

Substitute Guide: Main Idea, Details, and Author's Purpose

Grade: 4 **Subject:** Reading / Language Arts **Time:** ~45 min core + ~15 min extension RLA

5-minute guide (plain language)

Goal: Students read a short true article, "Octopuses: Smart Ocean Helpers," then find the **main idea** (the most important point), list **supporting details**, decide the **author's purpose** (inform, persuade, or entertain), and write a short **summary**. **You do not need a reading background to run this.** Everything — including the whole article — is printed in the student packet, and every question can be answered right from the article. **This packet is read-aloud friendly:** you may read the article or any question out loud to one student or the whole class at any time.

Standards alignment

Framework: 19 TAC §110.6 (Grade 4 English Language Arts and Reading).

- **Main idea:** identify the main idea of a text and explain how details support it.
- **Summary:** summarize a text so the main points keep their meaning and order.
- **Author's purpose:** explain the author's purpose and message in an informational text.

Provisional — pending educator verification against the current official TAC source.

(Standards are paraphrased here, not quoted. Please confirm codes and wording against your official source. This packet is **not** described as "aligned to the TEKS.")

Setup Before class (5 min)

- Hand out one **student packet** per student.
- Make sure each student has a **pencil**. No devices or other materials are needed.
- Write the date on the board and remind students to fill in the name line.
- Keep the **answer key** with you — it is a separate file and is **not** in the student packet.

Materials What's needed

- Printed student packet per student.
- Pencil per student.
- This guide and the separate answer key (teacher only).
- No technology, no special materials.

Timing Suggested pacing (~45–60 min)

Segment	Time	What students do
Start — Look & Predict	5 min	Q1–Q2 warm-up

Segment	Time	What students do
Build — Read the article	10 min	Read "Octopuses: Smart Ocean Helpers," word bank; Q3
Apply — Read closely	15 min	Q4–Q7 (main idea, details, author's purpose, best support)
Explain — Main idea & summary	10 min	Q8 main-idea sentence + 3–4 sentence summary
Close — ACE	5 min	Answer / Cite / Extend
Continue — early finishers	optional ~15 min	Write a new title that fits the main idea

Script Read aloud to start

"Today's activity is a reading and writing task called *Main Idea, Details, and Author's Purpose*. You will work by yourself with just a pencil — no computers. First read the short true article called *Octopuses: Smart Ocean Helpers*. Every answer is in the article, so if you're unsure, go back and read it again. Answer the questions in order; if one is tricky, skip it and come back. You may read the article quietly out loud to yourself. Put your name, class, and date at the top now. You have about 45 minutes. Raise your hand if you want a word or a question read to you — I am happy to read any part aloud."

Reading the article aloud to the whole class first is a great option for Grade 4. It levels the reading load so every student can focus on the thinking.

Support When students ask for help

- **You may read any part aloud** — the article or any question — to a student or the class, at any time.
- If they are stuck, point them to the **paragraph numbers** [1]–[5]; every answer is in the article.
- Remind them the **main idea** is the **most important point**, written as a full sentence, not one word.
- Remind them a **detail** is one small fact that helps show the main idea.
- For author's purpose: **inform** = teach facts, **persuade** = make you agree, **entertain** = tell a fun story. This article informs.
- Point to the printed **sentence starters** and the **word bank** for Q8 and ACE.
- Do **not** give answers; prompt with "Which paragraph shows that?" or "What is the big point of the whole article?"

Access Accommodations & language support

- **Read-aloud** of the article or any question is allowed for all students.
- Point students to the **sentence starters** and the **word bank** (kid-friendly meanings provided).
- Extended time is fine; the core can stop after Q8 if time runs short.
- Students may answer in short phrases if writing full sentences is a barrier, as long as the idea is clear.
- The packet is grayscale-safe — it prints and reads clearly in black and white.

Tools Allowed & not allowed

Allowed: pencil, the printed packet, quiet self-read-aloud. **Not needed / not allowed:** phones, computers, outside sources (everything is in the article).

Collect at the end: Collect every packet, whether finished or not, with names on them. Stack them for the teacher. Note on a sticky how far most students got and any questions that caused confusion.

Answer key: The **answer key is a separate file** (answerkey.html) and is for the teacher only. Please do not hand it to students.

Teacher follow-up (for the returning teacher)

Watch for two common mix-ups: *topic* vs. *main idea* (students write "octopuses" instead of a full-sentence main idea) and *a single detail* vs. *the main idea* (students give one small fact instead of the big point). A quick next-day mini-lesson turning topic words into main-idea sentences, and sorting sentences into "big idea" vs. "small detail," would reinforce this well. The author's-purpose item (Q6) and the best-support item (Q7) quickly show who can explain why a text was written and which detail truly backs the main idea.

G04_RLA_MainIdeaSummary_01 — Main Idea, Details, and Author's Purpose Substitute Guide