

# Inquiry Mini-Lessons

## Finding the Main Idea

Finding the main idea is a difficult skill because the reader must pick out important details and then synthesize this information. Students will need plenty of modelling and guided practice in this skill before attempting it independently.

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Materials:**

- paragraph from a piece of non-fiction text copied onto chart paper or an interactive whiteboard

- sticky notes

**Grouping:** whole class

### Procedure:

1. Do a Shared Reading of a non-fiction paragraph as a class.
2. Explain to students that good readers constantly monitor their reading to be sure that they understand what the author has written. Explain that good readers often try to pick out the main idea or most important idea in a paragraph to help them with this self-monitoring.
3. Read the first sentence of the text, and model how to pick out the important words in the sentence. You might say, “I think this sentence is about... because I see the word...” Underline each key word in the text, and write each one on a sticky note.
4. Repeat this process for the next line of text.
5. Take a minute to review the words that are highlighted and written on sticky notes. Make a prediction about what the main idea of the passage might be based on the highlighted words. You might say, “At this point, I think this paragraph might be about... because...”
6. Repeat the process with the next line of text. Revise your prediction, if necessary, based on the new highlighted words.
7. Once you have completed this process with all the lines of text, model how to look at all the highlighted words to find what they have in common. Be sure to think aloud so that students can see how you are processing the text.
8. On subsequent days, you may want to repeat the process with another paragraph, having students help read each line of text and record the important words on sticky notes. Together you can examine the key words and determine the main idea.

*Today, I'm going to be showing you how to find the main idea in a paragraph of text.*

**Teaching Tip:** After much practice in the large-group setting, students can work in smaller groups or pairs using paragraphs from materials they have selected for their inquiry. Provide sticky notes for students to record the key words and then have them determine the main idea.