

What is the Main Idea?



Photo Credit: Lorax

If someone asked you to write a paragraph about fortune cookies, what point would you make about those cookies?

That point would be the main idea of your paragraph:

the main idea = topic + the point that the author makes about the topic

Once you identify the main idea of a paragraph, you will be able to remember it more easily. This can help when you are writing a reading response or participating in a class discussion. You can also see how the main idea of each paragraph supports the central idea of your reading. That's the whole point of a nonfiction text with more than one paragraph.

After reading the paragraph below, find the topic and what the author is saying about it:

The invention of fortune cookies as we know them today is difficult to pin down. Most people nowadays believe that fortune cookies were created by a Japanese man named Makoto Hagiwara in 1914 in San Francisco. Hagiwara owned what is now called the Golden Gate Park Japanese Tea Garden, where he served tea and fortune cookies. However, many still hold to the popular belief that fortune cookies were invented by a Chinese-American named David (Tsung) Jung, who owned the Hong Kong Noodle Company in Los Angeles. He claimed to have stuffed the cookies with passages from the Bible and handed them out to unemployed men near his bakery in 1918. In 1983, the debate between the two confectioners came to a head in the Court of Historical Review in San Francisco when their dispute was decided by Judge Daniel M. Hanlon, in favor of Hagiwara.

Source: Library of Congress

The author stated the main idea in the opening paragraph. To make sure I understand it, however, I need to state it in my own words:

The Topic: Fortune Cookies

What the Author is Saying About the Topic: The inventor of the fortune cookie is one of two possible businesspeople.