

# An Inquiry Approach to Determining Importance

This work is inspired by Halbert & Kaser's

Spirals of Inquiry For Equity and Quality, 2013

In our work supporting reading assessments across the district, our curriculum support team noticed a trend. The findings revealed that many of our learners lacked confidence in showing what they know (representing their understanding) after reading a selection of text. During this district **scanning**, we wondered what was going on for our learners? Because this is a foundational skill, we knew it needed attention.

We asked ourselves why this was happening for our learners and what was contributing to this situation? We want our learners to be independent and pursue topics that speak to their hearts and minds, but realized our **focus** needed to be on making meaning and determining importance. Our **hunch** was students could name and identify text features, but had difficulty using them to support comprehension. We asked ourselves, what should we do differently? We decided to slow down the pace of instruction and explicitly teach note-making to help students build confidence and independence in determining importance and comprehending nonfiction text.

In the following pages you will see a lesson sequence with images taken in grade 6/7 classrooms to show this, 'slowing down' as we led students toward greater understanding when **determining importance** and **making notes**.

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# Determining Importance: Making Notes to Show What you Know

**Big Idea-** Texts are created for different purposes and audiences.

**Curricular Competency:-**Recognize an increasing range of text structures and how they contribute to meaning.

**Lesson format for students:**

**Learning Target:** I can use the structure of the text to help me determine the topic and main ideas in an article.



## *Our Learning Intention:*

I can use the structure of the text to help me determine the topic and main ideas in an article.

**The big picture:** We will explore a variety of ways to make notes, beginning with what is familiar ~ webbing.

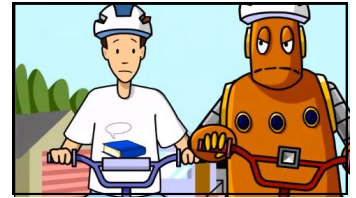
(We intentionally focus on inviting students to identify the topic and main ideas for now... strategies for identifying specific details will come later.)

**Driving Inquiry Questions:** How do you figure out the topic, main ideas and supporting details in a piece of text?

How does the organization of the text help us to do this?



**Establishing a Need to Know:** we shared the YouTube clip Brain Pop ~ Main Idea <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THX0XRB54Yk>  
The video described 3 layers of meaning. After watching the video we invited students to have a conversation with the person next to them regarding the layers of meaning that were described.



From the video we see there are 3 layers of meaning: **topic, main ideas, and details**. We offered students the following colour-coded post-it notes ...

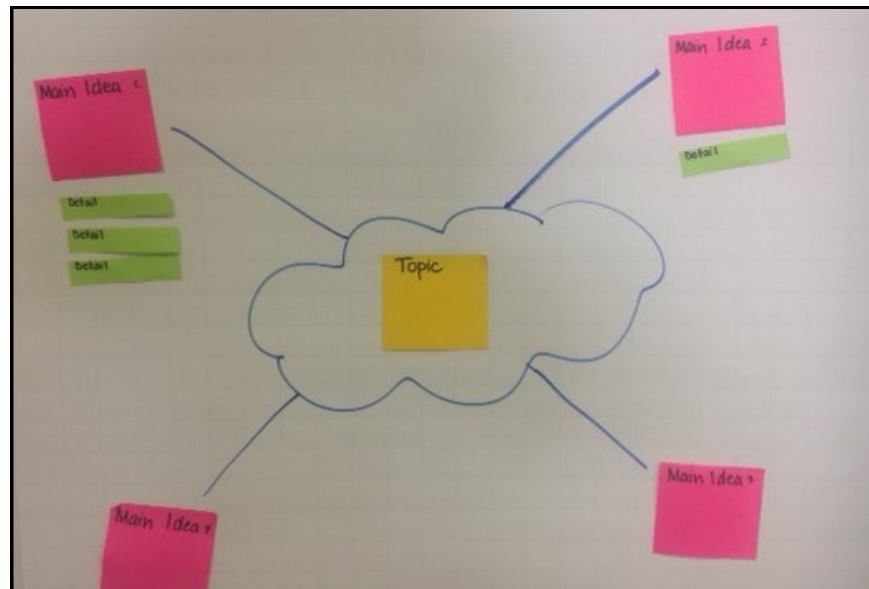
**TOPIC** ~ We  
used a yellow  
post-it note

**Main Ideas** ~  
We used pink  
post-it notes

**Details** ~ We used  
small green post-it

We asked students the following questions to tap into their prior knowledge about creating a web ... “**If we’re building a web, what goes in the centre?**” And, “**Once the center topic has been determined, how do we build a web from there?**” And, “**When we have the topic and main ideas, what’s our next step?**”

Coloured post it notes were  
used to build the example of a  
web shown here.





