Basic Reading Course Activity
Creating Paragraphs with Main Ideas and Supporting Details

Purpose:
- to provide an engaging and fun activity to reinforce topics, main idea, and supporting details
- to provide writing practice with a meaningful and relevant assignment where students apply what they learned
- to allow students ownership of their learning experience as they create a class assignment

Directions:
1. Students are introduced to topic, main idea, and supporting details. They also receive some practice identifying topics, main ideas and supporting details through handouts and textbook assignments.

2. The instructor explains to the students that they are now going to become published authors who will create an assignment for the class.

3. Each student is to think of a topic they want to write about. Then they need to come up with a main idea and some ideas that support it. They put the information into a coherent but brief paragraph.

4. The instructor walks around and provides assistance to students. Teachers can encourage students to educate the class about something they might not be familiar with and/or understand well. They can encourage students to write about their own native country or their culture. You may have to suggest topics to a few students.

5. Students turn in their papers and the instructor will edit them and turn the paper into a class assignment for the next class (see page 2-5 for samples).
   a. The instructor will have to change the opening of some paragraphs and add an introduction so the main idea is not always the first sentence.
   b. Instructor should also move the main idea to the end of the paragraph in a few student papers.
   c. Instructor will have to select ten to twelve paragraphs for the class assignment.

6. At the next class meeting, hand out a copy of the student paragraphs turned into a class assignment. Direct students to find the topic, main idea and/ or supporting details.

7. When everyone has completed the assignment, check all answers together and then let students guess at who wrote each paragraph. (That is fun for them).

Included below are a couple of sample assignments made with student paragraphs (pages 2-5). Students are so proud of their work and they really have fun doing the assignment. It becomes a very meaningful experience for them because their voices are heard. They also have ownership of their learning as they wrote the paragraphs.
Read each paragraph carefully. Look for the MAIN IDEA SENTENCE. This sentence will be a general statement that says what the paragraph is about. Write the number of the MAIN IDEA SENTENCE on the line above the paragraph. Then, look for the sentences that give the MAJOR SUPPORTING DETAILS. Number them on the line also. (40 pts)

Paragraph A Main Idea# _______ Supporting Details # __________________________

1. If you do not have a job, maybe you should get one. 2. There are many valuable rewards you will receive from having a job. 3. First of all, a job will give you a chance to earn your own money. 4. You will never have to ask your parents for money again. 5. You will get to meet lots of new people when you get a job. 6. You will meet employees you work with as well as customers. 7. A job will also provide you with an opportunity to develop professional skills.

Paragraph B Main Idea# _______ Supporting Details# __________________________

1. You really need to turn off your cell phone when you drive. 2. It could cause an accident if you do not. 3. It is also illegal in some states to drive while on your cell phone. 4. You should also watch your emotions when you drive. 5. If you are thinking about how mad you are at someone, it could interfere with your thinking. 6. Concentration is important too as you need to keep your eyes on the road. 7. As you can see, there are many things you can do to drive more safely.

Paragraph C Main Idea# _______ Supporting Details # __________________________

1. Have you ever had to stay in a hospital? 2. Have you ever visited someone there? 3. Hospitals really are not fun places. 4. One reason why they are not fun is that there are a lot of sick people there. 5. People have been hurt in accidents or they are suffering from terrible diseases. 6. Hospitals are not fun because often you are there to visit a family member who is dying. 7. Also, hospitals provide a great deal of stress to you and your family. 8. You are so worried about the person staying in the hospital, so you cannot relax.

Paragraph D Main Idea# _______ Supporting Details # __________________________

1. Computers are a great invention for many reasons. 2. Computers allow you to be in contact with people from everywhere. 3. You can send email across the globe to family and friends or total strangers. 4. Many times computers provide the best source of information. 5. Computers also give you a variety of types of entertainment. 6. There are so many computer games, chat rooms and other fun things to do.

Paragraph E Main Idea# _______ Supporting Details # __________________________

1. Studying is important for all of us yet sometimes we find it difficult to get the most out of our study time. 2. However, there are many ways you can study without distractions. 3. One thing you can do is turn off your cell phone. 4. That important call from your girlfriend can wait. 5. You should have all your materials you need right next to you. 6. Then you don’t have to run back and forth wasting time looking for things. 7. You should also find a nice quiet room like the library where you can work uninterrupted.

Paragraph F Main Idea# _______ Supporting Details # __________________________

1. I have learned some lessons about boyfriends. 2. Are you sure you want one? 3. Boyfriends can really get jealous very quickly. 4. If they even see you talking with another guy after class they get angry and concerned. 5. Boyfriends can cheat on you. 6. They may tell you they are staying up late studying for a big test but actually they are out on a secret date with a new girl. 7. Boyfriends can also leave you. 8. They just send you an email and tell you that have picked up a new girlfriend. 9. Having a boyfriend can really be complicated for many reasons.
Paragraph G Main Idea# _________ Supporting Details # ________________________________

1. The world is always changing and moving forward. 2 Progress is valuable because without progress we would have no improvements in the lives of people around the world. 3. Progress is one way that the economy moves forward. 4. When people make money, they spend money and the economy is good. 5. In addition, progress is required to raise our standard of living. 6. As the world progresses, we build nicer homes, fancier cars and neater gadgets like IPODs. 7. A third value of progress is that it improves our health. 8. Scientists and doctors can find cures for diseases, discover ways to treat serious illnesses, and save millions of lives.

