

# **Main Idea and the Supporting Details**

# The Topic Sentence & Supporting detail

- Many paragraphs have topic sentences that indicate what their about.
- Find the topic sentence in this paragraph:
- **Homeless people have many problems. In winter, it's hard to stay warm and it gets too hot in summer. It's also hard to keep things safe without a home. Worst is the lack of privacy.**
- Supporting details prove the value of the main idea. What are they here?

Supporting Details = **Additional information to help understand the main idea**

**Details consists of specific information such as:**

- Examples, Illustrations
- Facts and Statistics
- Reasons
- Incident
- Descriptive Details
- Steps or Procedures
- Comparison or Contrast.

***also,***

- *Who, what, when, where, why, how?*

The answers will be in the details.

# Main Idea

The main idea answers the question,

- **“What is the author’s one *most* important point about the topic?”**
1. Must always **contain the topic** (the word, name, or phrase that tells who or what the paragraph is about)
  2. Must always **make complete sense** by itself (even if you couldn’t read the rest of the paragraph)
  3. Must be a general sentence that **sums up the details** in the paragraph

# Location of the Stated Main Idea Sentence

Can appear **anywhere** in a paragraph:

- Most often it appears at the ***beginning***.
- The next most likely location is at the ***end***.
- The third possibility is somewhere else ***within*** the paragraph.
- Regardless of where it appears, it will have supporting details that explain more about it, give examples of it, or prove it.

- Read the entire paragraph before you decide
- Is it asking about:
  - *The overall main idea?*
  - *The subject?*
  - *The theme?*
- choose the answer that deals with the **whole selection**, *not* just part of the selection.
- Longer selections (textbook sections, essays, articles, and editorials) can have **overall** stated main ideas.
- The main idea is **general**. Details are **specific**.
- Examples are **always** details.
- Details are often introduced by ***In addition, also, moreover, another, next, then, last, finally,*** etc.

# Remember:

- Only ONE sentence can be the stated main idea in a paragraph.
- The main idea is NEVER a question.
  - Examples are details that support the main idea, so examples cannot be the main idea.
  - Watch for words or phrases authors use to signal their main idea: *The point is, It is important, Thus,* etc.

Lantern fish live near the bottom of the ocean where it is very dark, so they carry their own lights. The lights look like tiny glowing pearls. They are called photo-phores. A lantern fish can flash its photo-phores on and off.

1. The light looks like tiny glowing pearls.
2. Lantern fish live near the bottom of the ocean where it is very dark, so they carry their own lights.

Lantern fish live near the bottom of the ocean where it is very dark, so they carry their own lights. 1-The lights look like tiny glowing pearls. 2-They are called photo-phores. 3-A lantern fish can flash its photo-phores on and off.



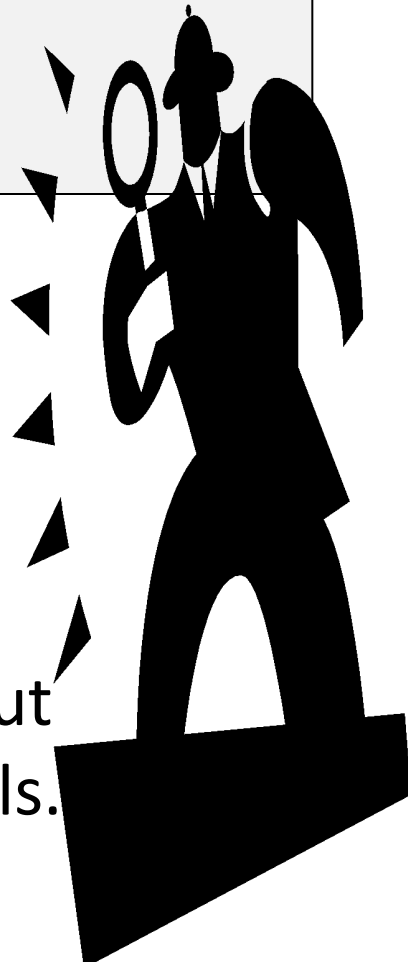
Next time you see lightning, count the number of seconds that pass until you hear thunder. The lightning is a mile away for every five seconds that you count. In this way, you can “measure” how far the lightning is from you. Scientists know that the speed of light is faster than the speed of sound. So calculating the difference between the two speeds, they have developed this easy five-second formula.

