



Ready Reference Form

Goal: Comprehension		Strategy: Use Main Idea and Supporting Details to Determine Importance	
Definition	Readers understand the most important idea about what is being read. This idea is often stated in a sentence in the passage, whereas other sentences comprise pieces of information that tell more about the most important idea.		
Why Children Need This Strategy	Identifying and understanding main ideas along with determining importance are prerequisite skills to summarizing text. Readers summarize the most important aspects of the text by determining the details that are significant and discard those that are not while stating the main idea in their own words, thus improving comprehension and understanding what is read.		
Secret to Success	When constructing the main idea of a piece of text, the reader may start with a topic they think the selection is about and then add one detail to support it.		
How We Teach It	<p>Many students shy away from the main idea because they confuse it with theme or topic. To clarify more completely, we start by establishing a common language as we teach and review with our students the following terms: <i>topic</i>, <i>main idea</i>, <i>theme</i>, and <i>supporting details</i>. We find that when students understand these terms, we are on the right path to understanding main idea.</p> <p>We then model this process of determining the main idea, pointing out that one person's view of the author's main idea may be different from another. When we determine the main idea, we always support our claim with evidence from the text.</p> <p>The terms:</p> <p>The topic is the subject, or what the text is about.</p> <p>The main idea is the most important idea about the topic and is expressed as a sentence or two. When we identify the main idea, it is usually in a sentence; if we say just a word, we are probably referring only to the topic.</p> <p>A theme is the big idea from the text. This is often an idea or lesson the author wants the reader to know from reading the text.</p> <p>Supporting details are bits of information that are used to verify and support the main idea.</p> <p>Language we use:</p> <p>"In a few words, what is this selection about?"</p> <p>"What would you say is the most important idea about this topic?"</p> <p>"Did you find the main idea stated in the passage or did you have to infer it?"</p>		
Troubleshooting	<p>If the main idea is not stated in a sentence in the passage, the reader must infer the main idea based on the details and their prior knowledge of the topic and what they learn from the text.</p> <p>We are clear with students that this process of determining the main idea can require considerable thinking and hard work. To support students who need scaffolding for this strategy, we may meet every day for a week, checking in on them and asking them each time to identify the main idea and support their thinking with details from the text.</p>		