



EXPEDITIONARY  
LEARNING

## **Grade 3: Module 4: Unit 1: Lesson 8**

### **Determining the Main Idea and Key Details: “River to the Sea”**



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**Long-Term Targets Addressed (Based on NYSP12 ELA CCLS)**

I can determine the main idea of an informational text. (RI.3.2)

I can retell key ideas from an informational text. (RI.3.2)

I can make connections between specific sentences and paragraphs and the overall text. (e.g., *comparison, cause/effect, first/second/third in a sequence*). (RI.3.8)

**Supporting Learning Targets**

- I can determine the main idea of “River to the Sea.”
- I can determine the key details of “River to the Sea.”
- I can describe connections between sentences in “River to the Sea” and how they support the key details and main idea.

**Ongoing Assessment**

- Students’ annotated text “River to the Sea”



Agenda	Teaching Notes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Opening<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Engaging the Reader: By the Brook (5 minutes)</li></ol></li><li>2. Work Time<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Determining the Main Idea: Avoiding Distractors (25 minutes)</li><li>B. Sharing Main Ideas (10 minutes)</li><li>C. Describing the Connections between Sentences (10 minutes)</li></ol></li><li>3. Closing and Assessment<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Debrief: It's NOT All about the Main Idea (5 minutes)</li></ol></li><li>4. Homework<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Take home “River to the Sea.” Reread the text and look at the key details that you highlighted and starred. Then read the first draft of your main idea statement. Decide whether you need to revise it. If you write a new one, put a number 2 next to it. Put a ✓ if you choose not to revise.</li><li>B. Continue reading in your independent reading book for this unit at home.</li></ol></li></ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The goal of this lesson is for students to build scientific knowledge while becoming better readers. This lesson does not fully address science content standards or replace hands-on, inquiry-based science. Please see the Unit 1 overview for suggested science resources.</li><li>• Students should be in the same pairs as in Lessons 6 and 7.</li><li>• In the Opening, students focus on three vocabulary words before reading the text. These words are pre-taught because the text offers little context for students to figure them out on their own.</li><li>• Post: Learning targets.</li></ul>



Lesson Vocabulary	Materials
distract/distractors; brook, silt, current	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Image of a brook (see supporting materials)</li><li>• Power Words/Water Words anchor chart (from previous lessons)</li><li>• Determining the Main Idea and Key Details anchor chart (from previous lessons)</li><li>• “River to the Sea” article (one per student)</li><li>• Determining the Main Idea and Key Details task card (one per student)</li><li>• Highlighter or colored pencils (one per student)</li></ul>

Opening	Meeting Students’ Needs
<p><b>A. Engaging the Reader: By the Brook (5 minutes)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Display the <b>image of a brook</b> with the words <i>silt</i>, <i>current</i>, and <i>brook</i>.</li><li>• Invite students to turn to a partner and share a sentence using one or more of these words.</li><li>• After students have shared, cold call a few volunteers to read their sentence or their partner’s sentence.</li><li>• If more clarification of these words is needed, point to the picture and give brief definitions of each word. (“A brook is a small river.” “Current is the flow of a river. The current in this brook is very slow. It’s barely moving.” “Silt is fine sand or dirt carried by water.”)</li><li>• Add these words to the Water Words section of the <b>Power Words/Water Words anchor chart</b>.</li><li>• Encourage students to be on the lookout for these words as they read a new text today.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Show a picture of a brook to support ELLs and visual learners.</li></ul>



