

Finding the Main Idea

Paragraph: A group of sentences organized around a topic, a main idea about the topic, and details that support the main idea.

Topic: The overall subject of a paragraph.

Main Idea: A statement that tells the author's point about the topic. The main idea provides the message of a given paragraph or the argument that is being made about the topic.

Details: The specific information about the main idea or support for the main idea.

Main Idea = Topic + Author's Point about the Topic

How to Find the Topic

Ask yourself the question:

What or who is this paragraph about?

How to Find the Main Idea

Ask yourself the question:

What is the overall message or argument being made by the author about the topic of this paragraph?

How to Find Supporting Details

Turn the main idea into a question by asking *who, what, when, where, why, or how?* The answer will give a set of details.

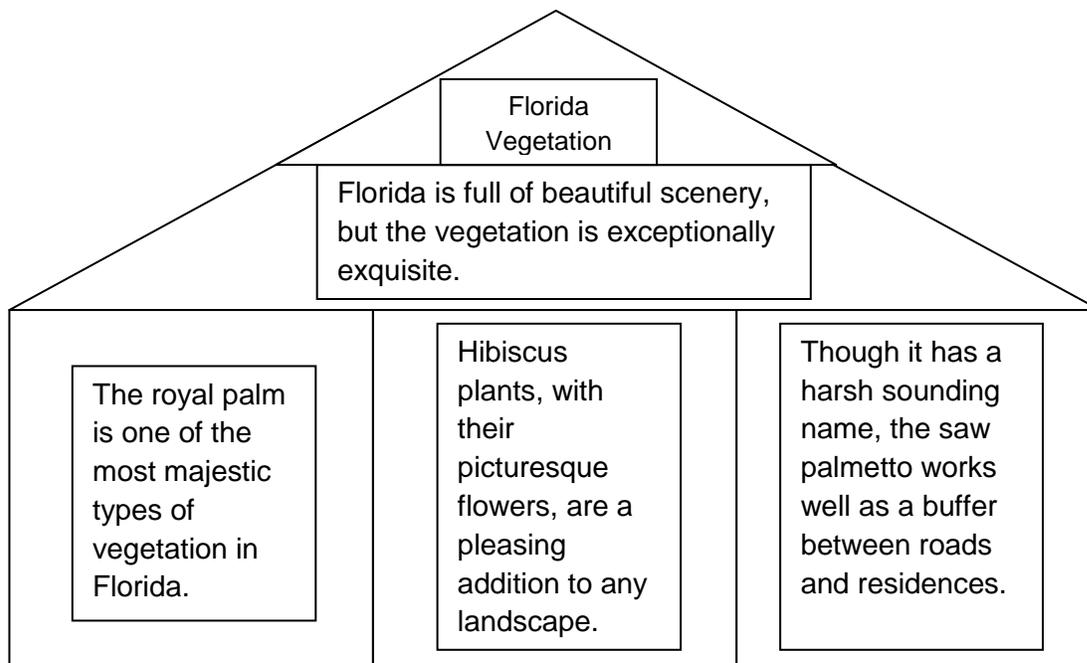
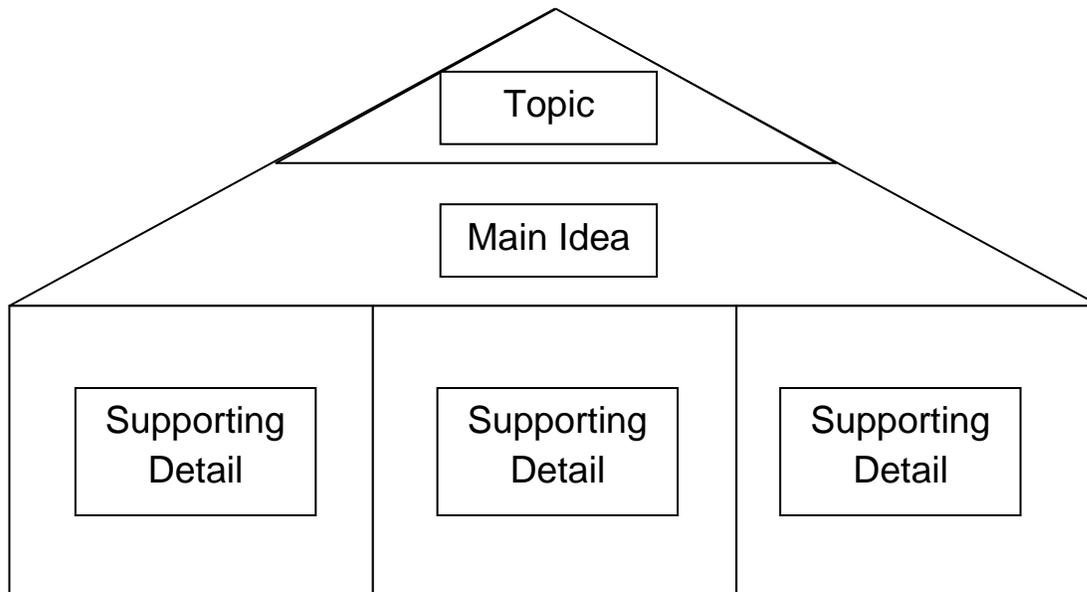
Hints

