



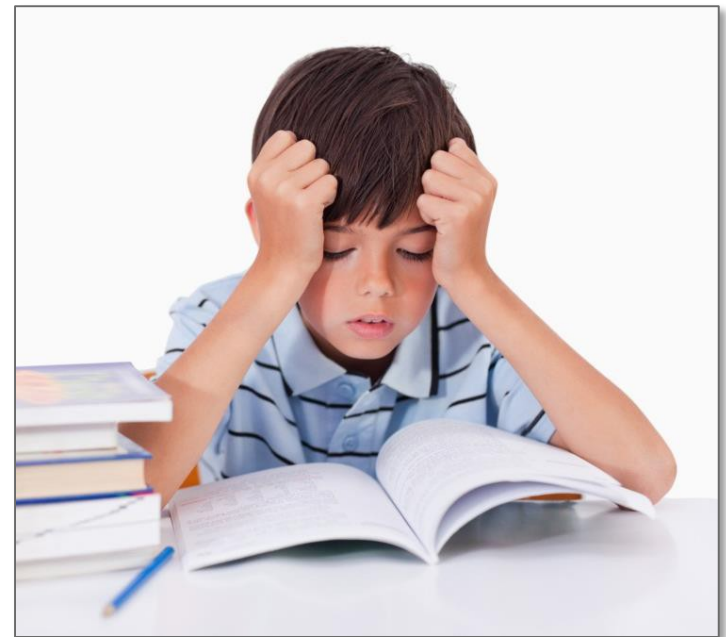
# Considerations for Teaching Students to **DETERMINE IMPORTANCE AND IDENTIFY MAIN IDEA**





## Main Idea

“Finding the main idea has never been fun for most struggling readers. They have been asked to find it countless times and have produced inadequate answers.”



(Zwiers, 210, pp. 31-32)





## Main Idea

The main idea can usually be stated in one sentence. The main idea sentence includes

- the topic and
- the important information that is said about the topic.





# Tools for Determining Importance

## Tools for Determining Importance



BEFORE  
READING

- Scan the text, notice text features and structure
- Use background knowledge
- Make predictions
- Set a purpose for reading



DURING  
READING

- Look for a main idea statement
- Look for repeated words or phrases
- Use text features:
  - Table of Contents
  - Titles, headings and subheadings
  - Font (**colored**, italics, **bold**)
  - Graphics (e.g. photos, diagrams, maps, etc.)
  - Captions and labels
  - Definitions and pronunciation guide
- Chunk the text
- Use text structure



AFTER  
READING

- Reread, discuss and identify main ideas

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ANTES DE  
LEER

- Examina las palabras del texto, fíjate en las características y estructura del texto
- Utiliza conocimientos previos
- Haz predicciones
- Establece el propósito de la lectura



DURANTE  
LA LECTURA

- Busca la idea principal
- Busca las palabras o frases que se repiten
- Usa las características del texto:
  - Tabla del contenido
  - Títulos, encabezamientos y subtítulos
  - Letra (**color**, *cursiva*, **negrilla**)
  - Gráficos (e.g. fotos, diagramas, mapas, etc.)
  - Leyendas y etiquetas
  - Definiciones y guía de pronunciación
- Divide el texto en partes
- Usa la estructura del texto



DESPUÉS  
DE LEER

- Vuelve a leer, habla de, e identifica las ideas principales

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## Scan the Text, Notice Text Features and Structure

Good readers

- notice the length of the text,
- notice text features that have been included to support the reading of the text,
- look for signal words and organization which indicate text structure, and
- think about what the text appears to be about.





## Use Background Knowledge and Make Predictions

Good readers

- make connections to background knowledge if the topic is familiar,
- make connections to related topics and concepts if the topic is unfamiliar (e.g. Spring thaw ... ice cubes melting), and
- make predictions about the text.





# Set a Purpose for Reading

Good readers identify a purpose for reading.

- Teacher Comprehension Purpose Question
- Student Comprehension Purpose Question:
  - Rely on titles or headings
  - Review test questions
  - Consider predictions
  - Consider, “What do I want to learn from reading this text?”



BEFORE  
READING

# Before Reading Demonstration

**Ecosystem Changes**

**Slow Changes**

An ecosystem usually has *stability*, or balance. There are many changes occurring all the time, but they cancel each other out. For example, organisms live, die, and decompose, returning the materials they were made of to the soil. New plants grow and use the materials. Water evaporates from a pond, but rain adds more water. Because these changes balance each other, they do not cause the overall ecosystem to change.