1. You can figure out how far away lightning is.
2. The lightning is a mile away for every five seconds that you count.

# Finding an Inferred Main Idea:

- **Imply** - means to suggest an idea but not state it directly.
  - Ex: “If that blue shirt is back in my closet by noon, I’ll forget that it was missing.”
- **Infer** - means to reason out something based on what has been said.
  - Ex: I wouldn’t even feed that cake to my dog.

- Find the topic of the selection.
- Decide what the author wants you to know about the topic.
- Express the idea in your own words.
- An **implied main idea** is not stated directly but is strongly suggested by the supporting details.



# Using Supporting Details and Thought Patterns to Find Implied Main Ideas

- The implied main idea
  - must be general enough to cover all the details,
  - must not be so broad that it is an overgeneralization
  - must not be a sweeping statement that suggests details not given
- To find the implied main idea, create a summary from the supporting details.

# Questions for Finding the Implied Main Idea

1. What is the topic, or subject, of the paragraph?
2. What are the major supporting details?
3. Based on the details about the topic, what point or main idea is the author trying to get across?

## **What larger idea do these details point to?**

- The wind was blowing at 35 mph.
- The wind chill was 5 degrees below zero.
- Snow was falling at the rate of 3 inches per hour.

# Figuring Out Implied Main Ideas

Wind 35 mph

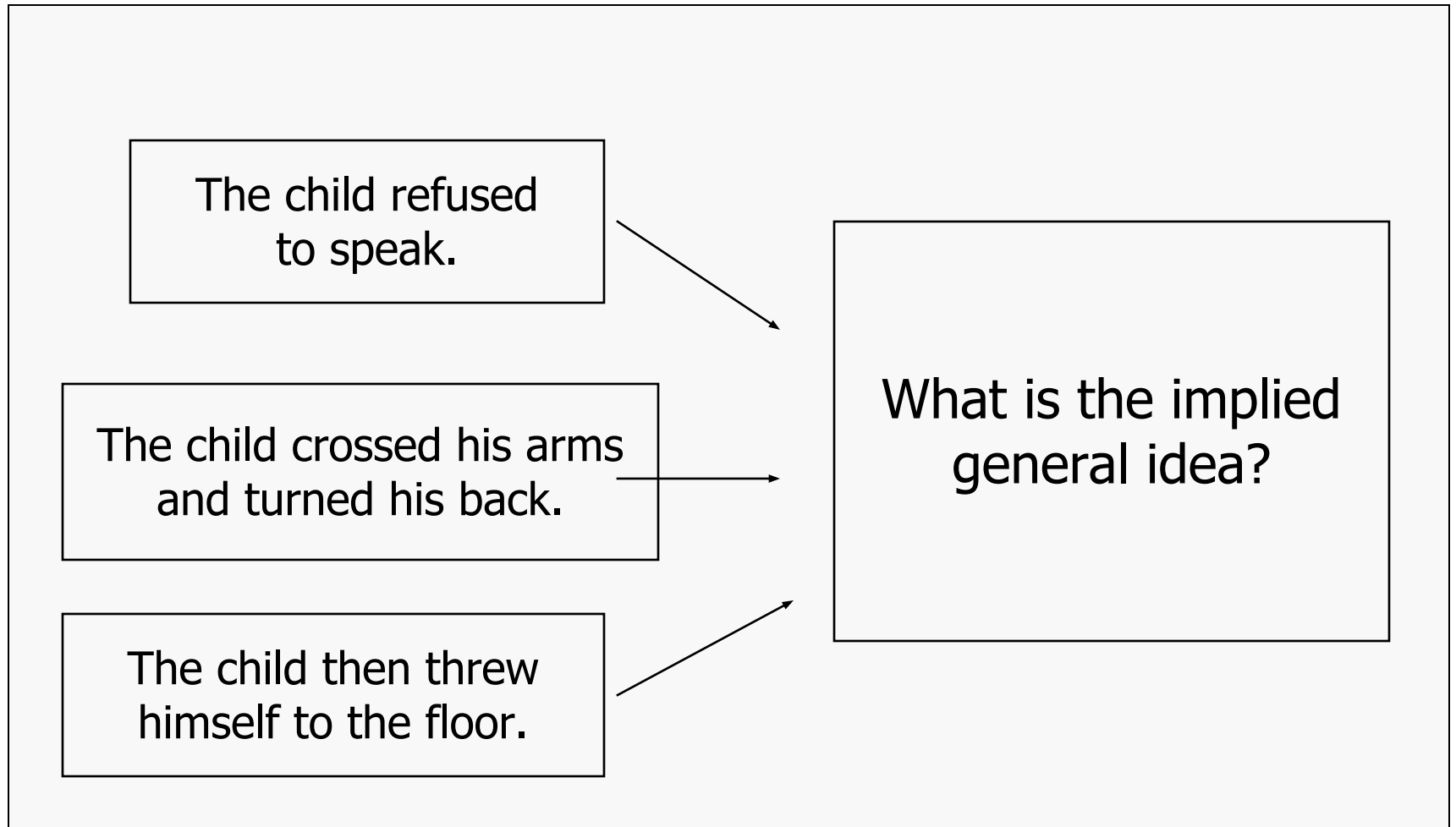
- 5 degree wind chill

Snow 3" per hour



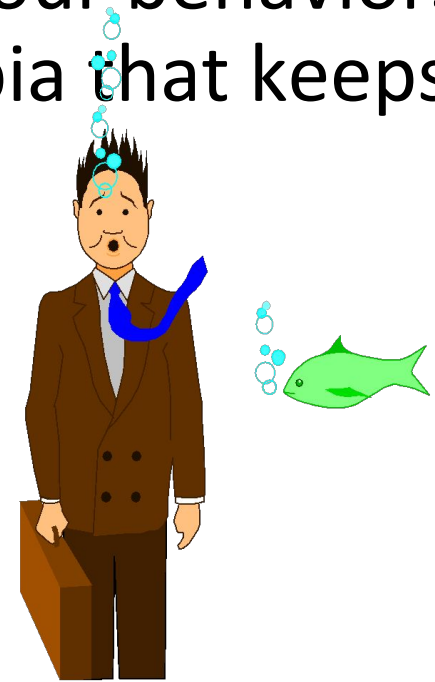
