

Poisonous SNAKES

by Thomas Kane

Vocabulary

species	surroundings
survive	prey
alert	predators
vibrates	lunging



Context Clues

Context Clues are words or phrases that can help you figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word. For example, you might figure out that *species* means *kinds* after reading the third sentence of this selection.

There are about 130 different **species** of snakes found in the United States and Canada. Many people are afraid of snakes because they think they are poisonous. However, only four kinds of poisonous snakes live in the United States. One, the coral snake, is in the cobra family. The other three snakes belong to the pit viper family. A bite from a poisonous snake can kill a person. However, most people bitten by snakes **survive** if they are treated quickly.

All snakes have some characteristics in common. For example, none of them hear well. Instead, they are constantly aware and **alert** for times when the ground **vibrates**, or shakes slightly. They feel, rather than hear, something coming.

copperhead snake



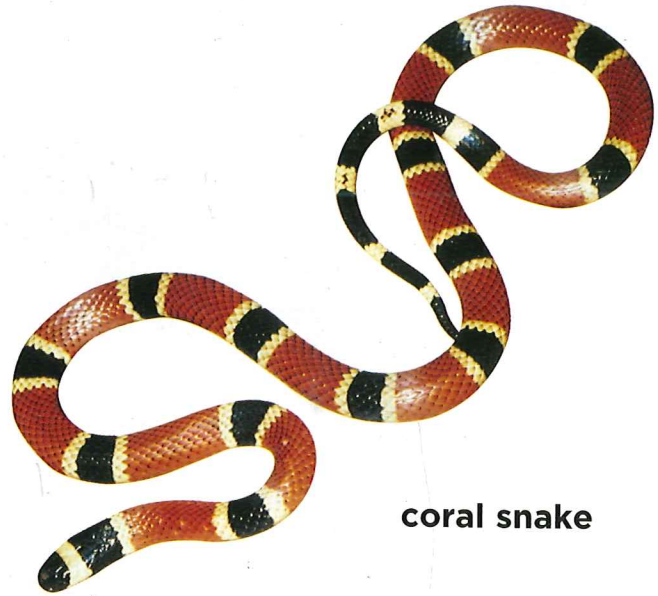
Snakes also have a keen sense of smell. They use their tongues to pick up smells from the air. They sort out these smells to find out whether an animal in their nearby **surroundings** is **prey**. Snakes are **predators** that hunt other animals for food. Snakes usually eat small animals, sometimes swallowing them whole.

Coral Snakes

Coral snakes live in the southern part of the United States. Their shiny red, yellow, and black bands make them easy to spot. A coral snake has a small head. You can see its fangs at the front of its mouth. When a coral snake bites, it shoots poison into its prey. The animal soon stops breathing and dies.

Pit Vipers

A pit viper is named for the two large pits or dents on each side of its head. When both pits feel the same temperature, the pit viper knows it is facing its prey



coral snake

and it springs forward. **Lunging**, the viper digs its fangs into the animal. The poisonous bite causes bleeding and swelling that leads to death.

The three types of pit vipers in the United States are rattlesnakes, copperheads, and cottonmouths. Copperheads and cottonmouths are sometimes called moccasins.

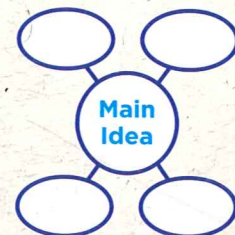
Pit vipers live in the southeastern United States, the West, and the Midwest.

