

Reading Detective: Case Files for Grades 3–5

6 complete activities from Reading Detective, each with a worked answer.

Read

Read the passage closely.

Find

Underline the words that prove it.

Explain

Tell how the clues fit together.

HOW TO USE

1. Read the situation and the evidence first.
2. Show your thinking in the work boxes, not only an answer.
3. Explain how you know your answer makes sense.
4. Try the new problem at the bottom of the page.

6 activities • 3 answer pages • From the 24-activity collection

10 US Letter pages • Print at 100% / Actual Size

Original Bobotemp educational printable • Fictional names, places and prices

Name _____ Date _____

The Rope Bridge Builders

LEVEL 1



Read the numbered passage. Find the topic sentence. Then choose the main idea that is just right.

(1) In some mountain villages, neighbors work together to build bridges out of rope. (2) First, families twist long grass into thin cords. (3) Next, they braid many cords into thick ropes. (4) Then teams stretch the ropes across the river and tie them to stone posts. (5) Children help by carrying bundles of grass. (6) When the bridge is finished, the whole village celebrates. Which sentence states the main idea? Which choice below is just right, and which choices are too narrow, too broad, or inaccurate?

WORD BANK: TOO NARROW, TOO BROAD, INACCURATE, JUST RIGHT

Choice	Label
A. Children carry bundles of grass.	
B. People all over the world build many kinds of bridges.	
C. Villagers work together to build rope bridges.	
D. Villagers build rope bridges out of metal wire.	

1. Write the number of the topic sentence.

2. Label each choice A-D with a word from the word bank.

3. Name two sentences that support the main idea.

TRY IT • (1) Ants pass messages in clever ways. (2) Some ants leave scent trails for others to follow. (3) Others tap their antennae together. (4) A few kinds of ants make tiny squeaking sounds. Which sentence is the topic sentence? Name one supporting detail.

Name _____ Date _____

Maya's Hand-Drawn Map

LEVEL 1



Read the numbered story. Use definition and synonym clues to figure out the meanings of the target words.

(1) Maya drew a map of the park for her cousin Leo. (2) First she marked each landmark, an object that is easy to spot and helps you know where you are. (3) The giant oak tree was her first landmark. (4) Beside it she drew the winding trail, which is full of twists and bends. (5) Her pencil lines were faint, or pale, so she traced over them with a dark marker. (6) Maya wanted the map to be precise, so she made every distance exact. What does faint mean in sentence 5?

TARGET WORDS

Word	Sentence	Clue words	Clue type	Meaning
faint	5			
landmark	2			
precise	6			

EVIDENCE TO USE

- A. loud and noisy
- B. light and hard to see
- C. tired and sleepy
- D. thick and dark
- Clue types: definition, synonym

1. Choose the meaning of faint and underline the clue words.

2. Write what landmark means and name the clue type.

3. Write the synonym the passage gives for precise.

TRY IT • Read: 'The puppy was drowsy, or sleepy, after its long walk.' What does drowsy mean, and what kind of clue helped you?

Name _____ Date _____

Case of the Busy Beaver Pond

LEVEL 2



Read the numbered sentences. Use the main idea to sort each detail, then solve the case.

Passage: 'How Beavers Change a Stream.' Main idea: When beavers build a dam, they change the stream in ways that affect other living things. Label each sentence as key, nonessential, or off-topic. Then solve the case: Which candidate sentence (2-6) describes a result of the dam AND mentions an animal other than beavers? Support strip: key = helps prove the main idea; nonessential = true and about beavers, but does not prove the main idea; off-topic = about something else. Starter: 'Sentence __ is key because it shows...'

HOW BEAVERS CHANGE A STREAM

- 1 Beavers build dams of sticks and mud across streams.
- 2 A dam slows the water and spreads it into a wide pond.
- 3 Beavers have orange front teeth.
- 4 Ducks and frogs find new homes in the still pond.
- 5 Raccoons sometimes dip their food in streams.
- 6 Water from the pond soaks into the ground nearby.

LABEL AND TEST

No.	Label	Dam result?	Other animal?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

1. In the table, label sentences 1-6 as key, nonessential, or off-topic.

2. Name the sentence that survives both case clues.

3. Explain in one sentence how that detail supports the main idea.

TRY IT • Main idea: A beaver pond becomes a busy home for many creatures. Which detail is key? (a) Beavers slap their tails on the water. (b) Small fish hide among the sunken sticks. (c) The pond looks blue in the morning.

Name _____ Date _____

The Unbreakable Record

LEVEL 2



Find the affix words in the passage, split each into a base plus any prefix and/or suffix, and build its meaning.

Passage: 'The Unbreakable Record.' Eight words are built with affixes: unbreakable, rewrite, preplanned, reusable, misread, careful, kindness, endless. Split each word into prefix + base + suffix and write what it means in the sentence. Affix bank: un- = not; re- = again; pre- = before; mis- = wrongly; -able = able to be; -ful = full of; -less = without; -ness = state of being; -ed = in the past. Case: Which of the eight words has a prefix meaning 'again' AND a suffix meaning 'able to be'? Starter: '___ means ___ because the prefix ___ means ___.'

