

Main Idea/Supporting Details



Reading to find the main idea is one of the most important reading skills to ensure comprehension. The **main idea**, a general or broad topic, is the most important idea in a selection. The main idea can be stated in one sentence that condenses specific ideas or details. Sometimes the main idea is referred to as the thesis or gist of the selection.

The main idea is generally stated in the topic sentence, which is often the first sentence in a paragraph. The main idea is easier to identify when it is the first or the last sentence in the paragraph. It is more difficult to find when it is located in the middle of a reading. And, it is perhaps most difficult to identify when it is inferred and not actually stated. Regardless of where the main idea is stated, you can identify it by answering the question, “What is the most important idea in the selection?”

The main idea is followed by **supporting details**, which explain, describe, prove, or clarify. Supporting details may tell the who, what, where, when, and why of the main idea. Supporting details may also provide examples, illustrations, facts, and statistics. Sometimes, if the main idea is not clearly stated, identifying the supporting details first makes finding the main idea easier.

Often the main idea and supporting details are found in the textbook almost in outline form. The main idea may be found in the heading for a section of reading and the supporting details may be found in the paragraphs that follow.

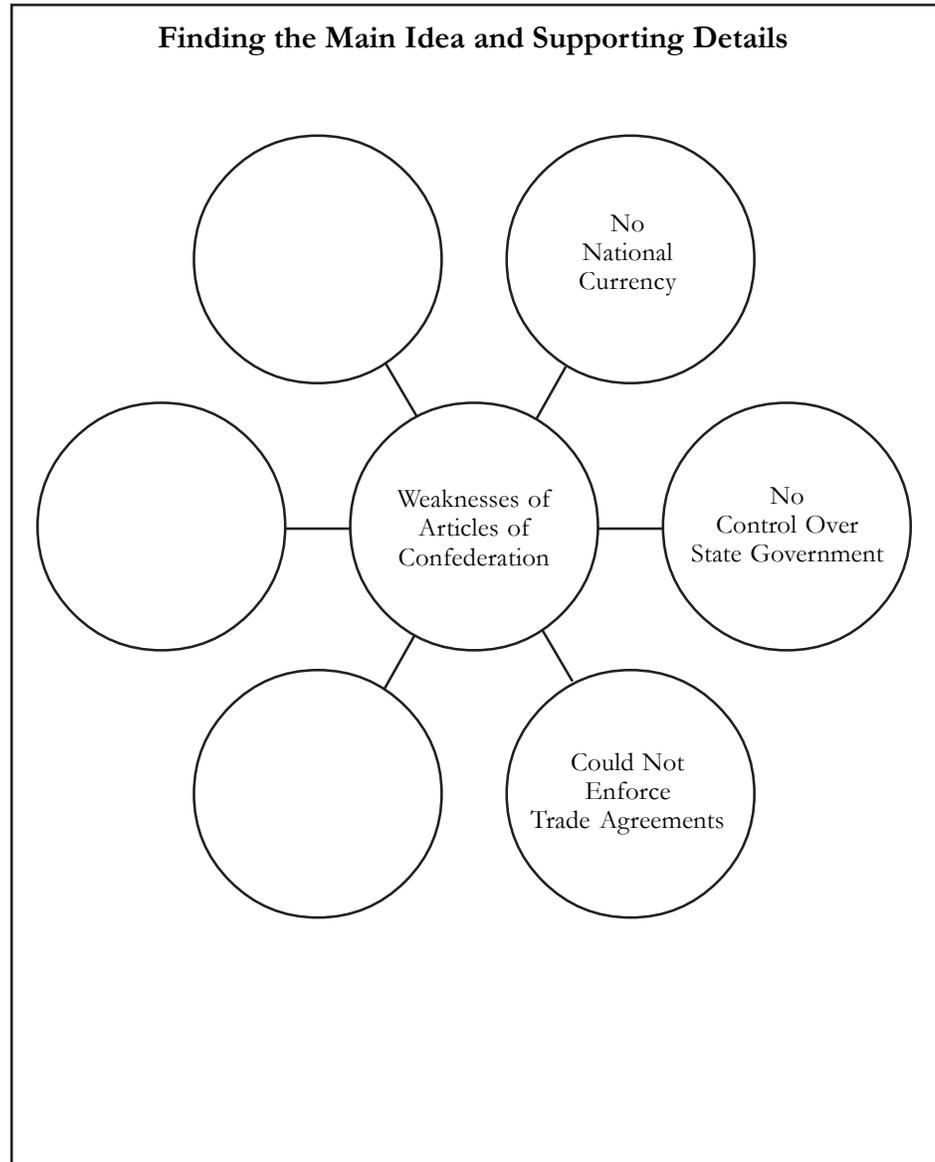
Main Idea/Supporting Details

To Teach the Main Idea/Supporting Details strategy, use Selection 7 and Graphic Organizer 7. You may want to make a transparency of Graphic Organizer 8 or write the information on flip chart paper. Teach the strategy by following the steps in the left column.

1. Give students a copy of Selection 7 and Graphic Organizer 7.
2. Ask them to read the article on the Articles of Confederation and identify the main idea. Have them write the main idea in the center circle of the graphic organizer.
3. Then ask them to re-read the article to find at least three supporting details. Write those ideas in three of the circles that surround the main idea.

VARIATION: Use Graphic Organizer 8 instead of Graphic Organizer 7 to record the information.

You may also have the students list expanding details that further define supporting details.



