Main Idea/Detail Relay

Introduction: The topic of “main idea and supporting details” can cause confusion with some students. This lesson, in which students use their agility and brains at the same time, is sure to help students learn the concept while enjoying the physical activity.

Grade Level and Subject: Fourth Grade Reading and P.E.

TEKS: Reading 10F
P.E. 1A, 3A, 3E, 7A, 7B, 7D

Materials: enough large cards (made of poster board or other sturdy material) for eight stories, with each card having one sentence (either a main idea sentence or detail sentence) written on it; several cards with random sentences written on them


Activity: Before beginning the activity, the teacher needs to make the main idea/supporting details cards. He or she is to use eight different paragraphs with one topic idea and approximately three to five supporting detail sentences. The teacher will write (or cut and paste) each sentence on a sturdy card large enough for the students to see easily. Also, the teacher should have random sentences placed on cards that are not details of any of the main ideas in the paragraphs. The cards should be grouped by story, with random cards placed in the sets, and clipped together.

This activity should be performed in a gym since the students will be handling cards that don’t need to get wet or dirty. As the students progress into the gym, the teacher should divide them evenly into groups of approximately three to four students; line up the groups in separate rows. Each row should have plenty of room around it. From each stack of cards, the teacher should give the students the main idea card and let them read it together and discuss it.

While the students are discussing their main idea card, the teacher is to place the remainder of the cards with the supporting details and random sentences in a straight line in front of each group of students. Each line of students will have cards placed in front of them.

On the starting signal, the first student in each line is to run to one of the cards placed before them, pick it up, and read it. If he or she thinks that the card is a detail card, the student should run back with it and get in place at the end of the line. If the student thinks the card is not a supporting detail of the main idea, he or she is to leave it there and run back to the end of the line. Once the first player is in place at the end of the line, the next player should run to find a card with a detail sentence on it. Play continues in this manner until all cards with detail sentences have been found. The students will then put their cards in order and call the teacher to come check the cards for them. When all groups’ cards have been checked, the teacher is to retrieve the cards and give each group another set of cards to begin another relay.

Evaluation: The teacher is to check the cards to ensure that the students chose the correct supporting detail sentences to collaborate with their main idea sentence. The teacher should also monitor the activity and correct any problems that may arise.