## Co-Constructing Ideas: Zooming in on the organization of a specific text

We invited students to explore how these pages are organized? What clues could be gathered from the **structure of the text** to help figure out the topic, and the main ideas ?

We invited students to look at these two pages and explore all the features/parts/chunks that offer meaning. Students spent time noticing and discovering, then shared their ideas. (When we tell them, we rob them of their opportunity to determine these elements themselves.) We prompted their thinking by asking questions and honouring their responses. ("What are you noticing about the structure of this text? What else do you see? etc")

# The High Cost of CHILD LABOUR

**START UP** Think about the clothes that you are wearing and the food that you eat every day. What would you do if you knew that you are supporting child labour by buying these products?

**"CHILDREN SHOULD HAVE PENS IN THEIR HANDS NOT TOOLS."**  
— Iqbal Masih, a boy from Pakistan who lost his life in his fight against child labour

A t the foot of the Samala volcano near Brilliantes, Retalhuleu [Guatemala], Juan Carlos, 17, earns a living chipping volcanic rocks. He's been doing this since he was eight years old. Juan Carlos lives with his mother and five younger brothers. "I am the oldest, that's why I have to be responsible for the family," he says.

The work is hard. Heavy rocks are gathered from the river, carried to shore, and crushed using heavy and dangerous tools. The gravel is then sold to construction companies for a very low price. Children who do this work regularly suffer bruises and insect bites, and some experience vision loss due to dust from the rocks.

According to a report by the International Labour Organization (ILO), in 2012, about 168 million children around the world, ages five to 17, were involved in child labour. The reasons for child labour can be different in each situation. Some children are forced into it through bonded labour or human trafficking, but others, like Juan Carlos, do it to support themselves and their families. Their work may be essential to the survival of their families, but these children are often forced to work in dangerous conditions.

*bonded labour: when an employer gives a high-interest loan and the family has to work on low wages to pay the money back*

### Child Labour by Region (%)\*

Region	Percentage (%)
Sub-Saharan Africa	21%
Asia and the Pacific	9%
Latin America and the Caribbean	9%
Middle East and North Africa	8%

Source: International Labour Organization  
\* Information is not available for the regions that are not listed.

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## OPINION PIECE

### What Is Child Labour?

Juan Carlos's and Awa's stories are typical of child labourers. Child labour falls into three categories. According to the ILO Convention No. 182, the worst forms of child labour include slavery, trafficking, bonded labour, child soldiers, and other illegal jobs for children. Of the 168 million child labourers in the world, the ILO estimates that about 5.5 million are victims of the worst forms of child labour.

Juan Carlos and Awa fall into the other two categories. The second category is labour that is done by children under the minimum age set for that kind of work; doing the work stops them from going to school and developing fully. The third category is labour that is dangerous or done in such dangerous conditions that it could be harmful to the child. Of the 168 million child labourers in the world, the ILO estimates that 85 million were engaged in dangerous work in 2012.

### Why Does Child Labour Happen?

Children are used because their labour is cheap, and this makes the products consumers buy cheaper than products produced without the use of child labour. Manufacturers compete to win the consumer's purchase decision, often offering a lower price than another manufacturer. One of the ways manufacturers can offer the lowest price to consumers is by having very low costs. Low costs usually come with cheap labour, and children are used for this reason. But the personal costs to these children are high. They are often sold as if they were belongings, and abused, exploited, and injured.

### Who Is Responsible?

When we explore the supply chain of major companies, the question of who is responsible for child labour comes into question. For example, Apple, Nike, and Hershey's have all been accused of using child labour. Companies such as these use suppliers from all over the world. These suppliers provide finished products or raw materials. They may also make products or distribute products. The supply chain gets even larger if each supplier needs more suppliers and resources. With such a large

supply chain, many companies claim that they are not aware that their suppliers are using child labour.

Does this make child labour acceptable? Are the people who run these companies responsible for knowing that a small farm on the Ivory Coast paid for a child to help with this year's cocoa harvest? Is the responsibility perhaps with the farmer who needs cheap labour? Does the responsibility lie with the trafficker who kidnaps children? What responsibility does the government of the Ivory Coast have? The simple answer is that everyone involved in the process is responsible.

Children should never be forced into slave labour. They shouldn't have to give up going to school so we can eat cheaper fruit or afford a new gadget. But children like Juan Carlos and Awa shouldn't go hungry, either. We need to find a solution to child labour.

supply chain: system of people and resources involved in producing and moving products to the consumer

**Hmmm** According to the US Department of Labor, the top products produced by child labour are gold, bricks, tobacco, cotton, coffee, sugar cane, cattle, rice, and diamonds. Why do you think the companies and people producing these products use child labour?

