

# Writing Activity

*Common Core Standards: English Language Arts Standards: Reading Informational Text, Key Ideas and Details—RI.4.2–RI.8.2 and Writing, Key Ideas and Details—W.3.2–W.8.2*

## Summarize Using the 5 W's Plus H



**NOTE:** You will need to replace the examples provided below with examples from your students' textbook.

Remind your class that a summary is a short description of a longer piece of writing that includes its most important points. A summary of the one of our student textbooks might be, “*The Massachusetts Story* tells about Massachusetts' geography, the Wampanoag, the Pilgrims and Puritans, the American Revolution, and local government today.”

One way of writing a summary is to use the tools reporters traditionally rely on to write news stories: the 5 W's plus H. Ask your students if any of them know what those letters stand for. List the question words What, Where, When, Who, Why, and How on the board and tell students that they can use them to write summaries. Not all pieces of writing—especially paragraphs and short sections—will include answers to every single one of these questions, but the questions make a good starting point.

In this writing assignment, students will practice summarizing paragraphs. Explain that one sentence should be enough to summarize most paragraphs, but sometimes two may be needed. Read the paragraph below about what Puritans ate for dinner together as a class.

*Dinner was the big meal of the day. It was served at noon, when the men and boys came in from the fields. Women usually made a stew called succotash. It was made of meat, peas, corn, and other vegetables. Everyone got a heaping serving of succotash in a pewter dish. Pewter is a type of tin used to make spoons, forks, cups, bowls, and pitchers.*

Ask students to find the answers to each of the 5 W's plus H questions. Sometimes they will know answers from what they have already been reading. Other answers may be implied, as in the response to Where in the example. (Since the men came in from the fields, they probably ate dinner in the house or in front of the house when the weather was warm. Usually people eat when they are hungry, so that could be the answer to “Why?”) Put students' answers on the board. Point out that “what” can ask, “What happened?” or can ask for an important idea about the paragraph topic. Students should be able to come up with ideas such as the following:

**WHEN**—At noon every day

**WHERE**—Probably in the house or out in front in summer

**WHO**—Puritans

**WHAT**—Ate a big dinner, usually succotash

**WHY**—They were hungry

**HOW**—Women cooked for their families

Assign students to work in pairs to come up with one or two sentences that summarize the information in this 5 W's plus H list. They should use most, if not all, of the information in the list. Then give pairs a chance to share their summaries. What information did they include? Which summaries seem to work the best, and why? Have the partners practice again on a paragraph from the textbook of your choice. This time students will make their own 5 W's plus H lists before writing their sentences. When they are ready, discuss their summary sentences as a class. Here are examples of possible summary sentences for the paragraph about the Puritan dinner:

*At noon every day, Puritans ate a big dinner of succotash.*

*Puritan women cooked succotash for their families each day at noon.*

*Dinner was a big meal of succotash that Puritans ate at noon.*

Now students will write their own summaries of paragraphs from the lesson using the “Summarize with 5 W's Plus H” strategy. Choose 3–4 specific paragraphs for them to work on, preferably ones with most or all of the 5 W's plus H questions either provided or implied. When they finish, students should work in pairs to get feedback so that they can revise their work. Have students share their best summaries with the class.