Identify a Central Idea and Write a Summary

Classroom copy · 2 November 2026

In this 40-minute reading lesson, you will distinguish a topic from a central idea, state a central idea supported across a short passage, and write a concise, accurate 2–3 sentence summary with at least two key details and no added opinion.

The Shared Tool Case

Invented instructional example.

The after-school makers' club at Juniper Hall used to keep scissors, rulers and tape in different drawers. Members sometimes searched for a tool during build time, then left it on a table after the club ended. The group tried one labeled case for the shared tools. A card inside listed the tools, and a short sign reminded members to return each item before leaving. At the end of each meeting, one member checked the card against the case. By the next week, the group could find the tools faster, and fewer supplies were left on tables. The club kept the case and check-in routine because the simple system made shared tools easier to find and return.

The Labels That Could Move

Invented instructional example.

At the fictional Harbor Room, a student group changed the pictures on a display each Friday. At first, they wrote the artist and title on paper labels and taped the labels under each picture. When a picture moved, its label sometimes stayed behind. The group tried a new method: each label went into a clear sleeve attached with a clip. Now members could move the whole label with the picture and replace the name without tearing the paper. At the next display change, every picture had the right label, and the students reused the same sleeves. The group kept the sleeves and clips because they made labels easier to move and reuse.

A Notice Board with a Clear Routine

Invented instructional example.

At the made-up North Field Center, volunteers posted notices for clubs, games and craft times on one large board. At first, new notices went wherever a space looked open. Some covered older dates, and visitors had to scan the whole board to find the week's activities. The volunteers tried a simple routine. They grouped notices under three headings, wrote an end date on each notice, and removed expired notices every Monday. They also placed the current week's schedule at eye level near the entrance. In the following week, visitors could find current activities without reading every older notice. The volunteers kept the routine because clear sections and regular updates made the board easier to use.

Modeled practice

Passage: The Shared Tool Case

Read “The Shared Tool Case.” With the teacher, name the topic in a word or short phrase, state the central idea in one complete sentence, and draft a 2–3 sentence summary using at least two important details. Then compare the model response. Notice how it names a topic, states a point about the whole passage, and combines that central idea with details in a concise summary without adding an opinion.

> Topic: shared tools. Central idea: A labeled case and check-in routine helped the club find and return shared tools. Summary: The club once kept tools in several drawers, so members searched for supplies and sometimes left them out. Members moved the tools into a labeled case, listed them on a card and checked the case before leaving. The routine made the supplies easier to find and put away.

Guided practice

Passage: The Labels That Could Move

With a partner, read “The Labels That Could Move.” In a word or short phrase, name the topic. Then write one sentence that states the main point about how the labels helped the group update its display. Draft a 2–3 sentence summary with at least two key details. Use your own words and leave out opinions or details that do not explain the central idea. If you need more space, use a separate sheet.

Partner draft

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Independent response

Passage: A Notice Board with a Clear Routine

Read “A Notice Board with a Clear Routine” on your own. Before you write, you may use the planning organizer on the next page. Write the topic in a word or short phrase. State the central idea in one complete sentence. Then write a 2–3 sentence objective summary that includes at least two key details. Use your own words; do not add an opinion or information from outside the passage. Put your finished response in the lines here. If you need more room, use a separate sheet.

Independent response

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Planning organizer

Use this page to plan before writing your independent response. Take your ideas and evidence from the passage. This organizer gives you space; it does not provide the answer or choose details for you.

Topic: who or what is the passage about?

What point does the whole passage develop? (brief phrase)

Key detail 1 from the passage

Key detail 2 from the passage

Central idea: state the whole-passage point in one sentence

Objective summary: draft 2–3 sentences in your own words

Support: Before writing, you may plan on the organizer after the independent task. It has space for the topic, whole-passage point, two details, a central-idea sentence and a short summary. Use evidence from the passage. The organizer does not give the answer or choose details; write your finished response in the lines on the task page, using a separate sheet if needed.

Extension: On a separate sheet, write a new title that captures the central idea and explain which two details support it. Review your summary: remove any detail that does not support the idea. If all its details fit, choose one passage detail to leave out and explain why it is less important. Use only the passage.

The three situations in this lesson are fictional examples.

Teacher directions

Grade 6 ELA. Adapt the reading and response demands to your students and curriculum.

Prerequisites: Learners have experience reading or listening to a short teacher-provided passage; no prior lesson in the term central idea is required.

Materials: This lesson in print or editable form; Pencil; a highlighter is optional.; Board or display for the modeled think-aloud; optional.

Estimated preparation: 5 minutes. Basis: Estimate to review the three passages and teacher notes and prepare learner copies.

Estimated teaching: 40 minutes. Basis: Planned sequence of 4 minutes opening, 5 minutes strategy, 8 minutes modeling, 9 minutes guided practice, 10 minutes independent response and 4 minutes closure; estimated

Before teaching (about 5 minutes, estimate): read the passages and key, print or share the learner pages, and prepare a board or display for the modeled example. A display is optional.

