Reading Detectives Prove the Main Idea

Teacher		**Class**	Grade 3
Subject	ELA	**Topic**	Main idea and key details
Date		**Room**	
Lesson length	60 minutes	**Country**	United States

Students learn to find the main idea and use details as proof. They make posters that show the big idea with pictures and words.

Curriculum links

- Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea. [1]

Learning objectives

- Students will determine the main idea of an informational text in one sentence.
- Students will recount key details and explain how they support the main idea.

Success criteria

- I can tell the main idea of the text in one sentence.
- I can recount two key details from the text.
- I can explain how each detail proves the main idea.

What students already know

Show the class a book cover and ask: What do you think this whole book is mostly about? Listen for one big topic, not one small fact.

Key words

main idea	what a whole text is mostly about [1]
key details	important facts and examples that tell more about the topic [1]
support	to show with proof why something is true [1]
recount	to tell again in your own words what you read

Materials

- Slides 1-5, 7, 9-12 projected
- printed Worksheet Task C with Busy Honeybees passage, one per pair
- large paper, one sheet per pair
- markers and crayons
- sticky dots for gallery walk

Before the lesson

- Print Worksheet Task C with Busy Honeybees passage, one copy per pair
- Queue Slides 1-5, 7, 9-12 and test projector
- Put large paper, markers and crayons on tables
- Clear table edges and a path for gallery walk and set out sticky dots

Lesson outline

0–5 min **Starter** 5 min · Whole class

Hook students and recall that good readers ask what a text is mostly about.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 1 Reading Detectives! Find the main idea and prove it and read it aloud.
2. Show Slide 2 photo and say good readers hunt for what a text is mostly about.
3. Say the poster hook and point to large paper to build excitement.
4. Ask partners to whisper what their poster will need in the middle and around it.

STUDENTS DO

1. Look at Slides 1-2 and listen to the mission.
2. Turn and whisper to a neighbor what goes in the middle and around a poster.
3. Share one idea quickly with the class.

Say: We are making posters that teach the whole class in one look — big idea in the middle, proof all around it! Good readers hunt for what a text is mostly about. Today we will be reading detectives.

Ask: What are we hunting for as reading detectives? (What the text is mostly about, the main idea.) · What will go around the middle of our posters? (Proof, the key details that tell more about it.)

Check understanding: Thumbs up if you can say what mostly about means. If many are unsure, repeat with a familiar example like lunch.

Support: Let students whisper first, then repeat a neighbor's words if they are stuck. **Stretch:** Ask ready students to whisper what proof they could draw for a book about pets.

Use: Slides 1-2

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5–15 min **Teaching** 10 min · Whole class

Model how the main idea covers all details and details prove it.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 3 Detective Toolkit and read the three cards aloud.
2. Show Slide 4 statement Key details are clues that prove the main idea and explain it.
3. Show Slide 7 mindmap and think aloud through the dog clues.
4. Ask the Slide 5 question and fix the main idea into one sentence.

STUDENTS DO

1. Listen, point to the toolkit cards, and repeat the two terms.
2. Follow the mindmap clues and answer what they all show.
3. Say the one-sentence main idea together with the teacher.

Say: The main idea is what the whole text is mostly about [1]. Key details are important sentences that tell more about it [1]. Every detail must prove the big idea, like clues prove a case.

Worked example: Slide 7 shows Dogs Help, guide on walks, find lost toys, cheer sad feelings, guard the home. Step 1: Ask what two words describe it: dogs help [3]. Step 2: Check each clue: guiding, finding toys, cheering feelings and guarding all are ways dogs help. Step 3: Say main idea in one sentence: Dogs help people in many ways. It covers all the clues.

Ask: If a text tells about dogs guiding, finding, and cheering, what is it mostly about? (How dogs help people.) · How do guide on walks and cheer sad feelings support that? (They are both examples of help, so they prove the idea.)

Check understanding: Hold up one finger for main idea or many fingers for key details when I name each card. Reteach any card most miss.

Support: Point to each clue on Slide 7 as you read it and stress the word help. **Stretch:** Ask students to add one more dog-help clue that would fit the map.

Use: Slides 3-5, 7

15–30 min **Guided Practice** 15 min · Whole class

Practise finding the main idea and linking two details to it together.

YOU DO

1. Project Slide 9 and read aloud: Worms make soil soft. Bees visit flowers. Birds eat bad bugs. Helpers keep our garden growing.
2. Ask what two words describe the general idea to stay focused [3].
3. Model picking the main idea in one sentence from the last sentence.
4. Model how two details support it with because.

STUDENTS DO

1. Read Slide 9 text aloud with the teacher and find repeated topic words.
2. Vote on the one sentence that covers all details.
3. Practise saying the because link with a partner.

Say: We will pick the main idea in one sentence. Then we will tell how two details prove it. Ask yourself what the whole part is mostly about, not just one small fact.

Worked example: Main idea: Helpers keep our garden growing. Detail 1: Worms make soil soft. This proves it because soft soil helps plants grow. Detail 2: Birds eat bad bugs. This proves it because fewer bad bugs keep plants safe so the garden grows.

