

Readers use strategies to figure out the main idea of a nonfiction passage.

CCSSR. Determine **central ideas or themes** of a text and analyze their development; **summarize** the key supporting details and ideas.

What is a main idea of a nonfiction text?

It is a big idea that the writer wants me to understand about the topic of the text—an idea is a way of thinking about a topic.

How do you figure it out?

I answer it? What strategy and skills will I use?

1. First, I will make sure I know what the topic is.

But I will make sure I know that the topic is not the idea. The topic is what the writer is going to give me an idea to think about. For example, in an article about birds, the topic is birds, but the main idea would be a way of thinking about birds. The example at the bottom of this page shows what this means.

2. Then I will re-read the passage to figure out what the writer is explaining. I will look at each part and ask myself: What idea is the writer helping me to understand by telling me this information? So I will take time to think about the whole passage. I might make a list of important facts.

Topic: _____

Important facts I find:

Then I will look at the ideas inside the passage and draw a conclusion about what the BIG idea is, the idea that the writer has explained with the different ideas and facts.

This is an example of figuring out the topic, important facts, and main idea of an article about birds.

Topic: Birds

Important facts I find in the text.

- A bird's feet shows how the bird moves.
- Birds wings are different shapes that they use to fly in different ways.
- Birds have different kinds of beaks to help them get food.

Main Idea: Each part of a bird helps it live.

You can see the text on the next page.

BIRDS

INTRODUCTION: When you look at a bird, you can read it! You can make inferences. You can use the parts you see to infer how the bird uses that part to live.

FEET When you look at a bird's feet, you can tell a lot about how it lives. For example, if it has webbed feet, you know that it swims. Webbed feet would help it paddle in the water. Ducks have webbed feet. So do swans. So do penguins! Yes, penguins are birds, even though they look so different. Other birds have feet that are claws, and they use those to sit in trees. They spend most of their time in trees, not in water. Some birds have toes that spread out and have thick coverings. Those are birds that walk a lot on land, like the ostrich. In fact, the ostrich never flies.

WINGS You can tell how a bird flies from the shape of its wing. If the bird has wide long wings that spread out so they look like a cape when they fly, those birds probably are soaring birds. Soaring means they float on the air. They do flap their wings to get into the air, but when they are in the air they can glide on those big wings. If a bird has long thin wings, those birds probably are fast flyers. They will flap their wings a lot to get into the air and keep flapping to keep flying. The ostrich does not fly, but it does have wings. But they are small wings. It does not use them to fly, but it has wings because it is a bird.

BEAKS When you look at a bird's beak, you can tell how it gets food. If the bird has a flat wide beak, it uses it to strain water. The bird will scoop up some plants and small fish or snails along with some water. Then it will close its beak and strain the water out so what is left is food it will eat. If you see a bird with a short beak shaped like a triangle then you probably are looking at a bird that eats seeds. It needs a strong beak to crack the seeds. Birds that have long thin beaks that look a little like straws with a pointed end are birds that get their food from plants. They put their beak into the plant to get nectar, which is a sweet part of some plants.

CONCLUSION There are many kinds of birds and there is much more you can learn about how they survive. Each kind is different because those differences help it get food, move, and stay alive. When you look at each bird you can tell a lot about how it lives by looking at its parts.

CCSSR2. Determine the main idea of a nonfiction text.

Which of these is a better main idea for this passage?

Birds have feet, wings, and beaks.

Each part of a bird helps it live.

Choose one and explain why you chose it.