

Main Idea & Details

Lesson 1: What do most sentences tell about?

GRADES 3-5



MAIN IDEA



DETAIL

ANCHOR CHART

2 ORIGINAL PASSAGES

SORT + EXIT TICKET

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Teacher page: goal, 15-20 minute plan, standards
- Illustrated anchor chart: topic, main idea, detail
- Guided passage with think-aloud notes (Level A)
- Independent passage (Level B) + 5 questions
- Main idea match-up sort (16 cards) + mat
- Exit ticket (two per page) and answer keys

What do most sentences tell about?

LEARNING GOAL

I can find the main idea of a paragraph by checking what most of its sentences tell about, and tell it apart from the topic and the details.

THE 15-20 MINUTE LESSON

3 min	Hook	Anchor chart (page 3): read the two ant examples. Ask: which one do the other ant sentences tell more about?
8 min	I do	Read Ants aloud (page 4). Think aloud with the notes for sentences 1, 8, 12, 13 and 15. Students fill the M / D strip.
5 min	We do	Partners label the other sentences and name the main-idea sentence each detail tells more about.
3 min	Check	Exit ticket (page 9), two per page.

Next day, centers or homework: the Volcanoes passage and five questions (pages 5-6) and the main idea match-up sort (pages 7-8). Answer key: page 10.

Say: The topic is what a paragraph is about, in a word or two. The main idea is the big point the paragraph makes, and MOST of its sentences tell more about it. It is not always first. Clue phrases are hints, not rules.

LISTEN AND LOOK FOR

- Students check a sentence against the rest of the paragraph before calling it the main idea, even when it comes first (sentence 8 is first but is a detail).
- Students find the main idea at the END of paragraph 2 (sentence 12).
- Students do not stop at a clue phrase: sentence 15 says many different but tells about smells only.

STANDARDS (WORDING CHECKED AGAINST THE OFFICIAL COMMON CORE TEXT)

RI.3.2	Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.
RI.4.2	Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.
RI.5.2	Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.

Wording copied from the official Common Core pages. The unit teaches the main idea and key details half of each standard; it does not teach summarizing on its own. Check your state or district document for its codes.

WHERE THIS LESSON FITS

This is Lesson 1 of the Main Idea & Supporting Details Complete Unit (Grades 3-5). Page 11 shows real pages from the unit and what it adds.

Main Idea or Detail?

Ask: What do MOST of the sentences tell about?



MAIN IDEA

The big point of a paragraph. Most of the other sentences tell more about it.

It can be first, in the middle, or last, or not written at all.

EXAMPLE (the last sentence!)

“Each ant in the colony has a job to do.”



DETAIL

One fact, example, or reason that tells more about the main idea.

It tells about just ONE part of the paragraph.

EXAMPLE

“Older workers go out to find food.”

TRICKY!

- 1 TOPIC: a word or two (ants). MAIN IDEA: a full sentence about the topic. DETAIL: one part.
- 2 Check it: do MOST of the other sentences tell more about this one? Then it is the main idea, even when it is not first.
- 3 Clue phrases such as “many kinds of” or “several different” are hints, not rules. A detail can have one, and a main idea can have none.
- 4 No main idea sentence? Say what all the details have in common, in your own words.

Listen to your teacher think aloud. Then write M or D for every numbered sentence.



Ants

● Level A · 152 words

- 1 Ants live and work together in big families. 2 Each family is called a colony. 3 The mother of the family is the queen. 4 Her daughters are the workers. 5 Many ants make their nests under the ground. 6 A small colony may have just a few workers. 7 The biggest ones have many millions of them!
- 8 The queen spends most of her life laying eggs.
- 9 Young workers stay in the nest and take care of the queen and her young. 10 Older workers go out to find food. 11 Some workers guard the nest from enemies.
- 12 Each ant in the colony has a job to do.
- 13 Ants are good at sending messages to each other.
- 14 An ant smells messages with its two antennae.
- 15 Ants can make many different smells, and each smell means something else. 16 A worker that finds food can leave a smell for the rest to follow. 17 Ants can also touch each other to share news.

THINK ALOUD

1 Check it

Do most sentences tell more about ant families? Yes. MAIN IDEA.

8 First, but...

It tells about the queen only. DETAIL.

12 Last!

8 to 11 each name one job. All tell about 12. MAIN IDEA.

13 Check it

14 to 17 tell how ants share messages. MAIN IDEA.

15 Clue phrase?

A hint, not a rule. Only 14 and 16 back it up. DETAIL.

Write M (main idea) or D (detail) for each numbered sentence.

1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		9	
10		11		12		13		14		15		16		17			

Read the passage. The sentences are numbered. Then answer the questions on the next page. For each paragraph, ask: what do MOST of the sentences tell about?



