

Determining Central Idea and Details

CCLS

RI.6.2: Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details....

Theme: *Extraordinary Plants*

Think about your favorite story. If you had to tell a friend what it’s mostly about, what would you say? A text’s **central idea** is the most important point the writer is trying to make. Sometimes the central idea is directly stated, but more often it’s not. **Supporting details** are facts, examples, reasons, or descriptions that expand on the central idea.

Look at the picture. What is the central idea? What supporting details do you see?



Complete the chart. First, find and record a third supporting detail. Then figure out what important point the illustrator is trying to make.

Central Idea		
Supporting Detail	Supporting Detail	Supporting Detail
A cactus can survive for months without water.	The sign states the cactus should not be touched.	

Readers determine a text’s central idea and supporting details so they can better understand the text’s meaning. A central idea often needs to be figured out by analyzing the supporting details. Think of yourself as a detective describing a complex situation and finding clues to support your observations.



Read the first paragraph of a scientific account about the Venus flytrap.

Genre: Scientific Account

The Unusual Venus Flytrap *by Amy Baker*

The Venus flytrap is a unique plant with many admirers. This carnivorous plant grows in the bogs of North America. With red-lined lobes that resemble a mouth, the Venus flytrap looks more like a creature than a plant. It uses these lobes to capture and eat insects. It can even digest small frogs! The lobes have small trigger hairs that cause the plant to clamp down in an instant when unsuspecting prey comes too close. Finger-like extensions called *cilia* intertwine to keep the lobes shut tight. It is this trapping action that people find so fascinating.



(continued)

Explore how to answer these questions: “What is the central idea of the paragraph? What details support this idea?”

The central idea is the most important point the author makes. The central idea is not always directly stated. You often need to figure it out based on the details and state it in your own words.

Reread the title and the first and last sentences of the paragraph to look for clues about the central idea. Write the central idea in the middle of the web. Then skim the paragraph to find details that support this idea. Two supporting details are shown below.

Central Idea		
Supporting Detail	Supporting Detail	Supporting Detail
The Venus flytrap looks like a creature with a mouth.	The Venus flytrap can eat frogs.	



Close Reading

Find and **underline** the sentence in this paragraph that most closely restates the central idea you found on page 4.

Continue reading about the Venus flytrap. Use the Close Reading and the Hint to help you answer the question.

(continued from page 4)

One of the most mysterious things about the Venus flytrap is that scientists still don't understand how the trap closes. The flytrap does not have the muscles, tendons, or nervous system necessary for movement. Scientists guess that the trap might close using some electrical impulses and pressure changes. The longer they study the Venus flytrap, the more likely scientists are to discover how it functions. It should be no mystery, however, why this unusual plant has captured the imaginations of so many people.

Hint

Which choice best represents what the author wants readers to take away from this text?

Circle the correct answer.

Which sentence from the paragraph best shows the text's central idea?

- A** "One of the most mysterious things about the Venus flytrap is that scientists still don't understand how the trap closes."
- B** "The flytrap does not have the muscles, tendons, or nervous system necessary for movement."
- C** "Scientists guess that the trap might close using some electrical impulses and pressure changes."
- D** "It should be no mystery, however, why this unusual plant has captured the imaginations of so many people."



Show Your Thinking

Explain how the answer you chose conveys the text's central idea.



Pick one of the answers you did not choose. Tell your partner why that sentence is not the best illustration of the text's central idea.



Read the scientific account. Use the Study Buddy and Close Reading to guide your reading.

Genre: Scientific Account



The author opens the account by asking why so many people would want to see the corpse flower. I will underline a detail that supports the idea that many people want to see the flower.

Close Reading

Why do people rush to see the corpse flower? **Underline** details that show why people find it so interesting.

Reread the first and last sentences. What similar idea does the author use to open and close the account?

