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Introduction

Reading comprehension involves numerous thinking skills. Identifying main ideas and the details that support them is one such skill. A reader who is adept at identifying main ideas makes better sense of a text and increases his or her comprehension of what is being communicated. Identifying main ideas is one step in reading nonfiction, but it is important that students go further. They should also be able to use main ideas to summarize information. By summarizing as they read, students will be better able to recall important points. Exercises 1–18 will help students learn to recognize main ideas and the details that develop them. Exercises 19–35 focus on practice in summarizing. Use pages 8 and 9 after you introduce the skills to give students help in understanding them.

Using This Book

Pages 8–9

After introducing main ideas and summarizing to students (see pages 6 and 7), duplicate and pass out pages 8 and 9. Use page 8 to help students review what they have learned about finding main ideas and supporting details. By explaining their thinking, students are using metacognition to analyze how they recognized main ideas. Page 9 helps students review what they have learned about summarizing.

Pages 10–27

These pages provide practice in identifying **main ideas** and supporting details. The first question for each passage asks students to identify the main idea, and the second question requires students to focus on supporting details. Tell students that some passages have explicit main ideas, which are stated in a sentence, while other passages have implicit main ideas, which require students to put the details together to determine the main idea. Students should fill in the bubble in front of the correct answer for each question.

Pages 28–44

These pages provide practice in **summarizing**. The first three questions help students identify the key information in the paragraph. The fourth question asks students to select the title that best summarizes the passage. Finally, students are asked to use their answers to summarize the information given.

Pages 45–46

Use these pages to assess students' progress after they have completed the practice pages.

Page 47

You may wish to keep a record of students' progress as they complete the practice pages. Sample comments that will help you guide students to improving their skills might include:

- reads carelessly
- misunderstands text
- doesn't recognize main ideas
- has trouble differentiating main ideas from supporting details
- is weak in summarizing material

Teacher Tip

For students who need extra help, you might suggest that they keep pages 8 and 9 with them to refer to when they complete the exercises.

Teacher Tip

Students can learn a lot if you review the finished exercises with them on a regular basis. Encourage students to explain their thinking for each correct answer. Ask them to point out the words that helped them identify main ideas.

Mini-Lesson

Teaching About Main Ideas (and Supporting Details)

1. Introduce the concept: Write these words on the chalkboard.

ocean lagoon bay pond creek

2. Model thinking: After students have correctly identified bodies of water as what the words are about, continue the lesson by thinking aloud.

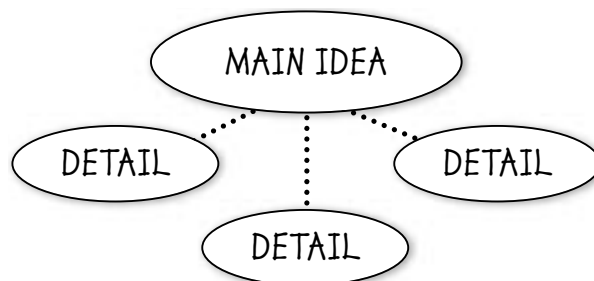


3. Define the skill: Remind students that when they read a paragraph, the sentences in it are related to one another. The sentences are all about a main idea. This is the key point in the paragraph. Explain that often the main idea is stated in the first sentence of a paragraph, but the main idea can also be given in the middle or at the end of a paragraph.

Tell students that the other sentences in a paragraph tell more about the main idea. These sentences give supporting details. A supporting detail might be an example. It might also be a fact about the main idea or a description of it. Explain that supporting details fill in information about the main idea and make the paragraph more interesting to read. Help students understand that the main idea is bigger or broader than the supporting details.

Point out that sometimes the main idea is *not* stated in a single sentence. Instead, all the details suggest the main idea; in other words, the main idea is implied, as in the example above. Then the reader must figure it out by asking questions such as "What is happening?" "What is this about?"

Use graphics to help students who are visual learners understand the concept.



Mini-Lesson

Teaching About Summarizing

1. Introduce the concept: Draw five pictures on the board that convey the power of wind. (You may also create an overhead transparency using the illustrations below.)



Ask students to make up a sentence that tells about all the pictures.

