The Main Idea Strategy: Student Practice Lessons

Name

Date

Passage #18

**Hidden Computers**

Computers were people until 60 years ago. Look up the definition in a 1940 dictionary. It will say that a computer is someone who uses numbers and data. People “computed” numbers.

Computers today spend most of their time “thinking” about words. They really could be called “thinkers.” They probably should be called “organizers.”

Walk into any office. We will find computers sitting on a desk. These are called standard computers. Standard computers have a keyboard, monitor, and mouse. They have a printer, speakers, and cables. These are easy to see.

There are also hidden computers that hide inside another device. They are called dedicated computers. For example, a computer hides inside your digital watch. In a watch, it is “telling time.” Computers hide inside your pocket calculator.

Computers hide in your Nintendo video game machine. They fix popcorn in your microwave oven. They keep your car running, and hide in your car’s dashboard. A dedicated computer has only one job.

The “thinker” or dedicated computer in the microwave can be programmed to fix a meal. Somehow it knows exactly to what degree of doneness to cook. And it knows what time to stop. Just touch a few pads. While you are fixing the rest of the meal, supper is cooking. It soon will be ready to serve. Most home appliances have their own fancy microprocessor. The microprocessor in the microwave controls the timing and cooking level.

Adapted from: Walter, R. (2000). *The Secret Guide to Computers*. Secretfun.com. Used by permission.

236/7.9

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