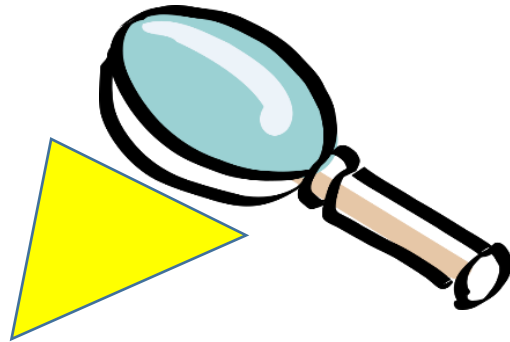


# L.E.N.S. FOCUS

L – Literacy  
E – Educators'  
N – Network of  
S - Saskatchewan



(formerly the Saskatchewan Reading Council)

## FEBRUARY, 2020

**This month's focus:**

### **Main Idea and Supporting Details (Determining Importance)**

One of my favourite go-to places for reading comprehension strategy ideas that are new, fresh and unique is the “Developing Readers” e-binder. It was published by the School District of Surrey and is chock full of practical teaching ideas broken into comprehension strategies and includes reproducible sheets for recording students’ responses.

A couple of activities I really like for introducing or reinforcing main ideas and supporting details are “Artifact Dig” and “It’s in the Bag.” Both of these have the students use real-life materials to make connections to a topic and to justify their connections to their group and to the class.

In “Artifact Dig,” students read an article or series of articles about a topic, then choose any random item and try to find a connection from it to their topic. The items DON’T have to have a direct connection! It always amazes me how students will find some kind of connection to what they have read. It’s not the connection itself that really matters, but the discussion and justification within their small group that is so valuable!

In “It’s in the Bag,” students are challenged to look at a group of items in order to find the theme or “main idea” of the items in the bag. Again, the labelling of the theme isn’t as important as the discussion leading up to the conclusion, as well as finding the item(s) that might be interesting but not important to the theme, and justifying that, as well.

I have used both of these activities with my grade fives and have found that they love the challenge, as well as the excitement of thinking outside the box. Why not try them or adapt them as you need to for your students?

## Artifact Dig

<p><b>Targeted Cognitive Processes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Setting a Purpose</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accessing Background Knowledge</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring Comprehension</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Determining What's Important</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Making Inferences</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Visualizing</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Synthesizing and Evaluating</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Making Connections</li> </ul>	<p><b>Use this Strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Before Reading</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> During Reading</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> After Reading</li> </ul> 
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*Artifact Dig* is a post-reading strategy that actively engages students in discussion and reflection about information that has been read. Students use artifacts to reflect on their reading material and to discuss reactions and connections between the new information they are learning and that which they already know.

### Steps

1. In preparation, before the class begins, select a number of artifacts that represent various aspects of the content in the reading material. Have enough artifacts so that one artifact can be selected by a group of 4-6 students. (Note: It is not necessary for the artifacts to be literally or directly connected to the content. In fact, the greater the discrepancy between content and artifact, the more thinking and fun there is to be had.)
2. During the lesson, organize students into small groups of 4 to 6. Each group sends a representative to "dig" through the collection of artifacts and to select one.
3. Groups summarize the reading material and make connections between their artifacts and the content of material they read.
4. Groups share their artifacts, summaries and connections with the class.

## *Artifact Dig*

Complete each section below by:

- summarizing what you read in point form
- making connections between your artifact and the reading material

Summary of key points...



Our artifact is like the material we read because...



## In the Bag


<p><b>Targeted Cognitive Processes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Setting a Purpose</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Accessing Background Knowledge</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring Comprehension</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Determining What's Important</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Making Inferences</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Visualizing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Synthesizing and Evaluating</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Making Connections</li> </ul>	<p><b>Use this Strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Before Reading</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> During Reading</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> After Reading</li> </ul> 
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Determining what's important in nonfiction is central to understanding text, yet deciding what ideas are essential can be challenging when students are presented with reading material that is full of information, ideas and concepts. *In the Bag* is a pre-reading strategy aimed at helping students differentiate between what's important and what's not important by sorting and classifying physical items prior to reading. Using thematically linked objects gathered by the teacher, students are encouraged to focus on the purpose of their task and to determine the importance of the information based on this purpose.

### Steps

1. Prior to meeting with the class, prepare several "theme bags" in clear plastic baggies. The bags should be filled with items that have a consistent theme or "big idea" (e.g., first aid kit, healthy food, school supplies, etc.). Although the items in the bag should be thematically linked, include a few "red herrings"; these may be somewhat related or completely unrelated.
2. Explain to students that in order to make sense of dense text, readers must sort and classify the material they read. Rather than immediately beginning with text, however, they are going to "practice" sorting and organizing the contents of a special bag you prepared.
3. Distribute theme bags to pairs or small groups of students. Before directing students to complete the following task, "set a purpose" that is directly connected to the contents of the bag. For example, if the bag contains items commonly found in a first aid kit, the purpose could be to sort and categorize items found in a first aid kit prepared for a day-hike.
4. Students explore the contents of the bag and sort the items into two categories:
  - ✓ Important – Related to the purpose of the task
  - ✓ Interesting – But not related to the purpose of the task
5. Students re-examine the items they deemed important. Using these items, students determine categories (big ideas – for example, "things that stop bleeding") for the items.
6. Using a graphic organizer (e.g., *Shower of Stars* or *Two Column Notes*), students organize and record their thinking (identify big ideas and itemize supporting details).
7. When students are ready to differentiate what's important and what's not important with text, refer to the activity on the following page ("*Interesting or Important*") for an example of how to approach the next instructional steps.

## In the Bag - Advanced!

<p><b>Targeted Cognitive Processes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Setting a Purpose</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Accessing Background Knowledge</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring Comprehension</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Determining What's Important</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Making Inferences</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Visualizing</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Synthesizing and Evaluating</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Making Connections</li> </ul>	<p><b>Use this Strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Before Reading</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> During Reading</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> After Reading</li> </ul> 
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Determining what's important in nonfiction is central to comprehension. In order to help students retain important information from their reading, we often ask them to take notes. For many students, it is a mystery *how* to identify a main idea from amongst a sea of words... everything looks important! *In the Bag - Advanced!* requires students to work through a process with physical items (prior to reading) that parallels one way to approach sorting and synthesizing dense informational text. After the activity, students have a clear idea of one way to approach note-taking with text.

### Steps

1. Prior to meeting with the class, prepare several "theme bags" in clear plastic baggies. The bags should be filled with items that have a consistent theme or "big idea" (e.g., first aid kit, healthy food, school supplies, etc.) Although the items in the bag should be thematically linked, include a few "red herrings"; these may be somewhat related or completely unrelated. If you have already worked with "*In the Bag*" (see the previous strategy) you will need to prepare a new set of bags on a completely different theme.
2. Explain to students they are going to engage in a process of physically sorting materials. This activity parallels the kinds of thinking and decisions they can transfer to a reading and note-taking task.
3. Distribute theme bags to pairs or small groups of students. Set a purpose for the task: To identify a theme (or a "big idea") for the contents in the bag and sort the items based on that theme.
4. Students are to complete the task in a specific order:
  - First:** Explore the contents of the bag by removing all items.  
Think about the connections amongst the various items and how they are similar and different.
  - Second:** Ask yourself, "What does not seem to fit with the majority of items?" In a concise statement, synthesize the remaining items into a main theme. (e.g., *These are items found in a candy store.*)