

Module: Reading

Lesson Title: Finding the Central Idea and Supporting Details

Objectives and Standards

Students will:

- Determine the central idea of a text
- Identify the key supporting details
- Understand how key details support the development of central ideas

Florida Adult Basic Education Reading Standards	Level Expectation
Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development, summarize the key supporting details and ideas. (Apply this standard to texts of appropriate complexity as outlined by Standard 10.) (CCR.RE.ABE.2)	NRS Level 4 - Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

Materials

- Handout A: Finding the Central Idea
- Handout B: Non-Fiction Text Structures
- Handout C: Building the Central Idea (for beginning level students)
- Sample nonfiction text – a copy of each student to use (one recommended site is **Newsela** (<https://newsela.com/>) which provides articles at different readability levels)

Instructional Plan

Overview

When students are asked to find the central or main idea of a reading, they often recite the first or last sentence of a paragraph. Mastery of this standard involves two key skills: the ability to determine central ideas and to objectively summarize text. The purpose of this lesson is to provide students with a structure that they can use to identify the key details of a reading passage and how to determine the central idea.

Process

Prior to the lesson, access two nonfiction texts for students to use that are of interest to them. You may wish to use an article from one of your textbooks or use a website to access nonfiction articles.

Begin the lesson by writing the phrase **central idea** on the board. Have students brainstorm what a central idea is. Next, ask students how they determine a central idea in a text that they are reading. Share with students that the central idea of a text tells you what that text is mostly about. However, in a science text, the central ideas are sometimes conclusions the author draws. When an author draws a conclusion, he or she makes a general statement based on evidence and observations.

You may wish to share examples of this with students, such as the following:

Example: if an author noticed that people who eat mostly green vegetables are healthier than people who eat mostly junk food, the author may draw the conclusion that eating green vegetables is better for your health than eating junk food. This would be the central idea of the reading. Key details would assist the reader in drawing this conclusion or central idea.

Provide students with a sample nonfiction article and **Handout A: Determining Central Ideas**. One example of a nonfiction to use with this lesson would be the article on the melting of glaciers from *Newsela* at: <https://newsela.com/articles/antarctic-ice/id/3994/> or another science article of interest to the class. The article “Antarctic glaciers melt is happening more rapidly than was first believed” is written at the 3.0, 5.0, 7.0, 8.0 and high school grade levels. If teaching a multi-level classroom, the same topic can be shared through the same article being written at different levels. This provides a venue where a reading strategy can be taught and then applied to different levels of readers.

To teach the strategy, the following is the step-by-step process:

- Have students read the text. After they have completed their reading, discuss that they will take a closer look at the text to determine the central idea and key details.
- First, have the students take a look at the text features of the article (headings, sub-headings, italic and bold-type words, pictures, diagrams, labels, captions, etc.). Have students copy them down on the graphic organizer. Ask students what hints they give about the central idea.
- Next, have students identify the author’s purpose in writing the text (entertain, persuade, inform, explain). Have students note the purpose and orally share their reasoning.
- Have students look at the organization or structure of the text. Discuss that in nonfiction articles, text structure refers to how an author organizes the information. Review the common text structures. You may wish to share with students a simple chart on text structures: Handout C: Non-Fiction Text Structures.
- After students have identified the text structure, have them read through the article again and circle or underline the key words or ideas in the text. After they have circled or underlined the ideas, have them determine what they feel are the three most important points being made in the text. Have students write these three ideas in the organizer. Students do not need to write their ideas as complete sentences.
- Share with students that they have all the information they need to determine the central idea of what they have read. Using the three main points that they identified, have students craft one complete, succinct sentence.
- Have students share their final sentence with the class. Debrief by discussing the similarities and differences between the sentences. Make sure that students are using their own words and are providing objective central ideas, not their personal opinions.

Sample Debriefing Questions

- How did identifying key details assist you in determining the central idea?
- In looking at your central idea, did you include the most important key details?
- Did you write the central idea in your own words?
- Would someone who has never read the complete text clearly understand the central idea and key details from reading your chart?

Modifications for Different Levels

At a lower complexity level, teach the strategy by discussing how determining the central idea is like building a table. The legs of the table are the key details that support the top of the table or the main or central part. Provide students with a copy of **Handout C: Building the Central Idea** and a text written at their readability level. At this level, you may wish to verbally ask students questions and have them answer orally rather than in writing. Have students identify key words or details from the passage. Show students how to circle the key words and details. Have students identify their top three words/ideas and write these words or details in a graphic organizer. Model for students how to put these words/details into a sentence. After modeling the strategy for students, have them work together in small groups to complete the activity with a different text.

At a more complex level, provide more complex nonfiction text where the central idea is not specifically stated, but rather must be inferred.

Assessments/Extensions

As an extension of this lesson, have students independently complete the **Determining Central Ideas** graphic organizer when reading science or social studies text. Use this activity as a basis for students to summarize the main ideas of nonfiction texts that they have read.

Handout A: Determining Central Ideas

Directions: Complete the following chart to determine the central (main) idea of the text.

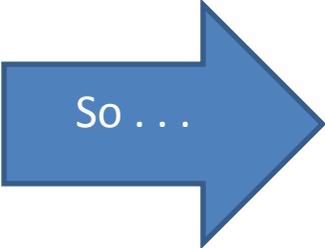
Copy down the title, headings, sub-headings, bold and italicized words in the document:

What is the **PURPOSE** of the text?

How is the text **STRUCTURED**?

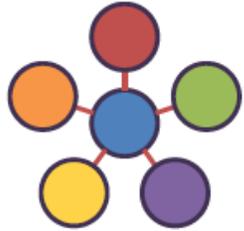
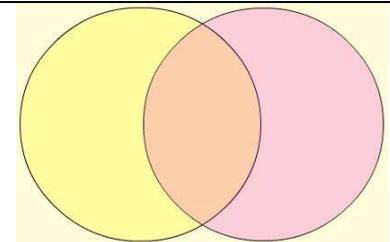
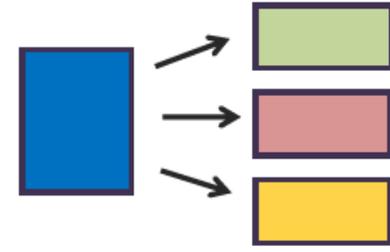
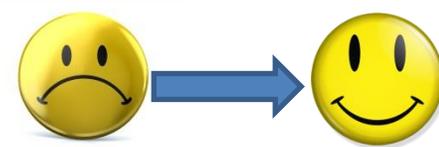
What are the three **MOST** important points being made in the text?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

 So ...

What is the **CENTRAL** idea of the text? (Write your three main points into one complete, concise sentence.)

Handout B: Non-Fiction Text Structures

Text Structure	Signal Words	Visual
Description	for example, for instance, characteristics include, specifically, in addition	
Sequence and Order	before, in the beginning, to start, first, next, during, after, then, finally, last, in the middle, in the end	
Compare and Contrast	similar, alike, same, just like, both, different, unlike, in contrast, on the other hand	
Cause and Effect	since, because, if due, to cause, as a result of, so, then, leads to, consequently	
Problem and Solution	problem, issue, cause, since, consequently, therefore, as a result, because of, leads to, due to, solve, so, then	

Handout C: Building the Central Idea