THE UNBREAKABLE RECORD

- 1 For years, the school's paper-chain record seemed unbreakable.
- 2 This spring, Room 12 hoped to rewrite the record book.
- 3 The students preplanned each step on a chart.
- 4 They chose reusable clips so nothing went to waste.
- 5 One helper misread the chart, so they counted again.
- 6 Careful teamwork, kindness, and endless patience helped them finish.

SPLIT EACH WORD

Word	Prefix	Base	Suffix	Meaning
unbreakable				
rewrite				
preplanned				
reusable				
misread				
careful				
kindness				
endless				

1. Use the table to split all 8 affix words into their parts.

2. In the Meaning column, write a meaning for each word that fits its sentence.

3. Name the word that has both re- and -able.

TRY IT • Use the affix bank to build one word that means 'full of hope' and one that means 'without hope.'

Name _____ Date _____

The Rooftop Garden: Ranking the Proof

LEVEL 3



Read the claim and the numbered sentences. Rank the evidence and defend your strongest choice.

Case: The Rooftop Garden. Claim: The rooftop garden kept the top-floor classrooms cooler. (1) Last spring, students at Brookline Elementary planted grasses and herbs on the flat roof. (2) Many families said the garden looked beautiful from the street. (3) In June, Ms. Okafor said the top-floor rooms felt less stuffy than the year before. (4) The custodian's thermometer showed the top-floor rooms were 4°F cooler than the same week last year. (5) The same thermometer showed that the basement rooms, with no garden above them, stayed the same. (6) Students also sold bookmarks to buy more seeds.

RANK THE EVIDENCE

Sentence	Strong	Weak	Irrelevant
S2			
S3			
S4			
S5			
S6			

EVIDENCE TO USE

- Strong: directly proves the claim with clear, checkable facts
- Weak: related, but only a feeling, an opinion, or part of the proof
- Irrelevant: does not connect to the claim
- Cite like this: S4

1. Rank sentences 2–6 as strong, weak, or irrelevant.

2. Name the single strongest sentence and explain how it proves the claim.

3. Explain why sentence 3 is weaker evidence than sentence 4.

TRY IT • Extension: New claim: Families liked how the garden looked. Which sentence is the strongest evidence, and why is it still not as strong as S4 was for the first claim?

Name _____ Date _____

The Library Hours Letter: Why That Word?

LEVEL 3



Read the letter. Decide the author's purpose, then explain one word choice and one structure choice.

Case: The Library Hours Letter. (1) Dear Town Council, our library now closes at 5:00 on weekdays. (2) Many students arrive at 5:15 after practice and find the doors locked. (3) We are left stranded on the steps with unfinished projects. (4) Libraries in two nearby towns stay open until 7:00. (5) Please add two evening hours so every student has a fair chance to study. -Priya, grade 5. Question: Priya wanted one word to make readers feel the students' problem. Which word was it: closes, locked, stranded, or fair?

TEST EACH WORD

Word	Students or building?	In S1-S3?
closes		
locked		
stranded		
fair		

EVIDENCE TO USE

- Purpose choices: inform, persuade, entertain
- Connotation: the feeling a word carries beyond its dictionary meaning
- Structure: problem (S1-S3), comparison (S4), request (S5)

1. Name Priya's purpose and cite the sentence that shows it most clearly.

2. Choose the word that makes readers feel the problem and explain its effect.

3. Explain why Priya placed sentence 4 right before her request.

TRY IT • Extension: Priya replaces stranded with waiting in S3. How does the effect of the sentence change, and is the letter more or less persuasive?

1. The Rope Bridge Builders

LEVEL 1

C. Villagers work together to build rope bridges. Sentence 1 is the stated topic sentence. A is too narrow, B is too broad, and D is inaccurate.

WORKED REASONING • Sentence 1 tells what the whole passage is about, and sentences 2–6 support it with steps and the celebration. Test each choice. A is true but matches only sentence 5, so it is too narrow. B goes beyond this passage, which is only about rope bridges in some villages, so it is too broad. D covers the whole topic, but sentence 2 says the cords are made of grass, not metal wire, so it is inaccurate. C is true, stays on topic, and covers every sentence, so it is just right. Accepted supporting sentences: any two of 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

WATCH FOR • Students may pick A because it is a true detail they remember. A main idea must cover the whole passage, not just one sentence.

TRANSFER • Sentence 1 is the topic sentence. Any detail from sentence 2, 3, or 4 is accepted, such as ants leaving scent trails.

2. Maya's Hand-Drawn Map

LEVEL 1

B. light and hard to see. Faint has a synonym clue (pale) in sentence 5.

WORKED REASONING • Sentence 5 says the lines were faint, or pale. The word or signals a synonym, so faint means about the same as pale. Pencil lines are not loud or sleepy, so A and C fail. D, thick and dark, is the opposite of pale, and dark lines would not need tracing with a dark marker. Only B fits both clues. Landmark (sentence 2) has a definition clue: an object easy to spot that helps you know where you are. Winding (sentence 4) has a definition clue: full of twists and bends. Precise (sentence 6) has the synonym clue exact.

