

Main idea

Stage 2

Learning focus

Students will learn to find the main idea in persuasive, imaginative and informative texts. Students will use the strategies of scanning to quickly identify the main ideas in a text, and skimming to find key words.

Syllabus outcome

The following teaching and learning strategies will assist in covering elements of the following outcomes:

- EN2-4A: uses an increasing range of skills, strategies and knowledge to fluently read, view and comprehend a range of texts on increasingly challenging topics in different media and technologies.

Year 3 NAPLAN item descriptors

- identifies the main idea of a text
- identifies the main idea of each paragraph in an information text
- identifies the main idea of a section of an information text
- identifies the main idea of an information text
- identifies the main idea of a poster
- identifies the main idea of a persuasive discussion
- identifies the main idea of a paragraph in a persuasive text
- identifies the main idea of a narrative
- evaluates the presence of information in an information text

Literacy Learning Progression guide

Understanding Texts (UnT6-UnT9)

Key: C=comprehension P=process V=vocabulary

UnT6

- reads and views simple texts and some predictable texts (see Text Complexity) (C)
- locates specific information in a predictable text or a given set of digital sources (C)
- recounts or describes the most relevant details from a text (C)

UnT7

- identifies the main idea in a predictable text (C)
- reads and views predictable texts and some moderately complex texts (See Text Complexity) (C)

UnT8

- reads and views some moderately complex texts (C)
- accurately retells a text including most relevant details (C)

UnT9

- identifies the main themes or concepts in moderately complex texts (C)

Resources

- 'A picture paints a thousand words' image - Appendix 1
- 'A picture paints a thousand words' student images - Appendix 2
- 'The Tree of Life' text and teacher guide - Appendix 3
- identifying main idea: paragraph level - Appendix 4
- identifying main Idea: whole text level - Appendix 5

Background information

Main idea

Being able to determine the main idea helps readers to recall important information. Locating the main idea and significant details helps the reader understand the points the writer is attempting to express. Identifying the relationship between the main idea and significant details will improve comprehension.

Following is a model of explicit instruction for teaching students how to determine main idea. Students begin by learning the definition of main idea and then how to apply this definition to identify the main idea in sentences and short texts. The ability to identify the main idea in a text, whether it is stated directly or inferred, is critical for students to gain meaning when reading.

Students need to develop a main idea statement based on the following information:

- who or what the paragraph is about (the topic of the paragraph, which will usually be the subject of the main idea statement).
- the most important information about the 'who' or 'what'.

Students are taught to combine the above elements into a main idea statement with 10 words or less, eliminating nonessential details.

The following teaching steps are adapted from Denton, C., Bryan, D., Wexler, J., Reed, D., Vaughn, S. (2007) Effective instruction for middle school students with reading difficulties: The reading teacher's sourcebook. University of Texas Systems/Texas Education Agency.

(Centre for Effective Reading: Comprehension strategies Middle Years).

Skimming

Skimming happens when the reader is unfamiliar with a text and quickly peruses the text to determine the general idea. Some strategies to use include:

- read the first and last paragraphs
- look for general information
- use headlines, page layout, graphs, diagrams and charts, pictures, highlights

Scanning

Scanning occurs when the reader already has prior knowledge and wants to find out more. The reader scans the text to find specific information and key words. Strategies to use include:

- look over the text quickly to locate words and sentences that link to what you need to find out
- use contents pages, first and last sentences in a paragraph, subheadings, captions, bold key words, hyperlinks etc.

Where to next?

