

ELA UNIT · GRADE 3		
What it is mainly about 5 days 5 books 171 min full	92 min short	Grade 3

THE QUESTION THIS UNIT FOLLOWS

What is this mainly about, and what in the book says so?

THE IDEA

A main idea is not the topic, and a theme is not a moral. Five Grade 3 books are used here, and in four of them neither is stated anywhere, so the class has to build the claim and defend it from the pages. One of the five leaves its question deliberately open, which is the most useful day in the unit.

The unit places expository and narrative text side by side on purpose. *Faces of the Moon* has a main idea and supporting details and states neither; *Just like Josh Gibson* carries a theme shown three ways and stated once. The evidence move is the same: make a claim about the whole text and test it against the pages.

Different kinds of books ask for different kinds of whole-text claims. Informational text has a main idea. Narrative text may carry a theme. In both cases, the claim has to survive the evidence.

Day 5 ends on a book that will not answer its own question. A class that has spent four days finding an answer has to decide that sometimes the evidence supports two, which is where this skill stops being a hunt.

THE ARC

1	The topic is not the main idea
2	A main idea can be tested against the pages
3	A theme can be shown several times and stated once
4	The illustrations can support a theme as well as the words
5	The evidence sometimes leaves the question open

WHERE THIS FITS

When to run it. Middle of Grade 3, after the narration unit. Deciding what a book is about is easier once the class asks who is saying it.

What it assumes. The narration unit, and the Grade 1 message unit if the class had it.

What it builds. Distinguishing topic from main idea; testing a claim about a whole text against its pages; finding a theme shown rather than stated; tolerating an open question.

What it leads to. Grade 4 and later work on argument, and any comparison of two texts on one subject.

THE 5 DAYS

DAY 1

The Main Idea And Its Details Find the main idea of this book and sort the details that support it from the ones that do not.

Why here. First because the text states neither the main idea nor which details support it, so the class cannot begin by copying. The topic-versus-idea distinction is unavoidable here.

From: Faces of the Moon by Bob Crelin

Focus:

Main idea and supporting details in a text that states neither
34 min full · 18 min short Makes: A pyramid: one main idea and three supporting details

DAY 2

What The Book Is Mainly About Decide what this book is mainly about and support it with details from the pages.

Why here. Second: the main idea is tested against the pages rather than guessed from the title. The title of this book invites exactly the wrong answer, which makes the test necessary.

From: The House That George Built by Suzanne Slade

Focus:

Main idea tested against the pages rather than guessed from the title
34 min full · 18 min short Makes: A main idea with four supporting details

DAY 3

Outside The Fence Find the ways this book shows what Grandmama was kept out of, and what she carried with her anyway.

Why here. Third, and the move into narrative: a theme shown three ways and stated once. The class finds the three showings before being shown the statement.

From: Just like Josh Gibson by Angela Johnson

Focus:	A theme shown three ways and stated once 34 min full · 18 min short Makes: Three findings with evidence, and what she remembers
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DAY 4

The Evidence For The Wish Say what this book is about and support the claim from the pages, including the pages that show the claim holds.

Why here. Fourth: a theme supported from the words and the illustrations together. Two sources for one claim, which the Kindergarten picture unit began and this completes.

From: Ruby's Wish by Shirin Yim Bridges

Focus:	A theme supported from the words and the illustrations 34 min full · 18 min short Makes: A written answer with two pieces of evidence
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DAY 5

Who Won Work out what this book is saying, and decide whether the giant was treated fairly.

Why here. Last. A theme supported from the page and a question the book leaves open. It has to be last: a class needs four days of finding answers before it can accept one that is not settled.

From: Clever Beatrice by Margaret Willey

Focus:	A theme supported from the page, and a question left open 35 min full · 20 min short Makes: A written answer with evidence, and a judgement
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WORDS TO USE	
Word	How it is used
topic / main idea	A topic names the subject. A main idea says something important about that subject.
theme	Used from Day 3 for narrative text. Not used about Faces of the Moon.
supports	Used of details. A detail supports an idea; it does not prove it.

WHAT TO PREPARE

- Checkpoint 1 page, one per child
- Checkpoint 2 page, one per child
- A one-sentence claim card and three detail slips per child

CHECKPOINTS

After Day 2 · Topic or main idea Six short phrases and sentences about a text the class has met. The child sorts them into topics and main ideas.

Without a book. Six slips of paper and no book.

Look for. A topic names the subject. A main idea says something important about that subject and could be supported by details from the text. Sentence form can be a useful clue, but it is not the test by itself.

Say to the child. Sort these. Which ones only name what the text is about, and which ones say something important about it?

After Day 5 · Two answers, one question The question Clever Beatrice leaves open, with the evidence for each answer. The child gives both answers and says what would settle it.

Without a book. One page of evidence and no book.

Look for. The child names what evidence is missing rather than choosing a side and defending it. Naming the gap is the achievement.

Say to the child. Both answers have evidence. What would the book have had to say to settle it?

THE TASK AT THE END

The claim and three slips Each child chooses one of the five books in this unit, or another book the class has already studied closely. The child writes one sentence saying what the book is mainly about, then finds three details that support it and writes each on a slip. A partner reads the three slips without the claim and writes what they think the claim was. The two claims are compared.

Collect. The claim card, the three slips, and the partner's reconstructed claim.

Time. One session of about 40 minutes.

TEACHER KEY

- Checkpoint 1: 'the moon' and 'the phases' are topics; 'the moon looks different because of where we are standing' is a main idea.
- Checkpoint 2: the book does not say who won, and both readings are supported. What would settle it is a line about what Beatrice wanted before she started, which the book withholds.
- Task: a partner who reconstructs the claim closely has been given details that actually support it. A wide miss usually means the details support the topic instead.

WHAT A STRONG ANSWER LOOKS LIKE

Strand	What to see
Statement	The main idea is a statement about the subject, not just the subject itself.
Support	Three details from the text stand behind it.
Showing	Finds a theme demonstrated rather than merely stated.
Openness	Can say when the evidence does not settle a question.

KEEPING THE DAILY EVIDENCE

Keep each child's whole-text claim from Day 1 and evidence-based judgement from Day 5. What should change is that the early response stops being only a label such as 'the moon' and becomes a statement about the subject; by Day 5, the child should also be able to say when the evidence does not settle the question.

WHAT TO PASS ON

- Children whose main idea was still only a topic at the task need that addressed directly; it is a common Grade 3 error and does not resolve itself.
- Day 5 needs unhurried time. A class pushed to a verdict on *Clever Beatrice* learns the opposite of the day's lesson.

THE BOOKS THIS UNIT USES

- *Just like Josh Gibson* by Angela Johnson · 1 lesson
- *Ruby's Wish* by Shirin Yim Bridges · 1 lesson
- *Clever Beatrice* by Margaret Willey · 1 lesson
- *The House That George Built* by Suzanne Slade · 1 lesson
- *Faces of the Moon* by Bob Crelin · 1 lesson