

MEETING VIII

MAIN IDEA

A. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this chapter, the students will learn about previewing and predicting.

By the end of the course, the students are expected to be able to:

1.1. Understand and describe what main idea is.

1.2. Determine the main idea of a passage.

B. MATERIAL DESCRIPTION

1.1. Main Idea

Main idea is the core of the material, the particular point that the author is trying to convey. Main idea of the passage can be stated and unstated in the passage. Main idea has two parts, usually called the **Topic** and the **Controlling Idea**. These two parts of main idea can help us to determine the main idea of paragraph. Once you have identified the topic of the paragraph, you can locate the main idea by looking for a statement which contains some ideas/opinions about the topic. In short, you can come to the main idea by identifying the topic and controlling idea.

There are commonly two types of main idea, states main idea and unstated main idea.

Stated Main Idea

Stated Main Idea is the main idea which is stated in one sentence that condenses specific ideas or details in the passage into a general, all inclusive statement of the author's message. Commonly, main idea is stated in the first sentence of the passage. However, sometimes main idea can be stated in the middle or at the end of the paragraph. Look at the examples below!

Example 1: Main idea in the first sentence

You no doubt have an image of who you are: this is your self-concept. It consist of your feelings and thought about your strengths and weaknesses, your abilities and limitations. Your self concept develops from at least three sources: the image of you that others have and that they reveal to you, the comparisons you make between yourself and others, and he way you interpret and evaluate your own thoughts and behaviors.

Example 2: Main idea in the middle sentence

When you think you are failure, you are more likely to act like a failure. When you think you are successful, you are more likely to act like a success. When you feel good about yourself-about who you are capable of doing-you will perform better. Self-esteem is very important because success breeds success. Increasing self-esteem will, therefore, help you to function more effectively in school, in personal relationship, and in careers.

Example 3: Main idea in the last sentence

The open self represent all the information that both you and others know about yourself. The blind self represent all the things you don't know about yourself that others do know. The hidden self contains all that you know of yourself and of others that you keep secret. The unknown self represents truths about yourself that neither you nor others know. Thus, your self-awareness is how much you know about yourself according to the model of the four selves.

Unstated main idea (implied)

Sometimes main idea is not stated in any particular sentence but each sentence contains details that lead to a common idea. In order to arrive at the main idea, you have to read every sentence and figure out what they have in common.

Example 4: Unstated main idea

People in the United States disclose more than those in Great Britain, Germany, Japan, or Puerto Rico. American students also disclose more than students from nine different Middle East countries. Singaporean-Chinese students consider more topics to be taboo and inappropriate for self-disclosure than their British colleagues. In Japan, it is considered undesirable to reveal personal information whereas in much of the United States it is not only considered desirable, it is expected.

Explanation

From the above paragraph, you can notice that all of the sentence are about "self-disclosure." Also, you can see that the subject of each sentence is people from different countries and cultures. Each sentence talks about how much people from different cultures are willing to tell about themselves. If you put all this information together, you can come up with the main idea sentence such as "People from different countries have different degrees of self-disclosure."

C. EXERCISES**Exercise 1**

Directions: *Read the following paragraphs and determine the main idea of each paragraph.*

a. Paragraph 1

Luang Prabang has both natural and historical sites. Among the natural tourism sites are the Kuang Si Falls and Pak Ou Caves. Tourists may also ride elephants. At the end of the main street of Luang Prabang is a night market where stalls sell shirts, bracelets and other souvenirs. The Haw Jham Royal Palace Museum and the Wat Xieng Thong temple are among the most well-known historical sites. Along with the magnificent temples, a significant part of the old town's appeal is the many French provincial style houses.

Main Idea

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b. Paragraph 2

Food sits at very center of Vietnamese culture: for every significant holiday on the Vietnamese cultural calender, all the important milestones in Vietnamese person's life, and indeed, most of the important day-to-day social events and interactions-food plays a central role. Special dishes are prepared and served with great care for every birth, marriage, and death, and the anniversaries of ancestors' deaths. More business deals are struct over dinner tables than over boardroom tables, and when friends get tohether, they eat together. Preparing food and eating together remains the focus of family life.