- Literal comprehension
- Inference
- Author perspective

Teaching strategies

A picture paints a thousand words

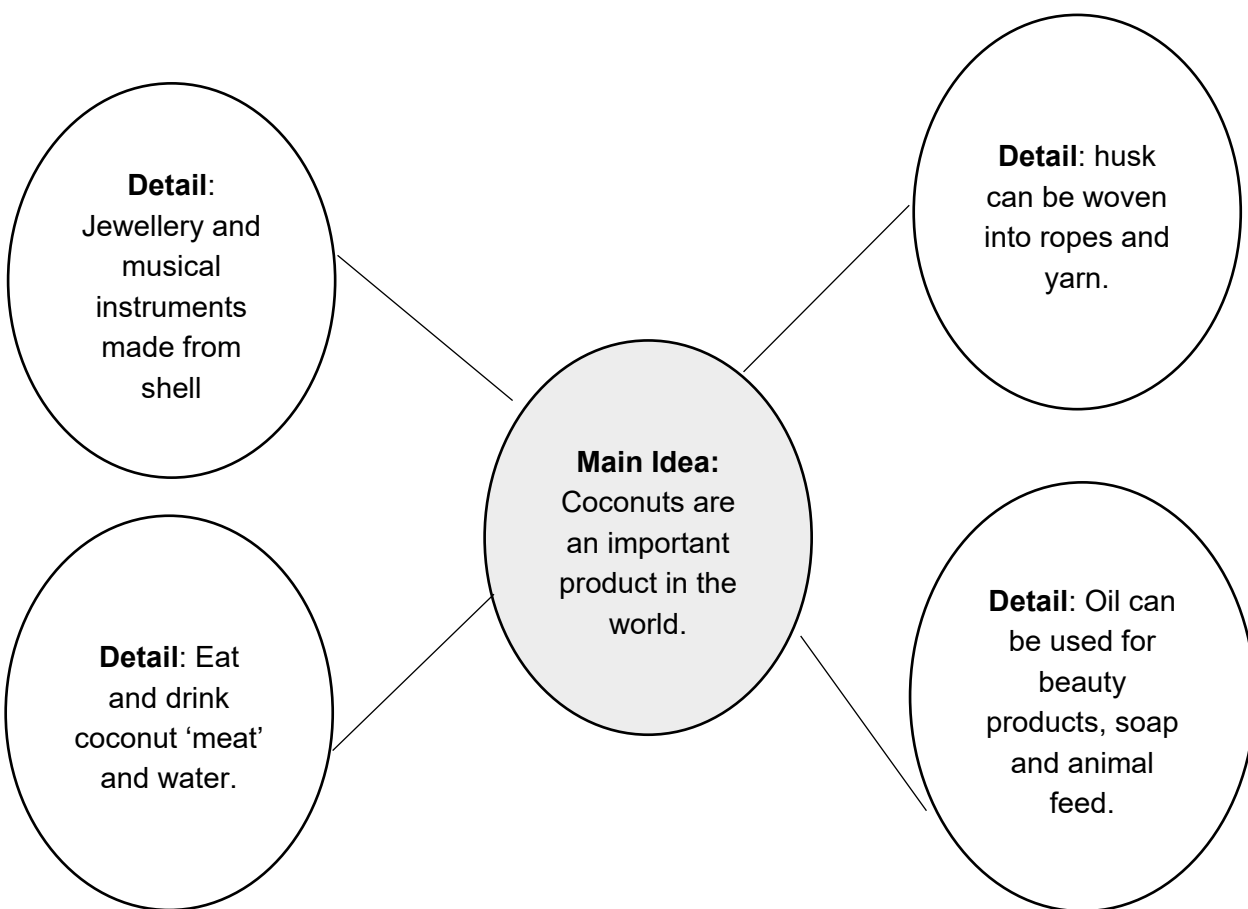
1. Teacher presents 'A picture paints a thousand words' image (see Appendix 1) for students to predict what might be happening. Teacher prompts with questions such as:
 - Who do you think is involved in this image?
 - What might be happening?
 - What do you think happened before this?
 - What might happen after this image?
 - What is the meaning /message of this image?
2. Teacher provides a range of images for students to respond to (see Appendix 2). This can be done as a *gallery walk* where students build upon each other's ideas.

Skimming and scanning

1. Teacher models *skimming* using a selection of unfamiliar texts including websites. Teacher selects a range of texts on a current topic, for example, texts on local geographical locations. Students are encouraged to read the first and last paragraphs, look for general information and use the headlines and other layout features to practise skimming. Students use sticky notes to indicate the main idea of each text.
2. Teacher models *scanning* a text currently being used in teaching and learning. Allocate a colour of sticky notes for different topics of the texts chosen, for example, if texts are based around local geographical sites, the different topics may be: location = green, tourism = blue, sustainability = yellow, Aboriginal significance = red etc. Allocate students with a topic to scan texts to identify, and use the coloured sticky notes to indicate, where information related to their topic can be found.

