Sum It Up: Main Idea and Key Details

Teacher		**Class**	Grade 4
Subject	ELA	**Topic**	Reading comprehension: summarizing
Date		**Room**	
Lesson length	60 minutes	**Country**	United States

Students learn to find the main idea and show how key details support it. They shrink a paragraph into a short summary in their own words.

Curriculum links

- Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Learning objectives

- Students will determine the main idea of an informational text.
- Students will explain how key details support the main idea.
- Students will write a short summary in their own words.

Success criteria

- I can state the main idea in one sentence.
- I can point to 2 key details that prove it.
- I can write a short summary in my own words.

What students already know

Show a sticky note. Ask: What does mostly about mean? Have students give the gist of yesterday's read-aloud in one sentence.

Key words

summary	short retelling that keeps only the most important parts in fresh phrasing [4]
main idea	what a text is mostly about [4]
detail	small piece of proof that shows the big point is true [1]
topic sentence	often the first line in a section that tells what that section is about [7]
own words	fresh phrasing thought up by you, not copied from the book [4]

Materials

- pencils
- sticky notes - one per student plus extras
- printed recess paragraph - one per student (text written out in plan)
- Slides 1-6, 9-12
- Video clip 3 Main Idea and Summarising on slide 6
- Worksheet Task B copies - Swap it: read copied detail and write own-words summary in empty box, page 2

Before the lesson

- Print recess paragraph for each student and Task B Swap it page 2 for each student
- Test Video clip 3 (0:00-3:06) on slide 6 with sound
- Load Slides 1-6, 9-12 and make sticky-note board space
- Put pencils and sticky notes on desks

- board space for sticky notes

Lesson outline

0–10 min **Starter** 10 min · Whole class

Activate prior knowledge of gist and hook students on shrinking text.

YOU DO

1. Hold up a tiny sticky note and a full page and say the hook.
2. Show Slide 1 Sum It Up! Find the main idea and retell it short and Slide 2: A summary tells what a text is mostly about in a few of your own words. It keeps only the most important parts.
3. Ask what summarizing feels hard and show Slide 5 vote options.
4. Preview goal: today we will write a short summary that states the main idea and key details in our own words.

STUDENTS DO

1. Look at sticky note and slides and vote hardest part.
2. Tell a partner in one sentence what a recent story was mostly about.
3. Share one idea with the class.

Say: This whole paragraph is too big for my brain. Who can help me shrink it to fit on this tiny sticky note? A summary tells what a text is mostly about in just a few of your own words. Today you will shrink reading to fit on one note.

Ask: What does a summary keep? (Only what a text is mostly about and the most important parts, in our own words.) · How is a summary different from telling everything? (It leaves out small extras and does not copy every little thing.)

Check understanding: Thumbs up if you can say what a summary keeps. If many are unsure, reread Slide 2 together and give another one-sentence example.

Support: Let students answer with the sentence frame: It was mostly about ___. **Stretch:** Ask students to add what part of summarizing feels hardest and why.

Use: Slides 1-2, 5

10–25 min **Teaching** 15 min · Whole class

Model how to find the main idea, pick key details, and summarize short.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 4 steps: Find main idea, pick key details that prove it, leave out extras, say it short in your own words.
2. Play Video clip 3 (0:00-3:06) on Slide 6. Tell students to listen for the big idea and spot details that support it.
3. Model with Slide 9 text, finding the topic sentence idea which is often the first one [7] and crossing out extras.
4. Think aloud a 2-sentence summary in own words, showing summarizing is different from quoting [4].

STUDENTS DO

1. Watch clip and call out main idea and one supporting detail.
2. Read bees text with teacher and vote which sentences prove the main idea.
3. Repeat the model summary and check it has main idea plus details.

Say: Good readers ask what it is mostly about. Then we pick 2 or 3 details that prove it and leave out small or funny extras. We say it short in our own words, not copied words.

