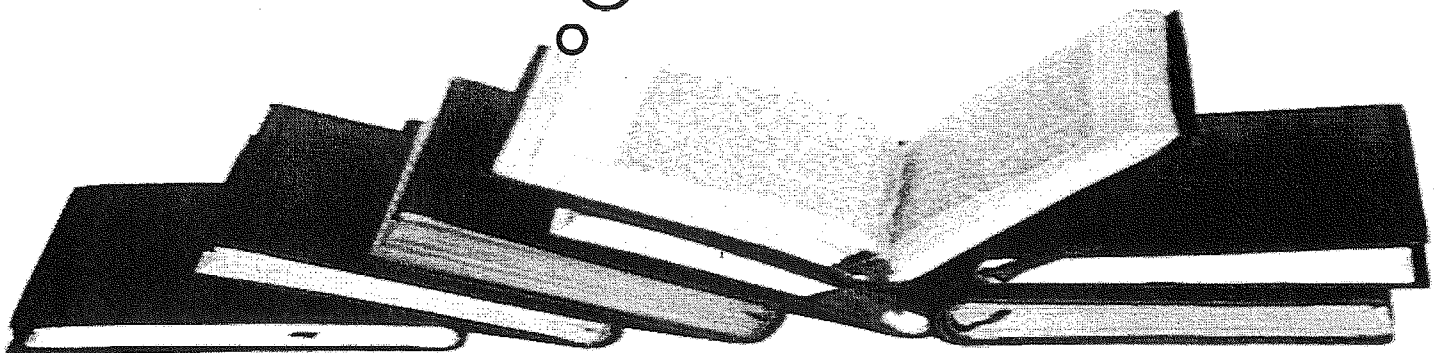
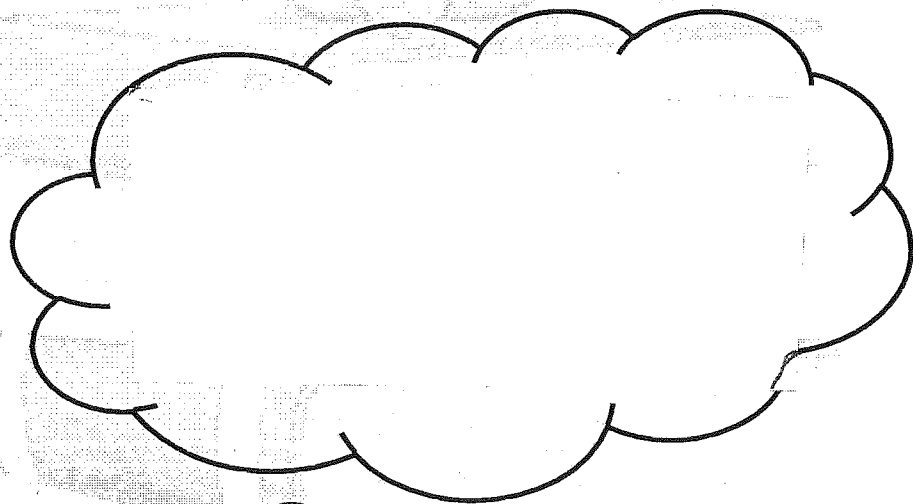


