

Lesson Skill: Identifying the main idea in fiction

Strand Reading — Fiction

SOL 3.5

4.5

5.5

Materials

- Teacher’s choice of an object or treat for students to unpack (e.g., lollipop with gum or chewy center, box within a box, rubber band ball)
- Three small sticky notes per student
- Short excerpt of children’s literature
- Available technology

Lesson

1. Before beginning the lesson, give each student an object or a treat to enjoy. Define *main idea* for students: In a short piece of fiction, it is a combination of the important character(s), the problem, and actions to solve the problem. Add that for students to understand what they are reading, it is important to identify the main idea of a story.
2. Explain to students that identifying the main idea is a lot like getting to the candy or gum center of the lollipop (or relate to the object chosen). Readers must go through a lot of delicious and interesting details to get to the center of the lollipop, or to the most important part of the story, the main idea.
3. Read aloud from an excerpt of a children’s story. If the technology is available, display the text on the interactive whiteboard.
4. While reading, model think-aloud strategies to answer the following questions: ‘Who is the main character?’, ‘What is the problem?’, and ‘What actions solve the problem?’ For example, in *Cinderella*:
 - Who is the main character? Cinderella.
 - What is the problem? She is mistreated by her stepmother and stepsisters.
 - What actions solve this problem? Her fairy godmother enables her to go to a ball to meet the prince. They fall in love, marry, and she is able to leave her cruel family.
5. Have students help put the three answers into a sentence to determine the main idea. For example:
 - Main Idea Sentence(s): Cinderella’s stepmother and stepsisters mistreat her, so her fairy godmother appears and enables her to go to the ball where she meets and falls in love with the prince. When they marry, she is able to leave her cruel family.
6. Again use the analogy of the object or the treat to help students identify the main idea of the story (the center of the lollipop) by enjoying the flavor of the lollipop (the details of the story).
7. During small-group reading instruction, provide students with a fiction text at their instructional level (word accuracy rate at 90–97 percent). Give each student three sticky

notes. Have students write: **Who is the main character? What is the problem?**, and **What actions solve the problem?** Remind students that these questions will help them focus on the main idea of the story, which will help them understand (comprehend) the story.

8. Have each student read the text independently and mark with the three sticky notes where the answers are found in the text. When students are finished reading the selection and have marked the pages with their sticky notes, have them discuss with a partner where they marked the answer to each question. Together, have them create a main idea sentence using the answers to the three questions. Have students share their answers with the group.
9. Gather all students together after the small groups have met. Have students summarize whether the use of the object or treat helped them to identify the main idea (theme) of a story and explain.

Strategies for Differentiation

- To differentiate for students with allergies, or to adhere to school policy, use wrapped, nested boxes with a token in the center box.
- In lieu of sticky notes, provide bookmarks with pictorial representations of **Who is the main character?, What is the problem?, What actions solve the problem?** (Step 7)
- Use cloze statements or guiding questions for differentiation of the summary activity.