

# Analyzing the Structure of Paragraphs

**CCLS**

**RI.8.5:** Analyze in detail the structure of a specific paragraph in a text, including the role of particular sentences in developing and refining a key concept.

Theme: *The Civil Rights Movement*

To assemble a model plane and have it turn out right takes planning and skill. Similarly, to assemble a paragraph takes planning and skill, too. An author organizes a paragraph so that details in each sentence play an important role and fit with others in a way that makes sense. Together, the sentences communicate a main idea, or **key concept**, about a topic. Noting how the sentences support the key concept is one way to think about a paragraph’s structure.

**Study the photograph below. It was taken the first day that nine African-American students, called the Little Rock Nine, began attending a formerly all-white school. Circle details in the photo that help you understand what happened and how people felt about it.**



**The chart below shows plans for a paragraph about the photo. Use the details you circled to complete it. Note the role each sentence plays in helping to develop the key concept.**

Sentence 1	Sentence 2	Sentence 3
Tensely, a brave African-American student walks to school through a large, angry crowd.		Federal troops with serious faces stand guard at the side of the crowd.
<b>Role:</b> to tell how the girl looks, acts, and feels as she walks through the crowd	<b>Role:</b> to describe how the crowd reacts to the African-American student	<b>Role:</b> to tell how the federal troops look, act, and feel as they guard the girl.
↓ ↓ ↓		
<p><b>Key Concept:</b> An African-American student braves an angry crowd as federal troops escort her to school.</p>		

Just like details in a photo, sentences in a paragraph develop and **refine**, or explain more completely, a key concept about the text topic. In turn, the key concepts of paragraphs work together to communicate the central idea of the text, or the author’s overall message.



Read the historical account below about the U.S. Supreme Court decision that ruled against segregation in public schools. Then read and answer the question that follows.

Genre: Historical Account

### A Landmark Case for Civil Rights *by Nadia Patel*

(1) The court case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* marked a defining moment in the struggle for equality and civil rights. (2) Though the Fourteenth Amendment had promised “equal protection” under the law, regardless of race, individual states continued to pass legislation requiring the separation of white people and people of color. (3) In 1892, a part-black man from Louisiana named Homer Plessy challenged such laws by refusing to move from an all-white railroad car. (4) His arrest led to the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. (5) In it, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation was constitutional as long as the separate facilities were equal. (6) Schools and other public facilities followed the “separate” part of the ruling, but they remained far from equal. (7) Many black students had to travel long distances to attend schools that continued to be inferior to all-white schools. (8) As a result, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) decided to do something to address this inequality. *(continued)*

**Explore how to answer this question:** “What role do the sentences play in helping to develop the key concept of this paragraph?”

The title and first sentence focus on the significance of a famous court case that questioned the legality of school segregation in the U.S. The other sentences provide background about the struggle for civil rights. Circle the sentence in the text that sums up the inequalities once allowed by state laws.

**Complete the chart below. For each sentence, either paraphrase the idea it supplies or identify the role it plays in developing the key concept. Then write the key concept of the paragraph.**

Sentence 2	Sentence 5	Sentence 7
	The Supreme Court ruled that segregation was legal if facilities were equal.	
<b>Role:</b> develops the idea that state laws allowed inequalities in spite of the 14th Amendment	<b>Role:</b>	<b>Role:</b> refines the idea in sentence 6 by describing one example of unequal treatment
↓	↓	↓
<b>Key concept:</b>		



### Close Reading

Though a paragraph’s main idea is often stated in the first or last sentence, it can fall anywhere in the paragraph. **Circle** the sentence that states the paragraph’s key concept. Then **underline** two details that help develop this idea.

### Hint

Think about how each sentence plays a role in developing the paragraph’s key concept. What caused the need for the Supreme Court to make a ruling?

Continue reading the historical account about the court ruling. Use the Close Reading and Hint to help you answer the question.

*(continued from page 112)*  
(9) In 1950, NAACP leaders encouraged seven-year-old Linda Brown and several other African-American students near Topeka, Kansas, to enroll in schools close to their homes. (10) The children were refused admission because of their race, so their parents sued the Topeka Board of Education. (11) The case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and signaled a turning point in the fight for equality: the court finally declared segregation of public schools to be illegal. (12) Although the court’s decision was largely ignored in Southern states, *Brown v. Board of Education* proved that battles for equality could be won. (13) The fight, however, was far from over.

Circle the correct answer.