# SUMMARIZING



# 5.3 Summarizing What's Most Essential

*Who is this for?*

LEVELS

E-K

GENRE / TEXT TYPE

fiction

SKILL

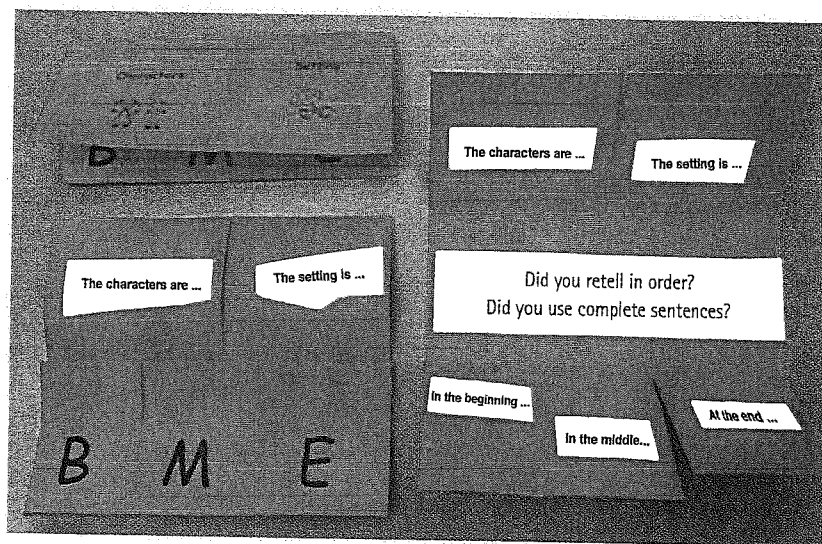
summarizing

**Strategy** When summarizing, remember to tell what's important. Tell it in the order it happened. Tell it in a way that makes sense. Try not to tell too much.

**Lesson Language** *A summary is a short recounting of what you just read. When you get ready to summarize, you have to think about what parts of the story you'll tell. Your summary should include enough information to make sense to someone who hasn't read the story before. That means you need to make it clear in your summary how one event led to another. You'll first think about the most important things that happened in the story—probably connecting to the problem in the story, if there is one, or what the character wants the most. Then, you'll tell the most important events in the middle of the story that connect back to the want or the problem. It's important to tell those middle events in order. Then, think about how the whole story ends up, and tell the ending. For each part you tell, try to say it in one short, simple sentence.*

### Prompts

- Say the beginning in a shorter way.
- Just tell me the one most important thing that happened in the beginning.
- How does that event connect to the one you just told me?
- Can you say that in a shorter way?
- You told me five things that happened in the middle. Which two or three were most important?
- Turn to the end. What's the most important thing that happened at the end?



**Hat Tip:** *Reading with Meaning: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades*, second edition (Miller 2012)

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## 5.10 Let the Blurb Help You

**Strategy** Read the back cover to orient yourself to the book. Ask yourself, “What’s the structure of this text? What will be the most important issues this story deals with? What problems will the main character face?”

**Teaching Tip** You can modify this lesson to support students with their nonfiction reading by pointing out that the back cover of a nonfiction book may clue the reader in to the sorts of information that will be covered in the book, as well as any perspective the author may have.

### Lesson Language

#### Text Structure

Figure out what kind of book you’re reading. If it says “five wonderful stories . . .,” then you know you’re going to read a bunch of different stories in one book. If it’s a summary of one story, then you know the whole book will be one story.

#### Main Problem

Look for key phrases like “Find out what happens when (character) has to deal with . . .” or “(Character) has a lot to be unhappy about . . .” that will highlight the problem(s).

#### Theme

Sometimes the book’s blurb (or the review quotes) will come right out and tell you what some of the important ideas in the book might be: “A heartwarming story about (theme) and (theme).”

### Prompts

- Read the blurb.
- What information in the blurb will help?
- What will the structure of the book be, based on what you read?
- Do you have any ideas about the main problem the character will face?
- Let’s talk about what a theme in this book might be, based on the blurb.
- You got a lot of information from this back cover blurb!

*Who is this for?*

LEVELS

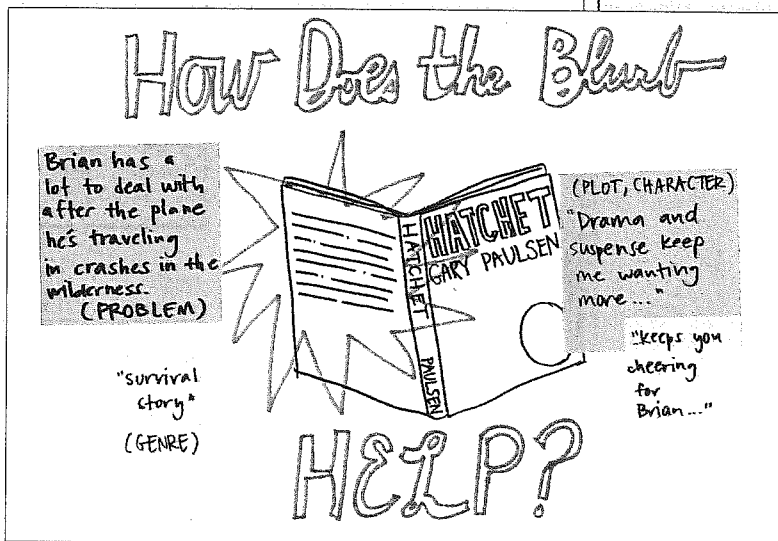
J and above

GENRE / TEXT TYPE

fiction

SKILL

determining importance



Fiction: Plot and Setting

143

# 5.11 Retell What's Most Important by Making Connections to the Problem

Who is this for?

