



# Using Details to Identify Main Idea

## Overview

This is a series of two 15-minute interventions to support students as they use details to help identify the main idea.

## Materials

- Any informational instructional-level text

## Procedures

### Day 1

1. Model how the main idea can grow out of two or more paragraphs.
2. Discuss that the main idea is a key point or concept in the text.
3. Show how details and text features such as headings, photographs, and boxes can help you figure out the main idea. For example, break the thinking process into a few steps. Show how the image supports the text and the main idea or how the subheadings break the details into pieces to support the main idea.
4. Have the student explain what you did and how text features support your thinking.

### Day 2

1. Ask the student to use photographs, text features, and text to figure out the main ideas in several other parts of the book.
2. By the end of the intervention session, the student can hopefully figure out main ideas without any prompting from you. If that is the case, schedule two five-minute conferences to have the student practice with different texts to ensure independence.

3. If he or she cannot work independently, return to modeling and find a different text to use, making sure that the student had enough background knowledge to learn from the new text and to identify main ideas.

## Scaffolding Suggestions

- Review the meaning of the main idea: the central purpose or key concept that one or more paragraphs express.
- Show the student how you use details in a paragraph to determine the main idea. Explain that, often, the main idea of a paragraph is in the first or last sentence.
- Have the student practice finding the main idea paragraph by paragraph, always pointing to details that helped.
- Show the student details from the text and discuss what details are.
- Have the student read headings and predict the kind of details he or she will find in a section.
- Have the student use photographs and captions, charts, diagrams, etc. to think of the details these features highlight. Have him or her find more details in the text that relate to the features.



# Using Details to Identify Main Idea *(cont.)*



Two 15-Minute Interventions

## Chapter 4

### Classroom Snapshot: 15-Minute Intervention

While making the rounds, I discovered that a fifth-grade student found finding the main idea challenging. First, I conducted a five-minute investigative conference to determine the type of intervention I felt would benefit the student. I discovered that the student, Emma, expected the main idea to be the first sentence of each paragraph. My plan was to schedule two consecutive 15-minute conferences, assess where the student was with the process, and decide how to proceed.

In the first intervention, I showed how details and text features such as headings, photographs, and boxes can help you figure out the main idea. Then I had Emma repeat/explain what I did. She responded by saying, “The main idea is an important idea. You found it by looking at photos, captions, boxes, and headings. It looked easy for you. I’m not sure I can do this.”

To boost her self-confidence, I praised her for listening carefully and recalling what I did. Then, I broke the thinking process into a few steps. First, I asked her to study the photographs and illustration on pages 8–9 and think of a main idea: “She [Jane] loved all kinds of animals.” I tell her that if she can find a main idea with pictures, she can do it by reading page 8 and the box on page 9. “I got one about the mom—she respected Jane’s love of animals and encouraged Jane’s love of animals.”

I ask, “How did you figure that out?”

“Well, when her mom found that Jane had earthworms in bed with her, she (her mom) didn’t get angry. I think it’s because her mom loved animals.” I tell the student that I notice how well she used details to figure out a main idea.

By the end of the intervention session, Emma could figure out main ideas without any prompting from me.