

# Cook's Corner

## What's the Main Idea?

December

Identifying main idea and supporting details is an important part of reading comprehension. State-mandated tests often assess whether or not students are able to find the main argument of a piece of writing and identify the information that supports it. Thus, developing this skill at an early age will allow your children to excel at reading and comprehension.



The main idea of a piece of writing is the central point the author tries to make. This can be an opinion, argument, or a general idea. Most of the time, but not always, the main idea is stated in a topic sentence. This sentence is usually near the beginning and sets up what the rest of the writing will be about, although authors may choose to place the main idea in the concluding sentence in a paragraph. The topic sentence not only sets up the thesis, but it also sets up tone, voice, and style.

Supporting details are sentences that support the main idea. These sentences have information that helps explain and prove the author's point. For example, a paragraph about how animals hide might have supporting details about camouflage. Strong paragraphs have clear and organized details that relate to the main idea. Transitions, descriptive adjectives, and active verbs are other elements of good writing. We recommend watching the [Writing a Paragraph](#) movie together as a review.

Children may have an easier time finding the main idea in nonfiction than in fiction. You can help them by drawing upon their prior experiences. For example, many children can determine the moral of a fable. Teach them to look for a "big idea" or "message" an author is trying to get across with their story.



Encourage your children to think about main ideas and supporting details as they read. How did they identify the main idea? Where is the topic sentence? What details help support the main idea? Students may find it helpful to create a main idea chart as they read. This will allow them to organize and digest new information that they encounter and learn. As students become comfortable with identifying the main idea and supporting information, they will be able to incorporate what they learn into their own writing.

## Main Idea Family Activities

Main Idea Movie: Watch a movie or television show with your child. Explain that

the main idea of a piece of writing can also apply to movies and television shows. Together, come up with the main idea of the show. Encourage your child to think of details or scenes in the movie that support the main idea.

Fairy Tale: Take turns reading a fairy tale together, such as “The Boy Who Cried Wolf” or “Billy Goats Gruff.” Encourage your child to use expression and intonation as he or she reads. Explain that the main idea of a fairy tale is most often the moral or theme of the story. What is the lesson taught in the fairy tale? What details help support the main idea?

Give the Gift of a Main Idea: Children’s comprehension can be aided when they write about things they know. Have your child choose one person in their family and help them come up with a main idea about that person. For example, “Grandma is the best cook!” Then help the m think details that support their main idea. For example, “Grandma always makes me a special breakfast when I sleep over” and “Grandma puts chocolate chips in her oatmeal cookies.” Help your child put their main idea on the front of a card and the details on the inside.



Give a Hand: Have children trace their hands and use it to write a short paragraph about their hands. The main idea/topic sentence can go in the palm. Some, or all, of the fingers can contain the supporting details. Make sure your child writes a sentence that supports their main idea. Display the hands around the house or create a “tree” and the main idea hands can be the leaves.

***Just a note: Don’t just ask the main idea of the entire book, ask for the main idea of particular paragraphs and more than one paragraph at a time. On standardized tests, the questions for main idea will ask for one paragraph, more than one paragraph, and the whole passage...so make sure to teach all of them.***



*The Important Book - Brown*  
*Chair for my Mother - Williams*  
*Fables - Lobel*  
*Frog Prince Continued - Scieszka*  
*Great Kapok Tree – Cherry*  
*The Important Book - Brown*  
*Keeping Quilt – Polacco*

**Any type of book is good to use if you are working on main idea of paragraphs. Chapter books are hard to use when trying to work on main idea of the entire story. However, your child can write or tell the main idea of each chapter.**