Identifying the Main Idea through Listening

Here's an activity that can be done whether your students are in-person or virtual.

Time: 15 minutes

Materials

- **Podcast**
  I highly recommend the **Short Wave** podcast produced by NPR. They have highly engaging topics and are timely. Run time for the episodes is around 9 minutes, so they're perfect for class. A few of my favorites are "Touch And Go: NASA's Delicate Mission to Sample Asteroid Bennu" and "After A Whale Dies, What Happens?"

- **A premade Google Form**
  I have students fill out their name and then I have four short answer boxes: main idea, supporting detail 1, supporting detail 2, supporting detail 3.

Plan

- The class listens to the podcast together. As students listen, they are free to fill in the Google Form.
- After we are done listening, students share their ideas with the class as part of a whole-class discussion.
- We agree together on the main idea, and the key so far has been making sure that two things happen with the supporting details.
  - The first is that students think of them in terms of a beginning, middle, and ending supporting detail. This helps students avoid picking random specific details but rather how the ideas tie together in a chronological order.
  - The second is that students make sure that the supporting detail makes sense with the main idea — that details support main idea. These two factors have been integral in helping students identify these key concepts.

Reflection

After analyzing MAP test data from my students and across Wisconsin, I noticed that identifying the main idea and supporting details is a skill that students need to work on. The listening-only aspect of a podcast forces students to actively listen rather than scan text. Once you have a podcast picked out, this activity is quick and a very interesting way to incorporate cross-curricular study into your classroom.

Justina Plemon teaches at St. Mary's Catholic Middle School in Neenah.
✉ justina.plemon@gmail.com