

TEACHER GUIDE **F**

FOCUS on



UNDERSTANDING MAIN
IDEA AND DETAILS

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INTRODUCTION

What is the **FOCUS** series?

FOCUS is a reading-strategy practice series. Each student book in the series provides brief instruction and concentrated practice for students in one targeted Reading Strategy. *FOCUS* also allows students the opportunity for self-assessment of their performance. It allows teachers the opportunity to identify and assess a student's level of mastery.

6 Reading Strategies featured in the *FOCUS* series:

- Understanding Main Idea and Details
- Understanding Sequence
- Recognising Cause and Effect
- Comparing and Contrasting
- Making Predictions
- Drawing Conclusions and Making Inferences

The *FOCUS* series spans 8 reading levels (1.0–8.9). The reading passages in each book are designed so that the book can be used by all students performing at that reading level. The reading passages in each book progress from low to high along that reading level range.

Book	Reading Level
Book A	1.0–1.9
Book B	2.0–2.9
Book C	3.0–3.9
Book D	4.0–4.9
Book E	5.0–5.9
Book F	6.0–6.9
Book G	7.0–7.9
Book H	8.0–8.9

What is Understanding Main Idea and Details, the Reading Strategy featured in this *FOCUS* book?

The main idea is the most important idea in a passage. The main idea tells what the passage is mostly about. Everything in the passage relates somehow to the main idea. Every passage has a main idea, and each paragraph in a passage also has a main idea. Details are pieces of information in the passage that tell about or explain the main idea. Details tell who, what, when, where, why, or how about a person, place, or thing. Details can tell about the order in which things happen, or they can explain how to do something.

What is in each student book?

There are 48 student books in the *FOCUS* series. There is one student book for each of the 6 Reading Strategies, at each of the 8 reading levels. Each student book contains:

- *To the Student*
This introduces the program and should be read and discussed with students to make sure they understand what they are to do in the book.
- *Table of Contents*
- *Learn About (Modelled Practice)*
These two pages provide basic instruction and modelling in the understanding and application of the Reading Strategy. The Learn About should be read and discussed with students to make sure they understand the Reading Strategy. Additional tips for helping students understand and use the Reading Strategy are included in the Reading Strategy Tips for the Teacher on pages 12–13 of this teacher guide.
- *Lesson Preview (Guided Practice)*
These two pages include a sample reading passage and two selected-response questions with explanations of why each of the eight answer choices is correct or not correct. The Lesson Preview should be read, worked through, and discussed with students to make sure they understand how to answer strategy-based questions.
- *20 Lessons (Independent Practice)*
Each two-page lesson contains one reading passage, four strategy-based selected-response questions and one strategy-based constructed-response writing question.

Reading Passages: The reading passages progress across the reading level. The passage genres include:

—**Fiction:** personal narrative, realistic fiction, historical fiction, fantasy fiction, mystery, folktale, fable, legend

—**Nonfiction:** report, article, interview, letter, postcard, book report, movie review, diary entry, journal entry, biography, textbook lesson, directions, instructions, recipe, invitation, announcement, experiment

Selected-response questions: In each lesson, students apply the Reading Strategy to a reading passage and then choose the correct answers for four selected-response (multiple-choice) strategy-based questions. You should model how to answer these kinds of questions using information on the Lesson Preview pages.

Constructed-response writing questions: In each lesson, students apply the Reading Strategy to a reading passage and then write a short response to a strategy-based question. You should model how to answer these kinds of questions by using one of the sample answers provided on pages 28–29 of this teacher guide.

- *Tracking Chart*
Students use this chart for noting their completion of and performance in each lesson.
- *Self-Assessments*
These five forms allow students the opportunity for self-assessment of their performance.
- *Answer Form*
Students may use this form to record their answers to the eighty selected-response questions and to indicate that they have answered each of the twenty constructed-response writing questions.

What is in each teacher guide?

There are 48 teacher guides in the *FOCUS* series, one for each student book. Each teacher guide contains:

- suggested instructions for using the *FOCUS* series effectively in the classroom
- Reading Strategy Tips for the Teacher, a facsimile of the Learn About on pages 2–3 of the student book, with tips for additional discussion related to understanding and using the Reading Strategy
- four reproducibles: three Teacher Assessments to be used for individual student assessment in the Reading Strategy and one Class or Group Performance Graph to be used for class or group assessment in the Reading Strategy
- summary of research that supports the *FOCUS* series
- a completed Answer Form for the eighty selected-response questions in the student book
- Answers for the eighty selected-response questions, plus sample answers for the twenty constructed-response writing questions in the student book

How should I use the Reading Strategy Tips for the Teacher?

These pages contain a facsimile of the Learn About on pages 2–3 of the student book, along with extended information about the Reading Strategy, which you can use as a basis for in-depth discussion to make sure students understand the strategy and how to use it for better reading comprehension.

Where do students record their answers?

Students should fill in their answers to the selected-response questions on the Answer Form on page 53 of the student book. If students use the Answer Form, they may detach it from the book. Alternatively, students may fill in the correct answers directly on the student book page.

Students should write their answers to the constructed-response questions directly on the lines provided in the student book. Students who use the Answer Form for the selected-response questions should fill in the circle on the Answer Form to show that they have answered the constructed-response question, which is the fifth question in each lesson.

