

SKILLS Coach
America's Best for Student Success™

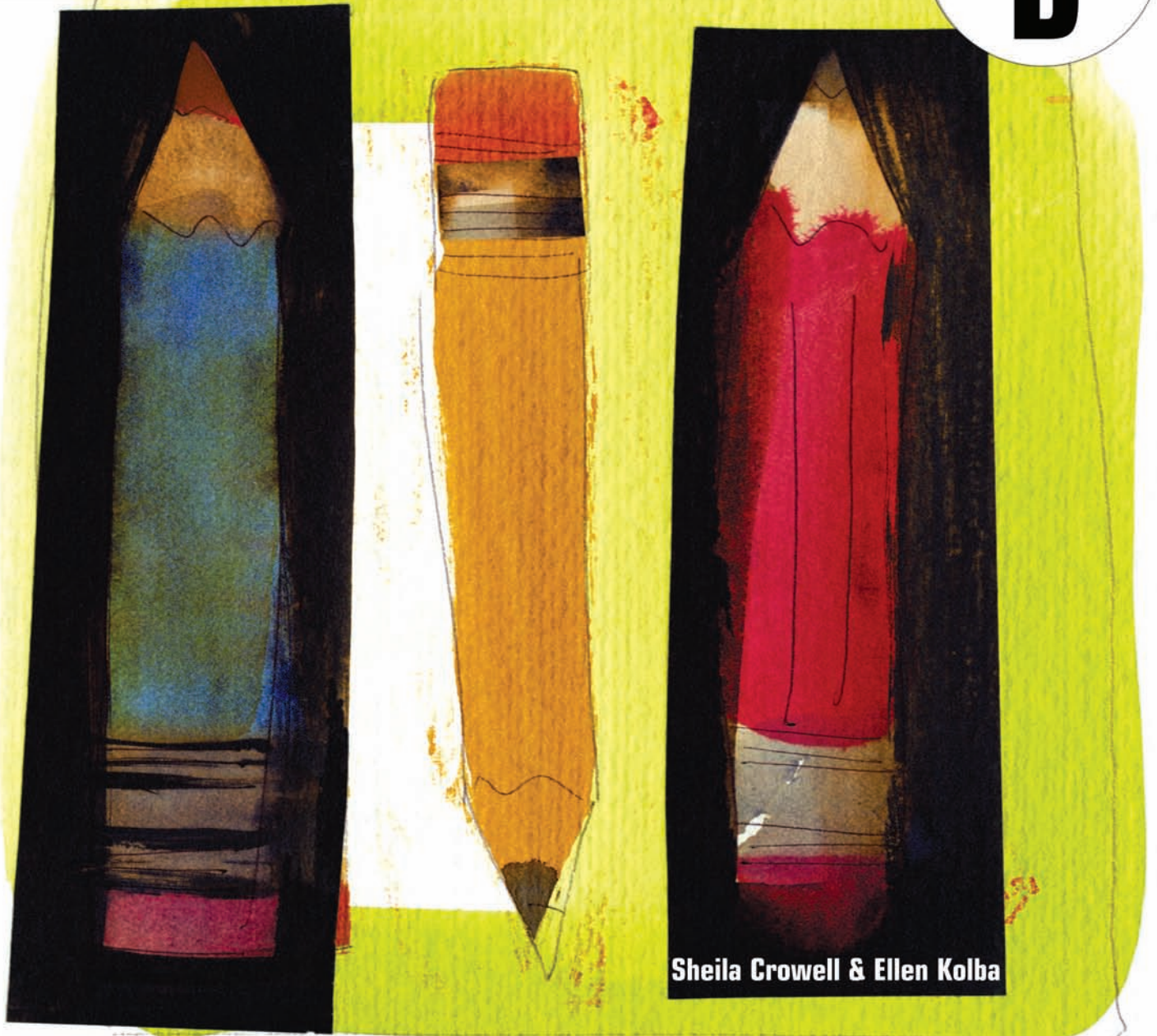


Write It Out

*Mastering Short and Extended Responses
to Open-Ended Questions*

LEVEL

D



Sheila Crowell & Ellen Kolba

Unit 1

Main Idea and Supporting Details

When you read, sentences usually appear in groups. Groups of sentences are called **paragraphs**.

