

Acknowledgments

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Table of Contents

STRATEGY ONE	Finding Main Idea	4
STRATEGY TWO	Recalling Facts and Details	14
STRATEGY THREE	Understanding Sequence	24
STRATEGY FOUR	Recognising Cause and Effect	34
STRATEGY FIVE	Comparing and Contrasting	44
STRATEGY SIX	Making Predictions	54
STRATEGY SEVEN	Finding Word Meaning in Context	64
STRATEGY EIGHT	Drawing Conclusions and Making Inferences	74
STRATEGY NINE	Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion	84
STRATEGY TEN	Identifying Author's Purpose	94
STRATEGY ELEVEN	Interpreting Figurative Language	104
STRATEGY TWELVE	Distinguishing Between Real and Make-believe	114
STRATEGIES ONE–TWELVE REVIEW	124

Learn About Finding Main Idea

Thinking about the strategy

If you know how to find the **main idea** when you read, you can better understand and enjoy what you read. The main idea is the most important idea of a paragraph or of a whole selection.

You will sometimes find the main idea of a paragraph in a main idea sentence. Then all the other sentences in the paragraph help explain the main idea. Sometimes, an author will not state, or say, the main idea in a main idea sentence. Then look at all the other sentences. Decide the one idea that the sentences all tell about.

To find the main idea of a paragraph	To find the main idea of a selection
<p>Look for a main idea sentence. It is often the first or last sentence in the paragraph.</p> <p>Figure out the most important idea that all the sentences make.</p> <p>Look at the title.</p>	<p>Look at the title.</p> <p>Look at the first and last paragraphs. The main idea is often found in the first or last paragraph.</p> <p>Think about the main ideas of all the paragraphs.</p>

Studying a model

Read the paragraph and the notes beside it.



The first sentence states the main idea: The students planted a garden to help the animals.

All the other sentences help explain how the garden could help the animals.

The students in Mrs Becker’s class decided to plant a small garden to help the animals that lived near their school. Birds and bees could come to gather nectar from the flowers. Small animals, like possums and birds, could collect the seeds from some of the garden plants. Spiders could weave their webs among the leaves and stems. Other insects could also munch on the leaves.



Learn About a Graphic Organiser

Understanding a main idea chart

A **main idea chart** will help you find and understand the main idea of a paragraph or selection. You can use a main idea chart when reading articles, essays and other nonfiction works.

Here is a main idea chart for the paragraph on page 4. It shows the main idea and the details that help explain the main idea.

Write the main idea sentence. If there is no main idea sentence, write a sentence that tells the main idea.

What is the main idea?
<i>The students in Mrs Becker's class decided to plant a small garden to help the animals that lived near their school.</i>

List examples, reasons and other details that give more information about the main idea.

What details help explain the main idea?			
<i>Birds and bees could gather nectar.</i>	<i>Small animals could collect seeds from the garden.</i>	<i>Spiders could weave webs among leaves and stems.</i>	<i>Insects could munch on leaves.</i>

When you fill in a main idea chart, you see how an author arranges details in a paragraph or whole selection to explain an idea.

What is the main idea that the author wants to make about the garden?

The first sentence states that the students decided to plant the garden to help the animals that lived near the school. The author then gives four examples of ways that the garden will help the animals.

As you read, ask yourself

- What is the main idea?
- Does the author state the main idea in a main idea sentence?
- What one idea do all the sentences in the paragraph help explain?

Learn About a Form of Writing

Focusing on a letter to the editor

Readers write **letters to the editor** of a newspaper or a magazine to give their personal opinions about a subject. Sometimes a reader writes a letter to the editor to reach all the people in the community.

A letter to the editor often has these features.

- It tells a writer's opinions or feelings.
- It gives facts and details that support the writer's main idea.
- It uses business letter form.

Here is a letter to the editor of a school paper. As you read, think of what the writer wants readers to do or understand.

Dear Editor:

The Lionel Rose Primary School maths team deserves our thanks and praise. Last week, the team won first place in a statewide contest. Each team member stayed after school every day for months to study and practise. At the contest, everyone said how polite and friendly the team was. During the contest, the team members showed the true meaning of teamwork.

Sincerely,
Maria Peterson

Organising ideas in a main idea chart

You can use a main idea chart when reading a letter to the editor.

Here is a filled-in main idea chart for the letter above.

What is the main idea?			
The Lionel Rose Primary School maths team deserves our thanks and praise.			
What details help explain the main idea?			
The team won first place in a state contest.	Team members stayed after school to study.	The team was polite and friendly.	The team showed the true meaning of teamwork.

Prepare for the Reading Selection

Gaining knowledge

When you think of school, you probably think of reading, writing, maths and, of course, homework. All of these are an important part of learning, and school is all about learning. However, many schools also offer a variety of special programs that teach children other kinds of skills. These programs provide children with a chance to discover and develop hidden talents in areas such as sport, music, art and theatre. Many people believe that these special programs are important but not absolutely necessary to a child's education. As a result, when schools do not have enough money to support these programs, the programs are dropped. The letters to the editor that you will read on the pages that follow, focus on the special programs that make school more than just reading, writing, maths and homework to students.

Learn Vocabulary

Understanding vocabulary

The boxed words below are **boldfaced** in the selection. Learn the meaning of each word. Then write the word that matches the clue.

attend

1. This is an event to honour someone or something.

cancelled

2. If you did this, you listened in on what someone was saying to someone else. _____

overheard

3. This is someone who teaches you a skill.

instructor

4. If a game was this, the game would not be played.

tribute

5. This means the opposite of "take for granted".

appreciate

6. This means "to be present at". _____

Reading Selection—Part One

Read the first letter to the editor.

1659 Poplar Avenue
Curtin, ACT 2605
16 November, 2009

Letters to the Editor
The Curtin Gazette
23 Highland Street
Curtin, ACT 2605

Dear Editor:

I am in year three at Curtin Primary School. Every Thursday, I **attend** the after-school music program. I am learning to play the trumpet. Yesterday, I found out that the after-school music program might be **cancelled**. I am writing to say that the after-school music program should not be cancelled. After talking with many of my classmates and friends, I can say for sure that I am not the only one who feels this way.

Our class does have music during the regular school week. However, the after-school program is special. In music class, we sing songs and listen to music. At the after-school program, we learn how to play real instruments.

I have been taking trumpet lessons every Thursday afternoon for ten weeks. I never thought I would be able to play any instrument. I admit that, at first, I was terrible. My parents would smile as I practised, but I really think that they wanted to cover their ears. Now, however, I can play two songs that actually sound like music. I **overheard** my father tell my mother that Mr Portland, my **instructor**, must be a magician as well as a musician.

