



Topic & Main Idea

For the Homeschool Educator

The **topic** is the main thing that a piece of writing, a lesson, a book, a conversation, or a movie is about. The **main idea** is the important idea the writer wants the reader to know or understand about the **topic**. Details about who, what, where, when, why, how much, and how many tell more about the **main idea**. Reading comprehension increases when children are able to distinguish between the **topic** and the **main idea**.

Example **Topic**: Dinosaurs

Example **Main Idea**: Dinosaur Teeth Decay

Signs of Readiness

This lesson was designed for children ages 6–8 who have demonstrated basic reading skills such as decoding words (single- and multi-syllabic) and early listening comprehension (understanding the who, what, when, where, and why). Your child should be ready to learn to make basic connections between different parts of a text and to summarize a text.

Common Misconceptions

Children often confuse the **topic** and **main idea**. Be sure to clarify that the **main ideas** are about a **topic**.

Key Vocabulary

Use these definitions to explain key terms that are used in the activities below.

Word or Phrase	Definition
topic	“the main thing that a piece of writing, a lesson, a book, a conversation, or a movie is about”
main idea	“an important idea the writer wants the reader to know or understand about the topic”

Lesson Options:

Use the lesson elements below to create a single-day or multiday lesson.

Digital Playlist: Generally, your child will complete the Digital Playlist first, then follow up with some or all of the activities described below. As you select and do these activities with your child, you may wish to reassign some or all of the digital activities for additional practice.

Explore Activity: This follow-up is designed to be used closely with the Digital Playlist to help your child understand the topic.

Dig Deeper Activity: This offline activity provides an additional learning experience with the same topic.

Extend Activity: This offline activity extends your child’s understanding and application of the same topic.



Explore Activity

Steps

1. Rewatch *Tyler: Topic & Main Idea* with your child. Guide them to pay particular attention to the difference between **topic** and **main idea**, and how to identify each in a story.
 - a. A **topic** is the main thing that a piece of writing, a lesson, a book, a conversation, or a movie is about. It can usually be described with one or a few words.
 - b. A **main idea** is an important idea the writer wants the reader to know or understand about the **topic**. It is a full sentence.
2. Provide your child with one sticky note in one color and several sticky notes in a second color. Explain to your student that you will be reading a story together. As you read, your child will use a sticky note of one color to mark text that tells the story's **topic**, and they will place notes of another color to identify **main ideas**.
3. Read a preselected text with your child. Read slowly so that your child will have the opportunity to think about each page and look for the sentence that tells the **topic** and the sentences that present **main ideas**. Allow your child to use only one to two **main idea** sticky notes per paragraph. This will discourage them from marking small details.
4. After you finish reading the text, review the text. On each sticky note, have your child write a word or short sentence to help them remember the **topic** or **main idea** they have identified. (Note: Do not allow them to copy full sentences verbatim. Help them to paraphrase as much as possible.)
5. Explain that marking the **topic** and **main ideas** with sticky notes is a good way to remember the most important information they learn in a nonfiction text. They can use this technique now and when they are older.

Materials

- Sticky notes (in two different colors)
- Pen or pencil
- A short, nonfiction text at your child's independent reading level

Modifications

- **Beginning learners** may benefit from using the sticky note annotation technique with additional nonfiction texts to build fluency and accuracy.
- More **advanced learners** may enjoy discussing the sticky note annotation technique with more experienced readers. If you have an older student or adult learner available ask them to show your child examples of their own annotated texts



Dig Deeper Activity

Steps

1. Print out the Male and Female Lions Resource Page. Have your child read the article with whatever support is needed to be sure they have comprehended the information.
2. Tell your child that they will color-code the article to identify the **topic** and **main idea**.
 - a. Guide your child to highlight, lightly color over, or underline the part of the article that tells the **topic**. (Sample answer: "Male and Female Lions. But there are differences between male lions and female lions.")
 - b. Guide your child to highlight, lightly color over, or underline the part of the article that tells the **main ideas**. (Sample answer: "Male and female lions do not look exactly the same. The lives of male and female lions are also different.")
 - c. Help your child to notice and confirm that the remaining sentences tell details about the **main ideas**.(Note: Be sure your child knows that the **main idea** is usually stated in the first sentence of a paragraph, but not always. Sometimes, authors choose to write it later in the paragraph or even at the end.)
3. Talk to your child about why a reader would want to be able to find the **topic** and **main idea** of an article. Guide them to realize that these are the most important parts to remember. They also provide categories for the small ideas. The **main ideas** are like folders in which your brain can save the details.

Materials

- Male and Female Lions Resource Page (included at the end of this lesson)
- Highlighters, colored pencils, or crayons

Modifications

- More **advanced learners** may be able to try this process with an additional, less controlled article. It may be more challenging to find the **main idea** sentences if they are not the first sentence of the paragraph.



Extend Activity

Steps

1. Rewatch *The Write Team! What's the Main Idea?* with your child.
Guide them to pay particular attention to how a text's title can be helpful in determining the **main idea**, and how supporting details are different from the **main idea**.
2. Have your child read the nonfiction text independently. Allow them the time to read it more than once if they choose.
3. Give your child the Graphic Organizer: Topic & Main Idea Resource Page. Explain to them that they will now fill in the story's **topic** and **main ideas** in the correct places on the graphic organizer. (Note: Add or cross out boxes, if needed.)
4. After you finish reading the text, review the text with your student. Have them describe how they determined the story's **topic** and **main ideas**.
5. Reflect upon the activity by discussing the following questions with your child.
 - a. Did you have any difficulty determining the **topic** and **main idea**?
 - b. What helped you find the **topic** and **main idea**? Was the title of the text helpful?
 - c. How did you tell the difference between the **main idea** and the details that supported this idea?

