Comprehension

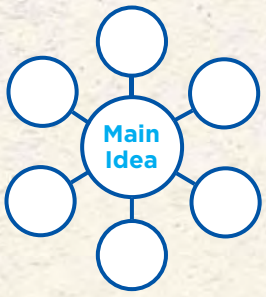
Genre

Informational Nonfiction is a detailed account of real situations or people using verifiable facts.

Make Inferences and Analyze

Main Idea and Details

As you read, use your Main Idea Web.



Read to Find Out

How did volunteers help save the endangered sea turtles?

INTERRUPTED JOURNEY

Saving Endangered Sea Turtles

by KATHRYN LASKY

photographs by CHRISTOPHER G. KNIGHT

Stranded

The young turtle has been swimming for three months now in the same warm shallow bay, grazing on small crabs and plankton, basking in an endless dream of calm water and plentiful food. But as the days begin to shorten and the light drains out of the sky earlier and earlier, the water grows colder. It drops to fifty degrees Fahrenheit. The turtle is confused. Swimming is harder. Its heartbeat slows—and almost stops.

Ten days before Thanksgiving, on a beach where Pilgrims once walked, Max Nolan, a ten-year-old boy, and his mother begin their patrol. The Nolans are among volunteers who walk Cape Cod's beaches during November and December to search for turtles who are often cold and stunned and seem dead—turtles whose lives they may be able to save.

It is a blustery day on Ellis Landing Beach. At twenty-five knots the bitter northwest wind stings Max's face like sharp needles. It makes his eyes water but he keeps looking—looking above the high-water mark through the clumps of seaweed, looking below the tide line where the sand is hard and sleek and lapped by surf—looking for a dark greenish-brown mound about the size of a pie plate, looking for a Kemp's ridley turtle that is dying and perhaps can be saved.

Max and his mother and the other volunteers work for a **vital** cause. All sea turtles are threatened or endangered; Kemp's ridleys are the most endangered of all. Right now on our planet there are fewer than eight thousand Kemp's ridley turtles left. They are a vanishing species.

On Ellis Landing Beach, snow squalls begin to whirl down. The waves are building, and as they begin to break, the white froth whips across their steep faces. So far there is no sign of a turtle.

Max is far ahead of his mother when he sees the hump in the sand being washed by the surf. He runs up to it and shouts to his mom, "Got one!" The turtle is cold. Its flippers are floppy. Its eyes are open, but the turtle is not moving at all. It might be dead, but then again, it might not.

Main Idea

What is the main idea on pages 108–109? What details support it?

Max remembers the instructions given to all rescuers. He picks up the turtle, which weighs about five pounds, and moves it above the high-tide mark to keep it from washing out to sea. Then he runs to find seaweed to protect it from the wind. He finds a stick to mark the spot, and next, he and his mother go to the nearest telephone and call the sea-turtle rescue line of the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

Within an hour the turtle has been picked up and taken to the Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary on Cape Cod. Robert Prescott, the director of the Sanctuary, examines the turtle. “It sure does look dead,” he says softly. “But you never can tell.” If the turtle is really alive, it must be brought out of its cold, stunned condition. That is a task for the New England Aquarium with its medical team who, over the years, have made a specialty of treating turtles.

Robert puts the new turtle in a plastic wading pool with another turtle that is quite lively. Max crouches by the edge and watches his turtle. It is as still as a stone. He gently touches a flipper. Nothing moves. Then after about twenty minutes, he thinks he might see a flicker in the turtle’s left eyelid. He leans closer. “Hey, it’s moving!” It wasn’t just the eyelid. He saw the right rear flipper move a fraction of an inch. Over the next five minutes, he sees the turtle make three or four microscopically small motions with its right rear flipper. Soon, the rescue team from the New England Aquarium arrives.

Emergency

Beth Chittick is a vet at the New England Aquarium. When the turtles arrive she is ready for them. The turtles are taken immediately into the examination room. Beth is joined by head veterinarian, Howard Crum. They insert a thermometer into the cloaca, the opening under the turtle's tail. The temperature of the turtle Max found is fifty degrees Fahrenheit. Normal temperature for a turtle is usually about seventy-five degrees. Howard next tries to find a heartbeat. He listens intently. "I think I can hear a faint sound . . . " He holds the stiff turtle against his ear as one might hold a seashell. "Why, gee whiz, I can hear the ocean," he jokes.

Main Idea

What is the main idea of this paragraph? Find two details to support your answer.

Howard is still not convinced that the turtle is dead. “With turtles,” Howard says, “death is a relative term.” Turtles can operate, can survive, even when their hearts slow down for periods of time. Events that might damage the larger, more complicated brains of other animals will not always prove fatal to turtles.

