



Reading Comprehension: Main-Idea Maps

Description: This simple strategy teaches students to generate a graphic organizer containing the main ideas of an expository passage.

Reserve at least a full instructional session to introduce this comprehension strategy. (For effective-teaching tips, consult the guidelines presented in "*Introducing Academic Strategies to Students: A Direct-Instruction Approach*").

Materials:

- Overhead transparencies of practice expository passages, transparency markers
- Student copies of practice expository passages (optional) or reading/text books, *Main Idea Graphic Organizer*

Preparation:

- Prepare overheads of sample passages.

Intervention Script:

1. Introduce the strategy by telling students that we can draw pictures, or Main Idea Maps, that help us to understand how the ideas of a multi-paragraph passage fit together. Present these three steps for mapping out the main ideas of an expository:

Locating the Main Ideas of Paragraphs. Read through a short (2-6 paragraph) practice expository passage with students.

On a blank overhead transparency or chart paper, begin building a graphic organizer by writing the title of the passage in the center. Draw a box around the title. (If the passage has no title, query the class and make up a suitable title based on their suggestions.) NOTE: Instead of drawing your own map, you can use the pre-formatted *Main Idea Graphic Organizer* that is included with this strategy.

Tell students that some paragraphs have summary sentences that state the main idea or "gist" of the paragraph or passage. Other paragraphs have *implied* main ideas, which the reader must figure out, based on key facts or ideas that they contain.

Go through each paragraph in the practice passage and identify the paragraph's main idea. Demonstrate how to summarize that main idea as a single, succinct phrase.

Building the Main Idea Graphic Organizer. As you summarize each paragraph's main idea, write the number of the paragraph and main-idea summary phrase on the graphic organizer. (Start writing at the upper left corner of the organizer sheet and continue clockwise around the page. Space the summary phrases to allow space to write under each. See the sample "Main Idea Graphic Organizer.").



Adding Key Facts. When you have written the main idea for all of the paragraphs onto the graphic organizer, return to the passage. For each paragraph, pull out 2-3 important facts, ideas, or supporting details. On the graphic organizer, write these key pieces of additional information under the main-idea phrase for that paragraph. Then draw a box around the main-idea and supporting details and move on to the next paragraph.

2. Practice Using the Graphic Organizer as a Study Tool. Demonstrate how the completed Main Idea Graphic Organizer can be a useful method to summarize and review the content of expository passages. Give students new practice passages and have them create their own graphic organizers. Provide feedback and encouragement as needed.

Tips:

Use a Giant 'Main Idea Map' to Teach The Strategy. You can make the teaching of this strategy fun and highly interactive by drawing a giant version of the Main Idea Graphic Organizer onto newsprint and laying it on the floor. Assign each individual in the class to read through a practice passage and write out a summary main-idea phrase and key ideas or facts for each paragraph. Review the passage with the group. For each paragraph, invite a volunteer to stand on the space on the giant organizer that corresponds to the paragraph and read aloud his or her summary for class feedback. Continue through the passage until all paragraphs have been reviewed and student volunteers have occupied each point on the graphic organizer.

References:

Berkowitz, S.J. (1986). Effects of instruction in text organization on sixth-grade students' memory for expository reading. *Reading Research Quarterly, 21*, 161-178.



Main Idea Graphic Organizer (adapted from Berkowitz, 1986)

Main Idea 1:

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Main Idea 2:

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Main Idea 6:

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Title:

Main Idea 3:

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Main Idea 5:

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Main Idea 4:

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