Worked example: Slide 9 text: Bees visit flowers for sweet juice called nectar. They carry pollen dust that helps new plants grow. In the hive, they work as a team to make honey. Step 1 Main idea: bees do important work that helps plants and makes honey. Step 2 Key details: collect nectar from flowers; carry pollen dust that helps new plants grow; work as a team in the hive to make honey. Step 3 Summary in own words: Bees gather sweet juice and move pollen that grows new plants. In the hive, they work as a team to make honey.

Ask: What is the bees text mostly about? (Bees collecting what they need and helping plants grow while making honey together.) · Which details prove it and what do we leave out? (Nectar collecting, pollen moving for new plants, teamwork for honey prove it; we leave out tiny extras.) · Why use our own words? (Copying is quoting; summarizing uses new wording to show we understand [4].)

Check understanding: Mini-whiteboards: write M for main idea sentence I show. If mixed, model again pointing to topic sentence which is often the first sentence in a paragraph [7].

Support: Underline the first sentence for students and highlight 3 candidate details to choose from. **Stretch:** Ask students to explain how two details connect to each other, not just to the main idea.

Use: Slides 3-4, 6, 9, Video clip 3 (0:00-3:06)

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25–45 min **Main activity** 20 min · On their own

Students shrink a paragraph to a sticky-note summary with main idea and details.

YOU DO

1. Give out printed recess paragraph, pencils and sticky notes.
2. Read paragraph aloud once, then have students reread and underline the topic sentence which is often the first sentence [7].
3. Model crossing out repeated words and a funny extra, keeping 2-3 key details, since summarizing checks understanding and finds main ideas [4].
4. Direct each student to write a 2-3 sentence summary that includes only the main ideas [7] on the sticky note and stick it on the board.

STUDENTS DO

1. Read paragraph, underline likely main-idea sentence and cross out extras.
2. Circle 2-3 key details that prove the main idea.
3. Write 2-3 sentence summary in own words on sticky note and post it.

Say: Read twice. Find what it is mostly about. Cross out extras. Keep 2 or 3 key details that prove it. Now shrink it. Write 2 or 3 sentences in your own words to fit this tiny note.

Worked example: Full text to print: 1 Recess at our school gives fourth graders a healthy break to move and play together. 2 The bell rings and we hurry outside to the blacktop and field. 3 Some groups play kickball and take turns pitching and catching. 4 Others take turns on the swings and climb while talking with friends. 5 Walking around the track is also a good way to stretch tired legs. 6 Yesterday a student lost a shoelace and we all laughed for a minute. 7 Teachers watch and blow a whistle when time is almost up. 8 We line up sweaty and happy and go back inside ready to learn. Worked shrink: keep sentence 1 as main idea, keep sentences 3, 4, 5 as proof, cross out 6 as small extra. Sticky-note summary: Recess gives fourth graders a healthy break to move and play together. Students play kickball, use swings and climbing parts, and walk the track to stretch. They return happy and ready to learn.

Ask: Which sentence is the main idea and how do you know? (Sentence 1; it tells what the whole paragraph is mostly about, like a topic sentence [7].) · Which details prove it and what did you leave out? (Kickball, swings and climbing with friends, track walking; left out shoelace laugh and whistle as small extras.)

Check understanding: Scan sticky notes on board for main idea plus 2 details in own words. Pull 2 strong and 1 weak example to fix together if needed.

Support: Give a paragraph with the topic sentence already underlined and only 5 sentences to shrink.
Stretch: Have students shrink a second paragraph to exactly 20 words without losing the main idea.

45–55 min **Independent practice** 10 min · On their own

Students practice using own words for a summary of the garden passage.

YOU DO

1. Give out Worksheet Task B Swap it on page 2: read each copied detail from How Our Class Garden Grows and write own-words summary in empty box.
2. Point to paragraph 2 growth steps and paragraph 3 result where steady water and sunlight helped the plants grow.
3. Remind students to change copied words and shorten, because paraphrasing differs from quoting and summarizing [4].
4. Collect or have partners compare boxes for own-words check.

