

PROMPT ENGINEERING
PORTFOLIO

Literary Inference

Passage Generation System

Literary Style Emulation · Inference Design · Question-Set Generation

Continuous iterations · 11 variables · 5 question-design sub-prompts

Literary Inference Passage System

A modular literary passage generator that produces original, style-emulating fiction for classroom inference instruction — paired with a suite of question-design sub-prompts that build complete, distractor-rich multiple-choice assessments from each generated passage.

MODEL	INTERFACE	AUDIENCE	STATUS
Claude 3.5+	Chat / API	ELA, Grades 7–10	Continuous iteration

Problem Statement

Teaching inference is one of the most persistently difficult tasks in ELA instruction — not because students lack the capacity for inferential thinking, but because finding appropriately leveled, inference-rich literary passages is extraordinarily time-consuming. Published anthologies rarely include passages calibrated to a specific topic, conflict type, and point of view simultaneously, and most commercial reading passages are too exposition-heavy to require genuine inference.

The prompt system was designed to solve this by generating original literary passages on demand — mimicking the style of specific canonical authors, built around a chosen topic and conflict type, and engineered to contain an implicit situation that readers must infer rather than read directly. Each generated passage is immediately usable as a classroom assessment text.

The secondary problem was question design. Even when an appropriate passage exists, building a rigorous multiple-choice question set — with precisely calibrated distractors, text evidence support, and DOK Level 3 inference questions — requires significant educator time. The companion sub-prompts address this by generating the complete question infrastructure from any produced passage.

Main Prompt Design

The following is the complete core passage-generation prompt. Variables (author style, conflict, topic, character details, etc.) are substituted at the time of use. The prompt itself contains the non-negotiable structural requirements that hold constant across all variations.

We are going to take on the roles of literary authors and create a detailed passage as if it came from literature. This passage will include description and may include dialogue (if appropriate). This passage will be used to test students on various literary elements, including theme, central idea, and inference.

You will write this literary passage in media res. You must emulate the style, syntax, structure, and imagery of [AUTHOR]. This passage must be written in such a manner that the reader may infer deeper meaning in what is written.

This passage must be written in [POV], with a conflict of [CONFLICT TYPE],

and must center around the topic of [TOPIC]. This passage must be between [WORD COUNT RANGE] words.

For this passage, there will be only one character. The character must be [GENDER] who is [AGE].

Knowing that setting always has a psychological effect on the characters involved, place this passage in an appropriate and realistic setting that supports the passage.

Include a situation, event, or issue that is strongly implied and that the reader must infer because that thing is not explicitly evident. You must never use symbolism. You must also provide one, clear contextual clue that does not give away the inference but rather strongly supports it. Then, indicate, separately, what that inference is in the passage.

Finally, give the passage a literary-sounding title, without starting with the direct article 'The.'

Variable Matrix

Each passage is generated by substituting values into the bracketed variables above. The following table documents all available variables and their options. Different combinations produce entirely distinct passages with no structural overlap.

Variable	Options / Notes
Author Style	Jack London, Isabel Allende, Wilson Rawls, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Morrison — named specifically in the prompt
Point of View	1st Person, 3rd Person-Limited, 3rd Person-Omniscient
Conflict Type	vs. Self, vs. Antagonist, vs. Society, vs. Nature, vs. Technology, vs. Supernatural
Character Count	One character or multiple (with named dialogue)
Character Age	Mid-thirties, 19 years old, mid-life, elderly — specified per passage
Character Gender	Male or female — specified per passage
Topic / Theme	Selected from a catalog of 80+ named topics and thematic subjects
Setting	Psychologically appropriate to character and conflict — always specified
Word Count	Strict range (e.g., 400–420 words) enforced per generation
Inference Requirement	One implied situation + one contextual clue + separate inference statement
Title Convention	Literary-sounding; cannot begin with the definite article 'The'

Design note: The strict word-count range (e.g., 400–420 words) is one of the most important variables. Classroom reading passages need to be approximately timed for assessment conditions. The narrow range prevents generation of either too-brief passages that lack inferential depth or too-long passages that create timing issues.

Inference Architecture

The most technically demanding design element is the three-part inference requirement. The prompt requires all three components simultaneously, and they must remain in tension with each other — the inferred situation cannot be obvious, the contextual clue cannot be a giveaway, and the explicit inference statement is provided separately from the passage (for the educator, not for students).

Component	What It Means
Implied Situation	A significant event, condition, or fact that is never directly stated in the passage — the reader must construct it from behavioral, environmental, and emotional cues
Contextual Clue	One specific detail in the passage that strongly points toward the inference without making it explicit — the difference between a hint and a revelation
Inference Statement	A declarative statement of what the passage implies, provided separately in the prompt output for the educator's use in question design
No Symbolism Constraint	The inference must be built from literal narrative detail, not symbolic objects or events — a constraint that forces psychological and behavioral specificity rather than metaphorical shorthand

Companion Question-Design Sub-Prompts

Five short companion prompts follow any generated passage. Each is run sequentially, using the passage as its source text. Together they produce a complete, ready-to-use multiple-choice assessment with distractor-rich question sets across five question types.