Why does one paragraph end and another one begin? Each paragraph has a separate big idea. That idea is often called the **main idea**. The sentences in the paragraph are about that main idea. They **support** the main idea. That means the sentences explain or give important information about the main idea. This supporting information is called the **supporting details**.

A whole reading selection has a main idea, too. On a test, you might be asked to explain the main idea of a reading selection. Or you might be asked to identify the supporting details.

In this unit, you'll learn how to find the main idea and supporting detail.

Lesson 1

What Makes a Good Answer?

Read this short information article. The question on the next page asks you to tell about the main idea.

We All Scream for Ice Cream

The main idea is expressed in this paragraph.

Today, you might scream, I might scream, we all might scream for ice cream. Has everyone *always* screamed for this tasty treat? The answer, surprisingly, is yes!

People have been eating a form of ice cream for a very long time—nearly two thousand years. The first form of ice cream was snow or ice, topped with fruit or juice.

Hundreds of years later, people began adding cream to this cold, delicious treat. Everyone loved it, but it was not easy to make. The person making the ice cream had to beat and shake the creamy ingredients by hand for nearly an hour before the ingredients turned into ice cream. Another problem was that if it wasn't eaten right away, the ice cream would melt. Because it was so difficult to make and keep frozen, not many people got a chance to try ice cream.

Then freezers were invented! Machines in factories began making ice cream, and the freezers kept the ice cream cold. Grocery stores began selling packaged ice cream about a hundred years ago. Now everyone could experience this frozen delight, and ice cream soon zoomed to the top as people's favorite treat.

The main idea is summed up in this paragraph, too.



What is the main idea of this selection? Support your answer with details from the selection.

Marta's Answer:

Marta wrote a good answer to this question. Read what she wrote.

The main idea of this selection is that people have enjoyed ice cream for a long time. First, people ate snow or ice with fruit on it. Then they started mixing in cream. They had to make it by hand, so they couldn't make a lot. Finally, people began to make ice cream in factories and freeze it. Now everyone can eat ice cream.

What Makes Marta's Answer Work?

Marta does what the test scorers are looking for:

- ✓ She repeats part of the question to help focus her answer.
- ✓ She supports her answer with details from the selection.
- ✓ She writes her answer in complete sentences.

Let's take a closer look to see why Marta's answer would get a good score.

HINT!

The people who score the test look for the following things:

- * A clear and complete statement of the main idea.
- * Details from the selection that support your first sentence.
- * Complete, correct, and interesting sentences.

1. Marta keeps her answer in focus by including part of the question in her answer. That helps her stick to the main topic.

In which sentence does Marta answer the question? Write the sentence here.

2. In her answer, Marta gives details from the selection that support the main idea. One detail is that people ate snow or ice with fruit.

In which sentence does Marta include this detail? Write the sentence here.

3. Marta includes not one but a few supporting details.

Find another supporting detail in Marta's answer. Write the sentence here.

4. Marta ends her answer with a concluding sentence. This sentence sums up the main idea.

What is Marta's conclusion? Write the sentence here.

Tools & Tips

Make sure you know the difference between a main idea and a supporting detail.

- ✓ The **main idea** is the BIG idea. It explains what all the details in the paragraph are about, put together.
- ✓ The **supporting details** are SMALLER bits of information. Details are facts, descriptions, and examples that explain the main idea.

Read the paragraph below.

An American president helped make ice cream popular. James Madison was the fourth president of the United States. He had just been elected for the second time. His wife, Dolley, gave him a party at the White House. She served a brand-new dessert—ice cream. Soon, everyone wanted ice cream at their parties.

Which sentence states the main idea? Write it here.

Which sentences have supporting details? Write them here.
