

PART ONE: Think About Main Idea

WHAT IS MAIN IDEA?

Stories, poems, and articles all have a main idea. A movie or television show also has a main idea. **The main idea tells what something is mostly about.**

★ Write the name of a book you have read in school or at home.

★ Write some of the things that happen in the book.

★ Tell what the book is mostly about.

You just wrote about main idea!



Tell your partner about a movie you have seen or a TV show you have watched. Then take turns telling the main idea of the movie or TV show. Try to tell your main idea in one sentence.

PART TWO: Learn About Main Idea

Read what Louis wrote about frogs. As you read, think about the most important idea in the paragraph.

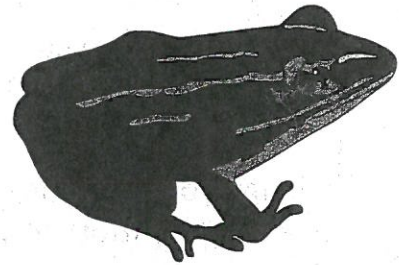
Frogs change as they grow. Frogs begin as eggs. A frog egg looks like a tiny black dot in jelly. In time, a frog egg changes into a tadpole. A tadpole has a tail. It breathes underwater and has gills like a fish. Later, the tadpole develops legs, and its tail gets shorter. It grows lungs to replace its gills. The tadpole is now a frog that can live on land.



egg



tadpole



frog

The most important idea in Louis's paragraph is **Frogs change as they grow.**

The most important idea in a paragraph is called the **main idea**.

The main idea tells what a paragraph is mostly or mainly about.

- ★ The main idea is **sometimes** found in the **first sentence** of a paragraph.
- ★ The main idea is **sometimes** found in the **last sentence** of a paragraph.
- ★ The main idea is **sometimes not found in the paragraph**. You can figure out the main idea by thinking about the most important idea in the paragraph.

PART THREE: Check Your Understanding

Remember: The main idea tells what a paragraph is mostly or mainly about.

- ★ Read the first sentence of the paragraph. The main idea is sometimes found here.
- ★ Read the last sentence of the paragraph. The main idea is sometimes found here.
- ★ Sometimes, the main idea is not found in a sentence from the paragraph. You can figure out the main idea by thinking about the most important idea in the paragraph.

Read this article about celebrations. As you read, ask yourself, "What is the article mostly about?" Then answer the questions.

When do you celebrate the new year? In the United States, Europe, and Japan, most people celebrate the new year on January 1. In China, the new year begins sometime between the middle of February and the middle of March. Jewish people celebrate the Jewish new year in the fall. In Iran, the new year begins on the first day of spring.



3. What is the article mostly about?

- Ⓐ countries that celebrate the new year on January 1
- Ⓑ why the new year begins on a different day each year
- Ⓒ different times that the new year is celebrated
- Ⓓ people who begin the new year in the fall

4. Where or how did you find the main idea?

- Ⓐ in the first sentence of the paragraph
- Ⓑ in the last sentence of the paragraph
- Ⓒ in the middle of the paragraph
- Ⓓ by thinking about the most important idea in the paragraph

PART FOUR: Learn More About Main Idea

- ★ Each paragraph in a reading passage has one main idea. The whole reading passage also has one main idea. The main idea of a whole reading passage is often found in the first or last paragraph.
- ★ The title of a reading passage tells something about the main idea.

Read this article about birds. Then answer the questions.

Outside and Inside

Birds have two kinds of feathers. The outside feathers help keep the bird dry. These feathers cover each other. They form a kind of raincoat for the bird. These outside feathers are flat and smooth.

Under these outside feathers is a different kind of feather. These feathers are called "down." Down feathers are soft and fluffy. Down feathers are right next to the bird's skin. The down keeps the bird warm. Baby birds have only down feathers. As they get bigger, their outer feathers grow in.



5. What is the main idea of the first paragraph?
 - (A) Outside feathers are flat and smooth.
 - (B) Outside feathers keep birds dry.
 - (C) Feathers keep a bird dry.
 - (D) Birds have feathers.
6. What is the main idea of the last paragraph?
 - (A) Down feathers keep birds warm.
 - (B) Down feathers are fluffy.
 - (C) Feathers keep birds warm.
 - (D) Baby birds have only down feathers.
7. What is the article mostly about?
 - (A) As birds get bigger, their outer feathers grow in.
 - (B) Birds have two kinds of feathers.
 - (C) All birds have feathers.
 - (D) Feathers are called "down."
8. What is another good title for this article?
 - (A) "Baby Birds"
 - (B) "Where to Find Birds"
 - (C) "How Birds Fly"
 - (D) "All About Feathers"



PART FIVE: Prepare for a Test

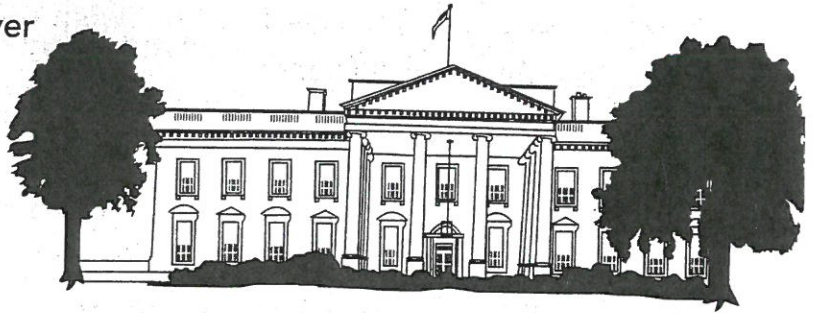
- ★ A test question about the main idea may ask you what a reading passage is *mostly* or *mainly* about.
- ★ A test question about the main idea may ask you to choose the best title for a reading passage. A good title tells something about the main idea of the whole reading passage.