Over time, however, changes in climate, rate of erosion, and populations can cause big changes in an ecosystem. New communities can form within it. **Succession** (suhk•SEH•uhn) is the process that gradually changes an existing ecosystem into another ecosystem.

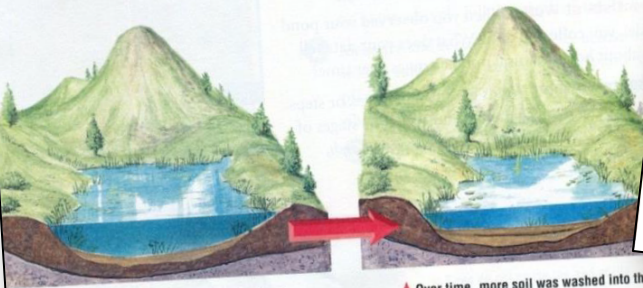
Succession can change an area that has little life into one that has many living things. For example, during Earth's ice ages, widespread glaciers scooped large holes in rock. When the climate got warmer, the ice melted. Water was left in the holes, forming ponds. As in the investigation, at first the ponds had no soil, and no plants grew in them.

**FIND OUT**

- how ecosystems change
- how changes affect ecosystems

**VOCABULARY**

succession



▲ When this pond first formed, nothing lived in it. As soil dropped to the bottom and wind blew seeds and spores into the pond, many organisms began to live there.

▲ Over time, more soil was washed into the pond. It became shallower and narrower.

BEFORE  
READING

## What Do Good Readers Do Before Reading Informational Text?

### Scan the text, notice text features & structure

Notice the length of text.

Notice text features that have been included to support the reading of the text.

Look for signal words and organization which indicate text structure.

Think about what the text appears to be about.

### Use Background Knowledge and Make Predictions

Make connections to background knowledge if the topic is familiar.

Make connections to related topics and concepts if the topic is unfamiliar.

Make predictions about the text.

### Set a Purpose for Reading

Identify a purpose for reading.

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# Before Reading Demonstration

## FIND OUT

- how ecosystems change
- how changes affect ecosystems

## VOCABULARY

succession

## Ecosystem Changes

### Slow Changes

An ecosystem usually has a balance. There are many things that can change the time, but they cancel each other out. For example, organisms live, die, and decompose, returning the materials they were made of to the soil. New plants grow and use the materials. Water evaporates from a pond, but rain adds more water. Because these changes balance each other, they do not cause the overall ecosystem to change.

Over time, however, changes in climate, rate of erosion, and populations can cause big changes in an ecosystem. New communities can form within it. **Succession** (suh-seh-shuhn) is the process that gradually changes an existing ecosystem into another ecosystem.

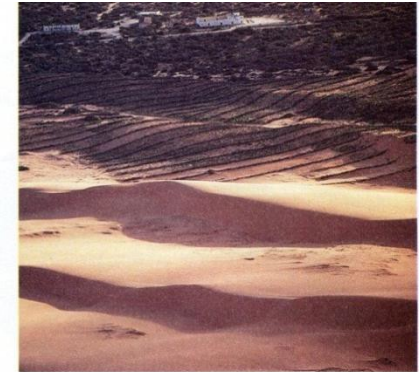
Succession can change an area that has little life into one that has a lot of living things. For example, during Earth's ice ages, glaciers scooped large holes in rock. When the glaciers melted, the ice melted. Water was left in the holes, forming ponds. As in the investigation, at first the ponds had no plants growing in them.

The first organisms that grew near the ponds were mosses and lichens (LY•kuhns). They grew on the rocks and began breaking down the rocks, forming soil. Some soil was washed into the ponds by heavy rains. The bottom of the ponds became muddy. Wind blew seeds and spores of many living things into the ponds. Bacteria and algae need few nutrients, so they began to grow first.

As these living things grew and died, they increased the amount of nutrients in the ponds. The added nutrients allowed other organisms, such as water lilies, to grow there. Insects began to live in the ponds. Frogs soon came to eat the insects.

Dead plants and animals settled to the bottom of the ponds and began to fill them up. The ponds became marshes with cattails and other populations of marsh plants and animals.

Over time, communities of other kinds of plant and animal life replaced the marsh communities. Grassy meadows formed as soil filled in the marshes. Finally, a forest grew where the ponds used to be.