How do the sentences in the paragraph help to develop the idea that *Brown v. Board of Education* was a “turning point in the fight for equality”?

- A They explain the differences of opinion among leaders, parents, and the Supreme Court about school segregation.
- B They compare and contrast important events that occurred both before and after the Supreme Court’s decision about segregation in public schools.
- C They outline the circumstances that led up to the Supreme Court’s decision that public schools could no longer be segregated.
- D They describe the consequences that resulted when Southern states ignored the Supreme Court’s ruling about segregated schools.



### Show Your Thinking

Explain why you think the answer you chose resulted in an important turning point.

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With a partner, discuss how the sentences in each paragraph give historical context and how they help develop the author’s central idea about the significance of *Brown v. Board of Education*.



Read this excerpt from the official transcript of the decision made by members of the United States Supreme Court. Use the Study Buddy and the Close Reading to guide your reading.

Genre: Public Document



As I read, I'll think about what each sentence adds to the overall explanation of the Supreme Court's decision, as well as how it helps develop the key concept in each paragraph. To start, I'll figure out what decision the court needs to make in this case.

*The issue to be decided in the Brown v. Board of Education case was the problem of whether segregated schools provided equal education and were therefore constitutional, or legal, under the Fourteenth Amendment.*

### from *Brown v. Board of Education*

delivered by Chief Justice Earl Warren (1954)

- 1 In approaching this problem, we cannot turn the clock back to 1868, when the Amendment was adopted, or even to 1896, when *Plessy v. Ferguson* was written. We must consider public education in the light of its full development and its present place in American life throughout the Nation. Only in this way can it be determined if segregation in public schools deprives these plaintiffs of the equal protection of the laws.
- 2 Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.
- 3 We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does.

### Close Reading

What is the key concept in paragraph 2?

**Underline** details in the paragraph that develop this idea.

In which paragraph does the court state its final decision? **Circle** details that explain more about this decision.



### Hints

Which choice best explains what the Supreme Court based its decision on?

Which sentence in paragraph 2 presents the main idea?

How do the sentences in paragraph 2 support the idea that education is important to everyone?

Use the Hints on this page to help you answer the questions below.

1 Read this sentence from paragraph 1.

We must consider public education in the light of . . . its present place in American life throughout the Nation.

How does this sentence help to develop the key concept of the paragraph and clarify the reasoning of the Supreme Court members?

- A It serves to emphasize the problem that *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* had presented to the Supreme Court.
- B It points to a belief that the Supreme Court could only rely on the 14th Amendment and *Plessy v. Ferguson* to rule on public schools.
- C It explains that the Supreme Court considered the purpose of education in today’s world in their decision.
- D It is meant to contrast the function of schools today with educational practices once followed in the 19th century.

2 Which statement best expresses the key concept in paragraph 2?

- A Education plays a vital role in people becoming good citizens.
- B A good education is essential both for individuals and for society.
- C Local governments spend a great deal of money on education.
- D People need an education to perform many basic public services.

3 The Supreme Court ruled that segregation prevents children of minority groups from getting an equal education. Explain how the sentences in paragraph 2 develop the idea of the importance of equal educational opportunities. Use two details from the text in your answer.

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Read the public document. Then answer the questions that follow.

## from “The Little Rock Nine”

*from* The National Park Service

### Who Are the Little Rock Nine?

1 In 1957, nine ordinary teenagers walked out of their homes and stepped up to the front lines in the battle for civil rights for all Americans. The media coined the name “Little Rock Nine,” to identify the first African-American students to desegregate Little Rock Central High School.

### The End of Legal Segregation

2 In 1954, the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court decision outlawed segregation in public education. Little Rock School District Superintendent Virgil Blossom devised a plan of gradual integration that would begin at Central High School in 1957. The school board called for volunteers from all-black Dunbar Junior High and Horace Mann High School to attend Central.

3 Prospective students were told they would not be able to participate in extracurricular activities if they transferred to Central—such as football, basketball, or choir. Many of their parents were threatened with losing their jobs, and some students decided to stay at their own schools.

### The First Day of School

4 On September 3, 1957, the Little Rock Nine arrived to enter Central High School, but they were turned away by the Arkansas National Guard. Governor Orval Faubus called out the Arkansas National Guard the night before to, as he put it, “maintain and restore order . . .” The soldiers barred the African-American students from entering.