LEVELS  
K and above

GENRE / TEXT TYPE  
fiction

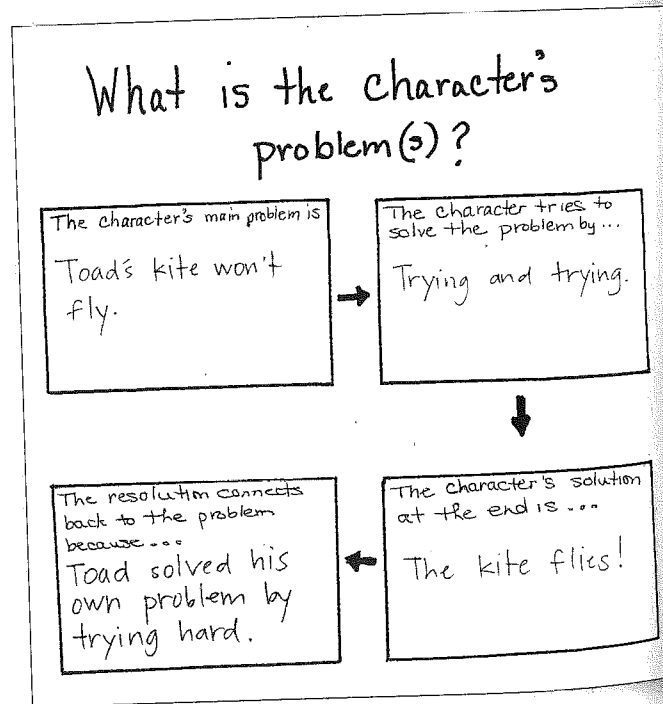
SKILLS  
summarizing,  
retelling, determining  
importance

**Strategy** Find the page or pages with the problem. Explain the character's main problem. Find the page or pages where the character tries to solve the problem. Retell those pages. Find the (re)resolution of the problem at the end. Explain how the (re)resolution connects back to the problem.

**Teaching Tip** Up to about level M/N, characters tend to have one main problem and the problem gets solved (i.e., in *Days with Frog and Toad* [Lobel 1979], an example of a level K text, Toad has a kite that won't fly, and after he tries to get it to fly, it flies at the end of the story—problem solved!). At and after levels M/N the characters often have multiple problems, both internal and external, and it's more likely that the problem is resolved instead of solved (i.e., in *Amber Brown Is Not a Crayon* [Danziger 1995], Amber is dealing with her best friend moving away, and in the end he does move, but she comes to accept it—this is a resolution). Equipped with this knowledge of text complexity, revise the language in this teaching point to be appropriate for the reader you're working with, and choose the prompts from the list below that also align to the text's complexity.

### Prompts

- What's the main problem?
- Find the main problem. Is there another problem?
- Yes! That's got to be the problem. There was a whole chapter about it, and the character has a strong emotion.
- What does the character do in this chapter that connects to the problem?
- Explain how the story ends up. How does the end connect to the problem?
- Does that seem like an internal (inside) or external (outside) problem?
- Is the problem solved or resolved?



# Angled Summaries for Highlighting Deeper Ideas in Plot

**Strategy** To summarize only the most important information, it's helpful to stop and say, "What was this story really about?" Whatever your answer to that question is can be your leading statement, a claim. Then, you can tell just the events that best support that deeper idea.

**Teaching Tip** To write this type of summary, students will need to be able to state a message, lesson, or theme. You can see Chapter 7 for ideas on how to help students with this at various levels of text difficulty.

## Prompts

- Start with what the story is *really about*.
- What's the big idea you have from the whole story?
- Say it like a thesis.
- What parts of the story best support that idea? Tell them in order.
- Did anything else happen that you think is important?
- That happened, but does that support your idea?
- Only tell the parts that go with your idea.