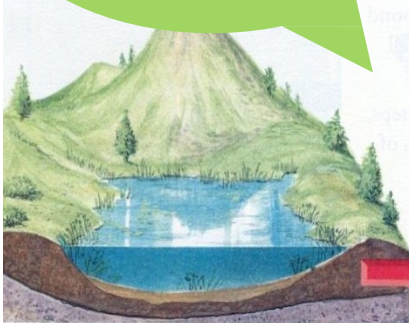


▲ Farming and grazing livestock on the dry grasslands of Africa may change the ecosystem so that it supports much less plant and animal life.

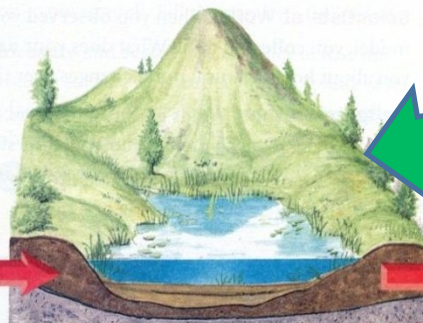
Succession doesn't have to stop with the forest. Climate changes that happen slowly can make it easier for some types of trees to grow than for others. Fires, floods, and other changes that happen quickly can kill many trees at once.

✓ **What allows more and more organisms to live in an ecosystem?**

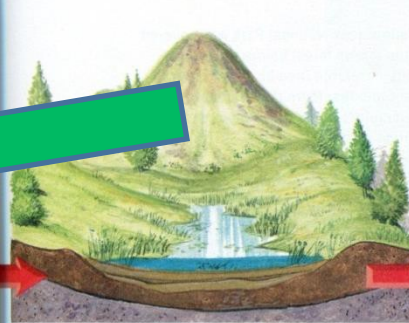
CPQ: What changes occur in an ecosystem?



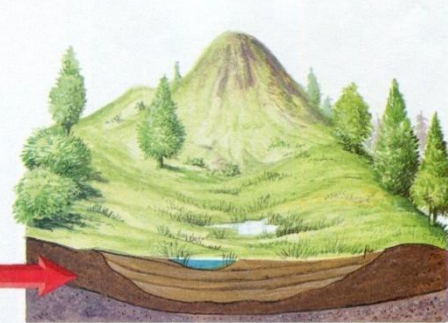
▲ When this pond first formed, nothing lived in it. As soil dropped to the bottom and wind blew seeds and spores into the pond, many organisms began to live there.



▲ Over time, more soil was washed into the pond. It became shallower and narrower.



▲ As organisms died, their remains and more soil continued to fill up the pond until a marsh formed.



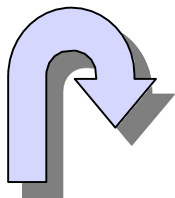
▲ Recycling of dead plants and animals, along with added soil, completely filled up the marsh. It became a meadow.



Think

How might thinking aloud before reading help your students?

How might you use this checklist with students?



Turn



Talk



### What Do Good Readers Do Before Reading Informational Text?

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#### Use Background Knowledge and Make Predictions

Make connections to background knowledge if the topic is familiar.	
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#### Set a Purpose for Reading

Identify a purpose for reading.	
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# Your Turn

CPQ:  
What do we  
learn about the  
Aztecs?

**The Aztecs**

In about 1200, people called the Aztecs began to migrate south from northern Mexico. According to legend, they were following the instructions of one of their gods, who told them to travel until they saw an eagle with a snake in its beak sitting on a cactus. There, he said, they should settle. When the Aztecs reached an island in Lake Texcoco, they at last saw what they had been searching for. Here, in the **Valley of Mexico**, they built **Tenochtitlan** (te noch tec TLAHN), meaning "near the cactus." Today the eagle, cactus, and snake appear as the central symbols on the flag of the country of Mexico.

Tenochtitlan grew into a great city. Causeways, or low bridges, linked Tenochtitlan to the land around the lake. As many as 300,000 people lived there, making it one of the largest cities in the world.

In order to have more land for farming, Tenochtitlan farmers created "floating gardens" around their island city. Farmers on other Aztec lands developed irrigation systems and created more farmland by carving terraces, or wide, flattened steps, into hillsides.

From Tenochtitlan, the Aztecs sent out armies to conquer other peoples in the Valley of Mexico. Soon they had created an empire that stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans. An **empire** is a group of people ruled by one leader.

**MAP SKILL** Early American Civilizations

Place Which early civilization is located in the Incan homeland?

Adapted from: Deans-Barrett, C., Frazer (2003). The United States. Glencoe/McGraw-Hill.



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Use the sticky notes to record what you will say in your think-aloud before reading.

