Main idea
Stage 3

Learning focus
Students will learn to find the main idea in persuasive, imaginative and informative paragraphs, text sections and whole text. Students will focus on identifying vocabulary and key details to determine an overall main idea.

Syllabus outcome
The following teaching and learning strategy will assist in covering elements of the following outcomes:
- EN3-3A: uses an integrated range of skills, strategies and knowledge to read, view and comprehend a wide range of texts in different media and technologies.

Year 5 NAPLAN item descriptors
- identifies the main idea of a text
- identifies the main idea of each paragraph in an information text
- identifies the main idea of a section of an information text
- identifies the main idea of an information text
- identifies the main idea of a persuasive discussion
- identifies the main idea of a paragraph in a persuasive text
- identifies the main idea of a narrative

Literacy Learning Progression guide
Understanding Texts (UnT-UnT9)

Key: C=comprehension P=process V=vocabulary

UnT8
- reads and views some moderately complex texts (C)
- accurately retells a text including most relevant details (C)

UnT9
- identifies the main themes or concepts in moderately complex texts (C)
- summarises the text identifying key details (C)
Resources

- A picture paints a thousand words: teacher guide - Appendix 1
- A picture paints a thousand words: student copy - Appendix 1
- ‘Headlines’ - Appendix 2
- ‘The Honey Bee Mystery’ - Appendix 3
- The Honey Bee Mystery’ paragraph - Appendix 3
- Concept map - Appendix 4
- Newsflash! - Appendix 5

Background Information

Main idea

Being able to determine the main idea helps readers to recall important information. Locating the main idea and significant details helps the reader understand the points the writer is attempting to express. Identifying the relationship between the main idea and significant details will support comprehension.

Students need to develop a main idea statement based on the following information:

- who or what the paragraph is about (the topic of the paragraph, which will usually be the subject of the main idea statement).
- the most important information about the “who” or “what”

(NSW Centre for Effective Reading: Comprehension strategies Middle Years)

Where to next?

- Compare and contrast
- Literal comprehension
- Inference
Teaching strategies

Task 1: A picture paints a thousand words

1. Teacher presents an image (see Appendix 1) for students to predict what might be happening. Teacher prompts with questions such as:
   - Who do you think is involved in this image?
   - What might be happening?
   - What do you think happened before this?
   - What might happen after this image?
   - What message do you think this image is sending?
   - What was the creator’s intention or message?

2. Teacher provides a range of images for students to respond to (see Appendix 2). This can be done as a Gallery Walk where students build upon each other’s ideas or on a Google doc.

Task 2: Identifying main idea in a paragraph or section of text

1. Gallery Walk: Teacher shows a range of headlines as posters around the classroom using Appendix 1. Students brainstorm responses to these questions:
   - What do you think this headline is about?
   - What questions do you have about this headline?

2. Teacher displays and reads the text ‘The Honey Bee Mystery’ (Appendix 2) using the following guide:
   - predict what the text might be about. Use headings, subtitles and captions.
   - highlight or circle any repeated terms
   - record key words
   - predict a possible sentence in the text
   - read aloud and mark important points with a highlighter or a sticky note.

To further illicit information, teacher uses a Think Aloud strategy to identify key details:
   - What is this text about?
   - What key information is in this paragraph?
   - What or who is involved?
   - Where is this happening?
   - What might have been written before this?
   - What might be written after this?

3. Teacher displays the text ‘The Honey Bee Mystery’ paragraph (Appendix 3). Turn and Talk: Students retell in one sentence what this text was about. Teacher underlines and highlights key vocabulary in the text e.g. pollination, consumers, vital link. Teacher guides students to identify the general ‘gist’ or main idea of the text: If I need to think of one sentence to explain what the text is about, I would underline the end of the first sentence “…the reality is that bees are a vital link in the production of our food. This gives the overall idea about the text.”
4. Teacher models how to pull information into a concept map:

- **Main idea:**
  - **Vocabulary**
  - **Detail:**
  - **Detail:**
  - **Detail:**
  - **Detail:**

5. Students use a range of paragraphs and sections of texts to identify the vocabulary, details and main idea. This can be presented in a concept map (See Appendix 4). Students share with their peers for feedback.
Task 3: Finding main idea in a whole text

1. Students watch BTN video on bees: https://www.abc.net.au/btn/classroom/bee-issues/10525994. Students notice the vocabulary, key ideas and interesting facts; these can be recorded on sticky notes, whiteboards etc.