Reread for Comprehension

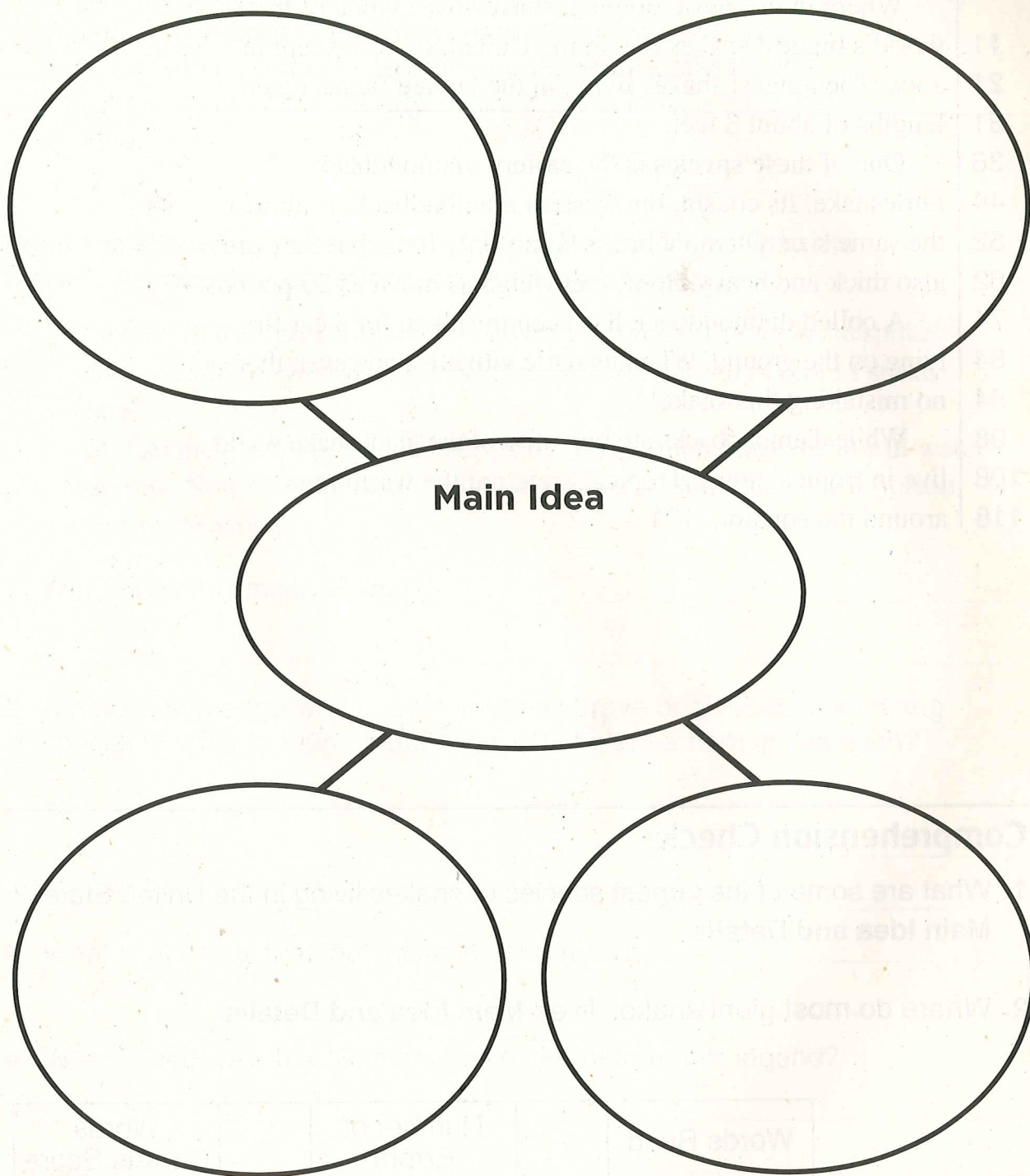


Summarize Main Idea and Details

A Main Idea Web helps you decide which information is important to include in a summary. Use your Main Idea Web as you reread "Poisonous Snakes" to summarize the main idea and the important details of the selection.



As you read a section of "Rattlers!", fill in the Main Idea Web.



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How does the information you wrote in this Main Idea Web help you summarize the section of "Rattlers!" you chose?



At Home: Have the student use the chart to retell the story.

Name _____

A **main idea** is the important or main point that the writer makes in a story. The main idea is what the story is about. The writer often gives **details** to support the main idea.

Read the paragraph below. Write the main idea and three supporting details.

Many people are afraid of rattlesnakes, but the more you learn about them, the less scary they seem. Most rattlesnakes live in wilderness or desert areas away from humans. Even when people are near rattlesnakes, most rattlers would rather slip away unnoticed than attack. A rattlesnake shakes its tail when it feels that it is in danger, giving a warning to anyone who has stepped too close.

1. Main Idea: _____

2. Detail: _____

3. Detail: _____

4. Detail: _____

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