

# Main Idea and Supporting Details

A.1.4.1 A.2.4.1 B.3.3.2

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The **main idea** is the most important idea. Everything else builds around it. Every piece of writing, short or long, has a main idea. Each part of a longer writing can have its own main idea, too. In fact, each paragraph can have its own main idea. These might not be the same as the main idea of the whole passage, but will usually be connected to the overall main idea.

**Skim** Sometimes the author does not tell you his main idea directly. Look for clues in key parts of the text, like the title or the beginning and end of the passage. Think about what any pictures or charts show.

## Example

“Peace Maker” is mostly about

- (A) the life of John Smith.
- (B) why Pocahontas went to England.
- (C) why people wanted to settle in Jamestown.
- (D) how Pocahontas brought peace to her people and the settlers.

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- (A) This doesn't seem to be the main idea. The passage talks about John Smith, but it's not mostly about him.
- (B) The passage says that Pocahontas went to England. But that is a small part of the story. Her trip does not really connect to the other parts of the passage.

- (C) The passage doesn't say why the settlers came to Jamestown. This can't be the main idea.
- (D) Almost everything in the passage is about Pocahontas and what she did to bring peace to the settlers and her people.

A **supporting detail** tells more about the main idea. Ideas without support are weak. For example, you might not believe that Pocahontas wanted peace. However, the detail that she begged for John Smith's life supports the idea that she did want peace.



**Connections** Which detail supports the idea that Pocahontas lived like the English? Write your answer on the lines below.

**Headings** help you to understand the main idea of a section of a passage. They give you a clue about what the section is mostly about.

When you see a heading, guess what information you will find there. Then look to see if you are correct. Think about what other information might be included under such a heading, too.

**Example**

If the author added a sentence to the section called "A Friend," which of these would fit **best**?

- (A) The Indians were happy to trade with the settlers.
- (B) Pocahontas saw John Smith again in England.
- (C) Pocahontas did many things to keep the Indians and settlers from fighting.
- (D) No one will ever know if Pocahontas really did beg for John Smith's life.

<b>D I S C U S S</b>	(A) This information doesn't belong under the heading "A Friend." It would fit better in the section "Pocahontas and the Settlers."	(C) This seems to belong to the section called "A Friend." It fits in.
	(B) This would be better in the section called "Trip to England."	(D) This would make sense under the heading "John Smith," not "A Friend."



**Connections** Tell why you think headings are useful.

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