2. Guided Instruction: Students categorise their information into headings on butcher’s paper: main idea, supporting details and vocabulary.

3. Teacher models putting information in a Newsflash! template (Appendix 5 scaffold).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headline</th>
<th>A succinct and catchy summary sentence of the main idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual Representation</td>
<td>Supporting details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An image that represents the main idea or a key element of the text</td>
<td>Dot points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. To further build on background knowledge, students use the second BTN clip on bees ‘Bee Problems’: https://www.abc.net.au/btn/classroom/bee-problems/10527972 to create their own Newsflash! graphic organiser.
Task 4: Identifying main idea in informative texts

1. *Explicit Instruction:* Teacher displays the informative text: ‘A Honey Bee Mystery’ (Appendix 3) and models using the GIST process to identify the main idea of a text using the graphic organiser (Appendix 6) to build understanding.

   **Get the GIST**

   **G**ather information about background knowledge and key vocabulary:
   - Colour 1: Important vocabulary to understand which is pertinent to the text
   - Colour 2: Unfamiliar vocabulary
   - Colour 3: Repeated vocabulary

   **I**dentify the topic: Use vocabulary to guide ideas and refine to a word e.g. dragonflies or a phrase e.g. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand

   **S**ummarise the text by placing vocabulary into key points

   **T**op and Tail sentences- check first and last sentences as these may reinforce main idea.

2. Students apply GIST process to identify the main idea in a range of informative, persuasive and imaginative texts suited to a current unit of learning (see Appendix 3). *Gallery Walk:* Students add their information onto a class record e.g. posters/google docs.  
   *Differentiation:* Students determine the product or mode of presentation. If support is needed, use ‘A Honey Bee Mystery’ as the stimulus after explicit instruction.
Appendix 1
Teacher copy: a picture paints a thousand words

Unsplash – Current Events November 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
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Student visual stimulus: Identifying main idea

‘Unsplash.com’ Nov 2019
Student visual stimulus: Identifying main idea

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<tr>
<td>We Shall Overcome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soda Ban Goes Flat</td>
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<tr>
<td>So, there was this squirrel…</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cows lose their jobs</td>
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© NSW Department of Education, Apr-20
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We Shall Overcome

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Soda Ban Goes Flat

So, there was this squirrel...
Soda Ban Goes Flat

What do you think this headline is about?

What questions do you have about this headline?

Cows lose their jobs
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Reading: main ide Stage 3
Appendix 3
The Honey Bee Mystery – Whole text

The honey bee mystery

Having an entire bee colony disappear overnight is not unknown. There are written records of cases in North America and Europe from as long ago as the 1800s. At that time, unusual weather conditions were blamed.

But in 2006, after a huge and sudden increase in the disappearance of bee colonies in North America, the worrying phenomenon was given a name: Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD). That year, and in many of the years since, North American and European apiarists (beekeepers) have recorded losses of up to half of their bee colonies. No-one knows exactly why, or why so far, Australia has been spared.

CCD is blamed for the death of a colony only when the following characteristics occur simultaneously:
• a complete absence of adult worker bees
• few or no dead bees evident in or near the hive
• the queen bee is present
• there is plenty of food
• there are unhatched eggs.

While you may think the absence of bees is no more than a mild inconvenience for honey-lovers, the reality is that bees are a vital link in the production of our food. Bees are responsible for pollinating about a third of the fresh produce that we eat. The shortage of bees in the USA has caused significant problems for farmers, with many having to hire honey bees from all over the country and as far away as Australia to guarantee pollination of crops. Bee-hire and transportation have become huge expenses for food growers, which in turn result in higher prices for consumers.

Scientists and beekeepers are racing against time to discover both the cause of and a cure for CCD before it is too late. Theories about climate change, pesticides, parasites and bacteria have all found favour at various times and current thinking suggests that it is a combination of all these factors that has created a ‘perfect storm’ of environmental stresses for bees.

Colony collapse has put bees firmly in the scientific spotlight, and it is a problem we cannot afford to ignore.
The Honey Bee Mystery

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Appendix 4
Identify main idea – Blank concept map

Main idea: 

Key Vocabulary: 

Detail: 

Detail: 

Detail: 

Detail:
## Newsflash!

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<th>Headline (a succinct and catchy version of the main idea)</th>
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### Appendix 6

‘Get the GIST’ student scaffold

#### Get the GIST

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| Summarise text by placing vocabulary into key points | Top and Tail sentences- check first and last sentences as these may reinforce main idea. |