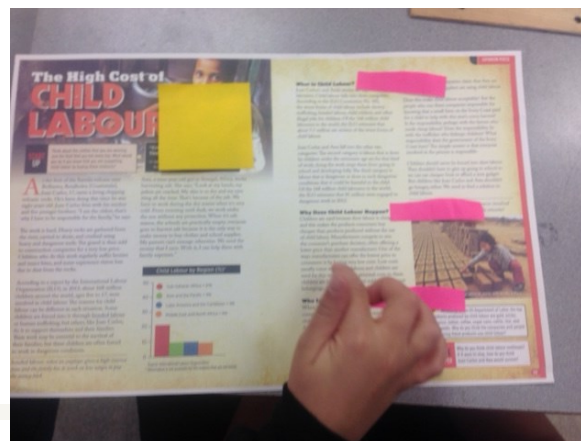
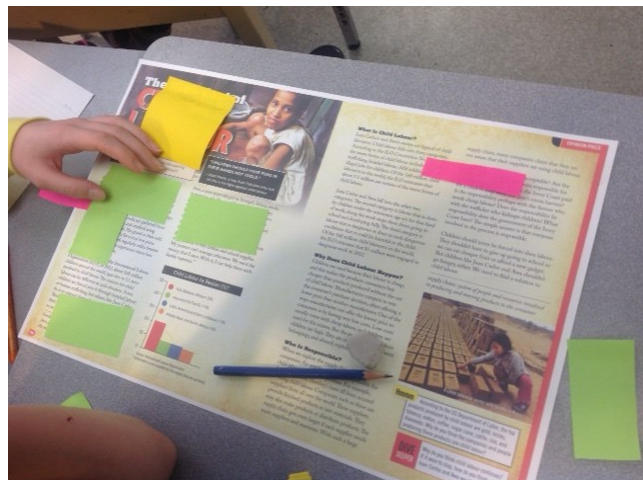
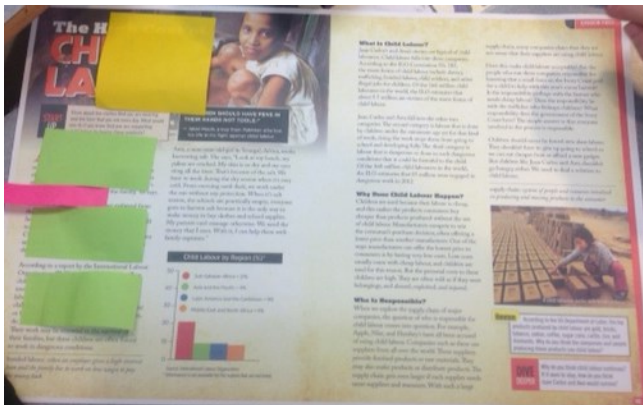
**DIVE DEEPER** Why do you think child labour continues? If it were to stop, how do you think Juan Carlos and Awa would survive?

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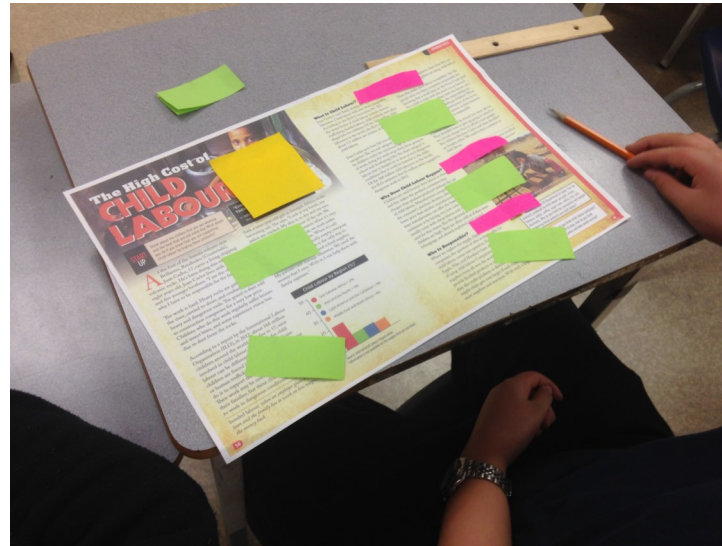
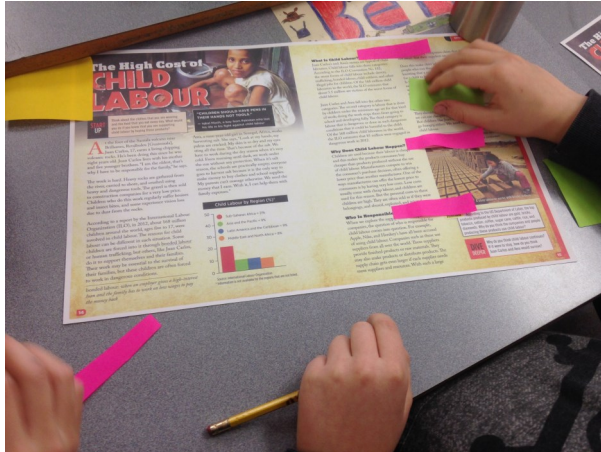
**Co-creating Ideas:** We asked if there was one page that, at a glance looked easier to web and why? We wanted students to note the headings on the second page. Often our vulnerable students miss these text features and how they help us to determine importance. Again, we prompted their thinking with questions and resisted the urge to tell them! e.g. “There is an organizational structure on the second page that might make it easier to figure out a few of the main ideas that we can add to our web. What might those be? How many post-it notes will you need to represent these main ideas?” We invited students to place their pink post-it notes on the article to show where the main ideas were found. We also wanted to know about their awareness of the details this article offered, so we provided them with green post-it notes to identify where they are found. This results informed our next steps.

