

Finding Topics and Main Ideas



Tools for
reading
nonfiction

What is a topic?

A topic is the word or phrase that everything in a text refers back to



What is a topic?

Can you find
the topic of
the pictures?



Streams

What is a topic?



Can you find
the topic of
the pictures?

Fish

Looking for a topic in text

Water is an amazing resource. Everyone in the world depends upon it. Every creature needs water to survive. Without water, we would not last long. Water makes our world beautiful.

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The topic is water

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Look for repeated words

In the last paragraph, the word water was repeated again and again.



Look for repeated words

Looking for repeated words and phrases is a good way to find topics.



Can you find the topic?

Colonial Williamsburg is a great place to visit. In Williamsburg, you can see how people lived in colonial times. There are guides in costumes who can show you to taverns, shops, and houses. You can even sample some colonial food at the restored taverns! One visit to Williamsburg will make you feel as if you have been transported to the 1700s.

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The topic was Williamsburg

We could tell
this because
the word
Williamsburg
was repeated
several times



But some paragraphs are tricky

Sometimes,
authors use
different
words for the
same thing





vegetables

plants

crops

greens

Can you find the multiple referents?

Colonial Williamsburg is a great place to visit. In this Virginia town, you can see how people lived in colonial times. There are guides in costumes who can show you to taverns, shops, and houses. You can even sample some colonial food at the restored taverns! One visit to this place will make you feel as if you have been transported to the 1700s.

Can you find the multiple referents?

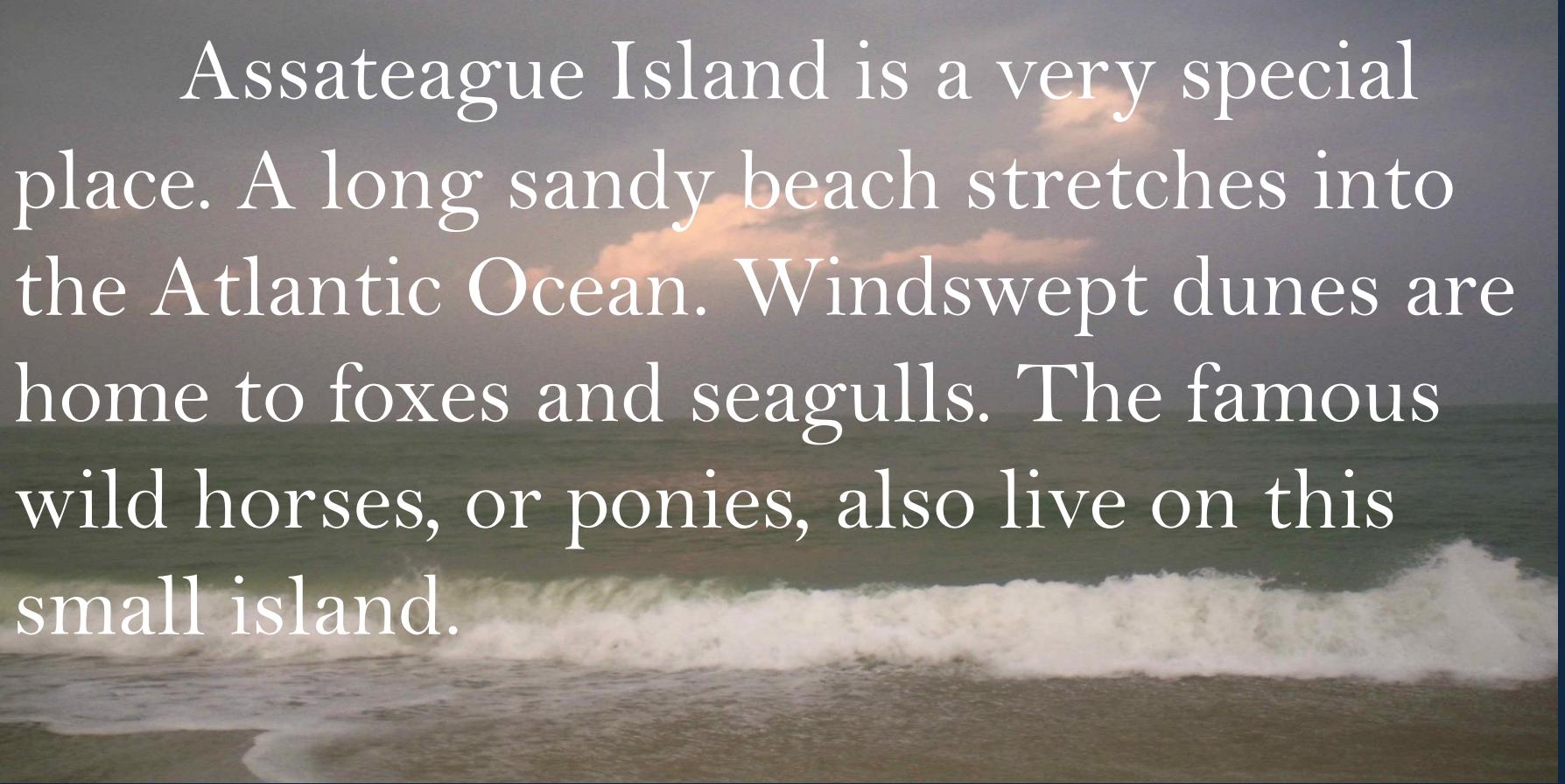
Colonial Williamsburg is a great place to visit. In this Virginia town, you can see how people lived in colonial times. There are guides in costumes who can show you to taverns, shops, and houses. You can even sample some colonial food at the restored taverns! One visit to this place will make you feel as if you have been transported to the 1700s.