Identifying the main idea in paragraphs and sections

1. Teacher models skimming and scanning 'The Tree of Life' using the teacher guide to support discussion (Appendix 3). Draw attention to where information can be found: diagrams, headings, sub-headings, illustrations. Teacher uses a think aloud strategy to identify the general 'gist' or main idea of the text: *"If I need to think of one sentence to explain what the text is about, I would underline the first sentence: A large part of the world's population depends on the coconut." This sentence is supported by the details in the text that we can use coconuts for cooking, drinking and making oil. So this sentence is the 'main idea' of the topic."*
2. Review the topic sentence and supporting sentences and discuss that the main idea is often found in the topic sentence and is supported/reinforced within the paragraph. It is often reinforced with the last sentence of the paragraph.
3. Students guide teacher to put this information in a concept map:



4. Students find the main idea in a range of texts (see Appendix 4). Students identify vocabulary, and details in a text to build an understanding of the main idea.

Identifying main idea in whole texts

1. Teacher demonstrates how to find the main idea in a whole text using a think aloud process (see Appendix 5). Teacher identifies key and repeated vocabulary and supporting details found in the text to build an understanding of the main idea of the text.
2. Students use examples from Appendix 5 to apply learning. Share and discuss.
Alternate Task: Appendix 5 can be enlarged and put on posters around the classroom as a gallery walk for students to add to.

Appendix 1

Teacher copy: A picture paints a thousand words



Image sourced from pobble.com, November 2019

What is this text about?	
What key information is in this image?	
What or who is involved?	
Where is this happening?	
What might have been happening before this?	

Appendix 2

Student copy: A picture paints a thousand words





Image by Tim Mossholder on Unsplash





Appendix 3

Identify the main idea: whole text

The tree of life

The coconut is actually the seed of a coconut palm tree. It was given its name by Spanish sailors who likened the three dents on the shell's base to a smiling monkey and named it 'coco' meaning monkey face.

A large part of the world's population depends on the coconut. The stringy tough brown husk (coir) can be woven into ropes and yarns for household goods. Jewellery and musical instruments can be created from the hardened shell. After it's dried, the tasty coconut meat is called copra. This copra produces oil which is used for cooking and beauty products, soap and animal feed. People also use coconut oil for its health benefits. The clear coconut water from fresh green coconuts is a delicious sweet drink.



Year 3 NAPLAN Reading Magazine, 2014 ACARA

The tree of life: Analysing a paragraph

Year 3 NAPLAN Reading magazine, 2014 ACARA

The tree of life	
<p>The coconut is actually the seed of a coconut palm tree. It was given its name by Spanish sailors who likened the three dents on the shell's base to a smiling monkey and named it 'coco' meaning monkey face.</p> <p>A large part of the world's population depends on the coconut. The stringy tough brown husk (coir) can be woven into ropes and yards for household goods. Jewellery and musical instruments can be created from the hardened shell. After it's dried, the tasty coconut meat is called copra. This copra produces oil which is used for cooking and beauty products, soap and animal feed. People also use coconut oil for its health benefits. The clear coconut water from fresh green coconuts is a delicious sweet drink.</p>	<p>Key vocabulary</p> <p>coconut, population, depends, husk, coir, shell, copra, oil, produces, health benefits, seed</p> <p>Repeated vocabulary</p> <p>Coconut, oil</p> <p>Important details</p> <p>Household goods, jewellery and musical instruments, cooking and beauty products, health benefits</p> <p>Main Idea</p> <p>A large part of the population depends of coconuts for their health benefits and for household goods.</p>

Analysing a paragraph

Some people think there is nothing to do in the outback. But they are so wrong! I'm already planning things that we can do together. We could visit the kangaroo orphanage and see the joeys. We could explore the opal fields and go digging and panning for gold. People in Coober Pedy call that 'noodling'. If it gets too hot, we can always visit my friend or make new ones. My friend, Mark, lives in a house under the ground. It is nice and cool inside. These are things you just can't experience in the city.

Key vocabulary		Repeated vocabulary	
Detail	Detail	Detail	
Main Idea			

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Analysing a paragraph

In the small village there lived a particularly unkind child. This particularly unkind child seemed to enjoy tripping, pushing, poking and generally annoying any passer-by. Almost every child in the class had experienced this unkindness and every child in the class now was very cautious around him. Even the class pet was cautious around him. There was only one person who had not experienced this unkindness. And oh boy was he was ready for the day.

Key vocabulary		Repeated vocabulary	
Detail	Detail	Detail	
Main Idea			

Analysing a paragraph

Bamboozled!

Bamboo is an amazing plant. Did you know it is actually a grass? In fact giant bamboo is the largest member of the grass family. Some types can grow an incredible 90 centimetres in just one day. Some bamboo plants can grow to over 30 metres tall, which is as tall as a gum tree.