**Gallery Walk:** After a bit of work time to figure this out, we invited students to walk around and see where others had placed their post-it notes and how many yellow, pink, and green post-it notes had been used. When they returned to their seats, they were invited to rearrange their post-its/remove some/add some, if their thinking had changed by what they saw.



As you can see from examining these samples, there were a variety of responses to this request. Explicit instruction was required.


**Self Assessment:** By walking around the room and seeing the work of their peers, students were able to check in with others, and self assess from the highly visual evidence. Throughout this process, the role of the teacher has been to facilitate these growing understandings. The article we chose happened to be about child labour, but the skills being taught extended far beyond this text.



Taking the time to slowly build this together was producing clear evidence of learning; especially for our more vulnerable learners.



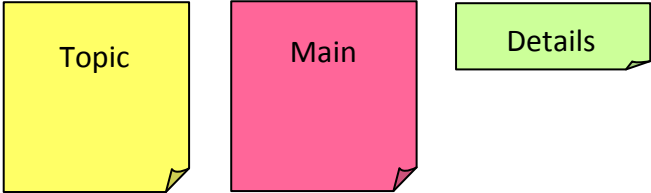
**Nonfiction Text Structure:** This work alerted our attention to the organization of text. Nonfiction text is organized in so many ways! We needed our learners to be aware of this too. So the next day we brought an article that had different text features. This one **didn't have headings** to support the concept of main ideas. Our learning intention remained the same. We posted it so it was visible to students throughout this lesson series.



