How much information is enough?

Explore the Big Question as you read the excerpt from Always to Remember. Take notes on the kinds of information the writer provides about Maya Lin and the way in which she planned her work.

CLOSE READING FOCUS

Key Ideas and Details: Main Idea

Main, or central, ideas are the most important points in a work of nonfiction. Often, the main idea is stated in the introduction. As you read, look for ways the main idea of the work is developed. To do so, first identify the main point of each body paragraph.

- This point may be stated in a topic sentence (often, the first sentence in the paragraph).
- For a paragraph without a topic sentence, determine the implied main idea—the idea that all the sentences in the paragraph work together to express.

Link the main points of paragraphs together to determine how they contribute to and develop the main idea of the work.

Craft and Structure: Biography and Autobiography

Biography and autobiography are two types of nonfiction.

- A biography is a nonfiction work in which the writer tells about important events in the life of another person.
- An autobiography is a true account of events written by the person who directly experienced the events. It includes the writer's thoughts and feelings.

Both types of writing examine the influence of personal experiences on a person's development and accomplishments. They also may capture the heritage, attitudes, and beliefs of the subject.

Vocabulary

Read each word listed from the selection. Which words share a suffix? What does the suffix indicate about the words' meaning?

authorized anonymously criteria eloquent harmonious unanimous
In the 1960s and 1970s, the United States was involved in a war in Vietnam. Because many people opposed the war, Vietnam veterans were not honored as veterans of other wars had been. Jan Scruggs, a Vietnam veteran, thought that the 58,000 U.S. servicemen and women killed or reported missing in Vietnam should be honored with a memorial. With the help of lawyers Robert Doughty and John Wheeler, Scruggs worked to gain support for his idea. In 1980, Congress authorized the building of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial.

The memorial had been authorized by Congress “in honor and recognition of the men and women of the Armed Forces of the United States who served in the Vietnam War.” The law, however, said not a word about what the memorial should be or what it should look like. That was left up to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, but the law did state that the memorial design and plans would have to be approved by the Secretary of the Interior, the Commission of Fine Arts, and the National Capital Planning Commission.

What would the memorial be? What should it look like? Who would design it? Scruggs, Doughty, and Wheeler didn’t know, but they were determined that the memorial should help bring closer together a nation still bitterly divided by the Vietnam War. It couldn’t be something like the Marine Corps Memorial showing American troops planting a flag on enemy soil at Iwo Jima. It couldn’t be a giant dove with an olive branch of peace in its beak. It had to soothe passions, not stir...
them up. But there was one thing Jan Scruggs insisted on: The memorial, whatever it turned out to be, would have to show the name of every man and woman killed or missing in the war.

The answer, they decided, was to hold a national design competition open to all Americans. The winning design would receive a prize of $200,000, but the real prize would be the winner’s knowledge that the memorial would become a part of American history on the Mall in Washington, D.C. Although fund raising was only well started at this point, the choosing of a memorial design could not be delayed if the memorial was to be built by Veterans Day, 1982. H. Ross Perot contributed the $160,000 necessary to hold the competition, and a panel of distinguished architects, landscape architects, sculptors, and design specialists was chosen to decide the winner.

Announcement of the competition in October, 1980, brought an astonishing response. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund received over five thousand inquiries. They came from every state in the nation and from every field of design: as expected, architects and sculptors were particularly interested. Everyone who inquired received a booklet explaining the criteria. Among the most important: The memorial could not make a political statement about the war; it must contain the names of all persons killed or missing in action in the war; it must be in harmony with its location on the Mall.

A total of 2,573 individuals and teams registered for the competition. They sent photographs of the memorial site, maps of the area around the site and of the entire Mall, and other technical design information. The competitors had three months to prepare their designs, which had to be received by March 31, 1981. Of the 2,573 registrants, 42 submitted designs, a record number for such a design competition. When the designs were spread out for jury selection, they filled a large airplane hangar. The jury’s task was to select the design which, in their judgment, was the best in meeting these criteria:

- a design that honored the memory of those Americans who served and died in the Vietnam War
- a design of high artistic merit
- a design which would be harmonious with its site, including visual harmony with the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument
- a design that could take its place in the “historic continuity” of America’s national art
- a design that would be buildable, durable, and not too hard to maintain.