Main Idea

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c. Paragraph 3

Singapore has four official languages: English, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil. English is the common language of the nation and is the language of business, government and the medium of instruction in schools. Public organization in Singapore conduct their business in English, and official documents written in a non-English oficial language

such as Chinese, Malay, or Tamil typically has to be translated into English to be accepted for submission. The Singapore Constitution and all laws are written in English, and translators are also required if one wishes to address the Singaporean Courts in a language other than English. However, English is the native tongue for only one-third of all Singaporean Indians speaking it as their native tongue.

Main Idea

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d. Paragraph 4

Due to its long history as a tributary state of China, as well as several periods of Chinese occupation, Vietnamese culture is heavily influenced by that of Southern China, with Confucianism forming the basis of Vietnamese Society. The Vietnamese language also contains many loan words from China, though the two languages are unrelated. Buddhism remains the single largest religion in Vietnam, though like in China but unlike in the rest of northern Southeast Asia, the dominant school of Buddhism in Vietnam is the Mahayana School.

Main Idea

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Exercise 2

Directions: *Read each paragraph below and answer the questions that follow. Tick the correct answer.*

a. Paragraph 1

Clothes can tell a lot about a person. Some people like very colorful clothes. They want everyone to look at them. They want to be the center of things. Other people like to wear nice clothes. But their clothes are not colorful or fancy. They do not like people to look at them. There are also some people who wear the same thing all the time. They do not care if anyone looks at them. They do not think what anyone thinks about them.

(Source: Mikulecki, B.S. & Linda. J. (1986). *Reading Power*. US: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, p. 93)

What is the main idea of the paragraph?

- A. Clothes are colorful.
- B. Clothes can tell a lot about people.
- C. Clothes always look nice on some people.

b. Paragraph 2

It is important to bring the right clothes when you travel. If you are going to a cold country, you should bring warm clothes. Be sure you have a hat and gloves, too. If you are going to a hot country, you need different clothes. You do not want heavy or dark clothes. In hot weather, light clothes are best. If you are going to a city, you may need some nice clothes.

(Source: Mikulecki, B.S. & Linda. J. (1986).*Reading Power*. US: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, p. 93)

What is the main idea of the paragraph?

- A. Clothes for warm weather are light.
- B. Appropriate clothes are important when you travel.
- C. Clothes can be heavy.

c. Paragraph 3

Clothes today are very different from clothes of the 1800s. One difference is the way they look. For example, in 1800s all women wore dresses. The dresses all had long skirts. But today women do not always wear dresses with long skirts. Sometime they wear short skirts and sometime they wear pants. Another difference between 1800s and today is the cloth. They were made from cotton, wool, silk and linen. But today, there are many kind of man-made cloth. A lot of clothes are now made of nylon, rayon, or polyester.

(Source: Mikulecki, B.S. & Linda. J. (1986).*Reading Power*. US: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, p. 93)

What is the main idea of the paragraph?

- a. Clothes of the 1800s were beautiful.
- b. Clothes are made of man-made cloth.
- c. Clothes today are different from the cloths of the 1800s.

Exercise 3

Directions: *Read each paragraph below and determine the author's purpose and tone of each paragraph.*

a. Paragraph 1

An average hurricane releases as much energy as several atomic explosions. Its power output in a single minute could keep the United States in electricity for 50 years. The hurricane that struck Bangladesh in 1970 produced a tidal wave that killed 200,000 people. In 1900, in Galveston, Texas a hurricane created storm tides that swept 6,000 people to their deaths.

(Source: Osborne, J. (2006). *CAHSE on Target*. California : University of California Press, p. 26)

1. The author's purpose of this paragraph is to
 - a. persuade the reader that Texas and Bangladesh can be dangerous places to live
 - b. compare the weather in Texas and Bangladesh
 - c. present factual information about hurricanes
 - d. entertain the reader with a story about hurricanes
2. The author's tone can best be described as
 - a. humorous
 - b. straightforward
 - c. sarcastic
 - d. frustrated

b. Paragraph 2

Like human beings, ants can be both cooperative and aggressive towards one another; in fact, certain species of ants survive by raiding other ant colonies and enslaving the offspring. Scientists believe that these "slavemaker" ants cannot survive on their own and need other ants to take care of them. The only way in which they can achieve this is by raiding other colonies and seizing the larvae and pupae; they then carry them back to their own colonies and raise them as slaves. Once their slaves die, they raid new colonies, capture new larvae, and acquire a new supply of slaves.