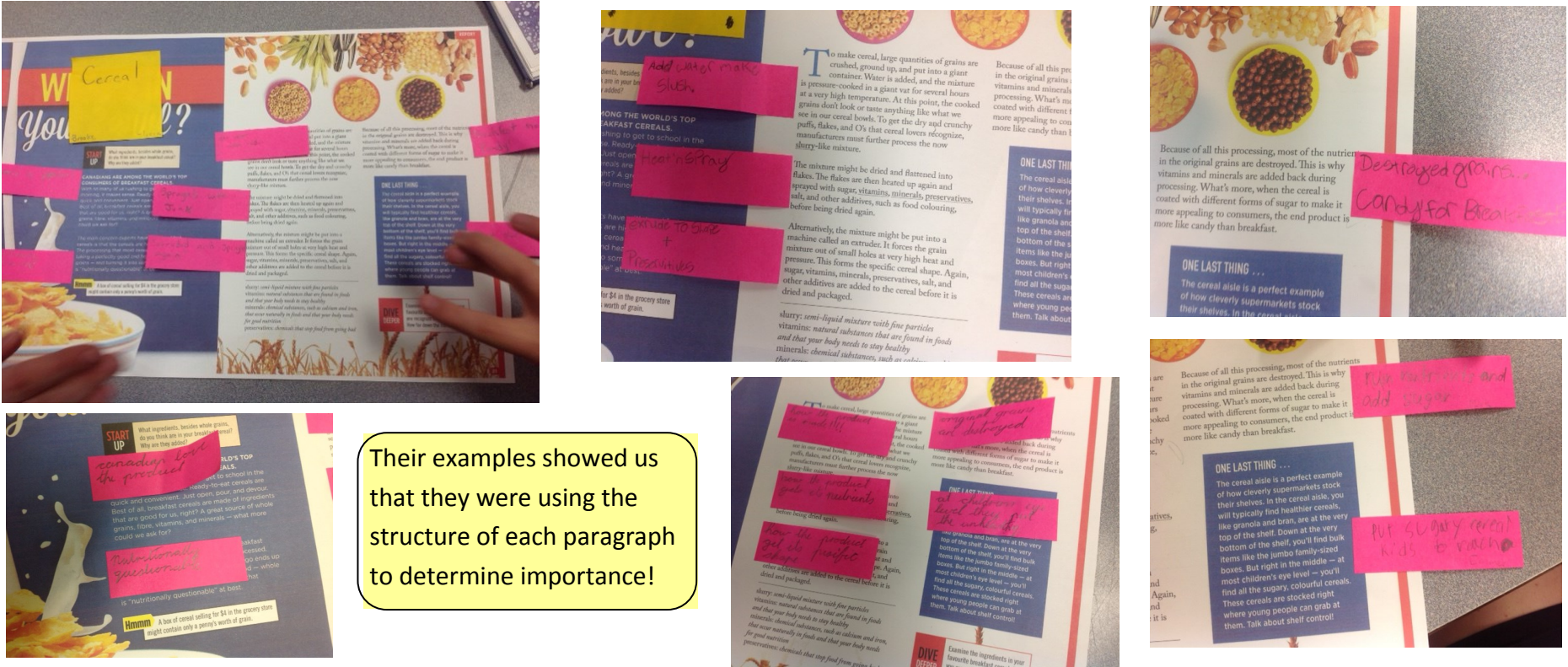
**Our Learning Intention:**

I can use the structure of the text to help determine the topic and main ideas in an article.

**Co-creating ideas:** We asked students what they were noticing about the organization of this text? When they noticed the missing headings, we then asked how we would go about identifying the main ideas without this feature? Once again we asked them to use the colour-coded post-it notes to identify the topic and main ideas.



We encouraged thorough reading of this text so they could **label the main idea** on each post-it note. As you can see, we focused on main ideas and didn't even look at details at this stage.



The collage shows four different pages from the article 'The Food Industry' with various pink and blue sticky notes attached. The notes contain handwritten text such as 'Add sugar make slush', 'Heating/Boiling', 'Extra wide to crush + preservatives', 'Dive deeper', 'Destroyed grains... Candy for Breakfast', 'Put sugary cereal kids to eat', and 'Put sugary cereal kids to eat'. The sticky notes are used to identify main ideas and details within the text.

Their examples showed us that they were using the structure of each paragraph to determine importance!

Article from Scholastic's Issues 21, "Food Industry"

# How Do We Increase Student Engagement?



Co-constructed  
Ideas



Clear Learning  
Intentions



Questions: Using  
oral language to  
prompt thinking



Descriptive  
Feedback

Ownership, Engagement, Motivation,  
Self-Regulation & Goal Statements



Peer and Self  
Assessments

## FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES



**Exit Slip/Reflection/Formative Assessment:** We invited students to respond in writing to the question “What clues can we gather from the structure of the text to help us figure out the topic, main ideas and details?” This checking in, along with their responses continued to inform our instruction.

Name: Lataany Lee  
What clues can we gather from the structure of the text to help us figure out the topic, main ideas, and details? If there are titles/subtitles, the topic and main idea is solved, but if not, you can read it and determine what it is about. Then, find words that repeat meaning and those become the main ideas, and if there are descriptive phrases/words that describe the main ideas, those become the details.

Name: Mark  
What clues can we gather from the structure of the text to help us figure out the topic, main ideas, and details? The introduction usually gives you a good point of view on the article. The sub-titles too always describe what you are about to read. Even key words in the paragraph.

Name: Kirsten C.  
What clues can we gather from the structure of the text to help us figure out the topic, main ideas, and details? I learned that it really is pretty easy to determine what the topic, main ideas and details are. If you can't find the main ideas you just read the intro paragraph which gives you an idea of what the main ideas are.