Key Vocabulary		Repeated vocabulary	
Detail	Detail	Detail	
Main Idea			

Year 3 NAPLAN Reading magazine, 2014 ACARA

Appendix 4

Identify main idea in whole texts



Earthworms

Earthworms live in dark, damp soil. They have no arms, no legs and no eyes!

Earthworms make the soil healthy. They eat rotting plants and dirt. This food passes through the worms' bodies, adding extra goodness to the soil.

Earthworms have stiff hairs on their bodies. They use these hairs to grip the dirt and to wriggle their way through the ground. Their wriggling makes tunnels in the ground. The tunnels add air to the soil. The air helps the roots of plants to grow.

Many animals eat earthworms. Snakes, birds and frogs all eat them. They are even eaten by people in some countries.

Many people say that earthworms are the most important animals in the world.

Year 3 NAPLAN Reading magazine, 2014 ACARA

Annotated teacher copy: Identify main idea in whole texts

Earthworms	
<p>Earthworms live in dark, damp soil. They have no arms, no legs and no eyes!</p> <p>Earthworms make the soil healthy. They eat rotting plants and dirt. This food passes through the worms' bodies, adding extra goodness to the soil.</p> <p>Earthworms have still hairs on their bodies. They use these hairs to grip the dirt and wriggle their way through the ground. Their wriggling makes tunnels in the ground. The tunnels add air to the soil. The air helps the roots of plants to grow.</p> <p>Many animals eat earthworms. Snakes, birds and frogs eat all them. They are even eaten by people in some countries.</p> <p>Many people say that earthworms are the most important animals in the world.</p>	<p>Key vocabulary</p> <p>Earthworms, soil, healthy, rotting plants and dirt, goodness, hairs, grip, wriggle, tunnels, air, roots, eat, important</p> <p>Repeated vocabulary</p> <p>Soil, earthworms,, plants, ground, eaten</p> <p>Important details</p> <p>Earthworms live in dark, damp soil, adding goodness to the soil, eat rotting plants and dirt, air helps the roots of plants to grow, many animals eat earthworms.</p> <p>Main Idea</p> <p>Earthworms are one of the most important animals in the world as they are food and ensure food grows.</p>

Year 3 NAPLAN Reading magazine, 2014 ACARA

Student copy: Identify main idea in whole texts



Bamboo scaffolding



Bamboo bicycles



Bamboo boats



Bamboo chairs



Bamboozled!

Bamboo is an amazing plant. Did you know it is actually a grass? In fact giant bamboo is the largest member of the grass family. Some types can grow an incredible 90 centimetres in just one day. Some bamboo plants can grow to over 30 metres tall, which is as tall as a gum tree.

You probably know that bamboo is the favourite food of pandas, but chimpanzees, gorillas and elephants eat it too.

Bamboo is also extremely useful to people. It is a very valuable construction material because it is so strong. In fact, whole houses can be built from bamboo. In some parts of the world bamboo is used as scaffolding (the frame used to support building work).

The range of things that can be made from bamboo is huge. Furniture, cooking utensils, and musical instruments can all be made from bamboo. Bamboo fibres can be used to produce a soft, cotton-like material for T-shirts and underwear. Bamboo fibres are also used to make paper. Bamboo can even be used to make bicycle frames and boats.



Key vocabulary:

Repeated vocabulary:

Important details:

Main Idea

Identify main idea in whole texts (accessible version)

The range of things that can be made from bamboo is huge. Furniture, cooking utensils, and musical instruments can all be made from bamboo. Bamboo fibres

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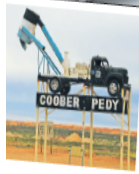
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Key vocabulary	Repeated vocabulary
Important details	Main idea

Year 3 NAPLAN Reading magazine, 2014 ACARA

Letter to Amy



Hi Amy

Guess what!

Mum and Dad said I can invite you to stay with us in the Christmas holidays. I know Coober Pedy is a long way from the city, but I'm sure you'll love it.

Some people think there is nothing to do in the outback. But they are so wrong! I'm already planning things that we can do together. We could visit the kangaroo orphanage and see the joeys. We could go digging for opals. People in Coober Pedy call that 'noodling'. If it gets too hot, we can visit my friend, Mani. He lives in a house under the ground. It's nice and cool inside. The best thing is that Mani has an underground swimming pool. I'm sure there aren't any underground houses in the city.