Work Time	Meeting Students' Needs
<p><b>A. Determining the Main Idea: Avoiding Distractors (25 minutes)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell students that in a few minutes, they are going to try out the task card they practiced over the last few days with a new text, “River to the Sea,” to see what more they can learn about rivers and streams.</li> <li>• Ask:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* “What will your first task be?”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Call on a volunteer to respond. Listen for something like: “Read the text and determine the main idea.” Affirm this response and refer the class to the first learning target.</li> <li>• Refer to the <b>Determining the Main Idea and Key Details anchor chart</b>. Tell students that the approaches they named in Lesson 7 are good ones to try with this new text. Then tell them that you are going to add something new to the anchor chart. Write: “Look out for distractors in the text and pictures.”</li> <li>• Ask:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* “What do you know about the word <i>distract</i>?”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Give students a moment to think and then call on volunteers to share. They will likely share ideas such as when someone or something distracts you, they keep you from doing what you are supposed to be doing.</li> <li>• Tell students that <i>distract</i> is the verb, or the action. <i>Distractors</i> are those things or people that distract you. Give an example (e.g., “If you are supposed to be doing your homework and your little brother keeps bugging or distracting you, your brother is a distractor. If it’s your older sister’s music that is keeping you from doing your homework, the music is the distractor.”)</li> <li>• Tell students that sometimes there are distractors in text or pictures that keep you from accurately determining the main idea. As they read this text, it will help them to look out for words and pictures that distract from the main idea. Often writers include lots of information that is interesting but not central to their main point.</li> <li>• Add the words <i>distract</i> and <i>distractors</i> to the Power Words section of the Power Words/Water Words anchor chart.</li> <li>• Distribute “<b>River to the Sea</b>” and the <b>Determining the Main Idea and Key Details task card</b> to students.</li> <li>• Tell them that they will have 15 minutes to work with this text independently and complete Part 1: Determining the Main Idea.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider providing smaller chunks of text for ELLs (sometimes just a few sentences). Teachers can check in on students’ thinking as they write or speak about their text.</li> <li>• If some students have not yet mastered the Speaking and Listening standards (3.1 and 3.6), you might consider using the Conversation Criteria checklist from Module 2 to continue gathering data about students’ conversational skills.</li> <li>• Using silent signals (a quiet thumb, etc.) ensures engagement by promoting simultaneous engagement, communicating when students have had enough think time, and encouraging accountability. Any student who gives the signal is communicating readiness to share.</li> </ul>



Work Time (continued)	Meeting Students’ Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Remind students to look out for distractors as they work to determine the main idea of “River to the Sea.”</li><li>• Circulate and observe students’ work. To prompt thinking, ask questions like these to individuals, small groups, or the whole class:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* “What is helping you determining the main idea?”</li><li>* “What is this text mostly about?”</li><li>* “Have you found any distractors?”</li></ul></li><li>• You might ask follow-up questions like these:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* “Do the pictures help you to understand the main idea? Why or why not?”</li><li>* “Read the first sentence of the second, third, fourth, and fifth paragraphs on the second page. What are most of these paragraphs about? Which of these paragraphs do you think might distract you from the main idea?”</li></ul></li><li>• After 10 minutes, tell students that they will have 5 more minutes to work and to record the first draft of their main idea statement on the back of their paper.</li><li>• Ask students to get with their partner and share their main idea statements. Circulate as pairs share and select a few strong main idea statements to share with the class. It’s OK if these are simple first drafts as long as they have the main idea that rivers start out small and become larger and faster as they flow from the mountains to the sea.</li><li>• After a few minutes, call students together. Share the main idea statements that you pre-selected.</li><li>• Tell students that you can tell from their main idea statements that they were really looking out for distractors. Ask the class or a few students you worked with to share the distractors that they found (e.g., the pictures, the paragraph about wildlife).</li></ul>	



Work Time (continued)	Meeting Students’ Needs
<p><b>B. Finding Key Details (15 minutes)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask a volunteer to read the second learning target. Tell students that they will now be working on the second part of their task card, finding key details.</li><li>• Refer to the Determining the Main Idea and Key Details anchor chart. Tell students that the approaches that they named in Lesson 7 are good ones to try with this new text. Tell them to look for words that signal importance and also watch out for distractors in the key details, just as they did with the main idea.</li><li>• Distribute <b>highlighters</b>.</li><li>• Give students about 8 minutes to work with their partner on Part 2: Finding Key Details.</li><li>• Circulate as the pairs work. As needed, ask questions like:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* “Why did you select this passage as a key detail?” (Listen for approaches from the anchor chart.)</li><li>* “What words or sentences do you think might be distractors?” (personal stories, “I,” pictures)</li><li>* “Did you notice any other words or phrases that signaled importance?” (Listen for “most” and “often.”)</li></ul></li><li>• After about 8 minutes, gather the class together. Give specific praise of times you saw or heard students watching out for distractors.</li><li>• Direct the class to the third paragraph on the second page. Ask students to read along silently as you read this paragraph aloud.</li><li>• Ask:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* “What are the distractors in this paragraph? How do you know these are distractors and not key details?”</li></ul></li><li>• Give students time to think and then call on a volunteer. Listen for ideas like: “The story of the author walking in the river and riding the raft are distractors. I can tell that these aren’t key details because they don’t connect to the main idea directly.”</li></ul>	



