

IMMIGRATION AND URBANIZATION

Reading Strategy**Identify Main Ideas**

When an author writes a paragraph, section, or chapter of a book, he or she is trying to convey certain information. As you read, ask yourself: "What is the author trying to tell me?" If you can answer this question, you have found the main idea. If you cannot answer this question, go back and re-read the material, looking for the sentence or sentences that are necessary for the paragraph to make sense. Without the main idea, the supporting details would seem confusing.

Read the following paragraph:

New York City has a long history of ethnic diversity. In 1643, when New York was still New Amsterdam and controlled by the Dutch, as many as 18 languages were spoken in the city. By 1815, when St. Patrick's Cathedral was dedicated, the Irish had joined the Dutch, Jewish, English, and Roman Catholics as major ethnic groups in New York City. Germans came in large numbers in the 1840s. By the time the Civil War broke out, New York City was 50 percent foreign-born.

The main idea of this paragraph is that New York City has a long history of ethnic diversity. Without this statement, the sentences that follow would be just a collection of facts. With it, they become supporting details.

Directions: Read the following paragraph. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions below.

During the late 1800s, the Jewish community in Russia was discriminated against. After 1881, this discrimination grew violent and led to the mass emigration of many Russian Jews to the United States and Western Europe. The cause of this outbreak of violence was the 1881 assassination of Czar Alexander II. Rumors spread that the Jews had been involved in the murder plot. Although this was untrue, mobs in more than 200 towns rose against Jews. This wave of violence continued for several years and many Jewish families fled to other countries.

Hint: Decide which statement(s) are necessary for the paragraph to make sense.

1. What is the author of the paragraph trying to tell you?
2. List three details from the paragraph that support this main idea.
3. Why would these details be unclear without the main idea sentence(s)?