

PENNY LEARNING LITERATURE

Penny Cracks the Case

A story about choosing your best evidence, Connect, Support,
Infer

Book Five • The CSI Song

The Writing Academy®, LLC

© 2026 The Writing
Academy®, LLC. All rights
reserved.

This document is provided for
classroom instructional use. No part
may be reproduced for resale or
distribution outside the purchasing
campus without written permission
from The Writing Academy®, LLC.

Penny's page was glowing with highlighter. She had tracked down evidence everywhere, a clue here, a clue there, more clues than she could count. She patted Champ's head and thought, surely all this evidence made her essay strong. Then Mrs. Ray read Penny's page, smiled, and asked the question Penny did not expect: "You found a LOT of evidence, Penny. But is all of it your BEST evidence?"

Penny blinked. “Isn’t more evidence better?” she asked. Mrs. Ray shook her head kindly. “A real detective doesn’t use every clue she finds. She keeps the ones that actually crack the case.

Some clues are strong. Some lead nowhere. Your job is to CHOOSE the strong ones.” Penny sat up. Choosing the best clues, just like a real detective. That sounded important, and a little bit thrilling.

“To test each clue,” said Mrs. Ray, “a detective asks three quick questions. We call them C-S-I.” Penny’s eyes went wide. “Like a real investigator!” “Exactly. C is CONNECT. S is SUPPORT. I is INFER. Ask all three about a clue, and you will know if it is worth keeping.” Penny grabbed her pencil like a magnifying glass.

“C is CONNECT,” said Mrs. Ray. “Ask, does this clue connect back to the PROMPT, the question you are answering?” Penny looked at a clue about the cafeteria menu. But the prompt was about recess. “That one does not connect at all,” she said, and crossed it out. Then she found a clue about kids running and playing, right on topic. “This one connects!” she said, and kept it. “Connect it to the prompt,” Penny hummed. One question down.

“S is SUPPORT,” Mrs. Ray went on.

“Ask, does this clue support my thesis, my reason, or my way?” Penny’s point was that recess helps kids learn. She checked a clue: students who played at recess focused better in class. “That supports my reason exactly!” she said, and kept it. Another clue did not back up her point at all, so she set it aside. “Support my thesis,” said Penny. Two.

“And I,” said Mrs. Ray, leaning in, “is the clever one. I is INFER. Ask, does this clue lead to MORE ideas? Can I say more about it, or is it a dead end?” Penny found a clue with nothing else to add, a dead end, and let it go. Then she found a clue she could think and write about for days. “This one gives me so much more to say!” “Infer more from it,” Penny whispered. “Not a dead end.” Three.

Penny ran every clue on her page through the three questions. Connect? Support? Infer? The clues that connected to the prompt, supported her point, and gave her more to say, she kept. The ones that wandered off, or proved nothing, or dead ended, she let go without a fuss. Her page had fewer clues now, but every single one was strong.

“I did not just FIND evidence,” Penny said, amazed. “I CHOSE my best evidence.” Her page was not a pile of clues anymore. It was a case built on strong ones, the kind that crack a case wide open. She sat back, feeling like the sharpest detective in the whole fifth grade.

“That is the secret,” said Mrs. Ray.

“Strong evidence connects back to the prompt, supports your point, and leads to more ideas you can grow. Weak evidence wanders off, proves nothing, or dead ends. CSI helps you tell them apart, every time.” Penny nodded, tucking that away like a detective’s badge.

Penny hummed the detective's song, tapping the beat with her pencil:

**Hey! Hey! Hey! Evidence is on the way!
Find the proof and make it fit, CSI will help with
it!**

**C means CONNECT, S means SUPPORT, I means
INFER,**

choose the clues that ring out clear!

Does it fit what I want to say?

Keep the evidence that leads the way!

From that day on, Penny never used every clue she found. She tested each one, Connect, Support, Infer, and kept only her strongest evidence. Her writing stopped being a pile of clues and started being a solid case.

Now you know the detective's secret too. Finding evidence is only the start. The best writers CHOOSE their strongest evidence. Ask C-S-I of every clue: does it Connect back to the prompt? does it Support your thesis, your reason, or your way? does it let you Infer more, or is it a dead end?

So the next time you gather your evidence, do not grab every clue in sight. Put on your detective eyes, sing it out, “Hey, hey, hey, evidence is on the way!”, and test each one: Connect, Support, Infer. Keep the strong clues, let the weak ones go, and build a case that cracks wide open, just like Penny.