

Main Idea, Key Details, and Summary

Name: _____

Date: _____

Score: _____ / 10



Quick Review

The main idea is the most important point of the whole text. Key details are facts and examples that support it. A summary tells the main idea in your own words, using only the most important details.

PART 1 — READ

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

A Short History of the Pencil

The pencil is one of the simplest tools in your backpack, but it has a long and surprising history. The story begins in the 1560s in Borrowdale, England. After a windstorm knocked down some trees, farmers found a strange black material clinging to the roots. It looked like coal, but it left dark, smooth marks on sheep and on paper. People thought it was a kind of lead, so they called it "black lead." Today we know that the material was graphite, a soft form of pure carbon.

Pure graphite is too soft and crumbly to hold in your hand. Early users wrapped sticks of graphite in string or sheepskin. In the late 1700s, a French scientist named Nicolas-Jacques Conté discovered a better way. He ground graphite into powder, mixed it with clay, and baked the mixture in a hot oven. The amount of clay he added changed how hard or soft the writing core would be. This is why modern pencils are still labeled with numbers like 2B, HB, and 2H.

The wooden case came next. In the 1800s, factories in the United States and Germany began gluing two grooved strips of wood around a graphite rod, then cutting the sandwich into pencil shapes. Cedar wood was popular because it smelled pleasant and did not split when sharpened. By 1900, factories in New York could make millions of pencils every year. Even with computers and tablets, the pencil has not disappeared. It is light, cheap, and works without batteries—qualities that have kept it useful for more than four hundred years.

PART 2 — PRACTICE

Read the article. Then choose the best answer for each question.

1. Which sentence states the MAIN IDEA of the whole article?
 - A. Writing tools through history
 - B. The pencil has a long history of discoveries that improved a simple tool.
 - C. Nicolas-Jacques Conté was a French scientist who lived in the 1700s.
 - D. Cedar wood was used by factories because it did not split when sharpened.



2. Which detail BEST supports the idea that graphite was misunderstood at first?
 - A. It was found after a windstorm knocked down trees.
 - B. It left dark, smooth marks on paper.
 - C. People called it "black lead" because they thought it was a kind of lead.
 - D. It was discovered in Borrowdale, England, in the 1560s.
3. Why did Conté mix clay with graphite?
 - A. To control how hard or soft the writing core would be
 - B. To make the graphite stick to the wooden case
 - C. To make the pencil cheaper to ship
 - D. To make the graphite easier to find in the ground
4. Which fact BEST shows that pencil-making became very large in scale?
 - A. Cedar wood smelled pleasant when sharpened.
 - B. Graphite was first found in England in the 1560s.
 - C. Conté lived in France in the late 1700s.
 - D. By 1900, factories in New York could make millions of pencils every year.
5. Which sentence would make the BEST topic sentence for a summary of the whole article?
 - A. Conté was one of the most important inventors of the 1700s.
 - B. Graphite was discovered after a windstorm knocked down trees in England.
 - C. The pencil is a simple tool whose design improved through key discoveries over four hundred years.
 - D. Modern pencils are still labeled with numbers like 2B, HB, and 2H.
6. Which detail does NOT belong in a SHORT summary of the article?
 - A. Graphite was discovered in England in the 1560s.
 - B. Conté mixed graphite with clay so pencils could be made in different hardnesses.
 - C. Factories began wrapping wood around the graphite to make modern pencils.
 - D. Cedar wood smelled pleasant when sharpened.
7. Why does the author mention the labels 2B, HB, and 2H?
 - A. To prove that Conté's clay-and-graphite idea is still in use today
 - B. To list the names of famous pencil brands
 - C. To show that pencils are sorted by color
 - D. To explain how factories pack pencils for shipping



8. Which detail BEST supports the idea that pencils are still useful today?

- A. Pencils are light, cheap, and work without batteries.
- B. Pencils were once wrapped in string or sheepskin.
- C. Graphite was once called "black lead."
- D. Pencil factories were built in New York.