Work Time (continued)	Meeting Students’ Needs
<p><b>C. Describing the Connections Between Sentences (10 minutes)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refer to the third learning target: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“I can describe connections between sentences in ‘River to the Sea’ and how they support the key details and main idea.”</li> </ul> </li> <li>Remind students that when they read “Rivers and Streams” (in Lesson 7), they found that authors sometimes support the main idea and key details by using sentences that are connected. And they found several sentences in “Rivers and Streams” that were connected because they described the sequence or order of events using words like “first” and “last.”</li> <li>Explain that today students will again make connections between sentences, but this time they will look for sentences that are connected in a different way. Tell them that instead of explaining a sequence or order, these sentences will make a <i>comparison</i>.</li> <li>Explain that the word <i>comparison</i> comes from another word, its root word, <i>compare</i>. Explain that <i>compare</i> means to describe what is alike, or similar, and what is different about two things.</li> <li>Give students a few examples: “You might compare two video games when deciding which to buy. Or you might compare the flavors of two kinds of ice cream.” Ask: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“What else could you compare?”</li> </ul> </li> <li>Add the words <i>compare</i> and <i>comparison</i> to the Power Words section of the Power Words/Water Words anchor chart.</li> <li>Project the text on the document camera. Direct students to the last paragraph on page 1 and reread the first sentence aloud: “Rivers often start in the mountains with no more than a trickle.” Then direct students to the last sentence of the same paragraph on page 2: “As more and more water joins a river, it gets wider and deeper and faster.”</li> <li>Ask: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“How are these sentences connected?”</li> </ul> </li> <li>Give students a moment to share with a partner, then cold call a student to respond. Listen for ideas like: “They tell what the river looks like at the beginning and what it looks after it has more water.”</li> <li>If needed, follow up: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“What words in these sentences make the <i>comparison</i>, or what is alike and different, clear to the reader?” Call on volunteers to respond. Listen for: “wider” and “deeper” and “faster.” Also listen for students to explain: “When the author says wider or deeper, it is comparing how part of the river is different from another part.”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	





Work Time (continued)	Meeting Students’ Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explain that these sentences <i>compare</i> the rivers beginning with what it looks like toward its end, and the author uses words with “er” at the end to signal this to the reader.</li><li>• Ask:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* “What other word endings do you know, like ‘er,’ that might show comparison?”</li></ul></li><li>• Give students 1 minute to call out answers. Listen for the suffix “est.” If needed, prompt students by giving them additional examples: “deep, deeper, and ... deepest,” “wide, wider, widest.”</li><li>• Tell students that some other words, such as “also,” “as,” and “like,” signal comparisons. Record these endings and words so that students can reference them.</li><li>• Ask students to reread the third paragraph down on page 2 of the text with their partner. Prompt them to circle other words that show comparison and monitor them as they work. Look for students who circled “strongest” and “deepest.” After students have had a few minutes to work, point out these words using the document camera. Ask:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* “How do these words signal that there will be a comparison in this paragraph?”</li><li>* “What is being compared in the sentences of this paragraph?”</li></ul></li><li>• Give students a moment to share with a partner, then cold call a student to respond. Listen for ideas like: “They compare the current in the shallow edge of the river and the deeper middle of the river.”</li><li>• Ask:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* “What do you think is the most important idea that the author wants you to know about rivers and streams from the comparison in this section?” Listen for ideas like: “The deeper part is moving faster.”</li></ul></li><li>• Explain that authors often use comparisons to help readers understand information about a topic. Here the author is comparing different parts of the river to help readers understand how the river changes from beginning to end.</li><li>• On the Determining the Main Idea and Key Details anchor chart, below “Notice how sentences are connected,” add “Comparisons of details or ideas” to both the Main Idea and Key Details sections (see the supporting materials).</li></ul>	



Closing and Assessment	Meeting Students’ Needs
<p><b>A. Debrief: It’s NOT All about the Main Idea (5 minutes)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* “In this text, you noticed a lot of pictures and personal stories about the author. Why do you think an author might include information that doesn’t directly support the main idea?”</li></ul></li><li>• Give students a moment to think and then to share with a partner.</li><li>• After a few minutes, call on a few volunteers to share. Listen for ideas like: “to make the text more interesting,” “to share his love of rivers,” and “to help the reader imagine the river more clearly.”</li><li>• Emphasize that writers write informational text to teach readers, but also to share things they love. Paying attention to the details and key ideas is important, but it’s also good to notice other things that may be important to the author.</li><li>• Preview the homework.</li></ul>	
Homework	Meeting Students’ Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take home “River to the Sea.” Reread the text and look at the key details that you highlighted and starred. Then read the first draft of your main idea statement. Decide whether you need to revise it. If you write a new one, put a number 2 next to it. Put a ✓ if you choose not to revise.</li><li>• Continue reading in your independent reading book for this unit at home.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If you have students who are likely not to bring their papers back to school, make a copy of them before sending them home.</li></ul>



