

SMART™ Lesson

Reading Non-Fiction: Understanding Main Idea and Supporting Details

When we read non-fiction, we are typically trying to gain knowledge about a certain topic or to become more informed on a particular subject. In order to do this, it is important that we are able to understand the main idea and supporting details of the text we are reading. This will help us to comprehend the material more fully and to remember the important information that we have learned.

What is the Main Idea?

The main idea of a piece of non-fiction writing is the most important point that the author is trying to convey. It is the overall message or purpose of the text. Sometimes the main idea is directly stated in the text, while other times it takes a bit more effort to determine what the author is saying.

Example 1:

If we were reading an article about pollution and the harmful effects of plastic on the environment, the main idea might be something like:

"Plastic pollution is a major problem for the environment and is causing harm to wildlife and ecosystems."

Example 2:

Another example could be an article about exercise and its benefits, with a main idea like:

"Regular exercise is crucial for maintaining good health and can improve both physical and mental well-being."

What are Supporting Details?

Supporting details are the pieces of information that help to support and explain the main idea of a piece of non-fiction writing. They provide additional evidence, facts, or examples that help to prove or illustrate the main point of the text.

Example:

If the main idea of an article is that healthy eating can prevent certain diseases, the supporting details might include:

- Studies that have shown a correlation between a healthy diet and disease prevention.
- Information on specific nutrients that are important for good health.
- Examples of foods that are known to be beneficial for preventing certain diseases.

Practice Determining Main Idea and Supporting Details:

Read the following passage and then answer the questions below:

Global warming, sometimes referred to as climate change, is a phenomenon that has been observed over the past century. It is characterized by an increase in the average temperature of the Earth's atmosphere and oceans, leading to changes in climate patterns and weather events. There is a scientific consensus that global warming is primarily caused by human activity, such as the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation. The consequences of global warming are significant and include rising sea levels, loss of biodiversity, and more extreme weather events such as hurricanes, droughts, and floods.

1. What is the main idea of this passage?
2. What are some supporting details that help to support the main idea?

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Main Idea and Supporting Details

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