

Reading Comprehension Exercise

By focusing on the reader's internal understanding of the material, you enable them to confidently look for either a stated or unstated main idea.

My "protocol" for using such paragraphs involves these steps:

- 1) Cover the ¶ except for the first sentence.
- 2) Have the student read the sentence aloud (at this point, you'll get a feel for the student's fluency and word attack).
- 3) Ask for a guess about what's coming.
- 4) Have the student read the next sentence, and mutually evaluate the guess.
- 5) Continue, uncovering one sentence at a time. After two or three correct guesses...
- 6) Stop, and, casually covering the ¶, ask *why* the student has been making these correct guesses. If possible, get the student to phrase the response as a complete sentence.
- 7) Continue on through the ¶.
- 8) Review the ¶, and double check that the description the student gave of the ¶ was true for the entire ¶. That's the main idea.

Along the way, it is fairly easy to see how the supports shift from point to point. This can be a good way to investigate identifying supporting details (on another day).

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1. When a group of Middle Eastern Moslem friends sit down to a meal, they begin by saying "Bismillah," or "in the name of God." Aside from washing the hands before eating, it is considered polite to eat with the hand, using the thumb and first two fingers; to detach choice morsels and offer them to a neighbor at the table; and to continue nibbling even after one is full. If one stops eating, others may feel it is necessary to stop as well, even though they have not yet satisfied their hunger. Guests are expected to talk about pleasant subjects and be entertaining, never to introduce a sad or angry note into the conversation. They compliment the hosts with the phrase "May your table always be generous to all!" meaning they hope they will be asked to dine there again soon. Once two people have eaten a meal together, they are expected to treat one another with friendship and honesty. If not, according to traditional belief, the food they have shared will bring a curse upon them.

2. Sherry Lansing, chairman of Paramount Pictures, has produced such hits as *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*, *TITANIC*, and *CLUELESS*. In an industry dominated by men, she is considered the most powerful person in Hollywood. When asked about her success, she told this story to *PREMIERE* magazine. "[My mother] escaped from Nazi Germany when she was 17 and came to this country, where she sold dresses and learned to speak perfect English. When my dad died of a heart attack, I saw my mother cry and mourn and then take over his real estate business. I remember one of her office managers saying, 'You can't do this. You don't know anything about real estate,' and Mother saying, 'No, I'll do it. Teach me. I can do it.'

"I've never forgotten that," said Lansing. "Teach me. I'll do it."

3. While lying in bed and resting may be relaxing, it is not a substitute for real sleep. Sleeping less than you individually require can make you feel grouchy and even unwell. Researchers have seen rats deprived of sleep become deathly ill in as little as a week. Even just disturbing one's usual pattern of sleeping and waking can have unpleasant effects. When people fly across several time zones, for instance, or take a night-shift job, and have to adjust to a new schedule of waking and sleeping, they often experience fatigue, depression, and irritability. Oddly enough, no one understands exactly why we need to sleep at all. Although it might seem that the body and mind need periods of total inactivity, that does not really describe sleep. People's brain waves are nearly as active during sleep as they are during periods of wakefulness.
4. Daphne Sheldrick runs an orphanage that she founded in 1977 at her home in Nairobi, Kenya. One of her charges was Zoe, a two-week old elephant found wandering not far from her mother's badly decomposed body. "Stressed baby elephants are very fragile," Sheldrick explains. "Often they have witnessed the death of their families at the hands of ivory poachers or irate farmers whose crops have been trampled. The baby elephants are so devastated with grief that some die of a broken heart." However, under Sheldrick's care, Zoe thrived. Each day the infant consumed six gallons of vitamin-laced formula, and after about a year in the orphanage, living only with humans, Zoe was weaned and taken to a refuge where her keepers will gradually introduce her to the ways of the wild. The hope is that after some years, she will be able to be released to a wild herd. Eleven other infant elephants have also been saved over the years by the orphanage.

5. Often, a colony of tiny yellow ants lives near a colony of larger ants. These yellow ants, "thief" ants, support themselves by raiding the larger ants' tunnels and stealing their food. Then they escape through tunnels so tiny that the big ants cannot follow them. Several other species of ants are slave-keepers. In North America, for instance, there is a type of large red ant that makes slaves of smaller black ants. The red ants raid the nests of the smaller ones and carry away their young. Although the red ants can support themselves if necessary, they prefer to make the kidnapped ants do their work. Still another type of ant, the amazon ant, has lost its ability to support itself. Instead, it captures slaves from other nests and depends upon them to work. Oddly, the "slaves" of the amazon ants begin to act much like their masters. They become aggressive, even helping the amazons conduct slave raids on their own former colony

6. Babe Ruth was the son of a saloonkeeper whose family lived over the bar. His neighbors never forgot him: he was the worst kid in town. He stole. He fought. He cut school, made more noise than three kids, and stole whiskey from his own father's saloon. His parents eventually sent him to a combination training and reform school, where he began to play baseball. His reputation as a player grew until the Baltimore Orioles signed him at age 19. Orioles fans were astonished when, after he threw a runner out to win a game, Ruth whooped with joy and hurled a baseball into the stands. Baseballs were expensive, and the gesture was unheard of. The fans loved it. As the star player with the New York Yankees, Ruth alternately delighted the fans and scandalized the public. He badmouthed umpires, ate and drank too much, and climbed into the stands to punch a heckler. Although he retired in 1935, there were to be countless stories told as well as books and movies made about the "Babe."