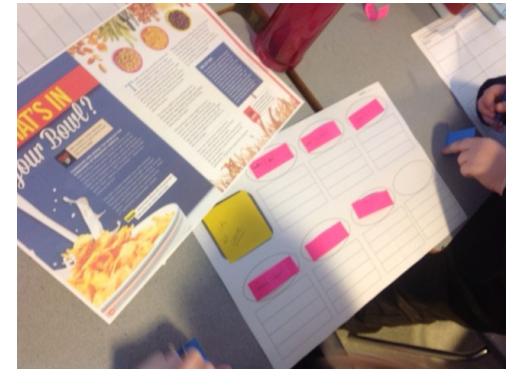
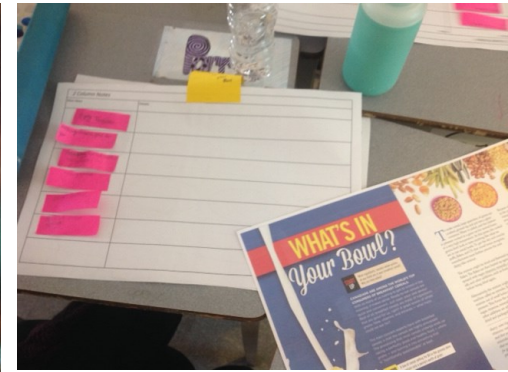
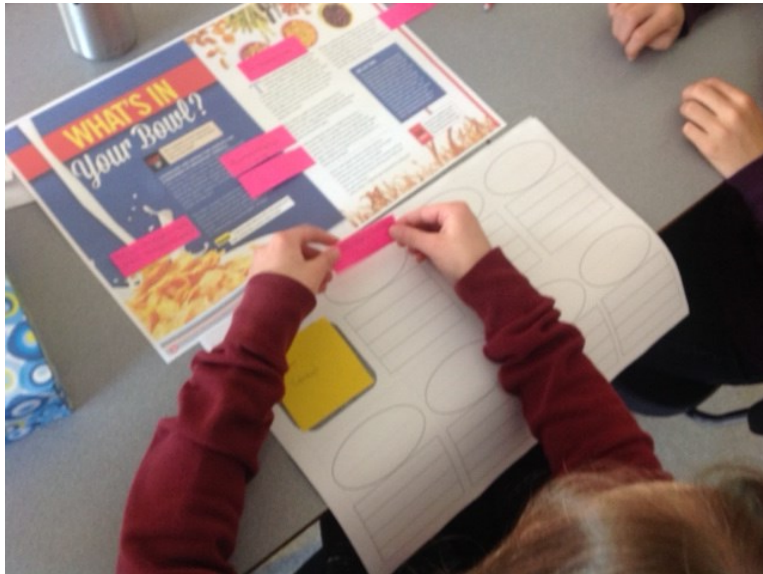
Name: Mark  
What clues can we gather from the structure of the text to help us figure out the topic, main ideas, and details? I now know that if there isn't a title or sub-titles you don't have to go on a wild goose chase to find them. They are usually in the first few sentences or the last few concluding sentences.

Name: Amber  
What clues can we gather from the structure of the text to help us figure out the topic, main ideas, and details? Sub-headings, topic sentences and repeated words help us figure out the topic, main ideas and the details are found in the text.

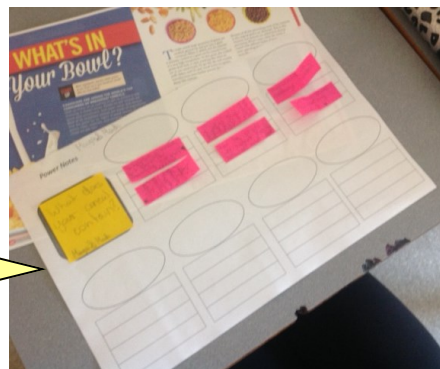
Name: Amelia  
What clues can we gather from the structure of the text to help us figure out the topic, main ideas, and details? There are a bunch of tiny paragraphs so that tells you that under each sub-heading there are a couple things being talked about.

**Offering choice:** We began this work using the structure of a web because we knew that was familiar to all students. When we reached the stage where students were successful at determining importance (topic and main ideas), we introduced two new formats for note-making: power notes and two column notes.

We tasked this group of students to carefully examine the structure of these note-making graphic organizers. From there they were asked to place the yellow, pink and green post-its onto the graphic organizer of their choice.



A quick bit of feedback was required for this student to fully understand how this note-making graphic was arranged.

