

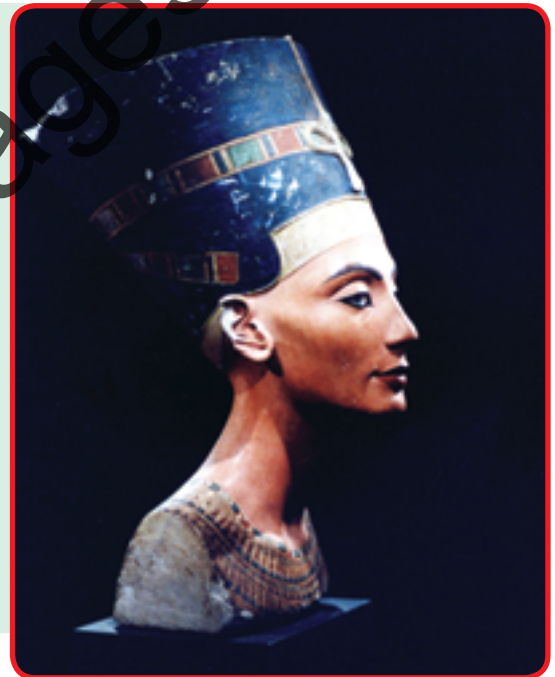
Main idea and supporting details

The **main idea** of a story or an article is the most important idea about the topic—the point the writer wants you to understand and remember. In some paragraphs and articles, the main idea is stated in a topic sentence. The topic sentence often appears at the beginning of a piece of writing. When you know the main idea, you are much more likely to remember what you have read.

The **supporting details** in a paragraph or article are sentences that tell about or support the main idea. Supporting details are small pieces of information that help you better understand the main idea.

Read the following paragraph. As you read, look for the main idea.

Both historical records and archaeological evidence show that the ancient peoples of the Middle East used cosmetics. Their lavish use of eye cosmetics seems to have been to ward off the glare of the sun, as well as helping to improve one's appearance. Two famous Egyptian queens who used eye make-up were Nefertiti (c. 1365 BC) and, much later, Cleopatra (c. 50 BC). Also in common use among the upper classes of Egypt were rouges, henna for dyeing hair and fingernails, white powders, bath oils, and abrasives for cleaning teeth. The oldest cosmetic item that archaeologists have found in the Middle East is one in common use today—lipstick. Dating from about 4000 BC, it was found in a Babylonian tomb and in all likelihood belonged to a man.



Is the main idea of this passage stated or unstated? _____
Underline the topic sentence.

Write the main idea in your own words.

The main idea of a paragraph or article is not always stated directly. You can work it out: firstly, study the supporting details, then write a topic sentence that summarises the details.

As you read this article, think about the main idea.

‘I haven’t got my wheels today. I’ll have to walk or catch the bus.’

Have you heard someone say this recently? Without wheels you could not travel by bike or bus or train or car, and there are many other things that you would have to do very differently as well. You would have to plant and harvest wheat with a horse and row a boat to cross the sea. So the next time you travel by plane, or buy a loaf of bread, remember the ancient Sumerians who invented the humble wheel about five or six thousand years ago!



Is the main idea of this passage stated or unstated?

Which sentence best expresses the main idea of the passage?

- Most forms of transport use wheels.
- Tractors and other farm machinery rely on wheels.
- The wheel is one of the world’s most important inventions.
- Wheels are more useful than feet for getting from place to place.

Write one detail that supports the main idea.

Tip

A writer does not always state the main idea of a story or article. You can figure out the main idea by summarising the information given in the supporting details.





