson, 2000). Unlike a purely decoding activity, comprehending requires the reader to mobilize multiple knowledge systems - linguistic, textual, pragmatic, and encyclopedic - to construct meanings. In this perspective, reading is understood as a process of integration between the text's explicit information and the reader's prior knowledge, making inference a central mechanism in the elaboration of meanings (Kato, 1999; Koch & Elias, 2011; Pereira, Baretta & Borges, 2022).

According to Marcuschi (2008), comprehending is making inferences, as every text presents gaps that need to be filled by the reader. Inferences arise when the reader establishes relationships between explicit information in the text and other non-explicit information, transforming explicit content into new propositions that confer cohesion and coherence to the text. From this perspective, textual comprehension occurs in an interactive movement: the reader alternates between using linguistic cues (bottom-up) and activating their world repertoire to build a mental model of the reading (top-down) (Kintsch & Van Dijk, 1978; Pereira, Baretta & Borges, 2022).

Baretta and Pereira (2018) state that reading comprehension cannot be conceived as a static product, but as an inferential process by nature, in which the reader uses cognitive strategies to fill in what the text does not make explicit. The authors highlight that inferences are linked to the depth of comprehension: comprehending the explicit meaning corresponds to decoding; the implicit meaning, to making inferences; and the meta-explicit, to the use of extratextual knowledge. It is, accordingly, inference that allows the reader to transition between levels of meaning, relating textual and contextual elements.

Psycholinguistic studies confirm that inferential capacity is a robust indicator of reading proficiency. Pereira and colleagues (2022) demonstrated that performance in comprehension tasks is directly related to the ability to formulate inferences - whether local, elaborative, or creative - and that this

competence evolves with schooling. However, previous research, such as that of Baretta and Pereira (2018), already indicated that inferences constitute the core of reading activity, requiring the integration of explicit information and the reader's cognitive schemas.

From a constructivist perspective of comprehension, Lussani (2021) reinforces that inference is not in the text but in the reader's mind. Inferring is a mental operation that starts from prior knowledge to generate new interpretations of implicit information. The text serves as a guide and stimulus for the production of inference, offering cues that orient sense-making. However, in a classroom situation, the teacher sometimes needs to provide more stimuli than just the text itself to promote inferences. In this sense, Lussani (2021) proposes a didactic sequence focused on inference, in which the student is led to observe, formulate, and revise hypotheses during reading, recognizing that comprehending requires active reflection on the relationships between language, context, and communicative intention.

A base teórica da sequência didática integra pressupostos de autores como Coscarelli (2002) e Koch (1997), que defendem que as inferências devem ser sustentadas pela materialidade textual e pelo contrato de leitura estabelecido entre autor e leitor. O ato de inferir, portanto, não é arbitrário: ele pressupõe controle metacognitivo e monitoramento contínuo da coerência das interpretações. Essa dimensão autorreguladora da leitura, também destacada por Giasson (2000), mostra que o leitor precisa comparar constantemente o que lê com o que já sabe, ajustando hipóteses e confirmando sentidos à medida que o texto se desenvolve, logo fazendo uso consciente das estratégias de leitura (Solé, 1998).

The theoretical basis of the didactic sequence integrates assumptions from authors such as Coscarelli (2002) and Koch (1997), who argue that inferences must be supported by textual materiality and the reading contract established between author and reader. The act of inferring is not arbitrary: it presupposes metacognitive control and continuous monitoring of the coherence of interpretations. This self-regulatory dimension of reading, also highlighted by Giasson (2000), shows that the reader needs to constantly compare what they read with what they already know, adjusting hypotheses and confirming meanings as the text develops, making conscious use of reading strategies (Solé, 1998).

In this line, Colomer and Camps (2002) affirm that every verbal message is incomplete and invites the reader to complete it based on their knowledge and expectations. The author constructs only the space for the reader to act, predicting what should or should not be made explicit. Inference is the convergence point between text and reader, responsible for maintaining the global cohesion of the reading and enabling the apprehension of total meaning.

Lussani (2021) further demonstrates that inference is a formative process that can be taught and improved through guided reading practices. When creating a didactic sequence for teaching inference, the author proposes stages that lead the reader from literal perception to inferential elaboration, stimulating reflection on the implicit and reinterpretation of the text. Such an approach evidences that comprehending involves acting cognitively on the text, producing meanings that result from the interaction between linguistic cues and the reader's mental models.

