



Summarize and Synthesize: Grades 3–5

OVERVIEW:

Effectively summarizing a text not only helps students monitor their comprehension but also teaches them how to discern the most important ideas in a text, filter out irrelevant information, and retell the main idea and details in a meaningful way. Summarizing is a higher-level skill that requires students to determine and explain the main idea of a text and key supporting details. Once students have learned to summarize and retell, they can be taught to synthesize. Synthesizing is one of the most challenging reading skills as it involves multiple strategies. Synthesizing a text is the process of pulling together background knowledge, newly learned ideas, connections, inferences and summaries to form a deeper, original understanding of the text. Through synthesis, students become aware of how their thinking evolves and deepens as they engage with a text.

As needed prior to teaching the following mini-lessons, provide students with additional support in determining the central idea and key details in a text, referencing the Identify Main Idea and Details Toolkit to teach or review the skill.

Mini-Lesson I

Writing a Summary (20 minutes)

Background: To write an accurate summary, students must be able to identify the main idea and key details of a text. Once students have mastered that skill, they can be taught to combine the pertinent information into an accurate summary. The following mini-lesson provides specific teaching suggestions for modeling this strategy using the article “Taking Action Against Pollution” in the *Expedition: Learn!* lesson “Pollution.” However, instruction can be adjusted to align with a different topic.

- Invite students to turn and talk about their favorite book or movie. After each partner has shared, gather students’ attention and explain that when they told their partner about their favorite book or movie, they were summarizing. They were telling their partner the most important parts of the book or movie in a succinct manner.
- Share that it is important to learn to summarize. It helps us talk about what we read, and it also helps us become stronger readers as we ensure that we understand what we read and learn to determine the most important ideas in a text.

- Share that in this lesson, students will learn how to write a summary.
- Choose a familiar passage from an Expedition: Learn! lesson related to students' interests or a topic being studied.
- Read through the text once with students. Invite them to turn and talk to determine the main idea of the text. For example:
 - *There are many ways to recycle to help stop pollution.*
- Share with students that you will read the article a second time. As you do, they should listen for details that explain the different ways we can recycle and prevent pollution.
- Conduct a second read-aloud, strategically stopping to think aloud and demonstrate how to identify and paraphrase key details, for example:
 - *Because of recycling, things like glass or cans that would be thrown away can be reused.*
 - *Composting is a way of recycling food waste to make rich soil.*
 - *Water can be recycled by being cleaned and then reused.*
 - *Recycling reduces pollution and protects natural resources.*
- Display the [Writing a Summary anchor chart](#) and demonstrate how to use the identified main idea and key details to write a summary. Introduce and model each step, recording on a piece of chart paper for students to reference, for example:
 - The title of the article is "Taking Action Against Pollution," so I'll start by writing:
 - In the article "Taking Action Against Pollution," ...
 - No author is named, but I know the text talks about how recycling helps reduce pollution, so I'll add:
 - *the author explains that ...*
 - And I know the main idea, so I'll finish the sentence by adding:
 - *there are many different ways to recycle to help stop pollution.*
 - Finally, I'll add my key details:
 - *Because of recycling, things like glass or cans that would be thrown away can be reused.*
 - *Composting is a way of recycling food waste to make rich soil.*
 - *Water can be recycled by being cleaned and then reused.*
 - *Recycling reduces pollution and protects natural resources.*
- Read through the full summary, emphasizing how each piece of the summary aligns to the anchor chart.
- Release students to work with a partner to read and summarize a text using the steps on the anchor chart. As time allows, invite pairs to share their summary with another pair, discussing how they included each component on the anchor chart.

Mini-Lesson II

Determining What Is Important for a Summary (20 minutes)

Background: One of the hardest skills for students when writing a summary is determining what information to include. Oftentimes when reading a text, students can be distracted by information that is surprising and interesting but not necessarily related to the main idea. This lesson teaches students how to evaluate the details in a text to determine the most important facts to include in the summary. The following mini-lesson provides specific teaching suggestions for modeling this strategy using the article “What Are Landforms?” in the *Expedition: Learn!* lesson “Landforms and People.” However, instruction can be adjusted to align with a different topic.