The designs were displayed without any indication of the designer’s name so that they could be judged anonymously on their design merits alone. The jury spent one week reviewing all the designs in the airplane hangar. On May 1, it made its report to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund: the experts declared Entry Number 1,026 the winner. The report called it “the finest and most appropriate” of all submitted and said it was “superbly harmonious” with the site on the Mall.

Remarking upon the “simple and forthright” materials needed to build the winning entry, the report concludes:

This memorial, with its wall of names, becomes a place of quiet reflection, and a tribute to those who served their nation in difficult times. All who come here can find in it a place of healing. This will be a quiet memorial, one that achieves an excellent relationship with both the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument, and relates the visitor to them. It is uniquely horizontal, entering the earth rather than piercing the sky.

This is very much a memorial of our own times, one that could not have been achieved in another time and place. The designer has created an eloquent place where the simple meeting of earth, sky and remembered names contain messages for all who will know this place.

The eight jurors signed their names to the report, a unanimous decision. When the name of the winner was revealed, the art and architecture worlds were stunned.

Vocabulary
harmonious (hár'mō nə sə) adj. combined in a pleasing arrangement
anonymous (ə nə mōn'sə) adv. without an indication of the author’s or creator’s name

Biography
The author identifies the winner by number. How does this detail suggest that the winner’s identity may surprise readers?

Vocabulary
eloquent (ə kwont') adj. vividly expressive
unanimous (ə nə mən'ə sə) adj. in complete agreement

Comprehension
What is the purpose of the memorial?
It was not the name of a nationally famous architect or sculptor, as most people had been sure it would be. The creator of Entry Number 1,026 was a twenty-one-year-old student at Yale University. Her name—unknown as yet in any field of art or architecture—was Maya Ying Lin.

How could this be? How could an undergraduate student win one of the most important design competitions ever held? How could she best out some of the top names in American art and architecture? Who was Maya Ying Lin?

The answer to that question provided some of the other answers, at least in part. Maya Lin, reporters soon discovered, was a Chinese-American girl who had been born and raised in the small midwestern city of Athens, Ohio. Her father, Henry Huan Lin, was a ceramicist of considerable reputation and dean of fine arts at Ohio University in Athens. Her mother, Julia C. Lin, was a poet and professor of Oriental and English literature. Maya Lin's parents were born to culturally prominent families in China. When the Communists came to power in China in the 1940s, Henry and Julia Lin left the country and in time made their way to the United States.

Maya Lin grew up in an environment of art and literature. She was interested in sculpture and made both small and large sculptural figures, one cast in bronze. She learned silversmithing and made jewelry. She was surrounded by books and read a great deal, especially fantasy such as The Hobbit, and Lord of the Rings.

But she also found time to work at McDonald's. "It was about the only way to make money in the summer," she said.

A coed student at Yale during her undergraduate years, Maya Lin went to Yale without a clear notion of what she wanted to study and eventually decided to major in landscape architecture. During her junior year she studied in Europe and found herself increasingly interested in cemetery architecture. "In Europe, there's very little space, so graveyards are used as parks," she said. "Cemeteries are cities of the dead in European countries, but they are also living gardens."

In France, Maya Lin was deeply moved by the war memorial to those who died in the Somme offensive in 1916 during World War I. The great arch by architect Sir Edwin Landseer Lutyens is considered one of the world's most outstanding war memorials.

Back at Yale for her senior year, Maya Lin enrolled in Professor Andreas Burr's course in funerary (burial) architecture. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial competition had recently been announced, and although the memorial would be a cenotaph—a monument in honor of persons buried elsewhere—Professor Burr thought that having his students prepare a design of the memorial would be a worthwhile course assignment.

