

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 2 page 39

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 2 page 39

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 2 page 39

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 2 page 39

Compare the following three passages from “Contents of the Dead Man’s Pockets,” by Jack Finney (pages 41–56).

Passage 1

He [Tom] walked to the front-door closet to help her on with her coat. He kissed her then, for an instant, holding her close, smelling her perfume she had used, he was tempted to go with her; it was not actually true that he had to work tonight, though he very much wanted to. This was his own project, unannounced as yet in his office, and it could be postponed.

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 2 page 39

Passage 2

All [the notes on the paper] were needed to support and lend authority to his idea for a new grocery-store display method; without them his idea was a mere opinion. And there they all lay, in his own improvised shorthand—countless hours of work—out there on the ledge. . . . They were the beginning of the long, long climb to where he was determined to be—at the very top. And he knew he was going out there in the darkness, after the yellow sheet fifteen feet beyond his reach.

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 2 page 39

Passage 3

No one would be able to identify his body . . . *Contents of a dead man's pockets*, he thought, *one sheet of paper bearing penciled notations—incomprehensible*. . . . He thought of all the evenings he had spend away from [his wife], working and he regretted them. He thought wonderingly of his fierce ambition and of the direction his life had taken; he thought of the hours he'd spent by himself, filling the yellow sheet that had brought him out here. *Contents of a dead man's pockets* he thought with sudden fierce anger, *a wasted life*.

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 2 page 39

Directions: Describe the main idea of each passage.

- In the first, Tom decides not to go out with his wife so that he can stay home and work on a special project for his job.
- In the second, Tom sees his notes which have blown out on the ledge outside his apartment and decides to go after them.
- In the third, Tom, faced with the possibility of falling to his death, realizes that he has spent his time on unimportant things.

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 2 page 39

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

- In the first, Tom decides not to go out with his wife so that he can stay home and work on a special project for his job.
- In the second, Tom sees his notes which have blown out on the ledge outside his apartment and decides to go after them.
- In the third, Tom, faced with the possibility of falling to his death, realizes that he has spent his time on unimportant things.

In all three, the common idea is that Tom's work has taken over his life, crowding out his relationship with his wife.

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 2 page 39

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

If the central idea is that the character realizes that his work is controlling his life, identify how this idea is developed and refined in each of the three passages. Cite specific details in your answers.

- In the first, Tom decides not to go out with his wife so that he can stay home and work on a special project for work.

Passage 1: This passage focuses on the past. It provides the context for understanding Tom's choices. He has spent hours researching for this project. He is ambitious and wants to be successful at work.

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 2 page 39

- In the second, Tom sees his notes which have blown out on the ledge outside his apartment and decides to go after them.

Passage 2: This passage shows the length to which Tom will go to be successful, not only will he neglect his wife, but he will risk his own life.

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 2 page 39

- In the third, Tom, faced with the possibility of falling to his death, realizes that he has spent his time on unimportant things.

Passage 3: This is the turning point in the story. Tom visualizes himself dying by falling off the ledge. The only thing found in his pocket would be the paper with his research notes. This paper is a symbol of his wasted life. He has sacrificed relationships to gain success.

Generalizing to Determine the Central Idea

Cluster 2 page 39

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.

Possible summary: Tom is a man who is driven to succeed. His ambition causes him to neglect his wife by spending weekends working on a special project for his job. When the notes for his project blow out the window, Tom climbs out on the ledge to retrieve them. The window blows shut, and Tom is stuck on the ledge. Clinging for his life, Tom has a vision of his lifeless body on the pavement below, with only the notes in his pocket. This causes him to rethink what is really important in life.