**READING FOR INFORMATION- TOPIC SENTENCES**

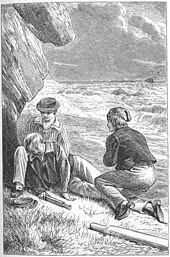
The article below is an extract from a Wikipedia entry about a classic novel. The article provides considerable detail, but if you were wanting to extract the key information how would you start?

Step1: read quickly over the whole article (skim read) to get a general idea of what it is about.

Step 2: Now find the main idea (topic sentence) in each paragraph. Remember any paragraph always deals with one main idea which is then expanded on in the rest of the paragraph. The paragraph is built around a single sentence that states the main thought or idea. It is often (but not always) the first sentence in the paragraph. Underline or highlight the topic sentence in each paragraph. Sometimes the main idea spans more than one sentence and you have to rephrase it into one sentence in your own words.

**The plot of R.M. Ballantyne’s novel *The Coral Island***

The story is written as a [first person narrative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First-person_narrative) from the perspective of 15-year-old Ralph Rover, one of three boys shipwrecked on the [coral reef](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coral_reef) of a large but uninhabited [Polynesian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polynesia) island. Ralph tells the story retrospectively, looking back on his boyhood adventure: "I was a boy when I went through the wonderful adventures herein set down. With the memory of my boyish feelings strong upon me, I present my book especially to boys, in the earnest hope that they may derive valuable information, much pleasure, great profit, and unbounded amusement from its pages."[[29]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Coral_Island#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBallantyne1911Preface-32)

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Coral_Island_-_Shipwrecked.jpg)

Jack, Ralph, and Peterkin after reaching the island, from an 1884 edition of the novel

The account starts briskly; only four pages are devoted to Ralph's early life and a further fourteen to his voyage to the Pacific Ocean on board the *Arrow*. He and his two companions – 18-year-old Jack Martin and 13-year-old Peterkin Gay – are the sole survivors of the shipwreck. The narrative is in two parts. The first describes how the boys feed themselves, what they drink, the clothing and shelter they fashion, and how they cope with having to rely on their own resources. The second half of the novel is more action-packed, featuring conflicts with pirates, fighting between the native Polynesians, and the conversion efforts of Christian missionaries.

Fruit, fish and wild pigs provide plentiful food, and at first the boys' life on the island is idyllic. They build a shelter and construct a small boat using their only possessions: a broken telescope, an iron-bound oar, and a small axe. Their first contact with other humans comes after several months when they observe two large [outrigger canoes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outrigger_canoe) in the distance, one pursued by the other. The two groups of Polynesians disembark on the beach and engage in battle; the victors take fifteen prisoners and kill and eat one immediately. But when they threaten to kill one of the three women captured, along with two children, the boys intervene to defeat the pursuers, earning them the gratitude of the chief, Tararo. The next morning they prevent another act of [cannibalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cannibalism). The natives leave, and the boys are alone once more.

More unwelcome visitors then arrive in the shape of British [pirates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pirate), who make a living by trading or stealing [sandalwood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandalwood). The three boys hide in a cave, but Ralph is captured when he ventures out to see if the intruders have left and is taken on board the pirate [schooner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schooner). He strikes up a friendship with one of the crew, Bloody Bill, and when the ship calls at the island of Emo to trade for more wood Ralph experiences many facets of the island's culture: the popular sport of [surfing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_surfing), the sacrificing of babies to [eel gods](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuna_(Polynesian_mythology)), rape, and cannibalism.

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Coral_Island04.jpg)

Ralph and Bloody Bill making their escape on board the pirate schooner, from an 1884 edition of the novel

Rising tensions result in the inhabitants attacking the pirates, leaving only Ralph and Bloody Bill alive. The pair succeed in making their escape in the schooner, but Bill is mortally wounded. He makes a death-bed repentance for his evil life, leaving Ralph to sail back to the Coral Island alone, where he is reunited with his friends.

The three boys sail to the island of Mango, where a [missionary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Missionary) has converted some of the population to [Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity). There they once again meet Tararo, whose daughter Avatea wishes to become a Christian against her father's wishes. The boys attempt to take Avatea in a small boat to a nearby island the chief of which has been converted, but *en route* they are overtaken by one of Tararo's war canoes and taken prisoner. They are released a month later after the arrival of another missionary, and Tararo's conversion to Christianity. The "[false gods](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/False_gods)"[[30]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Coral_Island#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBallantyne1911332-33) of Mango are consigned to the flames, and the boys set sail for home, older and wiser. They return as adults for another adventure in Ballantyne's 1861 novel [*The Gorilla Hunters*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Gorilla_Hunters), a sequel to *The Coral Island*.[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Coral_Island#cite_note-Honaker-34)[[32]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Coral_Island#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMacKenzie1989158-35)

**Assignment**

Write only six sentences capturing the main idea of each paragraph of the extract.