2. Model thinking: After students have volunteered their sentences, help them review the process they used by thinking aloud.



All the pictures show what happens when the wind blows. The power of the wind is the main idea suggested in each picture. I might summarize this group of pictures by saying, *The wind is strong and can make things move.*

3. Define the skill: Explain that summarizing is a way to remember what you read (or see or hear). When you summarize, you look for the main ideas. Then you try to state or restate them in your own words. Tell students that adding details to a summary can be helpful. For example, you might say, *The wind is strong and can make things such as a kite move.*

Tell students that outlines and graphic organizers are often good ways to summarize information. For example:

- I. The power of the wind
 - A. Bends trees
 - B. Carries away hats
 - C. Turns umbrellas inside out
 - D. Helps kites fly
 - E. Makes boats move

Learning Page

What Is a Main Idea?

When you read a nonfiction passage, it usually gives you a lot of information. How does a reader remember all this information? How does a reader make sense of it?

A good reader sorts out the information. For example, a reader might think:



When you answer the first two questions, you identify the main idea. The main idea is what the paragraph is about. When you answer the second two questions, you identify the supporting details. These details tell more about the main idea by describing or explaining *what, where, why, how much, when, who, or how many*.

Read the passage. Complete the statements.

Can snakes crawl in reverse? Well, no, but they can move in other ways. For example, they can sidewind, which involves throwing the front of their body to one side and then zigzagging the rest along the ground. Some snakes such as pythons can climb trees, and some vipers can actually leap. Many snakes can swim, too.

- 1** This passage is mainly about _____

- 2** One detail about the main idea is _____

- 3** Another detail about the main idea is _____

- 4** The details help me understand the main idea because they _____

What Is Summarizing?

When you read nonfiction, you want to remember what you read. However, it isn't necessary to recall every word. Instead, you can use the main ideas to help you summarize a passage.

A good reader first finds the main ideas. Keep in mind that the main points are not always stated; sometimes they are implied or suggested. After finding the main ideas, a reader might think:

How can I restate the main idea in my own words?



The next thing a reader does is to identify supporting evidence for the main idea. This evidence can be details, examples, explanations, descriptions, or statistics that expand the main idea. Often, it is helpful to use an outline or a graphic organizer to summarize information.

Read this passage. Complete the statements.

Where is the Grand Canyon? Most people think it is in Arizona. However, many other states have their own grand canyons, too. The Waimea Canyon is known as the Grand Canyon of Hawaii. People in North Dakota think of the Painted Canyon in that state as their grand canyon. And Californians use the nickname for a canyon on the floor of the Pacific Ocean. This underwater grand canyon is officially called the Monterey Bay Canyon.

- 1 This paragraph is mainly about _____

- 2 A good title for this paragraph would be _____

- 3 A detail I might include in a summary would be _____

EXERCISE

1

Main Ideas

Read each paragraph. Choose the best answers.

You probably know that guide dogs are used to lead blind people. Did you know that a few blind people have guide horses? These are miniature horses trained much as guide dogs are. The small horses respond to more than 25 commands. They can see well in the dark. They are also trained to tap with a hoof on the door if they need to go out. One man has even taken his guide horse on an airplane!

1 The main idea of this paragraph is

- (A) How guide dogs are trained
- (B) A guide horse on an airplane
- (C) The use of small horses as guides
- (D) Why blind people like animals

2 A supporting detail is

- (A) Guide dogs lead blind people.
- (B) The horses respond to 25 commands.
- (C) Miniature means small.
- (D) Airlines welcome guide horses.

Dictionary writers are always busy. That's because the English language keeps changing. People stop using some words, and new words keep popping up. Where do new words come from? Many recent words are from technology. For example, *snailmail* came into use after people started using the much faster e-mail. Other new words come from books, television, movies, and fads. Do you know what a *wannabe* is? If not, you can look it up in a recently published dictionary.

3 The main idea of this paragraph is

- (A) Dictionaries show changes in English.
- (B) How television affects English
- (C) Why dictionary writers are so tired
- (D) How to find new words in a dictionary

4 A supporting detail is

- (A) Snails help to deliver the mail.
- (B) Many words come from technology.
- (C) Old dictionaries are not useful.
- (D) The English language never changes.