7. At the beginning of the twentieth century, when education became compulsory in France, teachers realized they had a problem. As classrooms became more crowded, the slower students held up the progress of the quicker ones. The teachers wanted a way to separate the students in terms of ability. A French psychologist named Alfred Binet started working on the problem. He realized the task of separating the children should not be left up to the teachers, who might favor the better-behaved children over the troublemakers. He realized, too, that teachers might not recognize the difference between a student who didn't perform well because of lack of interest and one that did badly because of lack of ability. In response, Binet developed the first IQ test, a test that measures intelligence and potential ability, rather than performance in school. First published in 1905, a revised version of the test is still widely used today.

8. The Roman (Western) alphabet consists of twenty-six letters, each representing a different sound. Chinese writing incorporates about thirty thousand pictograms, each representing a different word. Just as Roman letters can be combined to produce any word, Chinese pictograms can be combined to express any idea. Obviously, one advantage of the Roman system is that only a small number of symbols is required. The twenty-six letters are easy to learn. By contrast, the thirty thousand Chinese pictograms take a long time to learn. And it is difficult to use them with a keyboard. On the other hand, when the Roman alphabet is used, only people who speak a particular language can read text written in that language. By contrast, any language can be written and read in Chinese pictograms, as long as the reader has the "key" to those pictograms. In fact, speakers of many Chinese dialects who cannot understand one another's spoken language are able to communicate easily through text written in the Chinese style

9. All human groups were once hunters and gatherers. About ten thousand to twelve thousand years ago, some hunting and gathering groups found that they could tame and breed some of the animals they hunted—primarily goats, sheep, cattle, and camels. Others discovered that they could cultivate plants. The key to understanding the first branching is the word "pasture"; pastoral societies are based on the pasturing of animals. Pastoral societies developed in arid regions, where lack of rainfall made it impractical to build life around crops. Groups that took this turn remained nomadic, for they followed their animals to fresh pasture. The key to understanding the second branching is "horticulture," or plant cultivation. Horticultural societies are based on the cultivation of plants by the use of hand tools. No longer having to abandon an area as the food supply gave out, these groups developed permanent settlements.

10. A Vermont farmer named Wilson Bentley was not an expert photographer or any kind of scientist. But after peering at a snowflake through a microscope, he became fascinated by such fragile beauty. For forty-six brutal New England winters, Bentley stayed alone in a shack, studying snowflakes. He collected them on a chilly blackboard and photographed them quickly, before they could melt. Before Bentley's death in 1931, he had produced over six thousand photographs of individual snowflakes. Bentley's pictures, published in magazines and a book, fascinated the public. Jewelers bought the pictures and used them as patterns for their work. Teachers showed schoolchildren how to cut snowflakes out of construction paper, using Bentley's photographs for inspiration. Bentley described a snowflake as "an idea dropped from the sky, a bit of beauty incomparable, that if lost at that moment is lost forever to the world."

1)

- a. All cultures have a complicated system of accepted rules of behavior.
- b. Middle Eastern cultures have more rules of etiquette than cultures in other parts of the world.
- c. There are traditional rules of etiquette that guide behavior at the Middle Eastern Moslem table.

2)

- a. Lansing's mother has served as a role model for Lansing's own successful career.
- b. Lansing's mother came to this country knowing no English at the age of 17.
- c. As she has worked in the movie industry, it has been an advantage for Lansing to be a woman.

3)

- a. While undisturbed sleep is a key to our well-being, we don't understand it well.
- b. During sleep, our brain waves are as active as they are during wakefulness.
- c. Loss of sleep or a change in sleeping schedule makes people irritable and depressed.

4)

- a. According to Daphne Sheldrick, baby elephants have strong emotions and are devastated when parents are killed.
- b. Elephants are killed by ivory seekers or farmers angry at elephants that have trampled their crops.
- c. One woman runs an orphanage that saves infant orphan elephants who are later prepared to return to the wild.

d. 5)

- a. Babe Ruth's colorful personality, as well as his talent, made him a legendary player.
- b. Babe Ruth's professional and personal life was often troubled because of his unusual behavior.
- c. Babe Ruth began as a player with the Orioles, then moved on to be the star of the New York Yankees.

6)

- a. In France in the early 1900s, it was difficult for teachers to manage classrooms crowded with students of differing abilities.
- b. IQ testing was developed as a way to measure the potential success of students so that they could be separated according to ability.
- c. When education became compulsory, the newly crowded classes created numerous new problems.

7)

- a. Unlike the Roman alphabet, which consists of only twenty-six symbols, Chinese writing uses about thirty thousand pictograms.
- b. There are advantages and disadvantages to both the Roman alphabet and Chinese writing.
- c. While it is relatively easy to learn the Roman alphabet, learning the Chinese pictograms is difficult.

9)

- a. Societies based on the taming and breeding of animals became nomadic because of the need to follow the animals to fresh pasture.
- b. By learning to cultivate the land, people no longer have to abandon an area when the food supply gave out.
- c. A branching off of hunting and gathering societies resulted in the development of both nomadic, pastoral societies and settled, horticultural societies.

10)

- a. Wilson Bentley took more than six thousand photographs of snowflakes.
- b. Out of fascination, a farmer took numerous photos of snowflakes, which in turn fascinated many others.
- c. Bentley spent forty-six winters alone in a cold Vermont shack, collecting and photographing snowflakes.