

Lesson Skill: Elaborating the main idea, using supporting details

Strand Writing

SOL 3.9

4.7

5.7

Materials

- Desk
- One sentence strip with “Main Idea” written on it and four sentence strips with “Supporting Details” written on them
- Available technology
- Copies of nonfiction magazine/newspaper articles of interest to students
- Copies of a piece of fiction writing
- Main idea story starters (provided in lesson)
- A recent piece of nonfiction or fiction writing by students that is ready to be revised

Lesson

1. Put an empty desk in front of the room, and have students discuss what would happen if someone took off the legs of the desk. When students determine that the top of the desk would fall flat, explain that the same thing can happen when authors do not include supporting details in their writing. Label the top of the desk “Main Idea” and the four legs the “Supporting Details.” Define the *main idea* as “the most important thing the author wants the reader to know.” Define *supporting details* as “facts or opinions that add strength to the main idea.”
2. Display a nonfiction magazine article or a piece of fiction writing using available technology. Identify the main idea statement in the article, and have students help find the supporting details. Refer back to the example of the desk when appropriate.
3. Divide students into groups of three or four. Have each group choose one of the following main idea statements (or you may choose several of your own) with which to write three to four supporting details. Some of the main idea statements are opinions, some are facts, and others are fictional. Fictional supporting details can lend themselves well to character development. Main idea statements:
 - Soccer is a great sport for kids to play.
 - Hurricanes can do a lot of damage to communities.
 - Exercise is good for the body.
 - Dogs are smart animals.
 - Trading was important to early settlers.
 - Henry is a bright student.
 - Pam is dishonest.
 - Terrence is a good listener.

- I am the best math student in class.
- 4. Remind students that their details “hold up” the main idea, just like the desk legs hold up the desk top. After the groups have written their supporting details, have the groups share. Have students discuss which details were the strongest and what made them strong. Was it a direct link to the main idea statement, strong word choice, a vivid description, etc.?
- 5. Direct students to their own piece of writing. Have students reread their recent piece of nonfiction or fiction that is ready for revision. Have them add or change supporting details to make their pieces stronger. Have students share their original supporting detail and their revised supporting detail and reflect on how the revised detail changed.

Strategies for Differentiation

- Have students use four blocks and something flat, such as a book or tray, to demonstrate what would happen if the supports were removed from the flat object. If needed for added clarification, pre-label the blocks and the flat object with “main idea” and “supporting details.” In groups, discuss the results of removing the supports.
- Highlight/color code the main idea and supporting details in the displayed text.
- Differentiated groups might use sentence strips in lieu of the displayed text in which students will identify which of the statements is the main idea and which of the statements are supporting details.
- Have students justify how the supporting details relate to the main idea.
- Have students highlight/color code their own writing.
- Provide a graphic organizer in which students may cut and paste their own writings in order to assure completeness of main idea and supporting details. (Available technology may be used.)
- The use of text-to-speech software that outlines the main idea and supporting details with colors can be used with the electronic copy of students’ own writing.