- Invite students to turn and talk to discuss why we learn to summarize a text.
- Share an accurate student response that reinforces that summarizing helps us understand what we have read, determine the most important ideas, and explain the text to someone else in a way that makes sense.
- Choose a familiar passage from an *Expedition: Learn!* lesson related to students’ interests or a topic being studied.
- Read through the text once with students. Invite them to turn and talk to discuss the main idea of the text. For example:
 - *The United States has many types of landforms that look very different and are always changing.*
- Distribute note cards or sticky notes to students. Share that as they read the text a second time, they should jot important facts and information on their note cards (one fact per card) that relate to the main idea about different types of landforms.
- Conduct a second read-aloud of the passage, pausing to allow students to jot facts and details.
- Emphasize for students that authors include many types of details in their writing with the intention of both engaging and entertaining the reader. Share that when we write a summary, we want to make sure we include only the most important details that explain the main idea.
- Explain that to help us determine which facts to include in our summary, we can review our note cards and sort them into two categories: “Important” and “Interesting (but Not Important).”
- Invite students to work with a partner to sort their note cards into the two categories, discussing their rationale as they do so. Emphasize that the details in the Important category should help explain the main idea: The United States has many types of landforms that look very different and are always changing.
- After students have sorted their note cards, call on pairs to share details that they placed in the “Important” category. Record the details on a piece of chart paper for students to reference. When students provide a detail similar to one already recorded but phrased differently, highlight how we paraphrase information when summarizing a text. Sample details may include:
 - *A plain is large and mostly flat land found in the eastern United States and also in the Great Plains.*
 - *Mountains and hills, like the Rocky Mountains in the west and the Appalachian Mountains in the east, are raised landforms.*
 - *Buttes are small mountains with flat tops found in the American Southwest.*
 - *Valleys, canyons, and gorges, like the Grand Canyon, dip into the ground.*
 - *Landforms are created by the movement of earth and by weather, and they are constantly changing.*
- After details have been recorded, reinforce that a summary is a short retelling of the main points of the article. Model using the main idea and details to orally summarize the text, choosing the two or three most important details.
 - *In the text, the author describes the major landforms and how they are constantly growing and changing. One type of landform is a plain, which is flat land found in the Great Plains region. Mountains, such as the Rockies and Appalachian Mountains, are a type of raised landform. Buttes are another type of raised landform, but unlike mountains, they have a flat top. There are also valleys, canyons, and gorges, which dip into the ground. Many types of landforms are caused by weather and the movement of earth.*
- Invite students to practice summarizing by determining the most important details with a partner. Have partners read the second article in the Expedition: Learn! lesson, jotting the main idea and key details b

Mini-Lesson III

Synthesizing Information (20 minutes)

Background: When teaching students to synthesize, it is important to distinguish the skill from summarizing. A synthesis can include parts of a summary, or a retelling from the text, but it goes far beyond a retelling. Synthesizing requires the reader to take that summary or partial retelling and add in their own thoughts, experiences, opinions, interpretations and connections to generate a new, and bigger idea—going beyond the text. A true synthesis can even blend and integrate ideas from across multiple texts to form new big ideas. The following mini-lesson provides specific teaching suggestions for modeling this strategy using the article “Life in the Arctic” in the *Expedition: Learn!* lesson “Peoples of the Far North: The Inuit.” However, instruction can be adjusted to align with a different topic.