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The topic is still Williamsburg, even though the word is only stated once.

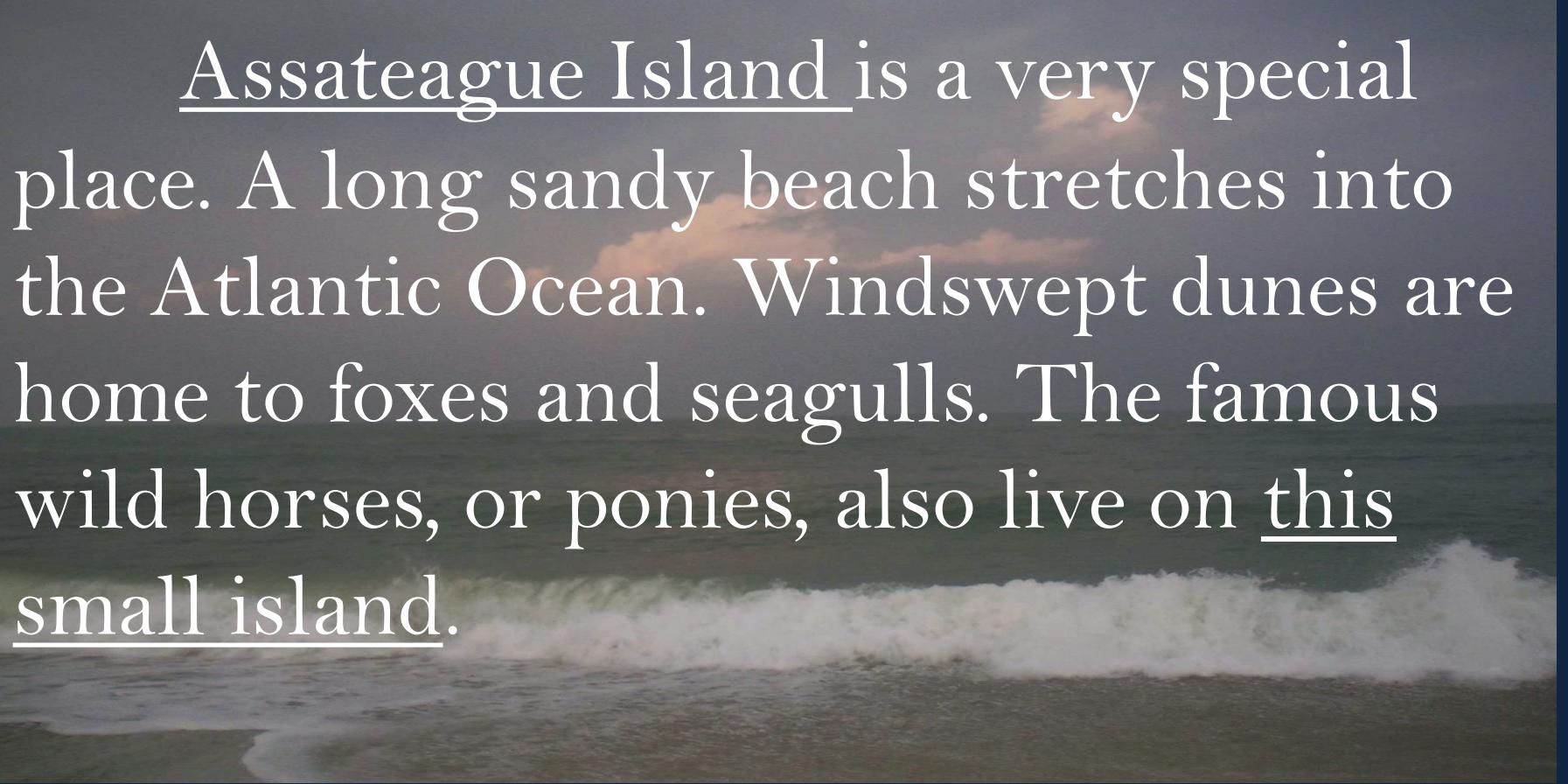
What is the topic of this paragraph?



