



# Summarize and Synthesize: Grades 6–8

## OVERVIEW:

Summarizing and synthesizing become increasingly important in middle school as students engage with deeper and more complex content. This skill helps students monitor their comprehension, retain information, and reflect on their learning. Summarizing is a complex skill that develops over time as students practice applying their knowledge to increasingly complex texts. In middle school, students should be encouraged to build off the foundational summarizing work done in elementary school as they hone their skills and learn to develop more concise and effective summaries.

Because it teaches students how to put information into their own words, summarizing is a critical step in learning to synthesize information. Synthesizing goes beyond understanding someone else's ideas; when synthesizing, students combine previous learning with new information to form new ideas and insights.

## Mini-Lesson I

### Writing Effective Summaries (10 minutes)

**Background:** Summarizing a text is a higher-order thinking skill that requires several cognitive steps and prerequisite skills from students. To write a summary, students must be able to explain the central idea and key details and determine their importance; synthesize the ideas; and understand the author's purpose. In addition, students must be able to paraphrase and write in a succinct and concise manner. The following lesson provides a quick review of what an effective summary is.

- Begin by explaining that a summary should tell us what the text is about, without extra details or opinions. Summarizing shows you understand the big picture.
- Consider co-creating an anchor chart to quickly review the key components of an effective summary:
  - includes only information from the text
  - includes the main idea and relevant details
  - is written in your own words
  - does not include your opinion
- Consider distributing the [Writing a Summary checklist](#) for students to reference when they are asked to summarize a text.
- Give students an opportunity to orally summarize a book they read or a movie they saw, referencing the checklist to ensure they include all the elements.

- Remind students of the key components of an effective summary from above.
- Using a short, familiar text, model for students how to write a summary using the following steps.
  - **Step 1:** Identify the main idea
    - What is the text mostly about?
  - **Step 2:** Identify relevant details
    - Identify two or three key details that support the main idea
  - **Step 3:** Combine the main idea and key details
    - Merge the main idea and details into one or two sentences
  - **Step 4:** Paraphrase
    - Put the ideas into your own words without changing the meaning.
- Invite students to practice writing a summary on their own or with a partner using a different text. Encourage students to think about how they can keep their summaries brief but clear.
- Review the key points about summarizing with students:
  - Include the main idea and key details.
  - Paraphrase to make the summary your own.
  - Only include information from the text, not your personal opinions.

## Mini-Lesson II

### Six-Word Summary (30 minutes)

**Background:** Summarizing is an essential higher-order thinking skill that encourages students to analyze and synthesize information from a text. The Six-Word Summary strategy challenges students to push their thinking further by condensing the most important ideas into just six words. This requires students to not only understand the main idea and key details but also to critically evaluate what information stands out and resonates with them. By distilling the main ideas into such a brief format, students engage in deep reflection and practice succinct, focused writing. This mini-lesson guides students through the process of creating impactful six-word summaries, promoting both critical thinking and metacognition. It provides specific teaching suggestions for modeling this strategy using the article “Fighting for Equality” in the *Expedition: Learn!* lesson “W.E.B. Du Bois.” However, instruction can be adjusted to align with a different topic.

- Invite students to turn and talk to discuss the key components of an effective summary. If students are unable to recall, remind them that an effective summary should:
  - include only information from the text
  - include the main idea and relevant details
  - be written in your own words
  - not include your opinion
- Invite students to read the article “Fighting for Equality” from Expedition:Learn! lesson “W.E.B. Du Bois.” Invite them to write a summary using the steps from Mini-Lesson I. See sample responses below:
  - **Step 1:** Identify the main idea
    - What is the text mostly about?
      - *The article is about W.E.B. Du Bois's efforts to fight against racism and promote equality for Black Americans, and how his views differed from Booker T. Washington's.*
  - **Step 2:** Identify relevant details
    - Identify two or three key details that support the main idea.
      - *1. Du Bois rejected Booker T. Washington's slow approach to achieving equality and demanding immediate rights for Black Americans.*
      - *2. He co-founded the NAACP to actively protest against Jim Crow laws and racism.*
      - *3. The NAACP worked through protests, lawsuits, and political action to secure rights for Black Americans*

- **Step 3:** Combine the main idea and key details
  - Merge the main idea and details into one or two sentences.
    - *W.E.B. Du Bois fought for immediate equality for Black Americans and co-founded the NAACP to oppose Jim Crow laws through protests and legal action. He disagreed with Booker T. Washington's gradual approach and pushed for civil rights.*
- **Step 4:** Paraphrase
  - Put the ideas into your own words without changing the meaning.
    - *Du Bois believed Black Americans should demand equal rights without waiting. He worked with others to form the NAACP, which led to protests. He fought in court to end racial discrimination and Jim Crow laws.*
- After completing these steps, students can condense their summary into a six-word sentence or phrase. Emphasize that students should choose words that are impactful and clearly convey the main ideas. For example:
  - *Du Bois demands equality, and opposes gradual change.*
  - *Du Bois champions equality through active resistance.*
  - *Du Bois: Immediate equality, active protest.*
  - *NAACP protests discrimination, Du Bois leads.*
  - *Du Bois rejects compromise, demands civil rights.*

