

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.