Assateague Island is a very special place. A long sandy beach stretches into the Atlantic Ocean. Windswept dunes are home to foxes and seagulls. The famous wild horses, or ponies, also live on this small island.

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Finding Main Ideas

Once we have found the topic of the paragraph, we can find the main idea.



Topic + Main Point about the Topic = MAIN IDEA

Can you find the main idea?

Water is an amazing resource. Everyone in the world depends upon it. Every creature needs water to survive. Without water, we would not last long. Water makes our world beautiful.

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Topic: Water

Main point about the topic:

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W Topic: Water

Main point about the topic: Water is an amazing resource

Finding Main Ideas

Notice that topics are expressed as words or phrases, but main ideas are expressed in sentences



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Can you find the main idea?

Colonial Williamsburg is a great place to visit. In Williamsburg, you can see how people lived in colonial times. There are guides in costumes who can show you to taverns, shops, and houses. You can even sample some colonial food at the restored taverns! One visit to Williamsburg will make you feel as if you have been transported to the 1700s.

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Did you find the main idea?

Colonial Williamsburg is a great place to visit. In Williamsburg, you can see how people lived in colonial times. There are guides in costumes who can show you to taverns, shops, and houses. You can even sample some colonial food at the restored taverns! One visit to Williamsburg will make you feel as if you have been transported to the 1700s.

Topic:
Williamsburg

Main idea:
Williamsburg is
a great place to
visit

Where is the main idea?

In many paragraphs, the first sentence states the main idea.



When the author states the main idea, it is called an *explicit* main idea.

Where is the main idea?

But the main
idea is not
always in the
first
sentence.



Look for the explicit main idea

Croak, croak, kerplop! What's that at the water's edge? It might be a green frog, a creature that's well-suited for life at the pond's edge. Green frogs like to live where the land meets the water. This keeps them safe from predators that live on the land. When a predator like a snake comes near, the green frog can quickly leap into the water and get away. Green frogs can eat animals from both places, including crayfish, spiders, fish, and even birds.

Look for the explicit main idea

The first sentence is
not the main idea.

Croak, croak, kerplop! What's that at the water's edge? It might be a green frog, a creature that's well-suited for life at the pond's edge. Green frogs like to live where the land meets the water. This keeps them safe from predators that live on the land. When a predator like a snake comes near, the green frog can quickly leap into the water and get away. Green frogs can eat animals from both places, including crayfish, spiders, fish, and even birds.

Look for the explicit main idea

Let's look for
the topic.

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What about the second sentence?

Main ideas are not
usually expressed as
questions

Croak, croak, kerplunk! What's that at the water's edge? It might be a green frog, a creature that's well-suited for life at the pond's edge. Green frogs like to live where the land meets the water. This keeps them safe from predators that live on the land. When a predator like a snake comes near, the green frog can quickly leap into the water and get away. Green frogs can eat animals from both places, including crayfish, spiders, fish, and even birds.

