

Get the Gist

Description: This cooperative learning activity teaches students how to identify the main idea of a paragraph. Scaffolding helps students determine what is and what is not important by stating the main idea in 10 words or fewer.

Materials: Picture cards, simple paragraphs and texts, get the gist cue cards

Procedure:

1. Begin by modeling the activity at the picture level. Provide multiple opportunities to practice the process using picture cards as a class.
2. When students understand the process at the picture level, model the activity with simple paragraphs, followed by simple text with multiple paragraphs.
3. Place students in pairs. Provide each a copy of the same text and one get the gist cue card.
4. Students take turns reading the selection, one paragraph at a time.
5. After each paragraph, students name the main idea by identifying the *who* or *what*, using a get the gist cue card to guide them. Students make a statement of 10 words or fewer using their fingers to help them count. The first thumb is the *who* or *what*; the remaining fingers count as the *most important information* about the *who* or *what*.
6. If students are unable to make a statement in 10 words or fewer, they work as a team to create a summary statement.

Preparation of Materials: Print cue cards. Cut the cards apart. Provide each student pair a copy of the same text and one Get the Gist Cue Card. Follow the activity directions.

More Challenging: Students identify the main idea as they “get the gist” for each paragraph or section of text. Then, students combine the main idea statements into a concise summary using the Get the Gist: Summarizing Chart.

Get the Gist Cue Cards

Get the Gist Cue Card

1. Name the who or what (the main person, place, or thing).
2. Tell the most important information about the who or what.
3. State the main idea in 10 words or fewer.

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