



Identify Main Idea and Key Details

OVERVIEW:

Finding the central idea (main idea) of a text is the key to understanding informational texts. Teaching students how to identify central ideas has been recognized as having one of the greatest impacts on student performance and comprehension. The key to this skill is reading to understand by focusing on what the text says. The idea is that students cannot access the deeper (implied) meanings of a text, nor can they make connections across topics and concepts, until they can first determine the explicit meaning of the text. Beyond just identifying the central idea, students must analyze how the author uses details to develop those ideas.

Connected Standard

CCSS.R.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Progression of Standard Across Grades

Grade 3

Determine the main idea of a text, recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.

Grade 4

Determine the main idea of a text and **explain how it is supported by key details.**

Grade 5

Determine **two or more main ideas** of a text, and explain how they are supported by key details.

Mini-Lesson I

Define and Distinguish Between Central Idea and Key Details (20-30 minutes)

Directions: Prior to teaching students to analyze the development of a central idea, students must first be able to identify the central idea and distinguish between the central idea and key details. Note the explicit teaching and modeling suggestions in this lesson are based on the text “Colonial Country Life,” found in the lesson *Daily Life in the American Colonies*: available in *Expedition: Learn!*

- Teach or review the related academic vocabulary. Display and read aloud the following terms and definitions, referring to the [Central Idea Anchor Chart](#):
 - **Central idea:** the main idea or most important idea of a paragraph or larger part of the text. Tells the reader what the text is about and what the author wants the reader to remember.
 - **Key supporting details:** important pieces of information that relate to and develop the central idea.
- Choose a short excerpt/passage from *Expedition: Learn!* that relates to students’ interests or a topic being studied. Ensure that each student can access the text through *Expedition: Learn!*
- Engage students in a shared reading of the text, strategically stopping to allow them to connect with the text. Consider the following examples based on the text “Colonial Country Life,” found in the lesson *Daily Life in the American Colonies*:
 - *After paragraph 2: What does the author want you to know about life in the colonies?*
 - *After “Men’s Work, Women’s Work”: What was different about life for a man compared to that of a woman?*
 - *After “Life on Plantations”: How was life different for plantation owners than for those that lived and worked on farms?*
- Display and distribute the Central Idea and Details Organizer.
- Guide students first to identify the central idea. Record it on the organizer, asking students to do the same.
Sample Response:
 - *Life on colonial farms was difficult no matter where you lived. The days were long and filled with hard work.*
- Then say:
 - *When writing an informational text, authors will include facts, evidence, examples, and descriptions that tell you more about the topic. You can turn the central idea into a question and look for details that answer the question. For example, if the central idea is life on a colonial farm was hard, I can turn that into the question: Why was life on a colonial farm hard? and look for facts, descriptions, and evidence that support that idea.*
- Guide students to turn the central idea into a question. For example:
 - *Why were colonial days for farmers long and hard?*
- Reread the passage looking for details that answer the question. Record the details on the organizer, asking students to do the same. Sample responses include:
 - *All family members helped on farms, starting the day before the sun came up.*
 - *Men tended to the outside work, taking care of the farms while women tended to the household chores and the children.*
 - *Boys helped on the farm and went to school. Girls learned how to run a household.*
 - *Farm families worked 6 days a week.*
- Have students work in pairs to complete this activity with the second passage contained in the *Expedition: Learn!* Lesson used for modeling.

Mini-Lesson II

Question the Topic (20-30 minutes)

Directions: Once students can identify an explicitly stated central idea they can progress to determining an implied central idea, using key details to justify their inference and explain how it is developed. Note the explicit teaching and modeling suggestions in this lesson are based on the text “Colonial Country Life,” found in the lesson *Daily Life in the American Colonies*: available in *Expedition: Learn!*