What about the third sentence?

This sentence includes the topic

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It also makes a main point about the topic

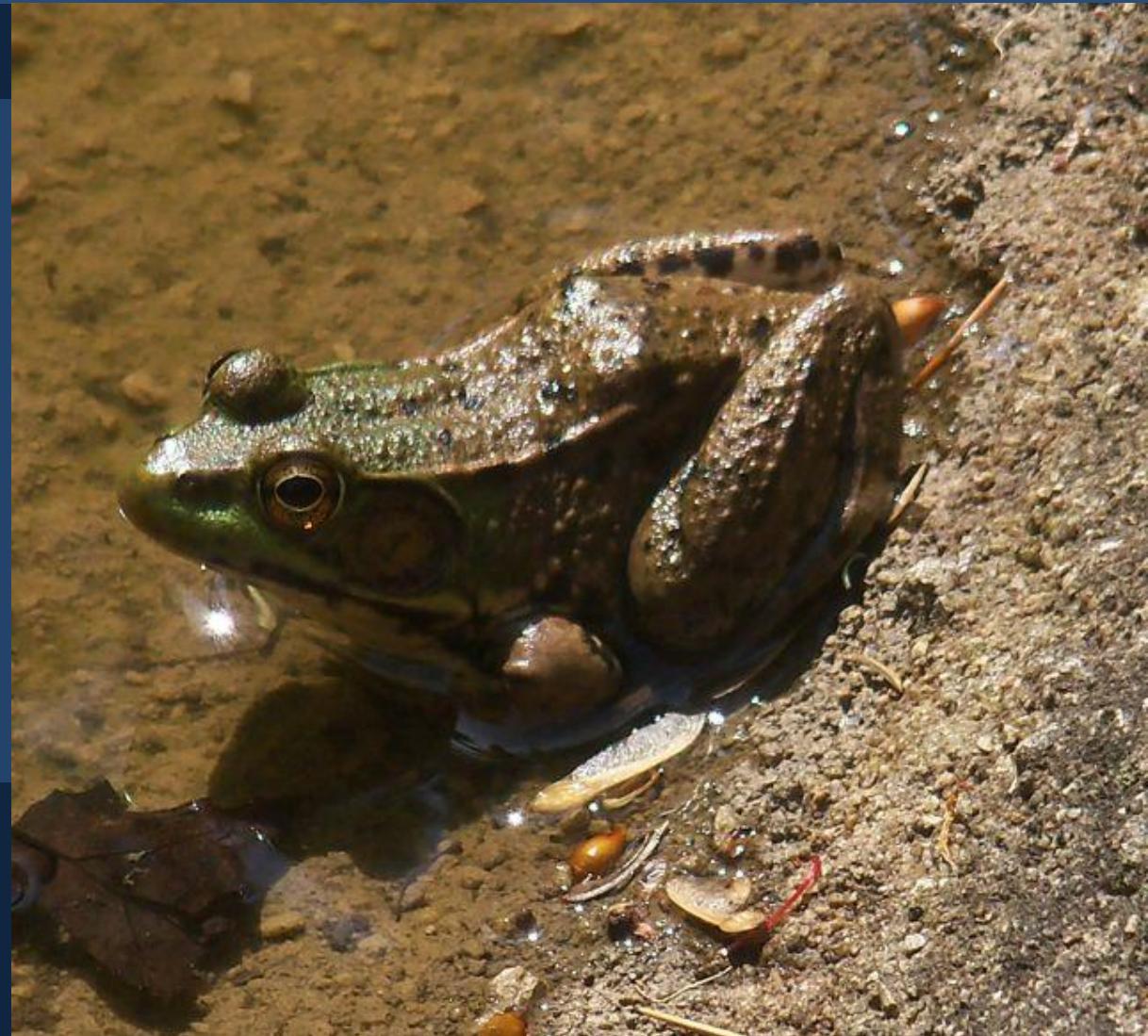
This is called the topic sentence

It's kind of silly that the sentence that states the **main idea** is called the **topic** sentence, but that's just the way it is.