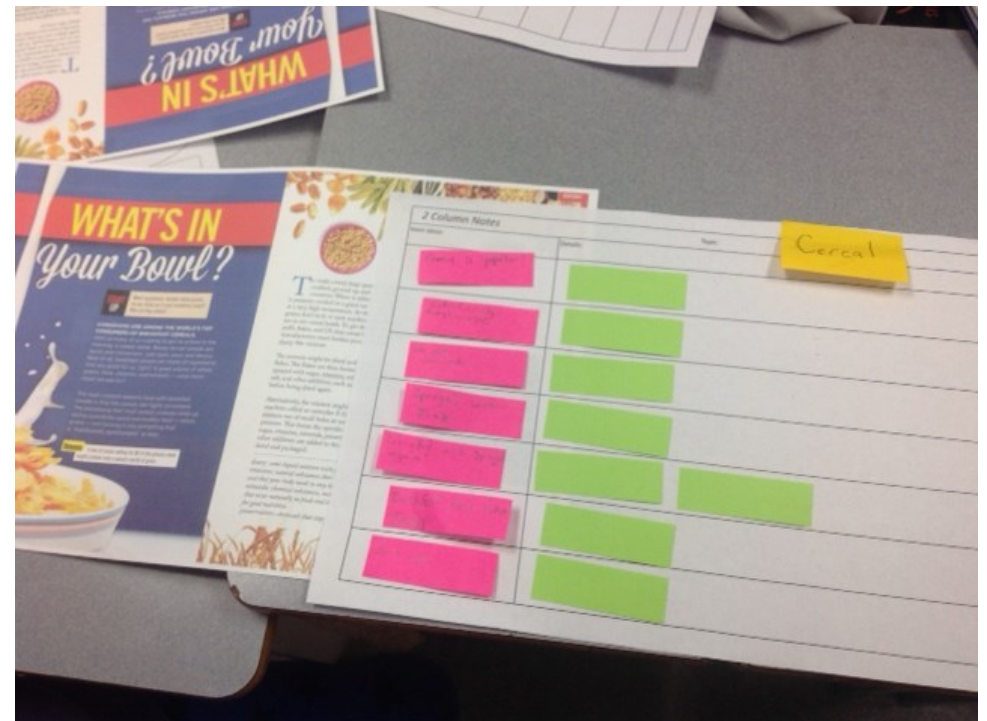
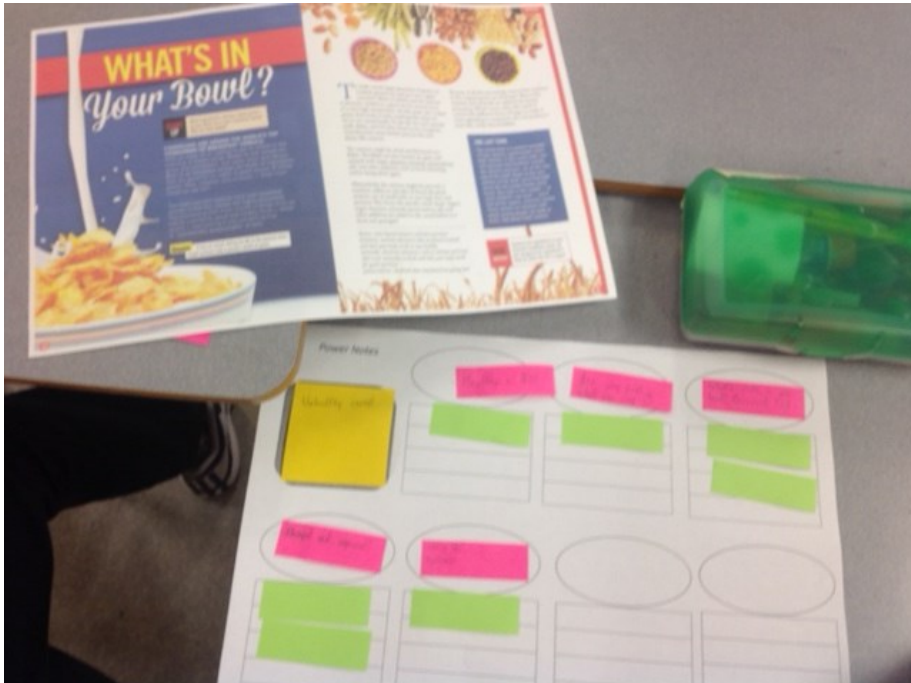


**All** students were successful in placing their colour-coded notes on the determining importance/note-making graphic organizer.



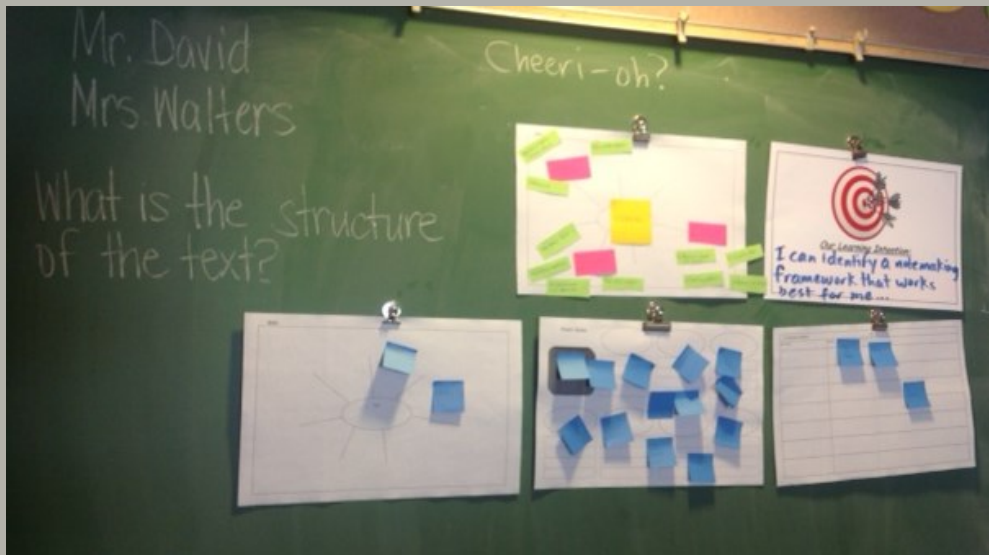
**Don't Forget the details:** Because students had a small stack of green post it notes, we asked them where they would go on their note-making graphic organizer in the future. They knew!