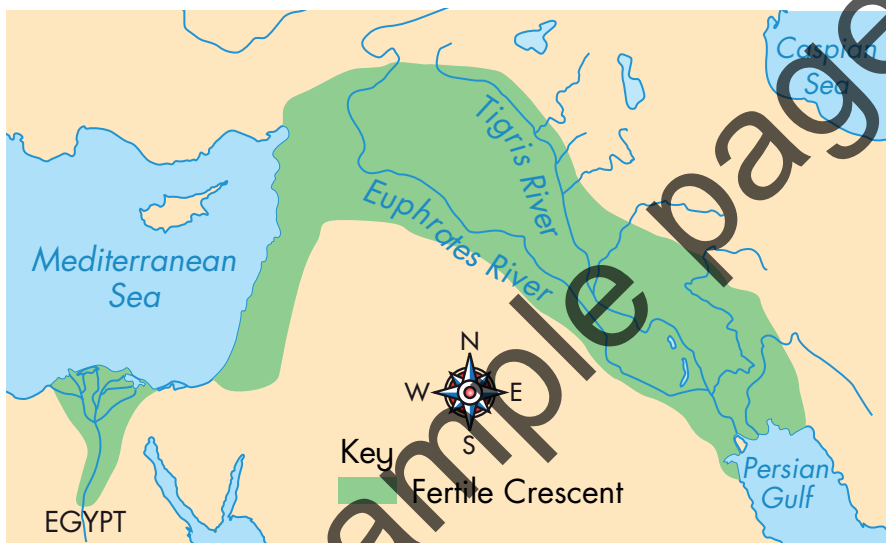
Read this article about one reason why people have migrated from one place to another to live. As you read, look for the main idea and supporting details.



Searching for fertile land

by Meish Goldish

From ancient times to the present day, people have migrated to find land that they could farm. One of the first places people settled in was the Fertile Crescent, in the Middle East. Today, this area includes parts of Israel, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Iran and Kuwait. Migration and settlement began before 5000 BC and continued for 3000 years. The region's rich soil allowed people to grow abundant crops.



In more recent times, people from Ireland migrated in search of fertile farmland and a better life. In the early 1840s, almost half of Ireland's population depended on potatoes for food and income. In 1845, Ireland suffered a serious food shortage, or famine, because diseases struck the nation's potato crops. As a result, more than one million starving Irish people moved to the United States, Canada, Great Britain and Australia to seek work and a new life.

This migration changed the cultures of these nations forever. Almost 400 000 Irish people emigrated to Australia between 1850 and 1921. Apart from the effect of the potato famine, the extent of the Irish migration owed much to the discovery of gold in the mid-1800s, the availability of affordable land and good possibilities for work. The contribution of the Irish in Australia has taken many forms, including the creation of a sizeable Catholic community and the adoption of a type of Gaelic football as a major sporting code, Australian Rules football. The profusion of Irish cultural, religious and political organisations was similar to what occurred in North America.

Understanding the text

1 Why did so many people settle in the Fertile Crescent?

2 Give four reasons for the migration of so many Irish to Australia after 1850.

3 Explain the connection between the potato famine in Ireland in the 1840s and Australian Rules football.

Developing comprehension skills

4 Write the main idea of the article in the top box. Write a supporting detail in each of the other boxes.



- 5 Migration means moving from one area or country to another. *Immigration* means moving to a particular place. *Emigration* means leaving a particular place.

Look back to the three paragraphs of the article. For each one, is the main focus about immigration or emigration?

Paragraph	Mainly about immigration or emigration?	
1	<input type="radio"/> Immigration	<input type="radio"/> Emigration
2	<input type="radio"/> Immigration	<input type="radio"/> Emigration
3	<input type="radio"/> Immigration	<input type="radio"/> Emigration

- 6 What is the main idea of paragraph 3?
- The contribution of the Irish in Australia has taken many forms.
 - The discovery of gold was a major reason for migration from Ireland.
 - Migration from Ireland had a big impact on the cultures of several countries.
 - Many Irish cultural organisations are similar in Australia and North America.

Read the following passage. Think about the main idea.

Living history sites such as Sovereign Hill in Victoria provide a way for people to find out about the past by actually experiencing what it was like. They re-create a certain time and place in history. Living history sites use actors to do the work and daily tasks of the people who lived in the past. These actors re-enact, or re-create, important events of the time, interact with visitors and talk about the past as if it were happening now. When you visit a living history site, you will feel as if you have stepped back in time.



- 7 Is the main idea of this passage stated or unstated?

- 8 Write the main idea in your own words.

9 Write two supporting details that tell more about the main idea.

10 What if the following statement had been the main idea of the passage?

'Sovereign Hill is the best living history site in Victoria, if not the whole of Australia.'

What supporting details would the author need to include to support this main idea?

Working with words

Match each word in the box to its definition.

adoption affordable depend fertile political profusion sizeable

- 11 productive, fruitful _____
- 12 to need help or support _____
- 13 that people have enough money for _____
- 14 of a good or large size _____
- 15 great amount, abundance _____
- 16 about government and public affairs _____
- 17 taking as one's own _____

Making
the reading
and writing
connection



Writing about your own history

Write a short article about how and why you and your family came to settle where you now live. Clarify the main idea before you start, and include supporting details.