(Source: Osborne, J. (2006). *CAHSE on Target*. California : University of California Press, p. 27)

1. The author wrote to
- a. illustrate the unusual way in which certain ant species survive
- b. convince the reader that ants can play a beneficial role
- c. compare and contrast the distinct roles that ants play
- d. amuse the reader with amusing facts about ants

2. The author's tone is
- a. hopeful
 - b. entertaining
 - c. informative
 - d. forceful

EXERCISE 4

PASSAGE 1

Basketball was invented in 1891 by a physical education instructor in Springfield, Massachusetts, by the name of James Naismith. Because of the terrible weather in winter, his physical education students were indoors rather than outdoors. They really did not like the idea of boring, repetitive exercises and preferred the excitement and challenge of a game. Naismith figure out a team sport that could be played indoors on a gymnasium floor, that involved a lot of running, that kept all team members involved, and did not allow the tackling and physical contact of American-style football.

1. What is the main idea of this passage?
- (A) The life of James Naismith
 - (B) Physical education and exercise
 - (C) The history of sports
 - (D) The origin of basketball

PASSAGE 2

Early maps of the North American continent showed a massive river that began in the Rocky Mountains, flowed into the Great Salt Lake, and from there continued westward into the Pacific Ocean. This river, named the Buenaventura River, on some maps rivaled the great Mississippi River.

This mythical river of course does not exist. Perhaps an early mapmaker hypothesized that such a river probably existed; perhaps a smaller river was seen and its path from the Rockies to the Pacific was assumed. As late as the middle of the nineteenth century, this river was still on maps and explorers were still searching for it.

2. Which of the following would be the best title for this passage?
- (A) Early Maps of North America
 - (B) A Non-Existent River on Maps
 - (C) A Comparison of the Buenaventura and the Mississippi Rivers
 - (D) Rivers in Mythology

PASSAGE 3

Most of the ice on the Earth, close to 90 percent of it, is covering the surface of the continent Antarctica. It does not snow very much in Antarctica, but whatever snow does fall remains and grows deeper and deeper. In some areas of Antarctica, the ice has perhaps been around for as much a million years and now is more than two miles deep.

3. The main idea of the passage is that
 - (A) The Earth is a cold planet
 - (B) Most of the Earth's ice is found in Antarctica
 - (C) It snows more in Antarctica than in any other place on Earth
 - (D) Antarctica is only two miles wide but is 90 percent ice
4. The best title for the passage is
 - (A) Snowfall in Antarctica
 - (B) The Icy Earth
 - (C) The Cold, Cold Snow
 - (D) The Causes of Antarctica's Ice Pack

PASSAGE 4

The extremely hot and humid weather that occurs in the United States in July and August is commonly called the "Dog Days" of summer. This name comes from the star Sirius, which is known as the Dog Star. Sirius is the brightest visible star, and in the hot summer months it rises in the east approximately the same time as the Sun. As ancient people saw this star rising with the Sun when the weather was at its hottest, they believed that Sirius was the cause of the additional heat; they believed that bright star added its heat to the heat of the Sun, and these two together made summer weather so unbearably hot.

5. The topic of the passage is
 - (A) How dogs like to play during the summer
 - (B) The causes of hot and humid weather
 - (C) Why the hot summer days are known as the "Dog Days"
 - (D) The day that dogs prefer
6. The main idea of this passage is that
 - (A) The name for the summer days come from Sirius, the Dog Star
 - (B) Dogs generally prefer hot summer days
 - (C) The hottest days occur in the summer because of the movements of the Sun and the star
 - (D) Sirius rises almost the same time as the Sun during the summer months

PASSAGE 5

The term “primitive art” has been used in a variety of ways to describe works and styles of art. One way that this term has been used is to describe the early period within the development of a certain style of art. Another way that this term has been used is to describe artists who have received little professional training and who demonstrate a non traditional naivete in their work.

A wonderful example of this second type of primitive artist is Grandma Moses, who spent all her life on a farm and working at tasks normally associated with farm life. She did not begin painting until she reached the age of seventy-six, when she switched to painting from embroidery because the arthritis in her hands made embroidery too difficult. Totally without formal education in art, she began creating panoramic image of everybody life on the farm that have achieved international fame.

