

main idea:

the overall idea of a paragraph or text; a brief statement of what the text says about the topic

Mars Rover Model Celebration – Lesson Plan

Introduction:

One of the new vocabulary terms for this unit is “main idea”. Main idea means “the overall idea of a paragraph or text”, or “a brief statement of what the text says about the topic”. A main idea is usually stated in one sentence or less. The main idea is often stated in the first sentence of a paragraph or text but it can appear in the middle or last sentence as well. Sometimes, an author will not state the main idea in his/her writing and the reader must figure it out on their own. The rest of the sentences in that paragraph or section will contain details related to the main idea. Those sentences are called “supporting details”.

Let’s look at a picture that will help us understand the meaning of the term “main idea”. You can think of main idea as a hamburger bun. Everything that goes inside the hamburger— meat, lettuce, tomato, ketchup, pickles—fit inside the bun, just like all the details fit inside a paragraph’s main idea.

As we do our research on Mars, the main idea will be very useful to us because it will tell us whether the information in the paragraph is related to our topic or not. Suppose you are trying to find out where on Mars you should land your rover. If the main idea of a section of an article you read in your research is, “Mars has two moons: Deimos and Phobos”, you can skip the rest of this section. Although the information might be very interesting, it will not provide you with the facts you need to land your spacecraft on Mars.

Example:

The main idea is also very useful to us when we write. If you are discussing weather conditions on Mars, all of the sentences in this section should be details related to the main idea. They would include temperature extremes on Mars, wind storms and tornados. However, in this section you would not write about how Mars got its red color or where volcanos are located on the surface of Mars.

Reflection:

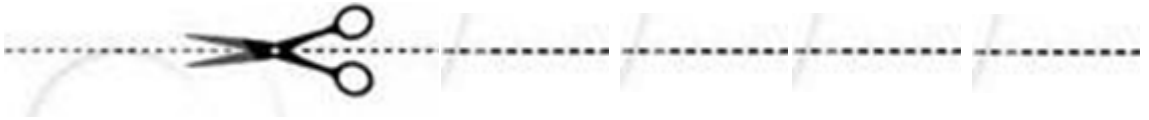
I want you to sit in groups of 3 or 4. I will read you a paragraph and you can follow along on photocopies. In your groups, you will decide which sentence in the selection is the main idea (the overall idea of a paragraph; a statement of what the text says about the topic) or write a main idea if it is not stated. *(Teachers: The main idea and the location are stated below. Have students explain how they determined the main idea for each selection. Student copies are on page 3 of this document)*

- # 1: **Starfish are fascinating animals.** (first sentence)
- # 2: **Saturn is not a very welcoming place for people to live.** (last sentence)
- # 3: **Godzilla was a dinosaur-like movie character** (middle sentence)
- # 4: **How to make chocolate candy** (not stated)

Make it personal:

Think about how knowing about main idea can help you as you develop your Mars Rover mission. Share your thinking with a neighbor. Afterwards, I will ask several of you to share your ideas.

Starfish are fascinating animals. One reason is that if a starfish loses an arm, it can actually grow a new one. Starfish move like caterpillars—they have hundreds of miniature legs that they use to walk underwater. However, starfish are not fish at all—they don't have gills and their skin is very hard which protects the starfish from animals that want to eat them.



It is not possible to live on the surface of Saturn because there is no solid land. Saturn is actually huge ball of gas. In addition, the weather on Saturn is very cold. The average temperature in the warmest place is much colder than the coldest winter day on Earth. Even the air on Saturn is poisonous for humans to breath. So in short, Saturn is not a very welcoming place for people to live.



Most of us have heard of Godzilla, but do you actually know what Godzilla was? Godzilla was a dinosaur-like movie character who appeared in nearly thirty movies from Japan. The word Godzilla comes from the combination of the Japanese words for gorilla and whale. Godzilla has been both evil and good. In some movies, he destroys cities, but in others, he defends the Earth from outer space invasions.



Chocolate begins as part of the cacao tree. Farmers remove the beans and roast them. Then the beans are ground up into paste by big machines. Sugar, cocoa butter and milk are added for flavor. Then all the ingredients are cooked slowly into liquid chocolate. Last, the liquid chocolate is poured into molds with different shapes to make candy bars or chocolate bunnies.