The Corpse Flower *by Stacia Alonzo*

- 1 Why would thousands of men, women, and children wait in line to see a flower that smells like rotting flesh? In May 2003, more than 16,000 visitors did just this when *Titan arum* bloomed in Bonn, Germany. *Titan arum*'s nickname of "corpse flower" emphasizes its unusual smell—like a decomposing body—when in bloom.
- 2 Scent isn't these flowers' only unique trait. They also grow at an impressive rate. The Bonn corpse flower reached a height of nine feet in full bloom. They bloom for only one to two days at a time, and their leaves open to reveal the dark red color of raw flesh. When a corpse flower blooms, people flock to witness the unforgettable sight of a man-size flower ripe with the color and scent of death.
- 3 This rare flower was first discovered in Sumatran rainforests in 1878. Although corpse flowers still grow there, they are endangered. To learn about the flowers, biologists raise them in botanical gardens. Some flowers never bloom, and others only bloom once. When a flower opens, biologists have only one or two days to observe the process.
- 4 Biologists have learned that these plants can grow up to six inches a day and reach nine feet tall. The rotting flesh scent lures in insects for pollination. Biologists analyzed the scent to determine how close it is to that of real rotting meat. Here's one fact they learned: the human nose can't detect a difference in the scents. Given *Titan arum*'s strange traits, who wouldn't jump at the chance to see the world's worst-smelling flower?



Hints

Which choice provides proof that many people want to see the corpse flower?

Which details help explain why someone would want to go all the way to Germany to see the corpse flower?

What does the author most want you to know about the corpse flower? Think about how the account's first and last sentences connect to this idea.

Use the Hints on this page to help you answer the questions.

- 1 Which of the following details best supports the idea that people are very interested in the corpse flower?
 - A The corpse flower has the smell of rotting flesh.
 - B 16,000 people came to see the corpse flower in Bonn, Germany.
 - C The flower was nicknamed "corpse flower" because of its smell.
 - D The inside of the flower looks dark red when it blooms.

- 2 Which of the following details from the text is not strong support for why people would be so interested in the corpse flower?
 - A It smells like rotting flesh.
 - B It often grows as tall as a man.
 - C It blooms for only a short time.
 - D It lures in insects for pollination.

- 3 State the central idea of the account. Remember that some central ideas are implied rather than directly stated. Include at least one direct quote from the text to support your explanation.



Read the scientific article. Then answer the questions that follow.

from “Against All Odds: Earth’s Fragile Pioneers”

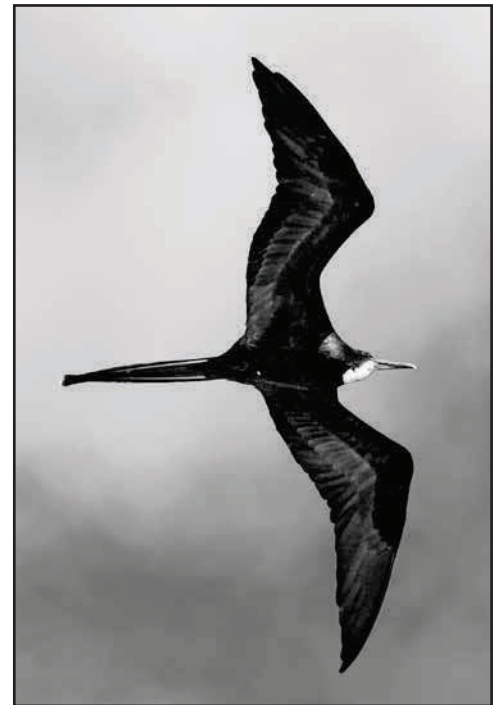
by Stephen James O’Meara, *Odyssey Magazine*

1 One species every 70,000 years! That’s the rate at which plants and animals once colonized the Hawaiian Islands. Countless millions of them had the chance, but only the most rugged pioneers—a salt-resistant seed, an insect clinging to a raft of wood, a strong-winged bird—survived the long voyage across the Pacific from their native continents. Of the hundreds of species that did make it to Hawaii, only a few survived the seclusion and harshness of the burning volcanic islands. It took time, but these barren new “worlds,” risen from the sea and born of fire, finally surrendered to the slow but persistent assault of life.

2 Of course, the story of the invasion of life is similar all across the globe. But what makes the Hawaii story special is the incredible distance life had to travel to get there. Remote and alone in the heart of the North Pacific, Hawaii is the most isolated island group on Earth. . . . Yet, life did get to Hawaii, and it did so in three ways: by wind, wings, and water.