7. The subject of this passage is
 - (A) An example of one of the types of primitive art
 - (B) Grandma Moses’ life on the farm
 - (C) How primitive art differs from formal art
 - (D) Grandma Moses’ primitive lifestyle

8. Which of the following best expresses the main idea of the passage?
 - (A) Grandma Moses spent her life on a farm
 - (B) Art critics cannot come to any agreement on a definition of primitive art
 - (C) Grandma Moses is one type of primitive artist because of her lack formal training
 - (D) Many artists receive little professional training

PASSAGE 6

The first English attempts to colonize North America were controlled by individuals rather than companies. Sir Humphrey Gilbert was the first Englishman to send colonists to the New World. His initial expedition, which sailed in 1578 with a patent granted by Queen Elizabeth 1 was defeated by the Spanish. A second attempt ended in disaster in 1583, when Gilbert and his ship were lost in a storm. In the following year, Gilbert's half brother, Sir Water Raleigh, having obtained a renewal of the patent, sponsored an expedition that explored the coast of the region that he named "Virginia." Under Raleigh's direction efforts were then made to establish a colony on Roanoke island in 1585 an6 1587. The survivors of the first settlement on Roanoke returned to England in 1586, but the second group of colonists disappeared without leaving a trace. The failure of the Gilbert and Raleigh ventures made it clear that the

tasks they had undertaken were too big for any one colonizer. Within a short time the trading company had supplanted the individual promoter of colonization.

9. Which of the following would be the most appropriate title for the passage?
 - (A) The Regulation of Trading Companies
 - (B) British - Spanish Rivalry in the New World
 - (C) Early Attempts at Colonizing North America
 - (D) Royal Patents Issued in the 16th Century

10. The passage states which of the following about the first English people to be involved in establishing colonies in North America?
 - (A) They were requested to do so by Queen Elizabeth.
 - (B) They were members of large trading companies.
 - (C) They were immediately successful.
 - (D) They were acting on their own.

PASSAGE 7

Although great natural barriers hindered east-west development in Canada, this circumstance was mitigated by the mighty river and lake systems that provided avenues for the fur trader, missionary, soldier, and settler. Canada's rivers and lakes allowed and, indeed, invited venturesome pioneers to explore the interior of the continent and in spite of natural barriers, to tap its great wealth. **The** rivers and lakes were essential to the great fur empire; people in canoes brought furs from the farthest extremity of the Canadian Shield to Montreal for exportation to Europe. The first settlements spread along the rivers, since only the rivers provided transportation and communication. Militarily, rivers and lakes were of prime importance; whoever controlled the St. Lawrence and its entrance also controlled Canada.

11. What is the main subject of the passage?
 - (A) The barriers to east-west communication in Canada
 - (B) The role of rivers and lakes in Canadian development'
 - (C) The adventures of Canadian settlers
 - (D) The development of the Canadian fur empire

12. Which would be an example of the type of barrier the author refers to in line 1?
 - (A) A military fort
 - (B) An ancient feud
 - (C) A political border
 - (D) A mountain range

PASSAGE 8

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) was perhaps the best-known American poet of the nineteenth century. His clear writing style and emphasis on the prevalent values of the period made him popular with the general public, if not always with the critics. He was particularly recognized for his longer narrative poems *Evangeline*, *The Song of Hiawatha*, and *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, in which he told stories from American history in terms of the values of the time.

Evangeline was set during the French and Indian War (1754-1763), when the British forced French settlers from Nova Scotia; two lovers, Gabriel and Evangeline, were separated by the British, and Evangeline devoted her lifetime to the search for Gabriel. With its emphasis on sentimental, undying love, *Evangeline* was immensely popular with the public.

In *The Song of Hiawatha*, Longfellow depicted the noble life of the American Indian through the story of the brave Hiawatha and his beloved wife Minehaha. The tear-inspiring poem follows Hiawatha through the tragedies and triumphs of life, ending with the death of Minehaha and Hiawatha's departure into the sunset in his canoe.

The Courtship of Miles Standish takes place during the early period of the settlement of New England, a period which was viewed as a time of honor and romance. In this poem centered around a love triangle, Miles Standish asks his friend John Alden to propose to Priscilla Mullins for him; John Alden ends up marrying Priscilla Mullins himself, and it takes time for his friendship with Miles Standish to recover. As with Longfellow's other narrative poems, the emphasis on high ideals and romance made the poem extremely popular.