In summary, comprehending a text is constructing an inferential path. Reading is an act of reasoning, and inferences are the bridges that connect what is said to what is unsaid. Without the production of inferences, the text is emptied of meaning; through inferences, the text becomes a space of reconstruction and authorship for the reader. It is in this dialogue between text, context, and mind that reading transforms into comprehension.

## 2. The song genre and the construction of meaning

The study of the song genre in the field of reading instruction allows for understanding how inferential processes manifest in interpretation situations marked by orality, subjectivity, and multimodality. The song is a hybrid genre, situated on the border between the literary and the everyday, between the verbal and the sonic. According to Marcuschi (2008), textual genres materialize forms of social action through language, configuring themselves as socially recognized discursive practices charged with communicative intentionality. Working with the song genre means exploring a textual modality that involves rhythm, emotion, and cultural context.

For Koch and Elias (2011), reading is an interaction process in which the reader seeks global coherence, activating linguistic and extralinguistic knowledge. In the case of the song, this process is intensified by the presence of implicit and symbolic elements, often expressed through figures of speech, metaphors, and repetition. The reader-listener must decipher not only the verbal content but also the effects of meaning produced by rhythm, sound, and pauses. In this perspective, the song becomes fertile ground for developing inferential competence, as it requires the formulation of hypotheses, the reconstruction of intentions, and the integration of different semiotic systems.

As stated above, comprehending a text is establishing relationships between the said and the unsaid, interpreting it from linguistic cues and the discursive context. The song, by alternating narrative and expressive segments, favors this exercise of inference, inviting the reader to fill in gaps and construct meanings based on their cultural experience. Lussani (2021) reinforces this idea by arguing that reading poetic and musical texts demands continuous inferential processes, since meaning rarely presents itself directly: it insinuates itself between words, in pauses, and in the ambiguities inherent in artistic language.

From a Psycholinguistic perspective, Pereira, Baretta, and Borges (2022) explain that reading comprehension involves the integration of explicit information (base text) and implicit information (situational model), which requires the activation of local and global inferences. In the song genre, these inferences are articulated in a particular way, as the text is built on the relationship between lyrics, melody, and the context of production. The reader needs to activate cognitive and affective schemas to interpret metaphors, understand ironies, and recognize poetic voices, leading them to operate at deeper levels of comprehension.

The use of music in school reading practices should value the artistic text as a gateway to linguistic reflection and the expansion of interpretive sensitivity. Working with songs allows for approaching reading as an aesthetic and cognitive experience, encouraging students to mobilize both inferential strategies and personal emotions and memories. This articulation between the rational and the sensitive enhances the formation of readers capable of perceiving the text in its multiple layers of meaning: from literality to implicitness, from form to communicative intention.

Furthermore, the song offers a privileged field to explore relationships between language and identity. By interpreting lyrics that theme social, affective, or cultural issues, the student is led to reflect on values, discourses, and representations, broadening the horizon of comprehension beyond linguistic structure. In this perspective, teaching the reading of songs can favor both the development of inferential competence and the critical and aesthetic formation of the student.

Therefore, the song genre constitutes a didactic resource of high potential for teaching inferential reading. Its polysemic and multimodal nature challenges the reader to construct meanings from different cues, promoting active and reflective reading. By articulating text, sound, and emotion, the song calls upon the reader to perform inferences that allow them to understand not only the verbal content but also the intentionality and expressiveness that sustain it. This experience of dialogic and sensitive reading brings the school closer to everyday life and reveals the transformative power of art as a mediator of textual comprehension.

### 3. Methodology of the didactic proposal

Inferential reading, as defended by Pereira, Baretta, and Borges (2022), constitutes the central axis of the comprehension process, as it requires the reader's ability to go beyond the literal level and construct meanings from the integration of the text's explicit information and their prior knowledge. As a result, comprehension implies cognitive engagement with the text, establishing relationships between what is said and what is implied, based on linguistic, discursive, and contextual evidence. Reading from this perspective becomes an activity of construction and reconstruction of meanings, mediated by the reader's experience and their ability to activate coherent inferences.

The didactic proposal presented in this study was primarily designed for the final years of Elementary School, within the Portuguese Language curriculum, and can be adapted for High School according to the students' reading maturity level. It is an activity focused on guided reading contexts, in which the teacher acts as a mediator of the inferential process, leading students from literal comprehension to the interpretation of the text's implicit meanings. The focus falls less on performance assessment and more on the formation of readers capable of reflecting on language and its effects of meaning.

Based on this conception, the activity proposal presented here seeks to develop inferential competence through work with the song genre, using as a reference the song "Marta" by Brazilian singer and songwriter Clarice Falcão. The choice of the song is not accidental: it is a contemporary poetic text permeated by subjectivity, irony, and ambiguity, which calls upon the reader to participate actively in meaning production. The proposal intends to articulate aesthetic perception, linguistic analysis, and interpretive reflection, transforming listening into a conscious reading experience.

