

Grade 7 Playlist: Finding the Central Idea

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.2*:

- Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

Welcome

Nonfiction writing can be very dense—full of facts, statistics, and expert opinions to use as evidence to support the claims made in the text and to give the author credibility. With all of this information, it can sometimes be difficult to determine what the text is about! That’s why it is so important to determine the central idea of the text and how the author develops it.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text.

Review

Key Terms

- A nonfiction text’s **central idea** is the overall message that the author wants to send to the reader. In other words, it describes what the author wants the reader to know about the subject they are writing about.
 - Some central ideas are **stated**. This means that the author simply tells the reader what the text is about in one or two sentences of the text. Other times, the main idea is **implied**. An implied main idea is more difficult for the reader to determine because it is not spelled out in the text.

Exploring the Standard

Often, in an informational text with multiple paragraphs, each paragraph has its own central idea. They are tied together and support the central idea of the entire text. However, informational texts can contain two or even more central ideas. The way to determine these central ideas is to analyze key details in the text.

Watch!

Watch this video to learn more about central ideas in nonfiction:

- <https://www.opened.com/video/central-idea-in-nonfiction/1551454>

A Closer Look: Stated and Implied Central Ideas

If an informational text has an implied central idea, the best way to determine what it is is by asking questions and finding answers within the text. Start with the following: “Who?” “What?” “Where?” “When?” “Why?” and “How?”



But if the text’s central idea is stated, it is much easier to find. Stated central ideas are often given to the reader in the first sentence or elsewhere in the introductory paragraph. An author might state the text’s central idea right in the title!

Practice!

Complete this activity to practice reading and analyzing informational text:

- <https://www.opened.com/homework/7-ri-1-cite-several-pieces-of-textual-evidence-to-support/3712069>

Example

This informational text from the National Park Service is titled “*Alamosaurus*.” Read the text and try to determine the central idea. First, look for a stated central idea (don’t forget the title!). Then, examine the details and ask questions about the text to determine what message each paragraph gives.

¹*Alamosaurus* belongs to the group of dinosaurs named Sauropods—large herbivores with extremely long necks and tails. *Alamosaurus* is the only known sauropod in North America from this time period (Upper Cretaceous).

²*Alamosaurus* was named after Ojo Alamo (Cottonwood Spring) in New Mexico, where the first specimens were found early in 1922. Other *Alamosaurus* fossils have been found in Utah, Wyoming, and the Big Bend region of Texas. Adults were probably about 70 feet long.

³All North American sauropods died out about 105 million years ago. Then, after a 35–40 million year gap, *Alamosaurus* appeared in North America about 70 million years ago. (All dinosaurs became extinct about 65 million years ago.) Some scientists believe that *Alamosaurus* migrated into North America from South America after the two continents were joined together by the Isthmus of Panama. This view is supported by the fact that *Alamosaurus* belongs to the titanosaurid family of sauropods, and titanosaurids were common in South America during the Cretaceous time period.

Big Bend’s *Alamosaurus*

⁴In 1999, Dana Biasetti, a graduate student from the University of Texas at Dallas, discovered giant dinosaur bones protruding from a dry hillside in the Javelina Formation of Big Bend National Park. Upon careful excavation, this hillside yielded partial pelvic bones and ten articulated cervical vertebrae of an adult *Alamosaurus*. The Big Bend *alamosaurus* appears to have been a massive individual, measuring in at 100 feet in length and probably weighing over 50 tons.

⁵Due to their extreme size and the remote location of the fossil site, excavation and removal of these giant bones by hand was nearly impossible. As a result, Big Bend National Park issued a special permit to the excavation team to remove the fossil by helicopter. In 2001, UT Dallas, now teamed with the Dallas Museum of Natural History, made history with Big Bend’s first ever “dinosaur airlift.”

⁶The *alamosaurus* fossil was transported on a flatbed truck to the Dallas Museum of Natural History. The specimen remains the property of the National Park Service, but is loaned to the researchers so that it can be properly prepared and studied at the spacious museum. When the study is complete, the fossil or a replica will be returned to Big Bend National Park for display.



Teacher Notes: Finding the Central Idea

The goal of RI.7.2 is for students to be able to determine two or more central ideas in an informational text. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classrooms as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities

1. Assign each student a small, one-paragraph article from a local newspaper or news magazine. Have them make a list of the questions that the author asks in the article. Then, have them use the answers to these questions to determine the central idea of the paragraph.
2. Divide the students into groups. Assign each group a multi-paragraph article. It should be long enough for each student to have at least one paragraph. Each student will take one paragraph and determine the central idea of that paragraph. Then, as a group, the students will determine the central idea of the entire article and describe how it relates to that of each paragraph.

Writing Prompts

1. Have each student write a multi-paragraph essay on an informational topic of their choosing. Instruct the students to include a stated central idea, either in the title of the text or within the text itself. Then, ask them to rewrite their informational text, this time making the central idea implied rather than stated while maintaining the conventions of the original text.
2. Present the students with a generic central idea. Then, have them build an outline for an essay that would include this central idea. The outline should build upon the topic with at least one additional central idea.

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching RI.7.2:

“Scaffold Mini-Lesson Concepts to Teach Main Idea”: This resource gives ideas for how to teach students about central ideas in informational texts.

- <http://www.smekenseducation.com/scaffold-mini-lesson-concepts-to-teach-main-idea.html>

“Reading Skills: Main Idea for Middle School Students”: This resource provides materials to aid in teaching the concept of central ideas to seventh-grade students:

- <https://ethemes.missouri.edu/themes/1954?locale=en-US>