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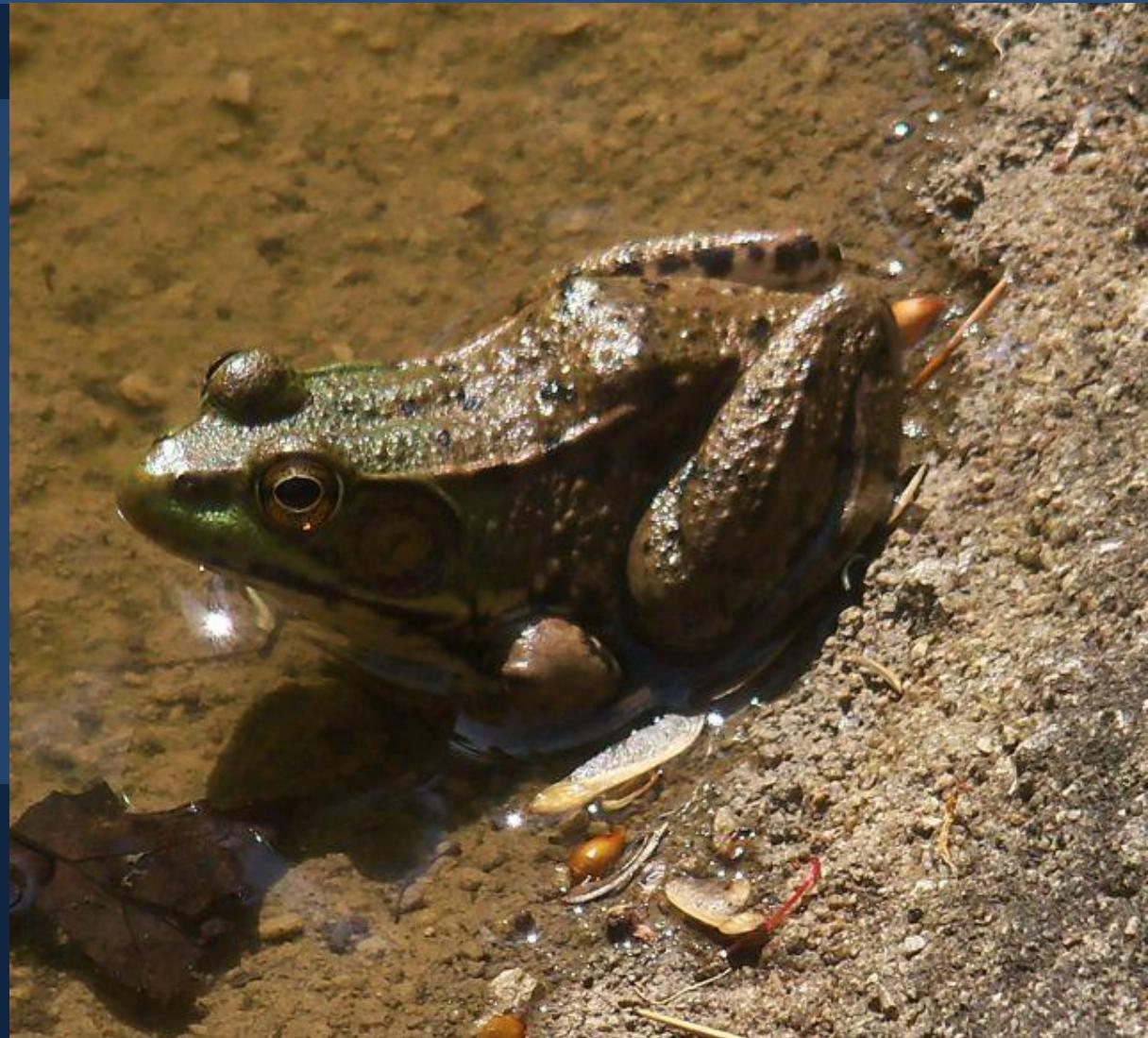
Finding the main idea

To find the main idea, figure out the topic first. Then, look for a sentence that states a main point about the topic.

