The main idea: what belongs in a short summary?

PUPIL ACTIVITY • Name: _____ Date: _____

A reading corner that works

A class wanted its reading corner to be easier to use. The pupils put books into three labelled baskets: stories, information and poetry. They placed a picture and a word on each label so that more readers could find the right basket. They also left a gap beside the shelf so pupils could reach the books without moving a chair. After a week, the class noticed that books were easier to find and put away. One basket was bright yellow.

1. Choose the best main idea

A. Yellow is the best colour for a basket.
B. The class made its reading corner easier to use.
C. The class stopped reading stories.
My choice: ____ The text shows this because _____

2. Keep or leave?

Choose two useful details for a summary. Choose one detail you can leave out. Explain why.
Keep: _____
Keep: _____
Leave out: _____

3. Write a short summary

Write one or two sentences. Keep the main message. Do not add facts the text does not give.

_____

_____

Teacher notes

The main idea: what belongs in a short summary?

Preparation

Give pupils page 1. Read aloud or support word reading as needed. Explain poetry and labelled. Discuss the purpose and result of the changes before pupils choose a main idea.

Suggested answers

1. B is the best main idea. The labels and clear space helped pupils use the books; the outcome confirms this. A is not supported, and C contradicts the text.
2. Useful details include labelled baskets, picture-and-word labels, clear space beside the shelf, and books being easier to find and put away. The colour of one basket can be omitted for this purpose.

One possible summary

The class organised its reading corner with labelled baskets and space to reach the shelf. This made the books easier to find and put away. Accept other accurate summaries that keep the message; this is not a sentence to memorise.

Common difficulties

A topic such as “books” is too broad to summarise the message. A list of basket categories misses the purpose. Claims about better test scores or pupils reading more are inventions: neither appears in the paragraph.

Support and challenge

Let pupils explain orally, point to evidence or rehearse with a partner. For extra challenge, remove the multiple-choice options. Ask how a summary would change if the reader needed instructions for setting up a corner, rather than an overview of what happened.

Next time

Use a new short text and ask pupils to justify one omission. Do not reward brevity at the expense of accuracy. Longer texts may need several main ideas and a longer summary.

Further reading: https://www.readingrockets.org/classroom/classroom-strategies/summarizing

Original activity and notes prepared by SkillFlex. Share the article link with colleagues. No login or pupil-data upload is needed.