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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 fourth 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 the topic sentence in a passage.
- ☞ The student will choose the best title for a passage.
- ☞ The student will summarize the main idea of a passage.

Passage 5

In South Dakota there is a special mountain called Mount Rushmore. Years ago workers carved four men's heads into its rock. They had to blast and then chip the rock very carefully in order to form the faces. At one point they had to start all over again. Each head is 60 feet (20 m) tall! It took 14 years for workers to shape the heads. They are of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt. All of these men once served as U.S. presidents.



What is the main idea?

- (a) In South Dakota there is a special mountain called Mount Rushmore.
- (b) Each president's head is 60 feet tall.
- (c) It took 14 years for workers to finish carving all four heads.
- (d) George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt are all former U.S. presidents.

Passage 6

One day, a man went to market to sell his grain. Onto the tiny donkey's back he loaded all sorts of bags and packages. The donkey had to carry all of the grain the farmer planned to sell, the food they would need on the journey, and gifts for his friends in town. The donkey's job was only to carry his master. They started on their way to town, which was about three days' journey away.

Step by painful step, the donkey bore its heavy load. The sun beat down on her, and she felt exhausted. Soon her breathing became ragged. Just a short time later, the load completely overwhelmed her. She collapsed in the middle of the road. Although the donkey struggled to stand up, she could not do so.

What is the main idea?

- (a) The donkey is lazy and chooses to carry only the man.
- (b) The overloaded donkey collapses on the way to town.
- (c) A man is going to market to sell his grain.
- (d) The donkey comes down with an illness on the way into town.

Locating Topic Sentences

Knowing these facts will help you locate topic sentences:

- ☞ A topic sentence states the main idea of a paragraph.
- ☞ Topic sentences are used often in nonfiction text.
- ☞ Usually topic sentences come at the start of a paragraph and are followed by details.
- ☞ Sometimes topic sentences fall in the middle of a paragraph. They are surrounded on both sides by details.
- ☞ Occasionally, topic sentences come at the end of a paragraph. They sum up the details that have come before.

Passage 1

About 400 years ago a settlement was formed in Jamestown, Virginia. Settlers from England arrived there and built a fort near the James River. They had a tough life. Many died fighting the Spanish and Native Americans. Even more died from disease. By 1699 no one lived at the fort. The people left no evidence or record of what occurred. It was as if they just vanished. No one knows exactly what happened to the people who lived in Jamestown.

A few years ago scientists unearthed the fort. They found guns, pots, coins, and toys. They hope that these things will help them to solve the mystery of what happened to the settlement at Jamestown. Even so, we may never know for certain.

What is the topic sentence?

- (a) A few years ago scientists unearthed the fort.
- (b) No one knows exactly what happened to the people who lived in Jamestown.
- (c) The people left no evidence or record of what occurred.
- (d) About 400 years ago a settlement was formed in Jamestown, Virginia.

Check one of the boxes to complete this sentence:

The topic sentence in this paragraph comes at the beginning middle end.

Passage 2

As they talked, the animals reluctantly agreed that they each should visit the sick King Lion. If they stayed away, he'd be mad and punish them after he got better. So one at a time, or in small groups, the animals went to the royal cave. Some gave him gifts, such as the best bit of meat from a recent catch. Others just went to ask about his health. Large and small, all of the animals in the kingdom visited the lion in his cave.

- (a) Some gave him gifts, such as the best bit of meat from a recent catch.
- (b) If they stayed away, he'd be mad and punish them after he got better.
- (c) Large and small, all of the animals in the kingdom visited the lion in his cave.
- (d) Others just went to ask about his health.

Check one of the boxes to complete this sentence:

The topic sentence in this paragraph comes at the beginning middle end.