Volcanoes

■ Level B · 210 words

- 1 1 A volcano is built by hot, melted rock that comes up from deep inside Earth.
2 Down under the ground, this melted rock is called magma. 3 When it pours out on top, it is called lava. 4 The red-hot lava cools down and turns into dark, hard rock.
5 Over time, layer after layer of new rock builds up into a big mountain. 6 It can erupt again and again in the same place.
- 2 7 Thick ash can pile up on the roofs of houses and make them fall in. 8 Even a little ash can harm crops and machines. 9 Breathing in ash is not healthy for people or for animals. 10 Wind can carry the ash to towns that are many miles away. 11 A lava flow can ruin all the things that are in its way. 12 An eruption can put people and their towns in danger.
- 3 13 Scientists keep a close watch on volcanoes to help keep people safe. 14 They use many different tools to check each one for changes. 15 The United States alone has more than 160 of them that could erupt. 16 When one starts to wake up, the scientists send out warnings. 17 They also help the people who live nearby get ready ahead of time. 18 Then those people will know what to do if it erupts.

Volcanoes: questions

Use the Volcanoes passage to answer each question.

- 1** Which sentence states the main idea of paragraph 2?
 - A** Thick ash can pile up on the roofs of houses and make them fall in.
 - B** An eruption can put people and their towns in danger.
 - C** Volcanoes.
 - D** Scientists keep a close watch on volcanoes to help keep people safe.

- 2** What is the TOPIC of paragraph 3?
 - A** how scientists watch volcanoes
 - B** Scientists keep a close watch on volcanoes to help keep people safe.
 - C** tools
 - D** lava

- 3** Which sentence states the main idea of paragraph 3? Write its number.
Sentence number:

- 4** Sentence 1 is the main idea of paragraph 1. Copy one detail from paragraph 1 that tells more about it.

- 5** Sentence 14 has the clue phrase “many different.” Is it the main idea of paragraph 3? Use the check: do most of the sentences tell more about it?

Main idea match-up

Cut out the 16 cards and find the 8 main idea and detail pairs.

1

We planted many kinds of seeds.

2

Our bus driver keeps us safe in several ways.

3

We play board games in the gym.

4

A day at the beach is full of things to do.

5

Library visits are the best part of our week.

6

Two kids in our class made signs for the table.

7

My mornings before school are very busy.

8

Our town gets ready for snow in several ways.

9

We all helped at the bake sale in many ways.

10

Our class garden keeps us busy.

11

We find many kinds of shells.

12

She waits until we sit.

13

We each pick two books.

14

First, I make my bed.

15

Rainy recess can be fun.

16

Trucks salt the roads.

For each pair, ask: which card does the other one tell more about? Glue it in the MAIN IDEA box and the detail beside it.

MAIN IDEA

detail

MAIN IDEA

detail

MAIN IDEA

detail

MAIN IDEA

detail

MAIN IDEA

detail

MAIN IDEA

detail

MAIN IDEA

detail

MAIN IDEA

detail

LESSON 1 · EXIT TICKET

Check your thinking

Name _____

- 1 Which sentence states the main idea? Write its number.

“(1) We run a relay race. (2) We toss water balloons. (3) We cool off with ice pops in the shade. (4) Field day is full of fun events.”

Sentence number:

- 2 What is the TOPIC? Write it in a few words.

- 3 Copy one detail that tells more about the main idea.

cut

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Lesson 1

GUIDED PASSAGE: ANTS (SENTENCES 1-17)

1	MAIN IDEA	the main idea	10	DETAIL	
2	DETAIL		11	DETAIL	
3	DETAIL		12	MAIN IDEA	trap: not first
4	DETAIL		13	MAIN IDEA	trap: no clue phrase
5	DETAIL		14	DETAIL	
6	DETAIL		15	DETAIL	trap: clue phrase
7	DETAIL		16	DETAIL	
8	DETAIL	trap: first, but one part	17	DETAIL	
9	DETAIL				

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE: VOLCANOES

1	B	A is first but names one danger; sentences 7-11 all tell about B
2	A	a topic is a few words; B is the main idea sentence
3	13	14 has a clue phrase but is about tools only
4	Any of sentences 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6.	copied exactly from paragraph 1
5	No. Only sentence 14 is about tools; most sentences tell how scientists keep people safe, so sentence 13 is the main idea.	any answer that uses the check earns the point

MATCH-UP SORT: 8 PAIRS (PARTNER CARD IN BRACKETS)