The activity should be conducted such that, in the first instance, the teacher asks the students if they have ever received calls or messages on their cell phones intended for people other than themselves. This question can generate debate and even fun exchanges of experiences among students, but primarily serves to introduce them to the universe of the song proposed by Clarice Falcão. The song is then listened to and discussed, and at this moment, the teacher should provide an A4 sheet with the previously structured song analysis, as illustrated below (Figure 1):

**Figure 1:** Illustrates an example of a possible structure for guiding inferential reading through song<sup>1</sup> analysis.

Fragmento da música	Literal message	Intended message	Cause-effect in the song
Marta, it's urgent, there are people from the bank trying to talk to you. A phone call for your account manager. I think it's something that can be sorted out.			
Marta, I don't know you. Marta, your face is a mystery to me. Marta, I pay this price Because your number must be very similar to mine.*			
Marta, forgive poor Carlos; he didn't mean any harm. I don't know the details, But from his text messages he seems nice.			
Marta, I don't know you. Marta, your face is a mystery to me. Marta, I pay this price Because your number must be very similar to mine.*			
Marta, get out of there! Rita, that crazy woman, already found out and she's on her way. What did you do, Marta? I still don't know this time, but one day I'll find out.			
Marta, I got worried, Thinking that you had died. Nobody calls you anymore. Your best friend, one day, might have been me. Marta, I've missed you, But what can I do? Nobody calls me anymore. I think my best friend was you.			

\*Song chorus

Source: Author (2025).

1 Free translation of the song lyrics by the author.

The activity illustrated above is structured into four metacognitive blocks, which guide the reader to progressively transition from the literal to the inferential level, considering: (i) the song fragment, (ii) the literal message, (iii) the intended message, and (iv) the cause-effect in the construction of the song. This methodological path is inspired by the didactic sequence proposed by Lussani (2021), which understands the inferential process as a spiral construction: the reader observes, formulates hypotheses, verifies, and reconstructs meanings from textual cues. The goal is not simply to “understand the lyrics,” but to understand how meanings emerge from the relationships between language, context, and emotion. Reading, in this sense, ceases to be an act of passive reception and transforms into an activity of interpretive authorship, where the student learns to recognize the multiple layers of meaning that overlap in a poetic-musical text.

In the **first block**, the focus is on the song fragment, which functions as the initial stimulus and delimits the reading focus. This selection not only guides the student’s gaze but invites them to perceive the text in its linguistic materiality: sound, rhythm, lexical choice, and repetition effects. According to Kato (1999), every text is composed of “footprints” left by the author, marks that guide the reader in reconstructing their communicative intention. Providing the full lyrics of the song to the student for analysis is of paramount importance so that they can perceive the narrative construction of the song, identify patterns, and notice how words are organized to produce multiple meanings. In this stage, the student exercises observation and description, preparing for interpretive analysis.

The **second block**, focused on the literal message, leads the reader to the textual surface. Here, they must recognize explicit information and structural elements, returning to Kintsch and Van Dijk’s (1978) definition of the explicit textual content: the set of linguistic information directly accessible to the reader. This level of reading, though initial, is indispensable, as it establishes the foundation upon which inferences are built. As observed by Pereira and Baretta (2018), this “surface comprehension” allows the reader to master literal content to then elaborate coherent and consistent inferences. Comprehending what is said is the starting point for perceiving what the text suggests or omits.

The **third block**, centered on the intended message, introduces the reader to the inferential field itself. The student is led to reflect on the unsaid, interpreting metaphors, ironies, and contradictions present in the lyrics. This is the dimension where the reader needs to articulate logical reasoning, aesthetic sensitivity, and linguistic awareness, identifying implicit intentions and possible discursive voices. The movement of formulating and revising hypotheses, as described by Giasson (2000), is metacognitive in nature, as it involves monitoring one’s own comprehension and evaluating the plausibility of interpretations. Upon perceiving that a song like “Marta” does not end with the narrated content, the student begins to understand that every text carries multiple reading possibilities, which must be supported by linguistic materiality and the communicative context.

