

Grade 4 Playlist: Summarizing a Text

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2*:

- Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

Welcome

Ruben reads a lot of books, but he rarely finds one that he really likes. He has just finished reading a book that he likes very much—so much that he cannot stop talking about it! One day, he is talking to Olivia in the lunchroom and she mentions that she saw the book on a display shelf at her local library. It looked interesting, and she asks him if he has read it. “I just finished it!” he exclaims. “It’s a great book. The main character has a different adventure in every chapter, and each one is so exciting!” Ruben continues to talk about the book for five minutes, giving Olivia many details from the story. As he continues to describe the book, he sees that Olivia looks a little confused. “It sounds like a good book,” she says. “But you still haven’t told me what it’s about!”

Objective

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- provide a summary of a literary text.

Review

Key Terms

- A **summary** is a short retelling of a story. In most cases, a good summary is no longer than four or five sentences.
 - When readers summarize a text, they must put it in their own words instead of just repeating the text. **Paraphrasing** is repeating the same information in different words.
 - It is very important that a summary be **objective**. This means that it should not be written from any particular point of view, and it should not include opinions like “This is a great story” or “It would be much better if this part were different.”

Watch!

To learn more about writing a summary, watch these videos:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=1&v=Dbf_Jby-OS0
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGWO1ldEhtQ>

Exploring the Standard

In order to explain what a story is mostly about, a reader must determine which details are the most important. Including a theme may also be helpful. Then, a reader should tell the story using his or her own words.



A Closer Look: What a Summary Includes

Every summary should explain what the main idea of the story is. A summary should include the most important events (the plot), the characters, and the settings (where the story takes place) of a story. Ask: *Would a summary of the story make sense without this information?* If the answer is no, then those are details that should be added to a summary.

When explaining the plot of a story, describe the problem of a story and how it is solved. The characters whose actions and motivations are important to the progression of the story should be mentioned. At the very least, the main setting of the story should be included as well. However, sometimes a story may have several settings. Ask: *How important is each setting to the action of the story?*

Example 1

This fable by Aesop is called “The Cat, the Cock, and the Young Mouse.” While reading, think about the story’s theme, setting, characters, and events, and decide which details should be included in a summary of the story.

¹A very young Mouse, who had never seen anything of the world, almost came to grief the very first time he ventured out. And this is the story he told his mother about his adventures.

²“I was strolling along very peaceably when, just as I turned the corner into the next yard, I saw two strange creatures. One of them had a very kind and gracious look, but the other was the most fearful monster you can imagine. You should have seen him.

³“On top of his head and in front of his neck hung pieces of raw red meat. He walked about restlessly, tearing up the ground with his toes, and beating his arms savagely against his sides. The moment he caught sight of me he opened his pointed mouth as if to swallow me, and then he let out a piercing roar that frightened me almost to death.”

⁴Can you guess who it was that our young Mouse was trying to describe to his mother? It was nobody but the Barnyard Cock, and the first one the little Mouse had ever seen.

⁵“If it had not been for that terrible monster,” the Mouse went on, “I should have made the acquaintance of the pretty creature, who looked so good and gentle. He had thick, velvety fur, a meek face, and a look that was very modest, though his eyes were bright and shining. As he looked at me he waved his fine long tail and smiled.

⁶“I am sure he was just about to speak to me when the monster I have told you about let out a screaming yell, and I ran for my life.”

⁷“My son,” said the Mother Mouse, “that gentle creature you saw was none other than the Cat. Under his kindly appearance, he bears a grudge against every one of us. The other was nothing but a bird who wouldn’t harm you in the least. As for the Cat, he eats us. So be thankful, my child, that you escaped with your life, and, as long as you live, never judge people by their looks.”



Teaching Notes: Summarizing a Text

This playlist discusses writing a summary of a text, including which details to include and exclude from a summary. Students should be able to write summaries that are complete, objective, and no longer than five sentences.

Theme vs. Summary

In the case of very short stories, such as the fables of Aesop, summaries should be much shorter than five sentences. (Some of Aesop's fables are shorter than this in their entirety!) In some cases, a summary can be only one or two sentences. However, it is important to distinguish a summary from a theme. Consider the following table, which lists a few well-known fables by Aesop, and use these examples to teach the students about the relationship between theme and summary:

"The Crow and the Pitcher"	<p>Theme: Little by little does the trick.</p> <p>Summary: A thirsty crow is unable to reach the water at the bottom of a pitcher, so he collects pebbles and drops them in the pitcher to raise the water level.</p>
"The Lion and the Mouse"	<p>Theme: Little friends may prove great friends.</p> <p>Summary: A lion spares the life of a tiny mouse who promises to help him someday, although he thinks it ridiculous that he will ever need the help of a mouse. The mouse later helps free the lion from a net.</p>
"The Fox and the Grapes"	<p>Theme: It is easy to despise what you cannot get.</p> <p>Summary: A fox tries very hard to reach a bunch of grapes that hangs out of reach before realizing that he cannot, but he tells himself that he never wanted the grapes because they were sour.</p>

Practice! Answer Key

The sentence "The first animal scares the young mouse away before he can meet the second animal" would give additional information that might be helpful to a person who is unfamiliar with the story. The other sentence, "It is hard for me to believe that a mouse would be afraid of a rooster and not a cat," should not be included in a summary because it is not objective.

Additional Teaching Resources

The following resources give tips and strategies for teaching summarization to students at a variety of grade levels:

- <https://wvde.state.wv.us/strategybank/summarization.html>
- <http://www.readingquest.org/strat/summarize.html>
- <https://teal.ed.gov/tealguide/teachsumm>

