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Introduction

The language arts section of standardized tests always involves a lot of reading. There are short questions, too, of course, but quite often you must read a paragraph or a long passage to answer the questions.

Here's the Idea

To answer your best on the language arts sections, you must be able to do the following:

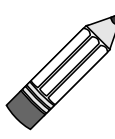

1. Identify main ideas.
2. Recognize important details or clues.
3. Draw conclusions on your own.

Before we look at each of the three skills, read the following tips that apply to taking any test, whether it is in language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, fine arts, or computers and technology. These tips will be repeated because they are important!



Test-Taking Tips



- **Read directions carefully before marking any test questions**, even though you have done that kind of test before. You may think you already know what the directions say, but don't ignore them—read them over. If you do not understand the directions, raise your hand and ask for help. Although your teacher must read the directions exactly as they are written, the teacher can make sure you understand what the directions mean.
 - **Follow instructions.** Pay close attention to the sample exercises. They will help you understand what the items on the test will be like and how to mark your answer sheet properly.
 - **Read the entire question and all the answer choices.** Do not stop reading when you have found a correct answer. Choices D or E may read “B and D” or “all of the above” or “none of the above.” On some tests, two answers are both correct. You need to read all the answer choices before marking your answer.
 - **For long reading passages, read the questions first so you know what to look for.** If you read the questions first, you will find information in the passage that answers questions.
 - **Remember that taking a test is not a race!** There are no prizes for finishing first. Use all of the time provided for the test. If you have time left over, check your answers.
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Try and Discuss

Now let's discuss the same three skills (*identifying main ideas, recognizing important details or clues, and drawing conclusions on your own*) for language arts tests.

Take a look at the question below.

Which one names the whole group?

- (A) Earth
- (B) Mercury
- (C) Pluto
- (D) solar system
- (E) orbits

Fill in the correct circle.

- (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)
-

One of these words includes all of the others. It is (D) “solar system.” The planets—Earth, Mercury, and Pluto—are all part of the solar system, and all the planets travel in an orbit in the solar system.

The main idea of a paragraph is just like that—it is an idea that names all of the other ideas in the paragraph by making them one group. You will be asked to identify main ideas on language arts tests. You also may be asked, “What would be a good title for this?” which is another way of asking, “What is the main idea?”

This time, look at the list of words below and decide what is the main idea of this group. (**Hint:** The main idea is not mentioned!)

What is the main idea that connects these things?

- (A) candles
- (B) games
- (C) ice cream
- (D) cake
- (E) gifts
- (F) guests

What do you think? _____

Think of a main idea that would include all of these things. You might come to the conclusion that the answer is a *birthday party*. In this case, you have to draw your own conclusion. In other words, you have to make a good guess at what the main idea is, even though it does not appear in words.

Sometimes the main idea of a paragraph is given in words directly—as in the solar system example above—but sometimes the main idea is only suggested, as in the birthday party example.