Surely, no classroom exercise ever had such spectacular results.

After receiving the assignment, Maya Lin and two of her classmates decided to make the day's journey from New Haven, Connecticut, to Washington to look at the site where the memorial would be built. On the day of their visit, Maya Lin remembers, Constitution Gardens was awash with a late November sun; the park was full of light, alive with joggers and people walking beside the lake.

"It was while I was at the site that I designed it," Maya Lin said later in an interview about the memorial with Washington Post writer Phil Michtenos. "I just sort of visualized it. I just popped into my head. Some people were playing Frisbee. It was a beautiful park. I didn't want to destroy a living park. You use the landscape. You don't fight with it. You absorb the landscape... When I looked at the site I just knew I wanted something horizontal that took you in, that made you feel safe within the park, yet at the same time reminding you of the dead. So I just imagined opening up the earth..."

When Maya Lin returned to Yale, she made a clay model of the design that had come to her in Constitution Gardens.

1. Somme offensive... World War I costly and largely unsuccessful Allied attack that resulted in approximately 800,000 British and French soldiers being killed.
She showed it to Professor Durrr; he liked her conception and encouraged her to enter the memorial competition. She put her design on paper, a task that took six weeks, and mailed it to Washington barely in time to meet the March 31 deadline.

A month and a day later, Maya Lin was attending class. Her roommate slipped into the classroom and handed her a note. Washington was calling and would call back in fifteen minutes. Maya Lin hurried to her room. The call came. She had won the memorial competition.

Language Study

Vocabulary In each word pair below, the first word appears in Always to Remember. Identify each pair as synonyms (words with similar meanings) or antonyms (words with opposite meanings).

1. criteria, guidelines
2. harmonious, compatible
3. acceptable, inexpressive
4. unanimous, divided
5. authorized, empowered

Word Study

Part A Explain how the Greek root -nym- contributes to the meaning of homonym, patronym, and acronym. Consult a dictionary if needed.

Part B Use what you know about the Greek root -nym- to answer each question. Explain your responses.

1. The word atlas is an eponym taken from the name of the mythological Greek giant Atlas. What eponym is related to the Roman goddess Fortune?
2. How is using a pseudonym different from being anonymous?

Spiral Review

AUTHOR’S PURPOSE

Why do you think the author notes that Maya Lin barely made the submission deadline? How does this detail add to the author’s portrayal of Lin?

Literary Analysis

Key Ideas and Details

1. (a) How did supporters of the memorial set about getting it designed? (b) Interpret: Why did people think that a Vietnam memorial was necessary? Cite essay details in your answer.
2. Main Idea Review the beginning of the text, through the account of the jury’s decision. (a) Identify the main idea of three paragraphs in this section. Cite details in support of your answer.
3. Main Idea Review the second half of the text, beginning with “How could this be?” Summarize the main idea of this section, citing textual details in support of your answer.

Craft and Structure

4. Biography and Autobiography (a) Fill out a chart like the one shown on the right with information about Lin. (b) Refer to the chart to summarize what you learned about Lin’s life.
5. Biography and Autobiography (a) According to the text, why was Lin’s win so surprising? (b) How did her background prepare her for the contest? (c) What personal qualities does she demonstrate that might also help explain her victory? Cite details from the text to explain your answer.
6. Biography and Autobiography Give two ways in which the text would have been different if it were part of Lin’s autobiography.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Make a two-column chart. (a) Classify: In one column, list the design criteria reported in the text. (b) Evaluate: In the second column, explain whether the memorial meets these criteria.
8. (a) Interpret: What were supporters of the monument responding to when they decided that “it had to soothe passions, not stir them up”? (b) Make a Judgment: Do you think their concerns were reasonable, or do you think they unfairly shut out other options? Explain, citing details from the text in support.

9. (a) How much information is enough? (b) What types of information did Maya Lin consider as she planned her design for the memorial? (c) Is there usually a connection between architecture and historical events? Explain.