**MAIN IDEA**

In order to become better and faster readers, recognizing the main idea is one of the most important skills to develop.

**Main ideas are:**

The reason something was written

An umbrella idea

The author’s primary point about a topic

All other material in the text fits under the main idea.

In a paragraph, authors presentthe main idea to readers in a single sentence called the **topic sentence.**

In an essay, authors present the main idea to readers in one or two sentences called the **thesis statement.**

When a main idea is given in a **topic sentence** or a **thesis statement**, the main idea is known as a **stated main idea.**

Example 1:

Our sense of personhood is continually in transformation and seeking new areas of growth or parts. Even when our self seems to be stable, psychological energy is being expended to keep it in its present state. A stable self needs to ward off negative interferences or new ideas and aspirations that could affect it. It could be easier psychologically to entertain change than to reject it outright.

**Supporting details are:**

Explanations that help you understand the main ideas

Examples

Facts

Other kinds of evidence that explain the main idea

**RECOGNIZING IMPLIED MAIN IDEAS**

Sometimes a selection lacks a topic sentence, but that does not mean it lacks a main idea. The author has simply decided to let the **details** of the selection suggest the main idea. Readers must figure out what that **implied main idea** is by deciding upon the point all of the details make when they are all added together.

**Passages that imply an idea** give supporting details first. The readers must make an inference (or make an educated guess) in order to understand the main idea. In these sorts of passages, the main idea is the general statement that all of the details make when they are considered as a whole. The main idea must be general enough that all of the details fit into it.

When readers consider all of the supporting details in a passage and make an inference about the **implied main idea,** they have to make sure that the main idea is **general** enough that it can be supported by all of the details and that it is **fully addressing** the topic that the details cover. Readers can test the inference by substituting it at the beginning of the passage as though it is a **topic sentence** or **thesis statement**. If the statement is **too narrow** or if it is **unrelated** to the rest of the details, then it is not the main idea. When readers make and inference and form the implied main idea themselves, they are essentially writing a **topic sentence** or **thesis statement** for that passage.

Example 2:

The smaller a group is, the more opportunities we have to get to know other people well and to establish close ties with them. Two-person groups are the setting for many of our most intense and influential relationships. In three-person groups, coalitions become possible, with two members joining force against a third member. Five-person groups are large enough that people feel they can express their emotions freely and even risk antagonizing one another, yet they are small enough that members show regard for one another’s feelings and needs.

If readers have trouble focusing in on an implied main idea, there are a couple things that they can look for to help. All main ideas have a **topic** and a **comment,** whether it is given in a **topic sentence** or a **thesis statement,** or if it’s something the readers have to figure out themselves.

The **topic** is the subject of the passage or the one thing that the passage discusses.

The **comment** is what the author explains, proves, or discusses about the **topic**.

Look at the topic sentence from example 1:

*Our sense of personhood is continually in transformation and seeking new areas of growth or parts.*

To identify the **topic** and the **comment** readers simply have to divide the statement into two parts.

What the statement is about = **Topic =** Our sense of personhood

What the author is explaining about the topic = **comment =** is continually in transformation and seeking

new areas of growth or parts.

When readers look back at the implied main idea of example two, they probably soon realized that the **topic** of the supporting details is the number of people in a group. Then you could have asked yourself, “What are the supporting details saying about the number of people in a group?” As you thought about the four statements, you would try to find a **comment** about the number of people in a group that is general enough to cover all of the specific details.

Readers need to be able to identify main ideas in both short and long passages. Sometimes, authors will come right out and **state** the main idea. Other times, authors are going to make readers really think deeply about what they are writing about, and they will **imply** the main idea. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using either of these two options?