

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 3 page 77

How can you develop skills for generalizing and determining the central ideas of a text?

Generalizing is drawing broad conclusions based on several pieces of evidence. The skill of generalizing will help you as determine the central ideas of a text. As you read, you should look for important ideas in a text. Based upon these important ideas, you should make a generalization in order to find the central idea.

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 3 page 77

To strengthen your skill at generalizing to determine central ideas, use the following three steps.

Step 1: Find the central idea in a text.

Step 2: Analyze how a central idea is developed by supporting ideas.

Step 3: Provide an objective summary of the text.

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 3 page 77

Step 1: Find the central idea in a text.

If an idea is central to a text, it is often mentioned multiple times. It might be:

- stated initially in one of the first few paragraphs
- expressed in one or more places in the body of the text
- restated in the final paragraph

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 3 page 77

Compare the following three passages from “Miss Cynthie,” by Rudolph Fisher (pages 87–99).

Passage 1

Miss Cynthie hardly noted that she had been left, so absorbed was she in the spectacle. To her, the theatre had always been the antithesis of the church. As the one was the refuge of righteousness, so the other was the stronghold of transgression.

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 3 page 77

Passage 2

Miss Cynthie turned dismayed eyes upon the audience, to discover that mob of sinners devouring it all with fond satisfaction.

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 3 page 77

Passage 3

She sat with stricken eyes watching this boy whom she'd raised from a babe, taught right from wrong, brought up in the church, and endowed with her prayers, this child whom she had dreamed of seeing a preacher, a regular doctor, a tooth-doctor, a foot-doctor, at the very least an undertaker—sat watching him disport himself for the benefit of a sinsick, flesh-hungry mob of lost souls, not one of whom knew or cared to know the loving kindness of God; sat watching a David she'd never foreseen, turned tool of the devil, disciple of lust, unholy prince among sinners.

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 3 page 77

Directions: Describe the main idea of each passage.

- In the first, Miss Cynthie sees the church and the theater as opposites.
- In the second, Miss Cynthie is dismayed to realize that the crowd likes the entertainment that she is watching.
- In the third, Miss Cynthie is disappointed to feel that David has become a tool of the devil.

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 3 page 77

Directions: What common idea can be generalized from these three examples?

- In the first, Miss Cynthie sees the church and the theater as opposites.
- In the second, Miss Cynthie is dismayed to realize that the crowd likes the entertainment that she is watching.
- In the third, Miss Cynthie is disappointed to feel that David has become a tool of the devil.

In all three, Miss Cynthie is critical of the actions she is watching on the stage. This is the central idea of the selection.

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 3 page 77

Step 2: Analyze how a central idea is developed by supporting ideas.

If the central idea is that the character is critical of the actions she sees on the stage, identify how she develops and refines this idea in each of the three passages. Cite specific details in your answers.

- In the first passage, Miss Cynthie sees the church and the theater as opposites.

Passage 1: This passage focuses on the past. It provides the context for understanding Miss Cythie's attitudes. She "had always" compared the church and the theater. Specifically, she considered the church the "refuge of righteousness" and the theater the "stronghold of transgression."

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 3 page 77

- In the second, Miss Cynthie is dismayed to realize that the crowd likes the entertainment that she is watching.

Passage 2: This passage focuses on the present. It describes Miss Cynthie's judgment of the crowd's reaction to the performance, not the performance itself. Because the crowd enjoys it, she considers it to be a “mob of sinners.”

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 3 page 77

- In the third, Miss Cynthie is disappointed to feel that David has become a tool of the devil.

Passage 3: Miss Cynthie feels a sharp contrast between how she thinks she raised David and what she sees him doing on stage. She “sat watching a David she’d never foreseen.”

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 3 page 77

Step 3: Provide an objective summary of the text.

The summary of the text should include the central idea, as well as the most relevant support for it.

When 70-year-old Miss Cynthie goes to New York to visit her grandchild, David, she is appalled to discover that he is a popular stage entertainer. She has always considered the theater the “stronghold of transgression.” She considers the audience that is enjoying the show a “mob of sinners.” She thinks she has raised a moral grandson, but this was “a David she’d never foreseen.” However, as David had hoped, her attitude changes once she sees him perform.