Find the Center and Show How It Grows

Teacher		**Class**	Grade 8
Subject	ELA	**Topic**	Reading comprehension: central idea
Date		**Room**	
Lesson length	60 minutes	**Country**	United States

Students learn to state a central idea and trace how it develops. They build a sticky-note map and write an objective summary.

Learning objectives

- Students will determine a central idea of informational text in one sentence.
- Students will analyze how supporting ideas develop the central idea across paragraphs.
- Students will provide an objective summary with no personal opinions.

Success criteria

- I can write the central idea as one clear sentence.
- I can show how each paragraph supports or extends the center.
- I can write a short summary using only the author's points.

What students already know

Ask: What is the difference between topic in 1-2 words and the point in a full sentence? Cold-call two answers, then confirm topic names subject, idea states point.

Key words

topic	the subject of a text, often said in one or two words
central idea	the most important point a text makes about its subject [1]
supporting idea	a reason, example, or fact that helps explain the most important point [1]
development	how the most important point grows clearer in the order sentences unfold ideas [5]
objective summary	a short retelling that gives only what the author says, with no personal views [1]

Materials

- Slides 1-5, 9-12
- Printed copies of passage Phones Off, Minds On with numbered paragraphs
- Printed copies of passage The Power of Sleep for modeling
- Sticky notes in two colors, large paper, markers
- Worksheet Task F
- Summary planners or notebook paper, pencils

Before the lesson

- Print Phones Off, Minds On and The Power of Sleep, one per student, paragraphs numbered
- Print Worksheet Task F, one per group
- Set out sticky notes in two colors and large paper, one set per group of 3-4
- Load Slides 1-5, 9-12 and check projector
- Pre-label one set with first and last paragraph gists for support groups

Lesson outline

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

Activate topic versus central idea and hook interest in finding what holds a text up.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 1 Holding It Up and read the hook in the say script.
2. Show Slide 2 Think, pair, share question: What is text about vs. what does it say?
3. Show Slide 5 mystery about what holds up a text and confirm central idea holds it up.
4. Model one contrast using sleep: topic is sleep, point is a full sentence from the text.

STUDENTS DO

1. Think for 30 seconds about topic versus point.
2. Pair-share answers with a partner.
3. Share two ideas whole class and vote topic or central idea.

Say: If this whole article was a building, what is holding it up, and what are just the decorations? Turn and tell your partner: what is this text about, and what does it actually say? The about is the topic in 1-2 words. The says is the central idea in a full sentence.

Worked example: Topic: sleep. Central idea from the author: In short, steady sleep supports learning, mood, and health, and teens can improve it with simple nightly choices. The first is 1 word. The second is the full point, not just the subject.

Ask: Is the word sleep a topic or a central idea? (Topic, because it is only the subject in one word, not a full point.) · What makes a central idea different from a topic? (It is a full sentence that states the point about the topic.)

Check understanding: Thumbs up if you can say the difference; if mixed, reteach with Slide 3 mindmap line Central idea: full sentence before moving on.

Support: Give sentence frame: The topic is ___. The point is ___. **Stretch:** Ask students to add a limit to make a too-broad topic statement more exact.

Use: Slides 1-2, 5

10–20 min **Teaching** 10 min · Whole class

Model how to gist paragraphs, find the repeated point, and link supports to the center.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 3 Topic Is Not the Point and review mindmap: Topic: 1-2 words, Central idea: full sentence, Supports: reasons, examples.
2. Show Slide 4 Find the Center steps: Gist each paragraph in 3 words, spot repeated point, write one sentence: topic + point.
3. Think aloud with The Power of Sleep paragraphs 1-4, underlining repeated words sleep, brain, mood, habits.
4. Model linking paragraphs with because to show development across the text.

STUDENTS DO

1. Follow along on printed passage and whisper gists.
2. Call out repeated words they hear.
3. Copy the one-sentence center and because link.

Say: Reading takes in meaning from symbols by sight or touch [3]. We make connections among ideas and use textual evidence to check answers [1]. I write a 3-word gist for each paragraph, find the point that repeats, then write topic plus point as one sentence.

Worked example: The Power of Sleep gists: P1 not enough sleep, P2 sleep stores learning, P3 sleep steadies mood, P4 habits build sleep. Repeated point: sleep helps learning and mood. Central idea: In short, steady sleep supports learning, mood, and health, and teens can improve it with simple nightly choices. Link: P2 supports center because the brain replays lessons in deep sleep.

Ask: Why is sleep stores learning a gist and not a central idea? (It is only what paragraph 2 mostly says, not the point that connects all paragraphs.) · Which evidence proves the center repeats across paragraphs? (Words about sleep helping learning in paragraph 2, mood in paragraph 3, and habits in paragraph 4.)

Check understanding: Mini-whiteboards: all write topic + point for the sleep text; scan, reteach gist versus center if many write details only.

Support: Underline key repeated words for students before they choose the center. **Stretch:** Ask students to name where the idea is sharpened, not just repeated, in paragraph 4.

Use: Slides 3-4

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20–45 min **Main activity** 25 min · Groups

Build a visual map that states the center and shows how supporting ideas develop it.

YOU DO

1. Hand out Phones Off, Minds On, large paper, and sticky notes in two colors.
2. Show Slide 9 Your task and read directions: Agree one-sentence center on top, add gist note per part below, draw arrows with because, for example.
3. Direct silent reading to take in the meaning of the written symbols [3], then one color sticky for what each paragraph mostly says and a different color for the one idea that connects them all.
4. Circulate with Worksheet Task F prompts to track Paragraphs 2-4 and push groups to explain development.