- ✓ Boldfaced headings or titles may contain the topic and/or main idea
- ✓ First and last sentences in the paragraph are usually helpful
- ✓ Look for repeating words, these often indicate the topic

Remember

Topics, main ideas, and supporting details work together. The main idea tells the author's point about the topic, and the details offer support for the main idea.

The main idea is the overall idea of the paragraph. It is supported by details throughout the paragraph much like the frame of a house supports the roof.



Florida is full of beautiful scenery, but the vegetation is exceptionally exquisite. Shopping plazas, residential areas, and highway medians are often elaborately decorated with grand palm trees and tropical plants. Of the many types of vegetation found in Florida, one of the most majestic is the royal palm. Growing to nearly ninety feet tall, it towers over many shopping centers and hotels with splendor. Hibiscus plants, with their picturesque flowers, are a pleasing addition to any landscape. Adorned with pink, red, or orange flowers, the hibiscus sets a tropical scene to homes and businesses alike. Finally, the saw palmetto, though it has a harsh sounding name, works well as a buffer between roads and residences.

Main Idea Practice Exercises

Read the passages and answer the questions.

¹Fire ants are painful and destructive pests. ²The fire ant earned its name because of its venom. ³The insect uses a wasp-like stinger to inject the venom, which causes a painful burning sensation and leaves tiny, itching pustules. ⁴The ants will swarm over anyone or anything that disturbs their nests. ⁵In addition to causing pain, fire ants damage many crops by eating the plants and by protecting other insects that damage crops. ⁶Fire ants are attracted to soybeans, eggplant, corn, okra, strawberries, and potatoes.

1. What is the topic of the passage?
 - a. Ant bites
 - b. Fire ants
 - c. Farming
 - d. Pests
2. What does the author want you to know about the topic?
 - a. Fire ants have a wasp-like stinger.
 - b. Fire ants swarm.
 - c. Fire ants are pests to farmers.
 - d. Fire ants are painful and pesky.
3. Which sentence contains the main idea?
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 4
 - d. 5

¹Rosa Parks was an African American woman who worked hard as a seamstress in a department store in the early 1960s. ²One day, tired from work, she refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and became a national hero. ³She was arrested and placed in jail for her refusal to move to the back of the bus, where African Americans were forced to sit in those days. ⁴The way she was treated garnered national attention. ⁵Some people say her refusal to give up her seat launched the civil rights movement. ⁶Rosa Parks proved that one brave person can make a difference.

