

PAT Teaching Resources Centre

Reading comprehension

Teaching activity: **Summarising key ideas (+extension)**

Curriculum code: ACELY1692, ACELY1695

Skill: Interpreting explicit information

Achievement band: 110–119

ACTIVITIES

Learning intention

For students to be able to recognise the key idea of a text and the key idea in each paragraph of a text.

Explain

that summarising the key idea of a text or paragraph means you need to rewrite it with as few words as possible while maintaining the meaning. You have to work out what is the most important information and how to express it in the shortest possible way.

Show

The nests of eastern screech owls can become so dirty and unhealthy that the baby owlets die. Like all owls, the screech owl is carnivorous and eats small animals like mice, birds, bats, frogs and lizards. When the owlets hatch, the parents kill small animals and bring them back to the nest, but the owlets cannot always eat all the food. The nest can become dangerously dirty as maggots, ants, spiders, lice and other insects move in to eat the decomposing food. The insects spread germs and disease that infects the owlets. Some screech owls, however, have found an unusual solution.

Scientists Fred Gehlbach and Robert Baldrige were observing screech owls in the 1970s and 1980s. They noticed that some of the owls carried small, live blind snakes* back to the nest. Remarkably, the blind snakes survived in the nest by living off the maggots and other insects in the decaying food. The owlets did not apparently try to eat the blind snakes. Some nests had up to 15 blind snakes.

Gehlbach and Baldrige conducted an experiment and found that baby owls from nests with blind snakes were 25 per cent more likely to survive and grew twice as fast as owlets in nests without blind snakes.

*Blind snakes are a species of small snakes with poor eyesight. They mainly live underground or in dark places.

Read

the text with the students.

Discuss

any unfamiliar words or phrases, such as decomposing, maggots, found an unusual solution, 25 per cent more likely to survive, grew twice as fast.

Ask

students to work with a peer and compose a summary of this text in as few words as possible while maintaining the main message.

Ask

What do we need to keep in to get the message across without all the detail?

Discuss

and compare suggestions.

Encourage

students to consider each other's work and who has been successful in keeping the essential information and deleting the detail.

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Consider

an example of a successful summary, which might be: Some owls use snakes to clean their nests.

Explain

that this is a successful summary because it states the key idea of a text and leaves out unnecessary detail.

Ask

students to compose a very brief summary of each paragraph and then compare and discuss their suggestions. For example:

- Owls often have filthy nests with rotting food.
- Some owls put blind snakes in the nest to keep it clean.
- Clean nests mean healthier owlets.

Come

to an agreement with the students about the best summaries for each paragraph.

Ask

students to think about the details.

Ask

students to highlight the key words or phrases that are repeated or reworded in the summary for each paragraph. For example, consider how 'the nests of eastern screech owls can become so dirty and unhealthy' in the original has been reworded to 'owls often have filthy nests' in the summary.

Point out

all the words without highlights. These are the details.

Discuss

with students various strategies they might use to help them to tell the difference between the details and the key ideas. Talk about which ideas are essential to understand the meaning of the text and which ideas are not.

EXTENSION

Repeat

the same activity with a short information text about a topic you are currently studying in class.

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