- Prior to teaching the lesson, review related academic vocabulary, reviewing the difference between a topic and a central idea:
 - **Central idea:** the main idea or most important idea of a paragraph or larger part of the text; tells the reader what the text is about and what the author wants the reader to remember
 - **Topic:** the subject of the text, what the text is about
- Display the Question the Topic Bookmark. Work through the steps with students and model recording responses on the Question the Topic Organizer.
 - Preview the text with students, inviting them to read the title, subtitles, and topic sentence while also previewing the text features. After previewing, invite students to determine the topic. For example,
 - *The topic of this article is about life and work on a colonial farm.*
 - Read the text aloud.
 - Model step 2 to determine the central idea, ask:
 - “What does the author want the reader to know about life on a colonial farm?”
 - *Sample Response: The author wants the reader to know that life on a colonial farm meant long days and hard work.*
 - Model step 3, turning the central idea into a question. For example:
 - *Why were days on colonial farms long and hard?*
 - Model Step 4, rereading the text and record the information that answers the question. These are your supporting details. For example:
 - *All family members helped on farms, starting the day before the sun came up.*
 - *Men tended to the outside work, taking care of the farms while women tended to the household chores and the children.*
 - *Boys helped on the farm and went to school. Girls learned how to run a household.*
 - *Farm families worked 6 days a week.*
- Distribute a Question the Topic Bookmark and Organizer to students. Have students work with a partner to complete the steps on the Bookmark with the second article in the *Expedition: Learn!* lesson.

Mini-Lesson III

Explain the Development of Two or More Central Ideas (20-30 minutes)

Directions: Once students have demonstrated their ability to explain both a stated and implied central idea, instruction can focus on multiple central ideas. Most complex texts contain more than one central idea and often the text structure and/or sections of the text can be clues to identifying the central idea of each section. Note the following teaching suggestions are based on the article, “Extinction” in the *Expedition: Learn!* lesson, *Extinct Plants and Animals*.

- Choose a passage in Expedition: Learn! related to students’ interests or a topic being studied. Ensure students can access the passage.
- Share with students that as we start to read more complex texts authors will often include more than one central idea. Explain that in this lesson students will learn a strategy for determining more than one central idea in the text.
- Share that the first step is to read the passage and note the key details the author includes. To do this we can consider what is most important to remember. Model this work, conducting a shared reading of the text, strategically stopping to record the key details. For example:
 - *Many plants and animals that once lived on Earth are no longer here.*
 - *Extinction is when an animal or plant species dies out.*
 - *Habitats can change because of natural disasters.*
 - *An asteroid caused the dinosaurs to go extinct.*
 - *Floods and droughts can change habitats and cause extinction,*
 - *Human activities such as hunting and building can destroy habitats.*
 - *It is important to take care of the environment because once something is extinct it cannot come back to life.*
- Explain that after we read and identify the key details, we can sort the details into categories, grouping related ideas together. Model sorting the key details, inviting students to provide input. For example, the sample details can be sorted into the following categories:
 - *Category 1:*
 - *Many plants and animals that once lived on Earth are no longer here.*
 - *Extinction is when an animal or plant species dies out.*
 - *It is important to take care of the environment because once something is extinct it cannot come back to life.*
 - *Category 2:*
 - *Habitats can change because of natural disasters.*
 - *An asteroid caused the dinosaurs to go extinct.*
 - *Floods and droughts can change habitats and cause extinction,*
 - *Human activities such as hunting and building can destroy habitats.*
- Share that once we have sorted all the facts, we can consider what they have in common and consider what they tell us about the topic. Emphasize that these statements are our central idea. For example:
 - *Category 1: Throughout history many plants and animals have become extinct, which means they no longer live.*
 - *Category 2: There are many reasons that plants and animals go extinct.*
- Have students work with a partner to complete the steps with the second article in the *Expedition: Learn!* lesson.

