

Grade 4 Playlist: Main Idea and Key Details

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.2:

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

Welcome

When students want to learn about a topic, like baseball, giraffes, or the environment, they could read a book on the subject. Authors write nonfiction texts to teach their readers. They carefully select details and information to give readers knowledge. Interested and curious readers can best understand a topic when they identify the main idea and key details.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- identify the main idea of an informational text.
- identify key details that support the main idea.
- explain how key details support the main idea.

Review

Key Terms

- The **main idea** is what the text is mostly about.
- A **key detail** gives important information about the main idea.
- The **topic sentence** is a sentence that states the main idea.

Exploring the Standard

The main idea is the point that an author is trying to make in a paragraph or a passage. An author develops the main idea with key details. Key details can be facts, reasons, or examples. To best understand a passage, readers should identify the main idea and its key details. A main idea can be found in the title of the passage or in a topic sentence.

Watch!

Watch this video to learn how to identify the main idea of a paragraph:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yN7o7uGgD4>



A Closer Look: Topic Sentence

A topic sentence states the main idea of a paragraph or a passage. Topic sentences usually appear at the beginning of a paragraph or passage.

Caution!

Sometimes, a topic sentence appears in the middle of a paragraph or a passage. It can also appear at the end.

Example 1

This passage is from *Ten Common Trees* by Susan Stokes. First, think about the title of the book. Then, read the paragraphs. What is the topic? What is the main idea? Which details support the main idea?

¹Willows drink a large amount of water. For this reason, they live on the banks of streams, where their roots help to hold the soil when the melting snows fill the stream and threaten to wash everything away.

²They also are frequently found in soils which hold a large amount of water. Much of it is drawn into the tree and thrown off through the leaves. This helps to make new clouds.

The topic is willow trees. Willow is one of the ten common trees. The topic sentence in paragraph 1 tells readers the main idea: “Willows drink a large amount of water.”

In the rest of the example, key details help develop this main idea. For example, the second sentence in paragraph 1 explains why willows live on the banks of streams: because they drink a large amount of water. The detail “they live on the banks of streams” supports the main idea.

The diagram below shows the main idea and the key details that support it.

Main Idea		
Willows drink a large amount of water.		
Key Detail	Key Detail	Key Detail
They live on the banks of streams.	They are found in soils that hold a large amount of water.	They throw water off through their leaves to help make new clouds.

A Closer Look: Key Details

Sometimes, the main idea is not stated in a topic sentence, but readers still need to identify it. How can they do that without a clear topic sentence? Readers can begin by reading the entire paragraph and finding key details. The key details can then suggest and explain the main idea.