- Reinforce the difference between summarizing and synthesizing for students, and provide them with the definition of synthesizing. Review the [Synthesizing anchor chart](#) with students.
- Choose a new passage from an *Expedition: Learn!* lesson related to students’ interests or a topic being studied. Distribute the [Synthesizing graphic organizer](#).
- Preview the article with students by reading the title and looking at the image and the caption. Invite students to turn and talk to discuss what they think the article will be about. Then invite students to think about what they already know about the topic. Ask students to fill in the first row of their organizer and then share out with the whole class. Sample response:
 - **Topic:** *The title of this article is “Life in the Arctic.” I think the topic of this article will be about different people that have lived in the Arctic.*
 - *I am thinking that the Indigenous peoples that live in the Arctic would have a hard time surviving because it is very cold and there are not too many plants or animals that live there.*
- Invite students to independently or collaboratively read the text. Remind students that they should be paying attention to what they are learning. Encourage students to stop and jot, or use other note-taking strategies, while reading.
- After reading the text, invite students to fill out the second row of their organizer. Sample response:
 - *When I was reading, I was thinking that the people living in the Arctic were able to creatively adapt to their surroundings because they hunted animals that were available, like seals. They used the skins to make clothing, the oil to light and heat their homes, and the meat for food. I was surprised to learn that Arctic peoples invented the kayak.*
- Invite students to turn and talk to share what they learned with their partner.
- Finally, invite students to reread their notes and think about a new understanding. Remind students that synthesizing is not simply retelling. They should add their own thoughts, experiences, opinions, interpretations, and connections to generate a new and bigger idea that goes beyond the text. Ask students to add their responses to the last row of their organizer. Sample response:
 - *By the end, I was thinking that the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic, like the Inuit and the Yup’ik, have lived in one of the toughest environments on Earth for thousands of years because they adapted their way of life to survive the extreme cold and harsh conditions. By moving with the seasons, using clever inventions like kayaks and igloos, and making full use of the animals they hunted, they were able to thrive. After reading this, I realize how creative and resourceful they had to be. I admire how they worked with nature rather than against it. This makes me think about how we can learn from them today, such as by using what we have and living sustainably.*

Check for Understanding

If you observe ...**Then try ...**

students struggling to summarize the whole article

asking students to write a one-sentence summary of each paragraph or section of the text as they read. After completing the whole text, students should read through their sentences and use them to create a summary of the entire article. Remind students to edit as needed to make sure their sentences flow together.

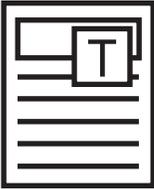
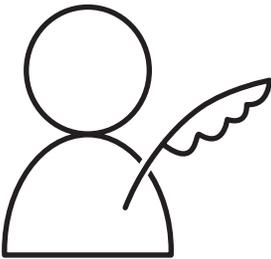
students including unnecessary details in their summary

reading through the text once with students to determine the gist. Place students in groups of three and ask them to reread the text. Ask each student to write down one of the most important key details on a note card or sticky note. After reading, the triads determine a main idea based on their three details.

students summarizing instead of synthesizing

encouraging students to connect the text to their own thoughts, experiences, or opinions. Ask questions like, "How does this new information change what you knew before?" or "What bigger idea can you draw from this?" Have students write down how their thinking evolved as they read, emphasizing that synthesis goes beyond retelling and adds their unique perspective.

Writing a Summary

	<p>1. Write the title and explain what type of text it is.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the article "___" ... • In the video "___" ...
	<p>2. Add the author's name (or say "the author") and a verb.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ... the author explains ... • ... _____ describes ... • ... the author compares ...
	<p>3. Add the main idea.</p>
	<p>4. Include some key details.</p>

Model Summary

In the article "Taking Action Against Pollution," the author explains different ways to recycle to help prevent pollution. Because of recycling, things like glass or cans that would be thrown away can be reused. Composting is a way of recycling food waste to make rich soil. Water can be recycled by being cleaned and then reused. Recycling reduces pollution and protects natural resources.



Synthesizing

What I know

At first I was thinking ___ because ___.

What I'm learning

When I was reading, I was thinking ___ because ___.

New understanding

By the end, I was thought ___ because ___.



Synthesizing

<p>What I know</p> 	<p>At first I was thinking...</p>	<p>because ...</p>
<p>What I'm learning</p> 	<p>When I was reading, I was thinking ...</p>	<p>because ...</p>
<p>New Understanding</p> 	<p>By the end, I was thinking ...</p>	<p>because ...</p>