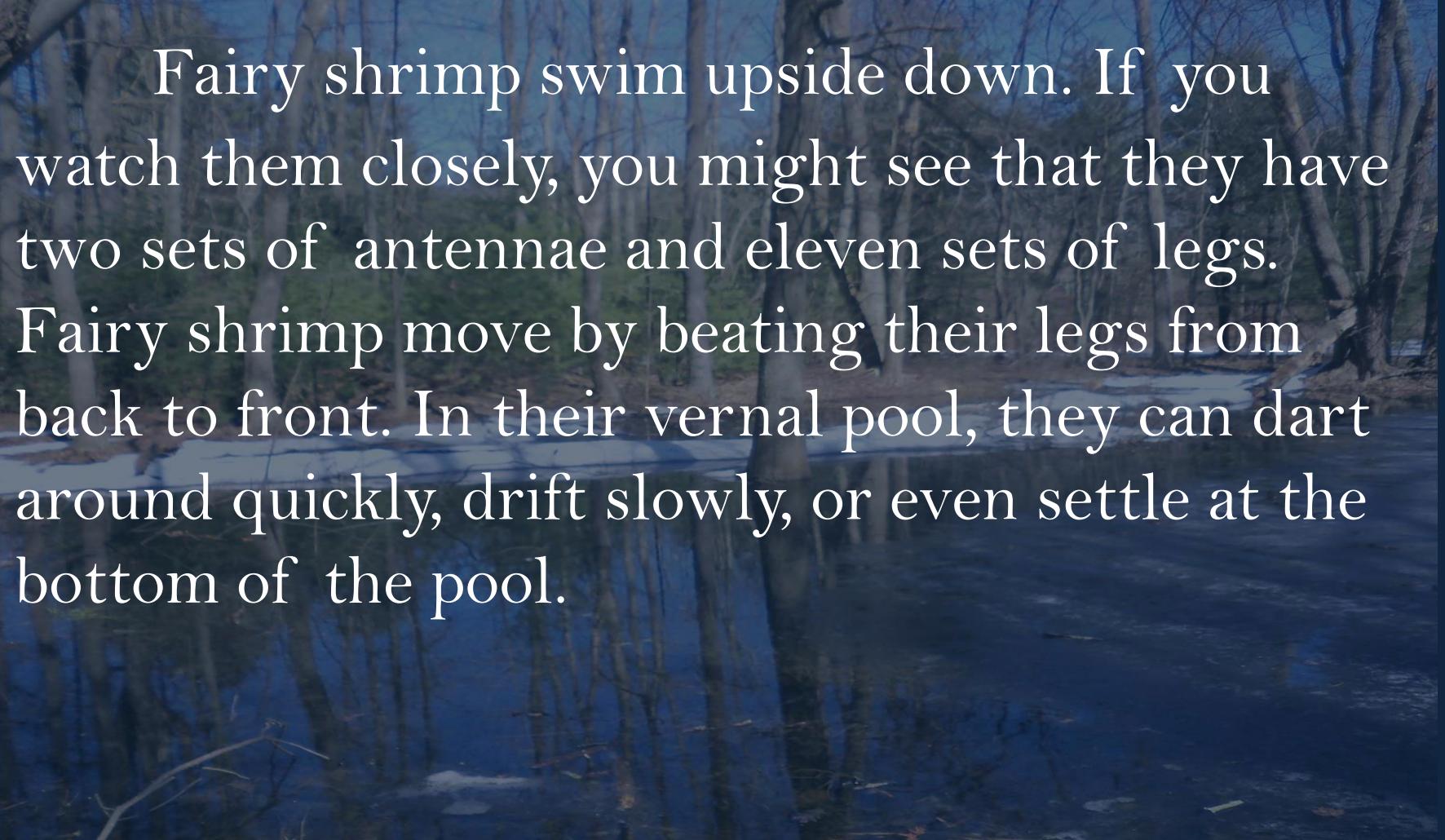


Implicit main ideas

Main ideas are not always stated directly. Sometimes, they are implicit, or left unstated.



