

# What's the Big Idea?

## Overview:

It is important to include nonfiction texts in your daily literacy activities. This activity not only teaches the concept of central idea, but it is also a great opportunity to expose students to a variety of nonfiction text type such as newspapers, magazines, journals, blogs, advertisements, and brochures.

## Procedure:

### Modeling ("I Do")

1. Provide a nonfiction text to your students. Great texts for this activity may include newspaper articles, magazine articles, or blog posts.
2. Read the text aloud to the students.
3. Once the text has been read, the teacher can use a think aloud strategy to model how to determine the main idea. (Ex. *"Let's see, we just learned a lot of information about different local restaurants who serve barbecue. The author described how the barbecue looks and tastes at four different places. At the end, she even picked her favorite. Maybe the central idea of this article is determining the best places to eat barbecue."*)

### Group Activity ("We Do")

1. Select a nonfiction text that is similar to what was used during modeling.
2. You can ask students to take turns reading parts of the text aloud or you may choose to read it to them.
3. Once the text has been read, the teacher can guide the class with questions such as:
  - "What did we learn from this text?"
  - "What was the author trying to tell us?"
  - "What is the central idea of this text?"
4. As students suggest their ideas, write them all down on a piece of chart paper or on a whiteboard.
5. Discuss all of the ideas and ask students to vote for their choice of central idea.

### Students' Turn ("You Do")

1. Select a nonfiction text that is similar to what was used during modeling and group work.
2. Allow students to work individually or place them in small groups (2-3 students).
3. As able, encourage students to read the text silently (individual work) or aloud (group work).
4. Once the text has been read, ask students to answer the following questions.
  - "What did we learn from this text?"
  - "What was the author trying to tell us?"
  - "What is the central idea of this text?"
4. Each individual or group will describe their text and share findings with the class.
5. Encourage other students to ask questions or provide positive feedback to classmates.

### **ASOLs Covered in this Activity:**

**8E--CN 1e:** The student will determine an author’s purpose or point of view in a nonfiction text.

**Extension Idea:** In place of the question “What is the central idea of this text?”, ask students “Why did the author write this text?”

**8E--CN 1f:** The student will determine whether claims in a text are fact or opinion.

**Extension Idea:** Select sentences from the text and ask students to vote on whether each is a fact or an opinion. You may first need to use a think aloud strategy to introduce the concepts of fact and opinion.

**HSE--CN 1b:** The student will determine central idea of the nonfiction text and select details to support it.

**HSE--CN 1d:** The student will determine which sentences in a nonfiction text support the claims of the author.

**Extension Idea:** Once the central idea has been determined, invite students to point to specific sentences or words in the text that provide support.

### **Materials Needed:**

- writing surface (poster board, white board, or large sheet of paper)
- sample nonfiction texts

### **Setting:**

Classroom

### **Community Connections and/or Peer Interaction:**

Select texts from local newspapers or periodicals. For high school students, consider your school’s newspaper.

### **Functional Activity/Routine:**

Use this activity to prepare for a community outing.

### **Strategies to Collect Evidence:**

- Anecdotal evidence can be used to document individual student performance.

### **Specific Options for Differentiating this Activity:**

- Provide a field of choices when necessary.
- Require students to independently read as much as is appropriate. Read aloud to students if needed.