STUDENTS DO

1. Read Phones Off, Minds On silently and write 3-word gists on one color.
2. Agree one-sentence center on second color and place on top of large paper.
3. Arrange gist notes below, draw arrows labeled because, for example, or but, then present paper.

Say: Read silently first. Put one color sticky for what each paragraph mostly says and a different color for the one idea that connects them all. Arrange the paragraph notes under the central idea note and draw arrows to show where the author adds a reason, example, or explanation. Use because and for example on your arrows.

Worked example: Center on top: Brief breaks from phones can improve attention and friendships, and setting clear limits helps students stay in control of technology instead of letting it control them. Below: P1 tried two-week challenge, P2 sharper focus, P3 friendships changed, P4 clear limits help. Arrows: P2 supports center because Without buzzes and alerts, they finished reading assignments faster and remembered more details during discussion. P3 extends center, for example students talked face to face and settled arguments more quickly.

Ask: How does paragraph 2 develop the center, not just repeat it? (It adds proof of sharper focus with faster reading and fewer missing assignments.) · How does paragraph 3 relate to the center and to paragraph 2? (It extends the center from attention to friendships with face-to-face talk, while paragraph 2 was about focus.)

Check understanding: Groups hold up center sentence; teacher scans for full-sentence point versus too-broad or detail-only, redirects with text quote if off.

Support: Give a version with the first and last paragraph already labeled with their paragraph ideas. **Stretch:** Have students add a note for a paragraph where the central idea is sharpened or shifted, not just repeated.

Use: Slide 9, Worksheet Task F

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45–55 min **Write it clean** 10 min · On their own

Turn the map into a short objective summary with neutral language.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 10 cards: Use only what the author states, Use states, explains, shows, adds, and cut opinion words.
2. Model turning the sticky map into 3-4 sentences using neutral verbs and no I think language [1].
3. Have students write 3-4 sentence summary from their map.
4. Direct partner swap to circle any opinion words to remove.

STUDENTS DO

1. Write 3-4 sentence summary from group map on planner.
2. Trade papers and circle any opinion or extra detail to cut.

Say: Can you shrink this whole page into three or four sentences without saying I think? Use only what the author states. Use states, explains, shows, adds. Cut amazing, boring, should and I feel language.

Worked example: The author states a Grade 8 class tried two weeks with phones off during the day. He explains focus improved because students finished reading faster and missing assignments dropped. He adds friendships improved as students talked face to face. He concludes brief breaks can improve attention and friendships when students set clear limits. No opinions, only author points.

Ask: Which word breaks objectivity: amazing, states, or explains? (Amazing, because it adds judgment the author did not state.) · What must an objective summary include? (Central idea plus key supports, using only what the author says.)

Check understanding: Collect two samples to read aloud; if opinions remain, model scrubbing one sentence together.

Support: Give a word bank of neutral verbs: states, explains, shows, describes, adds. **Stretch:** Have students cut their summary to 30 words while still keeping central idea plus one key support.

Use: Slide 10

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

Check central idea, development, and objective summary against success criteria.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 11 vote: Which helps you most to find the big point? and take quick show of hands.
2. Show Slide 12 Quick quiz and ask true-false and development question.
3. Return to success criteria and have students self-rate 1-3 fingers.

STUDENTS DO

1. Vote and defend choice in one sentence.
2. Answer quiz questions on whiteboards.
3. Self-rate against I can statements.

Say: Show me what stuck. Vote for what helped you most, then answer the quiz. Topic and central idea are the same. True or false? Be ready to explain with one quote from today.

Ask: Topic and central idea are the same. True or false? (False. Topic is subject, idea is point.) · How does phones off connect to focus in paragraph 2? (Phones off led to sharper focus because there were no buzzes, so reading was faster and work got done.)

Check understanding: Whiteboard answers to quiz; if many miss development link, point back to because arrows on maps.

Support: Provide sentence starter: In paragraph 2, the idea grows when the author adds... **Stretch:** Ask what the text would lose if one supporting paragraph were removed.

Use: Slides 11-12

Common mistakes

Mistake	How to spot it	How to fix it
Writing the topic instead of the central idea	One or two words like phones or sleep, or a too-broad statement with no limit from text	Require topic + point in a full sentence and check it against evidence across paragraphs [1]
Listing details instead of showing development	Paragraph notes with no arrows or only repeats the same sentence	Force because and for example arrows and ask where the idea is introduced, explained, and sharpened by paying attention to order ideas unfold [5]
Adding opinions to the summary	Words like amazing, boring, should, I feel in summaries	Scrub to neutral verbs states, explains, shows, adds and keep only what the author says [1]

Support

- Give a version with the first and last paragraph already labeled with their paragraph ideas
- Underline key repeated words before voting and provide gist starters and neutral verb bank

Stretch

- Have students add a note for a paragraph where the central idea is sharpened or shifted, not just repeated
- Have students cut summary to 30 words and explain which support most develops the center

For the LSE or teaching assistant

Sit with target groups during main map: help gist in 3 words, prompt because links, check center is one sentence. In summary stage, help scrub opinion words using verb bank.

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Check for understanding

Question	Answer
State the central idea of Phones Off, Minds On in one sentence.	Brief breaks from phones can improve attention and friendships, and setting clear limits helps students stay in control of technology.
How does paragraph 2 develop that central idea?	It supports attention with evidence: faster reading and fewer missing assignments without buzzes.
Rewrite to be objective: Phones off was amazing and everyone should do it.	The author states phones off improved focus and friendships during the challenge.

Homework

Write a 3-sentence objective summary of The Power of Sleep using your gist notes.

Sources

1. How to Read the Standards · thecorestandards.org · https://www.thecorestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/introduction/how-to-read-the-standards/
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3. Reading - Wikipedia · en.m.wikipedia.org · https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reading
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