Opening — 4 minutes (estimate): ask learners to name a topic from a familiar short text or class notice. Record a one- or two-word topic. Ask what a full sentence would need to say about that topic; do not treat the warm-up as a mastery score.

Teach the strategy — 5 minutes (estimate): explain that a topic names who or what the passage is about, while a central idea states the important point the whole passage develops. A summary briefly restates that central idea with key details in the learner’s own words. It leaves out small details, personal reactions and new information.

Model — 8 minutes (estimate): use “The Shared Tool Case.” Think aloud: name the topic; notice the problem at the beginning and what the group changed; ask what the details say together; state the central idea; then draft a concise summary. Point out that “tools” is only a topic and that one detail alone is too narrow to summarize the passage.

Guided practice — 9 minutes (estimate): partners complete the task for “The Labels That Could Move.” Prompt with “What happened before and after the change?” and “Which details support a point about the whole passage?” Let learners propose wording. If they list details only, ask what those details show together. Learners may use a separate sheet if they need more room.

Independent response — 10 minutes (estimate): learners complete the North Field Center task individually. Do not supply a central idea or choose details for them. Collect one response per learner. Score the central idea, key details, summary and objective accuracy separately with the four criteria.

Closure — 4 minutes (estimate): ask learners to underline their central-idea sentence and circle two details in the summary. Invite them to name one small detail they left out and why. This reflection is a teaching check, not a claim about lasting mastery.

Shortened 30-minute option (estimate): opening 3 minutes, strategy 4, model 6, guided work 7, independent response 7 and closure 3. Keep the independent task and four criteria; shorten discussion and partner sharing rather than removing the independent evidence.

Access: a read-aloud, text-to-speech, enlarged copy, chunked paragraphs or extra processing time may improve access when suitable. The objective checks central idea and summary, not independent decoding. Check individual access needs locally; a generic support does not replace an individualized plan.

Support: the learner copy includes a separate planning organizer after the independent task. It offers space for the topic, whole-passage point, two details, central idea and summary; it supplies no answer or selected evidence. Learners may use it before writing their final response in the lines on the task page.

Extension: learners can draft a new title for the independent passage, explain how it captures the central idea, and revise their summary to remove one detail that does not support that idea. Do not add outside research or personal disclosure.

All three passages describe invented instructional situations. Their settings, events and results are fictional; they are not reports of real schools, groups or outcomes. No outside source text, data, standard code or classroom result is used or claimed.

Practice task — intended evidence: The learner distinguishes the topic (shared tools) from the central idea (the labeled case and return routine helped the club find and put away shared tools) and sees a concise summary that combines that idea with accurate details.

Guided practice — intended evidence: The response identifies that sleeves and clips helped labels stay with moved pictures and be reused, supported by accurate details about the old labels staying behind and the new method.

Independent response — intended evidence: An individual response names the notice board or organizing current notices as the topic; states that a consistent grouping and update routine made current activities easier to find; and summarizes at least two accurate key details without adding opinion or outside information.

— key for Practice task

Topic: shared tools. Central idea: A labeled case and check-in routine helped the club find and return shared tools. Summary: The club first kept tools in several drawers, so members searched for supplies and sometimes left them out. Members moved the tools into a labeled case, listed them on a card and checked the case before leaving. The routine made supplies easier to find and put away.

“Shared tools” names the topic but does not state what the passage says about them. The central idea describes the point developed across the passage. The summary includes the original problem, the new system and its stated result without copying every small detail.

Topic: organizing club supplies. Central idea: A simple labeled storage and return routine made shared tools easier to find and put away. A summary may mention the separate drawers, the labeled case/card and the end-of-meeting check.

Accept accurate wording that captures both finding and returning the tools, supported by more than one relevant detail. Do not require the model’s exact phrase or every detail.

Scoring criteria: Criterion 1, Criterion 2, Criterion 3, Criterion 4

— key for Guided practice

Topic: display labels. Central idea: Sleeves and clips helped the group keep labels with moved pictures and reuse them. Summary: At first, a picture could move while its taped label stayed behind. The group put labels in clipped sleeves that moved with the pictures and could be reused. The new method helped each picture keep its correct label.

The central idea covers the problem and the purpose of the change. The summary uses details from before and after the change rather than treating the title, day of the week or one supply as the whole point.

The passage is about display labels. A sleeve-and-clip system kept each label with its picture and made it reusable. The old tape labels could be left behind when pictures moved; the new sleeves moved with the pictures and could be used again.

Accept any concise, accurate summary that includes the central idea and at least two relevant details. A learner may say “holders” for sleeves if the described method remains accurate.

Scoring criteria: Criterion 1, Criterion 2, Criterion 3, Criterion 4

— key for Independent response

Topic: the activity notice board. Central idea: A consistent routine for grouping and updating notices made current activities easier to find. Summary: At first, notices were posted wherever space looked open, so older dates could be covered and visitors had to scan the board. Volunteers grouped notices under headings, added end dates, removed expired notices and put the current schedule near the entrance. Those steps made current activities easier to find.

The central idea describes the effect of the whole routine, not only a board, heading or date. The summary uses the initial difficulty and several routine details, accurately staying within the fictional passage.