9. Write a two-sentence summary of the article in your own words.

10. Which fact is a KEY detail rather than an extra detail?

- A. The graphite was found near tree roots after a windstorm.
- B. Conté discovered a way to mix graphite with clay and bake it.
- C. Cedar wood was popular because it smelled pleasant.
- D. Pencil factories were built in both the United States and Germany.



Answer Keys

<p>1 <input type="radio"/> A <input checked="" type="radio"/> B <input type="radio"/> C <input type="radio"/> D</p> <p>2 <input type="radio"/> A <input type="radio"/> B <input checked="" type="radio"/> C <input type="radio"/> D</p> <p>3 <input checked="" type="radio"/> A <input type="radio"/> B <input type="radio"/> C <input type="radio"/> D</p> <p>4 <input type="radio"/> A <input type="radio"/> B <input type="radio"/> C <input checked="" type="radio"/> D</p> <p>5 <input type="radio"/> A <input type="radio"/> B <input checked="" type="radio"/> C <input type="radio"/> D</p>	<p>6 <input type="radio"/> A <input type="radio"/> B <input type="radio"/> C <input checked="" type="radio"/> D</p> <p>7 <input checked="" type="radio"/> A <input type="radio"/> B <input type="radio"/> C <input type="radio"/> D</p> <p>8 <input checked="" type="radio"/> A <input type="radio"/> B <input type="radio"/> C <input type="radio"/> D</p> <p>9 <input type="text" value="See below"/></p> <p>10 <input type="radio"/> A <input checked="" type="radio"/> B <input type="radio"/> C <input type="radio"/> D</p>
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Explanations	
1. B	A is too broad — the article is only about pencils. B covers every paragraph (discovery, improvement, lasting use). C is a key detail mistaken for the main idea. D fits only paragraph 3.
2. C	The wrong NAME shows the misunderstanding. A tells WHERE it was found. B tells what it could DO. D tells when and where, not what people misunderstood about it.
3. A	Paragraph 2 directly states this. B confuses Conté's clay step with the later wooden-case step. C is real-world plausible but not in the text. D mixes up Conté's improvement with the original discovery.
4. D	"Millions per year" is a true scale fact. A is about quality of wood, not amount made. B is about an early discovery, when only one piece existed. C is about a person, not production size.
5. C	A summary topic sentence must cover the WHOLE text. A is only about Conté. B is only about the first discovery. C captures discovery + improvements + lasting use. D fits only paragraph 2.
6. D	A short summary keeps only main steps. A, B, and C are turning points in pencil history. D is an interesting extra detail about wood quality — true, but not central.
7. A	The labels tie modern pencils back to Conté. C confuses hardness labels with color codes. B is plausible — letters and numbers LOOK like brand names — but they are not brands. D adds a plausible factory step that the text never mentions.
8. A	These qualities are listed at the end as reasons pencils have lasted 400 years. B and C describe early problems, not today's usefulness. D is about WHERE factories were, not WHY pencils are still used.
9.	Answer: Sample answers: (1) People discovered graphite in 1560s England and first wrapped it in string. Over time, inventors like Conté mixed graphite with clay and added a wooden case, which is why the pencil is still used today. (2) The pencil has a long history that began with the discovery of graphite. Key changes — Conté's clay mixture and the wooden case — turned it into the cheap, useful tool we still use. NOT acceptable: summaries that only repeat one paragraph (e.g., only Conté, only cedar wood), copy whole sentences from the article without rewording, or list every small detail without naming the main idea. Strong answers state the main idea (the pencil's long history of improvements) AND one or two key supporting details, in the student's own words. Reject one-paragraph-only summaries or full quotes.
10. B	Conté's invention is a turning point that changed pencils forever. A is one small how-it-was-found detail. C is a smell detail. D is a location detail. Only B is a step the rest of the history depends on.

