Has someone ever said to you, “Get to the point”? If so, what they mean is, “Tell me the main idea.” In reading, the **main idea** is the most important idea in a text. **Key details** support the main idea by telling you more about it.

The main idea often appears early in a paragraph or passage. Key details that say more about the main idea usually follow right after.

**Read the text below. Underline the main idea. Circle key details that support it.**

**Lewis and Clark’s Faithful Companion**

When Lewis and Clark explored the western United States, a dog named Seaman protected them. One night, a large buffalo came near their tent. Seaman chased the buffalo away. Another night, a grizzly bear entered their camp. Seaman barked and barked at the bear. He barked until the bear ran away. Seaman also protected Lewis and Clark by making sure they had food. Every day, Seaman hunted squirrels for the men to eat.

**Read the diagram below. It identifies the text’s main idea and key details. Complete the diagram by filling in a third key detail.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seaman protected Lewis and Clark.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Detail</th>
<th>Key Detail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seaman chased away a buffalo.</td>
<td>Seaman barked at a grizzly bear until it ran away.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you read, look for the main idea and the key details that support it. Remember, a diagram like the one shown above can help you keep track of both.
Read the first paragraph of a science passage about a snake and a snake charmer.

**The Snake and the Charmer**  
by Sylvester Capello

You have probably viewed the following scene in a movie or on TV. A snake charmer sits in front of a straw basket and plays a flute-like instrument. Suddenly, from inside the basket, a long, hooded cobra rises up. As the snake charmer plays the music, the cobra sways back and forth. The snake appears to be swaying in rhythm to the music. But, in fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

Explore how to answer this question: “What is the main idea of this paragraph?”

To figure out the main idea of this paragraph, look for key details about the snake and the charmer. Then ask yourself what those key details tell you about the snake and the charmer.

The diagram below identifies three key details. Complete the first two details. What main idea do all of the details support? Tell about that idea on the lines following the diagram.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Idea</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>?</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Detail</th>
<th>Key Detail</th>
<th>Key Detail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The snake charmer plays a</td>
<td>As the charmer plays the flute,</td>
<td>The music seems to be what makes the snake sway back and forth, but that is not true.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_______________________</td>
<td>______________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>_______________________</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

What is the main idea of the paragraph? Use details from the chart in your answer.

_________________________________________________________________________

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_________________________________________________________________________
Show Your Thinking

In reality, the cobra is quite deaf. It has no ears and can only sense vibrations in the ground. What the cobra sways to is not the music. It sways to the motion of the flute that the snake charmer moves back and forth as he plays. The cobra is trying to get into position to strike at the flute. However, as long as the snake charmer keeps the flute in motion, the snake cannot attack.

The Indian cobra is a favorite of snake charmers because daylight interferes with the snake’s ability to strike. At night, however, the Indian cobra is extremely dangerous and more accurate. Cobras don’t normally attack people, however. Instead, they go after frogs, fish, birds, and small mammals.

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Close Reading

What really makes the snake sway back and forth? **Underline** a sentence that tells why the snake sways.

Hint

Which choice tells what the whole passage is about?

1. The snake sways to the sound of the charmer’s flute music.
2. Indian cobras have poor hearing, so they hunt best at night.
3. Snake charmers prefer the Indian cobra to other snakes.
4. The flute’s motion, not its music, is what makes the snake sway.

Circle the correct answer.

What is the main idea of “The Snake and the Charmer”?

A. The snake sways to the sound of the charmer’s flute music.
B. Indian cobras have poor hearing, so they hunt best at night.
C. Snake charmers prefer the Indian cobra to other snakes.
D. The flute’s motion, not its music, is what makes the snake sway.

Look at the answer you chose above. Explain how details in the text helped you figure out the main idea of “The Snake and the Charmer.”
Read the social studies passage. Use the Study Buddy and the Close Reading to guide your reading.

First, I'll try to figure out the main idea of what I read. Then I'll look for key details that support the main idea.

**Lending an Ear**  *by Michael Simon*

1. Mitzi, a Labrador retriever, is always by her owner Leah's side. This isn't just because Mitzi and Leah like each other. Mitzi is Leah's hearing dog. Leah is mostly deaf, and Mitzi's job is to alert Leah to sounds she cannot hear. Mitzi is happy as a constant, helpful companion for Leah.

2. Hearing dogs listen for sounds that people with hearing loss cannot hear. These dogs alert their owners to sounds by touching them with their nose or paw. After giving the alert, hearing dogs lead their owners to the source of the sound. Hearing dogs can be trained to recognize many household sounds. These sounds include doorbells, telephones, oven timers, alarm clocks, and fire and smoke alarms. Hearing dogs keep their deaf or partly deaf partners both active and safe by alerting them to such important noises.

3. Hearing dogs don't just help around the home. They also help their partners live and thrive in the world outside. People who can't hear sometimes feel lonely and isolated from other people. Hearing dogs can help their partners feel comfortable in public by making them aware of sounds. A hearing dog must wear an orange coat when in public. This tells other people that the dog's owner has some degree of hearing loss. Those other people can then adjust their own behavior when it is necessary.

