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Level: First year

Module: Reading Texts

Reading Long Passages: Identifying the Thesis Statement

Like a paragraph, a longer passage focuses on a single topic, expresses a general idea about that topic, follows a pattern of organization, and uses signal words and phrases to indicate supporting ideas.

The Topic

The topic of a longer passage is usually repeated many times to focus the reader's attention and to reinforce connections between the topic and the supporting ideas. It is generally mentioned in:

- the title;
- the topic sentence of each paragraph;
- at least one other sentence in each paragraph.

The Thesis Statement In a longer passage, the writer's idea about the topic is stated in a sentence called the thesis statement. Like the main idea in a paragraph, the thesis statement tells the writer's overall idea about the topic. Recognizing and understanding the writer's thesis statement is the key to understanding the ideas in a passage

Identifying the Thesis Statement

The thesis statement in English

- includes the topic;

- is usually found in the first paragraph (or paragraphs);
- is always a complete sentence;
- often indicates how the ideas will be developed in the passage;
- is supported by the ideas and information found in all of the paragraphs of the passage

Exercise: Read the following passages, then identify the topic and the thesis statement

Cultural Universals in Emotional Expression

You can usually tell when your friends are happy or angry by the looks on their faces or by their actions. This is useful because reading their emotional expressions helps you to know how to respond to them. [...] Emotions have evolved to help us respond to important situations and to convey' our intentions to others. But does raising the eyebrows and rounding the mouth say the same thing in Minneapolis as it does in Madagascar? Much research on emotional expression has centered on such questions.

According to Paul Ekman, the leading researcher in this area, people speak and understand substantially' the same "facial language" the world around (Ekman, 1984,1992, 2003; Ekman & Rosenberg, 1997). Studies by Ekman's group have demonstrated that humans share a set of universal emotional expressions that testify to the common biological heritage' of the human species. Smiles, for example, signal happiness and frowns indicate sadness on the faces of people in such far-flung places as Argentina, Japan, Spain, Hungary, Poland, Sumatra, the United States, Vietnam, the jungles of New Guinea, and the Eskimo villages north of the Artic Circle (Biehl et al., 1997; Ekman et al., 1987; Izard, 1994).

Ekman and his colleagues claim that people everywhere can recognize at least seven basic emotions: sadness, fear, anger, disgust, contempt, 4 happiness, and surprise (Ekman &

Friesen, 1971, 1986; Ekman et al., 1969, 1987; Keating, 1994). There are, however, huge differences across cultures in both the context and intensity of emotional displays—the so-called display rules. In many Asian cultures, for example, children are taught to control emotional responses—especially negative ones—while many American children are encouraged to express their feelings more openly (Matsumoto, 1994, 1996).

Regardless of culture, however, emotions usually show themselves, to some degree, in people's behavior. From their first days of life, babies produce facial expressions that communicate their feelings (Ganchrow et al., 1983). And the ability to read facial expressions develops early, too. Very young children pay close attention to facial expressions, and by age five they nearly equal adults in their skill at reading emotions on people's faces (Nelson, 1987). [...]

This evidence all points to a biological underpinning' for our abilities to express and interpret a basic set of human emotions. Moreover, as Charles Darwin pointed out over a century ago, some emotional expressions seem to appear across species boundaries. Darwin especially noted the similarity of our own facial expressions of fear and rage to those of chimpanzees and wolves (Darwin, 1998/1862; Eijnabm, 1984).

But are all emotional expressions universal? No. Cross-cultural psychologists tell us that certain emotional responses carry different meanings in different cultures (Ekman, 1992, 1994; Ellsworth, 1994). These, therefore, must be learned rather than innate.' For example, what emotion do you suppose might be conveyed by sticking out your tongue? For Americans, this might indicate disgust, while in China it can signify surprise. Likewise, a grin' on an American face may indicate joy, while on a Japanese face it may just as easily mean embarrassment. Clearly, culture influences emotional expression.

Topic:.....

Thesis statement:.....

Human Responses to Disaster

Catastrophic events, such as natural disasters and major terrorist attacks, are extremely traumatic' for the people involved. In these situations, where one's own and others' physical safety is threatened, feelings may range from fear, to horror or helplessness. Studies of catastrophe survivors have taught psychologists how individuals who have undergone such traumas and losses respond to these circumstances. Such research is difficult: Ethics prevent psychologists from creating disastrous events in order to study their effects on volunteer subjects. The only way to study these events is to be on the scene after the catastrophe, getting the story from the survivors while it is fresh on their minds. From these stories, psychologists have theorized that responses to extreme natural and human-caused disasters occur in five stages.

The first stage begins immediately after the event and may last for a few moments or several days. During this period, victims experience psychological numbness—a certain inability to think or feel. They may be in a state of shock and confusion, and they have difficulty comprehending what has happened. This reaction occurs whether or not they have been physically injured themselves during the event.

During the next stage, victims continue to lack awareness of what is going on around them. They appear to function automatically, without conscious' control of their thinking or reacting. Later, they may not remember these moments or their actions. When there has been no warning at all of the disaster—as in an earthquake or the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York—this stage lasts longer. While people are in this phase, they are also unable to

focus their attention on their surroundings or coordinate their actions with other people. This can result in delays in rescue efforts and the loss of lives.

In the third stage after a disaster, victims turn to each other. They pool' resources and collaborate in trying to deal with the consequences. At this point, they may experience some pride at having managed to survive, they may be hopeful about the future, and they express their willingness to "roll up their sleeves" and try to rebuild. At the same time, they are physically worn out by the impact of the experience and they may not have much reserve energy.

The fourth stage is when victims are most likely to become depressed or even attempt suicide. They experience a letdown' and finally comprehend the full extent of the tragedy. By this time, the public and the media may have lost interest in the disaster and the victims are no longer given special consideration. Though the state of emergency may continue, the survivors feel abandoned and forgotten.

The final period of recovery is the most extended stage, as the survivors struggle to adapt to the changes in their lives. These changes may be personal or they may involve the whole community. In some cases, the victims may have to move elsewhere and start a completely new life. During this phase, survivors feel a basic need to find a meaning in their loss. "Why?" they ask themselves, and they demand answers from those in authority.

Topic:.....

Thesis statement:.....