13. Which of the following best describes the main idea of the passage?
 - (A) American history is often depicted in poetry.
 - (B) Longfellow described American history even though people really did not enjoy it.
 - (C) The popularity of Longfellow's poems results from his stress on the values of the people.
 - (D) Longfellow wrote long narrative poems that were not always popular with the critics.

14. The best title of the passage is
 - (A) Longfellow's Popular Appeal
 - (B) Historical Narrative Poems
 - (C) The Lyric, Dramatic, and Narrative Poems of Longfellow
 - (D) Longfellow and the Critics

15. The subject of the fourth paragraph is
 - (A) nobility and honor in the poems of Longfellow
 - (B) the love triangle involving Miles Standish

- (C) the popular appeal of *The Courtship of Miles Standish*
- (D) the period of the early settlement of New England

PASSAGE 9

Of the various tribes living in the Ituri rain forest of Africa, Pygmies are the most unusual. They are perfectly formed people except that they weigh only about eighty pounds with a height of not more than four feet. Pygmies are great travelers, capable of moving in the treetops almost as expertly as monkeys. Often they travel great distances through tree branches without touching the ground.

Pygmies are also renowned as great hunters as they can shoot three or four arrows one after another so rapidly that often the last one leaves the bow before the first has reached its target. If an arrow misses its target, the impatient Pygmy may fly into a rage, breaking his arrows and stamping on them. Regardless of their extraordinary little bodies, Pygmies can consume a large amount of food. One Pygmy can finish a stalk of sixty bananas at a single meal, in addition to quantities of meat. After eating, he will lie on his hard earth bed and groan in pain all night. In the morning, he is ready to eat the same amount of food all over again.

16. What is the main idea of the passage?

The Pygmy is

- (A) a unique tribe in the Ituri rain forest of Africa
- (B) a very skillful forest people
- (C) the African tribe best in hunting
- (D) a tribe in Africa living in isolation

17. Which of the following would be the best title for this passage?

- (A) Civilizing the Pygmy
- (B) Living in the Forest of Africa
- (C) The Wonders of Nature
- (D) The Incredible Pymy

PASSAGE 10

Dew, the thin film of water that has condensed on the surface of objects near the ground, forms when radiated cooling of these objects during the night time hours also

cools the shallow layer of overlying air in contact with them. It then causes the condensation of some water vapor. This condensation occurs if the capacity of air to hold water vapor lessens as the air is cooled. Dew forms most readily on those surfaces that lose heat through radiation most efficiently but are insulated from external heat sources. Dew is easily formed if humidity in the lowest layers of air is high. The humidity either supplies the moisture or at least inhibits the evaporation of the dew already deposited. Strong winds reduce dew formation since they mix a larger layer of air, creating a more homogeneous distribution of heat and water vapor. Under such conditions, it is unlikely that a sufficiently cool and damp layer of air can form near the ground

18. What does the passage mainly discuss?
- (A) The condensation of water vapor
 - (B) The impact of humidity on dew formation
 - (C) How dew is formed
 - (D) Where dew is formed

PASSAGE 11

Migration, very common among insects and birds, is driven by weather changes. During the cold winter period, food is incredibly inadequate for the animals to carry on, so they make remarkable migrations to find warmer places and to forage. Although most migrating insects only go short distances, particular insects fly very long distances. For example, monarch butterflies spend the summer in Canada and the Northern U.S., and afterward migrate as far south as Mexico for the winter. Many birds migrate in the fall and fly extremely far. For instance, arctic terns nests near the North Pole in the summer. In autumn, they fly south all the way to Antarctica and return to the north each spring. Since the journey can be dangerous, some travel in large flocks like geese that fly in noisy, V-shaped groups

19. What is the main idea of the passage?
- (A) Insects and birds migrate to keep alive
 - (B) Animal migration can cover long distances
 - (C) Insects and birds migrate in large flocks
 - (D) Animals can stay alive during winter
20. What is the topic of the passage?
- (A) Harsh weather
 - (B) Food insufficiency
 - (C) Insects' and birds' migration
 - (D) Severe winter

D. REFERENCES

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