In fact, a turtle’s heartbeat naturally slows down at times to just one or two beats per minute in order to **conserve** oxygen and keep vital organs like the brain working. So Howard won’t give up on this turtle yet. The turtle does not seem **dehydrated**. The skin on its limbs is not wrinkled—a good sign.

An assistant swabs down an area on the turtle’s neck, from which a blood sample will be taken. By **analyzing** the blood, Howard and Beth will be able to see how the turtle’s kidneys and other organs are functioning.

Next the turtle is cleaned. The algae are washed and wiped from its shell. The doctors detect movement in its tail and then see some of the same movements that Max saw in its flippers. They are the motions a turtle makes when it swims. They do not necessarily mean that it is alive, though. It has been **speculated** that these movements could be what are sometimes called vestigial motions, echoes of long-ago actions, fossil behaviors **embedded** in the brain of an ancient creature. The turtle could be swimming in death or swimming toward life.

Nonetheless, the vets hook up the turtle to an intravenous needle through which fluids will be pumped very slowly at a temperature slightly higher than the turtle's body. Beth and Howard have learned much about the condition of this turtle but they are still not sure if it is really alive or dead.

Finally the turtle is tagged with a yellow-blue band. It will be known as Yellow-Blue. It is put in the Intensive Care Unit, a large temperature-controlled stainless steel box with a glass window. Inside, the turtle is placed on a soft pile of towels so its shell is supported and it will not have to rest on its ventrum, or bottom shell.

Then the team turn their attention to another turtle, which is definitely alive. Howard picks up the turtle and talks to it as its flippers thrash madly. “Okay, little man!” This turtle’s temperature is sixty-two degrees. When they take its blood, the sample appears much redder than the nearly brownish blood of Yellow-Blue, which indicates that there is more oxygen in it.

But as lively as this one is, Howard gives it only a fifty-percent survival rate. There is a good chance that pneumonia could still develop. They insert an intravenous tube for rehydration. Then they tag the animal with a plain yellow band.

There are other turtles also being treated. One, Orange, needs to have its eyes lubricated and then be weighed and examined. The turtle is feisty and needs to be **sedated**. This is done without drugs, simply by shielding the top of its head from the ceiling lights. There is a gland inside a turtle's head that is sensitive to light, and it is speculated that when the gland is covered, it helps the turtle settle down into a relaxed, near-sleeping state.

In this peaceful state, Orange begins to "swim" on the table, its flippers making the paddling motions that have since birth **propelled** it through thousands of miles of sea. Its heart rate, at thirty-six beats a minute, is good. Its respiration rate is still slow. It takes only one breath every minute. Its temperature is near seventy degrees. Orange is x-rayed for signs of pneumonia. The lungs are clear.

Whatever the outcome for these three turtles, Beth, Howard, Robert, Max, and his mother all know they are doing their part to help return the turtles to health, to help return them to the sea.

Take a Journey with Kathryn Lasky and Christopher G. Knight

Kathryn Lasky has written more than 100 books in all genres. You would think she wouldn't have time for anything else, but twice she has sailed with her husband across the Atlantic Ocean in a small sailboat. Even when she was seasick, Kathryn loved watching the birds and the dolphins . . . and maybe she even saw a sea turtle!

Christopher G. Knight is Kathryn Lasky's husband. He is also a photographer and an adventurer. He has paddled a kayak from Alaska to Seattle and canoed through seven countries in Europe. Then he met Kathryn. They have two children and have done seventeen books together.

Other books by Kathryn Lasky:
The Man Who Made Time Travel and
A Voice of Her Own

LOG ON Find out more about Kathryn Lasky and Christopher G. Knight at **www.macmillanmh.com**

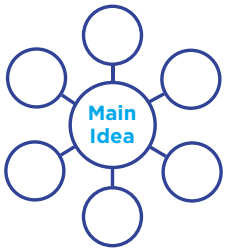
Author's Purpose

Kathryn Lasky's purpose here is to inform. She tells about real people doing real things and documents those acts with photographs. How do the photos add to the text?

Comprehension Check

Summarize

Use your Main Idea Web to help you summarize *Interrupted Journey*. State the main idea in one or two sentences.



Think and Compare

1. What are some important details that Kathryn Lasky includes to explain why the sea turtles need assistance? **Make Inferences and Analyze: Main Idea and Details**

2. Do you think the yellow-blue turtle will live? Explain why or why not. Use information from the text to support your answer. **Evaluate**

3. Max and his mother are volunteers. What kind of volunteer work would you like to do? Are volunteers **vital** to your community? Why or why not? **Synthesize**

4. What facts from *Interrupted Journey* would you choose to show if you were to give a presentation about conservation? Explain your choices. **Apply**

5. Read "Protecting the Clouded Leopard" on pages 104-105. Compare and contrast the conservation project detailed in this selection with the one in *Interrupted Journey*. How are the two projects similar? How are their methods different? **Reading/Writing Across Texts**