In the **fourth block**, the student analyzes the cause-effect in the construction of the song, reflecting on how linguistic and discursive choices produce certain effects of meaning. This stage broadens the interpretive gaze and brings the analysis closer to the discursive field. Each syntactic structure, pause, repetition, or contrast becomes a “cause” that generates interpretive effects, such as irony, empathy, melancholy, or estrangement. Marcuschi (2008) reminds us that every text is a social action, and accordingly, every linguistic choice is also a choice of meaning. By recognizing these relationships, the student develops textual awareness, a concept defined by Baretta, Borges, and Neves (2021) as the ability to reflect on one’s own reading processes and on the mechanisms of cohesion and coherence that sustain the text.

The choice to work with “Marta” reinforces the relevance of this methodology. The song presents a lyrical self that narrates absence and affection in an ambiguous way, alternating between a confessional tone and irony. This interplay of contrasts invites the reader to identify the poetic voice and reconstruct meaning from lexical and sonic subtleties. The text, while revealing feelings, hides intentions, and it is in this space of uncertainty that inference becomes necessary. The student must activate their world repertoire, recognize textual cues, and construct interpretive hypotheses that account for the work’s emotional and linguistic complexity.

This proposal, by integrating reading, listening, and reflection, highlights music’s potential to bring school language closer to students’ everyday cultural practices, favoring a more meaningful and reflective reading experience. Music, as a cultural product, awakens emotions, activates memories, and offers the reader an opportunity to understand the text as an expression of subjectivity and world view. The proposal not only develops cognitive skills but also stimulates aesthetic sensitivity and interpretive empathy.

In practice, the analysis of “Marta” concretizes the principle defended by Lussani (2025): teaching to infer is teaching to think. Each stage of the proposal invites the reader to formulate questions, confront evidence, and produce grounded interpretations, transforming the act of reading into an exercise of authorship. Comprehending the song is, therefore, comprehending the functioning of language and, at the same time, comprehending oneself as a reading subject.

In synthesis, this inferential reading proposal illustrates the possibility of combining work with artistic genres with the formation of critical, creative, and sensitive readers. The song, by uniting emotion and structure, becomes a privileged field for the exercise of inference and reflection on language, revealing itself as a fertile path for the cognitive, aesthetic, and linguistic development of students.

## Final Considerations

Reading, understood as a cognitive and social practice, remains one of the most complex and challenging dimensions of Portuguese language teaching. This study contributes to the field of reading instruction by proposing a theoretical reflection articulated with a didactic activity grounded in a genre of strong youth engagement (music) evidencing how the organization and direction of reading actions can favor the construction of textual comprehension. By discussing the role of inference as a central process of reading comprehension, the article presents a pedagogical proposal that exemplifies teacher mediation possibilities aimed at forming active and reflective readers.

The studies supporting the methodological and practical construction of this proposal (Colomer & Camps, 2002; Marcuschi, 2008; Koch & Elias, 2011; Baretta & Pereira, 2018; Lussani, 2021; Pereira, Baretta & Borges, 2022) converge in recognizing that comprehending fundamentally implies inferring. Reading, in this conception, is not limited to decoding words but involves constructing meanings from the interaction between text, reader, and context. In this process, inferences operate as cognitive bridges between the said and the unsaid, allowing the reader to attribute coherence, depth, and unity to the text.

The proposal of an activity with the song genre shows that organizing the reading path - through fragment analysis, identification of literal and implicit messages, and observation of cause-and-effect relationships in poetic construction - favors the mobilization of inferential strategies. By being guided to observe, formulate hypotheses, and revise interpretations, the student is led to an active work with the text, exercising cognitive operations that constitute the core of inferential competence. Teaching to infer, in this perspective, means creating conditions for the reader to understand the text in its multiple layers of meaning.

Furthermore, the use of music as a reading object expands the reach of school practices by integrating aesthetic, affective, and cultural dimensions that directly dialogue with the youth universe. The song, by its polysemic and emotionally engaging nature, favors student engagement and stimulates a more sensitive and critical relationship with the text, bringing school reading closer to significant social practices. This approach is supported by the conception of reading defended by Colomer and Camps (2002), according to which comprehending a text implies participating in a dialogue that articulates reason, emotion, and culture.

The development of inference is not reduced to a technical skill but is configured as a form of thought. Promoting inferential reading practices means forming readers capable of interpreting, arguing, and resignifying the world through language. The proposal presented, in its theoretical and practical dimensions, demonstrates that reading comprehension results from a guided process in which pedagogical mediation and the choice of textual genre play a decisive role.

In synthesis, comprehending a text is more than understanding it: it is reconstructing it. By articulating theory, aesthetic engagement, and pedagogical practice, reading instruction mediated by inference transforms the act of reading into a gesture of authorship, in which the reader ceases to be a mere receiver of meanings to become a co-creator of meanings.

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