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Introduction

The old adage “practice makes perfect” can apply to your child and his or her education. The more practice and exposure your child has with concepts being taught in school, the more success he or she is likely to find. For many parents, knowing how to help their children may be frustrating because the resources may not be readily available. As a parent, it is also hard to know where to focus your efforts so that the extra practice your child receives at home supports what he or she is learning in school.

A child’s ability to understand what he or she reads depends largely upon the ability to locate the main idea of a passage and identify the details that support it. *Practice Makes Perfect: Main Idea* covers identifying the main idea and supporting details in both fiction and nonfiction text. To allow for the greatest variety of practice, the passages are not complete stories. The exercises included in this book meet or reinforce educational standards and objectives similar to the ones required by your state and school district for fifth-graders:

- ☞ The student will identify the main idea in fiction and nonfiction text.
- ☞ The student will locate supporting details in fiction and nonfiction text.
- ☞ The student will identify topic sentences in paragraphs.
- ☞ The student will choose the best title for a passage.
- ☞ The student will summarize the main idea of a passage.

Determining the Main Idea (Unstated)

The main idea is not always stated in a paragraph or passage. This is especially true in fiction. Figure out an unstated main idea by making a “movie in your mind.” Forming pictures as you read gives you a sense of the key idea.

When the main idea is not directly stated in nonfiction, gather details by keeping questions in mind (see page 15). Use the answers to piece together the main idea.

Passage 1

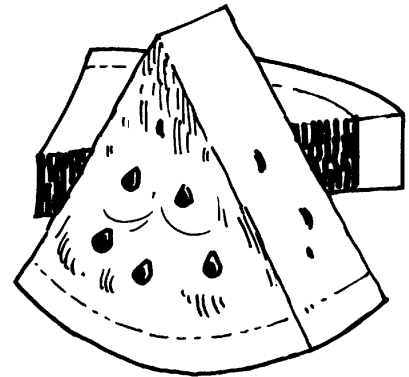
Bitterly cold wind and flakes of snow drifted through the cracks in the walls. The girls huddled close together in a corner of the cold barn. They had pulled bunches of loose straw around themselves to form a makeshift blanket. They listened to the blizzard raging outside. Their parents would be so worried about them! Thank goodness they’d found this shelter. Being outdoors during a blizzard was often deadly. Now they faced the problem of staying warm enough to survive until the storm ended.

What is the main idea?

- (a) There’s a blizzard raging outside a barn.
- (b) The girls are safe now that they’ve found shelter.
- (c) The girls surrounded themselves with straw.
- (d) The girls are in a barn, hoping to live through a blizzard.

Passage 2

Think about sinking your teeth into a delicious slice of watermelon on a summer day. What makes the watermelon taste so good? Well, this juicy fruit is about 93 percent water. This makes it almost as refreshing as a glass of water on a hot, sunny day. And it provides you with vitamins A and C, as well as potassium. Since watermelons grow on vines and must be replanted each year, scientists call them vegetables. Don’t you wish that all vegetables tasted so good?



What is the main idea?

- a Since watermelons grow on vines and must be replanted each year, scientists call them vegetables.
- b Watermelon not only tastes good, it’s good for you.
- c A slice of watermelon is nearly as refreshing as a glass of water on a hot summer day.
- d Watermelons are about 93 percent water.

Choosing the Best Title

To select a title, first decide what the main idea is. Then check your choices to see which one best fits the topic.

Passage 1

The census counts every person living in the U.S. on a certain date. The census tells where Americans live and the size of their families. It tells how many people have come from other places. It shows the number of people in each age group. The census finds out what people do for a living, how much money they earn, and how much education they have. It reports the number of births, deaths, marriages, and divorces.

The Constitution requires a census once a decade to decide how many people each state should have in the House of Representatives. The states with the biggest population send the most people to Congress. States with fewer people send less. After a census, some states may gain seats in the House of Representatives. Other states may lose seats.

What is the best title for this passage?

- (a) A Constitutional Requirement
- (b) Finding Out About Americans' Income
- (c) U.S. Census Provides Essential Data
- (d) American Citizens Respond to U.S. Census

Passage 2

Flames threw strange, dancing shadows on their tent. The hearty smell of smoke rose from the crackling campfire. Karlene's dad emerged from the darkness just beyond the circle of firelight, carrying two long twigs. He held their tips to the flames to clean the ends of the branches. Then he handed one to Karlene, along with a marshmallow. She pressed it onto the blackened twig tip and held the fluffy white cube over some embers at the edge of the fire. When it turned golden brown, she popped it into her mouth. Looking at her father across the flickering flames, she smiled. Time alone with her dad and toasted marshmallows. This must be paradise.



What is the best title for this passage?

- (a) A Dangerous Camping Trip
- (b) Karlene's Campfire
- (c) Enjoying Nature
- (d) Toasting Marshmallows