

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

Main Idea, Details, and Author's Purpose

Grade: 4 **Subject:** Reading / Language Arts **Time:** ~45 min core + ~15 min extension **Work mode:** On your own · pencil only RLA

Start Here

1. Today you will **read a true article** and answer questions with a pencil.
2. You do **not** need a computer. Work by yourself and do your best.
3. Every answer is **in the article**. You can look back as many times as you want.
4. You may read the article **out loud, quietly, to yourself**.
5. If a question is hard, **skip it and come back** later.

G04_RLA_MainIdeaSummary_01 — Main Idea, Details, and Author's Purpose Student Packet

Start Look & Predict 5 min

Look only at the title before you read.

1The article is called "**Octopuses: Smart Ocean Helpers.**" From the title, write **one thing you predict** the article will teach you.

2The **main idea** is the **most important point** the whole article is about. Name one animal you already know something about, and write one fact you know.

Build Read the Article 10 min

Words to know (from the article)

ocean

the big body of salt water where octopuses live.

tentacle

one of the eight long arms of an octopus.

predator

an animal that hunts other animals for food.

camouflage

a way of hiding by changing color to match what is around you.

"Octopuses: Smart Ocean Helpers" — an original article

[1] The octopus is one of the smartest animals in the *ocean*. It has a soft body, no bones, and eight long arms called *tentacles*. Even though it looks strange, the octopus is very clever. Scientists say it can solve puzzles that stump many other animals.

[2] An octopus is a great problem solver. In one test, a scientist put a tasty crab inside a jar with a lid. The octopus felt the lid with its arms, twisted it open, and pulled the crab out. Some octopuses have even learned to open jars from the outside *and* the inside. That takes a lot of brainpower for an animal with no bones.

[3] The octopus is also very good at hiding. Its skin can change color in less than a second. It uses this *camouflage* to match rocks, sand, or coral. Hiding helps the octopus stay safe from a hungry *predator*, like a shark or an eel. It can also squeeze its soft body into a space as small as a coin to escape danger.

[4] Octopuses even use tools, which not many animals do. Some carry empty coconut shells across the ocean floor. When danger comes, they climb inside the shells and hide, like moving into a little house. Using an object to stay safe is a sign of a smart mind.

[5] From solving puzzles to changing color to carrying shells, the octopus shows how clever ocean animals can be. The next time you think of a smart animal, do not forget the eight-armed octopus. It may be one of the cleverest creatures under the sea.

3In paragraph [1], what does the article say the octopus is one of? Use a detail from the article.

Apply Read Closely 15 min

Every answer is in the article. Look back before you write.

4**Main idea.** What is the **most important point** of the whole article? Write it as one sentence.

5**Supporting details.** Write **two details** from the article that show the octopus is smart. Add the paragraph number for each.

Detail 1 (paragraph #)

Detail 2 (paragraph #)

6**Author's purpose.** Did the author write this article to **inform** (teach facts), **persuade** (make you agree), or **entertain** (tell a fun story)? Circle one and give a **reason** from the article.

Circle one: inform · persuade · entertain

My reason:

7**Which detail best supports the main idea?** Fill in the circle for ONE choice.

- The octopus has a soft body and no bones.
- The octopus twisted open a jar lid to get the crab inside.
- The octopus lives in the ocean.
- A shark or an eel can be a predator.

7b. In one sentence, tell why that detail best shows the main idea.

Explain Write Your Main Idea & Summary 10 min

Question 8. Write the **main idea** in **one sentence**. Then write a **3 to 4 sentence summary** of the article using details. A summary tells the **most important** parts — you do **not** need every little thing.

You may start your sentences with: "The main idea is..." · "One way..." · "Another way..." · "Also,..." · "These details show..."

Main idea (one sentence)

Details (summary: 3–4 sentences)

Summary connection

How do your details show the main idea?

Close ACE Wrap-Up 5 min

Answer

Say the **main idea** of the article in your **own words**, in one sentence.

Cite

Name **one paragraph** that helps show the main idea.

Extend

What is **one new thing** you learned about octopuses? Write one sentence.

Continue Early Finisher optional • ~15 min

If you finish early (no new materials needed):

Write a new title for the article on the back of this page. Your new title should **fit the main idea**. Then write **one sentence** telling why your title fits.

Turn in: Hand in this whole packet with your name, class, and date filled in. Make sure questions 1–8 and the ACE box are done. The new title is optional — turn it in too if you did it.

G04_RLA_MainIdeaSummary_01 — Main Idea, Details, and Author's Purpose Student Packet



TEACHER ANSWER KEY FOLLOWS

Do not copy the pages after this divider for students.

Answer Key: Main Idea, Details, and Author's Purpose

Grade: 4 **Subject:** Reading / Language Arts **For teacher use only** RLA

How to use this key

Answers are grouped by section and question number. Many items are open-ended; accept any response that shows correct thinking and uses the article, even if the wording differs. Notes flag where more than one answer works and list common misconceptions. Paragraph numbers below refer to the bracketed markers [1]–[5] in the article. Estimated grading time: ~4–6 min per packet.

Start Look & Predict grade for effort · ~1 min

1 Predict from the title "Octopuses: Smart Ocean Helpers."

Full credit for any reasonable prediction. Examples: "it will teach me facts about octopuses," "it will tell how octopuses are smart," "it is about ocean animals." Any on-topic prediction is fine.