On purpose, we did not ask these students to make notes about the, 'details'. We wanted their attention to be fully placed on topic and main ideas. When we combine topic, main ideas, **and** details, we stand the chance of overwhelming our learners.



**Choosing your favourite note-making method:** After being exposed to webs, two column notes, and power notes, we invited students to choose their favourite way to show what they know, or determine importance. And what better way to vote ... than with post-it notes!

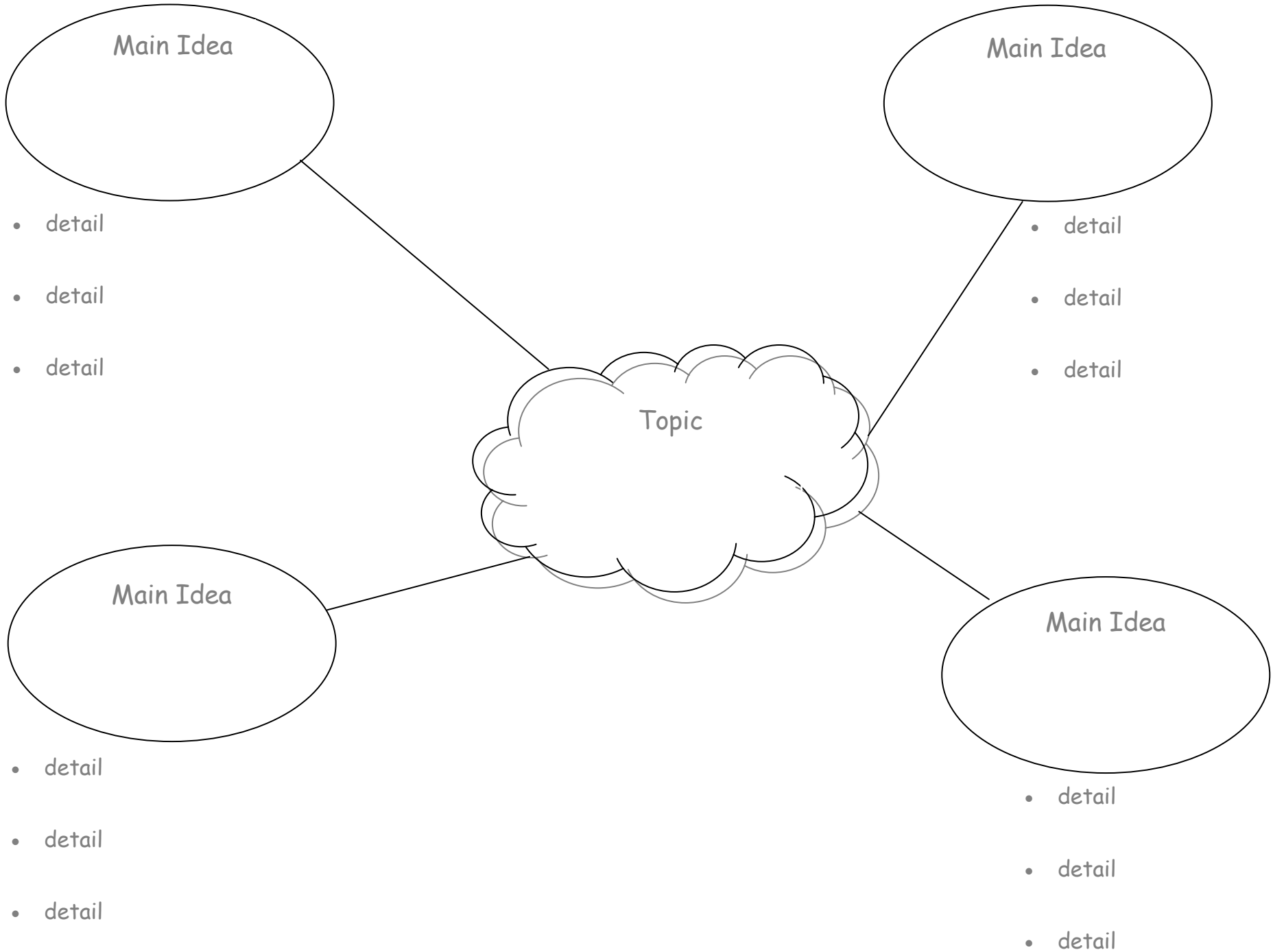
In both classes, power notes and two column notes received more votes than the webbing graphic organizer.



In one class power notes was the clear favourite. With another group of students, two column notes gathered the majority of votes. Our classes are diverse. Offering choice is a good thing!







*2 Column Notes*

Topic:

Main ideas:

Details:



# Power Notes

By: \_\_\_\_\_



Main Idea


Main Idea


Main Idea


Main Idea


Main Idea