To apply the main ideas/supporting details strategy, introduce a topic in the textbook. Have students use Graphic Organizer 7 and repeat the process they used in the practice session.

To extend the strategy, have students write paragraphs that include a main idea and supporting details. Then, have students trade papers and identify these features from the papers of their peers.

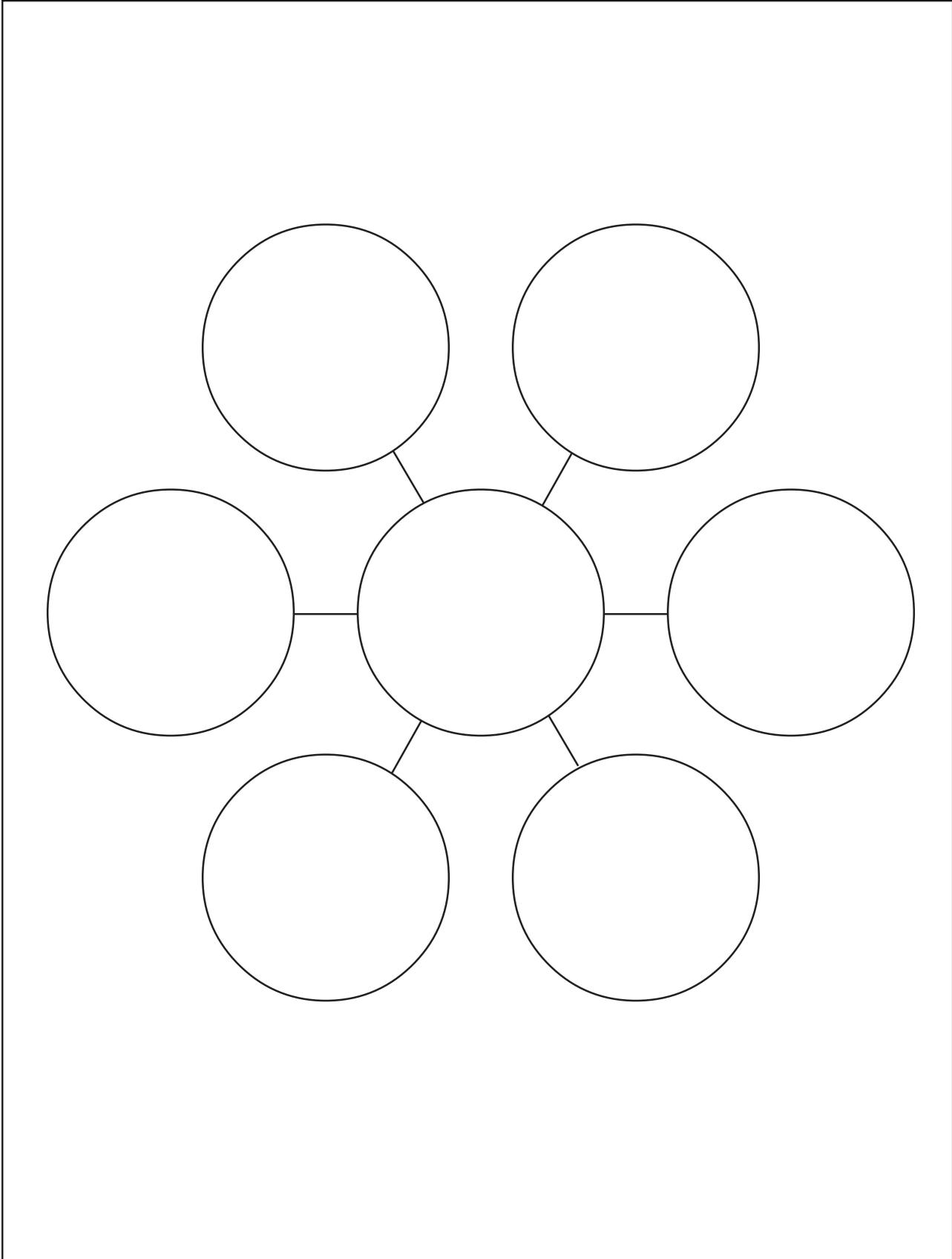
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Selection 7 - The Articles of Confederation

The United States began its life with a weak national government, known as the Articles of Confederation. This new government caused many problems for the young nation. One weakness was that the Articles government did not provide for a national currency. As a result, the United States government had no money and no way to get any money to pay its debts from the Revolutionary War. The states had agreed to give the national government \$10 million, but they only paid \$1.5 million. Since Congress had borrowed most of the money to pay for the war, it lost credibility with its creditors when it could not repay that debt. Another weakness was that Congress had no control over state governments or their citizens. Therefore, if a state or any one of its citizens disobeyed a law of the national government, there was no way for the national government to make them obey.

A third weakness concerned trade agreements. Congress had the power to make trade agreements with foreign nations, but it did not have the power to force state governments to live up to those agreements. Some colonies imported goods from other nations and then refused to pay for them. This practice also led to the loss of credibility of the national government. At home, Congress had no power to make laws controlling trade among the states. As a result, people in one state sometimes tried to take advantage of those in other states. In some instances one state would not permit goods from another state to be sold within its borders. Additionally, one state might not accept the currency of another in payment for goods. For example, Virginia had its own money and Massachusetts had a different currency. Virginia might not accept money from Massachusetts. Because of all the trade restrictions, many businesses failed, causing bankruptcies and impoverished conditions.

Graphic Organizer 7



Graphic Organizer 8