Drawing conclusions

When you read a story or an article, you often draw conclusions about characters, places, ideas and events. A **conclusion** is a sensible opinion you have or a decision you reach after thinking over the facts or details you've read.

Drawing a conclusion is a two-step process. First, you note the facts and details you have read. Then you put that information together with what you know from your own experience. Asking yourself questions like these will help you draw conclusions.

- What do these facts and details suggest?
- What do this character's appearance, words and behaviour reveal about him or her?
- What do I already know about the topic of this article?

Read the following information about the Swedish language. Look for facts and details that will help you draw conclusions.

Until now, the letter W has had a low profile in the Swedish language. Most words that begin with W, such as *watt*, *walkie-talkie* and *World Wide Web*, have been borrowed from other languages, and have been included in Swedish dictionaries under the letter V. The two letters have the same sound in Swedish, and the former—the 'single-v'—is much more widely used than the 'double-v'. (Sweden is called 'Sverige' in Swedish.)

But in 2006 the Swedish Academy, the organisation largely responsible for the Swedish language, upgraded W by giving the 'double-v' its own place in the latest edition of its Swedish dictionary.



Do you think that there are many words that begin with the letter W in Swedish?
How did you come to this conclusion?

Do you think that the following is a reasonable conclusion? Explain your answer.
'The Internet is an important influence in Swedish life.'

Tip

Back up your conclusions with information from the text as well as your own experiences with people and events.



Read this online newspaper article from Thailand. As you read, think about what conclusions you can draw.

How do you say 'Muggle' in Thai?

by Grace Cheung
1 December 2005

Behind the translation of the latest Harry Potter tome

Everybody's a critic. But Suma-lee Bumroongsook, Thai translator of most of the Harry Potter books, doesn't mind when fans of the massively popular series are upset with the way she chose to render a word—it shows they're paying attention.

For example, some Thai students were confused as to why Suma-lee chose to relate 'The Order of the Phoenix' as a group of people, and not a command. At a school appearance, Suma-lee patiently explained that the word 'order' had several meanings in English, not just to signify a command.

'I'm so happy they asked me, that I could help them to learn,' she said.

Tomorrow at midnight, Nanmee Books will release the fruits of Suma-lee's latest labor: the Thai version of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, the sixth book in the seven-part series. Almost 300 000 books—Nannee's entire first print run—have been reserved in advance.

Local Potter fans also showed their Gryffindor colours by running out along with the rest of the world in July to purchase the Bloomsbury-published English hardcover version of the *Half-Blood Prince* for a whopping 850 baht.

The English edition is still clinging to the number six spot on Asia Books' bestseller list, and sales of the Thai version are expected to mimic the trend of the original, according to Jiaranai Boonprasatsuk, senior marketing manager of Asia Books. About 1000 people have pre-ordered the Thai translation of the *Half-Blood Prince* through



their stores.

'I like reading the English version because it is better written,' says Potter fan Yui Patthanapantlagonsagant, 23.

If the Thai translation is clunky at times, it's not because Suma-lee didn't try. Successful literary translation is very difficult, close to an art form. A thorough understanding of both languages—and their surrounding cultures—is required.

And the Harry Potter books pose special problems. First, the cultural environment of the books is quite English, and to Thai readers, somewhere very far away. For example, the boarding school mentality of Hogwarts is specific to English literature and must somehow be conveyed.

Second, there are many regional nuances in the way author J K Rowling crafts her sentences. Even the American versions are 'translated,' with certain expressions changed, for example 'dustbin' becomes 'trash can' and a 'packet of crisps' turns into a 'bag of chips'. The translator must also try to retain dialects spoken by characters like Hagrid the caretaker.

Finally, Rowling invented many words in the books that were inspired by Latin, such as the incantations of spells ('Sectumsempra!') and words like 'pensieve,' a play on the words *pensive* and *sieve*, which describes a swirling magical pool where one can store and revisit a single unaltered memory. Translators can choose either to make up new words themselves as they go along, or transliterate.

'Transliteration is a universal phenomenon where some words are written in another language,' explains Michael Barang, a literary translator (and consultant to Thai Day).