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# Grade 3: Module 4: Unit 1: Lesson 8

## Supporting Materials



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Image of a Brook



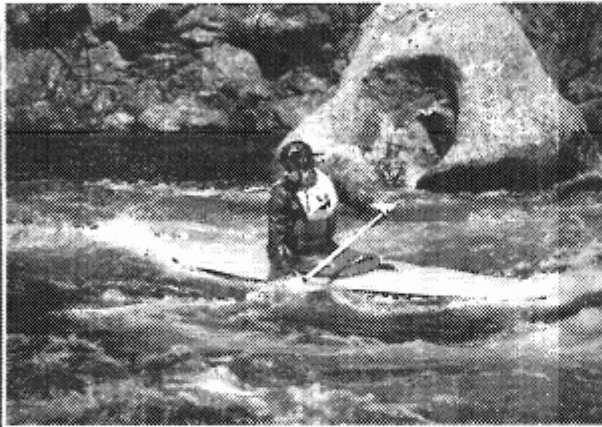
Addison, Martin, "Dolis Brook", 21 February, 2011. Online image. [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dollis\\_Brook\\_-\\_geograph.org.uk\\_-\\_870891.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dollis_Brook_-_geograph.org.uk_-_870891.jpg)





# River to the Sea

By Stephen R. Swinburne



A kayaker rides the current of the West River.

**W**hen you have a river for a neighbor, you can't help but get wet. I live beside the West River in Vermont. It's deep enough to swim in and as wide as a two-lane road. I've fished and skimmed stones on the West River. I've even fallen in.

But for all the time I've spent playing in the river, I didn't know where it began or where it ended. I decided to find out.

Rivers often start in the mountains with no more than a trickle. Rain, melting snow, and water from springs have nowhere to go but down. As trickles follow the easiest paths down, they combine to form brooks. Brooks join to become streams, and streams meet to become rivers. As

**Rivers are  
connected to  
faraway places.**

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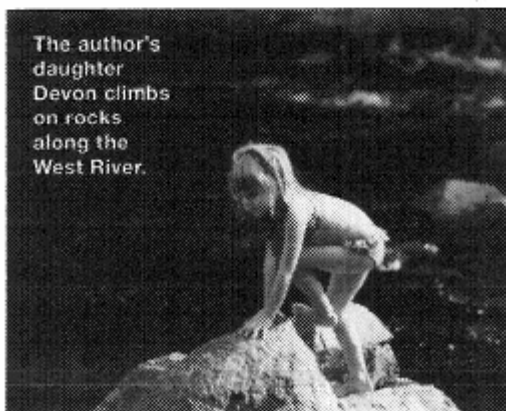
more and more water joins a river, it gets wider and deeper and faster.

That's what happens to the West River. I followed a map to learn this. I drove, then hiked, into the wooded hills about fifteen miles north of my house. I saw that the West River begins as a dribble, skinny as a pencil. By the time it reaches my town, it has become a river.

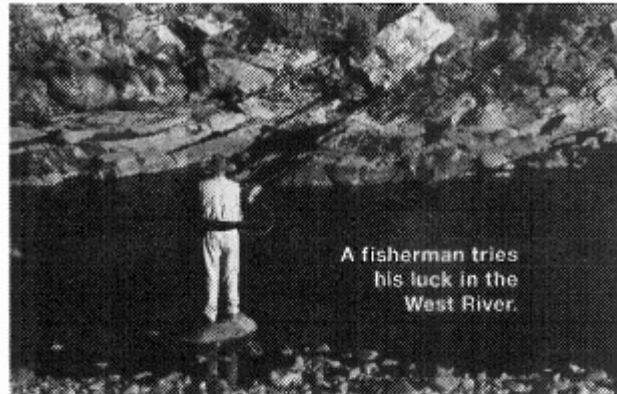
Rivers work hard. They're great diggers. The swift current of a river is a watery shovel digging up pebbles, silt, and sand. Rivers are also carriers. They carry lots of rocks and sand downstream.