## Mini-Lesson III

### Synthesizing: Connect-Extend-Challenge

**Background:** As students move through their schooling career, the skill of synthesizing information becomes increasingly important. Synthesizing involves combining knowledge from multiple sources to create a new, comprehensive understanding of a topic. It encourages deeper analysis by prompting students to identify connections, relationships, and patterns across different texts. The Connect-Extend-Challenge strategy fosters this critical thinking by helping students link new ideas to prior knowledge, extend their understanding, and challenge their thinking based on new information. The following mini-lesson provides specific teaching suggestions for modeling this strategy using the *Expedition: Learn!* lessons “Chinese Workers and the Transcontinental Railroad” and “The Great Migration, 1915–1940.” However, instruction can be adjusted to align with a different topic.

- Review the steps of synthesizing using the REST acronym or another familiar strategy.
  - **R:** Read two or more sources.
  - **E:** Edit notes and combine concepts.
  - **S:** Synthesize information from notes with what you already know.
  - **T:** Think about how your knowledge has grown.
- Share with students that they will be reading two articles and using the Connect-Extend-Challenge strategy to write a synthesis. Model the strategy for students using the *Expedition: Learn!* lessons “Chinese Workers and the Transcontinental Railroad” and “The Great Migration, 1915–1940.”
- Invite students to turn and talk to share what they already know about the topic.
- Read the articles aloud, or invite students to read them independently or collaboratively. Explain that while reading, students should take notes about what they are learning.



- After students complete their notes, ask them to consider what they have read and write down responses to the following questions. Sample responses for both lessons below:
  - How are the ideas and information connected to what you already know?
    - *The information about Chinese workers on the transcontinental railroad connects to what I already know about immigration and labor in American history. I knew that immigrants played a significant role in building major infrastructure, but I didn't realize how crucial Chinese workers were to the transcontinental railroad and how they faced extreme discrimination despite their vital contributions.*
    - *The Great Migration connects to my knowledge about the Black American experience in the early 20th century. I knew that Black Americans faced severe discrimination and economic hardship in the South, but the article provides a clearer picture of how these conditions pushed people to migrate north for better opportunities, reflecting a broader pattern of internal migration driven by economic and social factors.*
  - What new ideas did you get that broadened your thinking or extended it in different directions?
    - *I learned that Chinese workers faced extreme conditions and were underpaid despite their hard work and significant contributions. The new idea that broadened my thinking is how their healthier habits, like regular bathing and drinking tea, helped them endure the harsh conditions better than other workers. This shows how cultural practices can impact survival and health in extreme situations.*
    - *The idea that the Great Migration was not just about seeking better jobs but also escaping violence and racial terrorism was new to me. It extends my understanding of the migration's push factors by highlighting that the migration was as much about survival as it was about economic opportunity. The connection between the migration and the Harlem Renaissance also broadened my view of how migration can lead to cultural and political changes.*
  - What challenges or puzzles emerge for you?
    - *One challenge is understanding why, despite their critical role in building the transcontinental railroad, Chinese workers were not recognized or celebrated for their work. It puzzles me when I try to understand the extent to which their significant achievements were overshadowed by racism, and how this lack of recognition impacted their legacy.*
    - *A puzzle is how Black Americans could face such intense racial violence and discrimination in the North, despite fleeing the South to escape similar conditions. It's challenging to reconcile the progress they sought with the persistent racism they encountered in their new homes. How did the racial tensions and violence in the North compare to what they experienced in the South? How did they navigate these new challenges?*
- Model turning your notes into a synthesis. For example:
  - *Both articles reveal how marginalized groups played essential roles in shaping American history while facing racism and significant challenges. Chinese workers were instrumental in building the transcontinental railroad, overcoming harsh conditions and discrimination to complete a project that transformed the country's infrastructure. Similarly, Black Americans migrated from the South to the North during the Great Migration to escape severe racial discrimination and seek better opportunities. This migration was driven by both economic pull factors and the push of escaping violence and oppression. Both groups faced racism and were often exploited or undervalued despite their contributions. These historical experiences highlight how systemic racism has impacted marginalized communities throughout American history and how their resilience and efforts have significantly influenced the nation's development.*

## 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 Checklist



When summarizing an informational text, remember to:

- Keep it short.
- Clearly state the central idea.
- Include a few of the **most** important details.
- Consider the author's purpose.
- Consider the text structure.
- Use your own words.