Question Type	What It Generates
Topics	Generates five one- or two-word topics applicable to the passage (for discussion or question design)
5 Ws	Identifies Who, What, When, Where, Why — each as a complete sentence; then generates four distractor versions of Where and Why for multiple-choice use
Central Idea	States the central idea; generates four near-miss distractor central ideas; provides two text-evidence answers and four misleading text-evidence distractors
Theme	States the theme in 20–25 words; generates four distractor near-miss themes; provides two supporting text-evidence answers and four misleading text-evidence distractors
Inference	Writes five DOK Level 3 inference questions with text-evidence support; generates a full multiple-choice item with two correct text-evidence answers and four distractor answer sets, each with misleading text evidence

Design note: The distractor design is the most carefully engineered element of the question sub-prompts. Distractors must be 'subtly misleading but in no way' correct — a distinction that requires the model to understand what makes a wrong answer plausible without being defensible. This language was refined across multiple iterations after early versions produced distractors that were either too obviously wrong or legitimately arguable.

Sample Outputs

The following two complete passages were generated using the system. Each demonstrates a different combination of variables — author style, conflict, topic, and character configuration.

Sample 1 As if by Wilson Rawls · Topic: Heartbreak · Conflict: vs. Nature · 3rd Person-Limited

"Last Trail"

Sam pushed through the underbrush, his boots scuffing against the damp earth, the scent of pine thick in the cool morning air. Behind him, Rusty followed, his paws moving slow and careful over the uneven trail. It was the same path they had walked for years, up past the ridge where the valley stretched wide below, but today, Rusty lagged behind, his steps heavy, his breath coming in short huffs.

Sam slowed his pace. "Come on, old boy. Just a little further," he said, though there was no hurry. There was never any hurry on mornings like this.

Rusty lifted his head, his ears twitching at the sound of Sam's voice, and he wagged his tail once, slow and steady. He kept walking, but Sam could see it now — the shake in his legs, the way he placed each foot down careful, like he was thinking hard about every step.

They reached the ridge just as the sun broke through the clouds, casting golden light over the valley. Sam dropped his pack and sat on a flat rock, watching Rusty make his way up the last few feet. The dog stood for a moment, his nose lifting to the wind, taking in the scent of the earth below. Then, with a heavy sigh, he eased down beside Sam, resting his head on his paws.

Sam reached out, running a hand down Rusty's back. "Good spot, huh?" he said.

Rusty didn't lift his head, but his tail gave the faintest of wags.

The wind shifted, rustling the trees below. Sam took a deep breath, letting it fill his chest. Rusty had always loved it up here, the open space, the wind, the quiet. He'd chased deer scents through these woods, barked at the hawks that soared overhead, run full speed down the hill like nothing in the world could catch him.

Now, he just lay still, his breath coming slower, his body warm against Sam's side.

Sam sat there a long while, his hand resting on Rusty's side, feeling each breath as it came, then went.

When the wind shifted again, Rusty didn't move.

Sam let out a breath and looked out over the valley. The world kept stretching on, rolling hills fading into the horizon, the same as they always had.

He reached down, smoothing his hand over Rusty's fur one last time. "We'll just sit a while," he murmured. "Ain't no rush."

Inference: Rusty has died — or is dying — during the passage. The contextual clue is the phrase 'feeling each breath as it came, then went,' which signals the dog's final breaths without stating death explicitly.

Sample 2 As if by Isabel Allende · Topic: Joy · Conflict: vs. Antagonist · 3rd Person-Omniscient

"Sound of Mangoes Falling"

"You're getting old, Tía."

"And you're getting rude, Sofia."

The girl laughed, balancing barefoot on the low stone wall, her arms spread like wings. Below her, the mango tree swayed, its branches heavy with fruit. A warm gust sent one tumbling down, landing with a soft thump in the dust.

Tía Dolores sat in the shade, her hands busy peeling mango skins, her knife slicing clean, smooth ribbons that fell into her lap. The juice ran over her fingers, but she didn't seem to mind.

"Come down before you break something," Dolores said, not looking up.

Sofía wobbled dramatically but didn't obey. "You used to climb trees," she teased. "Mamá says you were faster than anyone."

Dolores flicked a piece of mango at her, missing by inches. "Your mother also says I was a fool."

Sofía grinned, hopping down from the wall with an easy grace, her feet kicking up little puffs of dust. She scooped up the fallen mango and took a bite, not bothering to wipe it clean. "Then why'd you stop?"

Dolores paused, the knife stilling in her hand. She looked toward the horizon where the sky stretched wide and blue, where the sun made everything too bright, too golden. "I didn't stop," she said finally. "I just learned when to come down."

Sofía chewed thoughtfully, watching her aunt. The knife resumed its rhythm, peeling, slicing, never stopping. From the distance came the clatter of dishes, the faint call of Sofía's mother summoning them inside.

"You're wrong about one thing," Sofía said, tossing the mango pit into the dirt.

Dolores raised an eyebrow. "Oh?"

"You still climb trees," the girl said, grinning. "You just do it with your hands instead of your feet."