Card 1	DETAIL	garden (10) - trap: clue	Card 9	MAIN IDEA	bake sale (6)
Card 2	MAIN IDEA	bus (12)	Card 10	MAIN IDEA	garden (1) - trap: no clue
Card 3	DETAIL	recess (15)	Card 11	DETAIL	beach (4) - trap: clue
Card 4	MAIN IDEA	beach (11) - trap: no clue	Card 12	DETAIL	bus (2)
Card 5	MAIN IDEA	library (13) - trap: no clue	Card 13	DETAIL	library (5)
Card 6	DETAIL	bake sale (9)	Card 14	DETAIL	morning (7)
Card 7	MAIN IDEA	morning (14) - trap: no clue	Card 15	MAIN IDEA	recess (3) - trap: no clue
Card 8	MAIN IDEA	snow (16)	Card 16	DETAIL	snow (8)

EXIT TICKET

1	4	not first: 1-3 each name one event
2	field day	a few words, not a sentence
3	Any of sentences 1, 2 or 3.	

Main Idea & Details Complete Unit · Grades 3-5

Real pages from the unit (reduced):

MILESTONE READING SKILLS · MAIN IDEA & SUPPORTING DETAILS
 PRE-ASSESSMENT Form A
 Name: _____ Date: _____
 Read each paragraph carefully. Take your time. Score: ____ / 12
PART A: READ PARAGRAPH 1
Paragraph 1: Elephant Trunks
 1. An elephant uses a trunk to grab many kinds of food, such as grass, fruit, and bark.
 2. It also sucks water halfway up its trunk and then pours it into its mouth.
 3. An elephant's trunk is a very useful tool.
 4. The trunk is strong enough to lift a heavy log.
 5. The trunk can also pick up one single piece of straw.
 1. Is sentence 1 the main idea or a detail?
 Circle one: ☐ MAIN IDEA ☐ DETAIL
 2. Is sentence 2 the main idea or a detail?
 Circle one: ☐ MAIN IDEA ☐ DETAIL
 3. Is sentence 3 the main idea or a detail?
 Circle one: ☐ MAIN IDEA ☐ DETAIL
 4. Is sentence 4 the main idea or a detail?
 Circle one: ☐ MAIN IDEA ☐ DETAIL
 5. Which sentence states the main idea of paragraph 1? Write its number.
 Sentence number: _____
 6. What is the TOPIC of paragraph 1?
 (A) grass and fruit
 (B) an elephant's trunk
 (C) An elephant's trunk is a very useful tool.
 (D) a piece of straw

Pre-assessment, Form A

MILESTONE READING SKILLS · MAIN IDEA & SUPPORTING DETAILS
 LESSON 2: PART A Find It!
 Name: _____ Date: _____
 Use The Sahara Desert (page 16). Find each sentence and write M or D. For a detail, write the sentence number (1 to 16) of its paragraph's main idea.

Sentence	M or D	A detail? Write the sentence number of its main idea.
1. Sentence 1: The Sahara is the largest hot desert in the world.	☐	☐
2. Sentence 6: In some places, summer days are hotter than 100°F.	☐	☐
3. Sentence 9: The weather in the Sahara is harsh.	☐	☐
4. Sentence 13: A camel in the Sahara can go a week or more without water.	☐	☐
5. Sentence 15: Some plants sprout and make seeds just days after a rain.	☐	☐
6. Sentence 16: Living things have ways to live with the heat and the dry land.	☐	☐

EXPLAIN IT
 Write the main idea of paragraph 2 in your own words. Then write the numbers of two sentences that tell more about it.

Lesson 2: Find It! chart

MILESTONE READING SKILLS · MAIN IDEA & SUPPORTING DETAILS
 LESSON 3: YOU DO! Tricky sentences
 Name: _____ Date: _____
 Use The Sahara Desert (page 16). A topic is a few words. Clue phrases are hints, not rules.
PART A: PARAGRAPH 3 OF SHARKS. CIRCLE TOPIC, MAIN IDEA OR DETAIL.
 1. "Sharks and people."
 Circle one: ☐ TOPIC ☐ MAIN IDEA ☐ DETAIL
 2. "Most sharks are not dangerous to people."
 Circle one: ☐ TOPIC ☐ MAIN IDEA ☐ DETAIL
 3. "The chance of being bitten by a shark is very small."
 Circle one: ☐ TOPIC ☐ MAIN IDEA ☐ DETAIL
 4. "At least 35 kinds have ever been known to bite a person."
 Circle one: ☐ TOPIC ☐ MAIN IDEA ☐ DETAIL
PART B: CIRCLE THE CLUE PHRASE. THEN WRITE YES OR NO.
 1. "It has five different kinds of fins, and its tail fin pushes it through the water."
 Main idea of paragraph 1? (yes or no) _____
 2. "Sharks use several different senses to find their food."
 Main idea of paragraph 2? (yes or no) _____
 3. "Most sharks eat many kinds of smaller fish and other small sea animals."
 Main idea of paragraph 3? (yes or no) _____

Lesson 3: tricky sentences

MILESTONE READING SKILLS · MAIN IDEA & SUPPORTING DETAILS
 LESSON 4: YOU DO! Main ideas in a letter
 Name: _____ Date: _____
 Use the letter. Row 1 is paragraph 2, row 2 is paragraph 3, row 3 is paragraph 4. Write each main idea in your own words and one detail that supports it.

