

LESSON

2

Main Idea

WORDS
TO KNOW

Main idea the most important idea of a passage. It is what the passage is mostly about.

Review It!

Read these sentences. Use the Hint to help you figure out the main idea.

Warm-blooded animals maintain a constant body temperature, no matter what the temperature of their environment is. They stay warm by burning food for energy. They cool off by sweating, panting, or moving to a cooler place.

Hint Look at the first sentence. How is the broad idea it expresses different from the information in the rest of the passage?

Try It!

Read this passage. As you read, underline phrases and sentences that express the most important idea in the passage.

- ① Desert plants have adapted to deal with the lack of water in the southwestern desert. Some plants store water. Some have a waxy covering on their leaves and stems. This prevents stored water from evaporating. Small leaves, spines, and camouflage also help plants survive without much water.
- ② Desert animals, too, have adapted to the lack of water. Some recycle water from within their bodies. Some tap plants for water. Others get water from dry seeds they eat.
- ③ Desert plants have also adapted to the high heat in their habitat. Many live for only one season. They release their seeds and die. The seeds remain dormant until cooler weather comes. Then they sprout and new plants appear.
- ④ Animals deal with desert heat in different ways. Some leave the desert during the hottest times. Others burrow beneath the ground. Some only move around at night, when temperatures are cooler.

Now, use the passage to answer the questions on the following page.

1. What is the main idea of paragraph 1?
 - A. There isn't enough water in the desert.
 - B. Desert plants have adapted to survive with little water.
 - C. Many different kinds of plants grow in the desert.
 - D. Some desert plants die because of lack of water.



2. The main idea of paragraph 2 is that desert animals
 - A. have adapted to the lack of water
 - B. adapt in the same ways as plants
 - C. cannot live without water
 - D. can live without water

2. Which answer choice restates the most important idea from the paragraph?

3. Which sentence **best** states the main idea of paragraph 4?
 - A. Most desert animals can't tolerate the heat.
 - B. The best way animals escape the heat is by burrowing.
 - C. Different animals deal with desert heat in different ways.
 - D. Animals are better able to survive in the desert than plants are.

3. The main idea makes a general statement about the topic. Decide which answer choices are the most general. Then ask yourself: Which choice best matches the information in the paragraph?

4. Which sentence **best** states the main idea of paragraph 3?
 - A. Most desert plants die when it gets very hot.
 - B. Plants are scarce in the southwestern desert.
 - C. Desert plants have developed ways to survive the desert heat.
 - D. Plants sometimes release their seeds when the desert gets hot.

In Your Own Words

5. Write the main idea of the passage in your own words.

5. Don't get bogged down in details. Ask yourself: What was the passage mostly about?

On Your Own!

Read this passage. Answer the questions that follow it.

In ancient times, many Chinese inventions changed or improved the way things were done and how people lived. Among these were the wheelbarrow, gunpowder, printing, and the compass.

A wheelbarrow makes it easier to move a load from place to place. Chinese armies first used the wheelbarrow to bring supplies to injured soldiers. The wheelbarrow gave them such an advantage over their enemies that the device was kept secret for a long time.

The Chinese also invented gunpowder. This invention led to the production of more powerful and efficient weapons for use in wartime. The invention of gunpowder later led to the design of cannons, modern rockets, and missiles. Gunpowder eventually changed the way wars were fought all over the world.

The invention in China of wood-block printing also had a big effect on people's lives. Many more books could be printed using this technique than by writing them by hand. This gave people greater access to all kinds of books and information.

The compass has long been an important tool for sailors. This device allowed early Chinese trading ships to travel farther without getting lost.

1. What is the main idea of the first paragraph?
 - A. There were many Chinese inventions.
 - B. The Chinese invented the wheelbarrow.
 - C. The compass was a very important invention.
 - D. Early Chinese inventions changed the way people lived.
2. Which sentence **best** states the main idea of the second paragraph?
 - A. The wheelbarrow gave the Chinese an advantage over their enemies.
 - B. Wheelbarrows are used to move things from one place to another.
 - C. The wheelbarrow was invented by the Chinese.
 - D. The wheelbarrow is still used today.

3. In the third paragraph, the main idea is that gunpowder
- A. was discovered by accident
 - B. led to the design of rockets
 - C. changed the way wars were fought
 - D. was used to surprise the enemy
4. What is the main idea of the fourth paragraph?
- A. Wood-block printing was invented by the Chinese.
 - B. Wood-block printing made information more available.
 - C. Wood-block printing is not an important invention.
 - D. Wood-block printing was an easy process.
5. What is the last paragraph mostly about?
- A. how ancient compasses worked
 - B. why early Chinese compasses were not accurate
 - C. why magnets were used in early Chinese compasses
 - D. how Chinese compasses helped sailors navigate without getting lost
6. A good title for this passage would be
- A. "How Gunpowder Changed the World"
 - B. "Ancient Chinese Printing"
 - C. "Some Early Chinese Inventions"
 - D. "Life in Old China"

Explore

Write It Out

Use the passage to help you write a brief response to the prompt below.

7. Write the main idea of the passage in your own words.