Dolores chuckled, shaking her head. She placed a slice of mango into Sofía's waiting hand and stood, wiping her sticky palms against her skirt.

"Come," she said. "Before your mother scolds us both."

As they walked toward the house, another mango fell, landing softly in the dirt, waiting for someone to find it.

Inference: Dolores has experienced a significant loss or change in her life — something that once made her energetic and daring — that she carries quietly. The contextual clue is her pause and gaze toward the horizon when Sofía asks why she stopped climbing.

Design Decisions

1. In Media Res as a Non-Negotiable

The passage must begin in the middle of action or situation — not with backstory, exposition, or framing. This constraint was present from the first iteration and has never been relaxed. In media res is essential for inference instruction because it denies the reader the orientation that explicit context would provide, requiring them to reconstruct situation from cues. A passage that opens with setup forecloses the inferential work.

2. Author Style Emulation Rather Than Generic Literary Voice

Specifying a named author (Jack London, Isabel Allende, Wilson Rawls, Hemingway, Morrison) produces stylistically coherent passages because each author has a distinctive syntax, imagery register, and sentence rhythm that the model can emulate with reasonable fidelity. 'Write in a literary style' produces generic elevated prose. 'Write in the style of Jack London' produces short declarative sentences, elemental nature imagery, and morally weighted human-against-environment tension — all of which create an inferential texture that generic literary voice does not.

3. No Symbolism Constraint

This constraint was introduced in iteration 4 after early versions consistently used symbolic objects — a dying candle, a broken mirror, a withered tree — as the vehicle for inference. Symbolism is a legitimate

literary device, but it produces low-quality inference questions because the symbolic meaning is culturally legible rather than text-dependent. Prohibiting symbolism forces the passage to build inference from behavioral, psychological, and situational detail — the kind of close reading that produces genuinely rigorous DOK Level 3 assessment items.

4. The Separate Inference Statement

The prompt requires the model to provide the inference in a separate, labeled statement outside the passage text itself. This was introduced in iteration 2 after discovering that the first version's inferences were embedded as commentary within the passage prose, which contaminated the assessment text. The educator needs the inference stated clearly for question-design purposes, but students must not see it. The separate statement resolves this.

5. Setting as Psychologically Active

The prompt requires that setting be 'appropriate and realistic' and explicitly states that 'setting always has a psychological effect on the characters involved.' This language was added in iteration 3 after early versions produced passages where characters existed in functionally decorative settings. The psychological setting requirement produces passages where the environment and the character's interior state are in active relationship — a barn at dawn for a character in grief, a crowded market for a character in isolation — which creates the kind of environmental inference that is most educationally rich.

6. Distractor Design Language in Question Sub-Prompts

The instruction 'subtly misleading but in no way supportive of the correct answer' took multiple refinements before producing reliable distractor quality. Early versions of this phrase produced distractors that were either too obviously wrong (making the correct answer trivially identifiable) or genuinely arguable (making the question defensible from multiple answers). The final phrasing — 'subtly misleading but in no way the correct answer' combined with 'subtly misleading but in no way supportive of the [correct element]' — produces distractors that feel plausible while being clearly wrong to a reader who has read carefully.

Typical Workflow

A single session using this system produces a complete, assessment-ready passage and question set in the following sequence:

- Step 1: Determine the instructional target (inference, theme, central idea) and select variables (author, conflict, topic, character, POV, word count).
- Step 2: Run the main passage prompt with all variables substituted. Review the generated passage and the separately stated inference for accuracy and classroom appropriateness.
- Step 3: Run the 5 Ws sub-prompt against the passage. Extract the Where and Why distractors for potential use.
- Step 4: Run the Central Idea sub-prompt. Extract the central idea statement, distractor central ideas, and text-evidence sets.
- Step 5: Run the Theme sub-prompt. Extract the 20–25 word theme statement, distractor themes, and text-evidence sets.

- Step 6: Run the Inference sub-prompt. Select one of the five DOK Level 3 inference questions. Expand it with the full multiple-choice item: correct answer, two supporting text-evidence pieces, and four distractor answer-evidence pairs.
- Step 7: Assemble the complete question set. Passages, stems, answer choices, and text-evidence items are ready for immediate use in assessment or discussion.

Efficiency note: A complete passage plus full question set — passage, 5 Ws, central idea question, theme question, and inference question — can be generated in a single session. The modular design means any individual sub-prompt can also be run in isolation against an existing published passage.

Results & Application

6+ Named author styles available as emulation targets	80+ Named topics and thematic subjects in the variable catalog
5 Question-design sub-prompts per generated passage	DOK 3 Inference questions generated at depth-of-knowledge Level 3

The system is in continuous active use for ELA instruction across grades 7–10. Because every passage is generated fresh from a specific combination of variables, no two passages are identical and no generated passage exists in any external corpus — eliminating the possibility of students accessing answer keys through internet searches.

The modular sub-prompt architecture also allows the question-design tools to be applied to published literary passages, not just generated ones — extending the utility of the system to any text used in the curriculum.

Future development directions include expanding the author-style catalog, adding a narrative nonfiction mode, and developing a sub-prompt that generates extended constructed-response prompts alongside the multiple-choice items.