In most large rivers, the current is strongest in the deepest part. I can get my feet wet and test this. When I step into ankle-deep water, I feel very little current. But as I step farther out where the water rises over my knees, the current tugs at my legs. I like to ride the river's current on my tube or rubber raft in summer.

Rivers are great places to see fish, insects, and other wildlife. Lots of animals and birds live near rivers because there's a good food supply,



The author's daughter Devon climbs on rocks along the West River.



A fisherman tries his luck in the West River.

plenty of drinking water, nesting places, and shelter. To see wildlife, I step quietly. I never know what might be around the next bend—a deer and fawn drinking, a family of ducks, a dragonfly skimming the water hunting mosquitoes. I once saw a bird called an osprey flying over the West River with a foot-long fish in its claws. Rivers are a source of life to many creatures.

Most rivers eventually empty into the sea. Once again, I got into my car with a map, this time to see where the West River goes. I followed it through the countryside of southern Vermont to find that it merges with the wide Connecticut River. The Connecticut River flows out of Vermont, south into Massachusetts, then into Connecticut. It finally joins Long Island Sound and the Atlantic Ocean.

The river outside my door is connected to faraway places. It's neat to know that if I launched a sturdy boat into the river by my house, someday it might reach the open sea. That's the best thing about a river. It's water on the move, and it knows just where to go.

HIGHLIGHTS FOR CHILDREN, MARCH 1966 9

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Determining the Main Idea and Key Details Task Card

**Learning target:** I can determine the main idea and key details of an informational text.

**Part 1:** Determining the Main Idea

1. Read the text.
2. In your own words, what is **main idea** of this text? On the **back** of your text, write a number 1, then write a **main idea** statement.

**Part 2:** Finding Key Details

1. Reread the text. As you read, highlight the key details that you think support the main idea.

**Part 3:** Revising the Main Idea Statement

1. If needed, revise your main idea statement. Write a number 2 next to it. Put a ✓ if you choose not to revise.



Determining the Main Idea and Key Details Task Card

For Teacher Reference

**Part 1: Determining the Main Idea**

1. Read the text.
2. In your own words, what is **main idea** of this text? On the **back** of your text, write a number 1, then write a **main idea** statement.

**(Answers will vary)**

**Rivers change and change the land as they move from the mountains to the sea.**

*Note: Student answers may not be this complete on the first draft. Look for something about rivers and streams changing the earth/land.*

**Part 2: Finding Key Details**

1. Reread the text. As you read, highlight the key details that you think support the main idea.

**(Answers will vary. In general, key details should not include the author's personal stories.)**

**Rivers often start in the mountains.**

**Water has nowhere to go but down.**

**Rivers follow the easiest path.**

**As rivers, brooks, and streams join, they change, often getting wider, deeper, and faster.**

**Swift currents dig up pebbles, silt, and sand.**

**Rivers carry lots of rocks and sand downstream.**

**The current is strongest in the deepest part.**

**Most rivers empty into the sea.**

**Part 3: Revising the Main Idea Statement**

1. If needed, revise your main idea statement. Write a number 2 next to it. Put a ✓ if you choose not to revise.





**Determining the Main Idea and Key Details anchor chart**  
For Teacher Reference; Adapt to Suit Based on Student Responses

*Note: If you see a COLON on the list, leave space for additional items (e.g., other text features) to be added in future lessons. Use the language appropriate to your classroom.*

**Strategies for Determining ...**

The Main Idea	Key Details
<p><b>(Answers will vary)</b></p> <p><b>Pay attention to text features: titles and subtitles</b></p> <p><b>Notice what the author writes about most</b></p> <p><b>Use the pictures</b></p> <p><b>Notice how sentences are connected: Sequence (order) of what happens Comparisons of details or ideas</b></p> <p><b>Look out for distractors in text and pictures</b></p>	<p><b>(Answers will vary)</b></p> <p><b>Pay attention to text features: bold text for important words</b></p> <p><b>Look for words and phrases that signal importance:</b> <b>All</b> <b>Over time</b></p> <p><b>Often</b> <b>Most</b></p> <p><b>Notice how sentences are connected: Sequence (order) of what happens Comparisons of details or ideas</b></p> <p><b>Watch out for things that distract from the main idea:</b> <b>Personal stories</b> <b>Pictures/photographs</b></p>