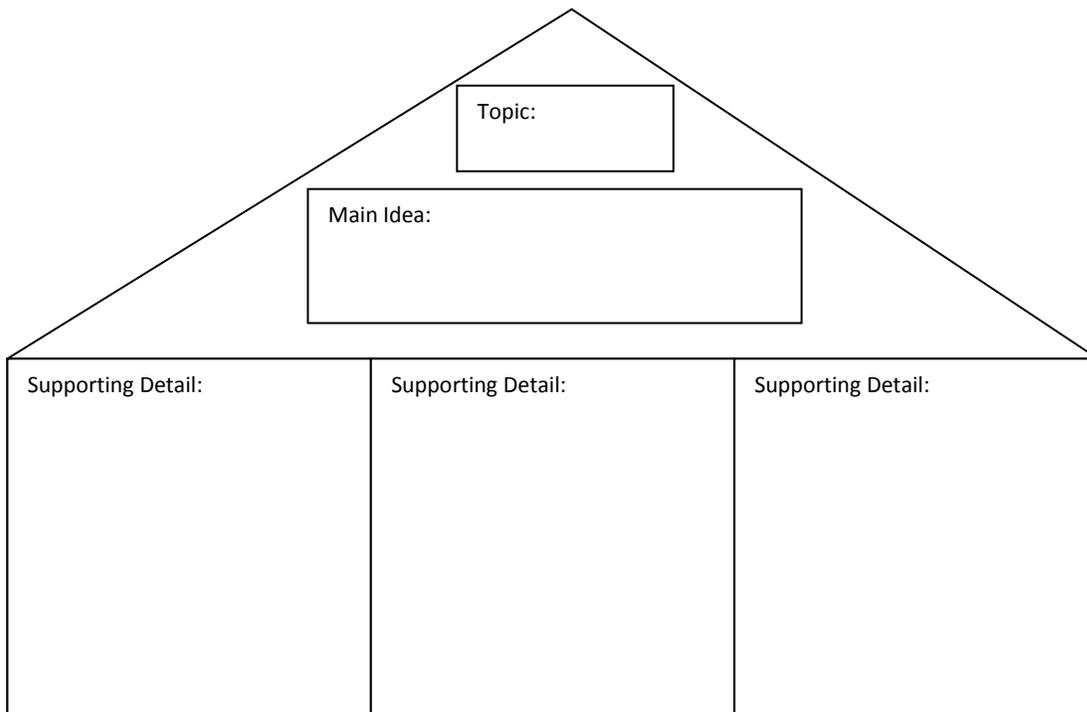
4. What is the topic of the passage?
 - a. Rosa Parks
 - b. Civil Rights
 - c. Brave People
 - d. National Heroes
5. What does the author want you to know about the topic?
 - a. Rosa Parks was a hard working woman.
 - b. Brave people deserve special attention.
 - c. Stubborn people always get their way.
 - d. Brave people can make a difference.
6. Which sentence contains the main idea?
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 5
 - d. 6

¹Few of us could swim in the ocean comfortably after seeing filmmaker Steven Spielberg’s terrifying movie *Jaws*. ²In his hit movie *E.T. the Extraterrestrial*, Spielberg created a sweet, funny film about a being from outer space. ³In 1985, he gave us *The Color Purple*, a moving picture about a black family in the South that earned him a Best Director nomination. ⁴Steven Spielberg has created some of the most successful and popular films of the 1970s and 1980s.

- 7. Sentence 1 is a
 - a. Main Idea
 - b. Supporting Detail
- 8. Sentence 2 is a
 - a. Main Idea
 - b. Supporting Detail
- 9. Sentence 3 is a
 - a. Main Idea
 - b. Supporting Detail
- 10. Sentence 4 is a
 - a. Main Idea
 - b. Supporting Detail

Read the following passage. Fill in the chart using information from the paragraph.

¹Reggae music is a complex mix of message and style. ²Originating in Jamaica in the 1960s, reggae evolved from folk music that protested racism and corruption. ³Reggae also has a religious side that is based on the Bible from the view of black culture. ⁴Some critics say that the serious messages of reggae are easier to accept because of its powerful dance beat.



Answers: 1. b, 2. d, 3. a, 4. a, 5. d, 6. d, 7. b, 8. b, 9. B, 10. a, Topic: Reggae Music, M.I.: Sentence 1, Supporting Details: Sentences 2, 3, & 4