Understanding the text

1 What is the unit of currency in Thailand?

2 Suma-lee did not have access to *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* before its publication in English. About how long did it take her to translate it and have it published?

3 Which do you think would be better, to transliterate incantations such as 'Sectumsempra!', or to make up new Thai versions? Use your own experience to justify your answer.

Developing comprehension skills

4 What conclusion can you draw about Suma-lee?

- She can read Latin.
- She is a Harry Potter fan.
- She has translated all the Harry Potter books.
- She prefers to read the Harry Potter books in Thai.

5 What conclusion can you draw about Nanmee Books?

- They publish books in Thailand.
- They translate many English books.
- All the books they publish are translations.
- They are Thailand's largest children's publisher.

6 Do you think that the following is a reasonable conclusion? Justify your answer with facts and details from the article.

Many young people in Thailand speak English as well as Thai.

7 What details in the article support the conclusion that Harry Potter books are very popular in Thailand?

Working with words

Each word in the box has at least two meanings. Match each one to the meanings given below.

better can close fan order spell spot

- 8 to give a command OR a list or sequence OR a group of people with something in common _____
- 9 a device that blows cool air OR a very keen supporter _____
- 10 particular place OR a dirty mark OR a filled-in circle _____
- 11 of higher quality OR improved in health _____
- 12 near OR to shut _____
- 13 to name in order the letters of a word OR a set of magic words _____
- 14 to know how to OR a tin containing preserved food _____

Making
the reading
and writing
connection

Drawing conclusions about the setting of the story

Think about a book that you have read and enjoyed recently. What could you conclude about the setting of the story from the text? Was your own experience also useful? Write a paragraph explaining your conclusions, and the details and information that helped you decide.

Sequence: order of events

Thinking about the order in which events happen helps you understand what you read. The **order of events** can be important to the meaning of a story or an article. In many cases, an outcome would change if events had occurred in a different order.

Reference to dates and times of day are clues to the sequence of events. Words that suggest time order such as *first*, *then*, *meanwhile* and *next*, or *yesterday*, *today* and *afterward*, are also clues.

As you read this story, picture the order in which the events occurred.

Before my parents renovated, our kitchen and living room used to be four different rooms. When they pulled out the old pantry, they found a small blue milk jug hidden behind some shelves. It was badly chipped, so they threw it out, but my dad often thinks of it, and wishes he hadn't thrown it away. Then they had to pull up the old timber floor, because parts of it were rotten. When they poured the concrete for the new floor, my dad threw some coins into the mixture. 'For the future,' he said to my mum, 'maybe someone will find them one day.'

I was born a couple of years later, and my parents added the back bedroom after my little sister was born. We still live in the same house, and I often think about the coins under the carpet in the living room.



Put the story of events in order by numbering them from 1 to 6.

- _____ My little sister was born.
- _____ Mum and Dad pulled up the old timber floor.
- _____ Dad threw away the milk jug.
- _____ I was born.
- _____ Mum and Dad took the old pantry apart.
- _____ Dad threw coins into the concrete.

Tip

As you read, think about the sequence of events. Then ask yourself, 'Would the outcome have changed if the events had happened in a different order, or if a certain event had not happened?'

In many stories and articles, an author starts at the beginning and tells events in the order in which they occurred. Sometimes, however, an author will interrupt the normal sequence of the events to describe something that happened in the past. This interruption is called a flashback. Flashbacks can help the reader to learn more about the people and details in a story or article. Flashbacks are often signalled by references to dates or clue words and phrases such as *earlier*, *many years before* or *he remembered when*.

As you read this article, think about the sequence of events and look for any flashbacks.

The 2002 Little Lonsdale Archaeology Dig in Melbourne was one of Australia's largest urban archaeology projects. After about a hundred years of being a densely populated area, with many small houses, shops, hotels and warehouses, the area had been bought by the Commonwealth Government in 1950. It remained unused, except for a street level car park, for almost 50 years. Before the present owners could develop the site for a large, multi-storey office block, they were obliged to allow archaeologists to dig up the site. Backyard cesspits, into which the locals had thrown all their waste and rubbish, provided a treasure trove for archaeologists. They were able to piece together the lives of the people who lived there from a huge range of artefacts, from broken pottery and toys to coins and hair brushes.



What is the present-day focus of this article?

What major events in the past does the article describe? Write these in order.