READING STRATEGY TIPS FOR THE TEACHER

A main idea sums up what the author says about the topic, or subject, of the passage. It is the main point the author makes about the topic of the passage. It is what the passage is mostly about, and everything in the passage relates in some way to the main idea.

Details support or explain the main idea by providing additional information or giving examples. A detail may be important, but it is not a main idea. It is not what the passage is mostly about; it is what the passage is partly about.

In the Learn About paragraph, “Dinosaur eggs are one kind of fossil” is not the main idea of the paragraph because everything in the paragraph does not tell about dinosaur eggs. Only part of the paragraph tells about dinosaur eggs; this is a detail telling one kind of dinosaur fossil.

A whole passage has a main idea, and each individual paragraph in the passage also has a main idea. The paragraph main ideas are usually details for the passage main idea. The details for each paragraph main idea are in the paragraph itself. Sometimes a long report or article is divided into sections indicated by boldface headings. In those cases, there is the passage main idea, section main ideas, and paragraph main ideas. The paragraphs under a section are the details of the section main idea. An outline often reflects the hierarchy of main idea and details.

Learn About

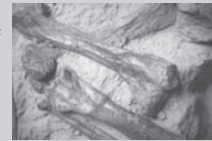
Understanding Main Idea and Details

The **main idea** is the most important idea in a passage, or piece of writing. The main idea tells what the writing is *mostly about*. Every passage has a main idea. Each paragraph in a passage also has a main idea.

Details are pieces of information that *tell about* the main idea. Details explain the main idea. They tell you who, what, when, where, why or how. Details can describe a person, place or thing. Details can tell you the order in which events happen. Details can also explain how to do something.

Read this passage. Find the main idea and the details that tell you about the main idea.

We know about dinosaurs from fossils. This is possible even though the dinosaurs themselves have been extinct for millions of years. A fossil is evidence of a plant or animal that once lived. Dinosaur eggs are one kind of fossil. They are evidence that dinosaurs laid eggs. Dinosaur footprints that have hardened are also a type of fossil. Another kind of fossil is the impression of dinosaur skin left in mud that later hardened. The most common type of dinosaur fossil is petrified bones. These bones were buried in mud. Then, over millions of years, minerals present in water replaced the living matter in the bones, and the minerals took the shape of the bones. These are the kinds of fossils that give us information.



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A main idea may be stated directly in a sentence, which is sometimes called the topic sentence. In the Learn About paragraph, “We know about dinosaurs from fossils” is the main idea. This main idea is stated in the first sentence in this paragraph. The main idea is sometimes stated or found in the last sentence in the paragraph, or it may be stated or found in a sentence somewhere in the middle of the paragraph. A main idea is not always *directly* stated in a sentence. For an unstated main idea, you have to use the details to figure out what the passage is mostly about. What do all the details tell something about? The answer to this question leads you to the main idea of the passage.

Main Idea
We know about dinosaurs from fossils.

Detail
eggs

Detail
footprints

Detail
impressions
of skin

Detail
petrified
bones

This web shows the main idea and details from the passage.

The main idea of the passage is that we know about dinosaurs from fossils. It is stated in the first sentence of the passage. A main idea may also be stated in the last sentence or anywhere else in a passage. Or a main idea may not be directly stated at all. If the main idea is not directly stated, ask yourself questions like these: "What is this passage mostly about? What is the most important idea?"

The details in the passage give information about four types of fossils from which we learn about dinosaurs: dinosaur eggs, dinosaur footprints, impressions of dinosaur skin and petrified dinosaur bones.

The passage about dinosaur fossils is made up of just one paragraph. Many other passages that you read will have more than one paragraph. In these longer passages, the whole passage still has a main idea and each paragraph in the passage also has a main idea.

Remember!

The main idea is what the passage is mostly about. Details are pieces of information that tell you about the main idea.

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Details telling who, what, when, where, why or how are often mixed together in a passage. In the following paragraph, "Serena enjoyed her day trip to the country" is the main idea. The other sentences are details, giving various types of information about why Serena enjoyed her trip.

Serena enjoyed her day trip to the country. As planned, Serena met her friend Pat (who), and the two went for a day-long walk (what) in the forest (where). They did this, they said, to clear their mind and please their spirit (why).

Here are more examples of each type of detail.

Details telling who: *Three of my favourite authors are Paul Jennings, Thomas Hardy and Ivan Southall.*

Details telling what: *Laura put three things in her bag for school today: her books, her lunch and an extra jumper.*

Details telling when: *Mark walks his dog, BestFriend, twice a day: in the morning before he leaves for school, and at night before dinner.*

Details telling where: *I've bumped into Karen three times this week: at the gym, at the library and at the supermarket.*

Details telling why or how: *Steve knew he was sick because he had a stomach ache, chills and a fever.*

Definitions: "The explicitness with which teachers teach comprehension strategies makes a difference in learner outcomes, especially for low-achieving students (modeling and careful scaffolding is key)." (Abadiano & Turner, 2003, p. 76).

Abadiano, H. R., & Turner, J. (2003). The RAND report: Reading for understanding: Toward an R&D program in reading comprehension. *New England Reading Association Journal*, 39(2), 74-79.