*Who is this for?*

LEVELS

L and above

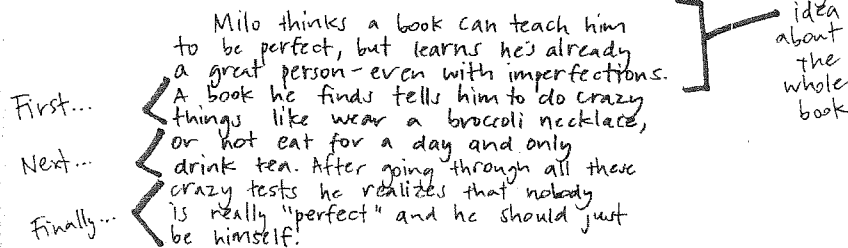
GENRE / TEXT TYPE

fiction

SKILLS

summarizing,  
determining  
importance, inferring

## ANGLED SUMMARIES

First... 
 Milo thinks a book can teach him to be perfect, but learns he's already a great person—even with imperfections. A book he finds tells him to do crazy things like wear a broccoli necklace, or not eat for a day and only drink tea. After going through all these crazy tests he realizes that nobody is really "perfect" and he should just be himself.

**TIP:** Retell just those details that match the big idea (first sentence).



**Hat Tip:** A Curricular Plan for the Reading Workshop, Grade 4 (Calkins and colleagues 2011c)

# 5.13 Summarize Based on What a Character Wants

*Who is this for?*

LEVELS  
L and above

GENRE / TEXT TYPE  
fiction

SKILLS  
summarizing,  
determining  
importance

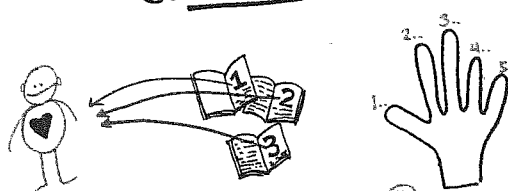
**Strategy** Think about what the character really wants. Then, think about the one, most important event that happened in each chapter that connects back to what the character wants. Summarize by saying the events in the order they happened.

**Lesson Language** Sometimes in chapter books, it's hard to summarize just the most important events—there are so many! If you think about what the character wants as the driver of the plot, it can help you to summarize with more focus. For example, in *Pinky and Rex and the Perfect Pumpkin* (Howe 1998), I know after the first chapter that what Rex really wants is to be included with Pinky's grandparents and cousins. In Chapter 2, "The Perfect Day," I could think, "What is the one event that connects to that?" I would say that during the whole car ride, while the grandparents kept saying what a perfect day it was, Rex was totally silent and feeling upset because Pinky was only talking to his cousins and ignoring her. In Chapter 3, "Pumpkin Picking," I might say that every time Rex picked a pumpkin, one of her cousins would say it was too small or skinny or had a bad spot and one time even said it was the "stupidest-looking pumpkin I ever saw" (14). So, in each chapter, I think, of all the events that happen, which is the one that connects back to what the character wants? In this way, I can focus my summary.

### Prompts

- What is the main event of this chapter?
- Can you retell from the beginning?
- What does this character want?
- Tell me one from this chapter.
- Turn back to the beginning—retell.
- Name the main event.
- You are telling me everything; what is most important?
- You are telling me about one chapter—connect all the chapters.
- Yes, that's what the character wants—is it showing up across the book?
- That's the main event that connects with that chapter.
- I like how you read the chapter titles and thought about what was important.

## SUMMARIZE...



① What does the character want?

② Think of one event per chapter that connects back to the want.

③ Summarize by saying events in order.



**Hat Tip:** Independent Reading Assessment: Fiction series (Serravallo 2012).

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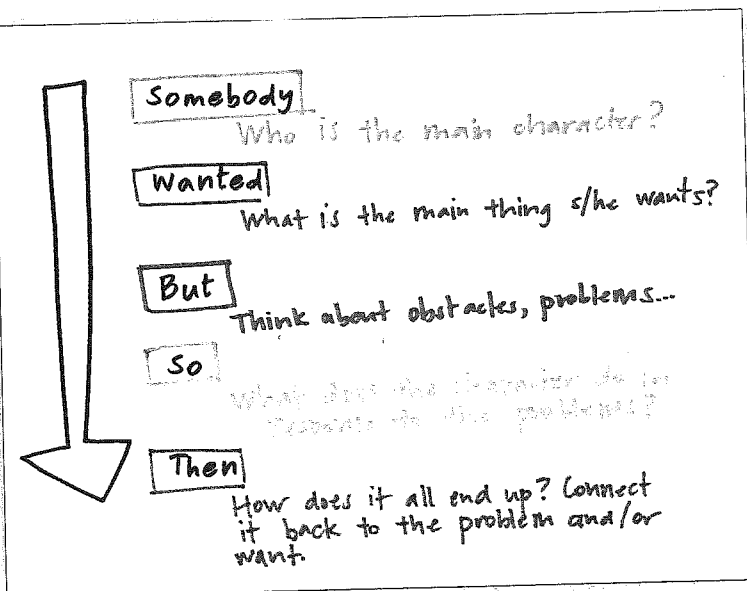
# 5.10 Summarizing with "Somebody . . . Wanted . . . But . . . So . . ."