The main idea of the whole letter (paragraph 1)	
Main idea of the paragraph	One detail that supports it
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____

 Paragraph 4 has no main idea sentence. How did you figure out its main idea? What do its sentences have in common?

Lesson 4: organizer

MILESTONE READING SKILLS · MAIN IDEA & SUPPORTING DETAILS
 LESSON 5: SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW Sea Turtles
 Name: _____ Date: _____
 Read the passages. The sentences are numbered. Then answer the Show What You Know questions.

Sea Turtles
 1. Sea turtles spend most of their lives swimming in the ocean. 2. They are found in oceans all around the world, from the tropics to cooler seas. 3. Like other reptiles, they breathe air, so they must rise to the surface again and again. 4. A sleeping sea turtle can stay underwater for several hours at a time. 5. Only the females ever return to land, and they come ashore only to lay their eggs.
 6. A sea turtle's body is well suited to a life spent in the water. 7. Instead of feet, it has large, flat flippers. 8. It moves through the water with strong beats of its front flippers, much like a bird's wings. 9. Its back flippers act like rudders, helping it steer as it swims. 10. Most kinds of sea turtles have a hard, bony shell that protects them from enemies.
 11. Different kinds of sea turtles eat different foods. 12. Green turtles graze mostly on sea grasses and algae that grow in shallow water. 13. Leatherbacks feed mostly on jellyfish and other soft sea creatures. 14. Loggerheads have strong jaws that can crush the hard shells of crabs and clams. 15. How birds use their narrow, pointed beaks to reach into cracks in coral reefs for sponges.
 16. A mother turtle crawls onto a sandy beach, usually close to the place where she hatched years before. 17. Using her back flippers, she digs a nest and lays about 100 eggs inside it. 18. She covers the eggs with sand and then returns to the sea. 19. About two months later, the tiny hatchlings break out of their eggs and dig their way to the surface. 20. A sea turtle's life begins in a nest buried in the sand of a beach.

Lesson 5: Level C passage

MILESTONE READING SKILLS · MAIN IDEA & SUPPORTING DETAILS
 REVIEW TASK CARDS The Sahara Desert
 Name: _____ Date: _____
 Each card is a NEW sentence for a paragraph of The Sahara Desert (page 16). Do most of that paragraph's sentences tell more about its MAIN IDEA. Just one part? DETAIL.

1. TASK CARD Add to paragraph 1 main idea or detail? "The Sahara spreads across 11 countries, such as Egypt and Morocco."	2. TASK CARD Add to paragraph 1 main idea or detail? "No other hot desert on Earth is as big as the Sahara."
3. TASK CARD Add to paragraph 1 main idea or detail? "The Sahara is huge, and it has many kinds of land."	4. TASK CARD Add to paragraph 2 main idea or detail? "The Sahara has several different kinds of harsh weather."
5. TASK CARD Add to paragraph 2 main idea or detail? "With almost no clouds, the hot sun beats down on the land."	6. TASK CARD Add to paragraph 2 main idea or detail? "Camels can eat many kinds of tough, thorny plants."
7. TASK CARD Add to paragraph 3 main idea or detail? "Sahara plants and animals can get by with lots of heat and little water."	8. TASK CARD Add to paragraph 3 main idea or detail? "Plants and animals in the Sahara survive in several different ways."

24 task cards

WHAT THE FULL UNIT ADDS TO THIS LESSON

- 4 more lessons in gradual release: first, middle or last; topic, main idea or detail (clue phrases are hints); main ideas nobody wrote down; and a show-what-you-know finale
- 6 more original passages at three measured reading levels (164 to 276 words), level and length printed; the finale puts one topic at all three levels
- Pre- and post-assessment in parallel forms (12 points each) with a class tracker
- 24 task cards tied to the unit's passages, with a recording sheet
- 3 small-group reteach cards for the most common mix-ups, mapped to the test items
- An exit ticket for Lessons 1 to 4 and an answer key for every page

Find the full unit on TpT:

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/x-17726169>

THANK YOU

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