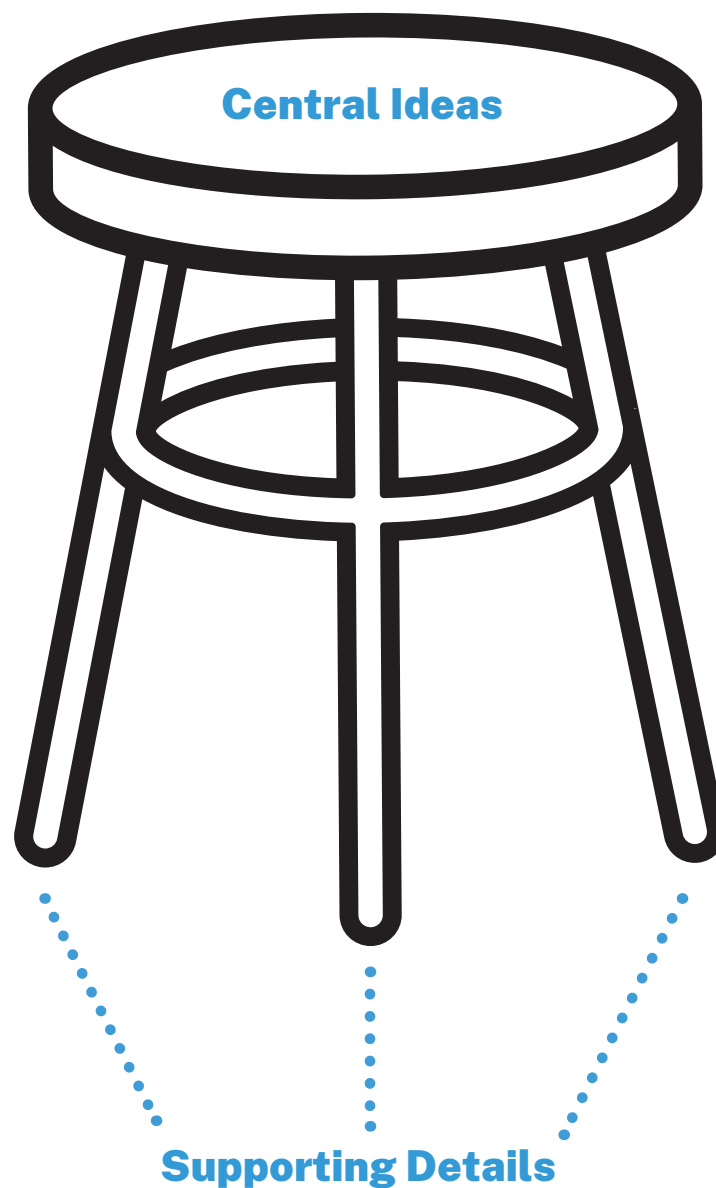
Check For Understanding

If you observe...	Then try...
difficulty in determining the central idea	having students reread the text, underlining repeated words and ideas, paying attention to the text features. After reading, students should track the words/ideas that appear most frequently and use that to determine the central idea.
students stating the topic as the central idea	providing additional practice with distinguishing between the topic and central idea, reinforcing that a topic is usually a word or phrase while the central idea is a statement that relates the most important idea about a topic.
difficulty in determining the central idea	turning the central idea into a question. Teach students to look for and use signal words (e.g., like, such as, for example) to see how the details and central idea are related.

Central Ideas and Supporting Details Anchor Chart

What is the central idea?

The **central idea** is what the text is **mostly** about. It is what the author **wants you to know** about the topic of the text