**Strategy** Think first, "Who is the main character?" Then, "What does the main character want?" Then, "What gets in his or her way?" And finally, "How does it end up?" Be sure the ending connects back in some way to the problem.

**Lesson Language** *We all read the story Henry's Freedom Box by Ellin Levine (2007). Watch me as I summarize this story by thinking, "Somebody wanted . . . but . . . so . . ." Somebody . . . the main character is Henry Brown, a slave. What did he want? He wanted his freedom. But? What was the problem? Well, what stood in his way is that he was a slave in the south. It was very hard to escape, and getting captured would be a dangerous or even fatal mistake. So? How does it end up? Well, I need to make sure I connect back to what he wanted (freedom) and the obstacle (dangers with running away). So, how it ended up is that he was able to mail himself up north and enjoys his first birthday as a free man.*

## Prompts

- Who is the character?
- What does the character want?
- What's an obstacle to getting it?
- Name the character.
- Talk about how it ends.
- Connect the ending to what the character wants.
- The part you just told me about was in Chapter 4 of 8, so that can't be the ending; reread the last chapter.
- That sounds like it helped overcome the obstacle.
- That ending clearly connects to what the character wants.



*Who is this for?*

LEVELS

**N and above**

GENRE / TEXT TYPE

**fiction**

SKILL

**summarizing**



**Hat Tip:** *When Kids Can't Read—What Teachers Can Do: A Guide for Teachers 6–12 (Beers 2002)*

# 8.9 Most Important . . . to Whom?

8.10

*Who is this for?*

LEVELS  
M and above

GENRE / TEXT TYPE  
expository or narrative  
nonfiction

SKILLS  
determining  
importance,  
summarizing

**Strategy** What the reader thinks is the most important idea and what the author thinks is the most important idea may not always be in agreement. First, write down what you think is most important. Then, write down what you think the author thinks is the most important idea. Look back to the text to see which of those is supported by more of the details from the text.

**Prompts**

- What do you think is the main idea? What facts support that?
- Does the author state (in a heading, topic sentence, introduction) the main idea? List the facts that support it.
- What details fit with that idea?
- Let's check to see if that's what it's *mostly* about. Do *most* of the details support it?
- What's different about your idea and what you think the author's idea might be? How can you check to see which one is what the section or page or book is mostly about?

I think the most important idea is water; is one of the most precious resources on Earth. the author thinks we need to use it wisely.

**Details**

1. Two thirds of our bodies are made up of water.
2. useses for cooking, cleaning, gardening, Making electricity, moving objects, brushing out teeth, and washing out bodies.
3. All the way to dinosaurs they all needed water.
4. water is decreasing.



**Hat Tip:** *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension for Understanding and Engagement*, second edition (Harvey and Goudvis 2007)

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# 8.16 What? and So What?

**Strategy** A main idea is more than a topic. To state the main idea, it's important to know what the text is about (the topic) and then to be able to say so what about it. The "so what" can be the angle, idea, or perspective that the author brings to the topic.

**Lesson Language** *The main idea of a text is more than just what the text is about (the topic). You can say this book is about whales. Or this one is about animals adapting. Or that this one is about celebrations in Central America. You would probably be able to say that without even reading the book! The title gives you that. Figuring out the main idea often requires a little thinking and a little work. The work you do as a reader to figure out the main idea is to collect all the information, notice what the author writes about and how he or she writes about it. And then, to step back from the text to ask yourself, "So what?" Your answer to "so what" might be about why the author wrote it. Or what unique perspective the author is bringing to the topic. Or, about how of all the books out there in the world on this topic, what makes this one unique? For example, in the book Exploding Ants: Amazing Facts about How Animals Adapt (Settel 1999), each section tells about a different animal and something interesting about how it's adapted. So, I could say the topic is "animal adaptation." But so what? So what about that topic? What's the author's angle? What does the author think about animal adaptation? Well, the author seems to be sharing not just any kind of adaptation, but gross ones. Ones that have to do with things like bloodsucking or swollen body parts or making homes in disgusting places such as dung. The author is not including, for example, facts about how a polar bear is white to blend in with the snow—something with no gross-out value. Still, I think the author is saying that it's kind of amazing and cool, even though it's also gross. So if I put all that together I'd say, "Although some animal behaviors are gross to humans, they are critical to their life on earth."*

