

Grade 7 Playlist: Determining Central Ideas

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

A nonfiction text makes claims that are supported with evidence. This evidence is given in the form of key details—facts, statistics, and expert opinions. These details can create a lot of words to stumble through. But whatever information the author gives, its purpose is to support the overall message that they are trying to make to the reader. In some texts, the author may have more than one message to send. It is crucial to determine what the author’s messages are in order to understand the text itself.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

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

Review

Key Terms

- A nonfiction text’s **central idea** is the overall message that the author wants to make to the reader. In other words, it describes what the author wants the reader to know about the subject he or she is writing about.
 - Some central ideas are **stated**. This means that the author directly 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 directly stated in the text.
- An **analysis** of a text involves examining it and the details within it very closely. When analyzing a text, the reader “takes it apart” and studies every detail and its relation to the text as a whole.

Practice!

Complete this activity to practice reading and analyzing nonfiction:

- <https://www.opened.com/homework/7-ri-2-determine-two-or-more-central-ideas-in-a-text-and/3712070>



Exploring the Standard

In a typical nonfiction text with multiple paragraphs, each paragraph has its own central idea. Together, these central ideas support the central idea of the text as a whole. This does not mean that every full text has to have one single central idea. After analyzing the text and its key details, the reader often can determine that a single text can have more than one central idea, or overall message that the author wants to make. These central ideas usually relate to each other, and always relate to the topic of the text itself.

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

“Who?” “What?” “Where?” “When?” “Why?” “How?” These are simple questions, but asking them is the easiest way to learn what the author is trying to say. If a text has an implied main idea, you will have to read between the lines to discover it yourself.

A stated idea, on the other hand, does not require as many questions. Sometimes it can be found in the text’s first sentence, elsewhere in the introduction, or even in the title itself. If an author wants to give a reader the message that the most delicious food on the planet is pizza, an essay with the title “Pizza: The Tastiest Food on Earth!” would be a great way to let the reader know.

Example

This informational text, from the National Park Service, is titled “Effects of Noise.” Read the text and try to determine the central idea. First, look for a stated central idea (do not forget the title!). Then, examine the details and ask questions about the text to determine the messages that the text gives.

That old expression, “The early bird gets the worm,” turns out to be truer than ever in urban settings today. In fact, recent studies are finding that some birds in noisy environments have taken to singing at night in order to be heard over the din of the city.

Sound, just like the availability of nesting materials or food sources, plays an important role in the ecosystem. Activities such as finding desirable habitat and mates, avoiding predators, protecting young, and establishing territories are all dependent on the acoustical environment. In order to continue with these activities, animals are being forced to adapt to increasing noise levels. Research shows that males of at least one frog species are adapting to traffic noise by calling at a higher pitch. This could be problematic for the females, because they prefer lower-pitched calls, which indicate larger and more experienced males. Human-caused noise has produced similar results in multiple bird species.

In general, a growing number of studies indicate that wildlife, like humans, is stressed by a noisy environment. The endangered Sonoran pronghorn avoids noisy areas frequented by military jets; female frogs exposed to traffic noise have more difficulty locating the male’s signal; gleaning bats avoid hunting in areas with road noise. When these effects are combined with other stressors such as winter weather, disease, and food shortages, sound impacts can have important implications for the health and vitality of wildlife populations within a park.



Teacher Notes: Determining Central Ideas

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 brief, two- to three-paragraph informational text on a 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 central idea to seventh-grade students.

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