5 The students arrived at Central alone on the first day. By prior arrangement, they gathered at the 16th Street entrance with several local ministers who accompanied them. Elizabeth Eckford arrived at the other end of the block by herself. She was met by a mob screaming obscenities and threats, chanting, “Two, four, six, eight, we ain’t gonna integrate!”

6 More than two weeks went by before the Little Rock Nine again attempted to enter Central High School. On September 23, 1957, the Little Rock Nine entered the school. Outside, rioting broke out and the Little Rock police removed the Nine for their safety.

### The President Becomes Involved

7 On September 24, 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered units of the U.S. Army’s 101st Airborne Division—the “Screaming Eagles”—into Little Rock and federalized the Arkansas National Guard. In a televised speech delivered to the nation, President Eisenhower stated, “Mob rule cannot be allowed to override the decisions of the courts.”

8 On September 25, 1957, under federal troop escort, the Little Rock Nine made it inside for their first full day of school. The 101st Airborne left in October and the federalized Arkansas National Guard troops remained throughout the year.



### Inside the School

9 The Little Rock Nine had assigned guards to walk them from class to class. The guards could not accompany the students inside the classrooms, bathrooms, or locker rooms. They would stand outside the classrooms during class time. In spite of this, the Little Rock Nine endured verbal and physical attacks from some of their classmates throughout the school year. Although some white students tried to help, few white students befriended any of the Nine. Those who did received similar treatment as the Nine, such as hate mail and threats.

10 One of the Little Rock Nine, Minnijean Brown, was suspended in December for dropping chili on some boys after they refused to let her pass to her seat in the cafeteria. She was later expelled in February 1958 for calling a girl who had hit her with a purse “white trash.”

11 After Brown’s expulsion, students passed around cards that read, “One Down, Eight to Go.” Brown finished high school at New Lincoln School in New York City, while living with Drs. Kenneth and Mamie Clark. The Clarks were the social psychologists whose “doll test” work demonstrated for the Supreme Court in Brown that racial prejudice and segregation caused African-American children to develop a sense of inferiority.

12 The remaining eight students completed the school year at Central. Senior Ernest Green was the first African-American student to graduate from Central High School.

### The Aftermath

13 The following year, the city’s high schools were closed to prevent further desegregation while the NAACP continued to pursue the legal case to integrate Little Rock’s schools.

14 When the schools reopened, Carlotta Walls and Jefferson Thomas returned to Central and graduated in 1960. Thelma Mothershed received her diploma from Central High School by taking correspondence courses to complete her studies. The rest of the Little Rock Nine completed their high school educations at different schools.

15 The Little Rock Nine have received numerous accolades and awards, from the renowned NAACP Spingarn Medal to the nation’s highest civilian honor, the Congressional Gold Medal.

**1**

How do the sentences in paragraph 3 help to develop the key concept of that paragraph?

- A** by describing parents who were unwilling to send their children to Central High School
- B** by describing the daily routine of African-American students who were already attending Central High School
- C** by describing how officials tried to calm parents of African-American students at Central High School
- D** by describing efforts to discourage African-American students from wanting to attend Central High School

### Answer Form

1 (A) (B) (C) (D)

2 (A) (B) (C) (D)

3 (A) (B) (C) (D)

**Number  
Correct****3**



**2** Which sentence from paragraph 5 **best** helps to develop the idea that the Little Rock Nine had trouble even entering the school?

- A** “The students arrived at Central alone on the first day.”
- B** “By prior arrangement, they gathered at the 16th Street entrance. . . .”
- C** “Elizabeth Eckford arrived at the other end of the block by herself.”
- D** “She was met by a mob screaming obscenities and threats. . . .”

**3** Reread paragraph 9. Then read this sentence.

In spite of this, the Little Rock Nine endured verbal and physical attacks from some of their classmates throughout the school year.

How does the sentence above help to develop the key concept of paragraph 9?

- A** It explains why guards were a practical solution to keeping the Little Rock Nine safe once inside the school.
- B** It illustrates the part the guards played in allowing some high school students to mistreat the Little Rock Nine.
- C** It shows that the guards were not effective in protecting the Little Rock Nine from all threats.
- D** It describes an eventful day for the Little Rock Nine while under guard at school.

**4** Reread the section titled “The Aftermath,” which describes what happened to the Little Rock Nine in later years. Then describe the key concept of paragraph 14 and how the sentences in that paragraph develop that concept. Include **one** detail from the paragraph in your response.

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**Self Check**

***Go back and see what you can check off on the Self Check on page 93.***