Figuring out implicit main ideas



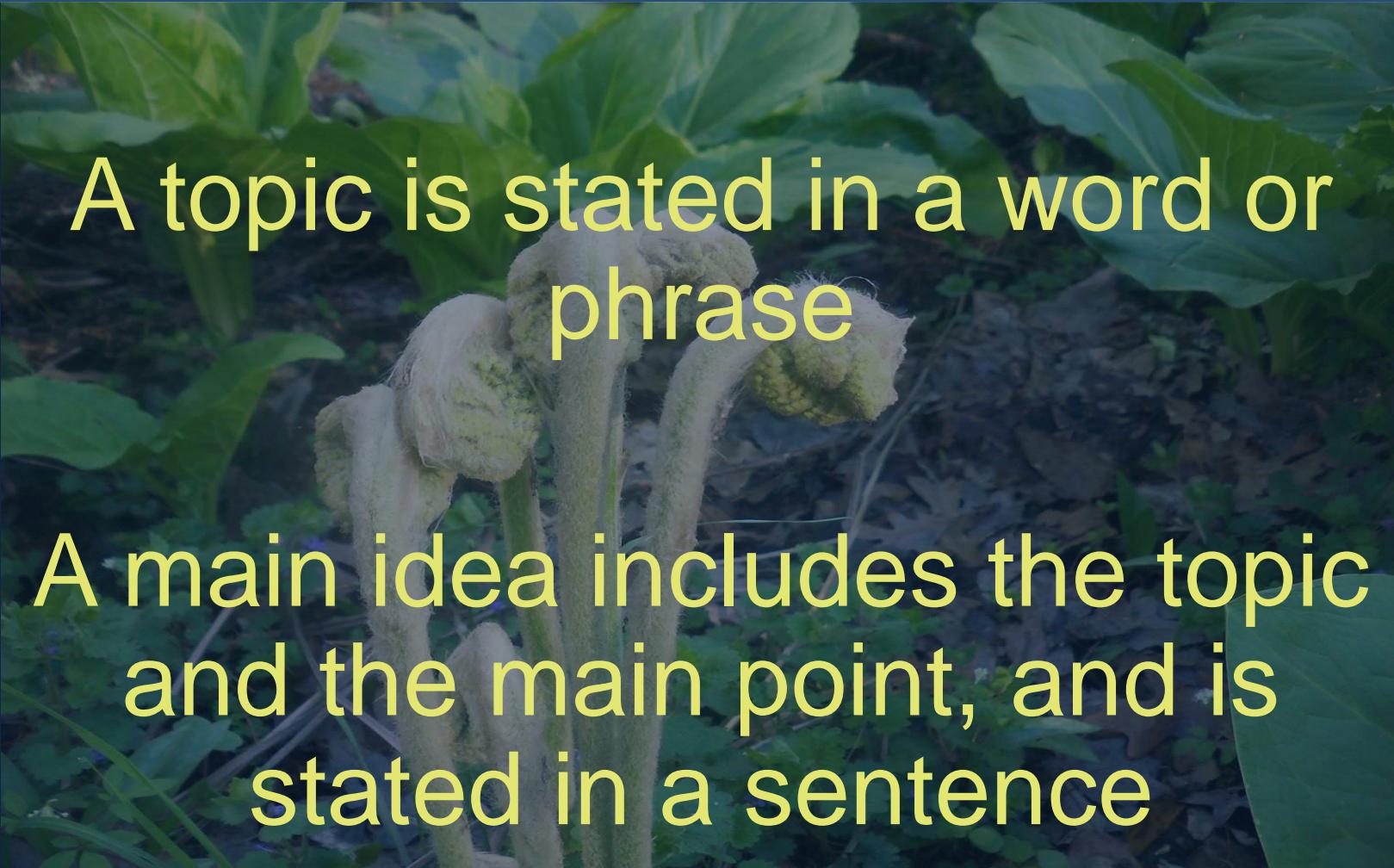
Fairy shrimp swim upside down. If you watch them closely, you might see that they have two sets of antennae and eleven sets of legs. Fairy shrimp move by beating their legs from back to front. In their vernal pool, they can dart around quickly, drift slowly, or even settle at the bottom of the pool.

What have you learned?

What is the difference between a topic and a main idea?



What have you learned?

A close-up photograph of green foliage, likely from a plant like a dandelion or similar seed head. In the center, several green, fuzzy seed pods are attached to thin stems. The background is filled with more large, broad green leaves.

A topic is stated in a word or phrase

A main idea includes the topic and the main point, and is stated in a sentence

What have you learned?

An implicit main idea is
not stated directly by the
author



Can you find the frog?



What have you learned about main ideas?