**Blizzard**

# Figuring Out Implied Main Ideas



# What is the implied main idea?

- Fear drains color from our faces, makes our teeth chatter, our hearts pound, our breath quicken, and our knees knock. Fear churns our stomachs, raises goose bumps, and causes jitters. Fear also raises feelings of anxiety and distrust, and may even cause us to change our behaviors. Obsessive fear can become a phobia that keeps us from enjoying life.
- Phobias keep us from enjoying life.
- Fear affects us in several ways.
- Fear is the result of distrust and anxiety.
- Fear affects many people.



# What is the implied main idea?



- Green tea has been used for thousands of years in Asia as both a beverage and an herbal medicine. This herbal tea contains **catechin**, which is a type of tannin that acts as an astringent. Research suggests that men and women in Japan who drink five to six cups of green tea each day have much lower rates of cancer than people who do not. Green tea is also thought to lower cholesterol and blood sugar, control high blood pressure, stop tooth decay, and fight viruses. Green tea has even been credited with the power to slow down the aging process.
- Green tea is an ancient herbal drink.
- Green tea has caught the attention of medical researchers.
- Green tea has many positive properties as a health drink.



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

# Implied Main Ideas

identifying the topic and main idea:

- Remember to look for **repeated words**
- Mark **major supporting details**. Major details are often signaled by **addition words**

## *Addition Words*

one to begin with      also further  
first (of all)    for one thing in addition    furthermore  
second(ly)    other    nextlast (of all)  
third(ly) another moreover    final(ly)

# Implied Main Ideas

Read the paragraph below. Then answer the question.