Topic: finding current activities. Central idea: Organizing notices into sections and updating them regularly helped visitors find current information. The volunteers used headings and end dates, removed expired notices, and placed the current schedule near the entrance. This made it easier to locate the week’s activities.

Accept other complete-sentence central ideas that describe how the organization/update routine improves access to current notices. The summary must contain at least two accurate key details, stay objective and avoid outside facts; exact wording and order can vary.

Scoring criteria: Criterion 1, Criterion 2, Criterion 3, Criterion 4

Criterion 1 — scoring criterion

Central idea: states in a complete sentence an important point developed across the whole passage; it is more than the topic and broader than one isolated detail.

A consistent routine made the current activity notices easier to find.

Accept accurate paraphrases and different sentence forms. A topic word or one small detail alone is partial evidence, not a complete central idea.

Criterion 2 — scoring criterion

Key details: the summary includes at least two accurate, relevant details that support or clarify the central idea.

Notices are grouped under headings; expired ones are removed regularly.

Accept any two or more relevant details from the passage. Do not require every detail or a fixed order.

Criterion 3 — scoring criterion

Summary: briefly combines the central idea with key details in the learner’s own words and represents the passage accurately.

A response that names the organizing routine and explains, using passage details, how it helps visitors locate current notices.

Accept 2–3 clear sentences as requested; concise bullets may show partial content but do not meet the assigned written-summary form. Do not score stylistic similarity.

Criterion 4 — scoring criterion

Objective accuracy: leaves out personal opinion and unsupported outside information and does not distort what the passage says.

The summary reports the notice headings, end dates and removal of expired notices without saying the routine is the best or only way.

A small wording difference is acceptable when the meaning remains faithful. Spelling and grammar are not scored unless they prevent the meaning from being understood.

Support (Independent response): A read-aloud, text-to-speech, enlarged text, chunked paragraphs or added processing time may support access. Record the support used when the result is interpreted; the objective does not assess independent decoding. Confirm individual needs locally.

The three situations in this lesson are fictional examples.

Fictional teaching response — sound for the named task

Named task: A Notice Board with a Clear Routine — topic, central idea and summary

Fictional response — sound for the named task: “Topic: the center’s notice board. Central idea: grouping and regularly updating notices made current activities easier to find. Summary: At first, scattered and overlapping notices made visitors scan the whole board. Volunteers added headings and end dates, removed expired notices weekly and displayed the current schedule near the entrance, so visitors could find current activities more easily.”

Visible evidence: A short topic, a whole-passage point and an objective own-word summary connecting the problem, routine and result.

Not established: That every visitor understood every notice or that the routine works in every center.

Clarify: Accept other relevant details and concise summaries preserving the point; exact sample wording is not required.

Next teaching/evidence: Use the different central-idea response pack Follow up check after another learning opportunity. Record any prior exposure: Notice Board also appears in the cover-material collection.

This response is invented for teacher interpretation. Accept defensible alternatives. Record access, prior exposure and the actual response; do not assign an ability label or claim mastery from this example.

Follow up check

Central Ideas and Summaries: Check and Next Teaching — matching teacher directions and answers

Fictional teaching response — partially developed

Named task: A Notice Board with a Clear Routine — topic, central idea and summary

Fictional response — partially developed: “The topic and central idea are notice boards. Volunteers wrote end dates.”

Visible evidence: The topic and one accurate detail.

Not established: A complete-sentence whole-passage point, the problem/result connection or the required summary.

Clarify: Ask ‘What does the passage tell us about notice boards?’ Then compare a topic with a point explaining the routine’s result.

Next teaching/evidence: Use the linked central-idea response pack teacher model/guided prompts before the Focused practice panel passage. Sort its topic, narrow detail and whole-passage point, then combine relevant details into a summary. Reserve its different Follow up check.

This response is invented for teacher interpretation. Accept defensible alternatives. Record access, prior exposure and the actual response; do not assign an ability label or claim mastery from this example.

Focused practice

Reserve: Follow up check

Central Ideas and Summaries: Check and Next Teaching — matching teacher directions and answers

Fictional teaching response — plausible error

Named task: A Notice Board with a Clear Routine — topic, central idea and summary

Fictional response — plausible error: “The excellent board was perfect because it stopped everyone being confused forever.”

Visible evidence: The response associates the new routine with easier use.

Not established: An objective supported summary: excellent/perfect and the universal permanent result exceed the text.

Clarify: Ask which exact words establish ‘everyone’ and ‘forever’; replace evaluation with the observed following-week result.

Next teaching/evidence: Use the central-idea response pack’s Keep the meaning accurate practice, where invented summaries similarly overstate success. Check each claim against the supplied panel passage, repair it and then use the reserved different Follow up check.

This response is invented for teacher interpretation. Accept defensible alternatives. Record access, prior exposure and the actual response; do not assign an ability label or claim mastery from this example.

Focused practice

Reserve: Follow up check

Central Ideas and Summaries: Check and Next Teaching — matching teacher directions and answers