

## Term: Main or Central Idea

I. Definition – The main idea of a passage or reading is the **central thought or message**. In contrast to the term *topic*, which refers to the subject under discussion, the term *main idea* refers to the point or thought being expressed.

Don't confuse **the main idea** with the more obvious topic. Although the topic is included in a main-idea statement, the rest of the sentence reveals what about that topic the text specifically addresses. Many texts are written about the same topic— but they have different main ideas.

II. Three typical details that authors include to imply what the text is mostly about:

### 1. Synonyms

Look for repeating ideas via synonyms. We know that authors vary their word choice to keep readers engaged, so teach students to look for the same detail being subtly restated in different ways. This includes noting each time it is referenced via a pronoun.

### 2. Descriptive phrases

The use of synonyms and pronouns are tied to individual words— but authors will often refer to the same idea in longer phrases. Look for sensory details and figurative language that allude to the same aspect.

### 3. Related details

An author wants to deeply inform the reader about something, so he will provide many relevant facts and specific examples all related to a specific idea. Readers must recognize that these little details are hinting at the text's main idea.