2 Name an animal you know and one fact.

Accept any real animal plus one true fact the student knows (e.g., "Dogs — they can smell very well"). This is a warm-up; grade for effort.

Build Read the Article ~1 min

3 What is the octopus one of? (paragraph [1])

From **paragraph [1]**: "one of the smartest animals in the ocean." **Ideal:** the octopus is one of the smartest animals in the ocean. Accept any answer naming that it is one of the smartest ocean animals, with a detail from paragraph [1].

Apply Read Closely ~2 min

4 Main idea (one sentence).

Accept any clear main-idea sentence such as: "The octopus is one of the smartest animals in the ocean," "Octopuses are very clever ocean animals," or "The octopus shows many ways it is smart." Reject a single topic word ("octopuses") as the full answer — note it and connect it to Q8.

5 Two supporting details with paragraph numbers.

Any TWO of these (each with its paragraph number) earn full credit:

[2] It twisted open a jar lid to reach a crab / can open jars.

[3] Its skin changes color in less than a second to hide (camouflage); it squeezes into a space as small as a coin.

[4] It carries and hides inside empty coconut shells (uses tools).

Full credit for two correct details that show the octopus is smart, each with a correct paragraph number.

6 Author's purpose + reason.

Purpose: inform. The author writes to teach facts about how octopuses are smart (jars, camouflage, tools).

Accept a reason such as "it gives real facts," "it teaches about octopuses," or "it explains how they solve puzzles."

Note: *persuade* and *entertain* are the wrong choices here — the article states facts, does not argue an opinion, and does not tell a made-up story. If a student circles one of those, use the misconception note below.

7 Best detail that supports the main idea.

7a — B. "The octopus twisted open a jar lid to get the crab inside." This shows the octopus solving a problem, which proves it is smart (the main idea).

Why the others are weaker: **A** describes its body, not its smarts; **C** tells where it lives; **D** names its predators. Only **B** shows the cleverness the main idea is about.

7b: Accept any sentence explaining that choice B shows the octopus solving a problem / being clever, which is the main idea.

Explain Main Idea & Summary (Q8) ~2 min

8 One-sentence main idea + a 3–4 sentence summary using details.

Acceptable main-idea statements (any one, or similar, as a full sentence):

- "The octopus is one of the smartest animals in the ocean."
- "Octopuses are clever animals that solve problems, hide, and use tools."
- "There are many ways the octopus shows it is smart."

Model summary (3–4 sentences): "The octopus is one of the smartest animals in the ocean. It can solve puzzles, like twisting open a jar to get a crab. It changes color to hide from predators and can squeeze into tiny spaces. Some octopuses even carry coconut shells to use as a hiding spot, which shows how clever they are."

Detail locations to support the summary: smartest ocean animal [1]; opens a jar to reach a crab [2]; changes color / squeezes into small spaces to hide [3]; carries coconut shells as tools [4]; wrap-up that octopuses are very clever [5].

How they connect: the summary should show that solving jars, camouflage, and using shells are all proof the octopus is smart — which is exactly the main idea. Full credit for a defensible main-idea sentence + a focused 3–4 sentence summary that keeps the main points + a link between them.

Main idea & summary scoring rubric (3 points)

Score	Main idea (one sentence)	Summary (details)	Summary connection
3	Clear main idea stated as a full sentence (not a topic word).	3–4 sentences that keep the most important points; focused, not a full copy.	Clearly explains how the details show the main idea.
2	Main idea present but partly a topic or a little too narrow.	Summary mostly right but misses a key point or adds too many small details.	Some correct linkage, but not complete.
1	Only a topic word, or one small detail instead of the big point.	Summary copies the article, or leaves out most of the points.	Little or no connection made.
0	No main idea / incorrect.	No summary.	No connection.

Close ACE ~1 min

Answer: accept any accurate one-sentence main idea in the student's own words (see Q8 list).

Cite: the named paragraph must help show the main idea (e.g., paragraph [2] the jar, [3] camouflage, or [4] the coconut shells → the octopus is smart).

Extend: any true fact from the article the student found new (opening jars, changing color, squeezing into small spaces, using coconut shells). More than one answer is fine.

Watch Common misconceptions

- **Topic vs. main idea.** A topic is one or two words ("octopuses," "ocean animals"). A main idea is a full sentence that says the most important point about that topic ("The octopus is one of the smartest animals in the ocean"). Push students from "octopuses" to a full main-idea sentence.
- **A single detail vs. the main idea.** A detail is one small fact (the octopus has no bones, or lives in the ocean). The main idea is the big point that all the details support. If a student writes only one small fact for Q4 or Q8, it is a detail, not the main idea.
- **Author's purpose mix-up (Q6).** The article *informs* — it gives real facts. It does not *persuade* (it never argues an opinion or tells you what to do) and it does not *entertain* with a made-up story. Watch for students who pick "entertain" just because octopuses are fun.
- **Best-support choice (Q7).** A detail must actually prove the main idea. Choices A, C, and D are true facts but do not show cleverness — only B does.

Teacher follow-up based on likely errors

If many students write a topic word instead of a main-idea sentence on Q4 or Q8, run a 5-minute mini-lesson turning "octopuses" into "The octopus is one of the smartest ocean animals." If students confuse a small detail with the main idea, sort a few sentences together into "big idea" vs. "small detail." The author's-purpose item (Q6) and the best-support item (Q7) quickly show who can tell why a text was written and which detail truly backs the main idea.