4. Living and working side-by-side every day, hearing dogs and their partners become a special team—just like Mitzi and Leah.
Use the Hints on this page to help you answer the questions.

1. What is the main idea expressed in paragraph 1?
   - A  Mitzi is always by her owner’s side.
   - B  Mitzi is a hearing dog to Leah.
   - C  Mitzi and Leah like each other.
   - D  Leah, who is Mitzi’s owner, is mostly deaf.

2. Read this sentence from paragraph 2. It is a key detail.
   These sounds include doorbells, telephones, oven timers, alarm clocks, and fire and smoke alarms.

   What idea in paragraph 2 does this key detail support?
   - A  Hearing dogs can be trained to recognize many sounds.
   - B  Hearing dogs use a nose or a paw to alert their owners to sounds.
   - C  Hearing dogs help their owners feel more comfortable in public.
   - D  Hearing dogs do many things to help people with hearing loss.

3. Describe the main idea of “Lending an Ear.” Then find at least two key details and tell how they support the main idea.

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Read the article. Then answer the questions that follow.

**Flying with a Tiger**

*by Elana Kopel, Highlights*

1. I am a zookeeper at the Dallas Zoo in Texas. One of my jobs is to care for Sumatran tigers.

2. These tigers live in the wild on the island of Sumatra and in some other parts of Asia. They are endangered, and their numbers are declining. But zoos around the world keep a few of the big cats to teach people about tigers and to let the tigers have cubs.

3. When a zoo wants a new tiger, it tries to get one from another zoo. That way, more tigers can stay in the wild. Some animals travel from zoo to zoo by truck, and some go by airplane. When we moved one of our tigers, a female named Skylar, to the San Francisco Zoo in California, she went by plane. I went along to help keep her safe.

**Skylar in the Sky**

4. Skylar spent the first two years of her life wrestling with her sister and stalking and pouncing on her brother. This is how tigers learn to hunt. By the age of three, Skylar was old enough to leave her siblings and start her own family. That’s what she would have done in the wild.

5. Before Skylar could take to the skies, we needed to prepare her for the journey. We trained her to go into a shipping crate and let us close the door behind her. When she cooperated, we gave her an uncooked meatball, her favorite treat.

**Meatballs Galore**

6. When moving day arrived, we put lots of meatballs inside Skylar’s crate. Once Skylar was inside, the crate was loaded into the back of a truck. Skylar turned around in the crate to see what was happening, but she was quiet and calm the whole way to the airport.

7. Skylar and I flew on an airplane that carries packages, not people. Skylar’s crate was loaded on with other large packages. The plane left at midnight, and we stopped in Indiana to change aircraft. While we waited at the Indiana airport, I peeked into Skylar’s crate. I was happy to see her sleeping peacefully.

8. Our second plane landed in San Francisco at eight o’clock in the morning. A zookeeper from the San Francisco Zoo met us and took us to Skylar’s new home. I knew Skylar was
nervous. She did not come out of the crate as quickly as she had gone in. She growled at her new zookeepers. We left her alone to calm down.

9  Skylar’s new keepers took me to see the tiger exhibit where Skylar would be living. I told them that Skylar liked to take a dip in her swimming pool and to play with plastic barrels, giant plastic balls, empty plastic flowerpots, perfume-scented logs, and ice. . . . By the next day, Skylar had calmed down a little.

10  After my last visit with Skylar, I returned to Dallas on a regular airplane. I knew I would miss Skylar, but I hoped that she would like her new zoo and teach the people of San Francisco about the wildlife of Asia. I hoped she would start a new family, too.

More Tigers in the World

11  Months later, Skylar gave birth to three male cubs. She is a good mom, and she has brought more Sumatran tigers into the world. Maybe one day her cubs will be dads and there will be even more of these beautiful creatures.

1  Which of these statements about Sumatran tigers does the passage best support?

A  They are healthier when left out in the wild.
B  They can help teach people to better respect wildlife.
C  Many of them grow up in zoos before being set free.
D  Many of them never learn how to hunt.

2  Why does the author describe Skylar’s favorite treat?

A  to explain how the zookeepers got Skylar into her crate
B  to tell why Skylar enjoys living at the zoo
C  to suggest that tigers like eating food made for people
D  to compare what tigers eat in the wild to what they eat in zoos
3. Read this sentence from paragraph 3. It is a key detail.

Some animals travel from zoo to zoo by truck, and some go by airplane.

What idea in paragraph 3 does this key detail support?

A. Zoos sometimes want more tigers.
B. Skylar was moved to the San Francisco Zoo.
C. Skylar needed to prepare for her journey.
D. Zoos try not to take tigers from the wild.

4. One central idea of the article is that Sumatran tigers need our help. Write a paragraph explaining the key points that support this idea. Use at least two details from the article to support your answer.

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Self Check

Go back and see what you can check off on the Self Check on page 1.