

“During Reading” Strategy for Determining Importance in Nonfiction: How to Find Topic, Key Details, and Main Ideas (*A precursor to highlighting*)

Adapted from Jeffrey Wilhelm’s *Improving Comprehension with Thinking-Aloud Strategies* (Scholastic, 2001)

How to Identify an Author’s Topic

First Steps:

- ◆ Read title and first and last paragraph—Ask yourself if you can name the topic
- ◆ Browse the entire selection, including illustrations, captions and headings—Ask yourself what subject penetrates all parts, and name the topic
- ◆ Check your choice of topic by asking yourself if it is the “umbrella concept” covering all the major details and events in the selection
- ◆ Don’t be fooled by a minor detail that may stray from the topic
- ◆ Make sure your topic represents what all the major details share in common

Next Steps (Check your topic choice with the following questions):

- ◆ Is my topic too big?
- ◆ Is my topic off the mark?
- ◆ Does my topic cover only one or two details instead of all of the major details?
- ◆ Does my topic give me an accurate mind picture to show the author’s message? (Test it out! Close your eyes and say your topic. Does it give you an accurate picture of the text?)
- ◆ Can I use my topic to give people an accurate overview of the author’s message?

How to Identify Key Details

- ◆ Important details often surprise
- ◆ Repetition often signals a key detail
- ◆ Key details often appear in the title, subtitle, and headings or subheadings
- ◆ Check italicized or bolded print for key details
- ◆ Note questions that the author puts in the text—they’re often followed by key details

**“During Reading” Strategy for Determining Importance in Nonfiction:
Identifying Main Idea and Details**

Adapted from Fountas and Pinnell’s *Guiding Readers and Writers, Grades 3-6* (Heinemann, 2001) Append.

Important Idea (in words and drawing)
Page _____

Key Detail

Key Detail

Important Idea (in words and drawing)
Page _____

Key Detail

Key Detail

Important Idea (in words and drawing)
Page _____

Key Detail

Key Detail

Write about the important ideas you learned from this reading. *What do the ideas mean to your life, the lives of other, or the world. How will you remember what you’ve learned?*
