

## FINDING THE MAIN IDEA

<b>ACADEMIC TEXT:</b>	A paragraph (or paragraphs) containing sentences organized around a topic, a main idea about the topic, and details that support the main idea.
<b>TOPIC:</b>	The overall subject of a paragraph.
<b>MAIN IDEA:</b>	A statement that tells the author's point about the topic. The main idea provides the message of a given paragraph or the argument that is being made about the topic.
<b>DETAILS:</b>	The specific information about the main idea or support for the main idea

### MAIN IDEA = TOPIC + AUTHOR'S POINT ABOUT THE TOPIC

#### How to Find the Topic

Ask yourself the question: *What or who is this paragraph about?*

#### How to Find the Main Idea

Ask yourself the question: *What is the overall message or argument being made by the author about the topic of this paragraph?*

#### How to Find Supporting Details

Turn the main idea into a question: *Ask who, what, when, where, why, or how?*  
The answer will give a set of details.

#### Hints

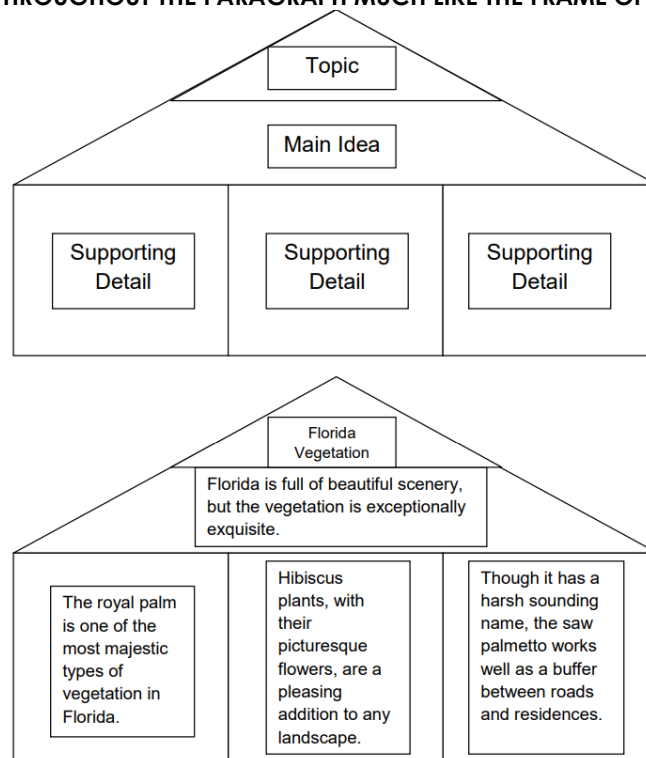
- Boldfaced headings or titles may contain the topic and/or main idea
- First and last sentences in the paragraph are usually helpful
- Look for repeating words, these often indicate the topic

#### Remember

Topics, main ideas, and supporting details work together. The main idea tells the author's point about the topic, and the details offer support for the main idea.

### THE MAIN IDEA IS THE OVERALL IDEA OF THE PARAGRAPH.

IT IS SUPPORTED BY DETAILS THROUGHOUT THE PARAGRAPH MUCH LIKE THE FRAME OF A HOUSE SUPPORTS THE ROOF.



<sup>1</sup>Florida is full of beautiful scenery, but the vegetation is exceptionally exquisite. <sup>2</sup>Shopping plazas, residential areas, and highway medians are often elaborately decorated with grand palm trees and tropical plants. <sup>3</sup>Of the many types of vegetation found in Florida, one of the most majestic is the royal palm. <sup>4</sup>Growing to nearly ninety feet tall, it towers over many shopping centers and hotels with splendor. <sup>5</sup>Hibiscus plants, with their picturesque flowers, are a pleasing addition to any landscape. <sup>6</sup>Adorned with pink, red, or orange flowers, the hibiscus sets a tropical scene to homes and businesses alike. <sup>7</sup>Finally, the saw palmetto, though it has a harsh sounding name, works well as a buffer between roads and residences.

**PRACTICE 1:** Read the passage and answer the questions (1, 2 and 3).

<sup>1</sup>Fire ants are painful and destructive pests. <sup>2</sup>The fire ant earned its name because of its venom. <sup>3</sup>The insect uses a wasp-like stinger to inject the venom, which causes a painful burning sensation and leaves tiny, itching pustules. <sup>4</sup>The ants will swarm over anyone or anything that disturbs their nests. <sup>5</sup>In addition to causing pain, fire ants damage many crops by eating the plants and by protecting other insects that damage crops. <sup>6</sup>Fire ants are attracted to soybeans, eggplant, corn, okra, strawberries, and potatoes.

(1) What is the topic of the passage?

- a) Ant bites                      b) Fire ants                      c) Farming                      d) Pests

(2) What does the author want you to know about the topic?

- a) Fire ants have a wasp-like stinger.                      b) Fire ants swarm.  
c) Fire ants are pests to farmers.                      d) Fire ants are painful and pesky.

(3) Which sentence contains the main idea?

- a) SENTENCE 1                      b) SENTENCE 2                      c) SENTENCE 4                      d) SENTENCE 5

**PRACTICE 2:** Read the passage and answer the questions (1, 2 and 3).

<sup>1</sup>Rosa Parks was an African American woman who worked hard as a seamstress in a department store in the early 1960s. <sup>2</sup>One day, tired from work, she refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and became a national hero. <sup>3</sup>She was arrested and placed in jail for her refusal to move to the back of the bus, where African Americans were forced to sit in those days. <sup>4</sup>The way she was treated garnered national attention. <sup>5</sup>Some people say her refusal to give up her seat launched the civil rights movement. <sup>6</sup>Rosa Parks proved that one brave person can make a difference.

(1) What is the topic of the passage?

- a) Rosa Parks                      b) Civil Rights                      c) Brave People                      d) National Heroes

(2) What does the author want you to know about the topic?

- a) Rosa Parks was a hard-working woman.                      b) Brave people deserve special attention.  
c) Stubborn people always get their way.                      d) Brave people can make a difference.

(3) Which sentence contains the main idea?

- a) SENTENCE 1                      b) SENTENCE 2                      c) SENTENCE 5                      d) SENTENCE 6

**PRACTICE 3:** Read the following passage. Fill in the chart below using information from the paragraph.

<sup>1</sup>Reggae music is a complex mix of message and style. <sup>2</sup>Originating in Jamaica in the 1960s, reggae evolved from folk music that protested racism and corruption. <sup>3</sup>Reggae also has a religious side that is based on the Bible from the view of black culture. <sup>4</sup>Some critics say that the serious messages of reggae are easier to accept because of its powerful dance beat.

<div>Topic:</div>		
<div>Main Idea:</div>		
<div>Supporting Detail:</div>	<div>Supporting Detail:</div>	<div>Supporting Detail:</div>