## Prompts

- What's the topic of the book?  
Check the title.
- What's this section mostly about?
- That's the topic.  
What's the main idea?
- What's the author's angle or slant?
- What do you think the author is trying to say about that topic?

A Main Idea is MORE than a Topic!



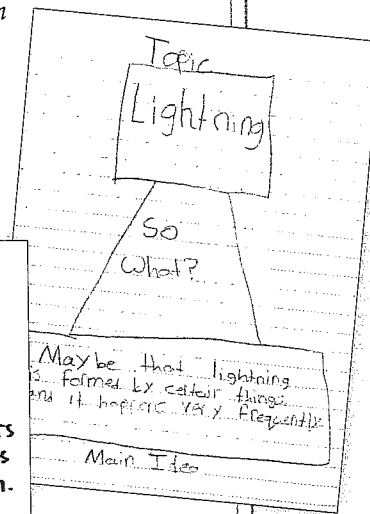
**What:** Triceratops

**So what?:** Even though T. is extinct, scientists can still study fossils to learn about them.



**What:** Arctic Fox

**So what?:** A.F. have many ways to survive in the cold, harsh weather of the Arctic.



*Who is this for?*

LEVELS

**M and above**

GENRE / TEXT TYPE

**nonfiction**

SKILLS

**determining importance, synthesizing**



**Hat Tip:** Independent Reading Assessment: Nonfiction series (Serravallo 2013a)

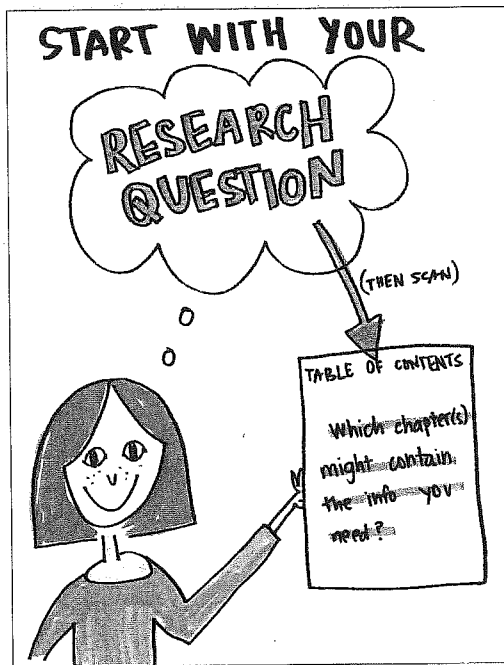
# 10.14 Hop In and Out Using the Table of Contents

**Strategy** Have your research question in mind. Scan through the table of contents thinking, “Which chapter(s) might contain the information I’m looking for?” Keep in mind that the titles of the chapters might be in slightly different words than the name of the topic you have in mind.

**Teaching Tip** You could teach a very similar lesson using the index. Teach children to have their topic in mind, and look for related key words in an index to help them find what they’re looking for. I want to note here, though, that my belief about nonfiction reading is that most of the reading students do should be of whole, continuous texts. I would use a strategy like this one only when I’m involved in a research project, or I’m teaching children how to seek out specific sorts of information for other reasons, such as to answer a question or confirm a piece of information they are reading in their whole book nonfiction reading.

### Prompts

- What are you hoping to learn?
- Look at the table of contents with your question in mind.
- What made you pick that chapter?
- You might need to think of other words that mean something similar to the topic you have in mind to find the right chapter.
- Scan the table of contents.
- Which chapter will you read first?



*Who is this for?*

LEVELS

**J and above**

GENRE / TEXT TYPE

**nonfiction**

SKILL

**determining importance**



**Hat Tip:** Independent Reading Assessment: Nonfiction series (Serravallo 2013a)