Read this article about a famous house. Then answer questions about the article. Choose the best answer for Numbers 13 and 14.

The White House is the most famous home in the United States. It is where the President and his family live.

The President's home was not always called the White House. At different times, it was called the President's Mansion, the President's Palace, and the President's House.

The President's House was burned by the British in 1812. Workers painted it bright white to cover the black walls. Soon, people began to call the building the White House. The name stuck. In time, the name was officially changed to the White House.



Finding Main Idea

13. The article is mostly about
- Ⓐ where the president lives.
 - Ⓑ how the White House got its name.
 - Ⓒ when the White House was burned.
 - Ⓓ who painted the White House.

Finding Main Idea

14. What is the best title for the article?
- Ⓐ "Famous Homes"
 - Ⓑ "The President's Mansion"
 - Ⓒ "One Famous House, Many Names"
 - Ⓓ "Mansions and Palaces"

Main Idea

Main Idea

Details

1)

2)

3)

4)

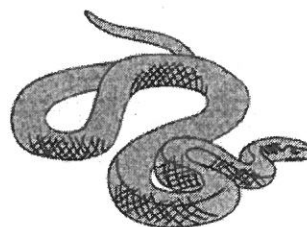
5)

Main Idea & Details

Name: _____

Directions: Write the main idea question for each paragraph. Use the Main Idea bank to help you.

- * What do snakes look like?
- * How do snakes eat their food?
- * Where do snakes live?



1. _____

Snakes eat their prey whole. Their teeth are rear-facing, which helps keep their prey in their mouths. Snakes hunt mostly at night.

2. _____

Most snakes live in tropical areas that are hot and moist. They also live in forests, prairies and deserts. There are no snakes in Antarctica, Iceland or Ireland.

3. _____

Snakes are flexible reptiles. They come in many different colors, and the poisonous ones are usually venomous. Snakes can be as small as two inches, or as long as 38 feet!

Main Idea & Details



Name: _____

Directions: Write the main idea question for each paragraph. Use the Main Idea bank to help you.

- * What do killer whales like to eat?
- * What does a killer whale do?
- * What are baby killer whales like?

1. _____

It takes anywhere from 13-16 months for a baby killer whale to be born. They are called calves. A calf is born in the fall and can weigh up to 400 pounds. A calf stays with its mother for two years.

2. _____

Killer whales live in pods. They travel all over the earth's oceans. The leader of the pod is a female. Some pods can have more than 100 members.

3. _____

Killer whales hunt their food using echolocation. Fish, seals, squid and birds are some of their favorite meals. Sometimes a killer whale will slide out of the water onto the shore to catch its prey.

Main Idea & Details

Name: _____

Directions: Read each detail sentence. Choose the main idea from the box that each detail best goes with.

A. Animals prepare for winter in the autumn.

B. People prepare for winter in the fall.

1. _____ Gardens are harvested and cleaned up.
2. _____ Squirrels store seeds and nuts.
3. _____ The apples are picked from the orchard.
4. _____ Leaves must be raked.
5. _____ Bears prepare to hibernate.
6. _____ Geese migrate south.

Bonus: Write a paragraph using one topic sentence from the box and the three details. Add a closing sentence.

Main Idea & Details

Name: _____

Underline the main idea for each paragraph in GREEN. Underline each detail in YELLOW.

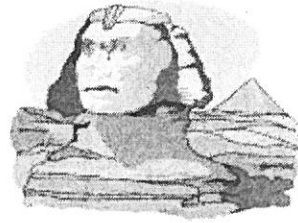


1. The Vikings were sailors from Denmark, Norway and Sweden. They are known mostly as raiders, but they also traded and explored. One of their greatest things were their ships that could handle long ocean voyages. Clearly the Vikings were interesting people.
2. Sometimes Vikings would sail for days across the open waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Their Longship was the perfect boat for this. It was a racing warship that was about 80 feet long. The square sail allowed it to move very fast. This boat could also go through rivers and land on any sandy shore.
3. Most Vikings lived in the country in longhouses. Their homes were made of peat blocks and wooden planks. Beds were only used in very wealthy Viking households. A central fire kept it the house warm and a hole in the roof let smoke out. Would you like to have lived in a longhouse?

Main Idea & Details

Name: _____

Underline the main idea for each paragraph in GREEN. Underline each detail in YELLOW.



1. Do you like playing checkers? Children in ancient Egypt had many games they liked to play. Some were fitness games like hockey, but they used palm tree branches for sticks. Other games were board games, such as Dogs and Jackals. Senet was another game many people enjoyed.
2. You probably wouldn't live long if you were born in ancient Egypt. If a baby was lucky enough to live the first year, it was considered to be a blessing from the gods. Also, most bathrooms drained into fields that food was grown in, so there were lots of diseases. As well, people usually didn't live past the age of 40. It was a rough life!
3. Have you ever worn braids? Egyptian women loved them. Children wore a side-lock until around 12 years old. Men usually wore their hair very short, unless they were a slave. There were many different styles of hair in ancient Egypt.