All people have a strong need to belong to groups, stemming from evolutionary pressures that increased people's chance of survival and reproduction when in groups rather than in isolation. This need may also be driven by the desire to feel protected against threat and uncertainty in everyday life or to gain a greater sense of personal and social identity. Moreover, people join specific groups in order to accomplish things that they cannot accomplish as individuals. Neither symphonies nor football games can be played by one person alone, and many types of work require team effort. Further, people join groups because of the social status and identity that they offer. An important part of people's feelings of self-worth comes from their identification with particular groups. Even a relatively low-status group can be a source of pride for individuals who are held in high esteem within the group; being big fish in small ponds can make people feel good about themselves, particularly people from individualist cultures. Finally, people may join groups simply because they like the members and want to have the opportunity to interact with them.

What is the **topic** of the paragraph?

# Implied Main Ideas

All people have a strong need to **belong to groups**, stemming from evolutionary pressures that increased people's chance of survival and reproduction when **in groups** rather than in isolation. This need may also be driven by the desire to feel protected against threat and uncertainty in everyday life or to gain a greater sense of personal and social identity. Moreover, people **join** specific **groups** in order to accomplish things that they cannot accomplish as individuals. Neither symphonies nor football games can be played by one person alone, and many types of work require team effort. Further, people **join groups** because of the social status and identity that they offer. An important part of people's feelings of self-worth comes from their **identification with** particular **groups**. Even a relatively low-status group can be a source of pride for individuals who are held in high esteem **within the group**; being big fish in small ponds can make people feel good about themselves, particularly people from individualist cultures. Finally, people may **join groups** simply because they like the members and want to have the opportunity to interact with them.

What is the **topic** of the paragraph?

***Joining groups***

# Implied Main Ideas

All people have a strong need to belong to groups, stemming from evolutionary pressures that increased people's chance of survival and reproduction when in groups rather than in isolation. This need may also be driven by the desire to feel protected against threat and uncertainty in everyday life or to gain a greater sense of personal and social identity. Moreover, people join specific groups in order to accomplish things that they cannot accomplish as individuals. Neither symphonies nor football games can be played by one person alone, and many types of work require team effort. Further, people join groups because of the social status and identity that they offer. An important part of people's feelings of self-worth comes from their identification with particular groups. Even a relatively low-status group can be a source of pride for individuals who are held in high esteem within the group; being big fish in small ponds can make people feel good about themselves, particularly people from individualist cultures. Finally, people may join groups simply because they like the members and want to have the opportunity to interact with them.

What is the **implied main idea** of the paragraph?

# Implied Main Ideas

All people have a strong need to belong to groups, stemming from **evolutionary pressures that increased people's chance of survival and reproduction** when in groups rather than in isolation. This need may **also** be driven by **the desire to feel protected against threat and uncertainty in everyday life or to gain a greater sense of personal and social identity**. **Moreover**, people join specific groups in order **to accomplish things that they cannot accomplish as individuals**. Neither symphonies nor football games can be played by one person alone, and many types of work require team effort. **Further**, people join groups because of **the social status and identity that they offer**. An important part of people's feelings of self-worth comes from their identification with particular groups. Even a relatively low-status group can be a source of pride for individuals who are held in high esteem within the group; being big fish in small ponds can make people feel good about themselves, particularly people from individualist cultures. **Finally**, people may join groups simply because **they like the members and want to have the opportunity to interact with them**.

What is the **implied main idea** of the paragraph?

*People join groups for a number of reasons.*

## *Explanation*

Each **major detail** in the paragraph is one reason that people join groups. Note that four of the major details are signaled by **addition words**.

- We're often told "He who hesitates is lost," but we're also warned to "look before you leap." Most of us have heard the saying, "Out of sight, out of mind," but then we hear "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." Everyone talks about "love at first sight." But then someone reminds us, "Marry in haste, repent at leisure." It's all very confusing.
- There are many sayings in our culture that contradict one another or are very confusing.



# IMPLIED MAIN IDEAS in Longer Passages

To find the implied central idea in a longer passage, you must ask the same three questions you used to find the main ideas in paragraphs:

- Who or what is this passage about?  
(What is the **topic**?)
- What is the **central point** the author is trying to make about that topic?

When you think you know the central idea, you can test it by asking:

- Does *all or most* of the material in the passage support this idea?