Paragraph H Main Idea# _________ Supporting Details # ________________________________

1. When I want to sleep late on a Monday morning, I think about my future. 2. One thing I know is that I will find a good job when I finish school. 3. Many different jobs will be available to me because of my schooling. 4. College will also give me engineering skills. 5. With these skills I could perhaps design new computer equipment. 6. A third value of college is that it will teach me about people from many different cultures. 7. I guess I should get out of bed because I really think that college is making my life much more successful in a variety of ways.

Paragraph I Main Idea# _________ Supporting Details # ________________________________

1. Many people complain about college. 2. They say classes are too hard. 3. They also argue that it is unfair that they can’t listen to IPODs during class. 4. However, getting good grades in school is really very easy. 5. Students need to do their homework and turn it in on time. 5. The need to pay attention in class so they understand the lesson well. 6. They can’t pay attention and listen to their IPOD. 7. Finally, students should also study hard for tests so they do get good grades.

Paragraph J Main Idea# _________ Supporting Details # ________________________________

1. Have you heard about the new trend- hair extensions? 2. They are actually becoming popular. 3. Hair extensions are becoming useful in women’s hair. 4. They are useful because they provide a way for women to change their appearance for social events. 5. You can have long hair for a big party when it was short yesterday. 6. Another useful thing is the fact that hair extensions can be worn by high school and college students as a way to look beautiful for graduation. 7. That beautiful hair will make you look flashy in that cap and gown. 8. A third way they are useful is they can be taken out at any time.
FINDING THE TOPIC AND THE MAIN IDEA- Read each paragraph. Find the Topic – Ask yourself what the paragraph is about. Then find the Main Idea Sentence. Look for a general sentence that explains the topic.

**Paragraph A**
1. There is a special holiday each year in Mexico. 2. Each October in Magdalena, Mexico, the people celebrate San Francisco and have a big fiesta in his honor. 3. The fiesta includes beer, dancing, games and Mexican food. People come from everywhere just to see San Francisco. 4. A lot of people believe he can perform miracles. 5. Some people walk for eight hours to get there. 6. They all want to celebrate on October 4th, his day.

**Main Idea #**

**Paragraph B**
1. Have you ever been to New York City? 2. There are eight million people there. 3. Do you have any idea what my school was like? 4. My school was one of the largest in the United States and it was quite different from school in Tucson. 5. One way it was different, was the size, there were 3,000 students in my school. 6. Another unique thing was the fact that there were two girls for every boy. 7. What guy wouldn’t love a high school like that? 8. It was so big, the school had to have three separate programs and schedules for students. 9. Sometimes there was not enough room to walk down the halls.

**Main Idea #**

**Paragraph C**
1. I have been doing Hebrew dancing since I was nine years old. 2. It is really one of my passions. 3. I am now a dance teacher. 4. I love the story behind it. 4. The culture and the moves which are very similar to belly dancing. 5. I can proudly say I am a leader at church and I inspire others to love and follow the rhythm. 6. Hebrew dance is really an important part of my life.

**Main Idea #**

**Paragraph D**
1. Going to Nogales is quite different these days. 2. Mafia gangs are on a killing spree and they are taking over Nogales, Sonora. 3. The people have not been able to stop them because too many people are too afraid. 4. The police let them do what they want because they are afraid for their lives too. 5. Some people say if you do not honk at them, instead of killing you, they will give you money. 6. Many store owners are losing business because Americans won’t shop there right now either.

**Main Idea #**

**Paragraph E**
1. Let’s all skip class and head to the beach. 2. Venezuela has more beaches than the Virgin Islands and each beach has a variety of exotic animals. 3. Also, some beaches are exclusive. 4. They are very expensive to visit and they are popular. 5. Most of the beaches are very clean and each beach is quite different. 6. As you can see, Venezuela has a large number of beaches and they are all quite spectacular to see.

**Main Idea #**

Paragraph F
1. Michael Phelps was a gold winning swimmer and we will never win eight gold medals. 2. We can take up swimming for ourselves though. 3. There are actually several health benefits you can get from swimming. 4. First, when you swim, you will get a strong body. 5. It will also help you relax after a long day of a boring reading class. 6. Swimming can also help you get that necessary vitamin D you will take in from the sun.

Topic ___________________________________________________________ Main Idea # ______________________

Paragraph G
1. The people of Ethiopia celebrate the Epiphany once a year on February 12th and it is a wonderful occasion. 2. The Ethiopian Christian community comes together at the same place for one night. 3. The people cook cultural food and cultural drinks. 4. The food is very spicy. 5. All the people are dressed in white clothes and get holy water. 6. Most of the time the people enjoy getting together for this celebration.

Topic ___________________________________________________________ Main Idea # ______________________

Paragraph H
1. Many countries debate the value of free trade in the world. 2. However, international free trade is really quite important and it is a benefit to many countries for many reasons. 3. If we had barriers to free trade we would not be able to import our food and materials from other places. 4. Free trade helps us learn many new languages. 5. Free trade allows America to buy oil from the OPEC nations. 6. It also is the only way that many nations can survive and develop their economy.

Topic ___________________________________________________________ Main Idea # ______________________