WATCH FOR • Students may pick D because the marker in sentence 5 is dark. The marker is what Maya used to fix the lines; the clue pale describes the pencil lines themselves.

TRANSFER • Drowsy means sleepy. The word or signals a synonym clue.

9. Case of the Busy Beaver Pond

LEVEL 2

Sentence 4. Sort: key = 1, 2, 4, 6; nonessential = 3; off-topic = 5. Also accept sentence 1 as nonessential if the student explains that it tells what beavers do, not how the stream changes.

WORKED REASONING • Clue 1 (a result of the dam): Sentences 2 (pond forms), 4 (new homes in the pond), and 6 (water soaks into nearby ground) survive. Sentences 3 and 5 are not results of the dam. Clue 2 (an animal other than beavers): Sentences 4 (ducks, frogs) and 5 (raccoons) survive. Only Sentence 4 survives both clues. Sort: 1 is key because the dam starts every change. 2 is key because the stream becomes a pond. 4 is key because other animals are affected. 6 is key because nearby land changes. 3 is nonessential because it is true about beavers, but teeth do not change the stream. 5 is off-topic because it is about raccoons, not beaver changes.

WATCH FOR • Students may mark Sentence 3 as key because it is a surprising fact. A detail can be interesting without supporting the main idea. A key detail must help prove the main idea.

TRANSFER • (b) is key because it shows a creature using the pond as a home. (a) is about beavers but not about the pond as a home, and (c) describes how the pond looks.

10. The Unbreakable Record

LEVEL 2

reusable (re- + use + -able = able to be used again)

WORKED REASONING • Check all eight words. Clue 1 (prefix re-, meaning again): rewrite and reusable. Clue 2 (suffix -able, meaning able to be): unbreakable and reusable. Only reusable survives both clues. Full split: un+break+able = not able to be broken; re+write = write again; pre+plan+ed = planned before; re+use+able = able to be used again; mis+read = read wrongly; care+ful = full of care; kind+ness = being kind; end+less = without an end. In Sentence 4, 'reusable clips' can be used again, so nothing goes to waste.

WATCH FOR • Students may think any word that starts with 're' has the prefix re-. In 'ready,' for example, 're' is not a prefix. Check that a real base word is left after you remove the prefix.

TRANSFER • hopeful (hope + -ful) and hopeless (hope + -less)

17. The Rooftop Garden: Ranking the Proof

LEVEL 3

The strongest direct evidence is S4. Rankings: S4 is strong, S3 is weak, and S2 and S6 are irrelevant. Accept S5 as weak on its own or strong supporting/control evidence when the student explains how the unchanged basement strengthens the comparison.

WORKED REASONING • Apply three clues. Clue 1: the sentence is about temperature or coolness (S3, S4, S5). Clue 2: the sentence reports a measurement from a tool (S4, S5). Clue 3: the sentence is about the top-floor rooms under the garden (S3, S4). Only S4 passes all three clues. S4 gives a measured 4°F drop in the exact rooms the claim names. S3 reports one person's feeling, so it is weak. S5 is weak as direct proof of the top-floor temperature, but it is strong supporting/control evidence when paired with S4 because the basement did not change. Accept either ranking when the explanation is sound. S2 is about how the garden looks, and S6 is about raising money, so neither one shows coolness.

WATCH FOR • Some students pick S1 because it mentions the garden, or S3 because it sounds like coolness. Mentioning the topic is not proof. A feeling is weaker than a measurement. S5 is useful control evidence and may be ranked strong when the student explains how the unchanged basement strengthens the comparison.

TRANSFER • S2 is the strongest evidence for this claim. It is still weaker because it reports what families said without a count or measurement, so it shows opinions rather than checkable data.

18. The Library Hours Letter: Why That Word?

LEVEL 3

The purpose is to persuade, shown most clearly by S5, which makes a request. The word is stranded. S4 shows that the request is reasonable because nearby towns already do it.

WORKED REASONING • S5 asks the council to act, so the purpose is to persuade. Now test the words. Clue 1: the word makes readers feel something about the students, not just the building. Closes and locked describe the library, so only stranded and fair survive. Clue 2: the word is in the problem part of the letter (S1–S3). Closes, locked, and stranded survive. Only stranded passes both clues. Stranded suggests the students are stuck and helpless, which builds sympathy. S4 comes just before the request so the council sees that longer hours are possible elsewhere. That makes the request in S5 sound fair rather than unrealistic.

WATCH FOR • Some students choose fair because it is a feeling word. Fair appears in the request, not in the description of the problem. Others say the purpose is to inform because the letter includes facts, but those facts serve the request.

TRANSFER • Waiting is neutral and does not suggest the students are stuck or helpless. The sentence builds less sympathy, so the letter becomes less persuasive.