

Grade 8 Playlist: Central Idea Development

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.2*:

- Analyze the development of a central idea of a text, including its relationship to supporting details.

Welcome

Some authors directly state their central idea, while others imply their central idea through the use of topical sentences and supporting details, which leaves the reader to “read between the lines” and make inferences. Regardless of an author’s method of explaining the central idea, understanding the common thread that runs throughout the text is a key component of reading informational texts.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- determine the central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of a text, determining when it first appears and when it is reinforced by details in the text.
- explain which supporting ideas in the text support the central idea.

Review

Key Terms

- The **central idea** (also known as the *main idea* or *thesis*) is the unifying element of a text, which ties together the information and the supporting details of a text.

Exploring the Standard

Determining the central idea involves analyzing the sections of a text and the major points made within the text. This can be achieved by first identifying the overall, or broad, topic and then the supporting details or types of evidence for the topic.

Hint!

A process that can guide this analysis is asking questions. The five *w*’s (who, when, where, what, why) can help readers determine how the idea develops and why it is important.

Watch!

The following video briefly shows how to find the main idea of a nonfiction text by analyzing its sections:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtjCPldqz6s>



Readers can practice determining the central idea by looking closely at Examples 1 and 2.

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson gave an inspiring and informative speech at the University of Michigan. The speech outlined his plan for shaping the United States into a “Great Society,” in which Americans were free from poverty and able to create a stronger sense of community “in our cities, in our countryside, and in our classrooms.” The excerpt details Johnson’s thoughts and plans for the “third place” he wishes to concentrate on for building this “Great Society.” Read an excerpt in Example 1.

Example 1

¹A third place to build the Great Society is in the classrooms of America. There your children’s lives will be shaped. Our society will not be great until every young mind is set free to scan the farthest reaches of thought and imagination. We are still far from that goal. Today, eight million adult Americans, more than the entire population of Michigan, have not finished five years of school. Nearly 20 million have not finished eight years of school. Nearly 54 million—more than one-quarter of all America—have not even finished high school. Each year more than 100,000 high school graduates with proved ability do not enter college because they cannot afford it. And if we cannot educate today’s youth, what will we do in 1970 when elementary school enrollment will be five million greater than 1960? And high school enrollment will rise by five million. And college enrollment will increase by more than three million.

²In many places, classrooms are overcrowded and curricula are outdated. Most of our qualified teachers are underpaid, and many of our paid teachers are unqualified. So we must give every child a place to sit and a teacher to learn from. Poverty must not be a bar to learning, and learning must offer an escape from poverty. But more classrooms and more teachers are not enough. We must seek an educational system which grows in excellence as it grows in size. And this means better training for our teachers. It means preparing youth to enjoy their hours of leisure, as well as their hours of labor. It means exploring new techniques of teaching, to find new ways to stimulate the love of learning and the capacity for creation.

In this example, readers can quickly understand Johnson’s topic of education and his central idea that the United States needs to “explore new techniques” and ultimately reform the education system. Johnson develops his idea for better education by adding facts of student enrollment, degree completion, underserved resources and educators, and a potential fix to these issues. Each issue he brings up has an impact on the overall state of education in the United States, and he ends with a call for a change to the educational system.

Read!

The full text of the speech identifies and develops the first two “places” where Johnson sought to create a “Great Society.” He ends his speech by asking for the will and hearts of the American people in order to “shape the civilization that we want.” Read the full text at the following link. Does the central idea of the text as a whole incorporate the central idea of the excerpt in Example 1?

- <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/lbj-michigan/>



Teaching Notes: Central Idea Development

The goal of RI.8.2 is for students to analyze the development of a central idea of a text, including its relationship to supporting details. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classrooms and additional resources to integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities

1. Distribute to students copies of an op-ed article of your choice. While they read, individually or in small groups, have students indicate sentences that either directly state or imply the central idea of the text. Then, have them indicate sentences or phrases that offer supporting details (perhaps in a different colored pen or highlighter) and ask them to assess the connection.
2. Find an informational text about science or technology, and have students analyze the text's central idea, purpose, and supporting details. The difference with this type of text is that it should pinpoint the scientific or technological relevancy in the world today. What is the importance of this new finding, method, or device? How does the author support that claim?

Writing Prompts

1. Instead of using traditional text, find a video that students must watch, take notes on, and analyze. After students finish, have them summarize the video in a brief response that answers the following questions:
 - What is the central idea of the video? How can you tell?
 - How does the video support its central idea? How does the video use images to help support the claims?
 - Do the methods of analysis for text still apply to video? How is this process different from analyzing traditional texts?
2. Have students write their own brief informational text on a chosen topic. Task students with coming up with an appropriate title, central idea statement, and at least three supporting details that reinforce the central idea.

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching RI.8.2:

- **“RI.8.2”**: This resource from EngageNY.org (maintained by the New York State Education Department) provides many example lesson plans to be used in the classroom:
<https://www.engageny.org/ccls-ela/ri82>