3 *Wind.* Many of Hawaii’s plants, spiders, and insects have origins in Asia, thanks to a torrent of thin air called the jet stream, which roars across the upper atmosphere with hurricane force. Each January, the eastward-flowing jet stream makes a southerly meander over Asia. As the wind in the jet stream moves away from Asia, it slows to a minimum of about 110 kph just over Hawaii. Are you getting the picture? Quite a transport mechanism here! Now, picture this: A gale-force wind in Asia strips a plant of its seeds and lifts a few spiders and insects off the ground, making them airborne . . . where they are then transported eastward at hurricane force until the winds slow and the seeds, spiders, and insects sprinkle down on the islands. The entire journey can take just four hours!

4 *Wings.* Insects, seeds, and spiders (as well as other life forms) can take alternate means of transport to Hawaii—such as hitching a ride on a migrating or storm-driven bird. With a wingspan of over two meters, the great frigate bird is a soaring wonder. Its powerful wings can carry it effortlessly across the tropical Pacific. Now imagine one of these gets caught in a hurricane. It soars with the wind until it sights land—in this case, Hawaii. After a long journey, it rests. A seed from a favorite berry it has eaten drops into a crevice and, in time, takes root. Years later, another great flier arrives. Preening itself, the bird frees a seed or a sticky land snail from its feathers. One by one, over the millennia, these birds have transported troops of accidental “tourists” to Hawaii.



the great frigate bird in flight



5 *Water.* Partnered with the wind, surface currents waltz around the world’s oceans, carrying with them all sorts of debris. Few seafaring seeds have what it takes to survive the long, meandering journey to Hawaii. . . . One plant whose seeds meet these requirements is the Hala—one of the world’s oldest known flowering plants, dating back 250 million years. How do its seeds survive the salty ocean? They are smuggled in a blanket of spongy material, which can float in the sea for months or even years. A species of Hawaiian crickets rafted in on pieces of floating wood. They had to struggle to survive on harsh Hawaii, feeding on organic debris tossed to shore by wind and wave. They soon adapted, however, giving rise to an endemic species—one found nowhere else on Earth.

Answer the questions. Mark your answers to questions 1–4 on the Answer Form to the right.

Answer Form

- 1 (A) (B) (C) (D)
- 2 (A) (B) (C) (D)
- 3 (A) (B) (C) (D)
- 4 (A) (B) (C) (D)

Number Correct

4

1 Which of the following is the **best** statement of the central idea of “Against All Odds: Earth’s Fragile Pioneers”?

- A The story of the invasion of life is nearly the same everywhere in the world.
- B Hawaii’s story is unique because of the great distance life traveled to get there.
- C The jet stream causes the wind to move away from Asia and blow right over Hawaii.
- D Certain species, such as Hawaiian crickets, struggle and adapt to survive.

2 Which sentence **best** expresses the central idea of the entire article?

- A “One species every 70,000 years! That’s the rate at which plants and animals once colonized the Hawaiian Islands.”
- B “It took time, but these barren new ‘worlds,’ risen from the sea and born of fire, finally surrendered to the slow but persistent assault of life.”
- C “Remote and alone in the heart of the North Pacific, Hawaii is the most isolated island group on Earth.”
- D “They had to struggle to survive on harsh Hawaii, feeding on organic debris tossed to shore by wind and wave.”



- 3** The central idea of paragraph 3 is that wind helped bring plant and animal life to Hawaii. Which sentence from the paragraph **best** conveys that central idea?
- A** “Many of Hawaii’s plants, spiders, and insects have origins in Asia, thanks to a torrent of thin air called the jet stream, which roars across the upper atmosphere with hurricane force.”
 - B** “Each January, the eastward-flowing jet stream makes a southerly meander over Asia.”
 - C** “As the wind in the jet stream moves away from Asia, it slows to a minimum of about 110 kph just over Hawaii.”
 - D** “The entire journey can take just four hours!”

- 4** Which detail **best** conveys the central idea of paragraph 4?
- A** Insects and seeds travel on birds that migrate or flee from storms.
 - B** The great frigate bird has an impressive, two-meter wingspan.
 - C** Berry seeds often drop into cracks and crevices and start to root.
 - D** Birds can loosen seeds and snails when they preen their feathers.

- 5** Paragraph 5 states that Hala seeds “can float in the sea for months or even years.” Explain how this detail supports the central idea of the article. Cite at least **one** detail from the text to support your response.

 **Self Check** Go back and see what you can check off on the Self Check on page 1.