Ask: Which sentence is the main idea and why? (Helpers keep our garden growing, because it covers worms, bees and birds.) · How does Worms make soil soft support the main idea? (Soft soil is one way helpers keep the garden growing.) · Why is Bees visit flowers not the main idea? (It is only one detail and does not cover worms and birds.)

Check understanding: Mini whiteboards: all write M for the main-idea sentence on Slide 9. If split, reread and ask what covers everything [3].

Support: Underline Helpers keep our garden growing and reread it after each detail. **Stretch:** Ask students to explain how the third detail also proves the idea in one because sentence.

Use: Slide 9

30–50 min **Main Activity** 20 min · Pairs

Make posters that state the main idea and show details that prove it.

YOU DO

1. Hand out Worksheet Task C with Busy Honeybees and large paper, markers and crayons.
2. Read Busy Honeybees paragraphs 1-4 aloud while pairs follow and point to job words.
3. Direct pairs to write the main idea in the center and draw three labeled boxes for details.
4. Remind pairs to add a because caption under each box to connect detail to center.

STUDENTS DO

1. Read Busy Honeybees paragraphs 1-4 together and agree the main idea.
2. Make the poster with center idea and three boxes with drawings and labels.
3. Write because captions to explain how each detail supports the center.

Say: Read with your partner and ask what the whole text is mostly about. Put that big idea in the middle in your own words. Add three boxes with drawings and labels that prove it.

Worked example: Center example: Honeybees work as a team to make and save honey. Box 1 label from paragraph 2: Worker bees fly out to find flowers. Caption: This proves teamwork because each trip adds food. Box 2 from paragraph 3: They fan it with their wings to dry it. Caption: This proves teamwork because drying makes honey for later [1].

Ask: What is the main idea of Busy Honeybees paragraphs 1-4? (Honeybees show teamwork to make and save honey for winter.) · Which detail from paragraph 2 or 3 proves it and how? (Worker bees fly out to find flowers / fan nectar to dry it; each job helps make honey.)

Check understanding: Walk and look for center sentence plus three labeled boxes. If main idea is a detail, ask: Does it cover paragraphs 1-4 or just one part?

Support: Let partners copy two key phrases from the text to use as labels before drawing. **Stretch:** Partners add a caption under each box with because to connect the detail to the main idea.

Use: Worksheet Task C

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50–60 min **Plenary** 10 min · Whole class

Compare learning and check that details prove the main idea.

YOU DO

1. Lead a quick gallery walk and have students leave a sticky dot on a detail that clearly supports the center.
2. Show Slide 10 to compare main idea and key details.
3. Use Slide 12 quiz to ask and answer questions by pointing to words in the text [1].
4. Close by restating the poster goal and collecting exit lines.

STUDENTS DO

1. Walk, look, and dot one strong detail on another poster.
2. Answer the quiz questions with text proof.
3. Say their poster main idea and one proving detail aloud.

Say: Dot the proof that fits best. A main idea tells what a text is mostly about in one big sentence. Details are small facts that show why it is true.

Worked example: Slide 10 shows Main Idea: Tells what text is mostly about, One big sentence, Needs proof from details. Key Details: Small facts and examples, Many in one text. Our posters needed one center and many proofs.

Ask: What is the main idea? (What a text is mostly about.) · What are key details? (Important sentences that tell more about it.) · How do details support the idea? (They give facts and examples that prove it.)

Check understanding: Exit lines on scrap paper: write main idea + one detail. If many confuse detail for idea, remodel with Slide 11 garden helpers mystery tomorrow.

Support: Provide sentence frames like The main idea is ___. One detail that shows it is ___. **Stretch:** Ask students to compare their main idea with another table and discuss which wording covers all the details better.

Use: Slides 10-12

Common mistakes

Mistake	How to spot it	How to fix it
Saying one interesting detail is the main idea	Poster center names only flowers, teeth-brushing, or one job	Ask what two words cover the whole text and check if every detail fits them [3].
Listing details that do not prove the main idea	Poster box cannot be linked with because to the center	Ask how this detail shows the big idea and replace it with a sentence from the text that does [1].
Copying a sentence instead of recounting the main idea	Center repeats one text sentence word for word	Model saying it in your own words and have students retell it without looking.

Support

- Let partners copy two key phrases from the text to use as labels before drawing.
- Provide sentence frames like The main idea is ___. One detail that shows it is ___.

Stretch

- Partners add a caption under each box with because to connect the detail to the main idea.
- Pairs write one tricky extra sentence that does not belong and challenge another pair to spot it.

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For the LSE or teaching assistant

Sit with target pairs during poster work. Help them pick the center sentence, find two phrases to copy, and say the because link aloud.

Check for understanding

Question	Answer
What is the main idea of Busy Honeybees paragraph 4?	Honeybees show teamwork to keep the hive alive.
Name one key detail that proves it.	They share jobs, gather food, and save it for winter.
How does that detail support the main idea?	It shows teamwork / sharing jobs keeps the hive alive with honey.

Homework

Tell someone at home the main idea of Busy Honeybees and one detail that proves it.

Sources

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