Materials

- Graphic Organizer: Topic & Main Idea Resource Page (included at the end of this lesson)
- A short, nonfiction text at your child's independent reading level

Modifications

- **Beginning Learner** may need to focus on just one paragraph (identify one **topic** and only one or two **main ideas**).
- More **advanced learners** may want to also identify supporting details for the **main ideas**. Have them list supporting details underneath each **main idea** box.



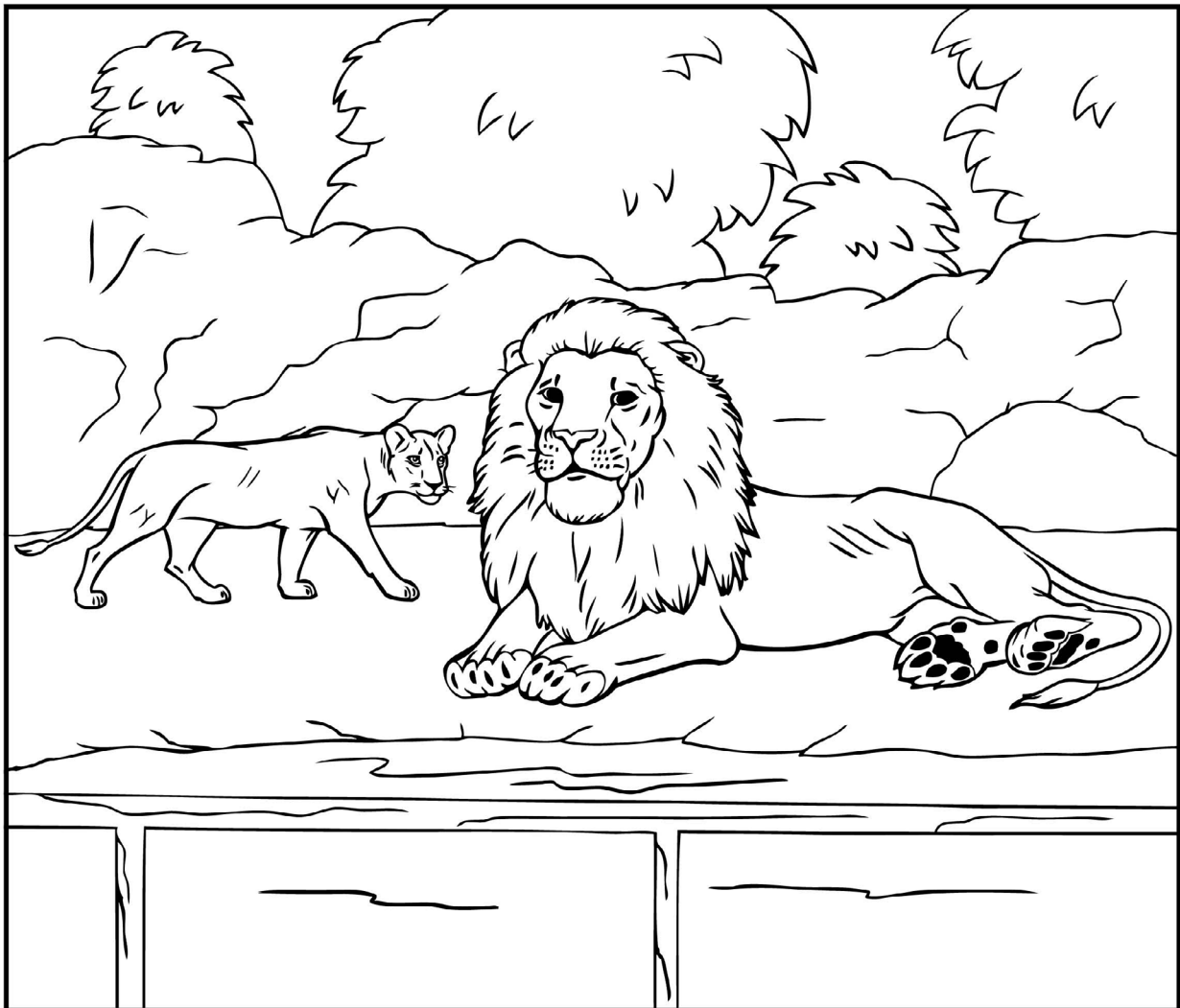
Topic & Main Idea

Male and Female Lions

All lions have many, many things in common with each other—they are all lions, after all. But there are differences between male lions and female lions.

Adult male and female lions do not look exactly the same. Adult female lions are smaller than adult male lions. Also, adult male lions have manes. A *mane* is the long hair that grows around the head and neck of the lion. They aren't born with the mane, it grows in over time.

The lives of male and female lions are also different. Female lions usually live in one large family group for their whole lives. The large family group of lions is called a *pride*. They hunt to get food for the pride and they care for cubs. When male lions grow up, they leave their pride and look for their own pride to lead. Their job is to protect the pride and the land on which it lives.





Topic & Main Idea

Graphic Organizer: Topic and Main Ideas

Topic: _____	Main Idea: _____ _____ _____
	Main Idea: _____ _____ _____
	Main Idea: _____ _____ _____