Dad said he could take us camping too. We could have a camp fire and look for shooting stars. We might even go camel riding. You'll be amazed at how much fun you can have here.

It would be fantastic if you could come and stay. I promise that you'll have more fun than you will ever have in your entire life!

Write back soon and tell me what you think.

From Alex

PS Just saw a shooting star and made a wish. Can you guess what it was?

Key vocabulary:

Repeated vocabulary:

Important details:

Main Idea

Identify main idea in whole texts (accessible version)

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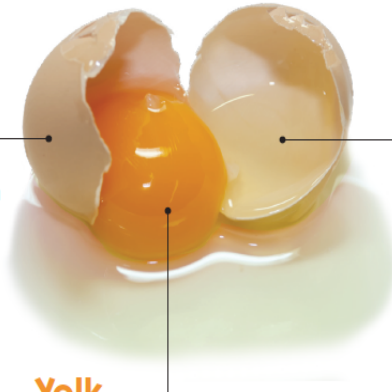
Student copy: Identify main idea in whole texts

Eggs

People all over the world eat eggs. Most of the eggs we eat come from hens. Eggs are easy to cook. They can be cooked in lots of ways such as fried, scrambled or hard-boiled. Eggs can be used with other things to make cakes, ice-cream and spaghetti.

Shell

The shell protects the egg. Shells can be brown or white.



White (albumen)

The eggwhite is mostly water, protein and some minerals. Before it is cooked, the white is not white; it is clear.

Yolk

The yolk has most of the egg's vitamins and minerals. The yolk can be pale yellow to dark orange. The colour depends on what the hen eats.

The fresh test

Put your egg in a saucepan of water and use the guide below to find out how old your egg is.

What happens to the egg	Age of egg
Sinks to the bottom of the pan and stays there	3-6 days old
Sinks, but floats at an angle	Just over 1 week old
Sinks, and then stands on end	About 2 weeks old
Floats on top or just under the surface	Over 2 weeks old

Eggs last a long time. You can keep them for about four weeks in your fridge.

Key vocabulary:

Repeated vocabulary:

Important details:

Main Idea

Identify main idea in whole texts (accessible version)

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Key vocabulary	Repeated vocabulary
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Year 3 NAPLAN Reading magazine, 2014 ACARA

Student copy: Identify main idea in whole text



Adopt-a-Dog



Candy
Size: small
Breed: Australian Terrier cross
Colour: black, white and tan
Age: 4 years old
Personality: gentle

Candy is a fun-loving dog who could come home with you straightaway – or in two wags of a tail. She is a much-loved pet but sadly, her family has moved overseas. Candy is now searching for a new family. Could Candy be the perfect pet you are looking for?

The Evans family found their perfect pet last year when they adopted a Labrador. Here’s what they said: “We love Rocky. He is really part of our family. He loves to be walked and to play with the kids.”

At Adopt-a-Dog we know that each of our furry friends will make a great addition to your family. Kids, are you having trouble convincing your parents? Tell them that Candy is friendlier than a cat, more interesting than a fish and cheaper to feed than a pony. And if you are lucky enough to take Candy home, you can even start using the excuse, “The dog ate my homework!”

We are proud to say that Adopt-a-Dog has helped more than 50 dogs to find a home this year. All our dogs have been to the vet so they are desexed, microchipped, vaccinated and wormed.

You can adopt Candy now for \$300.

You would have to be barking mad to miss out.

 Candy has our full 4 paws of approval.

Year 3 NAPLAN Reading Magazine, 2014 ACARA

Key vocabulary:

Repeated vocabulary:

Important details:

Main Idea

Identify main idea in whole texts (accessible version)

Adopt-a-Dog

Adopt-a-Dog,

0898761234

adoptadog@dogmail.com

Candy

Size: small

Breed: Australian Terrier cross

Colour: black, white and tan

Age: four years old

Personality: gentle

Candy is a fun-loving dog who could come home with you straightaway-or in two wags of a tail. She is a much-loved pet but sadly, her family has moved overseas. Candy is now searching for a new family. Could Candy be the perfect pet you are looking for?

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We are proud to say that Adopt-a-Dog has helped more than fifty dogs to find a home this year. All our dogs have been to the vet so they are desexed, microchipped, vaccinated and wormed.

You can adopt Candy now for three hundred dollars.

You would have to be barking mad to miss out.

Candy has our full four paws of approval

Key vocabulary	Repeated vocabulary
Important details	Main idea