The most basic main idea task is to identify the category that applies to a list of words. For example, fruit is the main idea for a list that includes apple, pear, peach, and banana. The thinking process that a student uses to come up with the answer (fruit) includes holding one detail in working memory (apple) long enough to compare it to the next detail (pear), then determining what the two have in common. As the student adds each new detail (peach, banana), he compares it to the previous items to test against the main idea (fruit) for accuracy. This thinking process occurs in a millisecond. Most of us are not even aware we are following these steps. You want to explain this process to your child so he understands how to find the main idea.

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