STUDENTS DO

1. Read copied details from How Our Class Garden Grows.
2. Write short own-words version in each empty box.
3. Underline any copied 3-word string and fix it.

Say: Look at the copied detail in the box. Say the same smart idea in a brand-new way. Write a short summary in your own words. Underline any 3-word string you copied to fix.

Worked example: Copied: We measured the stems each week - Own-words swap: We checked how tall the stems grew every week. Then shorten paragraph 3 proof to: Water and sun helped tomatoes and carrots grow well enough to share.

Ask: How did you change the copied words? (Used different words with same meaning and made it shorter.) · What detail from paragraph 3 proves steady care helped? (Tomato plants grew tall with red fruit and carrots grew long roots to share.)

Check understanding: Walk and check boxes for own words and key detail kept. If many copy, model swapping 3-4 key words with synonyms.

Support: Provide a word bank of synonyms and let students change just 3-4 key words first. **Stretch:** Have students write two different one-sentence versions of the main idea and pick the clearer one.

Use: Worksheet Task B Swap it

55–60 min **Plenary** 5 min · Whole class

Review what makes a great summary and check understanding.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 10 mindmap: Main idea, 2-3 key details, own words, short and clear, same order as text.
2. Read 2 sticky notes aloud and have class check them against the mindmap.
3. Run Slide 12 True or false: A summary tells every detail - false, it keeps only main idea and key details that prove what it is mostly about.

STUDENTS DO

1. Compare sticky-note summary to mindmap with partner.
2. Vote true or false and correct the false one.
3. State success criteria met: main idea, proof, short own-words summary.

Say: A great summary tells the big idea, leaves small stuff out, and uses new words. Check your note. Does it have the main idea, 2 details, and your own words in the same order?

Ask: How do key details support the main idea? (They prove what the text is mostly about.) · What do we leave out of a summary? (Small or funny extras; we do not copy every little thing.)

Check understanding: Exit ticket thumbs and answers. Reteach missing part tomorrow with Slide 11 riddle: I tell the big idea, leave small stuff out, and use new words. What am I? A summary!

Support: Provide starters: The main idea is ___. One detail that shows this is ___. **Stretch:** Ask students to add a title that states the main idea in 5 words or fewer.

Use: Slides 10-12

Common mistakes

Mistake	How to spot it	How to fix it
Retelling every little thing instead of the big idea	Summary is long and lists extras like shoelace laugh	Cross out extras and keep only 2-3 details that prove the main idea; a summary includes only the main ideas [7]
Copying sentences word for word	3 or more words in a row match the text	Model swapping words and shortening, since summarizing is different from quoting [4]
Mistaking one detail for the main idea	Main-idea sentence only names kickball or nectar	Ask what the whole text is mostly about and check topic sentence which is often first [7]

Support

- Give a paragraph with the topic sentence already underlined and only 5 sentences to shrink.
- Provide sentence frames and word bank: This text is mostly about. One detail is. Another detail is.

Stretch

- Have students shrink a second paragraph to exactly 20 words without losing the main idea.
- Have students write two different one-sentence versions of the main idea and pick the clearer one.

For the LSE or teaching assistant

Sit near target students during main activity. Help underline topic sentence, cover extras, prompt 2 details, check sticky note has main idea plus proof in own words.

Check for understanding

Question	Answer
What is the main idea of the recess paragraph?	Recess gives fourth graders a healthy break to move and play together.
Name 2 key details that support it.	Play kickball; use swings/climbing parts; walk track to stretch - any 2 that prove the break to move and play.
Write one own-words summary sentence for bees or garden text.	Accept any short sentence in new wording that keeps big idea, e.g., Bees move pollen that grows new plants and work as a team to make honey.

Homework

Shrink tonight's reading to 2 sentences: 1 main idea + 1 proof detail in your own words.

Sources

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