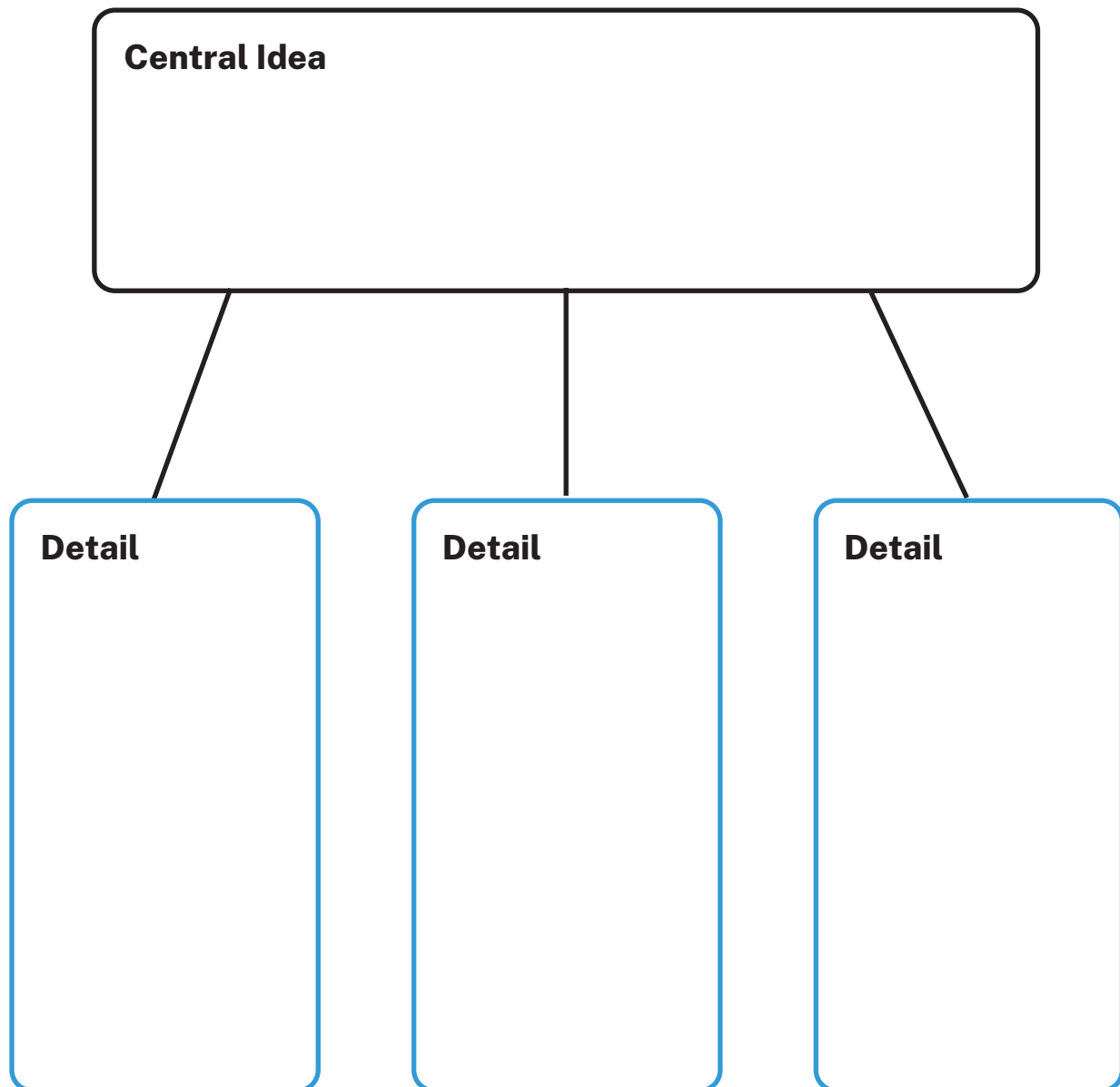


Supporting Details give **more information** about the central idea.

Central Ideas and Supporting Details Organizer

Directions:

1. Read the article and determine the central idea. Record it on the organizer.
2. Reread the article looking for details that explain the central idea. Add them to the boxes below.



Question the Topic Bookmark

Step 1



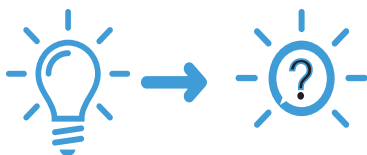
Read the article. Pay attention to the text features and structure to determine topic.

Step 2



Ask yourself, “What does the author want me to know about ___?”
That is the central idea!

Step 3



Turn the central idea into a question

Step 4



Use the information in the article to answer the question. The answers are the supporting details.

Step 1



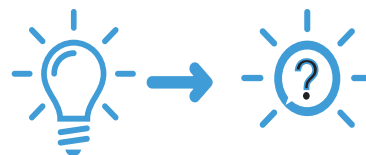
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That is the central idea!

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Turn the central idea into a question

Step 4



Use the information in the article to answer the question. The answers are the supporting details.

Question the Topic Organizer

Step 1



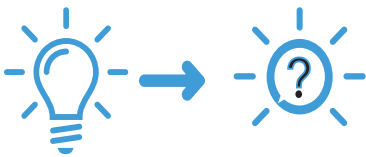
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Ask yourself, “What does the author want me to know about ___?”
That is the central idea!

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Turn the central idea into a question

Step 4



Use the information in the article to answer the question. The answers are the supporting details.